

**PHOTOVOICE TO DISCOVER COMMUNITY ASSETS IN A  
MATURE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN SINGAPORE**

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## CONTENTS

<b><i>Foreword</i></b>		<b>iv</b>
<b><i>Sections</i></b>		
<b>1.</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1.</b>	<b>Key Findings and Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1.</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2.</b>	<b>Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3.</b>	<b>Photovoice</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1.</b>	<b>Geographical Area of Interest</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.2.</b>	<b>Participants and Recruitment</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.3.</b>	<b>Half-Day Induction Workshop</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.4.</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.4.1.</b>	<b>Photography Mission</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.4.2.</b>	<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3.5.</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3.6.</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3.7.</b>	<b>Photovoice Community Gallery</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.1.</b>	<b>Physical, Emotional and Social Well-Being</b>	<b>26</b>

<b>4.1.1. Walkability</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.1.2. Connections</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.1.3. Empty Nest Syndrome</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4.2. Bumping Spaces</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.3. Stories and Heritage</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4.3.1. A Good Life</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4.3.2. Community Heritage</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.4. Mutual Aid</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>4.4.1. Local Economies</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>4.4.2. Active Contributors</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>7. References</b>	<b>50</b>

## **Annex A Photovoice Storyboard**

This photovoice initiative ran from April 2022 to December 2022. We wish to thank:

- All photovoice participants for their efforts and commitment
- All residents for their support in organising the Photovoice Community Gallery
- All staff and locum of 414 Community Hub, and photovoice facilitators for journeying on this process
- All Raffles Institution 2022 Gryphon's Purpose programme participants

Special thanks to:

- Dr Justin Lee for enabling and guiding this initiative
- Yu Yen King, Siew Ling Lee, Hunter Ong, Ruth Ong and Geoff Pereira; this initiative was even better with their support and participation.
- Natalie Goh, Rachel Lim, Dolly Ng, Wing Cheong Tham and Alex Tan for their time and special contributions as residents of Teck Ghee
- Wei Zhi Chiang, Palvindrana s/o Jayram, Nur Laila, Fadillea Nahadi and Xinyao Yu, for connecting and curating the Photovoice Community Gallery alongside with residents, and for their feedback to the data analysis.

- Sharon Low for managing the photovoice process, supporting data analysis and writing the report with Peiyi Woo.

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As part of the Ngee Ann Kongsi Community Fellowship by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Policy Lab, Ng Bee Leng, Director (Community Development, Strategic Communications & Partnerships) at AMKFSC Community Services and the Community Fellow for 2021, conducted a photovoice project from March and July 2022 that combined the principles of community development and participatory research.

Based on the narratives of 31 residents from the Teck Ghee neighbourhood, many of whom are senior citizens, this project sought to understand valued spaces and connections from the community's perspectives and identify the place-based assets within the community. From the project findings, the community workers at AMKFSC are able to link community members to these place-based assets, and promote mutual aid and collaboration among residents. This Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach emphasises community members' personal agency and promotes capacity and relationship building — rather than relying on external resources and

professional services. This is important in increasing social capital within the neighbourhood.

### **1.1 Key Findings and Recommendations**

1. Residents are active in tapping on their social networks to maintain their physical, social, economic and emotional well-being and health during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Local businesses, local organisations and well-maintained community facilities within walking distance are significant resources in the neighbourhood that support the maintenance of community members' well-being.
3. As many older residents have spent decades being the care-givers to their children and grandchildren, they may experience empty nest syndrome when their children and grandchildren move out of the neighbourhood. Connections between neighbours can be an important factor that contributes to older residents' social, emotional and physical well-being when their children and grandchildren move out. These findings about how to strengthen connections between neighbours can further inform housing and community space planning policies.
4. Ordinary people play an important role in their community, and their voices should be taken into greater account for effective policy-making. For example, understanding which assets the community values — and thus should be preserved, enhanced or restored — would enable senior

citizens to better support one another in maintaining healthy lifestyles and benefit their collective well-being.

5. Photovoice is a powerful tool for community building because the sharing of stories based on photographs of everyday scenes can help to bring people together. The process requires intentionality and an environment where trust is present — to start conversations between people from different social circles who would never cross paths otherwise.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 Context**

In the years since AMKFSC Community Services started the 414 Community Hub, community workers have seen how residents often tap and contribute to place-based assets within the Teck Ghee neighbourhood to enhance their well-being. These assets can be the community members themselves, associations, institutions, the physical environment, the local economy and the stories of the neighbourhood. While these assets are known to community workers, they can sometimes be overlooked by members of the community. Thus, this community-based participatory research project aims to make the invisible visible by using photovoice to document, curate and share stories of treasured assets, spaces and connections alongside the residents of Teck Ghee.

The method of photovoice in participatory research can serve community development objectives. First, having the residents take photographs and participate in telling their stories allows them to express their own sense of place and describe what they appreciate about their community. Second, when all the residents' personal reflections and stories are put together and made sense of — during facilitated group conversations — the process paints a larger picture of treasured spaces and connections amongst residents. The group process and collective narrative can help to strengthen the sense of belonging to the community. Community development is an ongoing effort, and the conversations that have taken place during this project only serve as the start to collective agenda-building and mutual understanding of the problem-solving capacities of the residents. By stressing the self-determination, investment, creativity and autonomy of the residents, the community workers hope that this project can act as a catalyst for more resident-led initiatives in the Teck Ghee neighbourhood.

A total of 32 photographs out of 237 collected photographs were selected for this report by residents and volunteers, alongside with 414 Community Hub's community workers and facilitators. The section was inspired by common themes observed in the conversations conducted with the participating



residents. The photographs were also curated into a community exhibition by the residents and community workers.

This report aims to offer a glimpse of the personalities and interesting stories of Teck Ghee residents, through their impressions of their own neighbourhood as well as their reactions towards broader societal transformations or issues that they care deeply about. It is more than a simple collection of data, but one that can become a stimulus and inspiration for continued development of their community, and for the reinforcement of empowerment that drive community-driven changes.

## **2.2 Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)**

Traditionally, social services and non-profit work focuses on needs, deficiencies and problems. Experts and formal organisations tend to solve problems or issues on behalf of clients.

ABCD is a place-based framework that can help build strong, safe and healthy neighbourhoods and communities. By bringing the community together and focusing on the gifts within, ABCD helps residents, associations, non-profits, government and business community, to act collectively as co-producers of their community's well-being. The foundation principles of ABCD are that everyone has gifts; everyone has something to contribute; and everyone cares

about something, where that passion is their motivation to act. Thus, residents are able to believe that they have a greater role to play than just being passive “clients”, and that they can be empowered to work together for the benefit of their community.

By focusing on narratives that are recounted first-hand by the residents, community workers can identify how they might support residents, where needed; instead of providing them with the services they assume residents need. This approach does not eliminate the need for external resources; it uses these external resources more effectively by:

- starting with what is present in the community;
- concentrating on the collective agenda-building and problem-solving capacity of the residents; and
- stressing local determination, investment, creativity and autonomy.

Thus, the ABCD model transforms the client into a contributor (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). It emphasises relationship building, which is the key to increasing social capital within the community.

The assets in the ABCD model can be broadly grouped into six categories according to McKnight and Russell (2018):

1. Contributions of residents: These refer to the gifts, skills and passions of residents that contribute towards the collective well-being of their community. Gifts are innate; people are born with them. Skills are what people practise, learn and can teach or share with others. While passions are what people care enough to act on.
2. Associations: Clubs, groups and networks of unpaid citizens who create the vision and implement the actions required to make their vision visible and of consequence. They can be formal, like a chamber of commerce, or informal, like a book club.
3. Local institutions: The nature of an institution that is community oriented is that it acts as a resource towards community well-being and aims to be supportive, not directive. The goal of such supportive institutions is to enable citizenship and interdependence at the centre of community life.
4. Local places: From the air we breathe to the community gardens we tend and the places we casually bump into our neighbours or gather in deep fellowship, our shared places root our community experiences.

5. Exchange: There are three forms of non-monetary exchange: 1) the exchange of intangibles<sup>1</sup>, 2) the exchange of tangibles<sup>2</sup>, and 3) use of alternative currencies<sup>3</sup>. All three types of exchanges occur within and strengthen the commons (i.e., shared civic space) in that they increase gift exchange, deepen associational life, and encourage hospitality.
6. Stories: Local culture, or “the community way”, often finds expression within stories of the people and the “ways” they have learned through time to survive and thrive within their home places. Stories also act as powerful connection points between older and younger generations within a community. Local stories, therefore, are treasure maps that help us discover the hidden bounty that weaves our cultural assets together.

### **2.3 Photovoice**

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an approach to research where there is an equitable partnership between researchers and the community (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Some CBPR principles include community empowerment and co-learning among different stakeholders (Israel et al., 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> They tend to be relational, rather than transactional exchanges.

<sup>2</sup> Involves bartering or swapping of tangible resources.

<sup>3</sup> Introduces own local currencies like time banking, where members of a timebank use their time as a form of currency and each hour of contribution is equal to all others regardless of what is contributed.

Photovoice is an appropriate method for conducting CBPR and is well suited to the strengths-based principles of ABCD. Participants take photographs to record and reflect on the strengths and assets in their community, and then engage in dialogue, which is analysed and may ultimately lead to community action (Wang & Burris, 1997).

The images and associated stories operate not just at the cognitive level but also tap into feelings, allowing participants to develop awareness and understand the way others experience the world (Lofton & Grant, 2021). Above all, viewing the eventual output of the community exhibition becomes a starting point for community building among those who view it. This is because the same image will be viewed through the lens of everyone's own experiences and such differences in viewpoints are a great initiation into conversation, connection and understanding.

Although CBPR as a community practice technique is not new to social work, photovoice is seldom used as a research tool in social work research and is generally not introduced as a research method in social work (Lightfoot et al., 2014).

### **3. METHODS**

#### **3.1 Geographical Area of Interest**

Teck Ghee Constituency was formed by merging parts of Ang Mo Kio (AMK) and Chong Boon constituencies in 1984.

Teck Ghee is well-served by bus services to and from AMK Interchange and AMK MRT Station. The MRT viaduct that connects Teck Ghee residents to the park and AMK Central is a place where natural vibrancy could be seen during certain times of the day — for example, people exercising in the morning and evening as well as residents making their way to and from work, home or school.

Besides the wide range of goods and services offered by the shops here, residents and visitors can enjoy local delicacies and buy fresh market produce from the Teck Ghee Market and Food Centre.

The nearby AMK Swimming Complex and Bishan-AMK Park are the perfect hangout for families and fitness enthusiasts. The Teck Ghee Community Club and Bishan-AMK Park are just a stone's throw away.

The map below shows the Teck Ghee Constituency:



### 3.2 Participants and Recruitment

Residents were invited by convenience sampling through 414 Community Hub's formal and informal networks, if they fulfilled the following criteria:

- They are a resident of Teck Ghee constituency for more than 12 months or had been a former resident of Teck Ghee constituency no more than five years ago;
  - They are at least 15 years of age;
  - They own a smartphone;
  - They have strong interest in the community development of Teck Ghee;
- and

- They are able to commit to a half-day workshop, two weeks of asset mapping — which involves going out in their neighbourhood to take one to eight photographs — and a two-hour focus group discussion (FGD).

During the recruitment process, the community workers also utilised the principles of ABCD by tapping “community connectors”. These are residents in the community who know and keep in touch with many people and are convenors of people (McKnight & Block, 2010). The community connectors reached out to their networks to include residents who were otherwise not likely to be connected to this initiative.

A total of 31 residents were recruited to participate in the photovoice initiative, with slightly more women (n=18) than men (n=13) participants. One in three participants were single, divorced or widowed.

Gender/ Average age (range)	Marital status		
	Single	Married	Divorced/ Widowed
Female 57.4 (20-80)	3	11	4
Male 58.8 (15-88)	2	10	1

Table 1: Gender, marital status, average age and age range of participants

The average age of the participants was 57 to 58 years of age, likely due to the aging population of Teck Ghee and their availability to participate during weekdays.



<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>n</b>
<i>Chinese</i>	24
Christianity/Catholicism	13
Buddhism	6
Taoism	3
No Religion	2
<i>Indian</i>	4
Hinduism	3
Christianity/Catholicism	1
<i>Malay</i>	3
Islam	3

Table 2: Ethnicity and religion of participants

There was a higher proportion of Chinese (n=24), compared with Indians (n=4) and Malays (n=3). This is proportionate to the population composition in Teck Ghee. Almost 50 per cent of the residents are Christians or Catholics (n=14) as compared with other religions.

<b>Dwelling types</b>	<b>Household size (including participants)</b>			<b>Average length of stay (years)</b>
	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>5 &amp; above</b>	
1-2 room	4	1	1	18.3
3 rooms	6	1	--	35.6
4 rooms and above	6	7	4	33.8

Figure 3: Dwelling type, household size and average length of stay of participants

About one in two participants (n=17) live in 4-room or bigger flats; and one in five live in 1–2 rooms flats (n=6). About half of total participants (n=16) live in a small household of one to two persons. The average length of stay in Teck Ghee was 30.4 years, ranging between 18.3 to 35.6 years.

### **3.3 Half-Day Induction Workshop**

A total of seven induction workshops were held between March and June 2022, with each workshop lasting two hours. All the workshops were held at 414 Community Hub. During the workshop, participants were briefed on the purpose of the research project, the intended outputs and outcomes, and potential benefits and risks attached to their participation. The participants were aware that participation was voluntary and gave their informed consent to sharing their photographs and having their data collected for research and community development purposes.

The workshop also included a short session to teach participants basic photography techniques and discuss potential ethical concerns when taking photographs.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### ***3.4.1 Photography Mission***

Participants were given two weeks to take photographs around their community. A WhatsApp group with all the participants and coordinators was set up so that they could be connected.

The theme of the mission was kept open-ended to encourage participants to freely express and interpret what the assets within the community were from their perspectives. They were allowed to take photographs of any place, thing and people that they felt contribute to the well-being of the Teck Ghee community. This is in line with the ABCD principles of “doing with” and “doing by” community, where residents take the lead to describe the community based on their lived experiences.

### ***3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions***

The follow-up Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) took place two weeks after the photography mission. A total of seven FGDs were held between the months of March to June 2022, with each session lasting a maximum of two-and-a-half hours. The FGDs was semi-structured, where the facilitators guided participants to share their personal stories and reflections based on their photographs. There were three co-facilitators, including a Teck Ghee resident.

After each participant in the FGDs had shared about their photographs, all the participants were asked to identify and discuss thematic overlaps of the photographs, if any, and the significance of those assets for them and the wider community.

All participants were provided with S\$50 cash as a token of appreciation after the completion of the FGD.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

During the seven FGDs, the participants were invited to select a few photographs that were most important to them. These selected photographs (“core photographs”) were discussed in more detail to elicit possible community narratives or common themes. After this participatory data analysis, two debriefing sessions were held among the facilitators to identify key themes from the FGDs.

While the photographs were used for the data analysis, in some cases, the places, things and people photographed might not directly reflect the eventual themes and issues of significance to the participants that were explored during the FGDs. This showed how the photovoice process is flexible and adaptive to the circumstances, whereby there is a larger commitment to allow participants to engage with the photographs in ways that are significant for them.

### **3.6 Limitations**

As participants had to commit their time to attending the required sessions and taking photographs outside of the sessions, most of the participants were older retired residents or homemakers. As the participants were recruited via

snowball sampling, there may have been fewer opportunities to reach residents who were not part of existing networks, or who had difficulties being active in the community.

While the community workers were also mindful of having a diversity of participants, including participants of ethnic minorities and participants who lived in rental flats, there could have been greater diversity to gain better understanding and more meaningful interactions. For example, the participants were all able-bodied.

Notes for the FGDs were recorded in English, even when parts of the conversations were held in different languages. Hence, there could be potential errors in translation and alternative interpretations or paraphrasing. This could have affected the eventual meanings in the findings.

While the study sought to be as participatory as possible, not all participants were involved in the data analysis and the later community development outputs.

### 3.7 Photovoice Community Gallery

After the photovoice project, two of the participants went on to partner with Secondary Three students from the Raffles Institution's Gryphon's Purpose programme<sup>4</sup> as well as other Teck Ghee residents to put together a Photovoice Community Gallery over the span of four weeks. This Photovoice Community Gallery was composed of storyboards displaying selected photos organised according to the six categories of assets. The Gallery was co-funded by the RI Gryphon's Purpose programme and 414 Community Hub. Two photovoice participants led in the process of designing and curating the photovoice gallery.

Before organising the storyboard, the students went around the neighbourhood to share the photographs and stories with the residents, to figure out which of the stories most resonated with them. It was an interactive and iterative process that elicited more community stories and anecdotes that contributed to the storyboards. This iterative method is also guided by the ABCD principles of "doing with", where the community is consulted on the themes found by the facilitators, and the communities' stories and insights are integrated. The following are photographs documenting the process:

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<sup>4</sup> This is a six-week programme for Secondary 3 students which was jointly organised between the RI Education Career Guidance (ECG) and the Experiential Education Specialists at the Raffles Leadership Institute. Its key objective is for students to explore non-academic interest and work on curated opportunities to apply interest in a real-world setting.



From these engagements, a total of 24 photographs were shortlisted for the Photovoice Community Gallery. The organisers also took care to ensure that the written messages that went with the photographs resonated with the residents.

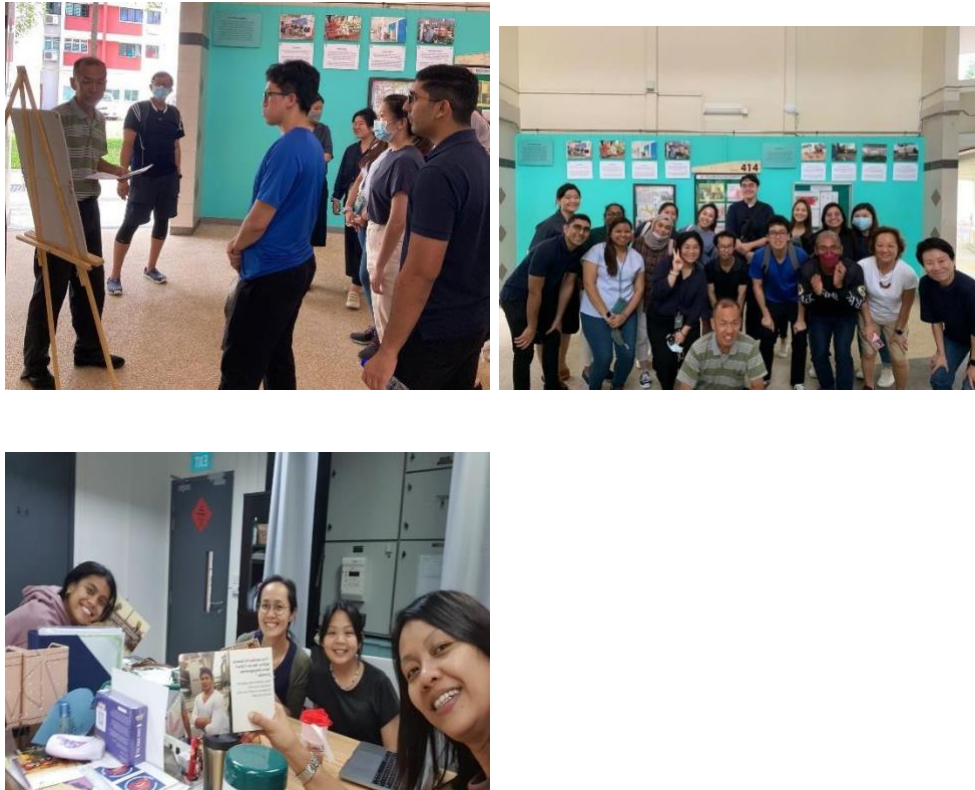
Many residents came together to provide suggestions for the materials for the exhibition and assemble the photographs, as shown in the photographs below. This was in line with the “inclusion” principle of ABCD, where residents are supported to contribute their talents and gifts to the co-creation process. This collective process helped to make everyone feel included and appreciated.



The Photovoice Community Gallery was launched officially by AMKFSC Community Services' Honorary Advisor Dr S. Vasoo on November 10, 2022. Photographs of the launch can be seen below. Residents led the launch and introduced their community to Dr Vasoo. Some of the participants were also there to share their experiences of the photovoice project and their stories behind the photographs used for the exhibition. (Refer to Annex A for the Photovoice storyboard.)







Upon the request of residents, to be more inclusive, the captions for the gallery photographs were later translated into Chinese, Malay and Tamil. The RI Experiential Education Specialist in charge of the students from the Gryphon's Purpose programme and community workers worked alongside residents to translate the captions as well as make QR codes with online versions of the captions so that other viewers could use their mobile phones to read the captions.

## **4. KEY FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Physical, Emotional and Social Well-Being**

#### ***4.1.1 Walkability***

Many participants took photographs of the facilities in the neighbourhood. Evidence from the Future Cities Laboratory at the Singapore-ETH Centre suggests that environmental attractiveness can have a significant impact on the amount of walking that take place (Silvennoinen et al., 2022). For example, improved façade quality was positively linked to walking, while building height and liveliness of the environment had negligible effects. This is corroborated by many participants who shared that the availability of safe walking paths in the neighbourhood allowed older residents to take regular walks to maintain their physical health. The older participants also shared that their walks allowed them to explore hidden spots and enjoy greenery, which also contributed to their mental wellness.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about the facilities and built environment in their neighbourhood:



“Eldercare homes are important places in the community for elderly, but I don’t use their services. [I have] mixed feelings as the [eldercare] facilities look nice but it’s better if I don’t need to use them [and remain healthy].... The track under the MRT is very cooling, [I] walk from RenCi to the MRT station every day, [it is a] long distance but good exercise. [I] cannot do without exercise.” (Photograph and quote from Mr Lek about his daily walk in the neighbourhood)



“I love walking and discovered this path on one of my daily walks. Not many people know this, but the tunnel is a short-cut to Serangoon. You can get to Chomp Chomp within 20 mins.” (Photograph and quote from Alex about exploring the neighbourhood)



“The park is good for families, people to meet friends. I used to walk there, but now my leg pain I don’t walk there anymore.”

(Photograph and quote from Mr Ong about the green spaces)

#### **4.1.2 Connections**

Residents in the community who know and keep in touch with many people and can influence others to contribute to the community are known as community connectors. Giebel et al. (2022) found that “structured support” could encourage individuals to be involved in community activities and build their social networks. Beyond serving as convenors for community activities, they can also play an important role in supporting isolated residents to become more confident in engaging with the community and existing services.

Participants shared that organic connections within the community can form through different ways. This finding is helpful in informing how the community workers and residents can engage different people.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about community connectors and how they have made connections:



“Uncle Jimmy’s Garden has been here for a while, since my daughter was young. I see many people visiting the garden and chit-chatting. They share tips on how to plant and even offer to help look after each other’s plants when they are overseas.” (Photograph and quote from Rachel about the caretaker of the community garden)

“[My] grandson enjoys plants, goes to Uncle Jimmy’s Garden to ask for seeds and learns how to grow. I usually don’t go in without my grandson.” (Quote from Mages about how her connection was formed)



“There are only one or two men in the regular exercise groups — I wouldn't have participated if not for my wife. Men are generally unlikely to join in social activities unless our wives bring us along. We focus less on such social group activities compared to women.” (Photograph and quote from Mr Wee about how his connection was formed)



“I know Rachel’s father since young — we are both Hainanese, from Ulu Pandan *kampung*. [We] met again in our 30s in Teck Ghee. We always sang karaoke at RC Block 418 and Rachel’s father is a singing teacher. I even attended Rachel and their siblings’ wedding dinners, rented a bus to go to wedding during the SARS period. Attended their grandparents’ funeral.” (Photograph and quote from Mdm Wee about how her connection was formed)



“The new volunteers are very passionate and like to help. They even do their own fundraising and take the initiative to help needy families. The group grows organically as the people they know bring more in. Rapport between the volunteers keeps the team going!” (Photograph and quote from Fazeli about his connections)



### **4.1.3 Empty Nest Syndrome**

Empty nest syndrome is something that many parents, and even grandparents who take care of their grandchildren, will experience when the children grow up and eventually leave the home. On the one hand, a longitudinal study in Germany showed that “empty nest” was shown not to be associated with one’s psychosocial health in terms of loneliness and depressive symptoms (Kristensen et al., 2021). On the other hand, two studies in China, by Wang et al. (2017) and Cheng et al. (2015), showed that loneliness and depression are more severe among rural older adults with empty nest syndrome. Thus, there is a concern that empty nest syndrome may cause loneliness and depression for the older residents in Teck Ghee. It is worthwhile considering how communities in Singapore can engage these older residents to remain active and alleviate their loneliness.

The following is a photograph and quote from an older participant about their difficulties with empty nest syndrome:



“[The] playground below my block and hopscotch below the MRT tracks where my grandchildren used to play when they were young (they are now grown). I have many happy memories of taking care of

them. Enjoys sitting in the area and watching the children. Every time I pass by, I think about the happy memories. The playground used to be very lively, but now it is quieter because the children have all grown up. Now I feel a bit lonely.”

#### **4.2 Bumping Spaces**

Residents do organically develop relationships through interactions with each other in common spaces. Thus, such “bumping places” are important in community development. The places are co-created through the interactions of the people within the spaces, and thus are unique reflections of the community (Diers, 2022). Residents can feel a sense of ownership when they constantly engage with these places.

Discussion of the photographs show that many middle-aged and older residents enjoy spending time within community spaces, especially places where older residents can “bump” into others daily. These places are often used for exercise and physical wellness, but also for making connections and enhancing social well-being.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about bumping places:





“Bishan Park is cooling/ fresh in the morning, many trees and otters/ squirrels/ chickens. Nice open space compared to the covered up, dense buildings in neighbourhood. Seems to be an important place for the community and caregivers, sees a lot of grandmothers/mothers with children, boys playing frisbee in the evenings.” (Photograph and quote from Mages)



“These sports facilities used to be my favourite place. Street soccer courts are not as common as badminton/ basketball courts. [We] can also play floorball, [they] used to have a programme here that lasted for some time. [There is] no need to book, [they are] not locked normally.”

(Photograph and quote from Gordon)



“Community is not just about physical assets, but memories with people. So, people in the spaces matters. The newer estates do not have corridors, so people must make the extra effort to talk... these days, we get to meet people in the lifts.”

(Photograph and quote from Natalie)



“A lot of elderly used to exercise in the morning, but [the place’s] condition [is] quite bad now. [It is still a] good place to gather and chit chat. The elderly still sit there with their birds.” (Photograph and quote from Rick)

There are also spaces where residents can strike up a conversation with others and make new friends with whom to share their thoughts and feelings. Through these conversations, people can often find answers and solutions to their own problems.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about bumping places where they have met new friends:



“While I sit at the void deck or just around the area. Sometimes I talk to people sitting next to me, we get to know each other like this.” (Photograph and quote from Auntie Kwek)

“I live with my daughter and spend all my time taking care of my four grandchildren so [we] mostly hang around the void deck where they play with their friends.” (Quote from Auntie Hong)



“When I have nowhere to go, I will go to CC to read newspapers. When I see people around many times, we become familiar.” (Photograph and quote from Auntie Kwek)

“[Teck Ghee CC] is a place that I see every day because I live nearby. It’s where my children went for their playgroup classes when they were toddlers. They

also have a bike shop, and I rented a tandem bike and cycled all the way to Potong Pasir with my mother.” (Quote from Bi Juan)



“These areas are good for meeting friends and strangers. I like to sit and watch people. It’s very nice, this is life, there are so many patterns. [These days] I sit with those I’m familiar with because we worry about people in Singapore now with all the scams, so I prefer to sit quietly and smile.” (Quote from Mr Ong)

“Men generally don’t like to join structured activities, so places like hawker centres provide that space for men’s social engagement with others.” (Quote from Mr Kua)



“Void deck corridors are very good... when we walk around, we are bound to meet someone we know. The more we meet, the more we chat... there is no need to make appointment, we just speak with whoever we meet.” (Photograph and quote from Auntie Wong)

## 4.3 Stories and Heritage

### 4.3.1 A Good Life

Many participants also shared about the community spaces, associations and institutions that enriched their lives. For example, they explored passions that also served as contributions to the community. Their ability to contribute to the community in turn gave them a sense of belonging, which is crucial to their physical and mental well-being (McKnight & Block, 2010).

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about the things that have contributed to their well-being:



“My husband and I would go to the swimming pool quite often, especially when my children were younger. We really enjoyed ourselves there and shared a close relationship.” (Photograph and quote from Susan)





“I used to play with my cousins under my block here. We played many games like *Ice and Freeze*, *Block Catching* and all. Then other kids would just join us too! It was fun growing up here.”

(Photograph and quote from Ash)



“There are many changes [to this place], for example, [there is now] more art and the new jogging/ cycling path. I find it nostalgic because I walk this route every day, when I take the bus, when I go to my parents-in-law’s, when I go to AMK. I like this area a lot, to go to the food and market, very convenient place. From my place, I can look out to the CC, it’s very nice. When I feel tired, I will look out the window to see the scenery. They upgraded the path, made it flat and there is a jogging/ cycling path. There is also a new wheelchair ramp, so it is very accessible for everybody. I do meet my friends there. My son really likes the MRT, since he was young, even his poly attachment was at SMRT, now he

also works at SMRT. For every train that passes, he will know which is the MRT number, a four-digit number.” (Photographs and quote from Henny)

#### **4.3.2 Community Heritage**

From the participants’ discussions, many have called Ang Mo Kio home for decades and are proud of its history, its early beginnings, and its development over the years. Participants also shared stories about how they contributed to the development of community clubs and schools in the neighbourhood. For example, older residents have rallied in the past to preserve iconic monuments within the community that were meaningful. Through these stories, the community workers and residents can learn about the strengths, gifts, talents, and resources of individuals in their community.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about their unique stories and community heritage:



“When they built this [Merlion statue], Bishan Park was not so developed. There is a pair of Merlions, [you can] see the one behind before you turn in [the road]. At first the Singapore Tourism Board wanted to remove them, but we rallied and applied to keep it. I live in Blk 200+, the location is good because there is a primary school and market nearby. I took [these]

photos with my family, my two grandchildren.” (Photograph and quote from Lilian)



“Someone said that Ang Mo Kio was named after ‘tomato’ (in Hokkien). In fact, the town’s name was coined because the *Ang Mos* had built a bridge from Thomson to here. Therefore, it is Ang Mo Kio in

Hokkien, *Ang Mo* meaning Caucasians and *Kio* meaning to the bridge.”

(Photograph and quote from Ann)

“This CC in AMK was the very first one, before it mushroomed into Cheng San and so on. I with Mr Yeo, one of the second advisors to Teck Ghee, we were from Kampong Kapor. Nobody knew at the time what was AMK, there were no HDBs. We came up here and set up AMK CC, at one of the units at the Blk 226 shophouse. Later we raised funds to set up the current AMK CC.” (Quote from George and Ann about the community centres)





“I am proud that Teck Ghee Primary school is named after where I have been residing for 20 years. I think it’s important for schools to be here to build our next generation.” (Photograph and quote from Diana)

## **4.4 Mutual Aid**

### ***4.4.1 Local Economies***

From the participants’ discussions, it appears that place-based community development involves not just the residents but also the local businesses and the government. This is because the residents’ sense of place is shaped by their connections to the local businesses that fulfil their daily needs. Beyond the practical aspects of providing food and necessities, the local businesspeople provide important social connection and care for residents, especially for senior citizens who spend most of their time in their neighbourhood rather than travel to other parts of Singapore.

The following are relevant photographs and quotes from the participants about their unique stories and community heritage:



“My mother grew up in Ang Mo Kio and she is used to go to this cobbler to fix her shoes as he was the only one she knew of who fixes it by hand.” (Photograph and quote from Natalie)



“This is an ‘old-school’ shop. The uncle is very kind and nice to the kids in our neighbourhood. Other grocery stores have no relationships, just pay and go. This place feels more like home, and the uncle is like part of our family.” (Photograph and quote from Fazeli)



“I have been going to Ang Mo [Supermarket] since I moved to this community 40+ years ago... the owner's grandfather started a fruit store then business was so good that they started the supermarket one after another. We can buy anything and everything there and it's cheap.” (Quote from Molly)



“This shop sells the cheapest vegetables in the area. They have been here for around 20 years. It is a family business, and they are very nice to me. The son of the stall owner is a graduate. When the family travels, the market will be less crowded. Vegetables will be even cheaper after 12 noon.” (Photograph and quote from Ah Tham)

#### **4.4.2 Active Contributors**

From the participants’ sharing about their contributions to the community, it appears that many Teck Ghee residents would participate in mutual aid activities, and this gave them a sense of purpose. They shared that they valued being able to do something meaningful together with friends, taking care of one another when a spouse passes on, and caring for animals in the community. Their connection to the community was also strengthened when they were appreciated for the unique gifts that they possess.

The following are relevant quotes from the participants about their contributions:



“I learned how to make coffee from my father who used to own a coffee shop. I find it meaningful that I could make coffee for others at the La-Kopi sessions held at Teck Ghee Community Club. Now, I actively contribute at 414 Community Hub by cooking for others.” (Photograph and quote from Mdm Chu)



“I have been in various community clubs since my retirement. I will participate in activities organised at AMKFSC, Teck Ghee Community Club, AWWA and others. That’s where I made friends with Mary who lives above my flat. My husband passed away and we have no children, so the volunteers and I take care of one other.” (Photograph and quote from Nancy)



“I have been volunteering at Teck Ghee Community Club for over 10 years. I made many new friends along the way, many of whom would invite me to participate in other exercising and volunteering sessions, like the daily biscuit distribution at the CC. I look forward to volunteering even more now because I am doing something good for the community with my friends.” (Photograph and quote from Mdm Wee)



“I have been rescuing and feeding cats for more than 20 years. I feel for them when I hear them ‘meowing’. My husband jokes that I owe these cats money because of how much I care for them.” (Photograph and quote from Mdm Tang)

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings about well-being have shown that one’s well-being involves social, emotional, and physical connections with other people. This is broadly consistent with existing research about structural measurements for social wellbeing such as living arrangements or network size; and functional

measurements like quality and meaning of social relationships (Holt-Lunstad, 2018).

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis on well-being as part of community development is even stronger, especially as movement restrictions and social distancing measures hindered people from making and maintaining social connections (Cudjoe & Kotwal, 2020). As the population in Singapore ages and family sizes shrink, solely relying on one's family as the main source of support, without the help of networks of neighbours and friends, may no longer be adequate for a good life and sustainable care. Compared with the services of the state and professionals, communities are also nimbler and can react to and support their members quickly, as shown in the many mutual aid initiatives that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore (Barrenetxea et al., 2022). Thus, community workers should explore the different ways in which older adults can receive social support and be active in making connections.

It must be acknowledged that many older citizens in Singapore rely mostly on their family members or close friends (Barrenetxea et al., 2022). Those who are less active in their neighbourhood and whose lives revolve mostly around their



spouses, children and grandchildren, may be vulnerable to loneliness and isolation when they suffer from empty nest syndrome.

It is interesting that many participants shared how they made connections in the community in unplanned and unexpected ways, with the help of community connectors and acquaintances they met in public spaces. These connections helped alleviate the loneliness and isolation many older adults experience (Yeh et al., 2013) and supported them to be active and have purpose in their own way. They were able to contribute meaningfully even with simple tasks like cutting vegetables and preparing meals at community kitchens, making coffee for fellow residents, attending church, taking care of stray cats, redistributing free concert tickets, exercising, or chatting with others. Many of them benefited from this personal sense of significance and being a part of a community or cause beyond themselves (Kapur, 2021).

Many common spaces can become significant bumping places where residents encounter familiar people and become comfortable to make friends with others. These include void decks with sitting benches, lifts, hawker centres and neighbourhood shops.

Neighbourhoods in Singapore today no longer resemble the communities found in *kampungs* that were cleared a few decades ago, as people now tend to spend a significant part of their professional and social outside of their residential neighbourhood (August & Rook, 2013). However, when residents share personal stories of familiar places in the neighbourhood, they can strengthen their sense of belonging and community heritage.

It is also worthwhile to explore how local exchanges and local businesses that are anchored within the neighbourhood can have important effects on social connections (Gibbons & Roberts, 2013). For example, local businesses that are part of important social networks in the neighbourhood can provide residents with access to their daily necessities, as well as look out for the residents in the neighbourhood. This can explain why trusted local vendors are still important in our landscape and have value that cannot be provided by generic chain stores.

In conclusion, this photovoice project has uncovered many valued assets within the Teck Ghee community — the various spaces, connections, local economies and stories all play important roles for the residents' overall well-being. Community development is an ongoing effort, and the conversations that have taken place only serve as the start to building more community connections and



mutual understanding of the shared value and problem-solving capacities of the residents.

Ordinary people play an important role in their community, and their voices should be taken into greater account for effective policy-making. For example, understanding which assets are valued by the community and thus should be preserved, enhanced or restored, would enable senior citizens to better support one another in maintaining healthy lifestyles and benefitting their collective well-being.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Photovoice can be an important tool for making invisible assets in the community visible through storytelling, collective reflection and sharing. These images and associated stories operate not just at the cognitive level but also tap into feelings — allowing viewers to feel some of what the residents themselves may have felt. For example, walking paths under the MRT tracks are important for residents' wellness and agency. Common views of the physical landscape can elicit reflections of how people are less connected to their neighbours today than compared with when they lived in *kampungs* in the past.

Committing to a participatory research method and community development objectives requires intentionality and mutual trust on the part of facilitators and participants. It is important that the community members themselves are empowered to define what is meaningful to them, as well as take further action to build what they want to see. Community development is a long-term effort that goes beyond one-off conversations and requires the active participation of diverse members.

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## Annex A Photovoice Storyboard

### What Matters in My Neighbourhood?

This exhibition was curated by residents of Ang Mo Kio community from diverse backgrounds. We took photos of what matters to us in our neighbourhood. In groups, we shared the stories of how these places, spaces and faces contribute to our well-being and that of our neighbours.

We found 6 key assets that matter in our neighbourhood: Individual, Associations, Institutions, Local Economies, Places and Stories.

1

### Individual Assets

Ang Mo Kio community boasts a treasure trove of diverse individuals with skills, passions and knowledge. Through various avenues, we leverage our individual gifts to contribute to the betterment of our community. From cooking up a meal for fellow residents to eat together, to protecting our often-overlooked furry friends, these photos showcase how we engage in active citizenship to build a community where we feel safe, appreciated and valued.

2



3

### Gifts of the Hand

*"I learned how to make coffee from my father who used to own a coffee shop. I find it meaningful that I could make coffee for others at the La-Kopi sessions held at Teck Ghee Community Club. Now, I actively contribute at 414 Community Hub by cooking for others."*

- Mdm Chu

Gifts of the hand such as cooking, gardening and painting, when shared with others, contribute to the well-being of not just the receiver but also the giver.

4



5

### Gifts of Human Connection

*"I with Mr Yeo one of the second advisors to Teck Ghee, we were from Kampong Kapor. Nobody knew at the time what was AMK, there were no HDB flats. We came up here and set up AMK CC, at one of the shophouses at Blk 226. Later we raised funds to set up the current AMK CC."*

- George Tan

George is a connector in our community. He has been serving the community with the grassroots since the beginning of Ang Mo Kio in the 1970s. Ang Mo Kio is like his first home; he travels to Ang Mo Kio daily to maintain and strengthen the extensive connections he has built here.

6



7

### Gifts of the Head

*"I love walking and discovered this path on one of my daily walks. Not many people know this, but this tunnel is a shortcut to Serangoon. You can get to Chomp Chomp within 20 mins."*

- Alex

Gifts of the head are knowledge and subject matters that we enjoy sharing and talking about with others. Some of these can only be discovered and shared through conversations with our neighbours.

8



9

### Gifts of the Heart

*"I have been rescuing and feeding cats for more than 20 years. I feel for them when I hear them 'meowing'. My husband jokes that I owe these cats money because of how much I care for them."*

- Mdm Tang

Gifts of the heart shine through when one's passion for a cause turns into action. Like Mdm Tang, these individuals look out and advocate for the marginalised and disenfranchised in our society.

10

### Associations

Associations within the neighbourhood exist in various forms – formal, like the Football Club, or informal, like groups that gather daily at our void decks for a fun afternoon of play.

They serve as vehicles through which residents' skills, passions and knowledge are discovered and connected through common interests. By doing things together, we amplify and multiply our effectiveness for change. The photos here showcase the associations within Ang Mo Kio where residents come together to pursue an interest that contributes to the vibrance of our community.

11



12



### Community Garden

*"The garden has been here for a while since my daughter was young. I see many people visiting the garden and chit-chatting. They share tips on how to plant and even offer to help look after each other's plants when they are overseas."*  
- Rachel

Informal associations, like this community garden, bring people with similar interests together, creating mutually beneficial relationships and strengthening interdependence within our community.

13



14

### Childhood Playmates

*"I used to play with my cousins under my block here. We played many games like Ice and Freeze, Block Catching and all. Then other kids would just join us too! It was really fun growing up here."*

- Ashley

Groups that form organically around play establish and strengthen new social relationships within our neighbourhood. These experiences reinforce the sense of belonging to the place and people around, nourishing our community life.

15



16

### Youths that Care

*"The young volunteers are very passionate and like to help. They even do their own fundraising and take the initiative to help needy families. The group grows organically as the people they know bring more in. Rapport between the volunteers keeps the team going!"*

- Fazeli

Volunteer groups like the one formed at 643 Community Hub not only meet for fun but also address the concerns and needs in our neighbourhood. Such associations maximise the assets within and outside for the betterment of our community.

17



18

### From Volunteers to Friends

*"I have been volunteering at Teck Ghee Community Club for over 10 years. I made many new friends along the way, many of whom would invite me to participate in other exercising and volunteering sessions, like the daily biscuit distribution at the CC. I look forward to volunteering even more now because I am doing something good for the community with my friends."*

- Mdm Wee

As with Mdm Wee's drive to do more for and with our community, associations like these build friendships and instill a sense of belonging that enable active citizenship.

19

### Local Businesses

Local businesses create a mutually beneficial support network for our community. From a family-run supermarket offering cheaper produce to a veteran tailor shop with quality yet affordable bespoke suits, these local resources are maximised for local economic benefits. These photos showcase the local businesses nestled within our neighbourhood that, when activated, meet the needs of our neighbours who have become friends more than customers.

20



21

### Tailor@410

*"An authentic tailor shop is a rare sight nowadays. I feel that it does not really get much recognition"*

- Mr Rick

Located in proximity to our neighbourhood, traditional tailors provide bespoke services at a reasonable price. They might not have an edge over their younger competitors, but residents appreciate them for their personal touch and traditional craftsmanship.

22



23

### Market@409

*"This shop sells the cheapest vegetables in the area. They have been here for around 20 years. It is a family business and they are very nice to me."*

*"The son of the stall owner is a graduate. When the shop is not open, the market will be less crowded. Vegetables will be even cheaper after 12 noon"*

- Ah Tham

Local shops sell items at a discount as patrons are treated as more than just customers. We become friends and even get to know one another's families.

24



25

### Cobbler@407

*"My mother grew up in Ang Mo Kio and she is used to going to this cobbler to fix her shoes as he is the only one she knew of who fixes it by hand."*

- Natalie

Local craftsmen such as our street cobblers are familiar to our neighbours and appreciated for their trade experiences and local knowledge of our community. They are skilled masters of their craft who personalise their services according to the unique needs of their patrons.

26



27

### Mama Shop @ 205

*"This is an old-school shop. The uncle is very kind and nice to the kids in our neighbourhood."*

*Other grocery stores have no relationships, just pay and go. This place feels more like home, and the uncle is like part of our family."*

- Fazeli

Local businesses and shop-owners like these seem to be rare finds nowadays. Although these shops may seem more disorganised, they instil a sense of home and familiarity in our residents.

28

### Institutions

Institutions like Family Service Centres, Schools or Nursing Homes often play a significant role in supporting communities. Institutions provide important services that meet the social, educational, and health needs of our residents. These photos feature the institutions that bridge service gaps, contributing to the well-being of our residents and families.

29



30



### Social Service Institutions

*"I have been in various community groups since my retirement. I will participate in activities organised by AWWA, AMKFSC and others. That's where I made friends with Mary who lives above my flat."*

- Nancy

Social service institutions within our neighbourhood provide services that meet the social, psychological and welfare needs of our residents through a range of programmes and activities.

31



32

### Healthcare Institutions

*"I like to walk with my wife under the MRT tracks everyday to stay healthy. Even though the Ren Ci facilities are nice, I would want to stay healthy so I do not have to rely on it."*

- Mr Lek

Healthcare services provided by institutions in neighbourhoods help people to age in place. However, there is a natural preference for residents to want to age in the community rather than in institutions.

33



34

### Educational Institutions

*"I am proud that Teck Ghee Primary school is named after where I have been residing for 20 years. I think it's important for schools to be here to build our next generation."*

- Diana

Institutions such as schools are vital stakeholders of the community. Besides shaping the experiences and characters of the young in our neighbourhood, it lays the foundation for social cohesion in our community.

35



36

### Community Institutions

*"This is a place I see everyday, because I live nearby. It's where my children went for their playgroup classes when they were toddlers. They also have a bike shop and I rented a tandem bike and cycled all the way to Potong Pasir with my mother."*

- Bi Juan

Formal institutions like community centres are important places that connect people in our neighbourhood. It is a space that supports the building of relationships between people of all ages.

37

### Places

Places where people meet naturally are essential in enabling social relationships within a neighbourhood. From the stone tables to the lift lobbies to the playground and BBQ pits, these communal spaces are rich with shared memories yet brimming with potential for new friendships and re-imaginings. The photos here spotlight the shared places that act as bridges for social exchanges between our residents from all walks of life, across generations.

38



39

### Bumping Spaces for Play and Fun

*"The playground used to be very lively last time when I brought my children and later grandchildren to play. Now, it is quieter because the children in Ang Mo Kio have all grown up."*

- Mdm Ngoh

People become reminiscent of places such as playgrounds and stone tables at void decks which brought different generations together and built a special part of our memories.

40



41

### A Walk Down Memory Lane

*"I find this path nostalgic because I walk this route everyday, and I meet my friends here. I attach many memories to this place."*

- Henny

Before-and-after photos of Henny and her son taken in 2000 and 2022. This path has since been upgraded to include more bicycle ramps as well as jogging and cycling paths, enhancing its value as a bumping space where people meet and connect.

42



43

### AMK Swimming Pool

*"My husband and I would go to the swimming pool quite often, especially when my children were younger. We really enjoyed ourselves there and shared a close relationship"*

- Susan

This swimming pool built in 1982 was a place of joy for extended families and neighbours, young and old. Places where people gather for activities serve to strengthen connections among residents.

44



45

### Green Spaces for Wellness

*"I enjoy going for walks at Bishan Park which is cooling and has fresh air, with trees, otters, squirrels and chickens. It is nice and open compared to the covered up, dense buildings in the neighbourhood."*

- Mages

Interaction with green spaces has a variety of benefits to the wellbeing of communities. Natural environment also draws people together for leisure and social interaction, creating meaningful memories for healthier and happier communities.

46

### Stories

Stories allow us to relive what once was and dream about what lies ahead. The nostalgic memories bring to attention how neighbourhoods and their occupants have evolved over the years. As these stories continue to be passed down through generations, they connect the young and old and shape the identity of our community. Look through the lens of Ang Mo Kio residents as we reminisce about our past that has shaped our community today.

47



48



### Merlions@216

*"At first the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) wanted to take the Merlions down, but they (RC) applied to keep it"*

- Lilian

This story shows how voices of communities are rallied through causes that people care about. This pair of merlions outside Blk 216 will continue to serve as a testament of how our residents rallied to preserve a heritage in our neighbourhood.

49



50

### More Than Just a Table

*"This table is quite a rare sight these days; there used to be plenty around in the 90s like the one at Blk 413. When I was younger, my friends and I would play 'Crocodile', standing on the table trying to avoid getting bitten."*

- Rick

Collective memories of spaces contribute to the sense of identity in communities. Emotions are attached to places through past experiences which give meanings to where we reside.

51



52

### The Red Tomato

*"Someone said that Ang Mo Kio was named after Tomato (in Hokkien). In actual fact, the town's name was coined because the 'Ang Mo' had built a bridge connecting Thomson to here. Therefore, calling it Ang Mo Kio; in Hokkien, 'Ang Mo' referring to the Caucasian and 'Kio' referring to bridge."*

- Ann

Our communities are filled with stories that spark different emotions. They remind us of our heritage and bring new meaning to everyday terms.

53



54

### **Places and Faces**

*"I became friends with an old man from the 409 market. He loves his children and used to send them to school everyday. He is now 76 and too old to drive them around. He keeps old dollar notes and sometimes exchanges them with me."*  
- Mr Ong

Stories are commonly associated with places and faces that stand the test of time. As old stories are told, new stories that connect communities are formed everyday, waiting to be discovered and shared.

55

### **Acknowledgements**

There are many other wonderful photos and stories from other residents that we were unable to put up here due to space constraint. These stories are equally treasured and add to the Ang Mo Kio heritage.

We invite you to talk to your neighbours to discover more and more of the collective memories of Ang Mo Kio.

Due to space constraint again, we apologise that the captions can only be done in English. We invite neighbours to help translate and together, make meanings to the exhibits.

56