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MOBILISING DIVERSE COMMUNITY ASSETS TO MEET SOCIAL NEEDS

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JUSTIN LEE
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IPS Exchange Series

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Overview of the Contributions

In the social service sector, we are familiar with the voluntary welfare organisation (VWO) as one type of community asset that provides welfare or social services to disadvantaged populations such as socially isolated seniors, youths-at-risk, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. VWOs manage homes and shelters; run day rehabilitation centres and drop-in centres; and offer services such as casework and counselling, provide caregiver support, and man crisis intervention helplines, amongst many others.

Beyond VWOs, there are diverse community assets that play a role in the social service sector, whether it is through direct provision of alternative interventions — for example, engaging community artists to work with the seniors or playing supportive roles; game designers to develop a volunteer management system; data scientists to solve VWO's operational problems; and academics to conduct research and training. Community assets are resources that can be leveraged to develop solutions to meet social needs. Each community asset can bring specific skills and expertise from which VWOs can benefit. The diverse community assets can add value by offering a different repertoire of knowledge and skills to meet social needs. These diverse

assets already contribute in important ways to the social service sector and can play an even more significant roles in improving lives if we have a better understanding of what these assets are, their strengths and interests, and what kind of social or organisational problems they are equipped to address.

To begin this dialogue on how community assets can be mobilised to meet social needs, we invited researchers, policymakers, social workers, community workers and other professional groups to share how they have utilised community assets as tools for social change.

SOCIAL NEEDS IN SINGAPORE

In Chapter 1, Emma Glendinning and Ho Han Peng, Research Fellow and Programme Manager, respectively, at the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, shared findings from a series of research projects to identify the unmet social needs of vulnerable communities, namely, low-income older persons, low-income single parents and low-income people with disabilities. They highlighted that problems faced by these vulnerable communities often require long-term perspectives that cannot be solved with a programme or service that is delivered by a particular agency. In fact, the solutions often require intervention by multiple stakeholders. This calls for greater collaborative partnerships for solutions that go beyond meeting short-term needs or the limits of a programme or service.



In Chapter 2, Foo Suan Wee, Deputy Director of the Policy Research Branch at the Ministry of Social and Family Development, outlined new strategies the government was adopting to better meet the social needs of individuals, families and the community. These strategies include improving the coordination and reach of service delivery, carrying out holistic needs assessment and assistance and adopting a strategy of early intervention, strengthening the capabilities of social service professionals and VWOs and deepening partnerships with the wider community by tapping the expertise of volunteers, philanthropists, social enterprises, academics and researchers.

DEFINITIONS, APPROACHES AND HISTORY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN SINGAPORE

Broadly speaking, community assets can include people, partnerships, organisations, physical facilities, funding, policies, programmes, regulations and even a community's collective experience. We begin by exploring *people as community assets*. When people become involved in their community, it is more than helping them realise their common interests as a group but about identifying their assets, developing leadership to mobilise these assets, and building their capacity to act in order to effect change.

In Chapter 3, Ang Bee Lian, Director of Social Welfare from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) provided much needed definitional clarity by outlining the major concepts of “community”, “community engagement”, “community participation and

empowerment”, which have gained considerable consensus in the field of community development today. She cited several contemporary examples of how the government and social services have been adopting community engagement as a strategy to empower individuals, groups, communities and organisations to respond to collective problems.

The character of community development in Singapore cannot be understood without locating it in its social and historical backdrop. In Chapter 4, Ng Guat Tin, Research Associate from the Social Service Research Centre at the National University of Singapore (NUS) outlined the history of community development in Singapore from the 1960s to the present day. She explained that historically, community development has been more focused on planning service delivery to meet the needs identified and prioritised by the government rather than building self-help capacity of the community to mobilise themselves for change, with the exception of a few examples of community organisation work by social activists or advocacy-oriented organisations.

As an alternative to the needs-based approach, the Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) model has been gaining traction in the last decade by shifting the focus from what the community needs or lacks, to what the community has to offer. ABCD involves identifying and mobilising existing (but often unrecognised) assets, thereby responding to and creating local opportunity for change. In Chapter 5, two ABCD practitioners — Jason Ng, Senior Manager of



the NUS Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme, and Andrew Arjun Sayampanathan, Fellow of the Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme and Medical Doctor of MOH Holdings — called for a balance between needs-based and assets-based approaches to community development. They highlighted that ABCD is built upon the assumption that everyone has needs, yet at the same time, everyone has the potential to contribute. ABCD works by tapping into the “driver assets” — the aspirations people have, or in other words, what people care about and whom they care about. The driver assets, as the name suggests, motivates people to take action to effect change, and the change can be sustained if it is cultivated by a sense of ownership.

However, in Chapter 6, Ijlal Naqvi, Assistant Professor of Sociology from the Singapore Management University, cautioned that community engagement when done a top-down manner could defeat its purpose of cultivating the sense of ownership among citizens who are being engaged to empower them to take make decisions on the issues that matter to them. He described a case example of how community engagement was adopted to inform and consult its residents and on some occasions involve deliberation and co-creation but rarely, if ever, empower them to make consequential decisions.

VWOS ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY WORK IN SINGAPORE

In the chapters that follow, we explored the role of VWOs as *community assets* where the organisations provide the catalyst for

community participation. In Chapter 7, Samuel Tang, Team Leader of Partnership and Talent Development and Gerard Ee, Executive Director of Beyond Social Services, shared that their organisation's approach to community development is a response to service provision that is time-limited and deficit-focused, and administered based on specific issues or criteria, often on the assumption that problem-solving lies in the expertise of professionals. Using the Youth United Programme as a case example, they demonstrated their role as an advocate, an enabler and a motivator in the community, bringing about change by doing things *with* the people, rather than *to* them or *for* them. The end goal is building a sustainable resource in the form of social capital that will go beyond the limits of any time bound intervention.

In Chapter 8, Susana Concorde Harding and Lee Yuan Ting Jasmine, Director and Senior Executive, respectively, of the International Longevity Centre Singapore under the Tsao Foundation reflected upon their organisation's nascent community development efforts through the Community for Successful Ageing (COMSA) programme. Bringing about a mindset change where the seniors own their problems and offer community-initiated solutions was identified as being particularly challenging, especially when most of them have become reliant on the government and social service agencies for help when faced with issues in the community. Despite the challenges, the practitioners recognised that building a sense of ownership and mobilising community action is key to promoting self-care and supporting positive ageing among the seniors.



Next, in Chapter 9, Choo Jin Kiat, Executive Director of O'Joy Care Services, described how the organisation evolved from providing counselling service to adopting a place-based approach towards community development. Using the Upper Boon Keng Health Oriented Ageing Community (HOA) project as a case example, Jin Kiat explained that the organisation's presence and contact with the community had enabled practitioners to uncover the needs of the seniors and facilitated change from within by mobilising the existing community assets in the locality, such as volunteers, grassroots leaders, healthcare and arts practitioners, to work together towards enhancing community wellness among the seniors.

BEYOND SOCIAL WORK: OTHER PROFESSIONAL GROUPS AS COMMUNITY ASSETS

The discussion thus far has focused on VWOs as catalysts for community development. However, community development has its roots in other academic disciplines or fields of practice, including sociology, political science, economics, urban planning, design and architecture. Hence, practitioners of community development are not exclusively social workers by profession. In Singapore, there is certainly a lot of scope for community development to draw from multiple disciplines. In the following, we explore the *other professional groups as community assets*.

In Chapter 10, Mizah Rahman and Jan Lim, the Directors and Co-founders of Participate in Design (PID) are often confronted by the lack of citizen participation, ownership and responsibility towards public spaces in their work as designers. Grounded by their belief that a participatory design process is not only able to transform public spaces but will allow communities to have meaningful social participation, they took on the challenge to address the question: “How might we bring people together to create solutions more meaningfully for our built environment?” Their solution was to introduce participatory design by bringing residents and other stakeholders in the planning and designing process of their neighbourhood. Through the neighbourhood planning of Tampines Changkat and the design of a community kitchen for the seniors at the Pacific Activity Centre, they have demonstrated that every individual has something positive to contribute to the design process, and that everyone can be collaborators and not merely consumers.

In the field of arts-based community development, Ko Siew Huey and Ngiam Su-Lin, Co-founders and Directors of ArtsWok Collaborative, shared in Chapter 11 how their role as an arts intermediary facilitated collaborations amongst arts practitioners, healthcare workers, social workers, community workers, educators and urban planners, using the arts as the primary medium and process through which communities benefit, and change occurs. Many of their collaborations involve them taking on the role of the creative producer, one example is “Both Sides, Now”, an arts engagement project focusing on end-of-life issues using immersive arts experiences in community spaces and



puppetry engagement. As an intermediary, Ko and Ngiam shared that a key challenge they were encountering was in fostering collaborations between different disciplines that may not familiar with one another could lead to misunderstanding of expectations and deliverables. As such, time, patience and communication are key for the potential of inter-professional collaborative practice to be fully realised.

VWOs typically do not look towards deploying data analytics as a primary solution to their existing issues and challenges. In Chapter 12, Tan Poh Choo, Operations Director of SAS Singapore and Eric Sandosham, Founder and Partner of Red & White Consulting Partners LLP, showed how her organisation seeks to change that by bringing to the table resources and the operational know-hows of data analytics, which are in short supply among the VWOs. Its Analytics for Social Good Movement facilitated the collaboration between data professionals, VWOs and academia to address social issues, such as identifying the demographics of beneficiaries that need greater support for the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund and identifying the clients who fall through the cracks of existing services for O'Joy Care Services.

In Chapter 13, Michelle Cheong Lee Fong, Associate Professor of Information Systems (Practice) from the Singapore Management University (SMU), discussed how SMU students have partnered with VWOs by bringing their knowledge and skills in Excel spreadsheet modelling to solve problems at the VWOs, as part of the requirement

for their Computer as an Analysis Tool (CAT) course. Beyond the course requirement, the partnership is a win-win for students who are given the opportunities to engage with real-world problems as well as for the VWOs as they often lack the resources to engage data professionals, but can benefit from the students' technical know-hows to address their problems.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS ACROSS DIVERSE GROUPS

While it is commonplace for VWOs to engage academics in their research activities, the following chapters reflect upon the two forms of partnership — a more conventional commissioning model and the other, a collaborative model. Ho Yin King, Anita, Assistant Director of Caregiver Service at AWWA, shared her experiences in Chapter 14, both the opportunities as well as the challenges of commissioning research to academics and conducting in-house research at the VWO. In Chapter 15, Esther Goh, Associate Professor from the Department of Social Work at the NUS, explained how VWOs could collaborate with academics as the latter takes on the role of research mentor in what is known as the “practitioner-initiated-academic-facilitated model” (PIAF) model of collaboration. In this model, the intent is to extend research mentoring to all practitioners, hoping that those with little or no experience the research process would begin to “think research” in their everyday practice.



In the last chapter, Wong Fung Shing, Research Assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies, discussed the benefits and perceived barriers to collaboration in the social service sector, as well as some recommendations that could build an environment that is more conducive for collaborations.

Through this series, the essays as a whole have demonstrated how different community assets have been mobilised to bring about change in some pockets of the social service sector. This comes with the recognition that many social needs cannot be effectively addressed by any given organisation acting in isolation from others. Meaningful platforms need to be created where different community assets invested in particular social issues can be brought together to dialogue and explore the possibilities of collaborating with one other, leveraging resources and possibilities to create change. However, collaborative practice involves complex interactions amongst different community assets; each comes with its own set of ethos, methodology, practice, roles and responsibilities and expectations. Ang Bee Lian, Director of Social Welfare from MSF urged community practitioners to adapt swiftly to a refreshed way of working with diverse and sometimes divergent inputs, through collaborative conversations, strengthening cooperation, and managing tradeoffs, to alleviate the barriers and fully realise the potential of collaborative practice, giving a more successful outcome to the people in need.



Part 1

Social Needs in Singapore



CHAPTER 1

Unmet Social Needs in Singapore

Emma Glendinning and Ho Han Peng

Singapore, as with any country, has certain communities regarded as more vulnerable than others. The needs of these communities will vary over time, as will the support networks developed for and by them. It would be hoped that certain support can help to lift communities out of vulnerability, but of course there is the possibility that new communities will emerge as vulnerable. This essay provides a brief introduction to the needs identified through three primary research projects completed by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, with research support from various voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) in 2015, before reflecting on the challenges of identifying needs (Donaldson et al., 2015; Glendinning et al., 2015; Raghunathan et al., 2015). Furthermore, it reflects on the important role of the social service sector in identifying needs, and how to build effective partnerships between academia and the social service sector, to further develop understanding and progress.

OVERVIEW OF UNMET SOCIAL NEEDS

In 2011 the Lien Centre for Social Innovation published *Unmet Social Needs in Singapore*, which identified six vulnerable communities: the disabled, the mentally ill, single-person-headed poor households, silent workers¹, foreign workers and new communities (Mathi & Mohamed, 2011). These groups were identified as “fall-out groups”, either due to changing demographics in Singapore, issues related to the acceptance of new immigrants by Singaporeans or those who were “left behind in the early years of nation-building” (Mathi & Mohamed, 2011). To further the understanding of these vulnerable communities and their need of support, three new studies were published by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation in 2015, mentioned above, specifically looking at the low-income elderly population, low-income single parents and low-income people with disabilities. Whilst each of these three communities had their own unique circumstances and needs, there were four key areas of need in common: (1) housing; (2) employment and financial struggles; (3) caregiving roles; and (4) access to social services. The first three of these are all intrinsically linked within each vulnerable community, as discussed below.

Employment and adequate finances are essential for independence, but people with disabilities (PWDs) can find themselves doubly disadvantaged, being confined to low-paid employment. For those that are not supported through mainstream education, skills and

¹ Silent workers refer to those who strive to be self-reliant even though their earnings are not high enough to cover their needs.



qualifications may be lacking; even when they do meet specific job requirements many face prejudice when applying for jobs. This can result in low-paid employment; indeed, specific sheltered employment opportunities that are open to PWDs pay wages at the level of an allowance rather than market wage. With high healthcare costs, and the need in some cases to take taxis due to the inaccessibility of public transport, PWDs can find their financial situation particularly challenging. As a result, low-income PWDs find themselves relying on family members for both housing and caregiving needs, leading to a lack of independence, concern at the self-perceived burden they are placing on family members, and anxiety over the long-term stability of both housing and caregiving as family members age and become weaker. Furthermore, caregiving is a daily requirement, with little, if any, respite available to family caregivers. Without the finances to employ further domestic help, the long-term health and well-being of family caregivers are a cause for concern.

Stable housing is essential to the stability in a family, including children's schooling and adults' employment opportunities. For single-parent families the challenges faced in securing stable housing are two-fold. First, stabilising finances when widowed or post-divorce takes time. This can be particularly challenging if the household has moved from double to single income, or has lost its breadwinner. Without adequate and guaranteed income, securing housing is problematic. Second, for those who are unable to reside with family members, temporary rental housing is subject to availability and may be a distance from childcare services (either formal childcare or



informal caregiving by friends and family), schools and workplaces. The family may then face added financial strain due to greater travel and potentially the dilemma of choosing between stable housing or proximity to friends and family who can provide support as required. Beyond practical support, single parents themselves may require emotional support as they take on every role for the family: breadwinner, housekeeper and caregiver, tending to the children's emotional, educational and other needs. Clearly there are many considerations and challenges when trying to provide a stable family home.

Physical ability to participate in valued activities as well as financial independence are two key areas that affect elderly persons' mental well-being. While physical impairments alone do not necessarily lead to poor mental well-being, the effect is more significant when these result in the inability to participate in valued activities. Such participation is likely to require access to some form of caregiving, either through formal, paid help or more informal arrangements with friends or family members. Whichever way, individuals will require either the finances to employ domestic help or available social networks to help at the time of day when activities are being offered. Yet, reliance on family members, even when they are offering support, causes concern for the elderly population. This is raised again when it comes to financial independence, with concern for relying on or being a burden to family members, particularly those who are supporting their own children. However, even for those with sufficient finances for everyday living, there was the concern for adequacy. Of



particular note are health issues, which could cause a significant financial burden. Such perceived lack of financial independence — even if not actual — affects the mental well-being of the elderly population.

For each of the concerns mentioned above (i.e., finances, housing and caregiving), suitable social services could provide assistance. Therefore it is essential to understand why these are perhaps not being accessed. An initial barrier relates to knowledge of available help and assistance, without which it is difficult to know who or where to approach for support. Lacking “free” time, especially in the case of single parents, seeking out this information can be challenging. Once support is identified, the application process can also be perceived as cumbersome, requiring much documentation and frequent re-submission of documents to monitor eligibility. This acts as a barrier especially if time is limited, access to documents challenging or language skills low. In addition, many individuals feel such services are “not for them” as others are “worse off”, or indeed the indignity of having to apply for external support. These feelings clearly demonstrate that promoting self-sufficiency and family as first line of support has been effective in preventing individuals from simply expecting support from the state. Yet, this is problematic in that it can also have the adverse effect of preventing those desperately in need from seeking the support for which they are more than eligible.



CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Social support provision helps to identify unmet needs of vulnerable communities. Indeed, talking to organisations that serve communities will bring to light a number of unmet needs. However, the challenge really lies in understanding the needs in terms of triggers, thresholds and root causes. Causality is the key to developing a long-lasting solution to underlying problems. As discussed in the section above, needs can often be multiple and intertwined. It is challenging to establish if there is one underlying problem that causes specific needs and whether a certain limit is reached which subsequently causes further challenges and needs. Unless a person is being studied at the point of the occurrence of a specific stressor, their reactions and the exact sequence of consequences will be difficult to establish. To unpack the sequence of reactions and the specific stressors, a researcher relies on being able to identify the “right” questions to ask — itself a demanding task — and receiving accurate responses. Every one of us remembers happenings to a certain degree of accuracy; for an individual facing stressful and fatiguing situations every day, it is likely that accurate recollection will be challenging. Needs may be identified, but there is great complexity in identifying the specific financial, emotional or other events (such as an accident, divorce or retrenchment) and their combination, sequence and severity, that bring about specific needs.



In practical terms, there are requirements for both the researcher and research tool that will help to accurately identify and understand unmet needs. Trust needs to be developed between interviewer and interviewee. When a study requires personal and likely sensitive information to be sought, this will certainly require time and well-trained researchers. This also requires the interviewee to have both availability and energy to participate and provide accurate responses. It is vital that interviewers are aware of the everyday struggles that such vulnerable communities are facing and the exhaustion caused by recurrent financial concerns to know when to stop interviews.

Developing a tool to explore unmet needs is challenging; whilst it may be formulated and based on what “society” expects, this may not really uncover an accurate picture. If an individual expects or is satisfied with something different, the measure must be capable of understanding why this is. Repeatedly in our research, respondents suggested that they felt others were worse off than they were, so they felt that what they had was adequate. The challenge in this instance lies in developing a measure that probes accurately and adequately to establish exactly what people have, what they are lacking and why this is the case. Importantly this must also uncover the independence of individuals and the support being provided to them by organisations, friends and family members. This will help to determine the potential vulnerability of their situation and provide greater insight to their unmet needs, even if these may not have been specifically identified by the respondents themselves.



HOW THE SOCIAL SECTOR CAN COOPERATE BETTER TO IDENTIFY NEEDS

Understandably, every organisation working in a specific sector has targets to meet and ways of working to achieve them. For various reasons, some organisations will hit their targets more easily or quickly than others. Furthermore, while an organisation might excel in one area or programme, it might not in another. Problematically though, organisations in the same sector may potentially see themselves in competition with one another. They are perhaps funded from the same funding pot; or if pioneering innovative ways of delivering projects, perhaps they question the wisdom of collaborating with others? This can cause a blockage to quickly and comprehensively identifying unmet needs. If an organisation openly discusses unmet needs, would it appear as if they were failing in their service provision? Simply, the answer to this question is “no”. By identifying needs and being open to collective discussion, solutions can be sought. If “many hands make light work”, then one would hope that many heads, with experience in the same sector and identifying the same problems, would more easily devise potential solutions.

To cooperate and identify needs, a number of elements are needed:

- An organised platform in which to discuss and report needs. This must be facilitated to ensure that all organisations are empowered to participate. It will also allow for the



establishment of nomenclature, to ensure that needs are not duplicated in their identification.

- The time and manpower to document needs. It is clear that identification will happen every day “on the ground”, but who will document this and how? How will employees be given the time to make such documentation?

Additionally, there are many community groups, local residents, religious organisations and the like, providing support to those in need, demonstrating Singapore’s “Many Helping Hands” approach. Such support provides vital resources to those in need, but beyond this there may be a greater need for communication between parties to ensure that needs are being recognised. This is not to say that any party should stop doing what they are doing, their support is vital, but the concern is that if small measures are put into place that ultimately paper over the cracks, is the extent of problems really apparent and are root causes of problems being fully identified and tackled? Without knowing the real extent of the problems, can non-profit organisations (NPOs) or VWOs and others work together to make long-term improvements to tackle unmet social needs? Communication is therefore vital between any groups or organisations, whether formal or not, and others working to support those with needs, to understand the provisions on offer, to identify specific needs and determine their extent.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN NPOS, VWOS AND ACADEMICS

Research partnerships between NPOs, VWOs and academics can take a variety of forms — from simply bringing a suggestion to the table, to introducing academics to research subjects through to being fully involved in data collection. Effective partnerships, however, are built with mutual respect and understanding of one another’s expertise. Academics bring to the table important evidence-based research, and so do NPOs and VWOs that employ staff members — often with years of experience “on the ground” and capable of making valuable contributions in research projects. Insights provided by NPO and VWO employees, particularly those interacting with specific social needs, are vital to academics. Whilst academics must remain objective to produce fair and balanced research papers, the more insights and information that can be provided to them to understand specific scenarios, the more likely it will be for nuanced scholarship to be produced and used for constructive discourse and action.

Effective partnerships need NPOs and VWOs to be open to discussion and suggestions of change. The recent research completed by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation sought a clear understanding of unmet social needs from the perspective of those who find themselves with such needs. It seeks to increase the understanding of why individuals find themselves with such needs as well as the effectiveness of the help they are receiving. For some NPOs and VWOs, while the findings may not be surprising, they may



not make for comfortable reading if their programmes are not seen to completely fulfil the needs of their clients. A researcher can present these findings but change can only happen when NPOs or VWOs are open to discussions around the findings. That is not to say that NPOs and VWOs can all simply change what they are doing. It is understood that processes, funding and such elements all need negotiating before change can occur, and the findings need to be understood, shared, discussed and used as a point of action, whatever form that action might take. Discussions can be helpful both before and after publication of findings. Discussing before publication can ensure that data interpretation is correct, NPO and VWO voices are heard and suitable suggestions are made within publications. NPOs, VWOs and academics can all be passionate about understanding the problem, but it is mutual working that will really help to facilitate change where needed.

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CHAPTER 2

THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO MEETING SOCIAL NEEDS

Foo Suan Wee

EVOLVING SOCIAL NEEDS

Singapore's development in the first five decades of independence is a unique story of transformation in our people's standards of living — broad-based social uplift in terms of jobs and rising incomes, as well as housing, education, public healthcare and public amenities for all. We were able to achieve this through both our economic and social strategies.

In the initial 30 years of independence, the government's focus was on nation-building and self-reliance. As Singapore became more developed economically, the balance of responsibilities between self, family, community and government in addressing social needs in Singapore has also started to shift.

In the last decade, Singapore has made a more decisive shift to ensure that we remain an inclusive society in response to changing



demographic and socioeconomic trends. (See Annex A for key social programmes and initiatives introduced in the last decade). The community and government are now doing more to support individuals and families who are struggling to cope with the challenges of a more advanced economy.

Notwithstanding these shifts, our approach to social policy remains underpinned by our principle of empowering personal effort and nurturing resilient families, complemented by strong collective responsibility. We have the four pillars in our social security system: home ownership, the Central Provident Fund (CPF), healthcare assurance, and Workfare. Over the years, we have fine-tuned this system to improve retirement adequacy, affordability and extend help to the more vulnerable groups. We have also put in place additional support through channels such as ComCare¹ and other targeted programmes.

As a whole, our social transfers system compares well internationally; our taxes and transfers system is a fiscally sustainable and progressive one, with low tax burden on the middle-income households. We have also seen relatively strong income growth across all income levels of Singaporeans, as well as higher intergenerational income mobility compared to other countries (Ministry of Finance, 2015).

¹ The ComCare Endowment Fund provides sustainable funding for assistance to families in Singapore with financial or other difficulties. More details can be found in the Ministry of Social and Family Development website:
<https://www.msf.gov.sg/Comcare/Pages/default.aspx>



NEW CHALLENGES, NEW STRATEGIES

However, like other developed countries, we are not spared from the headwinds of increasing fiscal tightness, rising inequality, economic volatility, and changing demographics and family structure. (See Annex B).

We are seeing emerging social needs that are increasingly complex and overlapping. For instance, vulnerable families who face problems across several dimensions — health, employment, financial, housing, domestic abuse, etc. — often require a combination of different types of assistance and support that target the root causes of the issues, rather than just the symptoms.

These new challenges call for new strategies. These broadly fall within four categories:

- Coordination and reach of service delivery
- Holistic needs assessment and assistance, with early interventions
- Developing our social service professionals and VWO capabilities
- Strengthening partnerships with the wider community



First, Coordination and Reach of Service Delivery

To improve the delivery of social services, we have re-designed our work processes, facilitated by “geographical clustering” and “systems integration”.

On “geographical clustering”, one recent development is the network of 24 **Social Service Offices (SSOs)**. This has significantly increased the number of ComCare touch points (i.e., assistance for the needy) beyond the original five Community Development Councils (CDCs). Today, some nine in 10 SSO beneficiaries living in HDB towns can access an SSO within two kilometres of where they live or work. The number of households who received short-to-medium and long-term ComCare financial assistance increased from 24,000 in financial year 2012 to more than 31,000 in financial year 2014. Building on their reach on the ground, SSOs will be able to improve coordination in the planning and delivery of social services within each HDB town. For instance, at Taman Jurong and Kreta Ayer, we are spearheading a new service delivery model by bringing together social assistance, family services and employment services under one roof at the SSOs. Elsewhere, SSOs will actively coordinate with government and community partners to integrate help, particularly in the areas of employment, family services, housing and healthcare.

On “systems integration”, we are developing the **Social Service Net (SSNet)**, which is an integrated information and case management system that links the government with VWO help agencies. With this electronic backbone, social service agencies can share information



and streamline work processes, which will in turn reduce the administrative burden on both our beneficiaries and officers and improve the efficiency and quality of case management.

We have also applied an integrated approach to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and seniors. **SG Enable** was set up in 2013 to provide PWDs and their caregivers easy access to information and referral services, and to enhance employability and employment options for PWDs. The **Senior Cluster Networks (SCN)**², which are being rolled out within each Housing & Development Board (HDB) town, will also to better reach and support vulnerable seniors by having them stay engaged in the community and receive coordinated care.

Likewise, besides SSNet, **information systems** are being integrated across government agencies and VWOs in various areas, such as **youth and disability**, to enable multiple parties to work together to deliver services and formulate policies more effectively and efficiently.

Second, Holistic Needs Assessment and Assistance, With Early Interventions

A holistic assessment and a continuum of complementary actions that go beyond meeting short-term needs are necessary to help individuals address the causes of the issues they face, and maximise their potential. For instance, recognising that employment is key to

² Senior Cluster Networks serve to provide a continuum of integrated localised services to support vulnerable seniors to age in place in their community.



empowering individuals and enabling them to improve their financial situations, ComCare clients who are work-capable are offered employment assistance (e.g., in job search and training) by career consultants from the Workforce Development Agency (WDA). In some instances, SSO officers who are trained by WDA provide such assistance directly to the clients. Clients with complex needs that require social work interventions are referred to **Family Service Centres (FSCs)**.³ The FSCs will assess, coordinate and integrate various types of assistance to provide comprehensive interventions to families with multiple needs, so that the families can become resilient and stable.

There are other examples of holistic assistance. The **Enabling Masterplan**,⁴ a disability roadmap that is reviewed every five years, takes a life-course approach towards helping PWDs through the involvement of the people, public and private sectors to roll out various plans of action. In the area of rehabilitation of youth offenders and protection of children known to child welfare services, we have also adopted common assessment frameworks and tools to systematically assess risks and needs, and to guide decisions on the types of interventions to be administered.

³ See details on Family Service Centres at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <https://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Family-Service-Centres>

⁴ See details on the Enabling Masterplan (2012–2016) at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: [http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Topic/Issues/EDGD/Enabling%20Masterplan%202012-2016%20Report%20\(8%20Mar\).pdf](http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Topic/Issues/EDGD/Enabling%20Masterplan%202012-2016%20Report%20(8%20Mar).pdf), and its progress report here: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/EM2%20progress%20report.pdf>. The third review of the Enabling Masterplan, which will be rolled out from 2017, has commenced.



Early intervention, which improves later-life outcomes, is central to social mobility. In this regard, the **Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)**, which was set up in 2013, has been driving changes in the early childhood sector to ensure that every child has access to affordable and quality early childhood development services and programmes. Likewise, there are now learning support programmes for weaker children at the school-going age. New initiatives such as **KidSTART**⁵ and **Fresh Start Housing Scheme**⁶ provide support to disadvantaged families with young children. KidSTART will pilot a new system of support for low-income and vulnerable children aged six and below, to provide them with early access to healthcare, learning and developmental support, while Fresh Start will provide grants to help families with children in rental housing who are committed and ready for home ownership to own a flat again. We have also introduced a new **Child Development Account (CDA) First Step grant**⁷ for all Singaporean children born from 24 March 2016, where parents will automatically receive S\$3,000 in their child's CDA, which they can use for their children's healthcare and childcare needs.

We are also adopting a strategy of early intervention in other domains. For instance, the Central Youth Guidance Office (CYGO) has rolled out various initiatives to tackle youth delinquency by strengthening

⁵ See details on KidSTART at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <https://app.msf.gov.sg/Press-Room/1-000-low-income-and-vulnerable-children-to-benefit-from-pilot-scheme-that-coordinates-strengthens-and-monitors-support>.

⁶ See details on Fresh Start Housing Scheme at the Ministry of National Development website: <http://app.mnd.gov.sg/Highlights/FreshStartHousingScheme.aspx>

⁷ See details on CDA First Step grant at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Baby-Bonus-Scheme#BBOSS>



early intervention on **youth-at-risk**, including a youth outreach and guidance programme, and a youth guidance support system.⁸ There are also plans to provide booster grants to help appointed agencies develop their organisational capability, and train youth workers to become more competent in managing youths with varying levels of risk. Besides addressing youth delinquencies, we are also rolling out programmes that support younger couples in their transition into married life and parenthood as part of our efforts to build strong foundations in **marriages and families**.⁹

Third, Strengthening Social Service Professionals and VWO Capabilities

Our social service professionals and VWOs are key to meeting social needs in Singapore.

We have been strengthening our service professionals by improving career prospects and professional development opportunities as well as improving recognition for their contributions to the sector.

Over the past few years, we have reviewed salary norms for our social service professionals for them to be closer to market benchmarks. We have also increased programme funding for VWOs significantly, with

⁸ See details on youth outreach and support at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/Children-Youth/Rebuilding-Children-and-Youth/Outreach-Support-for-Youth/Youth-GO-Programme>, and <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/Children-Youth/Rebuilding-Children-and-Youth/Outreach-Support-for-Youth/Youth-Guidance-Support-System>.

⁹ See details on marriage preparation support at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/Marriages/Preparing-for-Marriage>.



most of it going into supporting VWOs to raise the salaries of their social service professionals.

Aside from remuneration and funding, we have also strengthened professional development opportunities for social work professionals. In the area of training, the **Social Service Institute** has been providing more courses for our social service professionals. Launched in 2015, the **National Social Work Competency Framework**¹⁰ maps out the career opportunities and accompanying core competencies of all social workers at different career milestones across the community and health sector¹¹ to ensure professional development and standards.

In addition, we have also adopted a “hub-and-spoke” concept that allows us to attract, develop and deploy our specialist resources. There are currently three **Therapy Hubs** that support VWOs in delivering therapy services. In addition, a **Community Psychology Hub** has been established to attract the required psychological expertise and to deploy these professionals to support disability services (e.g., early intervention programme for infants and young children), before eventually expanding to support other areas such as family services.¹²

¹⁰ For the full report, see: <https://www.ssi.sg/SSI/media/SSI-Media-Library/Documents/National-Social-Workers-Competency-Framework.pdf>

¹¹ See details on the framework from the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Press-Room/Launch-of-the-National-Social-Work-Competency-Framework>.

¹² See details at the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Press-Room/More-Support-for-Social-Service-Providers-and-Professionals-to-Build-Capabilities>



To recognise the top echelon of our social service professionals, MSF and NCSS have launched a **Social Service Fellowship** where appointed fellows (i.e., social service professionals such as social workers, therapists, early intervention teachers, psychologists and counsellors) contribute and are rewarded for their expertise in areas such as training, mentoring, sector development or outreach work.

We have also invested in strengthening VWOs' organisational capabilities. For instance, by providing support for VWOs to hire experienced corporate professionals, the Corporate Development Funding Scheme (CDFS) helps VWOs develop corporate capabilities (e.g., IT, HR and finance) as they grow in size and scope. NCSS has also been tapping on the expertise of consultants to support VWOs in strengthening specific capabilities, e.g., utilisation of space and services, community engagement.¹³

Fourth, Deepening Partnerships With the Wider Community

A strong social service sector needs the support of the wider community — volunteers, philanthropists, social enterprises, and also academics and researchers, to contribute their time, skills, ideas and resources.

¹³ Areas where consultancy projects have been rolled out or piloted include compensation and benefits, financial processes, community engagement, client empowerment, utilisation of space and services and process delivery. NCSS will also launch a three-year HR consultancy project that will support up to 100 VWOs to help them diagnose needs and improve their HR capabilities in recruitment, compensation and benefits, performance management and career planning.



With this in mind, NCSS, in partnership with the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, has developed the **Volunteer Management Toolkit**¹⁴ to help VWOs put in place good volunteer management practices and identify ways of increasing partnership with volunteers. For instance, the toolkit helps organisations identify volunteer positions, maintain a volunteer database and conduct orientation programmes for volunteers. NCSS also works with VWOs to look into job process redesigning and skills-based volunteerism, to include roles for volunteers that will complement staff.

The **Business and IPC Partnership Scheme (BIPS)** was introduced to encourage employee volunteerism through businesses. Under the BIPS, businesses will enjoy tax deduction on qualifying expenditure incurred when they send their employees to volunteer and provide services to Institutions of Public Character (IPCs).¹⁵

To encourage philanthropy, the government had provided matching grants for the **Care and Share Movement**, a national fund-raising and volunteerism movement led by Community Chest for the social service sector. Following the end of the Care and Share matching period in March 2016, the government has introduced the **SHARE as One** programme,¹⁶ which aims to increase regular giving through the Community Chest's SHARE programme.

¹⁴ See details of the toolkit at the National Council of Social Service website:

<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/publications/Volunteer%20Management%20Toolkit.pdf>

¹⁵ See details of the BIPS at the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore website:

[https://www.iras.gov.sg/irashome/Schemes/Businesses/Business-and-IPC-Partnership-Scheme--BIPS-/](https://www.iras.gov.sg/irashome/Schemes/Businesses/Business-and-IPC-Partnership-Scheme--BIPS/)

¹⁶ See details of the SHARE as One programme at the Community Chest website:

<http://www.comchest.org.sg/HowYouCanGive/ShareasOne/tabid/1172/Default.aspx>



Social entrepreneurship is a sector that has seen rapid growth in recent years. To further develop the social entrepreneurship sector, the **Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise (raiSE)** was launched in 2015 as a one-stop hub for social enterprises to seek funding, find opportunities to collaborate with other organisations, and gain access to other forms of support such as mentoring.

Another group of important partners are academics, researchers and public policy experts. Advancing the social service sector requires a good balance between the adoption of established programmes, and experimentation, innovation and verification. It also requires the translation of diverse ideas from many groups of social service partners into sound and coordinated strategies and initiatives. It is promising that we have seen the creation of more platforms and initiatives for research and cross-pollination of ideas in recent years.

For instance, the **Social Science Research Council (SSRC)**,¹⁷ comprising local social science academics and public policy experts, was established by the government in 2015 to provide concerted direction for social science and humanities research. In the academic circle, the recently established NUS **Social Service Research Centre (SSR)** and the **Social Lab**, an independent centre for social indicators

¹⁷ See details on SSRC at the Ministry of Education website: <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/establishment-of-the-social-science-research-council-to-promote-social-science-and-humanities-research-in-singapore>



research at the Institute of Policy Studies, contribute to our knowledge of social changes and evidence-based social policymaking.

Researchers and practitioners have also been working together to roll out programme monitoring and evaluation efforts across government agencies and VWOs, as part of the effort to ensure that we are channelling our resources effectively and efficiently.

CONTINUING TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE SOCIETY

New challenges have necessitated shifts in the way we approach social needs. Our strategies go beyond the way we optimise government resources and work better with individuals, families and VWOs to how we engage and mobilise the wider community. We must continue to build an inclusive and progressive society, where everyone — rich or poor — has the same shot at success; where we value and support individual effort and strong families; and where everyone is on board the journey towards a brighter future for all.

This chapter had drawn on information from various publicly available sources. The author would also like to acknowledge the invaluable inputs provided by her colleagues in MSF.



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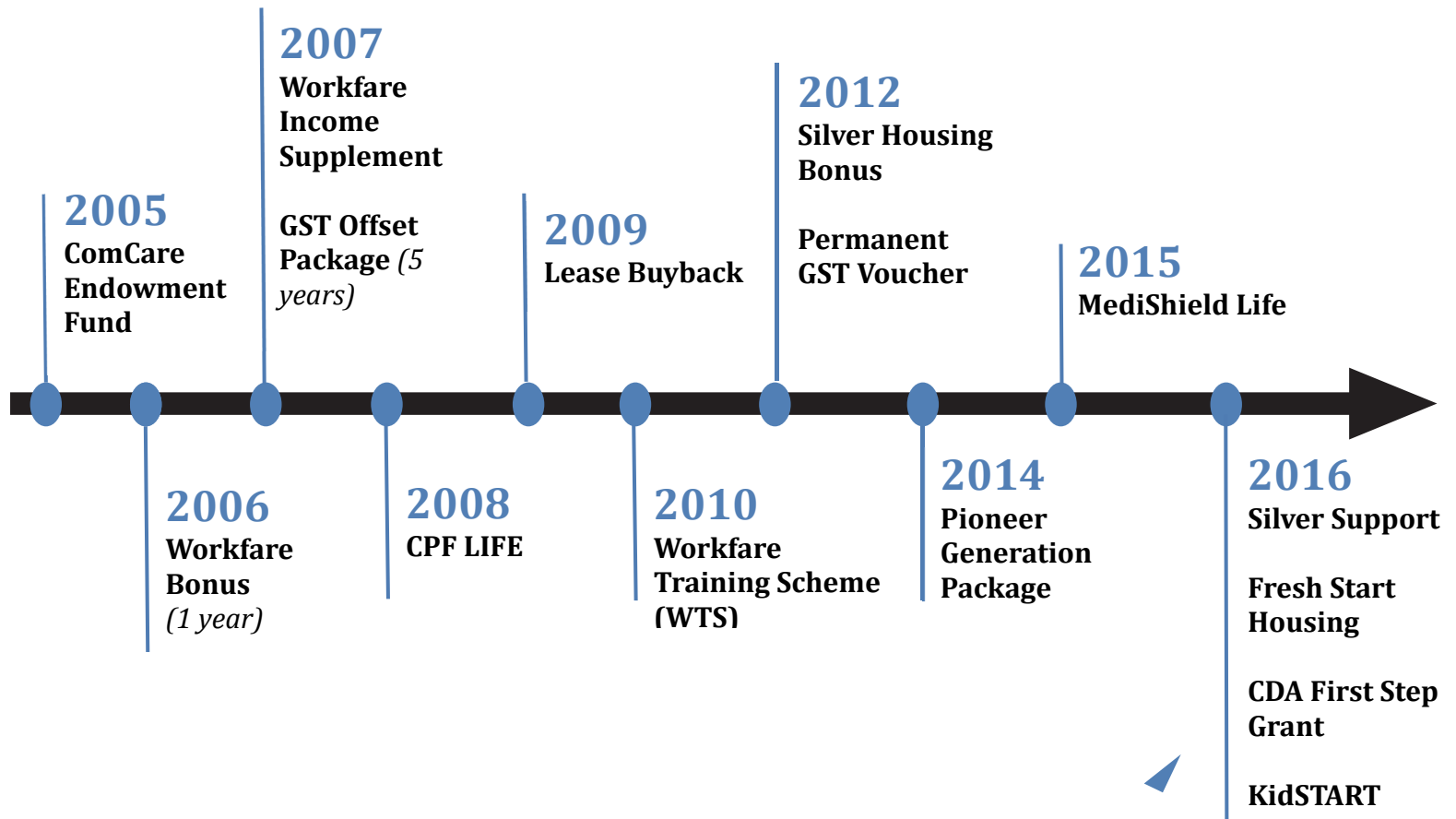
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ANNEX A

Key Social Programmes and Initiatives Introduced in the Last Decade





Notes:

1. This is not an exhaustive list of social programmes, and does not include enhancements to earlier schemes (such as top-up to Child Development Account, Edusave or Post-Secondary Education Account).
2. ComCare Endowment Fund provides sustainable funding for assistance to families in Singapore with financial or other difficulties.
3. Workfare Bonus provided cash bonus to older, low-wage workers to reward regular and productive work. It was replaced by the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) scheme introduced in the following year.
4. Workfare Income Supplement scheme supplements the wages and savings of low-wage workers aged 35 and above.
5. GST Offset Package was a comprehensive set of measures to help Singaporeans offset GST increase. It included GST credits, Senior Citizens' Bonus (cash and Medisave top-ups), top-ups to Post-Secondary Education Accounts, Utilities-Save (U-Save), Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC), and Rental Rebates, among other measures. It was replaced by the Permanent GST Voucher introduced in 2012.
6. CPF LIFE provides lifelong monthly payout starting from the relevant payout eligibility age.
7. Lease Buyback scheme allows low-income elderly flat owners to sell part of their flats' leases to HDB to be better funded for retirement.
8. Workfare Training Scheme (WTS) complements the WIS scheme by helping older lower-wage workers upgrade their skills through training.
9. Silver Housing Bonus allows low-income flat owners to right-size their homes in old age and be better funded for retirement.
10. Permanent GST Voucher helps lower-income Singaporeans offset their GST bills. It includes three components — cash, Medisave top-ups and U-Save rebates.
11. Pioneer Generation Package assures the pioneer generation of affordable healthcare. It includes three key components — Outpatient care, Medisave Top-ups and MediShield Life subsidies
12. MediShield Life replaced MediShield from 1 November 2015, and offers better protection and higher payouts, protection for all Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, including the very old and those who have pre-existing conditions, and protection for life.
13. Silver Support Scheme is targeted at elderly with low lifetime income and who have less retirement support. It supplements the incomes of eligible seniors from the age of 65. These seniors will receive between \$300 to \$750 every quarter.
14. Fresh Start Housing Scheme provides a grant of up to \$35,000 to help second-timer rental families with young children to own a home again.
15. Child Development Account (CDA) First Step grant provides \$3,000 in each child's CDA, which parents can use for the child's healthcare and childcare needs.



16. KidSTART will pilot a new system of support for low-income and vulnerable children aged six and below, to provide them with early access to health, learning and developmental support.

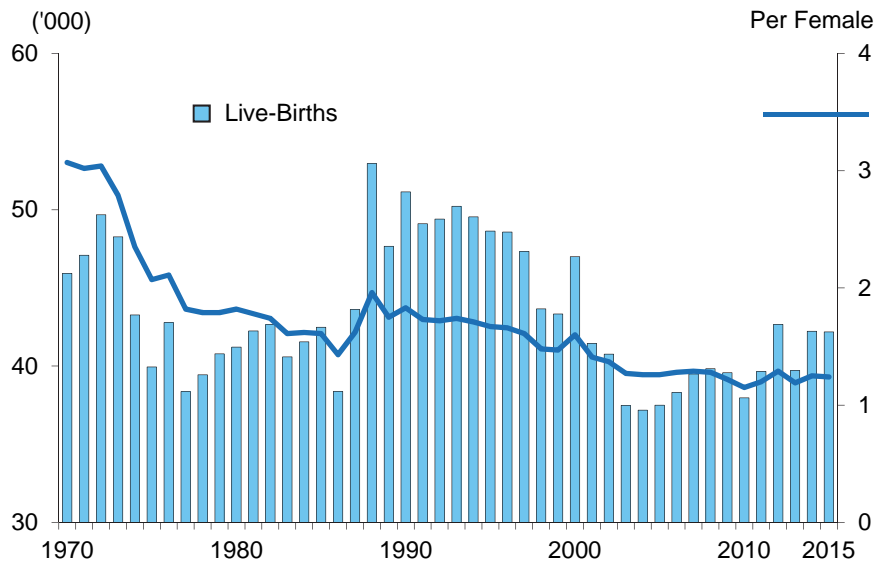


ANNEX B

Changing Demographics

- Falling fertility: Our Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was 1.25 in 2014. While TFR has increased from 1.19 births per female in 2013, it has remained below the replacement rate of 2.1 for more than three decades (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Total Live Births and Total Fertility Rate



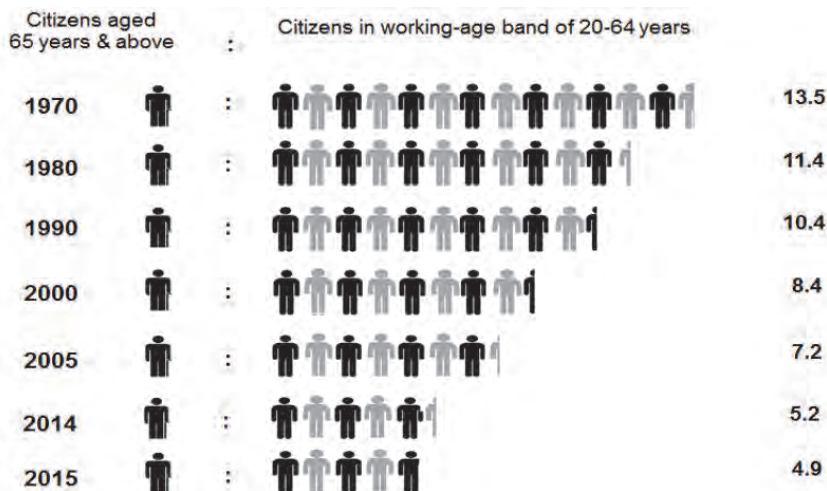
Note: Prior to 1980, data on TFR pertain to total population. From 1980 onwards, data on TFR pertain to resident population (i.e., Singapore citizens and permanent residents).

Source: Department of Statistics Singapore website, retrieved from: <http://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=3733>



- Ageing: Declining fertility coupled with an ageing population means that more elderly citizens will be supported by a smaller base of working-age citizens. There are currently 4.9 citizens in the working ages of 20 to 64 years for each citizen aged 65 and above (old-age support ratio). This ratio has fallen substantially from 8.4 in 2000 (Figure 2.2). The ratio is expected to decline to 2.1 by 2030, based on the Population White Paper published in 2013².

Figure 2.2: Old-Age Support Ratio



Source: National Population and Talent Division, *Population in Brief 2015*, retrieved from: <http://population.sg/population-in-brief/files/population-in-brief-2015.pdf>

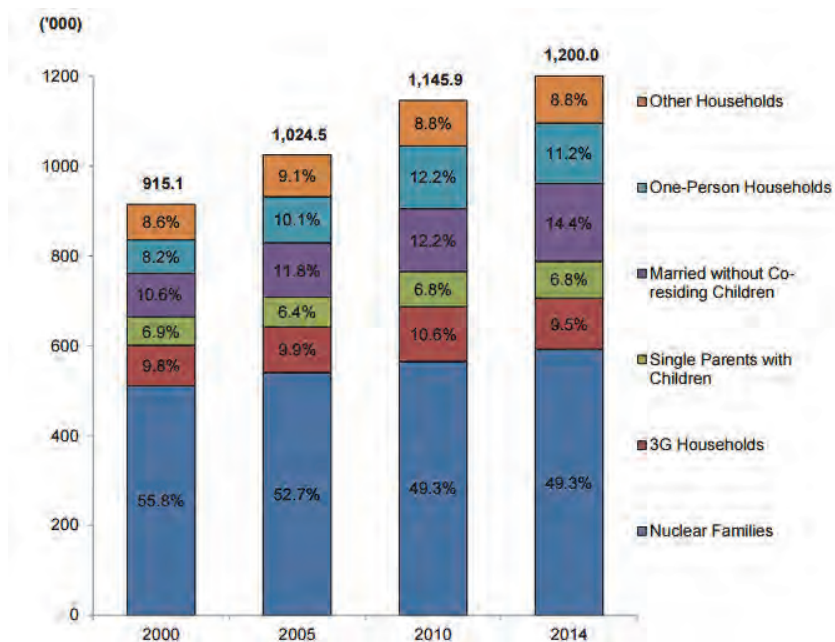


Changing Family Structure

The composition of resident households has also shifted over the years, with a falling proportion of nuclear families,¹ and rising share of single-member households (Figure 2.3).

- Falling proportion of nuclear families: The nuclear family remained the dominant household structure, although its proportion declined between 2000 (55.8%) and 2014 (49.3%).
- Rising share of single-member households: The proportion of one-person households increased between 2000 (8.2%) and 2014 (11.2%).

Figure 2.3: Resident Households by Household Structure, 2000–2014



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Families and Households in Singapore, 2000–2014*, retrieved from: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Research-Room/Families-and-Households-in-Singapore-2000-2014>

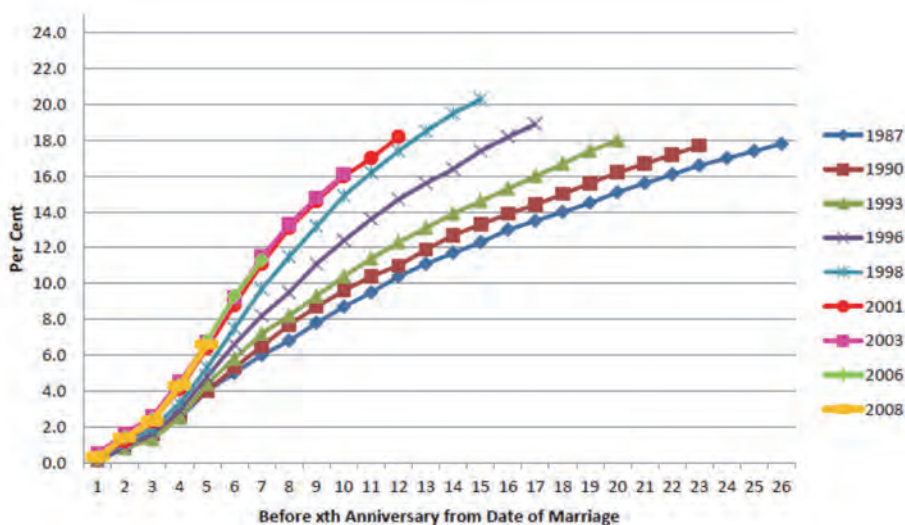
¹ Nuclear families are defined as two-generation couple-based households (i.e., with a married head and spouse) either living with parents or with children, as well as other two-generation households where the head lives with the married parents.



Changing Divorce Trends

- Increasing divorces: Among the 1987 resident marriage cohort, 17.8% of total marriages had dissolved before the 26th anniversary.² Despite the shorter duration of marriage, the proportion of dissolved marriages among the later cohorts from 1991 to 2001 has already surpassed the 1987 cohort rate of 17.8% by the end of 2013 (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Cumulative Proportion of Total Dissolved Marriages Before xth Anniversary



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Dissolution of Marriages among Marriage Cohorts, 1987–2012*, retrieved from: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Summary/publication/FDG/Statistics%20Series%20-%20Dissolution%20of%20Marriage%20Cohorts.pdf>

² Based on available data, the 1987 marriage cohort is the earliest cohort that the Singapore Department of Statistics can track.



Part 2

People as Assets for Community Development

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ang Bee Lian

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Almost every modern government claims to have community engagement. So does any national body that works with member organisations or communities. Some from the public institutions refer to community engagement as developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public bodies and one or more community groups, to help them to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences. The aim of doing so is to ensure that public services are of higher quality and are more relevant to the communities they serve. So in the planning of services, there is a process of getting greater engagement from the communities in the development and delivery of services.

Community engagement however is not a new organising concept. Literature, mostly in the public health arena in the past two or more decades, have surfaced research that support the notion that the social environment in which people live, as well as their lifestyles and



behaviours, can influence the incidence of illness within a population (Institute of Medicine, 1988). They have also shown that a population can achieve long-term health improvements when people become involved in their community and work together to effect change (Hanson, 1989). This is about community participation in health promotion and disease prevention efforts. We see our own local examples such as the Community for Successful Ageing at Whampoa (or ComSA@Whampoa).¹ ComSA, initiated by the Tsao Foundation, aims to promote self-care and enable community action that supports positive ageing. It also aims to develop a comprehensive network of services to provide efficient and effective health and psycho-social care in the community for older Singaporeans. The programme design takes reference from the World Health Organization's Active Ageing, Age-Friendly Cities and Age-Friendly Primary Care Centre framework.

But what about community involvement in solving social problems? What about using community collaborations to prevent crime, rather than relying solely on a law enforcement approach? Or encouraging neighbours to befriend vulnerable adults and communities to provide surveillance of at-risk families? The Singapore Police Force has certainly had a strong history in engaging the community for crime prevention with a lasting tagline and reminder that “low crime does not mean no crime”. An example of their efforts to engage the community is the transformation of the neighbourhood police centre policing model to the Community Policing System (COPS)² in 2012. The

¹ For details, see Tsao Foundation website at <http://tsaofoundation.org/comsa/home>

² For details, see Home Team website:

https://www.hometeam.sg/article.aspx?news_sid=201504060Q2KXAqx68VZ

COPS seeks to integrate the police into the community and in doing so, to get the support of the community in preventing, deterring and detecting crime.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

What is a community? What one person calls a community may not match another person's definition. However, those interested in working with a community must first have a clear picture of the entity they are trying to address. It is quite common to hear reference to a geographical area such as a township as a community and the cluster of blocks of flats in an area as a micro-community. Understanding the dimensions of the concept of community will enable those initiating engagement processes to better target their efforts and work with community leaders and members in developing appropriate engagement strategies.

There is also the sociological or systems perspective and a more personal, individual perspective to community. Central to the definition of a community is a sense of who is included and who is excluded from membership (Institute of Medicine, 1995). A person may be a member of a community by choice, as with voluntary associations, or by virtue of their innate personal characteristics, such as age, gender, race, or ethnicity (Institute of Medicine, 1995). An example is the Retired Senior Volunteers Program where seniors volunteer because they are keen to serve society through giving of their time, expertise



and experience. Individuals can therefore belong to multiple communities at any one time. When initiating community engagement efforts, one must be aware of these complex associations in deciding which individuals to work with in the targeted community.

From a sociological perspective, the notion of community refers to a group of people united by at least one common characteristic. Such characteristics could include geography, shared interests, values, experiences, or traditions. To some people it is a feeling, to some people it is relationships, to some people it is a place, to some people it is an institution (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1994). And it need not be a physical place as in the case of the online community.

Again, from the systems perspective, another way to understand and describe a community might involve exploring factors related to (Voluntary Hospitals of America, 1993):

- People (socioeconomic characteristics and demographics, health status and risk profiles, cultural and ethnic characteristics);
- Location (geographic boundaries);
- Connectors (shared values, interests, motivating forces); and
- Power relationships (communication patterns, formal and informal lines of authority and influence, stake holder relationships, flow of resources).

Similarly, we can define a community from a broader sociological perspective by describing the social and political networks that link individuals and community organisations and leaders. Understanding the nature and boundaries of these networks is critical to planning engagement efforts. For example, tracing individuals' social ties may help us when initiating a community engagement effort to identify leaders within a community, understand community patterns, identify high risk groups within the community, and strengthen networks within the community. (Minkler, 1997).

An individual also has his or her own sense of community membership. The presence or absence of a sense of membership in a community may vary over time and is likely to influence participation in community activities. This variation is affected by a number of factors. Take the example of a mayor township. Persons at one time may feel an emotional, cultural, or experiential tie to one Community Development Council; but they too may feel that they belong to more than that CDC at the same time. Someone may be registered with a constituency but spends most of the time in yet another place. Before beginning an engagement effort, it is important to understand that all these potential variations and perspectives may exist and influence the work within a given community.

CONCEPTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There are as many definitions of community engagement as the number of people who use it. Loosely defined, community



engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is sometimes used to refer to one-off contact, which should not be the case. Planned with some purpose, community engagement can be a powerful vehicle for bringing about social and behavioural changes that will improve the well-being of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and collaborations that help to mobilise resources and influence systems, to change relationships among partners, and to serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs and practices (Fawcett et al., 1995).

Community engagement draws its theory of change from sociology, political science, cultural anthropology, organisational development, psychology, social work, and other disciplines. The activities or channels of engagement involve community participation, community mobilisation and constituency building to foster community identity.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Concepts concerning community participation offer one set of explanation as to why the process of community engagement might be useful in addressing the physical and interpersonal aspects of people's environments. The real value of participation comes from appreciating the fact that mobilising the entire community, rather than engaging people on an individualised basis can lead to more effective outcomes (Braithwaite, Bianchi & Taylor, 1994). Simply stated,

change is sometimes easier or more likely to be successful and hopefully permanent when the people it affects are involved in initiating and promoting it (Thompson & Kinne, 1990, p. 46). In other words, an important element of community engagement is *participation* by the individuals, community-based organisations including voluntary welfare organisations and institutions that will be affected by the effort or that can support the effort.

This *participation* is “a major method for improving the quality of the physical environment, enhancing services, preventing crime, and improving social conditions” (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 56). Neighbourhood watch groups or community surveillance to help prevent crime is a good example. There is evidence that participation can lead to improvements in neighbourhood and community and stronger interpersonal relationships and social fabric (Florin & Wandersman, 1990). The community participation literature suggests that:

- People who interact socially with neighbours are more likely to know about and join voluntary organisations.
- A sense of community may increase an individual's feeling of control over the environment, and increases participation in the community and voluntary organisations.
- Perceptions of problems in the environment can motivate individuals (and organisations) to act to improve the community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).



When people share a strong sense of community they are motivated and empowered to change problems they face, and are better able to mediate the negative effects over things which they have no control (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 73). Moreover, a sense of community is the glue that can hold together a community development effort (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, pp. 73–74). An example of this is the ground work at the South Central Community (SCC) Family Service Centre. SCC aims to bring back the “Kampung (Community) Spirit” using the Asset Based Community Development methodology.³ Their premises are designed in such a way to provide accessible common spaces for the community. They have a Community Garden⁴ that is maintained by residents in the community, a Community Kitchen⁵ for residents to practice their cooking skills and a Goodwill Store⁶ where people in the community help one another by donating their pre-used items for those in need. These are some examples of the initiatives they have to encourage community involvement and ownership. This concept suggests that programmes that “foster membership, increase influence, meet needs, and develop a shared emotional connection among community members” (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 73) can serve as catalysts for change and for engaging individuals and involving the community to be part of decisions that affect their environment and well-being.

³ For details, see South Central Community Family Service Centre website: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/kampung-spirit/>

⁴ For details, see South Central Community Family Service Centre website: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/the-community-garden/>

⁵ For details, see South Central Community Family Service Centre website: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/the-community-kitchen/>

⁶ For details, see South Central Community Family Service Centre website: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/the-goodwill-store/>

The literature also suggests that another important element of community engagement relates to empowerment — mobilising and organising individuals, grassroots and community-based organisations, and institutions, and enabling them to take action, influence, and make decisions on critical issues. One way of empowerment is to provide important tools and resources so that residents of the community can act to gain better mastery over their lives. An example of empowerment in Singapore’s context is the job coaching and help given to individuals to navigate the jobs landscape. This is overseen by two main organisations, Workforce Singapore⁷ and the Employment and Employability Institute⁸. Individuals are also supported through job training and equipping for competency via SkillsFuture⁹.

The community organisation approach also shows findings that individuals and communities: (i) must feel or see a need to change or learn, and (ii) are more likely to change attitudes and practices when they are involved in group learning and decision-making (Minkler, 1990). An important element of community organising is helping communities look at root causes of problems while at the same time selecting issues that are simple and specific and easier to address to unite members of the group, involve them in finding a solution, and helping to build the community or organisation (Minkler, 1990).

⁷ For details, see Workforce Singapore website: <http://www.wsg.gov.sg/>

⁸ For details, see Employment and Employability website: <https://e2i.com.sg/>

⁹ For details, see SkillsFuture website: <http://www.skillsfuture.sg/>



Community organising can be an empowering process for individuals, organisations and communities. At the individual level, community organising activities provide individuals with the chance to feel an increased sense of control and self-confidence and to improve their coping capacities (Minkler, 1990). These have physical health benefits. Organising activities also strengthens the capacity of communities to respond to collective problems. An example is organising residents of a block of flats to address an infestation of bed bug. Individuals, organisations and communities can be empowered by having information about problems and having “an open process of accumulating and evaluating evidence and information” (Rich et al., 1995, p. 669).

There are often activities that can trigger the community engagement process. Some of these are tied to programme or legislative mandates, while others involve special initiatives, such as those of public health services, grant makers, or existing community groups. Once triggered, the community engagement process itself can take many forms. It can range from cooperation, where relationships are informal and where there is not necessarily a commonly-defined structure, to collaboration, or partnerships where previously separated groups are brought together with full commitment to a common mission (Mattessich & McKnight, 1992). Some of the Social Service Offices will be pivotal in taking on the coordination and initiating role as they bring about deeper discussions through their convening of platforms among service providers and community organisations.

One useful way to describe the community and its sectors is through a technique known as mapping (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Each Social Service Office (SSO) in Singapore now maps the bounds of a community by identifying primary, secondary, and potential community resources. The potential of these resources is that they can be seen as assets that can be identified, mobilised, and used to address issues of concern and bring about change.

To do service mapping, what is helpful is a heatmap rather than a geographical map to bring providers to the table. The aim is to help people to have clarity about what they are doing and allowing them to weave it together into meaningful results for the community. Questions that can facilitate this include: Why are you providing the service? (And avoid saying that there is a need.) Where are there gaps on the map (or service deserts)? And why are they there? And what do the services have in common? Sometimes there may be groups and individuals working in the same area but do not take cognizance of the contributions of others as relevant or appropriate. So the aim of such heatmaps is to facilitate agreement on outcomes and to pull everyone in the same direction.

The heat-mapping concept is part of the Social Service Offices' (SSOs) sense-making process. Data is extracted from existing database systems and plotted into geo-spatial platforms like GeoSpace or QGIS to produce heatmaps to better inform the SSOs on community issues. The different overlay of heatmaps then show

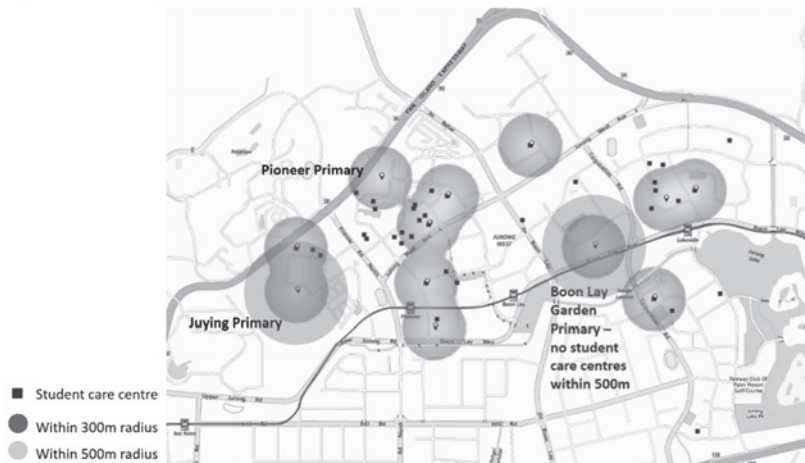


the intensity of the issue at hand and allow for deeper analysis within the community.

One example of a simple geo-spatial mapping is shown in the figure below (see Figure 1). This map shows the student care centres within 500m of the primary schools in a particular town. Upon mapping, it was identified that one primary school did not have a single student care centre within that distance radius. This information was then floated to the relevant agencies for their consideration.

Figure 1: Use of heatmap to identify student care centres

Presence of student care centres within 500m of primary schools



OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

So how do we ensure that community engagement successfully meets its aims? These are possibilities.

- People participate when they feel a sense of community; for example, when they see their involvement and the issues as relevant and worth their time, and view the process and organisational climate of participation as open and supportive of their right to have a voice in the process.
- People gain a sense of empowerment; for example when they have the ability to take action, influence, and make decisions on critical issues — when engagement efforts are purposeful and targeted.



- Community mobilisation and self-determination frequently need nurturing. Before individuals and organisations can gain control and influence and become players and partners in addressing social issues, they may need additional knowledge, skills, and resources.
- As participation involves time and effort, it is influenced by whether community members believe that the benefits of participation outweigh the costs. Community leaders can use their understanding of perceived costs to develop appropriate incentives for participation.

PURPOSEFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES

We are at a point of inflection at the ground for delivering services in a more coordinated way. We now see greater participation by both providers and consumers, greater efforts in co-designing and service providers reaching users that are hard to reach. As we open up opportunities for participation and involvement, organisers need to adapt swiftly to a refreshed way of working with diverse and sometimes divergent inputs. This can be achieved through collaborative conversations, strengthening cooperation and managing tradeoffs well. The skills needed and the openness to fresh strategies can be new to some and require more practice from others.

Now is the right time to develop our own way of community engagement for community development for the next decade. This is

because we have been seeing a greater willingness by the community to take part in discussions and to give their feedback. This provides the right ingredients to make the process of achieving better communities a more positive experience. Thoughtful and coordinated planning makes the engagements purposeful and fosters a deeper appreciation of the subject and outcome.

A good experience is at the core of building communities. It has to be created by all who have a vested interest and willingness to co-design and co-own both the time and effort that we put in as well as being equally responsible for the outcomes. Community development is not the responsibility of one stakeholder. Everyone has the capacity to contribute to the experience of the various facets of community development. The experience is almost like a Rubik's cube of daily experiences that can strengthen us as groups, communities and as a country.

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CHAPTER 4

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Ng Guat Tin

Community development, as practised in Singapore, tends to follow a planned, service-delivery, consensus model — different from textbook ideas of social action and social mobilisation. Most of the community development approaches have originated from the United States, where the socio-cultural-economic-political context is very different from Singapore. Nonetheless, there is an extensive use of the concepts and principles of community building, community bonding and community engagement in Singapore's various public policies (e.g., housing), programmes, projects, public seminars and ministerial speeches to rally community development council districts, electoral constituencies and Housing and Development Board (HDB) neighbourhoods, to be good neighbours, to care for the needy in the community, to develop bonding social capital, to volunteer time and organise activities, and to build a community (*kampung*) spirit. Community development, in Singapore, is dominated by government initiatives and oversight. In comparison, community work by the



voluntary welfare sector appears to be constrained and low-key. Little is known about community development as practised by social workers or voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs). This is not to say that social workers are not practising community work but that little is documented and publicised. However, there is slightly more academic and practitioner interests in community work, as delivered by Family Service Centres (FSCs).

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY WORK IN SINGAPORE

Community work in the voluntary welfare sector can be traced to Ron Fujiyoshi, who was trained in the tradition of Saul Alinsky and project director of Jurong Industrial Mission (1968 to 1972). Alinsky can be said to be the grandfather of a radical model of community development, developed in the United States and spread elsewhere (e.g., Australia, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom).

Jurong Industrial Mission: Fujiyoshi (a Japanese American) was asked to set up Jurong Industrial Mission (JIM), under the auspices of the East Asia Christian Conference. JIM ceased operations in 1972 after being warned by the government (Sng, 1980, cited in Goh, 2010). Singapore's economy was taking off during this period. There was little tolerance for social activists who organised industrial workers to agitate against employers for better labour management and make demands for better living conditions in Taman Jurong. Furthermore, the involvement of Christian entities in politics and economics was perceived as stepping beyond the boundaries of the church and



venturing into politics (Tamney, 1992). Religious groups were expected to “practice charity and perform community work, e.g., give alms to the destitute, set up child-care centers” (Tamney, 1992, p. 206). According to a government press release by the Ministry of Home Affairs dated December 1987, JIM was used by leftists and Marxists as a cover to stir up industrial unrest in Jurong. Despite Alinsky’s advocacy and use of conflict tactics and confrontational stance, he was not known to be a Marxist, believing instead in the American dream of a democratic, free society (Mayo, 2004).

Around the same time when JIM was in operations, in the late 1960s, two VWOs also pioneered community work: Nazareth Centre (started by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary) and Singapore Children’s Society. Not much is known about Singapore Children’s Society community outreach programme, other than the employment of Sushilan Vasoo (now Associate Professorial Fellow at the Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore), as one of its pioneer community workers in 1968–69 (Singapore Children’s Society, 2012). Other pioneer-age academics at the Department of Social Work and practitioners, who were social work students then, did their field placements in one of these three community work centres.

Nazareth Centre: In the 1960s, there were manifestations of secret society activities and “detached youths” in Bukit Ho Swee housing estate. Sister Sabine, who was trained in community development in the Philippines, was tasked to start a private community centre — Nazareth Centre — reaching out to those living on the margins (Barr,



2010; Loh, 2013). She obtained support from Fr Charbonnier, a French Catholic priest who was proficient in Mandarin, and Fr James Minchin, an Australian Anglican priest. Both priests were already active in “developing socially aware communities of young people in their parishes”, and operated in “loose alliance” with them (Barr, 2010, p. 345). Sister Sabine’s community organising work however caused concern (e.g., over one hundred people turned up for a meeting, arranged by her, with a local Member of Parliament) and she was subjected to internal security scrutiny (Barr, 2010). She then “retired” in 1969 due to poor health. Nazareth Centre stopped its community work and turned to the provision of social services instead. In the historical account, Beyond Social Services was said to have started only in 1969, though still operating under the name of Nazareth Centre, before making several changes in organisational name (Beyond Social Services website).

The demise of JIM and the change in approach of Nazareth Centre’s community development signalled a strong message to the voluntary welfare sector at that time that the use of a social action approach in community work, in the form of galvanising groups of people who were confrontational, was out of bounds.

Family Service Centres: In 1977, at the same time when Residents’ Committees were springing up all over Singapore, the Ministry of Social Affairs (the forerunner of the present-day Ministry of Social and Family Development) established a family service centre (FSC) in the MacPherson housing estate. It was conceptualised by Thung Syn Neo



(a pioneer social worker and social welfare administrator), who set up it up on a three-year pilot project basis, having secured funding support from UNICEF. Staffing for the FSC came from the Social Welfare Department, then located at Pearls' Hill Terrace, with several workers trained in social work or having had work experience in social welfare. The objective of setting up the FSC was to help prevent or reduce the incidence of social problems, with community involvement, at the grass-roots level. The focus of the pioneering FSC was on community organising rather than family work or counselling. As a result, there were conscious and conscientious efforts to work with and involve local community agencies such as Citizens' Consultative Committees, Community Centre Management Committee, schools, small groups and volunteers to improve community well-being in MacPherson. At the end of the pilot project phase (in 1980), the FSC ceased operations despite its apparent success in mobilising local community residents to identify and address local needs (Ng, 1999).

The FSC model was resuscitated in 1989, by the Advisory Council on Family and Community Life, which recommended the establishment of four pilot FSCs to provide family services for destitute families, to harness volunteer participation, and to mobilise community resources to assist families in need. Subsequently, more FSCs were set up by various voluntary welfare organisations, in different constituencies in Singapore. Currently there are 47 FSCs (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2016). These FSCs are expected to engage the local community in which they are located but the intensity in which they



have engaged in community networking and community organising vary.

In her study of 35 FSCs in Singapore, Briscoe (2005) explored the usage of seven different modes of community development. She found that the usage of two modes — Social Action and Social Movements — were low. Respondents appeared to be wary of being confrontational with the authorities or criticising public policies. Some respondents said that feedback on government policies were given discreetly. In contrast, there was higher usage of three other modes that had a social service delivery focus — Programme Development and Community Liaison; Community Coalition Building; and Community Education. As for the remaining two modes — Social Planning/Policy and Locality Development — there were also reservations about their usage. Briscoe's (2005) findings should not be overgeneralised to all FSCs; some FSCs were more community-oriented and others, less so.

Besides Briscoe's study of community work, there did not seem to be any other study of community work by FSCs and VWOs. Some FSCs have started to document their work, for example, the AMKFSC Community Services Ltd, which is a good start. For example, Tan and Ng (n.d.) reviewed the use of asset-based community development model in initiating and developing COMNET befriending service, which targeted older persons living in Ang Mo Kio. Another example is the study by Fareez and Lee (n.d.) on the challenges of low-income women who participated in the Bakery Hearts project, a social



enterprise started by AMKFSC Community Services Ltd. Nonetheless, the gap in knowledge of community development suggests a potential for more research on this topic.

PRESENT-DAY EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

There is sparse literature on the current practices of community organising in the voluntary welfare sector. Three examples are presented here, based on publicly available literature, in chronological order of establishment: (i) Advocacy of migrant labour; (ii) Project 4650; and (iii) Goodlife! Makan Kitchen. A fourth example is ComSA@Whampoa, which is elaborated in the case studies section of this publication.

Advocacy of migrant labour. In Singapore, there are few advocacy-oriented organisations aiming to fight for better labour rights and benefits. These are Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) and Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME). HOME provides humanitarian assistance to foreign workers in need and empowerment activities (e.g., education on human rights, employment laws and international treaties). Its primary focus however is advocacy through research and public education on the rights of foreign workers. HOME is well supported by volunteers comprising foreign workers themselves, expatriates, business people, church groups, retirees and students. TWC2 is similarly strong on research and advocacy. Together with UNIFEM Singapore they have collaborated in research and an educational campaign to give migrant



domestic workers a regular day off (see The Singapore National Committee for the United Nations Development Fund for Women et al., 2011).

Advocacy on behalf of foreign labour in Singapore in the 21st century is a far cry from the 1980s when priests and others were at risk of being labelled “Marxists” (see, for example, Arotcarena, 2015). The demographic composition of Singapore has also changed dramatically since then. In 1990, of a total population of 3.047 million, about 86 per cent were citizens, 4 per cent were permanent residents, and 10 per cent non-residents. In 2015, the respective figures were 5.535 million, 61 per cent, 10 per cent, and 29 per cent, respectively, with a majority of non-residents being foreign labour (Department of Statistics, 2015).

Project 4650: Initiated in 2012, it was named after the two HDB blocks in Bedok South, in which residents in the Interim Rental Housing scheme were living. Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman (who holds a doctorate in social work from the University of Illinois) was the prime mover and overseer for this project, in his capacity as both the Mayor for South East District and Adviser to Siglap Grassroots Organisations. Secretariat support and project coordination were provided by the South East Community Development Council (CDC) and Siglap Constituency Office. Dr Maliki (2015) said, “Through P4650, we bring together social intervention and community support as we realise housing problems are only the tip of the iceberg for many low-income families. They face challenging and complex social issues.... We have



had some good results with this pilot, not just in terms of helping many of the families to be homeowners again, but more importantly, in terms of changed behaviour and transformed lives that are essential in making homeownership sustainable.”

The project was impressive in two aspects. First, in the way it rallied and brought together a wide spectrum of government and social service organisations, to assist those with housing and social issues. These included HDB, Residents’ Committees, Youth Executive Committee (People’s Association), Women Executive Committee (People’s Association), Malay Executive Committee (People’s Association), Centre for Promoting Alternative to Violence (PAVE), Singapore Children’s Society, Mendaki, and the Singapore Police Force. Second, in the way it engaged Pave, a family violence specialist agency, to work with housing cases. The project success however raised a question of whether a community organiser, without positional authority and organisational influence, would have pulled it off.

Goodlife! Makan Kitchen: In January 2016, Montfort Care launched the first communal kitchen in Singapore. Operating from a void deck, at Block 52, Marine Parade, Goodlife! Makan Kitchen comprised 160 square metres, with eight stoves and a separate cooking area for Muslims (Tai, 2016). The programme targeted older residents living alone and enlisted their active involvement in running the kitchen: organising themselves to buy food ingredients, deciding what to cook, preparing food and cleaning up.



Whilst the concept of a communal kitchen is new in Singapore, it has been implemented elsewhere, as community kitchens or collective kitchens and a public health strategy (Iacovou et al., 2012). Many are designed to also deal with food security issue. Tai (2016) lauded the programme for developing a sense of empowerment. It was not clear what the power issues were, though she gave the example of an older participant feeling useful, which suggested a boosting of self-esteem.

The concept of client empowerment tends to be used loosely in community development, even though power issues in the community are rarely addressed. An example is the plight of the 51 stallholders whose livelihoods were affected by a fire that destroyed a wet market and a coffeeshop in Jurong West, on 11 October 2016. The Jurong Group Representative Constituency (GRC) Member of Parliament (MP) and representatives from HDB, National Environment Agency, Ministry of Social and Family Development, and the Singapore Civil Defence Force moved into action and held a meeting on 13 October with the fire victims. They deliberated on the option of alternative locations (in Clementi, Tanglin Halt, West Coast, Ghim Moh and Teban Gardens) to resume business, without having to go through the usual bidding process. However, it was not acceptable to those present at the meeting (Liew & Chan, 2016). A reason given by some stall operators was losing their existing customer base, which they had built up over many years, in Jurong West. An 81-year-old stallholder said it would be too tiring to travel elsewhere to run a stall. The issue at hand is facilitating local economic development, in which small



business operators are given the community space and support to regain their livelihood. An alternative option of a temporary wet market and food centre, to be ready before the 2017 Chinese New Year, was eventually adopted. More than 80 per cent of those who turned up at a meeting with the member of parliament on 19 October agreed to take up stalls at the temporary market (Lin, 2016). The final decision, which affected the well-being of a community group of stallholders and their customers, depended on who had the power to influence the use and distribution of community resources.

FUTURE PATH OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In social work, community work has traditionally been recognised as one of the three core components, the other two being casework and group work. However, its importance in social work education and practice started to decline in the United States, since the 1980s. At the same time, casework or clinical social work grew in importance. Hardcastle et al. (2011) observed that many social work students, planned to work as therapists, rather than social workers. Specht and Courtney (1994) labelled such clinical social workers as “unfaithful angels”, having given up their original mission of helping the poor to pursue 4Ps: psychotherapies, private practice, professional autonomy, and professional status in society (cited in Hardcastle et al., 2011).

Similarly in Singapore, there appeared to be less professional emphasis on community work, with more attention given to work with individuals, small groups and families. The Department of Social Work



at the National University of Singapore offers one compulsory course in community work practice, in its undergraduate major in social work. SIM University offers more in its Bachelor of Social Work: one compulsory course and two elective courses in community development. The only post-graduate community development course is a joint-venture of SIM University and the People's Association, initiated in 2012. The course curriculum appears to be politically neutral, as it should be. For those who want to learn more about the practice of community development internationally, there is the International Association of Community Development (<http://www.iacdglobal.org/>).

The knowledge base of community development is drawn from different professions, cultures and countries. Hence, practitioners of community development are not exclusively social workers, by profession. Many have been trained in other disciplines, for example, community psychology, sociology, anthropology, planning and building, public health, etcetera. In Singapore, there is certainly a lot of scope for community development to draw from multiple disciplines, different ethnicities, and all walks of life. Community development in culturally diverse communities necessitates looking after the well-being of not only the 3.9 million Singapore citizens and permanent residents but also the 1.6 million non-residents, i.e., international students, foreign workers and their dependents, and foreign spouses married to Singapore citizens.



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CHAPTER 5

AN ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD) CONVERSATION

Jason Ng and Andrew Arjun Sayampanathan

BACKGROUND TO THE CONVERSATION

Singapore's social sector revolves largely around providing social services to help individuals, families and communities overcome their challenges. This creates a culture saturated in services, with service providers — the authorities and agencies — being the solution providers. The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model argues that when the community is its own solution provider, we can create truly sustainable impact. When people have ownership to solve their own issues, they own the process, and thus the process can repeat the next time such issues arise and the impact sustains as a result of this ownership. To this end, a typical ABCD process would be to first identify and mobilise the community's own strengths, particularly their social assets such as the local associations and informal networks (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).



This chapter is based on a conversation between two ABCD advocates, to unpack the ideas behind ABCD, especially how to put it into action. The two advocates are:

- **Jason Ng** is a staff coordinator with the NUS Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme (CTPCLP).¹ He guides CTPCLP student fellows for community development projects driven very much by ABCD intentions and principles. In his former work in prototyping community engagement efforts at the South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCCfsc), he adopted ABCD to raise a neighbour-helping-neighbour community for working with lower income families.

- **Andrew Sayampanathan** is an alumnus of CTPCLP and currently a medical officer with the Singapore General Hospital. When he was with CTPCLP, he carried out an asset-mapping exercise at the Kampong Glam rental blocks, exploring what the assets were and how these assets could be tapped onto benefit the local community. Inspired by this experience, he had been designing learning and action frameworks for bring the ABCD know-hows to the wider audience.

What is ABCD? What Assets Drive ABCD?

Jason: Thank you, Andrew, for joining me to chat about Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), an approach we both strongly advocate. Broadly speaking, ABCD believes

¹ For more information about CTPCLP, see <http://ctpclp.nus.edu.sg/>.



that community development is best when we build on assets within that community, i.e., its resources and strengths. However, the way people approach ABCD differs from person to person. In that sense, what does it mean to you?

Andrew: To me, ABCD is a way of life. It is a way that we see the people and environment around us. It provides us direction in terms of interaction with others. How about you?

Jason: Yes, it's ultimately a mindset. ABCD gives a lens, appreciating people and communities for their assets, and not just their needs. And after having attempted more ABCD efforts on the ground, I wonder whether some assets are more important than others. For example, we often refer to "driver assets" as: (1) the aspirations people have — what they care about; and (2) their social connections — whom they know. These are driver assets because they drive people to action. Assets are practically useless if people don't put them into action.

Andrew: I agree with you that different assets have their own relative strengths. Big-picture wise, assets are strengths within communities. They can come from community members (i.e., people) or from the environment (both physical and/or man-made). So both an 80-year-old auntie's ability to cook good Nonya curry and the presence of a well-maintained



public garden can serve as assets. However, an individual's assets may not always benefit others. I've volunteered in a private estate. Some residents own high-end cars or have massive swimming pools. Materially, they are rich. Asset-rich. Whether these assets benefit others is dependent on how much a person wants to give back to his or her community. It depends on how connected this person is to his or her neighbours.

ASSET MAPPING – SYSTEMS VS. PEOPLE

Jason: Exactly! These factors go back to aspirations and connections — the driver assets! You've also captured what makes ABCD so powerful: people in a community should give back to their own community, using their own assets. As this change is from inside out, this change can be sustained, driven by an appetite for repeating social change cultivated by this sense of ownership. And this change starts with driver assets. So when we map for assets, it's good to have a selective focus on driver assets.

Andrew: I'm of a different opinion — we should just be looking for assets more broadly, beyond driver assets. Instead of being selective, we should look out for assets to obtain a holistic picture of what is actually present within the community. This opens up more possibilities. Concurrently, we may want to have a structured approach to assets



mapping, like having a classification of the different assets we should be documenting. Mappers need to also decide which structure works best based on their target community.

Jason: That’s probably a better word — how to be “structured” rather than “selective”. I also see value in customising the mapping structure. After all, all communities are different. There is no ABCD “formula”. However, there are universal principles for ABCD. For instance, one principle is knowing what our exact role is. We are researchers collecting data on assets that could generate solutions. We are also facilitators who provide platforms for solutions to originate from the community, and not from us. Do you have other principles to share?

Andrew: Definitely! For one, I always remind myself that the ABCD process has to be dynamic. Assets mapping cannot be static. It has to be performed regularly. The assets present in a community today may not be the same tomorrow. If one fails to recognise this, the entire ABCD initiative may collapse.

Jason: This is why ABCD is more challenging. If we believe that the solution should be community-owned, can the community also be activated to maintain this dynamic database?



Andrew: Certainly! I generally see ABCD comprising three key components: assets mapping, mobilisation and management. Database maintenance is part of assets management. There are other aspects of assets management: Development of current assets, creation of new assets, feedback systems to understand the success and failures of previous ABCD initiatives as well as community education regarding ABCD. But currently, there's very little literature on assets management.

Jason: You've outlined the general processes behind ABCD. But there's really no standard way to carry out ABCD, which is essentially a mindset. So dwelling on these processes too much, we may be unnecessarily and overly prescriptive. Ultimately, people drive processes. If we can map for the right "individuals", we can mobilise them quite effortlessly for community action, and they can even manage the assets data on the own. So how do we find the "right" individuals, who believe in improving their own communities and the power of mutual cooperation?

Andrew: I find these individuals by performing what I call "values mapping". I identify the values of individuals, what their visions are, and where they see their community in 10 years' time. Through this, I also ask people if they are interested in giving back to their community. Naturally, I am able to identify individuals who are more passionate in



serving their community. I can identify people who are more “in sync” with the ABCD mindset. This allows me to find the appropriate individuals who can serve as the core leadership for ABCD initiatives, as well as those who can contribute to the assets management process.

WHY DO WE CARE?

Jason: These people care, effectively demonstrating the first driver asset. And they show that they care through the visions they offer about their own communities. There are also connectors whom we know are connectors because they are already doing the connecting. Complementing “values mapping”, we should perform “behaviour mapping” too. We discover this cohort of connectors by observing who are already actively bringing people and assets together. Essentially, connectors are those who are well connected to the community and care for the community — they embrace both driver assets! Find these connectors and then mobilise them for whatever “assets management system” that they want to drive. In fact, they may already have their own system, which we can build upon. These connectors believe in ABCD, although they may not have explicitly articulated so. Some of them are already doing ABCD without even realising what ABCD is. But back to you, how did you become so passionate about ABCD?



Andrew: My belief is that you've got to immerse yourself into the entire process. You have to get your hands dirty in at least one ABCD project to understand the entire mechanism. For example, I was once testing a mapping structure I had designed, called the "Community Development Canvas", at a clinic for migrant workers. There, I met this Bangladeshi worker who apparently dropped out of his Master's programme. Although he had a degree and great interest in history, he wanted to expand his range of interests. That got me thinking. I did research and found out about a book exchange library model. I decided to prototype this within my neighbourhood before bringing this to the migrant worker community to evaluate its feasibility. We got an organisation to donate a cupboard and we placed it in a community centre. The community centre donated one shelf of reading material. There were instructions on how individuals could contribute to and obtain books from the collection. Within two months, there were two shelves of books, growing from the initial one shelf. This shows how ABCD actually can work and benefit others within a community. Recently, I read that there's a similar book swap corner in Yishun. A simple white shelf was placed outside the Nee Soon Town Council office at Block 290, Yishun Street 22 for residents to deposit and exchange pre-used books there. They even shared their thoughts via social media on the books they had read to encourage interactions. The objective is to foster friendships among



book lovers in this locality (Teo, 2016). For me, my book exchange project certainly inspired me to want to apply more ABCD. And this idea simply came from a conversation with a migrant worker, even though the migrant worker himself wasn't involved!

Jason: And that's why I thought that it is symbolic to do this article as a conversation! All ABCD work starts with conversations! I also agree that experiencing is believing. I acquired this ABCD DNA from a community conversation facilitated by Beyond Social Services for the lower-income parents in my estate. Beyond Social Services conducts group work regularly to bring the parents together. When the parents are connected, their assets are also connected and they work collectively on their children's well-being using these assets. It is very ABCD! For example, one parent can guide another parent's child in a hobby or skill that can help develop or fulfil the child's career aspirations, such as cooking. Prior to these, I didn't want to relate to these parents, mainly because I didn't know how. But this community conversation shifted my mentality because it's a conversation based on assets. The facilitator got these parents to share their positive everyday moments, like the last time they shared a joke with their children. I experienced their positive energy and their strong aspiration to better their own lives. So we aren't so different after all. Talking about assets can bring people closer



together. It develops a community, and a sense of community that can bring about change. To me, that is the essence of ABCD. Taking the Beyond example, they can do more when they mobilise the parents — that addresses why we adopt ABCD. And the parents can be mobilised when it is based on a common concern they share, like their children’s well-being — that is how ABCD is developed. Now that we have demonstrated “why” and “how” ABCD works, what are your hopes for ABCD locally?

AMPLIFYING THE ABCD VOICE THROUGH DOCUMENTATION AND CONNECTING WORK

Andrew: Interesting question. I really hope more communities within Singapore can tap on ABCD. There’s a lot of potential for ABCD. The unfortunate thing is that not many people appreciate the full extent of this potential. As such, in 10 years’ time, my hope is that there is a better balance of both the needs-based and assets-based approaches to community development. If you think about it, everyone has needs. But at the same time, everyone has the potential to contribute. It’s just a matter of realising this fact. So what more can we do? I believe that the future lies in community education with respect to the ABCD approach. The other suggestion is the creation of a chronicle of the various ABCD local efforts so that we can better analyse the strengths and weaknesses of previous ABCD initiatives.



With this information, we can refine our entire ABCD approach to fit our local context. I understand that this is work-in-progress for CTPCLP. As CTPCLP actualises more ABCD projects, it could eventually have substantial “data” based on its practice experience to do this meaningful analysis.

Jason: That’s an inspiring vision. For me, I want to see more organisations and practitioners playing the role of connectors. I believe that there are indeed promising ABCD efforts out here (just check out the chapters in this publication). It is valuable to influence more people to embrace this ABCD mindset by connecting them to these case studies, helping others experience what has worked and thus co-opting them as believers. This will grow a community, and a community can advocate ABCD with an amplified voice. My role as the coordinator of CTPCLP is essentially being the connector for the sector, linking students as resources to the community sector to co-create ABCD stories. It’s a role I find a lot of meaning in doing, allowing me to walk the ABCD talk.

Andrew: That’s quite thought-provoking. Certainly quite a lot to digest. What are some good resources I could tap on if I’d like to know more about ABCD?



Jason: Have more conversations with those who have experienced ABCD and with those who want to do more ABCD. This publication is an amazing start, archiving not just ABCD efforts but the people behind these efforts — so we know who to turn to for these conversations. Last question. What does ABCD mean to you in your new job as a medical professional, especially as “a way of life”, quoting you?

Andrew: I think ABCD can be adopted more extensively in the healthcare industry. In fact, I wrote an article on ABCD in healthcare. My belief is that medicine is not just about treating those with illnesses. It includes preventing diseases. Both the treatment and prevention of diseases can involve community members. There have been studies showing how various communities leverage on non-healthcare professionals in health management. I believe that is the next step forward in bringing together the ABCD approach with health and wellness.

Jason: A good example was how neighbourhood shop-owners and students were mobilised to make Yishun a dementia-friendly town, an initiative by Khoo Teck Puat Hospital and the Lien Foundation. And that’s a heartening note to end this conversation — you’re aspiring to be an ABCD advocate for your own healthcare community! I wish you all the best in this journey.



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CHAPTER 6

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A FORM OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Ijlal Naqvi

The Singapore government increasingly conducts a wide-ranging variety of community engagement, which involve some degree of public participation in government decision-making. These range from Our Singapore Conversation, a wide-ranging discussion of what Singaporeans want for their future, to the Colour Your Buses campaign in which citizens could vote on whether public buses should be red or green. While these engagement processes typically inform and consult, or occasionally involve deliberation and co-creation, they rarely — if ever — empower citizens to make consequential decisions in the manner of Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright’s concept of Empowered Participatory Governance (2003).

Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) is a theoretical framework for understanding bottom-up approaches to governance, which are intended to achieve practical solutions for specific areas of public problems through reasoned deliberation involving ordinary



citizens and local level officials. This approach is unabashedly normative, with Fung and Wright describing EPG processes as schools of democracy; the act of participation not only puts democratic principles into practice, but inculcates democratic norms among the participants. The cases introduced in the *Real Utopias* book represent a range of possibilities across the dimensions of EPG, with the best known being participatory budgeting in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. In participatory budgeting, ordinary citizens make proposals on how the municipal budget should be spent, and then deliberate on which will be funded in popular assemblies. The contrast to Singapore's more established mode of technocratic governance could not be more stark, and the fundamental enabling condition of EPG — a rough balance of power among participating actors — is typically unmet in situations where the government is involved. How then has Singapore's pragmatic and resourceful government fared with adopting novel forms of participatory practices?

This chapter proceeds to examine the particular case of a voluntary welfare organisation (VWO), which I will call Connect, which ran some community engagement exercises in a public housing estate concerning renovations and new construction of healthcare facilities aimed at serving the needs of an ageing population. Connect's unusual characteristics serve to illustrate some of the broader themes of community engagement practices in Singapore including the relationship with government, tradeoffs of efficiency and process, and the cultivation of a sense of ownership among the citizens being engaged.



In Singapore, government is the unavoidable partner in any public act. From access to spaces such as void decks, influencing policy, or securing funds, all is easier in alignment with government actors. For Connect, its patron is the Member of Parliament (MP) of the area where the proposed senior care facilities are located. Connect's initial funding was based on donations solicited through the patron's social network. Moreover, the patron's role as grassroots advisor was a channel to the People's Association's (PA) Resident's Committees (RCs), which were a crucial component of Connect's outreach strategy. Key members of Connect's staff were seconded from the public sector. While the funding and staff resources were of course an important component of Connect's operations, the personal networks and bureaucratic know-hows of the seconded staff were possibly an even greater asset to the organisation. The multiple identities of Connect staff as volunteers or affiliates of the MP and the ruling party were deployed as was considered advantageous to the situation. Collaborating with the RCs was crucial in terms of providing an extension to Connect's manpower, without which it could not have conducted so many door-knocking sessions or the like. Reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of this operating strategy, one Connect staffer simply commented "PA. It's *gahmen* lah." With all the capabilities that this brings, there are some Singaporeans who will simply have nothing to do with PA-associated events or the RC.

To work with the RCs in place of growing a network of volunteers on its own is emblematic of the tradeoffs between outcomes and process



that Connect was faced with. To cultivate a new, more organic network would have been a hugely time-intensive and uncertain commitment. Instead, Connect worked with the existing RC networks to extend its reach quickly, but thus did not get the benefits of mobilising citizens around their chosen topic of health and general welfare of seniors. Instead, Connect constantly negotiated with the chairs of the RCs to get them to assist with Connect's plans. As RC chairs are appointed by the MP, the community engagement exercises relied on and reinforced existing relationships with local residents rather than allowing anything new to develop.

That Connect originated the ideas for which it sought the RC's involvement also speaks to the ownership of the community engagement exercises, which largely remained with Connect rather than the community residents or even the RCs. The community engagement exercises themselves did not produce decisions. They were informative or consultative exercises as Connect itself was only an intermediary to the various public sector actors responsible for renovating, constructing, or managing the senior care facilities in question. As the residents could not make decisions and did not originate the engagement exercises, the sense of ownership that could be generated in such a situation was limited. The public service organisations responsible for constructing the facilities had their own constraints with regard to timelines and budgets. Suggestions from community members were considered, and fulfilled wherever possible, but priorities were always determined by institutionalised pressures to complete the project in a timely manner.



The construction which Connect's community engagement exercises contributed to is now completed. While it shows every evidence of being an excellent public health facility, there is little sense that it was meaningfully shaped by processes of community engagement. The enabling conditions of EPG were not met, nor were local residents ever empowered to address local problems. Consequently, it is hard to argue that any sense of ownership was generated by the community engagement in this instance. However, it is equally hard to argue that the facility is lacking in a way that could be addressed by EPG-style exercises. Nonetheless, in this neighbourhood and other locations, community engagement exercises continue to proliferate in this manner across Singapore.

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Part 3

VWOs as Assets for Community Development



CHAPTER 7

ACTIVATING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Samuel Tang and Gerard Ee

BACKGROUND OF BEYOND SOCIAL SERVICES

Historical Influences

On 26 May 1961, the blaze that was described as the Hari Raya Haji Inferno devastated 60 acres of squatter settlement resulting in 7,000 homeless people. The government quickly provided emergency housing units but the squatter settlement soon re-emerged. On 24 November 1968, near the same spot where the 1961 fire began, the homes of 3,000 people went up in flames.

It was in such a climate that religious groups and concerned citizens got together to form the Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project with the aim of helping residents solve problems associated with poverty and crowded living conditions. Buddhist monks, Catholic missionaries, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran pastors and service clubs pooled their resources to provide free medical treatment and food rations. Community workers were employed and they

encouraged self-help and thrift by helping residents organise themselves into the Bukit Ho Swee Residents' Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society Ltd. The Co-operative helped residents save on essential household items and second-hand schoolbooks. It also secured home-based jobs from factories for residents.

Over the next 40 years, Beyond Social Services, as it was renamed in 2001, employed an increasing number of professionals to serve the evolving needs of the community we found ourselves in; such as piloting the Family Service Centre¹, the Streetwise programme², the Men-in-Recovery programme³, the Healthy Start programme⁴, the Restorative Justice service⁵, and Babes⁶. We carved out a niche, specialising in youth work.

In 2004, with the proliferation of new problem definitions and services continuing unabated across the sector, we took a step back to reflect on our identity as a voluntary welfare organisation and how we could best contribute to the issues facing society. We began to notice the structural limitations of service provision:

- Service provision is primarily deficit-focused and administered based on specific issues or criteria. Traditionally, with most of

¹ The Family Service Centre provides support to individuals and families in need to better cope with their personal, social and emotional challenges in their lives.

² This is a diversionary programme for youth who are suspected of gang-related activities.

³ This is an anger management programme in prisons for perpetrators of family violence.

⁴ This programme supports low-income families of pre-school children to ensure that they get pre-school education and ensure the safety and well-being.

⁵ This uses restorative approaches to create inclusive communities in school, neighbourhoods and in the reformatory training centre.

⁶ This is a teenage pregnancy crisis service that reaches out girls in need of help or support.



the resources targeting isolated issues of the most needy or the most deserving, there is a lack of developmental approaches to facilitate growth of this still-vulnerable demographic beyond their circumstances.

- Service provision is time-limited. Many of the schemes available follow a process of assessment, administering the treatment or service, then closing the case. We observed the same families, with complex challenges, returning multiple times, unable to access the kind of sustained help needed for them to break out of their cycle of problems.

- Service provision places the ownership of solving social problems at the feet of the government and social service professionals. It comprises of solutions done *to* families based on the assumption that external professionals have the expertise necessary to solve problems. As consumers of services, there is no incentive (or in some cases, an artificial incentive) for clients to be co-creators of solutions. An unintended effect of this is that many lower-income individuals come to believe that their well-being depends upon being a suppliant client.

From our starting point of serving children and youth we have taken to heart the adage, “It takes a village to raise a child”. Whether we acknowledge it or not, the communities that children grow up in have an indelible effect on them, for good or for ill. It takes a village to come

together and provide the environment in which children of all abilities and circumstances can develop a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. It takes a village to inspire hope and appreciate the contributions of its children in all forms.

What's at stake? Studies show that children and youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to offend in the eyes of the law. Their families face complex and multiple challenges and share a long history of poverty-associated ills that can last generations. We wish for young people to respect the law, not just fear it. We wish for them to contribute to society, not just take from it. By developing communities that are empowered and families that are well supported, children and youth are then able to grow in an environment that best provides them the opportunity to refuse a lifestyle of delinquency and welfare dependency.

Influences From the International Social Work Discourse

With this goal in mind, we searched for alternative approaches in the international social work discourse that could be adapted to our experiences in Singapore. Alternatives that complement the existing social work infrastructure, and resonate with our belief that communities and wider society can do a lot more in creating a future for their children.

From the writings of Jurgen Habermas to Michael Sandel, we were made aware of the sociological impacts of technical rationality on the



lifeworld of the disadvantaged, and how institutional or market-based norms marginalise them.

From the observations of Robert Putnam and Richard Sennett, we gained a greater appreciation of the power of social capital and the need for cooperation and collaboration.

From the practice of John McKnight and Howard Zehr, we adopted the approaches and principles that bring people together and build on their capacities to contribute towards a more restorative and cohesive community.

By applying these ideas to our Singaporean context, we turned full-circle to our roots as a volunteer-run, community-involved organisation, driven by the principles of **compassion, community and social justice**. In 2010, we prototyped a model of social work that could empower families, neighbourhoods and a society that cared for, and could accommodate marginalised children and youth.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

To redress marginalisation, the Youth United (YU) Programme aims to foster greater social integration, inclusion and cohesion in families, neighbourhoods and wider society. **Social integration is not just about adjusting people to society, but rather to ensure that society is accepting of all people.** Hence, our vision is to create

neighbourhoods where every individual, including children and youth, has an active role to play, and are able to cooperate with and support each other. We believe that when more residents begin looking out for one another, their efforts will contribute to creating an environment where children and youth are less marginalised and more resilient against negative influences.

The YU programme operates within the public rental scheme housing areas at five different localities: Bukit Ho Swee, Henderson/Redhill, Lengkok Bahru, Whampoa and Ang Mo Kio. Households in these blocks are living on S\$1,500 a month or less.

At Beyond Social Services, the YU programme steps in at various levels of the ecosystem around the youth to provide an environment conducive for positive youth development. As a framework, we develop communities from the inside out, strengthening human resources to be better able to organise and act on the issues their children and youth face.



Figure 7.1 Working at different levels of the ecosystem

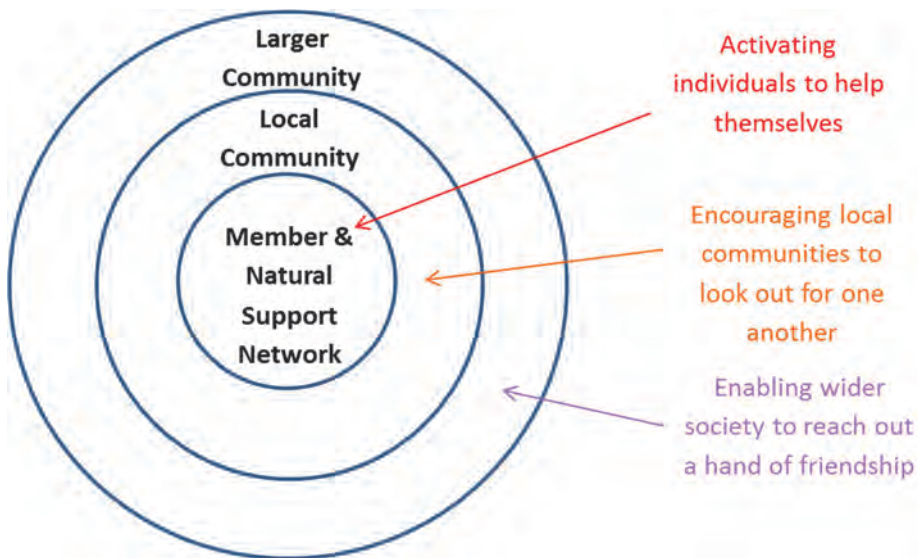


Table 7.1: Target group and focus

Target Group	Member & Natural Support Networks	Local Community	Larger Community
Focus	Strengthening of members mutual support networks with family, friends and volunteers	Creating platforms for associations to flourish and act in a restorative manner	Mobilisation of resources to help communities develop from the inside out

At present, the YU programme is designed to Invite, Inspire, Involve, Inform all three stakeholders to play a part in low-income community. These efforts revolve around the following goals for children and youth:

**Table 7.2: Goals and community efforts and activities**

Goals for Children and Youth	Community Efforts and Activities
Live crime-free lives	Foster belonging and responsibility
Pursue gainful employment and lifelong learning	Nurture talents and strengths
Enjoy family stability	Strengthen relationships and cooperation
Greater access to opportunities and resources	Building networks with friends and volunteers

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE VALUE OF THIS APPROACH

Are Resources Limited or Abundant?

For the most part, the social service sector mobilises limited national resource. These resources are entrusted by the wider society through government redistribution and must be held accountable to creating a visible assurance of stability and that society is taking care of its own. Structured schemes, services and programmes fulfil these criteria and are often governed by the principles of fairness as defined by consistency and due diligence in creating pre-determined outcomes.

Unlike the zero-sum-game narrative that arises from a context of limited resources, community resources are, when activated, limitless. By recognising the capacities of those who have been labelled mentally handicapped, disabled, lazy and criminal, or of those who are marginalised because they are too naughty, poorly educated, or too deviant, resources are continually activated and appreciated. The truth, which is often hard to accept, is that each defective individual or household is replete with a vast, and often surprising, array of under-valued contributions, potential, talents and productive skills, few of



which are being mobilised for community-building purposes. These provide a **sustainable** resource in the form of social capital, which will continue to look after children and youth beyond the limitations of any structured programme. We believe that this long-term engagement with children and youth will produce more of an impact in their development and resilience than time-limited interventions.

Furthermore, the main ingredient for any social programme to succeed is that the intended beneficiaries must have a genuine stake in its success. Doing *with* people rather than *to* or *for* them maximises the chance that resources will not go to waste, or run up against counter-productive resistance. By creating a base of mutual support amongst families and neighbours that will take **ownership** for the health of their community and be actively involved in matters pertaining to children and youth; this involvement enhances the efficacy of any existing programmes.

In fact, when we do introduce resources from wider society that the local community lacks, these external resources are much more effectively used and employed when the local community is itself fully invested and possesses a sense of responsibility for its own health.

Finally, community resources are **flexible**. Because it comes in the form of gifts through relationships, resources are allocated based on compassion, or perhaps even out of obligation or returning a favour. These are responses that can quickly, and with discretion, listen to and address the shifting needs of individuals or families within the

community's ecosystem, enabling the community to be adaptable in times of complex challenges.

What is Valuable?

The above discussion on resource optimisation warrants a follow-up discussion on outcomes. In our financially-driven world, this is usually defined as economic outcomes for the children and young people we serve. While it is vital that any approach, including the YU programme, endeavours to uplift the weaker members of our society, we need to pay special attention to expanding our notions of successful intervention to include human and social capital. This is because economic outcomes alone do not define quality of life.

If societal values revolve around economic success, there will always be winners and losers. Inequality, both income and capital, in Singapore has risen rapidly over the last 30 years and the government has acknowledged that greater support is needed. At present, efforts have been made to curb rising inequality, and social service offices and government grassroots organisations administer financial assistance to meet urgent as well as short to medium term needs. Those who are unable to work because of old age, illness or disability and have little or no family support are attended to for the longer term. These efforts are essential in helping the most disadvantaged meet their basic needs, but in an increasingly competitive education system and labour market, crossing income gaps remains a distant dream for many.



Feedback from our members who receive welfare include feeling disregarded and misunderstood, as well as blamed and belittled for their family situation and their lack of economic success. Apart from repeated means testing, they are urged to secure better-paying jobs. For many low-wage earners, taking such steps may affect family stability. They continually struggle to juggle work and obligations to care for their dependents. Despite their best efforts, they are persistently perceived as burdens to the state and are considered examples of bad choices and bad parenting.

To change this narrative, focusing on improving income is not enough. We feel that there is a need for an approach that safeguards the spirit of self-reliance and that strengthens our social fabric at the same time — by **creating and highlighting other values**. Over and above meeting of basic needs and the accumulation of material comforts, the factors that underpin quality of life can be found through relationships. To name a few, these values include connecting and cooperating with diversity; the privilege of caring and receiving care; and having a stake by participating in one's community.

In the process of building relationships among people, social trust is nurtured. International research indicates that where social trust is high, crime rates are low. Social trust and civic engagement is also positively correlated with health and happiness, all of which contributes to an improved quality of life.

Our recent national budget has put forward that Singapore's future must be built around a spirit of partnership, recognising that everyone has a role in building a caring and resilient society. We would like to echo these sentiments and suggest that the act of partnership, mutual care and resiliency are intertwined; that the resiliency of our society to weather the fractures that divide us is strengthened by society itself taking an active role in cooperating and caring for each other.

BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Working With Our Members

According to social interaction theorists, the problem of client resistance is this: *We forget to ask people what they want; we tell them what they need.* Practitioners that recognise the importance of the therapeutic alliance have demonstrated that people are more likely to cooperate towards positive change when those that are trying to help do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.

Clarity in helping relationships applies to community work as much as it applies to individuals and it entails a firm commitment to appreciate the strengths in the community and look for opportunities to cooperate on shared problems.

At the outset, our door knocking and community outreach efforts have placed a focus on discovering the aspirations, resources, and concerns of individuals living in government subsidised one- to two-room rental flats. Our activities, for example, flea markets, interest



groups and community celebrations, are then designed to invite residents to participate and build relationships with each other.

From there, we explore what individuals are willing to do and how they can be organised to cooperate in providing a *local response* to the needs and concerns involving children. Our role is to be:

- Advocates — rallying local communities around a concern or a need
- Enablers — organise aspirations into a work plan
- Motivators — linking resources to support the plan

Hence, by highlighting the strengths, efforts and contributions to the neighbourhood, we strengthen each community member's ability to demonstrate solidarity; and deal with their own concerns and the concerns of those around them. Over and above that, this approach allows our community members to change the negative perceptions of their neighbourhoods, and the narrative of their own lives and circumstances.

Participatory Research

On top of traditional research, which attempts to produce conclusive findings and contribute to a generalised body of knowledge, we practise a form of participative research. In this form, research serves to intentionally engage stakeholders in mutual learning and co-creation of solutions to problems perceived on the ground. It is an ongoing process of learning with the community. Currently, this is

initiated by practitioners but includes members of the community to clarify problem definitions, reflect on actions taken, interpret findings and decide on how to use and act on these findings.

In 2016, we embarked on a series of community Annual General Meetings, striving to inform the community members of their own efforts taken in the past few years and realign our goals and efforts moving forward. We have found that the process leads to more creative insights and solutions. Furthermore, it incorporates new ideas, new people, and greater enthusiasm to ongoing situations; empowering community members to be more effective agents of change in their environment.

Volunteers

In our work, volunteers are invaluable. Not only are they the hands that make the work possible, but the hearts that extend friendship, compassion and solidarity to our members. We strive to make each experience meaningful for all parties, coloured with a sense of fellowship, connectedness and a greater appreciation for the similarities and differences between them.

This can be a challenge because volunteers come in all shapes and sizes. They enter with different motivations, skills, availability; and many come in groups that may be organised to a greater or lesser degree. We try to avoid managing them like assets in a corporation, for their value go beyond efficiency or end result. For a seemingly mechanical activity like food distribution, volunteer involvement can



quickly devolve into an exercise of logistics if we do not emphasise or give time to shape the conversations that take place on every doorstep. Even if it comes at a cost, we have witnessed that the quality of involvement and the relationships built have far-reaching effects for our members and wider society.

Our role is to honour the identity of these volunteers and accept the gifts they bring. It is to create hospitable environments and inclusive opportunities, through training, briefing, and co-creating activities, where meaningful interactions can happen. It is to remain intentional about what good can be derived from each situation, while being sensitive to the changes and mindful of the dynamics that develop with volunteer involvement.

Community Workplace

Before we begin to create community in local neighbourhoods, we found it necessary to build a workplace culture, within Beyond Social Services, that embodies the values we espouse.

We endeavour towards collaborative learning through our fortnightly Journey Beyond. Everybody takes turn to teach, and learning emerges from the conversations and observations of each staff member.

We take time to be patient with each other, and are sensitive to the fact that colleagues are human, that we are all growing, and that relationships matter. We manage each other through trust and

collective responsibility rather than through greed or fear. We seek to treat each other with generosity, kindness, cooperation, forgiveness, acceptance of the human condition and curiosity.

This experience of community within the organisation is indispensable in forming the collaborative attitudes we need to approach various stakeholders in our local neighbourhoods.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social issues are not just problems to be eradicated, but opportunities to rally community and society together.

— Beyond Social Services

Social work is not just about helping the less privileged, but everyone in Singapore as well. It is about empowering all of us to reconnect with each other, our sense of compassion and our shared humanity. Our focus on children on youth charges us with an added responsibility: by coming together to care for and develop the potential of each child towards his or her aspiration, we create a lasting legacy for what Singapore will look like 50 years from now. For whether we are there to witness it or not, children and youth grow up — they *are* our future.

In the past five years, we have had the privilege of being in communities that care deeply for their children and youth. We have witnessed the strength and resilience of people whose lives are filled



with difficulties. At their own time, in surprising ways, these same people step up and respond to the needs of others.

Together, we need to relook at the culturally-ingrained way we distinguish between those that are different from us, have made different choices and live through different circumstances. Instead of treating them as problematic, we could choose to stand with them as people with different needs and strengths; and recognise that deep down, in many ways they are still similar to us — they deserve dignity. By creating a household, a HDB block, a street and a society that can understand, work around and accommodate these differences, we can avoid the dehumanisation that unintentionally occurs through institutionalisation and stigmatisation.

What we gain from walking with them is well worth the effort.

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CHAPTER 8

COMMUNITY FOR SUCCESSFUL AGEING (COMSA) – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN WHAMPOA

Susana Concorde Harding and Lee Yuan Ting Jasmine

COMMUNITY FOR SUCCESSFUL AGEING (ComSA)

Community for Successful Ageing, or ComSA in short, is the fourth initiative of Tsao Foundation, which upholds to the vision of promoting ageing in place and successful ageing, and at the same time it allows the Foundation to continue being a catalyst for changing societal perceptions about ageing. Conceptualised and developed in 2009, ComSA is a community-wide public health planning approach to create an integrated system of holistic programmes and services with the aim to promote health and well-being over the life course and to enable ageing in place. It comprises three aspects that are critical for supporting older residents in the community to age well and to age in place. They are, namely, primary care and care management system; community development system; and infrastructural development. The ComSA initiative shares the vision of the “City for All Ages”



(CFAA)¹ which aims to build senior-friendly communities where seniors can live safely and confidently, stay healthy and active, and be fully integrated.

In 2012, the CFAA Council invited Tsao Foundation to pilot ComSA in Whampoa. At the time, Whampoa was already one of the estates chosen to be the pilot sites of CFAA. Implementation of the first two systems — primary care and care management system as well as community development system — has been ongoing in phases since 2013, while the last aspect on housing and infrastructure is still in the pipeline and will be developed soon.

COMSA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (CD)

ComSA Community Development (CD) began in Whampoa in November 2014 to facilitate successful ageing in the community by effecting sustainable changes in social capital, knowledge of self-care and healthy lifestyles, as well as positive ageing. We aim to achieve these goals via three interventions: community assessment, community capacity building as well as community outreach and engagement. Community assessment was conducted in partnership with NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health in the first eight months of the project, with the objectives of gaining understanding of the community, identifying target elders and residents, and fine-tuning

¹ For details, see Ministry of Health website:
https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/dam/moh_web/PressRoom/Press%20releases/MCA%20Press%20Release%20-%20%243bn%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Enable%20Singaporeans%20To%20Age%20Successfully.pdf



the agreed strategies and intervention activities. On the other hand, activities under community capacity building and community outreach and engagement have started since the ninth month, which focus on mobilising community health partners and champions, and creating platforms and opportunities to build a more socially cohesive Whampoa that is age-friendly and inclusive of elders through various community events and self-care programmes such as the Self Care on Health for Older Persons in Singapore (SCOPE) Programme and the Guided Autobiography (GAB) Programme.

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF COMSA AND COMSA CD

ComSA is a holistic yet specialised framework, targeting seniors ranging from healthy and active ones to the frailer and socially isolated ones. We fully utilise our expertise in the ageing arena and gerontological healthcare in ComSA interventions, to work towards promoting successful ageing for the elders and the community at large. On top of being holistic, ComSA interventions also have a strong preventive element, as we aim to educate the community on potential age-related health risks before they deteriorate into more serious ailments or at the very least we help to inculcate them with knowledge on how to maintain their current health statuses. This has been commonly done through the SCOPE programme.

Another unique point of ComSA, specifically ComSA CD, is the focus on self-care. While there are different programmes available in the community which provide healthcare or even medical information,



SCOPE programme, the key community outreach programme of ComSA CD, not just focuses on health-related topics but also emphasises the importance of being responsible for one's own health. Just as the tagline "Self Care Starts with Me" suggests, we greatly encourage participants to be independent and take charge of their own body. This is in line with our goal of portraying a positive image of ageing in the community, in which seniors can be self-reliant and are capable of caring for themselves.

Participants who have completed SCOPE will then progress to attend the Sharing Wellness and Initiatives Group (SWING), which is another highlight of ComSA CD, as it builds up the foundation for community capacity building and resource mobilisation. SWING is in close relation to self-care, such that the participants who have already learnt the importance of self care through SCOPE will then share their new learning with people around them; family members, friends and neighbours. This may then create a positive ripple effect among the members of the community as they become aware of self care and learn to be responsible for their own health. Apart from encouraging the participants to continue spreading the self-care message among themselves and to others, SWING also provides a safe platform for them to voice out their feelings of oppression and also to make suggestions on how to improve their lives and their community as a whole. Being an advocate of asset-based community development model, we then play the role of supporting the SWING participants in taking community actions if they decide to do so. Overall, SWING is a powerful community tool of ComSA CD as it gathers like-minded



residents and together they can work towards achieving common goals such as promoting wellness in the community and building a better neighbourhood for everyone.

REFLECTIONS

Like almost everything we do in life, the current achievements we have gotten from ComSA CD did not come easy. Since we first introduced ComSA CD in Whampoa, we have met several challenges which fortunately we managed to overcome through various brainstormed measures as well as support from important community partners.

ComSA CD is a whole new experience for Tsao Foundation, and also a brand new concept for Singapore in building an enabling social environment to transform into an age-friendly community. All along Tsao Foundation has been doing island-wide outreach to seniors through various gerontological services such as care management and counselling. Hence, this is the first time Tsao Foundation steps into one community, via ComSA CD, to work directly with not just the seniors there but also other community members who are either residing or working there. Such targeted work is exciting yet challenging, as different skills sets and programmes are required to do a widespread community engagement.

However, for a start, positive change in the community can only be done with strong support from our major stakeholders — City for All



Ages at Whampoa and the Whampoa Constituency Office as well as the target residents in Whampoa. Since before the beginning of ComSA CD, we have been required to collaborate positively with these partners, through informal conversations and regular meetings. To create awareness of ComSA CD and consistently get the buy-in from the community, we have also been conducting road shows to each Residents' Committee (RC) in Whampoa to explain and about our programmes, as well as carrying out various publicity approaches such as door-to-door invitations, putting up banners and posters, and organising mega community events ("Longevity Party"). All these efforts require thorough planning, which takes a toll on our time and limited manpower. Sometimes, repeat explanations are also necessary to ensure our partners' full understanding of the programmes under ComSA CD. This, we had to overcome with proper time management and staff training. Furthermore, as mentioned, ComSA CD is a pilot project and new to all of us, so many of the programmes and strategies are subject to feedback and not all of them are successful in terms of our outreach to the residents. As we try to improve, we struggled too and even relied on trial-and-error methods, which produced amazing outcomes at times.

ComSA CD is proven to be a steep learning curve for all of us. Not only we are doing relationship-building with the community, which is a new experience, but we are also introducing new concepts to create an age-friendly community. Unlike other approaches in Singapore, which tend to be more ad-hoc and event-based, ComSA CD encourages participation from the community through a community-



building approach. Apart from receiving fun and interacting with neighbours in events, residents are constantly engaged as active participants in our programmes, who play a meaningful role in contributing ideas and taking actions. Ultimately, they are guided to take charge of all the community actions under ComSA CD. This asset-based community development concept, to us, is ideal and beautiful, yet difficult to carry out.

Singaporeans, especially seniors, have been well taken care of by our government and social service agencies. As such, most of us have become reliant and will seek help from authorities if we face any issue in the community. This is why doing ComSA CD is tough, as we aim to influence mindset change — to build a more cohesive community in which the residents gather together to overcome their own community challenges. Sometimes, when we challenge our participants more in thinking deeper and taking on more responsibilities in the community efforts, they become resistant and may stop coming forward. We are always mindful of such reactions from the residents and understand that change takes time, thus we occasionally slow down to pace with them, which in turn affects our project timeline. All these boil down to time management again. More importantly, we also need to consistently seek understanding from our project funder in terms of the project timeline, which we have been doing via regular reporting and meetings.

In our experience so far, the root for success in community development seems to lie in forming positive relationships with key



community stakeholders, especially the residents who play a major role in determining the project sustainability. Rapport building, regardless of what activity we do, should always be the main focus, because only through it then we can develop trust and obtain buy-in from our partners. A close and genuine relationship will also leave a deeper impression on the person involved, and makes communication and collaboration easier. Hence, as much as we are oriented to achieving project goals, we are fully aware of how critical it is to build rapport with our partners and it should remain as the topmost priority in our work with the community.

Respect for the community is another important point of consideration when we engage them. This is in close relation to creating ground-up approaches instead of the common top-down ones for community development. As community workers who wish to work on the ground, we have to bear in mind and respect that the community would know best on how to improve their own neighbourhood and estate and they have the inner resources to do so. We have to learn to appreciate the beauty of asset-based community development approach and play the role of a facilitator, who facilitates the process of developing ground-up initiatives by community stakeholders for the betterment of their community. We can also provide other support such as funding or even co-creating projects with them if they request for it and it is within our means to do. Ultimately, the community should feel a sense of ownership for the initiatives created and this is the key to programme sustainability.



CONCLUSION

Community development is a dynamic process that involves multiple stakeholders, thus making it challenging yet exciting at the same time. ComSA CD is still considered as a new process in the community, which requires consistent monitoring and fine-tuning, thus it continues to serve as a platform for vast learning opportunities. Importantly, building good partnerships with the community stakeholders remain as our topmost priority even as we continue our journey of exploring deep within the community.



CHAPTER 9

MEETING OLDER PERSONS' BIO-PSYCHO-SOCIAL NEEDS WITH COMMUNITY INTEGRATED CARE MODEL

Choo Jin Kiat

CONTEXT

Singapore is ageing rapidly — older persons can expect to live longer, but also have fewer adult children as potential sources of support in their old age. In 2015, 12% of our population was 65 years old or above (Department of Statistics, 2015). In 2030, 25 per cent of our population will be 65 years old or above (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2006). Within the ageing population, there is a rapid increase of people suffering from certain mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and dementia. In 2013, one in 10 aged 60 years old and above was suffering from dementia, using the 10/66 dementia criteria (Institute of Mental Health, 2015). By 2030, the number of dementia cases in those aged above 60 is projected to increase to 80,000 (Khor, 2016). As older persons with mental health issues have more care needs and require a higher level of support, collaborative practices are essential to address their multiple needs.



The challenge in providing appropriate, quality, accessible, and sustainable services to support older persons' needs with these projections in perspective is further complicated by our small land mass and small population size.

The Ministry of Health (MOH), in response to our rapidly ageing population and increased needs for mental health services, has provided the needed guidance through the various master plans, resulting in the introduction of many programmes. Community Mental Health Intervention Team (COMIT) is one such programme that provides holistic services to clients with mental health needs and their caregivers so they can age in place at home and in the community. COMIT is also one of the community-based Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC) services to support older persons living in the community. In 2012, O'Joy Care Services became the first voluntary welfare organisation (VWO) in Singapore to implement two COMIT pilots, i.e., one for older persons aged 65 years old and above, and the other for individuals aged 18 to 65 years old.

ORGANISATION BACKGROUND

O'Joy Care Services was formed in 2004 by a group of social workers and professional counsellors to enhance the well-being of older persons and their families. We have since expanded this scope to incorporate provision of mental healthcare services and also the organisation of events to enhance community wellness. Our mission and mantra are to enable healthy ageing in place. We seek to achieve



this mission by catalysing collaborations among the public sector (ministries, agencies, schools, etc.), the private sector (corporations) and the people sector (VWOs, grassroots organisations, or GROs, etc.) to effect change within the community.

Since 2012, we have witnessed a sustained growth of 28 per cent per annum in terms of the number of clients served. In the last fiscal year from April 2014 to March 2015, a total of 638 clients were served. This was achieved through consistent presence and contact with the community, which allowed us to uncover unique needs of the community and to facilitate impactful change from within the community.

Our commitment to the community is evident through continued efforts to uncover and address latent needs. Following this effort, we embarked on the process of developing an integrated care model using “design thinking”¹ to weave community development into our increasingly flexible service delivery model. We are confident that the sense of community we have created in Upper Boon Keng (UBK) will contribute to the sustainable delivery of an integrated care model.

O’JOY INTEGRATED CARE MODEL: THE JOURNEY

Similar to other aged care providers, we face an increasing demand for individualised care planning, flexible service delivery infrastructures, and the need to collaborate with other care providers.

¹ See Brown and Watt (2010).



Such requirements present us with the opportunity of instituting integrated models of care. Kodner and Spreeuwenberg (2002) have defined integrated care as a coherent set of methods and models on multiple levels, to create connectivity, alignment and collaboration between care providers, in order to improve outcomes for clients and other service users. Integrated care programmes for frail elderly populations have demonstrated an impact on the number and duration of short-term hospitalisations; drug use; mortality; the cost of services; and a smaller proportion of older people wishing to be institutionalised (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg, 2002).

Our idea of an integrated care model is one that integrates health, social and community care; addresses issues of continuity of care, and efficiency and effectiveness of services; and is feasible within our national constraint of small physical footprint and population size.

We initially opted to provide integrated care services based on predefined client needs. The service delivery model developed, described below, outlines three services addressing clients' varying level of needs (see Table 9.1). We then proceeded to find solutions by establishing the clear relationship between the root causes that resulted in client's various visible needs and symptoms.

Table 9.1: Different service delivery models

Care Type	Mental Healthcare	Social Care	Community Care
Name of Service (Clinical)	COMIT – funded by Agency for	Counselling for Older Persons (GC) – funded by	Health Orient Ageing (HOA) – funded by



	Integrated Care/MOH	National Council of Social Service/ToteBoard	Agency for Integrated Care/ToteBoard
Clients' Needs	Suffering from depression, anxiety, and dementia, needing mental healthcare to be delivered at their home.	Facing ageing-related issues such as isolation, grief and loss, etc., needing social care to be delivered at their home.	Low-risk, "healthy" but fragile, needing interesting and engaging activities to keep healthy.
Service Details	Delivered by a multi-disciplinary team comprising of nurses, occupational therapist and mental health counsellors. Services include bio-psycho-social assessment, individualised intervention plan, psychosocial education, counselling, psychotherapy and home visit services.	Delivered by community mental health counsellors and supported by the advanced practice nurse and occupational therapist. Services include bio-psycho-social assessment, individualised intervention plan, home-based counselling, psychotherapy, caregiver support and psychosocial education.	Conducted by professional artist/ therapist. Services include scheduled artistic activities, movement, drama, wushu, singing and visual arts targeted at encouraging participants to uncover and tap into their wellness.
Name of Volunteer-Supporting Service	COMIT Aide – funded by National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre	Para-Counsellor – funded by O'Joy Care Services	HOA Facilitator – funded by People's Association
Volunteer Details	Para-counsellors are trained in dementia care and equipped with skills on working with	Volunteers have undergone Level I and II training, including para-counsellor's roles and	Volunteers have undergone six sessions of training, topics including: signs of dementia,



	<p>caregivers and home visitation. Their role is to provide basic emotional support to caregivers, detect worsening of dementia and alert O'Joy Care Services of unfavourable changes.</p>	<p>responsibilities, sensitisation to ageing, listening skills, communicating skills, etc., conducted by O'Joy Care Services'. Their role is to do home visitation, provide basic emotional support, prevent social isolation and alert the centre of unfavourable changes.</p>	<p>depression and or anxiety, Self-Mandala, etc. Their role is to assist artists in conducting activities, detect behaviour changes of participants and alert the centre of unfavourable changes.</p>
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After SAS Institute Inc. (Singapore)'s one-off sponsorship allowing us to use their software Statistical Analysis System (SAS) on desensitised COMIT data, we realised that many clients were not captured by these existing service delivery models. In response, we adopted design thinking, by undertaking a “Probe-Sense-Respond” decision-making approach to find a solution. Instead of identifying and addressing the root causes for clients' various visible symptoms, we recognise and accept that the experience of ageing is multi-faceted; there is no single factor (medical, social, or psychological) that determines the clients' sense of well-being or level of wellness. With this in mind, we then proceeded to identify clients' latent needs or wellness, by using our “probing tool” — the 5-Level Wellness of Self (5LW), an adaptation from the Global Assessment of Functionality (see Table 9.2).



5LW is designed with client's wellness from the biological, psychological and social perspectives. We have been collecting such data from individual clients of both COMIT and GC through the use of bio-psycho-social assessments. We hope to analyse the data to detect wellness pattern of our clients and contribute to our efforts in uncovering the community's bio-psycho-social wellness.



Table 9.2: Using the 5-Level Wellness of Self (5LW) tool to assess client's bio-psycho-social wellness

Perspectives	5-Level Wellness of Self (5LW) for persons living in the community				
	-2	-1	0	+1	+2
Biological	impairments requiring intensive treatment	moderate symptoms, functioning with some difficulties	mild symptoms but generally pretty well	absence of visible symptoms	good functioning in all areas
Psychological	suicidal preoccupation or frequency anxiety attacks	depressed mood and pathological self-doubt	mild depressive symptoms and mild insomnia	sometimes everyday worries get out-of-hand	satisfied with life
Social	serious antisocial behaviour	isolated and moderately antisocial	some interpersonal relationships	mostly friendly	socially effective

Our understanding of the wellness experiences of our targeted service users is now guided by the 5LW. This tool has helped us to remain alert to our clients' bio-psycho-social needs, and to facilitate the selection of suitable intervention modality.

By reviewing samples of our client's 5LW ratings, we realised that our resources for COMIT had not been optimised. COMIT was intended to serve a wide range of client needs. However, clients scoring a 0 on a 5LW scale were already sufficiently served by GC and even HOA. Using the 5LW scale we were able to refer clients to the appropriate services, freeing up COMIT resources to serve clients with a score of



-2 or even lower. Following this realisation on how the use of resources can be optimised, we had begun to re-align our services to the level of client wellness (see Table 9.3).

Also, using 5LW as our visual “referral” tool we were able to more efficiently identify the gaps in our service delivery model, and develop solutions accordingly. We first worked on focusing COMIT for clients with -2 and below. Second, we are developing a new Clinical Case Management (CCM) service, so as to improve clinical outcomes for clients with -2 to -1. Third, for our volunteer services, besides recruiting, training and deploying volunteers, we can more systemically develop them according to their 5LW ratings. For example, volunteers with +2 can be potentially targeted as future volunteer leaders.

Table 9.3: Our services re-aligned in accordance to 5LW

Care Type	Mental Healthcare	Social Care	Social Care	Community Care	Volunteer Services
Name of Services	COMIT	CCM	GC	HOA	COMIT aide, Para-counsellor and HOA facilitator
5LW	<= 0*	-2 to -1	-1 to 0	0 to +1	>= +1
Current Status	Operational	Work in Progress	Operational	Operational	Operational

*Client criteria mandated by the funder



HEALTH-ORIENTED AGEING (HOA) COMMUNITY: PILOT @ UBK

Since the founding of O'Joy Care Services, one of our key objectives is to enhance the availability and skills of volunteers as community assets to help in our clinical services. Hence, for all of our three clinical services, we have trained volunteers, i.e., COMIT aide, para-counsellor, and HOA facilitator to work with the counsellors or the professional artist. Using this approach, we are able to serve more clients living in a relatively wider geographic area. For example, we have served over 250 COMIT clients in the Central and Northern regions and over 210 GC clients in the Central and Eastern regions. One of the key constraints of matching volunteers to clients is the geographic location. If the volunteer and client are located in different geographic locations, it sometimes limits the frequency of home visitations. To address this challenge we often have to tap formal assistance such as grassroots leaders, and on informal assistance such as neighbours when clients need more support from the community.

With our rapidly ageing communities, there is an urgent need to identify and train helpful members of the community, such as the grassroots leaders and residents, to become community assets. We have been using the 5LW scale to identify and invite volunteers, individuals scoring +1 and above for volunteer training. In our experience, besides awareness of mental illnesses among older adults, deep empathy and sense of belonging to the community is needed for members of the community to sustain their willingness to



help the older persons living in their community. The development of UBK HOA Community in Upper Boon Keng is one step towards the realisation of this objective.

In addition, we have designed this pilot programme to function as a platform to engage older persons living in the UBK community through specially selected and modified arts-based activities, such as, movement, drama, wushu, visual arts and singing, to develop and maintain their wellness. These workshops are conducted by professional artists recommended by the National Arts Council and the Esplanade. The daily interaction with HOA staff also enables us to identify helpful potential participants to be trained as HOA facilitators. Training for HOA facilitators includes facilitating art programmes, and more importantly on detection and alerting HOA staff on participants suffering from possible depression, anxiety and mild cognitive impairment.

Over the last few years, we have noted that participants, while enjoying, discovering and developing themselves, have bonded and connected more strongly with one another. This additional layer of support as neighbours would make a huge difference in cases of emergency, especially as many older persons are living alone. This process has helped to foster emotional closeness and forms the basis for mutual help in the future.



THE SELF MANDALA FRAMEWORK

In the selection and planning of HOA arts-based activities, we have used the Self Mandala Framework. This framework describes eight dimensions of self-wellness. Table 9.4 shows the relationship between these dimensions and the biological, psychological and social perspectives.

Table 9.4: The Self Mandala Framework

Perspectives	Self Mandala Wellness	Description
Biological	Physical	The body
	Sensual	The ears hear, the eyes see, the nose smells, the mouth tastes, and the skin senses touch, movements and tactile sensations
	Nutritional	The solids and fluids ingested
Psychological	Emotional	The right brain, feelings, intuition
	Intellectual	The left brain, thoughts, facts
	Spiritual	One's relationship to the meaning of life, the soul, spirit, life force
Social	Interactional	Communication between oneself and others
	Contextual	Colours, sound, light, air, temperature, forms movement, space and time

HOA's targeted service user would be between 0 to +1 on the 5LW scale. Those with 0 rating are generally capable of forming interpersonal relationships, mentally well, and not heavily reliant on others for their physical needs. Those with +1 and above 5LW rating are identified and trained as HOA facilitators to extend care to those whom have lower scores. Those with -1 and below will be referred and followed up by GC, COMIT and in the future CCM. Our aim is to offer



clinical help to UBK older residents who need more assistance before integrating or as they are integrating into the HOA community. This is to maintain healthy group dynamics within the community.

As HOA is a community care service, there is no formal assessment for HOA participants. However, by using 5LW, which is based on observations and interactions, we are able to determine the older person's level of wellness and to initiate suitable services.

CATALYSING COLLABORATION

Since our founding, we have been working with many VWOs and GROs in the social sector. Our COMIT programme has helped to expand this working relationship with medical professionals and allied health workers in restructured hospitals, ILTC institutions and even general practitioners. Till date, over 50 organisations have been referring clients to our programme. Moreover, since 2015, we have been hosting and attending collaboration platforms organised by National Healthcare Group, for the building of rapport and trust among organisations from social, health and community sectors.

We hope to share these acquired learning and hence enable us to collaborate better with other aged care providers. Our intention is to co-develop, with other aged care providers, 100 HOA communities by 2025. Within each HOA community, while regular and scheduled activities are held for active ageing, HOA participants are also supported by various well-connected and well-linked care teams



including COMIT, GC, HOA, COMIT aides, para-counsellors, HOA facilitators and other stakeholders. These various teams will then provide the appropriate level of care as the older person's wellness deteriorates due to the irreversible ageing process.

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Part 4

Other Professional Groups as Assets for Community Development



CHAPTER 10

BUILDING COMMUNITIES THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Mizah Rahman and Jan Lim

The practice of participatory design and planning is not a new concept. It has been applied to both developing and developed cities such as Copenhagen, New York, and cities closer to home such as Hong Kong, Taipei and Seoul. In these cities, the citizenry gets involved in not just urban policy design but also its implementation in the built environment.

Singapore on the other hand has traditionally been characterised as one with a top-down driven process to planning and governance; an approach that demands little public input, but one that has allowed the city to achieve great economic and urban developmental progress. This highly efficient planning process has however brought about a subdued sense of ownership that Emily Soh and Belinda Yuen (2006) captured succinctly in the essay titled, “Government-aided participation in planning Singapore” (p. 32):



Compared with western city public participation experiences and advocacy, it would appear that public participation in Singapore's urban planning process has been largely minimal.... A prevalent view that explains the subdued scene of citizen participation is that the state has been able to satisfy the demands and expectations of citizens.

THE CHALLENGE: LACK OF OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OUR PUBLIC SPACES

We believe that the lack of community involvement in current neighbourhood design and planning practices have resulted in a limited sense of responsibility and ownership towards Singapore's public spaces. The efficient modus operandi of past decades have resulted in a provider-to-consumer mindset where city agencies are largely seen as service providers from which people can expect the reliable delivery of solutions. Unfortunately, as the citizenry gets accustomed to this, it results in little motivation to offer self-initiated solutions, and for those with ideas, they begin to question if their comments or actions will have any impact on the process and decisions made.

A dissatisfaction with both the process and results of this condition has however seen some action on the ground in recent times, not just from the general public but also policymakers. Ground-up initiatives such as Friends of Rail Corridor, SOS Bukit Brown, and the many engagement programmes developed by various public institutions



suggests that a shift is underway — one that sees the city-state embracing citizen participation as it approaches solutions in a more “people-centric” and “people-driven” approach. This shift is heartening for us as designers and community organisers who believe strongly in the value of community-owned solutions. We also recognise that to continue urban development in Singapore along this trajectory, a participatory design framework that is contextually relevant must be developed.

Since 2010, we have been pondering the challenge: “How might we bring people together in creating solutions more meaningfully for our built environment?” This is the underlying question that has guided our quest in formulating a participatory design framework for Singapore. To help us further understand people’s perceptions and attitudes towards public participation in Singapore, we have undertaken an intensive research-in-action ¹ methodology alongside local groundwork and conversations with the spectrum of stakeholders of our city, which includes government ministers, public officers in city planning, grassroots leaders, social sector advocates, architects and planners and regular citizens. These conversations have not only given us a deeper understanding of the root causes for the lack of participation in Singapore, but also an insight into a way forward.

¹ BetterSG is a research-in-action project funded by the Philip Yeo Initiative in 2014. It aims to develop a participatory design framework for designers and planners to create with people — as opposed to for people. The research is documented in online platform bettersg.co



THE SOLUTION: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AS A TOOL FOR A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN APPROACH IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

We believe that the scaffolding of a solution should start with our local neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are potential platforms that can facilitate everyday interaction, become places where people meet to form and sustain social ties, and engage in discussion and debate. That shift — towards local issues and away from a top-down process — is the key to developing a new paradigm. As Susan Fainstein suggests in her book, *The Just City*: “At the level of the neighbourhood, there is the greatest opportunity for democracy but the least amount of power; as we scale up the amount of decision-making power increases, but the potential of people to affect outcomes diminishes” (2010, p. 17).

Neighbourhood participation is as much about design and planning, as it is about politics, dynamics and culture of its people. Participatory design can be a powerful platform for citizen participation but real democracy and genuine community participation can only occur if people know the impact of the decision they make, and if they are equipped with the knowledge and information to make an informed decision that affects not only the individual but the larger community.

In our research, we explored the catalysts that can trigger a participatory design action in a neighbourhood and found an answer in Frederick van Amstel’s (2012) article titled, “When Participatory



Design Makes Sense”, where he elaborated that one of the critical triggers for a participatory action is when, “Either a willing from the powered to share power or a willing from the disempowered to claim power.” This is interestingly parallel to the current Singapore context but one that has been hindered by a general uncertainty on how exactly to proceed.

We know for a fact that participatory design can be initiated from both top-down or bottom-up approaches; but unfortunately, a lack of exposure and practice to such processes have rendered the existence of a knowledge and ability gap in the current design and planning landscape in Singapore for it to materialise. However, herein lies the potential for a non-profit design organisation to play the role of neutral facilitators and catalysts to organise communities and initiate change.

Since its founding, Participate In Design (PID) has constantly upheld the ethos of designing and creating *with* people and not just *for* people. This is grounded in our belief of the potential for a design process being able to not only transforms our public spaces and to better communities, but to have a meaningful participation around that as well. Through our work, we hope to:

- Provide a platform to encourage conversation and dialogue about the neighbourhood

- Build relationship within the community, and between them and yourself



- Cultivate more actively engaged residents and a greater ability to influence decision-making
- Create a unique design solution that caters to the needs and aspirations of the community

These aspirations drive each one of our projects as we try to design platforms and processes that hope to make citizen participation accessible to everyone — one with ample opportunities for professionals, community leaders, estates managers, owners of local business, hawkers, elderly, youth and the young to have the confidence to partake in the design of their neighbourhoods.

FACILITATING A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AT TAMPINES CHANGKAT²

Tampines Changkat Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NRP) is a rethink of how residents and stakeholders could be more meaningfully involved in the design and planning of their living environment. Under the NRP framework, improvement works are made to the living environment at both the block and precinct levels in public housing estates. In most NRPs implemented in other neighbourhoods, residents are usually asked to select their preferred improvement

² This project is a partnership between Participate In Design (PID), Tampines Town Council, Tampines Citizens' Consultative Committee, Tampines Changkat Zone 3 and Zone 5 Residents' Committees, and the Housing and Development Board.



works from a predetermined list. The NRP at Tampines Changkat presented us with a different opportunity from the outset due to the stakeholders' desire for a deeper and more authentic way of engaging the residents. In alignment with this vision, we designed and facilitated a community engagement process that involved different user groups through a range of methods and platforms, allowing for earlier engagement in the design process and creating opportunities for the building of neighbourly bonds.



Walking Conversation: Getting people to explore an area on foot to observe people, things and spaces is a great way of collecting information on the strengths and resources of a neighbourhood.

Photo credit: Participate in Design



Design Clinic: Conducted in a public space to get residents share ideas and feedback on design opportunities and concerns.

Photo credit: Participate in Design



Community Design Workshop: Bringing together experts and residents to brainstorm solutions.

Photo credit: Participate in Design



Street Poll: Getting residents to prioritise and make an informed decision on which neighbourhood improvements they would like to have.
Photo credit: Participate In Design

We started by asking, “How might we bring residents and stakeholders together to be involved in the planning and design of their living environment, such that it will build stronger ownership of the built outcomes?”

Our main objective was to create and facilitate a meaningful community-driven process that brings residents and other stakeholders together, and involves them in the planning and design of the living environment, in ways that will build community ownership of the built outcomes. The outcome of the engagement is design brief for the neighbourhood amenities that represented the needs and aspiration of the community, which will be translated into architectural design by the appointed architects.



The majority of the Tampines residents who participated in our activities felt that it was important for them to be involved in neighbourhood projects and problems and they have built better relationships with their neighbours, designers and community stakeholders then before participating in the engagement activities. For example, they shared that, “I learnt that more can be done to improve my neighbourhood”; “Walking Conversation was a good way for residents to meet neighbours, especially during the walk, when they bump into their neighbours and asked them to join in”; and lastly, “Through the engagement with residents, the usual ‘loud’ voices of the experts and grassroots became softer and the residents’ voices became louder which made the eventual design outcome more meaningful.”

DEVELOPING A COLLECTIVE ASPIRATION WITH SENIORS AT PACIFIC ACTIVITY CENTRE IN THE DESIGN OF THE KITCHEN

A nation-wide initiative of locating Senior Activity Centres (SAC)³ within our public housing estates by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in response to the needs of our ageing population. Located at Yishun Greenwalk, NCSS and Pacific Health did not want to just go ahead with a typical design process, and the SAC it as saw an opportunity to involve the seniors in the creation and creative process in the renovation of the space. Hence, we approached the

³ Senior Activity Centres (SACs) look after the well-being of the needy and vulnerable seniors living in the rental flat clusters through the provision of a range of services.



challenge by asking, “How might we involve seniors and staff in the design of Pacific Activity Centre, in ways that build ownership of the outcome?”

One of the main tasks was how break down complex design concepts into information that was accessible to the seniors in various local languages including Hokkien, Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin. A rule of thumb for us was that if we were unable to communicate the idea to a 12-year-old, then we would need to change the way we delivered our information. We designed and facilitated a community engagement process that enabled the seniors to have a voice in the design process, where typical seniors are being left out.



Design workshop conducted with seniors where they contributed ideas and brainstormed solutions while interacting with physical models of the space.
Photo credit: Participate in Design



Halal and non-halal kitchen spaces and their accompanying flexible spaces for eating together and other activities.
Photo credit: Participate in Design



Entrance of the Senior Activity Centre designed to be inviting, to encourage new users to the space.

Photo credit: Participate in Design

The vision of concept design and programming of the space was: A welcoming social space where seniors can bond, learn, give, try and lead together and thereby “age gracefully in place”. One of the seniors wrote in the Chinese newspaper, *Lianhe Wanbao*, and shared with us that, “The elderly were moved by the designers after seeing their sincerity and provided feedback and suggestions for the kitchen actively. Even residents who rarely appeared came down to participate in this activity and feedback session.”



The two community-driven projects show that participatory design can be a powerful platform for citizen participation. By creating a design process that provides a platform to encourage conversation and dialogue about the neighbourhood, we can cultivate more actively engaged residents, nurture the ability to constructively influence decision making, and ultimately inculcate a greater ownership towards the outcome. These projects also hope to renew a sense of belief that every individual has something positive to contribute to the design process, and that everyone can be collaborators, not just consumers.

A better way forward for urban planning and development is possible and it will take more than just one non-profit organisation to make this happen. The design community and ecosystem of urban development needs to embrace a participatory approach to design and acknowledge that when people are part of the solution, they own it. Indeed this is a paradigm shift, but it can be achieved with small steps together. For a start, let us begin with the very neighbourhoods we live in.

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CHAPTER 11

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS INTERMEDIARY

Ko Siew Huey and Ngiam Su-Lin

ARTSWOK COLLABORATIVE AS ARTS INTERMEDIARY

Our work at ArtsWok Collaborative¹ lies at the intersection of arts and community, in the field of arts-based community development. Our vision is to see communities thrive, and we believe that what lies at the heart of many challenges we face as a society is the poverty of relationship. This deprives individuals of access to resources — economic, social, cultural, environmental and political. As such, the focus of what we do is in connecting communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.

¹ ArtsWok Collaborative connects communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference. We work with multidisciplinary teams to design and implement community-based arts projects, facilitate learning and exchanges through a community of practice, build capacity of practitioners through an action learning-incubator programme as well as conduct research and advocacy in the field of arts-based community development. ArtsWok Collaborative is a recipient of the National Arts Councils Seed Grant for the period from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2018.



As connectors, or bridge-builders, a significant aspect of our work is in facilitating relationships involving individuals, organisations, institutions, and so on. The Greenhouse Series, which we convene, consists primarily of a community of practice and action-learning lab for practitioners and stakeholders invested in the area of arts and culture, community-building and development work. This work is supported by the National Arts Council, which views our role as contributing towards strengthening the ecosystem of arts-based community development by building the capacity and connecting the work of important actors in the field, as well as making recommendations to the Council and other stakeholders on how to further develop the field.

Our bridge-building work can also be seen in the community projects that we spearhead. In our “Arts and Health” work, we partner with artists, senior centres and nursing homes, hospitals, foundations, community groups and government agencies, to conduct arts programmes for specific communities such as seniors as well as public education for a wider community demographic. Bridging these fields means that health and wellness-based outcomes are also important, apart from aesthetic and community development ones.

As such, because we are often found supporting artists in their work with communities and stakeholders, and across fields of practice and disciplines, we call ourselves intermediaries, enabling partnerships and collaborations to occur meaningfully, where the arts is the primary

medium and process through which communities benefit, and change occurs.

Arts Intermediaries are relatively new in arts practice in Singapore. In international arts practice, “arts intermediaries” are usually associated with and used within the context of funding and philanthropy, and the development of an artist or art form.

The role of the intermediary has been described as being fundamentally liminal — occupying a position on both sides of a boundary or threshold, a place where relationships with both funders and artists must be continuously navigated with balance and grace

— Claudia Bach (2014, p. 2)

ArtsWok Collaborative has, over the past few years, been inhabiting this “fundamentally liminal” space, with not many fully understanding the value of the work, and having scant pre-existing vocabulary to draw upon. We believe the role and its meaning is still evolving.

At this point in time, as intermediaries in the field of arts-based community development, we see our work as involving the creative producing of innovative programmes and projects that benefit communities in order to demonstrate value, training and building the capacity of arts practitioners to do community-based arts work, as well as research to better articulate and advocate for the field of arts-based



community development, contributing towards its legitimacy as a practice.

Even as the arts community and its various stakeholders here continue to unpack the role of intermediaries and understand our value, some arts practitioners have already started to articulate the need for more intermediaries when it comes to arts and working with communities. This was one of the findings that emerged from the community of practice we convene, mentioned earlier, and included in a report as a recommendation to the National Arts Council (Ko & Ngiam, 2014, p. 18):

The work of intermediaries would contribute to the emergence of mutual vocabularies amongst stakeholders in the field, the building of relationship and trust that enables sustainable and innovative work, helping artists with administrative tasks that frees them to focus on practice, and also contributing towards advocacy of the field and increasing its legitimacy.

For these arts practitioners, a significant contribution of intermediaries like ArtsWok Collaborative is to help bridge the work they do with various stakeholders which then contributes towards facilitating more meaningful collaborations and programme outcomes through the unlocking of resources, more effective communication, beneficial processes and constructive evaluation.



Co-Founder Ngiam Su-Lin facilitating a discussion among practitioners during The Greenhouse Sessions.

Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative

CULTURE AS A PILLAR OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR SOCIETIES

We believe our real value lies in being intermediaries across different fields of practice and disciplines, and creating collaborations amongst stakeholders that results in innovative work with impactful outcomes, and change for communities. This means artists collaborating with health, social services, community workers, educators, urban planners, futurists, etc. As societies become more complex, and the world and our needs become more interconnected, these collaborations are increasingly the way forward. We need to find better solutions for our challenges where previous approaches working in



silos and domain-specific knowledge and practices have been less successful.

The arts, with its processes and forms, has the ability to bring together different communities and challenges in creative and imaginative ways, to then offer responses and expression of solutions from participants. This is because the arts operate in the powerful sphere of culture, which cuts across the realms of the personal to the communal, the societal and the national. It also affords deep participation, drawing on the cognitive, emotional, sensory and imaginative.

In *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, Jon Hawkes advocates that culture is the fourth pillar (the other three being economic, social and environmental) that governments cannot afford to ignore, and is integral to the governance process for the sustainable development and flourishing of a society. He defines culture as “the inherent values and the means and the results of social expression” and “enfolds every aspect of human intercourse” (Hawkes, 2001).

Furthermore, he goes on to explain:

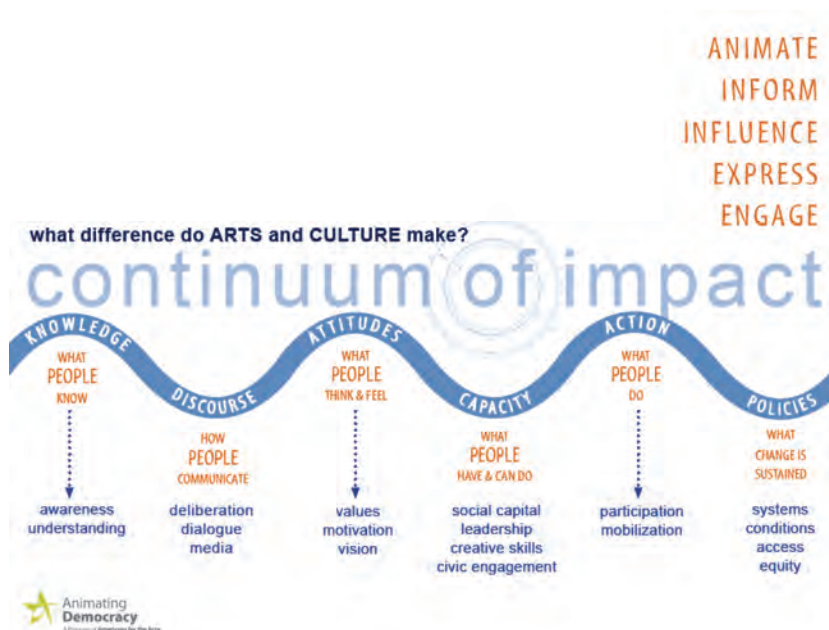
If culture describes how we make sense, and the results of that sense, then art describes that aspect of cultural action in which creativity and imagination are the key drivers, where we discover meaning and community in ways that are intuitive, non-lateral and unpredictable. With the arts, we can imagine

the future, unpack the past, confront the present. We can predict change, focus our visions and face our fears (Hawkes, 2003).

Artists and the arts are then central to cultural action, and can therefore be powerful agents of change driving social transformation.

Animating Democracy, an organisation in the United States that does research and advocacy work in the area of arts and culture and communities, developed a framework to help explain the difference arts and culture makes to communities, framed as a continuum of impact (Figure 11.1):

Figure 11.1: The continuum of impact of arts and culture



Source: Animating Democracy (2012)



Collaborating with the arts can result in manifold outcomes and impact over time, depending on stakeholders' objectives and subsequent programme design. As intermediaries, we are interested in collaborations and work within each impact area, as well as work that spans across the continuum of impact.

COLLABORATING WITH AN INTERMEDIARY

Many of our collaborations involve us in the role of creative producer for projects and programmes. Over the years, we have produced projects such as *Both Sides, Now* (2013–2016 and ongoing), a multi-disciplinary arts engagement project co-produced with theatre company Drama Box and largely funded by Lien Foundation, Ang Chin Moh Foundation, the Tote Board Community Healthcare Fund and the Ministry of Health. Focusing on end-of-life issues, this public engagement work has been staged in a hospital, reached out to heartland spaces, and has toured senior centres all across Singapore. From 2013 to 2014, we have reached out to about 12,000 members of the public through our immersive arts experiences in community spaces, as well as 1,800 seniors through our puppetry engagement programme over 50 senior centres in 2014 and 2016. It also involved working with more than 150 volunteers over the years.



ArtsWok Collaborative collaborates with arts groups like Drama Box to implement innovative community-based arts projects that benefit communities in order to demonstrate value.

Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative



Both Sides, Now is an arts-based civic engagement project that goes out into community spaces and seeks to normalise conversations about end-of-life care.

Photo credit: ArtsWok Collaborative



We have also produced a creative movement programme, *Everyday Waltzes for Active Ageing*, for seniors at nursing homes and senior centres together with The Arts Fission Company, in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and the National Arts Council. The programme involved piloting curriculum that was researched from the perspective of health and well-being outcomes, and subsequently developed into a training programme under the auspices of the AIC Wellness Programme. Through training, healthcare staff were equipped with skills to facilitate the programme for seniors in Community Care facilities. As at July 2016, 102 community care staff from 43 facilities have been trained through this programme.

For these projects, we adopt a DIME (design, implement, monitor, evaluate) model, which involves the following steps:

- Researching an issue and doing needs analysis
- Locating collaborators — artists and other stakeholders such as educators, social workers, healthcare workers, etc.
- Discovering common goals and aligning interests of stakeholders
- Designing a framework and the processes for realising outcomes
- Mobilising necessary resources such as financial and in-kind contributions from various sources
- Managing stakeholders and partnerships and handling negotiations

- Ensuring smooth implementation, sometimes working with a full production team to implement projects of a larger scale
- Overseeing marketing and communications/public relations
- Monitoring project to ensure adherence to plan and adapting when necessary
- Evaluating process and result — articulating value of the work to increase legitimacy and distilling lessons learned which can feed into the next design cycle

As an intermediary between different disciplines and fostering collaborations in creative producing work², close and deep listening of various stakeholders' needs and interests, including the communities involved takes place throughout the process. As with all collaborations, it starts off with building relationship, and we are continually cultivating the right constellation of partners that can result in innovative work with real impact for communities.

CHALLENGES ARTS INTERMEDIARIES FACE AND MOVING AHEAD

One of our bigger challenges is to communicate the value of our work as intermediaries. As not all aspects of the work are tied to projects, sometimes it is difficult to quantify and make visible the outputs of our processes which are often dialogic, and relational. A significant amount of time can be spent in meetings, doing presentations, writing

² For details, see ArtsWork website: For details, see ArtsWok Website: <http://artswok.org/our-work/creative-producing/>



proposals and in conversations educating stakeholders on the value of working with the arts and its unique processes, how to measure value and from whose perspective, and so on. Oftentimes this work is not compensated, especially if it does not result in a project or programme.

This liminal space that intermediaries occupy means that sometimes the role is less visible or not fully acknowledged. While one can draw the link between the work of an artist and their creative output, it is not immediately obvious the backend work that goes into creating the enabling environment for a successful arts-based intervention to happen. Ultimately, the creative process is a collaborative endeavour. The failure to acknowledge that creates a cyclical problem where the work of intermediaries is then not sufficiently valued or legitimised.

Yet another challenge of being bridge-builders and working in spaces between fields and disciplines is locating vocabulary that would be meaningful for all involved. Certain terms and theories that might be familiar to artists, for example, could sound alien to healthcare workers, and vice versa. This sometimes leads to a misunderstanding of expectations and deliverables, and the intermediary needs to spend more time unpacking concepts and ideas and communicating them with stakeholders. Time and patience are key ingredients in these collaborations and parties must really understand the value of a mutual partnership where the sum is larger than the parts.

Moving ahead, we need to surface strong case studies and highlight the impactful outcomes of intermediary work seen in projects and programmes that create positive change in communities. To that end, we have presented the *Both Sides, Now* project at multiple platforms to different stakeholders in social services, health, education, civil service and arts fields to positive reception and interest.

Meaningful platforms need to be provided where artists and a range of stakeholders invested in particular social issues can be brought together to dialogue and explore the possibilities of collaborating with each other, leveraging resources and possibilities to create change. In this area, the National Arts Council has been an effective intermediary, as seen in their interventions to bridge the arts and social services (seniors, at-risk youth, children and youth with special needs and disabilities). However, how can more of these opportunities be passed on to intermediaries on the ground, and equip them with sufficient resources to do the work?

This then points to the larger challenge of identifying more arts intermediaries who are interested in community-based work. More needs to be done to identify, train and support arts intermediaries if indeed our work is to gain more legitimacy here. Perhaps arts administrators and creative producers need to be engaged more concertedly to consider focusing on community-based work, and even social workers who are open to a broadening of their range of modalities can explore expanding their skill set and experience by collaborating and working closely with artists.



CO-CREATING SOCIETY

People are the backbone of any society, and as ours grow more and more complex and diverse, and as we develop as a nation existing in an international arena with smaller and smaller boundaries, we need strong and resilient communities able to engage across difference not just tolerating it but to co-create meaningfully. Collaborating with artists to collectively imagine and create possibilities with, and between communities becomes all the more urgent and necessary. It is the role of the arts intermediary to facilitate the process of transforming ideal into reality.

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CHAPTER 12

ANALYTICS FOR SOCIAL GOOD

Eric Sanosham and Tan Poh Choo

USING DATA AND ANALYTICS FOR SOCIAL GOOD

The practice of data and analytics has been around for years, and with the advent of big data concepts and technologies, more and more organisations have started to capture all sorts of data that stream into their businesses. In fact, most organisations now understand they can and should introduce analytics into the mix to derive actionable insights and improve their business performance, be it to increase revenues, reduce cost, improve the quality of products and services, or to intimately understand the areas of business risks.

At the same time, the effective use of analytics requires resources and the operational know-how — two things that are in short supply for many non-profit organisations. As such, these organisations do not necessarily look towards deploying analytics as a primary solution to their existing business issues and challenges.

An exception is the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development (MSD). The MSD has leveraged analytics to transformed social welfare to improve lives of citizens (http://www.sas.com/en_us/customers/msd.html). Being New Zealand's largest government agency accounting for nearly a quarter of its GDP, MSD is tasked with spending these funds responsibly. With analytics at the heart of their welfare reform, MSD is able to provide better support to those who need it and target its service-based investments to translate to greater savings of taxpayer money and better futures for people and their families.

THE ANALYTICS FOR SOCIAL GOOD MOVEMENT

To address the challenge of non-profit organisations not having the resources to invest in analytical capabilities, the “Analytics for Social Good” (ASG) movement was established in mid-2014 by SAS, together with the SAS User Group (Singapore). The ASG movement sought to propagate the benefits of data analytics and enable Volunteer Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to derive actionable insights from their data. The ASG movement would also reinforce collaboration between data professionals, corporates, VWOs and academia to address social issues through data analytics, as well as facilitate deeper engagement between corporates and VWOs.

The ASG attracted students from the NUS Business Analytics Consulting Team (BACT) and SMU Business Intelligence & Analytics Student Interest Group (BIA SIG). PCS Security Pte Ltd (PCS), a



close partner of SAS, also graciously offered their resources and hosted the technology environment — a fundamental working component in the ASG movement.

Getting into action, BACT, BIASIG, PCS and SAS worked with both National Council of Social Service (NCSS) using data collected for The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund (SPMF) and O'Joy Care Services to explore use of data analytics to meet social needs. These projects surfaced the demographics of beneficiaries that need greater support, explored factors contributing to the time taken to complete assistance, identified possible implications on policy, and identified recommendations to improve and streamline business operations.

HOW CAN NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS GET STARTED?

While it is easy to be overwhelmed by the increasing amount of data streaming into the business, organisations looking to get acquainted with data analytics can follow these three tips to get started:

Determining the Problem and What is Required to Solve It

Too often, organisations are only focused on data collection in their analytics endeavour, when in reality, they should first start with the problem at hand — **what** they are observing; **why** this is happening; and **how** to go about implementing the next course of action. As organisations come to terms with the digital revolution and look towards deploying analytics to drive better business outcomes, the



core issues that require solving must first be determined, along with the possible challenges and constraints. In essence, organisations need to:

- Start with problem identification — *What is it that you are trying to solve?* Generally, there are three general classes of problems: deviation, anticipation, allocation. Deviation problems arise when the organisation is interested to monitor the consistency of certain work process and/or outcomes; it needs to be able to detect statistically valid anomalies and outliers. Anticipation problems arise when the organisation is interested in predicting or forecasting a possible event so that they can take appropriate interventions, allowing them to be more proactive rather than reactive in their management process. Allocation problems arise when organisations are interested to improve the matching of resources to demands be it in the form of scheduling, queuing, assignment, etc.

- Once the organisation understands the class of the problem that it needs to solve, they need to determine if they have the appropriate data to solve it. In many cases, organisations have more data than they may be aware. And you do not need extensive or “big data” to solve many problems. If a problem is well framed and deconstructed into clear hypotheses, simple datasets may be adequate to solve it. However, if the appropriate data is truly not available, then the organisation has to decide if they can collect the data through a survey or



through observation, assuming that they have available resources.

Find the Appropriate Technology to Enable, Inspire and Create

The next step is in identifying the appropriate technology to both conduct the data analysis and to operationalise it. It is not just simply about churning out more data for collection, but it is also about creating a platform that will inspire and enable the organisation's staff to perform problem-solving on their own. Look for analytics technology that is simple to use and visually appealing to allow for "self-service" analysis to transpire within the organisation. SAS Visual Analytics is one such option with its capabilities beyond just general business reporting; instead it offers a way to explore and understand data. SAS Visual Statistics takes self-service analytics a step further by implementing statistical algorithms without the need to write code — making it easy for anyone to explore, discover and predict. This can ultimately address the shortage of analytical talent that most organisations face, regardless of size.

Embrace and Embedded Analytics into Operations

As they embark on their analytical journey, organisations should be mindful not to get caught up in an "analytics fad" but instead embed and embrace the mindset of using data and evidence to improve the quality of decision-making in their daily business operations. There needs to be a sustainable ecosystem comprising of people, process and technology, that is sponsored and supported by senior executives.



By having a clear understanding of the data and what issues need to be addressed, analytics can play a dynamic role in improving societal needs. From there, organisations can then start to look at inter-agency and inter-sector collaboration initiatives, which allows for a more holistic view of the social needs and the impact of human service programmes.

We have a golden opportunity in the social sector to use data analytics to transform the lives of New Zealanders. And that's what we're doing.

— *Paula Bennett,*
Minister of Social Development,
New Zealand



CHAPTER 13

WONDERS OF THE SPREADSHEET TOOLS FOR DATA MANAGEMENT AND INSIGHTS

Michelle Cheong

Ask any student at the Singapore Management University (SMU) to name one of the most practical and useful courses offered by the university. The answer would inevitably include CAT. CAT stands for the "Computer as an Analysis Tool" course. Originally based on a course of the same title offered by the Wharton Business School, the focus of CAT was shifted to provide business students the essential practical skills and necessary "real-world" exposure to better use personal computers for resolving business problems. The course is basically centred on using the Excel spreadsheet to work on ambiguous ill-defined problems (Leong & Cheong, 2009). Over the years, three editions of a textbook have been written to cover the major topics in spreadsheet modelling emphasising the problems, principles and practice perspective (Leong & Cheong, 2015), including all the models that were built and for more than 100 problems.



As part of the course requirement, students form groups of four to five students, to complete a group project using Excel spreadsheet to build models to solve problems. A few thousand projects have been completed so far since SMU started in the year 2000. Students have helped organisations in civic clubs and in the social welfare, education, entertainment, food and beverage, healthcare and medical, manufacturing and logistics, personal and lifestyle services, business services, public services, sports and recreation, transportation, and tourism and hospitality sectors (Leong & Cheong, 2008).

In 2015, a team of four students completed a project for Social Collaborative, which is a network of skilled volunteers who help voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and other non-profit organisations with need assessments, programme design, strategic planning and evaluation. In this project, the students built a volunteer and VWO management system, to achieve four objectives, namely:

- Efficiently manage the track record of volunteers and VWOs on a single platform
- Provide volunteers an ease of access to view and select projects listed by VWOs
- Allow various VWOs to have access to a pool of skilled volunteers under Social Collaborative
- Encourage continual volunteerism through an engaging feedback/scoring system that fosters progression and capability building



In 2014, another team of five students completed a project for The Island Foundation (TIF), which is an international non-profit organisation that works closely with the coastal communities in the Riau Archipelago, mainly in Bintan. An Excel model was built to allow TIF to manage the performance measures of their English language programme and their financial information. Using the system, TIF would be able to:

- Track the student attendance for each of their learning centres
- Analyse the success of their programme through the attendance rate of the students
- Compare the impact of the programme between centres
- Track and analyse organisation's expenditure to forecast future budget
- Examine the cost efficiency of each centre
- Determine if they should open a centre at a new location

Excel spreadsheet is a commonly used tool in many organisations. While it is often used as a recording and simple calculation tool, its exceptional capability actually lies in data analysis and exploratory modelling. From the two examples, we can see that Excel spreadsheet models have the ability to perform data recording and data analysis, to provide insights and support decision-making, which in many cases, are considered as enormous contributions to many companies and VWOs. However, spreadsheets should not be used as a database management system for large and fast growing data, which will be more appropriately handled by database software. Also,



spreadsheet models do not have the ability to perform predictions like in data analytics and machine learning, where more advanced tools like SAS, SPSS, R, Weka, Knime, and many others, will be more suitable.

The SMU's CAT course is delivered to thousands of undergraduates each year, in Term 1 (from August to December) and Term 2 (from January to April). It is a compulsory core course for all schools, except Law & Accountancy, while 80 per cent of Accountancy students still take it as they found it an extremely useful course. For each term, the students will engage organisations to provide business problems for them to work on. They will work from September to November for Term 1, and from February to March for Term 2, to design, develop and deliver the models. These students will not be paid as it is part of the course requirement.

To engage the students, it is best for each VWO to write a short description of the problems they face, and what they want the spreadsheet model to be able to provide, in terms of the types of outputs and the decisions it can support. The contact person's email address and phone number should also be provided for easy linkup. Note that the students are very well sought after and there are usually more requests than students can handle. So, not all proposed projects will be picked up by the students, as students tend to like challenging problems that can allow them to score well in the course. So, if the problems appear too trivial, they tend not to be picked up by students.



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CHAPTER 14

EMBRACING MIXED APPROACHES — FROM COMMISSIONING TO CONDUCTING OWN RESEARCH

Ho Yin King Anita

Mixed methods research combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration of evidence (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007); likewise, mobilisation of diverse community assets by bringing together practitioners and academics for the purpose of affirming evidence-based practices to serve the needs of the community. Few years ago, I had the opportunity to manage a quantitative research project on behalf of my organisation and it was commissioned to Assistant Professor Hong Song-lee from the Department of Social Work at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Building on the research knowledge I have gained, I conducted my own research two years later when I enrolled myself on a postgraduate degree, using qualitative method as a follow up of the earlier research I was involved. From the experience of commissioning to conducting my own research, I am able to embrace the beauty of adopting mixed approaches — drawing upon diverse



community assets and research methods to harness each other's strength to improve the quality of community life.

Moving towards evidence-based practice is something that the government widely promotes of late and research funding is readily available. Evidence-based practice has become a buzzword in the social and healthcare sector, and key discussions during annual review and planning sessions of voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) are no less than identifying issues faced by the targeted community, understanding why and how issues happened, analysing how best current interventions addressed those issues or needs of the community, and identifying ways to improve on current practices. All these questions can be answered by applied research. However, many VWOs have their reservations. Lack of in-house expertise and resources are the main reasons hindering VWOs from conducting research. Speaking from my experience, commissioning a research project is a good first step to expose staff to research and to pave the way for conducting in-house research in the future. Many academics are willing to collaborate in research projects of their interest, especially when the projects would provide them useful data for publications. With their knowledge and skills in specific fields, they can help to scope the research, put up a research proposal for funding and manage the research project. They may also submit a joint paper with the VWO staff to an academic journal for publication. However, there are other channels of commissioning research projects to be considered, such as independent researchers, postgraduate students and research consultants from market research companies.



Now back to the research on caregivers initiated by my organisation years ago. Assistant Professor Hong was recommended to us by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) given her research expertise in caregivers of the elderly. With her professional inputs, our initial research topic has been revised to “Multi-Cultural Determinants of Help-Seeking Behaviours among Multi-Ethnic Caregivers in Singapore” (Hong, Rozario & Ho, 2013) with the objective of better understanding the cultural influences on family caregivers of different ethnicity (Chinese, Malay, Indian and others), so that practitioners can design programmes that are tailored to meet their cultural needs. Assistant Professor Hong put up a research proposal and research budget, which landed us with research funding from NCSS and approval from the NUS Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the research adhered to the standards of ethical practice. Professor Philip Rozario was also brought on board the project, based on Assistant Professor Hong’s recommendation. Being involved as co-investigator to manage the field survey I worked closely with Assistant Professor Hong on developing the sampling frame, recruiting and taking consent from participants, briefing the research company, conducting focus group discussions, training of interviewees, doing a pilot test and so on. I was provided with the opportunity to give inputs on the questionnaire and to co-write the report. After completion of the report, Assistant Professor Hong spent time explaining the findings and clarifying doubts that I had. While the findings may not directly inform practitioners on best practices, there was a lot to chew on before we translate findings to practice. I had learnt tremendously from this experience.



One of the findings of the study of interest to me is the insignificant differences in health outcome between family caregivers who employ a foreign domestic worker to assist them in caregiving and those who did not. This finding contradicts the common perception that the increasing trend of reliance on foreign domestic workers to provide care for seniors at home would lead to poorer health outcomes. However, quantitative research has its limitations — the findings can only inform us on the “what”, but not the “why” and “how”. Having more than 10 years of direct work experience with caregivers and to further my research interest on this topic, I decided to pursue a qualitative research study to deepen my understanding on the perception of family caregivers on the instrumental support from the foreign domestic workers (Ho, 2015), through my gerontology master programme. Being the sole investigator designing and conducting a research is a whole new world of experience for me; nevertheless, a thesis supervisor was assigned by the university to guide and support me along the way. One of the advantages of conducting qualitative research is that it can be of a relatively small scale with a small sample size, hence manageable for VWO staff. Second, professionals like social workers, counsellors and psychologists are generally well-versed in conducting qualitative interview sessions due to their training. Third, practitioners as interviewers can clarify information during the interviews with participants in order to help them gain deeper insights and improve practice.



Comparing the experience of commissioning research to academics with conducting in-house research, there are some potential tradeoffs and challenges worth noting. As mentioned, it made more sense to commissioning research if VWOs lack research expertise and resources. However, identifying a suitable academic for the research can be challenging. Not only that VWOs lack the network with academics, negotiating and balancing needs of the commissioning organisation and that of the academics can be an uphill task. Due to the pressure to publish, academics are keen on collaborative research with community partners if they have more control over the scope of research to ensure its alignment with their research interest and the research's academic value. This could mean a more extensive scope of research than what is required by the VWO, hence the organisation has to be realistic in balancing both needs. Moreover, due to the heavy workload, frequent involvement in overseas conferences and multiple research projects, academics can be hard to get hold of and they may not have the time to provide research training for VWO staff involved in the research. VWOs have to be prepared to work around their busy schedules.

Rights over the use of data and intellectual property are grey areas to be discussed and agreed upon between the academic and the VWO. Generally, the academics involved and the commissioning organisation co-own the intellectual property and share the right to access and use the data collected. If any party has the intention to release data or publish a paper using the whole or part of the data, consent has to be obtained from all parties involved. Academics would



prefer prior agreement on giving them the autonomy of using the data for future publication in an academic journal, and the decision to publish in academic journals would mainly lie in the hands of the academics as to what, where and when to publish. However, the commissioning organisation may also express an interest in self-publishing the report. For pro-bono services offered by academics, there may be expectations of give and take; it would be good to discuss these upfront. Some academics may not prefer engaging in formal agreement for pro-bono service but it is encouraged to do so to avoid confusion, which may lead to disappointment in future.

To balance the pros and cons of commissioning and conducting research by VWOs, I would recommend adopting mixed approaches by mobilising both internal and external resources, in order to maximise the positive outcomes. When engaging an academic for a particular research project, getting recommendations from other academics or a review of literature on local publications on related topics would give you a few names to work on. It is important to understand the academic's research interest, expertise, their schedule, and possibly their working style and prior experience in working in or with the community, or with VWOs. A written agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the commissioning is recommended to clearly lay out:

- Roles and responsibilities between the primary investigator (the academic) and the commissioner (the organisation)
- Desired outcome of research, and most importantly



➤ Rights over intellectual property and clients' data

When planning for such a collaboration, the VWO could assign an experienced fieldwork staff to work closely with the academic on the research project and support him or her with relevant training. Also, the organisation could express interest in having their staff trained under the academic for future in-house research to give the staff exposure in conducting a follow-up research, and plan out the research with the academic accordingly to achieve these desired outcomes. The VWO has to be realistic in committing to the sample size of research, as it will take substantial amount of time and manpower resources in recruiting and getting consent from potential participants. VWOs may need to enlist support from team members, volunteers or even part-timers to complete the task. On the other hand, conducting the survey and analysing the data can be done by a research company if manpower or staff time is limited. In order to build the research capability of VWOs, it would be good to have a research portal available for VWOs staff to access journal papers and academic e-books for their literature review as well as useful information, such as guidelines on commissioning research projects, managing intellectual property, ethics, contact information and expertise of academics, independent researchers and research companies. Last of all, a consolidation of local research done by VWOs, hospitals, ministries, statutory boards and other organisations would help cultivate collaborative learning.



As a closing note, there are many possible ways to conduct in-house research that is of relatively low cost, for instance, use of secondary data, available frameworks or supporting existing staff who are undertaking their postgraduate degree to conduct a research that is relevant to the organisation. The latter would be a better option as those staff would be guided by a university supervisor. For long-term gain, it would be a valuable investment to develop in-house research capability so that VWOs can have full control over their research projects overtime. Moreover, pitching for funding and donations for social research projects has become more and more competitive, and a good programme proposal backed up by robust research findings would definitely make a strong case for funding. As I sit between academic (as a student) and practice (as a professional) world, I strongly believe that any research finding would value-add to the topic or the field concerned and it could eventually influence policies and practices if government, community, researchers and service providers work together closely and seamlessly to make that happen.

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CHAPTER 15

VWO DOING GROUND-UP RESEARCH — A PRACTITIONER-INITIATED, ACADEMIC-FACILITATED COLLABORATION MODEL

Esther Goh

While is not new for voluntary welfare organisations (VWO) to engage in research activities, this paper, presents a fairly distinctive model of cooperative inquiry between practitioners and academics. This practitioner-initiated-academic-facilitated model (PIAF) can be likened to new drivers seated behind the wheel learning the skills of driving, with the instructors coaching from the passenger seat beside them. On rare occasions, the instructor has to take over the wheel to demonstrate challenging techniques and model good practice for the new driver. Most of the time, however, the new driver is expected to take the wheel and face the traffic — learn by doing — while assured that the instructor is close by to give directions and “rescue” if necessary. This model diverges both from conventional academic-led as well as consultancy models of research collaboration between practitioners and academics (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998).



Similar to participatory inquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), one feature of this model lies in the democratisation of power relations between the two research partners as equal agents. Academic-led research typically has the research goals, design and usage of research output largely set by the research experts and grantor of research funding, while VWOs are considered as research sites for data collection. Hence, power is clearly skewed towards the academic research experts and funders. On the other hand, when a VWO sets the research agenda and pays academics for their research expertise to carry out a piece of study, the power dynamics take a different turn.

In the PIAF model discussed in this paper, the academic (i.e., the author) took on the role of research mentor on pro-bono basis to the practitioners without pre-determined research agenda from either party. The collaboration started with an invitation by the CEO of Montfort Care to the author in 2011 to give all the practitioners (i.e., social workers and counsellors) some exposure to conducting research. The aim was for practitioners to begin to embrace systematic reflection of practice as integral to their professional work through engaging in a distinctive genre of research (that is at the margin of both research and practice; see Shaw & Lunt, 2012), and to inculcate a culture of learning in the organisation (Baldwin, 2016).

Since cultural shift was the goal, the newly introduced research mentoring endeavour was not confined to a few practitioners with research interests or those who were thought to have an aptitude. Instead it reached out to all practitioners from the onset, hoping that



those who had little or no experience of either research design or process would begin to “think research”.

The practitioners were divided into two natural groups according to the different clientele groups they served — counselling and social work. Working separately with each team, the mentor moved practitioners to reflect on their own practice wisdom and form passionate interest in a practice issue or observation into a research question and research process. Practitioners and mentor spent hours meeting together to browse through clinical information from case files, deliberating research questions which practitioners were passionate to find out about and which had potential meaning for practice. The mentor facilitated the process by raising questions on feasibility in terms of data availability, access and scope of research questions, etc. The role of the mentor was to re-order these reflections by practitioners within the rigour of research methodology (Joubert, 2006).

This PIAF model of collaboration was a ground-up research process, in contrast to the conventional academic research approach where the research process begins with a hypothesis and the researcher seeks the practice environment to test the hypothesis. The two teams of practitioners eventually decided on two very different research topics: resilience of low-income blended families (social work); and a study of male clients’ perception of and experience of relationship counselling (counselling). Also, involving all practitioners in the agency in identifying research topics, and not just those who are



research-inclined, was a rather unique participatory model rarely reported in existing literature.

After the research topics were consensually identified the next phase of research, comprising design, data collection and analysis of data, did not involve everyone in the team for pragmatic reasons. The mentor worked closely with the team leads and an assistant from the respective team.

Many challenges confronted both the practitioner-researchers and the mentor in the implementation of the two projects. Time famine was a real issue for the practitioners as they were not given protected time for this new research endeavour: all these research activities were carried out in addition to their already very heavy work load. The mentor on the other hand was constantly struggling with the dilemma of maintaining research rigour yet being realistic in her expectations of the practitioners. This learn-by-doing mode had both positive and negative aspects. While the team leads had some vague memories on research method knowledge from their university training, it was too far away and rusty due to lack of research practice (Shaw & Lunt, 2012). The mentor had to provide very close guidance every step of the way. On hindsight, the journey could have been less stressful for both the practitioner-researchers and mentor if the team leads had first been given a heavy refresher dose on research methods before being thrown into the research activity. However, the practitioner-researchers demonstrated great resilience in propelling the two studies forward against all these challenges.



It is worthy of mention that the intensive and demanding research journey yielded short-term outputs and longer-term outcomes that deserved celebration, considering it was the first effort of the practitioners in conducting research. With the support of the management, the practitioner-researchers published a booklet to share their findings on the two studies with other practitioners (MPFSC, 2013). Such dissemination of ground-up research findings that did not take the conventional academic publication route, made it accessible to fellow practitioners. The mentor on the other hand was given permission to perform secondary data mining on the data collected by the social work team on low-income blended families and published a theoretical paper in a reputable academic journal.

After this first experience in conducting research, the practitioners as well as Montfort Care as an organisation took a decisive leap into more research activities. For instance, in 2014, one of the social workers in Montfort Care conducted a profile study of the homeless clients served in their organisation. The findings were presented to the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Housing and Development Board, National Parks and other Family Service Centres. They have also started collaboration with other academics including one from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in evaluating the new community based child protection specialist service — Big Love Service Model, which Montfort Care operates.



Moving forward, this PIAF model of ground-up research undertaken by VWO may inevitably have to include the third leg of the stool — the service users. While service users' participation in research and evaluation is not new in disability service sector in Singapore, it is still rare in other fields of practice. It is profitable to learn from western service users' movement experiences to locate a mode of participation that fits the local socio-political context. Discussion on involvement of user involvement in research is complex, multi-faceted (see Barton & Oliver, 1997) and beyond the scope of this paper. It will be a necessary challenge to create research processes where service users' involvement is neither tokenistic nor purely political (i.e., exalting emancipation above actual supporting users; see, for example Oliver, 1997) and could yield credible evidences from users that would enhance service provision and delivery by the VWOs.

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Chapter 16

INTRA-SECTORAL AND INTER-SECTORAL COLLABORATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM BREAK-OUT DISCUSSIONS AT SSRN 2015

Wong Fung Shing

The “Many Helping Hands” is often used to describe interdependence of the state, the charity sector and the community in providing for social well-being of its citizens in Singapore. It is a cornerstone in our approach to social policy, and is descriptive of a self-reliant society “that is robust, yet compassionate and caring.” It is achieved through “partnerships with concerned citizens, corporations, community organisations, religious groups and family members” (Tai, 2016).

The organic emergence of newer assets evinced in the Social Service Research Network and the slew of voluntary activities and collaborations occurring are an exemplification of the approach. Everyone can contribute, evoking a sense of the *gotong royong* spirit. While this emergence is indicative of a vibrant sector and socially conscious citizenry, it can also be potentially haphazard, failing to serve its *raison d’être*. We need to question if service-users can make



sense of this diversity. Will there just be too much information and too many competing assets to choose from? During the breakout sessions of the Social Service Research Network (SSRN) 2015, some participants expressed a sense that collaborations are desired. In this chapter, we discuss some of the benefits and perceived barriers to collaboration in the social service sector, as well as some of the recommendations that could build an environment that is more conducive for collaborations.

CONTEXT

The chapter is a reflection based on the breakout sessions of the Social Service Research Network (SSRN) 2015, which was co-organised by the Institute of Policy Studies and the National Council of Social Service. SSRN 2015 was themed “Mobilising Assets to Meet Social Needs”. During the panel discussion, representatives from academic institutions, research centres, community arts and voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) explored a series of questions including: what are the various assets that are already contributing to the community? What are their interests and strengths? What challenges do they face in working with social service agencies? Participants were later divided into four subgroups to discuss how they might better utilise and mobilise other alternative community assets to address problems faced in their sector. Subgroups were split according to the people that the practitioners were serving, namely, seniors, persons with disabilities, persons with mental health issues and children and youth.



“MANY HELPING HANDS” OR “TOO MANY COOKS SPOIL THE SOUP”?

In the break-out sessions for persons with mental health issues, participants suggested that service users often do not know where to look for the appropriate resources and services because there is a multitude of services and agencies out there, but a lack of coordination among the organisations. Another participant added that a large percentage of the population do not know about the existing services they can tap to improve their mental well-being or to seek help when they experience mental health issues. This confusion is not just evinced from the service user’s point of view; service providers sometimes face the same problem.

If the “Many Helping Hands” has resulted in creating a situation where the end users are not benefiting from the diversity and vibrancy of the sector, we need to question at some point if “too many cooks spoil the soup”. While this perceived disarray was raised more often during the breakout sessions for disability and mental health, the many growing number of socially conscious actors could possibly create a similar situation for the other sectors (i.e., elderly and youths). It would be an interesting thought experiment to think of ways to prevent such a scenario. Participants expressed that collaborations could be a way around such a challenge.



A participant said, “My concern is, there’re so many people coming up with new programmes to do it. It will be so good to know if people are doing the same thing; in the process of coming up with new programmes, you can join together and use that funding in a collaborative way to try and up the impact of it; to make sure you are not providing a new service that when no else is not providing. Again, it is information sharing; it’s not just (only for) research projects, but also new programmes. It will be good to have that platform or some place you can post it up and share.”

THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION AND INTER-SECTORAL COLLABORATION

Academic literature shows that there are many benefits to collaboration in the non-profit sector. According to Graddy and Chen (2006), collaboration has potential advantages over unilateral action and can improve efficiency and service quality. There are “benefits of increased efficiency and innovation, local adaptation, increased flexibility and enhanced community ties.” Beyond service quality, collaborations can also create new opportunities to serve clients. We see how collaborations between charities and social enterprises like (these)abilities⁴⁴ or MNCs like Uniqlo⁴⁵ can create new solutions to complex social problems.

⁴⁴ (these) abilities is a design & technology company that aims to create products that level the playing field for People with Disabilities at work, home and play. For details, see their website: <http://www.theseabilities.com>

⁴⁵ Uniqlo trains and employs people with intellectual disabilities and constantly reviews how they can work better for the community. For details, see: <http://www.csrsgap.com/c/news/229-learning-journey-to-integrate-people-with-disabilities-into-the-workforce>



Collaborative action could also create potential gains from inter-organisational cooperation. These could include economic efficiencies, more effective response to shared problems, improvements on the quality of services delivered to clients, the spreading of risks, and increased access to resources (Gazley, 2008). Collaboration with governments, other non-profits, private organisations, is an attractive option when non-profits face transaction cost incurred from uncertainty in service demands, client needs and funding (Jang, 2006).

During the panel discussions at the SSRN 2015, we have seen community artists at ArtsWok Collaborative explore taboo subjects like end-of-life issues. In SSRN 2016, we explored how data scientists (like SAS User Group) and researchers, etc., could put their professional expertise into good use for the charity sector. Clearly, collaborations can happen across sectors (public, private and charity) and involve a wide range of skillsets. During a roundtable on “Reimagining the Social Service Sector” conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies in 2016, we explored some of the alternative assets that can contribute to social good. These include lesser-known organisations and societies like cooperatives, mutual benefit organisations, faith-based organisations and their community service activities, community service offices in Institutes of Higher Learning, Social Innovation Labs like the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, social cause consultancies like Conjunct and Empact, professional groups like community artists, designers, Engineering Good, data



scientists (e.g., DataKind and SAS User Group), as well as game designers (Serious Games Asia).

The types of assets available are plenty, and the potential of collaborations limitless. However, platforms that create collaboration seem to be limited. Social enterprises have their own conferences and networks shared with RaISE; VWOs with NCSS; and MNCs with Global Compact. A common platform on which these assets can cooperate does not exist. Of course, this is not to say that there are no interactions between networks. Social enterprise like (these)abilities, for instance, work with various VWOs in the disability sector. However, the building of such relationships might be onerous and overly dependent on individual social networks.

INTRA-SECTORAL COLLABORATIONS: UNFULFILLED POTENTIALS?

Even though people acknowledge that collaborations are beneficial and there are plenty of assets, we have seen that practitioners continue to lament about the “silos”.

Broadly, silos are organisational units where there is a breakdown in communication, co-operation and co-ordination with external parties. Silos can arise within organisations or between organisations if there are limited connections with other organisations. Silos are often detrimental to the resilience of organisations and communities (Resilient Organisations, 2009).



The problem of silo occurs in many charities and third sectors across the world, and can happen between business and charity sectors, as well as even within the charity sector itself (Keidan, 2012; Makhijani, 2013)

In a 2002 report by the WELPAN network, a peer assistance network of senior welfare officials from different states in the US, the then-prevailing approach to social programmes in the United States was described as a “patchwork approach” where the conventional political response is to create new programmes or to tweak existing regulatory mechanisms. “New programs solidify over time, embedding themselves within a confusing complex of congressional committees and executive agencies. At that point, the regulatory and oversight process often proceeds as if the program operates in a vacuum” (WELPAN, 2002).

We can draw similarities in the Singaporean case, where programmes can sometimes work in their own vacuum after being conceptualised. After the initial phases, programmes often continue running, seemingly devoid of context, assessment and recalibration based on how their work relates to others in the sector, and how they collectively work together to achieve social aims. This silo can be attributed to numerous reasons.

As earlier mentioned, participants in the session for mental health lamented the lack of coordination between agencies, and discussed



how there should be broader understandings or conceptualisations of mental health, which includes clinical health as well as functional well-being. A definitional divide, in the example of the mental health sector, can occur in the conceptualisation of mental health and consequently in the organisation of care, creating confusion, or worse, inadequate support for people seeking to use the services. A health-social care divide could make collaboration on the ground more difficult.

Clearly, social service organisations could even fail to collaborate even if they are working with the same vulnerable groups. One of the participants from the disability breakout session offered a possible reason, “One of the problems is that, even though we want to work with as many agencies as possible.... But I think because of the way historically our sector is set up, there is a lot of... I don’t know if it’s a lack of confidence in other organisations or not wanting to share that with other organisations... we don’t get a lot of... we have partners that we work with, we have others just ignore us, when we are willing to do that and spend our manpower, our resources, our donation money to do that for, or do that with other organisations. So I think there is that larger issue where it shouldn’t be a central body bringing together and doing advocacy, coordinating. It should be us working together.” The break-out sessions also revealed other perceived reasons for such a phenomenon.

Information Asymmetries and Distrust

Some of the participants felt that there is often information asymmetry and distrust among organisations. Generally, organisations lack a



culture of sharing of information, and often do not know what one another are doing. A participant felt that it is frustrating because organisations and individuals work in their silos without communicating about their efforts. She said, “On a research front, it’s not just finished papers, but also what is ongoing, so as there will not be overlaps. It is frustrating when you are working on something and you find out someone else is working on it as well, doing it better than you. So what is the point of you doing it at a smaller scale, if you can just join on, or give your information to someone else. Stop it, cut your losses. There is just so much going on right now, that you don’t know what is going on.”

Another participant expressed that there is also sometimes a lack of reciprocity in terms of sharing and using information. He said, “I see a lot of reluctance in sharing information, sharing resources... when we wanted to look for standardised practices outside, there is a bit of reluctance in sharing those types of resources.”

Funding contracts and performance management

Some of the participants attributed this reluctance to collaborate to structural barriers to collaboration. She offered that one of the reasons might be “because of the “Many Helping Hands” approach, because of the way funding is done, we don’t all work with each other very well.”

The funding models, according to some of the participants, create an unhealthy competitive culture, and hence, cause reluctance to share information or collaborate. A participant expressed, “I don’t know



whether we are seen as competitors, or how agencies see other agencies. ... for example, when we are willing to take information from others, we should be able to share the information to others as well. I don't know. It's not happening that way. We were expecting that information to flow inwards."

Another participant furthered that organisations are often KPI-driven, and simply have little intrinsic motivation to collaborate. She said "one of the things could be, again this is something that I am speculating, is that a lot of the funding is tied to KPIs, and the KPIs are something that you are driven to meet. So, a lot of the actual work is only KPI-driven."

The contractual model arguably engenders competition among service providers, very much the way the private sector organisations compete with one another. New public management (NPM) strategies to fund, to compare and evaluate, while having its benefits, is not without its disadvantages. Literature has shown that fragmentation could be an unintended effect of NPM-style reforms, and coordination quickly became one of the key challenges in making NPM work (Webb, 1991). The structural disaggregation of the public sector in the UK was seen to lead to deficient coordination, duplication and even waste (Rhodes, 1994).

While anecdotal and some academic literature suggest that funding models could engender competition, distrust and a lack of collaboration, there are other literature that suggest that competition



could in fact lead to more collaborations for efficiency. Competition might lead to unilateral action, but could also create incentives to pursue the potential efficiency gains and service quality advantages of collaborative arrangements. If competition allows for service users to switch service providers to find cheaper or more cost efficient service delivery, non-profits might seek to minimise risk through collaborative partnerships (Austin, 2000).

Regardless, it is at least clear that there is a strong relationship between funding and collaboration. The resource dependence theory seeks to explain inter-organisational relationships through the exchange of critical resources and power imbalances. Organisations are not able to produce all the resources they need, and thus interact with other organisations that control needed resources. The perspective focuses on minimising inter-organisational dependencies and preserving the organisational autonomy while recognising that inter-organisational relationships are necessary to acquire resources. The focus can also change from an organisational-level resource configuration to the overall allocation of resources in the inter-organisational field, among all players. In the case of Singapore, to what extent does organisations compromise organisational autonomy to acquire resources? Are some organisations more willing to compromise autonomy than others? How does the current funder-fundee relationship affect inter-organisational or inter-sectoral collaborations? Are organisations stretched too thinly in terms of manpower and are too busy chasing specific KPIs?



The significance of funding models is also exemplified by other research. According to Jang and Feiock (2007), the ability and inclination of non-profits to engage in collaborative service arrangements depends on the organisational incentives shaped by their financial stakeholders. Jang and Feiock argue that public organisations are better positioned to capture the benefits of collaboration and thus, inter-organisational collaboration for public service delivery may be more likely for organisations that are largely dependent on government funding. The reliance on private funding, on the other hand, could create a narrower and specialised mission of the organisation, and consequentially discouraging collaborations with other organisations.

This hypothesis would of course need to be tested in the Singaporean context. Of course, it might not be a matter of who (government or private), but a matter of how the objectives and KPIs were negotiated.

Other Factors Affecting Collaborations

While participants in the disability and mental health sessions largely lamented competition, funding models and time constraints as barriers to collaborations, there remains a slew of other factors that could affect the amount, types and depth of collaborations.

The loss of managerial autonomy, co-optation of actors and goals, financial instability, difficulty in evaluating organisational results, and the opportunity costs from the time and resources devoted to



collaborative activities are some reasons why organisations could be hesitant to participate in collaborative activity (McGuire, 2006).

One would expect that the charity sector would have intrinsic motivations to collaborate for the better of the service users. However, research shown that “two homophily variables do not influence an organisation’s decision in collaborative tie-building.” Rhetoric also often do not necessarily match reality, and organisations might over-report collaborative efforts or desires to collaborate. As Levine, White and Paul (1969) argue, “Because ideas of coordination and cooperation are embedded in powerful social values, clear understanding and objective study of interagency relationships are rendered difficult. Who, for example, would admit opposing cooperation when the welfare of a patient might be involved?” It is not clear if rhetoric will match reality. The desire to collaborate and the current state are attributions by participants.

According to Kapucu and Demiroz (2015), similarity in motives and services do not provide as much trust as past friendship and collaboration. Beyond the different factors that could affect whether organisations collaborate, it is also important to consider the competing motivations of stakeholders. There are multiple stakeholders (both internal and external) and motivations to consider in collaborations.

Other factors that could affect collaborative efforts include:



- **Heterogeneity vs. homogeneity of client group:** Collaborations between organisations that serve the lower-income families might be necessary, because a single organisation is unable to differentiate services adequately in response to disadvantaged groups in the community. The information costs of non-profits are minimised by obtaining experiences and knowledge through inter-organisational relationships within formal collaborations (Jang & Feiock, 2007)

- **Organisational characteristics:** Larger charities (with a larger volunteer base, manpower and funding) have more potential to collaborate due to the wider range of primary services they can provide. On the other hand, revenue size and human resources are also indicators of independence of the organisation, which may diminish the need for collaborative incentives because they can provide for services independently. The nature of collaborations could also potentially differ for them (Guo & Acar, 2005)

- **Organisational values:** Common rhetoric assumes that charity organisations are altruistic and are committed to the sector's value base (Bush, 1992), and amidst the other various other imperatives, one could imagine that organisations are still committed to the organisation's mandate/mission statement, or to the sector's values.

- **Other factors including leadership, historical legacies, social capital:** Social capital is an important outcome of collaborative



planning and is deemed a precursor to collaborative planning success (Mandarano, 2009) Prior positive experiences collaborating could result in more social networks and more collaborative opportunities.

CREATING A MORE COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

Better Understanding the Nature of Collaborations and Social Networks In the Charity Sector

Given the many complexities, it would be useful to better understand relationships and the state of collaborations among relevant assets. Collaborations can come in various forms. The characterisations of these relationships between collaborations are varied, and can include formal-informal, high-low investment, and can also be differentiated according to the types of activities that occur. In a study on collaboration among third sector organisations in the healthcare sector in Australia, Mutch (2007) broke down collaborations into the following activities: sharing practical expertise, undertaking joint projects, lobbying the government, sharing equipment, making a joint funding application, sharing office space, sharing staff, amongst others. Given Mutch's definition, it will be safe to say that collaborations do happen in the sector. However, if indeed the case, why is it that some organisations lament the lack of collaborations?

What is not clear is the nature of collaboration happening in the sector. Are certain types of collaborations more prevalent among specific types of organisations or client groups? Are larger organisations more independent in terms of funding? Consequently, are they more willing



to collaborate with other organisations because they have the autonomy to do so? Or do they tend to work in silos given that they have the capacity to take on different expertise and deliver a wide range of services? There is no empirical evidence on what types of collaborations do happen, amongst whom, or if indeed, collaborations are desired by all practitioners.

During the break-out sessions, some practitioners have identified funding, competition and a lack of a culture of sharing information as reasons to why collaborations might be limited. It is not clear how each of these could have a direct causal relationship to collaboration. We have also previously seen that academic literature suggests that there could be many other underlying reasons. Understanding the nature of collaborations in the sector might help us better understand why some of the previously mentioned sentiments are prevalent within the sector.

Clearly, we need to better understand the current state of collaborations; the types of collaborations that exist, the types of information that are shared, the depth of interactions, amongst which types of organisations, and in which needs areas. Exploring these questions might be useful to better understand some of the expressed frustrations of practitioners. As of now, it seems like collaborations are based on individual networks and social capital, more than an organisationally intrinsic motivation to collaborate. It is not clear what specific types of collaborations are desired by the practitioners, or if indeed, they are desired by all practitioners across the mental health,



disability, elderly or youth scenes. The slew of greater assets like philanthropists, private sector and prospective do-gooders often look to the charities as the arbiters of knowledge on social needs, but without adequate sharing of information or collaboration between assets, there lies the possibility that the efforts to do good might be limited.

Empowerment for Collaborative Good

Besides better understanding collaborations related to the charity sector, there are other ways in which we could create a more conducive environment for collaborations.

There needs to be a change in basic assumptions of social service uses. The basic premise for the “Many Helping Hands” approach is that everyone can be an asset; this must also be applicable to service-users. Only by moving away from vulnerability narrative to one of capability, can people be empowered to act for themselves and the community. The predominant “vulnerable” narrative for the elderly, single-parent families, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, etc., should be changed to one that is more empowering. The narrative has been changing for the elderly population with concepts of successful ageing and active ageing gaining traction in the eldercare sector. This mobilisation of the elderly as assets is a clear attempt to recalibrate what was previously seen to be the narrative of the elderly, that they are vulnerable, and sometimes potentially a liability, not just economically, but also socially. This tendency of viewing people who receive aid as



vulnerable is debilitating, reinforcing a charity narrative where those in “privilege” need to “help the vulnerable”.

Several authors in the earlier chapters have explored community development as a strategy to empower individual groups and organisations to respond to collective problems. Many VWOs are increasingly seeing the value of building up both capability and facilitating the building of networks of communities to collectively address the community’s concerns. In the chapter by Susana Concorde Harding and Lee Yuan Ting Jasmine, they reflected on how practitioners of the Community for Successful Ageing (COSMA) programme, and concluded that building a sense of ownership and mobilising community action is key to promoting self-care and supporting positive ageing among seniors. Dr Ijlal Naqvi also wrote a chapter reflecting on the experience of a VWO that seeks to run community engagement exercises in a public housing estate concerning renovations and new construction of healthcare facilities.

Other VWOs like Beyond Social Services, as mentioned in the chapter by Samuel Tang and Gerard Ee, have explored how to move away from a vulnerability and charity narrative, and have taken a very different approach to providing services. It considers how the participants are social actors, and empowers them to act for themselves, with an end goal of building a sustainable resource in the form of social capital.



Empowering individuals have traditionally been done in the economic sphere, through job training of vulnerable people. While economic empowerment remains important, it is also necessary to see how people are seen to be valuable social and political actors.

Organisations like the Disabled People's Association have been advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities, not just in terms of public spaces and accessibility, but also in the political or decision-making processes. "Nothing about us without us" is often used by the disability movement across the world, and it exemplifies what it means to include people in the discussions and decision-making processes involving them. This should apply for any other group like the elderly, low-income families, youth-at-risk, etc. It is problematic when the charity sector acts *for* them, rather than *with* them. Participants during the breakout sessions at SSRN 2015 have also expressed that it was necessary to build the capabilities of clients and people in general, for them to acquire engagement skills, and learning how to apply them in a productive manner.

Expanding Language and Ideas About What Constitutes Assets

Today, when thinking about social good in Singapore, the charity sector and VWOs are often the first that come to mind. They typically embody the values of altruism and social consciousness. However, the desire and ability to achieve social good is not solely the domain of the charity sector and government. Businesses and private individuals have traditionally played a key role in providing for human need, and still play a relevant role today. Many of the early



philanthropists in Singapore were business people. Today, philanthropists work through foundations, and MNCs are also engaging CSR or starting diversity and inclusion departments. There is also an increasing number of skilled volunteers who utilise their professional skillsets, be it game design, financial planning, marketing or communications.

Policy, legislation and the language and lexicon used around the sector affect what is thought to be assets, and impact the nature of collaborations in the sector. This is clear when we think of other “third sectors” or non-profit sectors around the world. When we look at their social histories and underpinning values of the sector, we start to have some inkling of why the different third sectors are organised and thought of. For instance, conceptualisation of the third sector in the US is usually seen as being predicated on organisations that respond to market and government failure. The sector is therefore implicitly positioned in opposition to the private and public sectors. In the UK, however, the current conceptualisation is more practical than conceptual, and is not strictly associated with non-profits. Cooperatives, social enterprises and mutual, amongst others, are also included in the sector (Westall, 2009), demonstrating that the sector is dynamic and changes over time. Social enterprises in the UK were only shifted under the purview of the then-Office of the Third Sector (currently known as Office for Civil Society) not too long ago, as the government then desired to bring together the workings of the voluntary sector and charitable activities across government, together with the Social Enterprise Unit, then in the Department of Trade and



Industry. Perhaps a revaluation of what constitutes the social sector should be on the cards.

As discussed earlier, there is a slew of other assets that could be considered assets for social good. It will be useful to increasingly discuss them in the same plane as the charity sector.

CONCLUSION

As more diverse set of assets have been made available, with professional groups, private sector organisations and VWOs exploring new ways in which to empower people, there is a real danger that the social landscape might just become too complicated for service users.

Better collaboration and information sharing is necessary, and there is a strong case to better understand collaborations, attitudes towards it, the current state, and the factors that affect it.

The social sector has proven itself time and again that it can mobilise and reinvent itself to achieve social good. It is essential to get the collaborations right, and not let this be a self-serving endeavour. “The history of the social services is the story of the recognition of social needs and the organization of society to meet them” (Bradshaw, 1972). With an explosion of socially-conscious organisations, it feels as if we are at a critical juncture in the history of our social services; with the blurring of boundaries between the sectors, collaborations could be the way forward for the social services.



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Chapter 17

ORGANISING COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITY ASSETS

Justin Lee, Mathew Mathews and Wong Fung Shing

PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL BLINDSPOTS

The ways we address social problems have not caught up with our rising ambitions for social change. Policymakers and professionals often lament that social problems have become more complex, perhaps out of frustration at (or rationalisation of) the minimal gains made in those areas. In reality, such claims of complexity are probably the result of ambitious aspirations to achieve social impact, coupled with rather outmoded mental maps of the problems that often result in short-term standalone programmes. For example, to engage isolated seniors, a befriending programme would help them forge new friendships. To support caregivers, a respite care service would give them some time for themselves. To reach out to out-of-school youths, a youth mentorship programme would engage them more meaningfully. While these programmes would help alleviate the social



need, such solutions typically work away at the symptoms of a problem and do not tackle the underlying cause.

Given the many limitations that policymakers and professionals face, be it in terms of the lack of resources, manpower, time, or skillsets, it is often easier to target the proximate causes of such social problems instead of attempting to move the deep structural forces that are beyond the control of individual agencies. For example, it is more common to provide career counselling or skills upgrading for unemployed older workers rather than tackle the problem of unequal access to employment or unfair employment practices.

Furthermore, organisations interested in social change often only select approaches they are familiar with, rather than interventions that are the most relevant. For example, the social worker's *modus operandi* or tools of the trade is to provide casework and counselling to clients in need of help. Managers with private sector experience may seek to adopt performance management practices to improve effectiveness, efficiency and financial sustainability in the social sector. Academic evaluators may insist that all programmes go through rigorous outcome evaluations. While all of these approaches have value, they are also prone to professional blind spots. For example, not every problem can be addressed by counselling. For some social programmes, other criteria such as choice, autonomy, equity or respect may matter more than surface effectiveness or efficiency. And finally, not all programmes need to be rigorously evaluated according to the highest standards, especially for pilot programmes, process



evaluation may be more suitable for fine-tuning the programme, before it warrants an outcome evaluation.

DIVERSITY CAN BE STRENGTH — IF YOU KNOW HOW TO CONNECT TO THE RIGHT RESOURCES

Diverse professional groups and types of community assets will bring new skill sets to solving social problems. A key argument by Ronald Burt, in his paper “The Social Origins of Good Ideas”, has been succinctly summarised; “It’s not how many people you know, it’s how many kinds” (Shirky, 2008, p. 229). People or organisations who are able to access information or skills from diverse groups are the ones who seem to be gifted with creativity. As he explains, “This is not creativity born of deep intellectual ability. It is creativity as an import-export business. An idea mundane in one group can be a valuable insight in another” (p.5). Take, for example, a voluntary welfare organisation (VWO) that adopts game design or behavioural economics principles to the development of a social programme or hospitals that use community artists to create an immersive arts experience to allow their patients to contemplate the validity of different end-of-life options.

Having access to diverse networks and assets can improve the creativity and quality of the social intervention developed. However, community assets often operate in their own networks and circuits. VWOs are members of the National Council of Social Service. Social enterprises are part of RaiSE. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)



units meet one another in the Global Compact. There are many untapped and under the radar assets such as cooperatives, mutual benefit organisations, community service offices of tertiary education institutions, social innovation labs and social cause consultancies that can potentially bring great value to the VWOs. Increasingly, informal and unincorporated groups have also self-mobilised to volunteer, raise funds, bring awareness to social causes or initiate other types of community projects.

WICKED PROBLEMS REQUIRE COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS THAT ADDRESS STRUCTURAL CAUSES

Beyond the ability to access new skills, tools and resources, connections to diverse community assets are now imperative to solve “wicked problems” that no single agency can hope to resolve on their own.⁴⁶ In other words, wicked problems require collective solutions. Yet, there are imposing barriers to collaborations, and some effort could be put to better understanding the barriers. Is it a matter of the current funding models? Is this a matter of leadership and will, or is it organisational legacy?

One potential reason is that community assets simply have little knowledge of one another and their respective programmes, services

⁴⁶ Coined by design theorist Horst Rittel, wicked problems refer to problems that cannot be solved with a policy or a programme, but require sustained intervention by multiple stakeholders over the long term, often with little agreement among stakeholders what the most effective solutions are and limited evidence that can demonstrate the uncertain and dynamic impact of those interventions.



and skills. Even when they do know, they may not know how to engage with one another. For example, community artists may find it challenging to work with VWOs that insist on a rigorous outcome evaluation of art programmes to the extent that it undermines the artistic process that is considered central to its success.

Another possible reason is that VWOs may see one another as competitors for a limited pool of resources. This can prevent organisations from thinking strategically about opportunities to collaborate with other community assets for greater impact in the longer term.

There could be a myriad of other factors intrinsic to organisations that promote or impede collaborations. Large organisations might have adequate resources to operate independently, while smaller organisations, with fewer resources, might need to collaborate with others to ensure long-term sustainability. Alternatively, large organisations might want to have their own collaborations with organisations, because they are less dependent on state funding and can drive their own agendas. Both are rather valid hypotheses, and should be tested in a Singaporean context. There should be some effort in understanding the collaborations of socially conscious organisations in Singapore, their motivations and will, as well as some of these barriers, so as to better facilitate a more collaborative culture.

We may be tempted to think that effective collaborations are all that is necessary. But collaborations should be organised to solve structural



problems. A coalition of VWOs offering casework and counselling, while much improving its quality or capacity, is unlikely to have provided new levers for social change. In a situation where VWOs interact with other professional groups or organisations, there is the potential of leveraging on a wider variety of skillsets to achieve a similar end for service users.

Also, the solutions should address the problem at the level of the community or the society as a whole. Instead of merely intervening to help individuals, the focus can be to build communities or civil society. Unfortunately, barring a few exceptions, VWOs do not do much community development work in Singapore. *Community development* should not be confused with *community-based initiatives*, of which we have plenty of examples. The former empowers members through capacity building, meaningful participation and real decision-making to effect change at the macro level, for example, to influence policy. To elaborate, community development for policy change depends on the organisation's representational capacity — that is, how well peoples' views are represented within an organisation and how well the views represented are communicated to the government. Community-based initiatives, on the other hand, may share similar values and principles with community development, but the sphere of influence still remains at the micro level, such as working with communities to bring about positive outcomes in the individual or at the intermediate level, for example, working with communities to bring about a change or improvement in services.



In Singapore, commentators have noted how the state occupies such a large space that it does not allow civil society to flourish (See, for example, Soon & Koh, 2017). When the government is the dominant player, VWOs cultivate vertical relationships with government to access funding and support, often at the expense of horizontal relationships with one another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We Do Not Need More Organisations, We Just Need New Ways of Organising

Technology has made it “easier for groups to self-assemble and for individuals to contribute to group effort without requiring formal management (and its attendant overhead)” (Shirky, 2008, p. 21). As Shirky points out, the costs of association has gone down, and traditional institutional forms for getting things done will weaken as novel alternatives for group action will arise.

There are already experiments in this area, for example, there is a network of organisations and individuals called The Social Collaborative, participating in an open collaboration project to understand the needs of various vulnerable groups, for example, people with disabilities, ex-offenders and migrant workers using a wiki platform, which allows users to create and collaboratively edit entries via a web browser. Using the wiki platform as a tool for collaboration, partners have been mobilised to contribute to this effort and inputs



have been consolidated from relevant players in each group. For the disability group, they intend to submit their findings about social needs and service or policy gaps to the policy makers. New partners have also expressed interest, and plans are underway to host “wikithons” where students can populate wiki pages with relevant information.

Such networks operate in the space between organisations to create meaningful connections that allow parties to contribute in a variety of ways that traditional institutions do not. It creates bridges across organisations that do not currently interact with one another, and exposes them to diverse community assets. Within The Social Collaborative itself, participants include social innovation labs, VWOs, technopreneurs, researchers, students and policymakers. A technology-enabled platform also allows organisations to calibrate their level of participation and commitment since not everyone is willing or is able to provide the same level of inputs. A set of anchoring organisations might be heavily committed to drive the effort. This is then complemented by other organisations that will participate sporadically and academics who might be consulted occasionally and students might have participated in a one-off wiki-thon.

Community Development Driven by Community Organisations

Community development work can be done by more non-profit organisations and VWOs. Serving various vulnerable groups, these organisations are well placed to strengthen the capacity of its service users as *active citizens* through their community development



initiatives, and to enhance its representational capacity to allow service users to communicate with the organisational leadership and participate in organisational decision-making. These organisations tend to focus on the direct provision of services due to the availability of government funding, rather than developing the organisation's representational capacity. As a result, very few organisations in our local context have developed an advocacy agenda. For those who have, they struggle with the ability to represent the community they are part of.

Community development may take on different forms in different settings, however, they should express the following values and principles:

- **Democratic:** Community members promote the autonomous voices of the disadvantaged or vulnerable communities
- **Inclusive:** Community members embrace diversity; they recognise that they may have different strengths and weakness, yet each has a right to participate in processes that affect their lives.
- **Community ownership:** Community members accept and own their problems or issues and work together to develop a solution



- **Community self-determination:** Community members come together to discuss their concerns and make discussions. They may seek advice from the experts, but consider it along with other sources of information and their own experiences.
- **Community mobilisation:** Community members identify existing community assets and networks, and leverages them to effect change.

To facilitate more community ownership, the government can “communitise” its assets. For example, specific community spaces can be put under the leadership of non-profit organisations, social enterprises or community artists, who can then work with the residents to work out a tenant mix suitable for the area. As another example, a council of disability organisations can be set up by non-profit organisations in the disability sector, which can then mobilise themselves and articulate service gaps to inform policy and planning.

The twin dominance of administrative logic and market logic in the social space needs to be counterbalanced by the values of the third sector — a community or an associational logic. The government tends to create oversight through agencies that centrally coordinate certain functions (e.g., NCSS, SG Enable, Agency for Integrated Care). More recently, Social Service Offices (SSOs) have been set up to coordinate local service planning. Such administrative rationality tends to create clarity of responsibility and clear lines of accountability. However, it also means creating clear administrative jurisdictions that



may limit the opportunity for others who want to participate in decision-making. To elaborate, even though public agencies are keen on consultation, decision-making powers are nonetheless centralised, and therefore the participation of VWOs may be limited to providing inputs for others to deliberate upon.

Market logic is also dominant in the social services, where the most effective and efficient VWOs are funded. While there is great value in these modes of thinking, the logic of community and associations is underprivileged. Here, the values of authenticity, participation and inclusion matter, and act as countervailing force to the predominant considerations of administrative clarity and efficiency. These are not merely abstract issues with only academic significance, but have practical implications. For instance, clients may forgo access to needed services if these services, while efficiently delivered, undermines their dignity. To the command and control bureaucratic structures where only the talented are empowered to make decisions, or the unfettered markets where sometimes winner-takes-all, the associational logic suggests that “all can contribute”.

CONCLUSION

We need to constantly re-examine the traditional institutional forms for group action and problems solving. Collective solutions to wicked problems are powerful when the strengths of diverse community assets are mobilised coherently. Social entrepreneurs have started organisations that provide innovative services or products to that end.



The attention has been to innovating on a service, intervention, product or policy. However, little attention has been spent innovating on the social and institutional forms we use to organise and work together. What new roles, relationships and rules should organisations and individuals invent to better coordinate and collaborate with one another? If we do that type of work designing the structures and functions of how groups interact, we would then be engaged in a “truly social” social innovation.

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Gerard EE spearheads Beyond Social Services, which strives to provide the opportunity for socially disadvantaged young people to achieve social mobility. After 30 years of service as both a youth worker and family therapist, he is a firm believer that social work is not simply problem-solving but a peace-building process that engages people to be a little kinder, fairer and more cooperative.

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Justin LEE is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. He has substantive interests in issues related to disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, and has done research on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, proper end-of-life planning for vulnerable seniors and the re-integration of ex-offenders. He is also interested in the non-profit sector at large, specifically in developments that affect the state of philanthropy, social services and various other community assets in Singapore. He is paying keen attention to the role and

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