REPORT ON BALTIMORE STUDY TRIP 2022:

"ALL AT ONCE OR NOT AT ALL"

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CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), in partnership with Tote Board, embarked on a three-year partnership to organise the annual Transforming the Non-Profit Sector series that comprised learning journeys, panel discussions, and a conference. The theme for 2022 was "Solutions That Help Us Help One Another" and focused on the wide variety of ways that communities can support one another. Older forms of "mutual benefit organisations", "friendly societies" or community development work now co-exist with newer "ground up initiatives". Decentralised and distributed organisational forms also afford new kinds of tech-enabled, peer-to-peer collaboration, alongside more traditional associations structured to represent members' interests. Innovative forms of social care, worker-owned and platform co-operatives are also emerging to re-imagine how social impact can be achieved beyond traditional service delivery.

Through the virtual learning journeys and panel discussions, IPS invited speakers to share about contributing to the commons, new ways of organising social change through co-operatives, and collaborative forms of learning that help to unlock a community's learning capacity. This overseas study trip to Baltimore complements these discussions by allowing professionals in the non-profit sector — to immerse themselves in a different environment and understand how innovative organisations elsewhere harness existing assets and develop new ways to help communities help themselves.

Report on Baltimore Study Trip 2022: "All At Once Or Not At All" by Dr Justin Lee

1.1 Participants From Singapore's Non-Profit Sector

Six participants were chosen from the pool of applicants to receive a travel subsidy of S$3,000 to offset the cost of travel expenses to Baltimore. Seven other interested participants were invited to attend the trip with their personal funding. Together with representatives from IPS and Tote Board, there was a total of 16 participants.[1]

List of participants who attended the Baltimore study trip

S/N	Name	Designation/ Department	Organisation
1	Justin Lee	Senior Research Fellow, Policy Lab	Institute of Policy Studies
2	Cai Dewei	Senior Executive, Public Affairs	Institute of Policy Studies
3	Faith Aw Yong	Deputy Director, Grant Management	Tote Board
4	Fang Xinwei	Deputy Director, Yishun FSC	Singapore Children's Society
5	Kenneth Heng	Founder & Executive Director	Solve n+1
6	Rachel Loh	Head of Youth GO!	Fei Yue Community Services
7	Sarah Sulaiman	Deputy Head, Programme & Planning	Pertapis Centre for Women and Girls
8	Siti Adriana Muhamad Rasip	Manager (Sunray) /Assistant Senior Community Worker (AMKFSC)	NCSS Sunray/ Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre
9	Vincent Ng	General Manager	A Good Space Co-operative
10	Aadilah Aidid	Senior Manager, Education	Yayasan MENDAKI
11	Aidaroyani Adam	Deputy CEO	Yayasan MENDAKI

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[1] This report was also written with the inputs from the 16 participants.

Report on Baltimore Study Trip 2022: "All At Once Or Not At All" by Dr Justin Lee

12	Jenna Luen	Director, School Social Work	SHINE Children and Youth Services
13	Lin Weiting	Assistant Director, Independent Living and Caregiver Support Division	SGEnable
14	Sheena Lim	Assistant Manager, Fei Yue FSC (Yew Tee)	Fei Yue Community Services
15	Sylvia Phua	AVP, Impact & Partnerships, Corporate Affairs & Communications	GIC
16	Vimala Devi Athmalingam	Assistant Manager, Social Worker, Fei Yue Family Services at SSO@Taman Jurong	Fei Yue Community Services

1.2 Why Baltimore?

The Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP) was chosen as one of the main hosts to help the study trip participants understand the value of peer learning in a youth-led organisation. We got to hear reflections from Jamal Jones, Co-Director of Baltimore Algebra Project, who helps to facilitate community-organising projects (e.g., revisions to school policing policies, campaigns for community control of schools, obtaining day passes for students' travel during the school week, etc.); as well as Jay Gillen, a facilitator of the BAP for Baltimore City Schools and author of *The Power in the Room: Radical Education Through Youth Organizing and Employment*.

The Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED), a funder that supports worker-owned co-operatives, also showed our participants how its

work has helped to turn Baltimore into a "city of co-ops". We heard from Kate Khatib, co-founder and worker-owner of Red Emma's, a co-operative owned restaurant and bookstore in Baltimore that has helped to catalyse a city-wide ecosystem of worker-owned businesses over the last decade. In 2015, she helped to found the Seed Commons co-operative and its Baltimore peer, the Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy, and in 2018, became co-director of the Seed Commons network alongside Brendan Martin.

1.3 Trip Itinerary

29 Aug 2022	**Arrival**
30 Aug 2022	**Baltimore Algebra Project** • Sharing Session by Baltimore Algebra Project Part 1 (morning session): https://youtu.be/x2FgvD_O8y8 (1hr 45 mins) • Sharing Session by Baltimore Algebra Project Part 2 (afternoon session): https://youtu.be/OAYhskL1TEg (1hr 39 mins) • Dinner at Joe Squared (worker-owned restaurant; read about its transition)
31 Aug 2022	**BRED Tour of Worker-Owned Co-ops** • Metta Integrative Wellness Cooperative • Appalachian Field Service

	• Red Emma's • Mera Kitchen Collective (Lunch)
1 Sep 2022	**Trip Debrief and Reflections** • Facilitated by IPS & Tote Board at Springhill Suites Lounge Area

2. OVERVIEW

For the Transforming the Non-Profit Sector 2022 overseas study trip, this author and 16 Singaporean social workers, funders and non-profit practitioners visited Baltimore, Maryland, in the United States of America. By engaging with Baltimore's co-operatives and ground-up programmes that involve peer-to-peer or collaborative forms of learning, our group studied their ways of organising social care and social change and how they might help to unlock a community's learning capacity. The study trip challenged our participants to re-examine their own worldviews and to consider other possibilities in delivering social interventions.

First, we visited the Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP) to understand how peer learning may be able to help disadvantaged youth in learning mathematics. We had assumed that the critical lessons would be about their unique pedagogy, but we were wrong. In addition, we learnt how youths could make collective decisions about their wages and work conditions. As the BAP is deeply serious

about being a "youth-led" organisation; for instance, those older than 25 do not have voting rights. We listened to how the elder members of the community and older members of BAP supported the decisions of the youth even when there was disagreement, and gained a deeper appreciation of how such work is organised within the historical context of their nation's civil rights movement. This insight moved us — especially our minority race colleagues — as we saw how the youth had benefitted from learning mathematics as well as from the very experience of organising themselves. A social worker within our group, who had more than a decade's experience in youth work, reflected afterwards that we did not really know our youth. We also started to wrap our minds around the approach of doing it "all at once, or not at all", which seemed so foreign to our paradigm of addressing complex issues by breaking them down into specific dimensions and starting with low-hanging fruit.

Baltimore is also known as the "city of co-ops", thus we also wanted to understand how worker-owned co-operatives can be a means of economic inclusion. In Singapore, while there are an estimated 1.49 million members in 84 registered co-ops, none are worker-owned. In Baltimore, we practised yoga under an oak tree guided by the calming voice of our trainer and listened to how employees were supported with loans and technical assistance to buy over the business and transit to a wellness worker co-op. We ate at a worker-owned restaurant run by refugee women and drank coffee at a bookstore café that runs a "free school" for the community. We also visited houses in a rougher part of Baltimore that were being refurbished by people in recovery, which will be rented to the people who fixed them. This gave us another glimpse of the "all

at once" approach, where the workers who refurbished their homes have opportunities for both skilled work and secure housing.

We were interested in how a funder (Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy) would be involved with rallying support when their grantees found themselves with personal troubles. The work seemed simultaneously energising and exhausting, and we asked them why they cared so much about specifically supporting worker co-ops. The answer, we learned, was that a worker co-op structure creates a pathway for waged workers to become future owners, and this was a promise of hope baked into the constitution, and the design of the enterprise going beyond the structures of any limited liability company.

2.1 Summary of Insights

The group made several observations from the study trip, and here is a summary of their key insights:

- Solutions that seek to achieve structural change need to consider ways to deal with the problems "all at once", instead of categorising them as one-dimensional issues and working on them sequentially. Solutions should be person-centric and consider addressing both material and aspirational needs.

- Solutions to achieve structural change often require a clear collective understanding and long-term collective action plan. Structural change entails uplifting the whole community instead of enabling an individual to get ahead while others are left behind. Community members as well as professionals in the non-profit sector should thus resist unintentional or well-meaning co-optation into a system that individualises social problems.

- The approach of the Baltimore organisations to achieve structural change is to engage with alternative paradigms and build parallel institutions. From their experience and perspective, "parallel" does not necessarily mean being "against"; it could be proposing an "alternative" that is more ideal. It does not mean "complementary" either because those who create alternative parallel institutions are clear that something is wrong with the current system.

- Serious community building means putting relationships first, checking professional power, and supporting the community's autonomy even when there is disagreement among individual perspectives.

2.2 Sharing and Reports of Trip

The group recorded short videos of the study trip and some participants presented their reflections of the trip at other sessions. Here are the links to the videos and the recorded presentations:

- Video Documentation:

  Baltimore Study Trip (8mins 40 secs; short video overview)

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlZyVtaoInM

  Sharing Session by Baltimore Algebra Project Part 1 (1hr 45mins 58secs)

  https://youtu.be/x2FgvD_O8y8

  Sharing Session by Baltimore Algebra Project Part 2 (1hr 39mins 23secs)

  https://youtu.be/OAYhskL1TEg

- Learning from Mutual Aid Initiatives and Co-operatives: Reflections from Baltimore, USA:

  https://youtu.be/mV9p76vdIEo (46mins 28secs; recording of a virtual session to share learnings from the trip, hosted by Vincent Ng, A Good Space Co-operative)

- TNPS Conference 2022: Solutions that Help Us Help One Another – Panel 1 (1hr 13 min 22 secs; presentation of trip reflections by

participant, Rachel Loh, Fei Yue Community Services):

https://youtu.be/AEY3dEnYAfk?t=731

3. ORGANISATIONS VISITED

3.1 Baltimore Algebra Project

The BAP (https://www.410ap.org/) seeks to create a community of leaders committed to the education of those in need of socio-economic advancement. BAP was founded on the need to address the history of racial oppression affecting young people in Baltimore. BAP tackles educational injustice and the resulting economic and political disempowerment. They employ Baltimore students as instructors and seeks to change school culture so that youths see their Black and Brown peers as algebra experts and resources for learning. This supportive culture helps Baltimore students reach their higher education goals and ultimately to be better ready for jobs after they leave school.

3.1.1 What issues do they address?

1.   Inner-city and rural children are deprived of quality instruction in math, setting them up to continue the cycle of unskilled labour and poverty, which can lead to prison, crime and death.

2.   Black students are taught in a way where lessons cannot relate to their communities or personal experiences.

3.   There are some systemic barriers for black students in the Baltimore school district, e.g., inadequate funding for the Baltimore City Public

Schools system by the Maryland State Department of Education despite court orders to increase funding to address overcrowded schools, outdated instructional materials, and reduce the risk of going to jail instead of graduating high school.

3.1.2 What do they do?

BAP's members see a clear connection between their work and the civil rights movement. They identified the right to a quality education as just as essential as the right to vote. Black youth in Baltimore run the organisation, from scheduling tutoring appointments and filing taxes, to identifying issues and tactics for campaigns. Their motto is: "No Education, No Life".

- **Math Tutoring** — Youth-run tutoring programme where students are employed to build math literacy amongst their peers. The mission is to raise socio-economic status of inner-city youth by building math literacy, which enables them to participate in skilled work, higher education and become full citizens.

- **Youth Organising** — Committee of tutors that devote themselves to demanding quality education as a constitutional right (e.g., campaigns for bus pass extension, shutting down construction of a $100 million youth jail in 2009, and organising huge street actions against police violence in 2015).

- **Youth Employment** — They employ black youth who work as tutors, which serves as an additional income stream for their families. Over the past 20 years, BAP has paid more than US$4 million in wages to Baltimore youth.

3.1.3 Other interesting information

- The BAP was founded by Ella Barker and Dr Bob Moses, who were leaders of the civil rights movement.

- **Unique pedagogy** — They have a [five-step Algebra Project Pedagogy](#) that gives students a sense of ownership over their learning.

- **Connections to other youth coalitions** — The BAP is part of a larger youth coalition called Peer to Peer Youth Enterprises, where they team up with other similar youth organisations on advocacy.

- **National Student Bill of Rights** — Funded by Hazen Foundation for an advocacy campaign to develop a [National Student Bill of Rights,](#) which seeks to ensure that every student has access to a quality education and that this should be a constitutional right.

- **Democratic governance** — Decisions about everything are made democratically and only youths under 25 have a vote. Youth leaders are provided with paid training opportunities and receive coaching from staff, board members and volunteers.

3.1.4 Its People

Jamal Jones, Co-Director

- 30 years old (in 2023)

- Helped to facilitate community-organising projects (e.g., revisions to school policing policies, campaigns for community control of schools, obtaining day passes for travel for students during the school week, etc.)

- B.A (Philosophy major, Psychology minor) from Morgan State University, father of two daughters, Jayla (11 years) and Kaylee (9 years) who both attend Baltimore City Public Schools

 Jay Gillen, Founder / Math Teacher

- Taught and organised in and around Baltimore City Public Schools since 1987 (almost three decades now) and was teacher-director for many years at the new Stadium Middle School, the first community-controlled public school in Baltimore

- Currently helping to design youth-led math research centres and develop a peer to peer youth enterprise incubator

- Authored the book *The Power in the Room: Radical Education Through Youth Organizing and Employment* about the BAP

3.2 Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy

3.2.1 What do they do?

The Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED, www.baltimoreroundtable.org) offers financial and technical support so that worker co-operatives in the greater Baltimore area can get capital needed to start and grow. BRED helps local businesses form and re-form into co-operatives, by getting them access to knowledge and capital. BRED focuses on marginalised communities that need resources the most, and they have supported co-ops of various kinds, from a full-service bicycle shop to a staffing agency that helps integrate residents returning to the community after incarceration.

BRED is one of over 25 members — where most are organisations that develop co-ops) of the Seed Commons co-operative, a national network of non-extractive loan funds that support local co-operative businesses. Kate Khatib helped to start Seed Commons and BRED, which is the Baltimore member of Seed Commons. In 2018, she became co-director of the Seed Commons network. Seed Commons takes in investment as a single fund and then shares this capital for local deployment in various cities across the US. They also have a peer-based learning system to give each member the knowledge and tools to access capital. They mitigate risk by rigorously assessing the business plans of prospective borrowers and working with them after the loan is made to ensure they also have the technical assistance to succeed.

As a member of the Seed Commons co-operative, BRED can provide a unique kind of capital known as non-extractive loans. In short, it means the repayment of loans comes only from an increase in revenues or profits stemming from the loan. Repayment will not be extracted from prior existing business assets nor the personal assets of those who make up the enterprise. As of 2020, BRED has loans totalling just over US$2 million out to eight co-operative enterprises, a small piece of the US$10 million deployed out of Seed Commons' roughly US$16 million fund.

3.2.2 Why do it? Non-extractive finance and co-operative capital

By helping to develop more co-ops in Baltimore, they hope to build a new and more democratic and equitable economy, focusing on marginalised communities that need these resources the most.

Traditionally, communities in need of longer-term, non-extractive capital are also less likely to get it. For example, notions like risk and creditworthiness that are supposed to be objective are deeply racialised in the mainstream financial system. Finance is expected to benefit borrowers, but it often does not work that way. Interest rates or other terms can make the cost of borrowing so high that it can leave the borrower poorer than they were before receiving the loans.

In short, non-extraction is such that the returns to the lender can never exceed the wealth created by the borrower using the capital, so a borrower will never

be worse off for taking the loan. Seed Commons practices a stronger interpretation of non-extraction in that they ensure that at least 50 per cent of profits generated from the loan stays with the borrower. Seed Commons makes different kind of loans (e.g. secured asset purchase loans, working capital loans, line of credit loans, etc) but each loan reflects non-extractive terms, such as:

- No repayments greater than profits — borrowers are not required to make interest or principal repayments until they are able to cover operating costs. If no wealth is created, nothing is returned to the lender.

- No personal guarantees needed from the borrower

- No credit scores — instead they use close relationships between local loan officers and potential loan recipients to establish a borrower's reliability

For details, see https://seedcommons.org/about-seed-commons/seed-commons-approach-to-non-extractive-finance/.

3.3 BRED Tour: Visits to Worker-Owned Co-Operatives

The participants visited five worker-owned co-operatives, where they got the opportunity to speak to the owners and staff to find out how the co-operatives were run. The five co-operatives were:

- **Appalachian Field Services:** Property preservation and management (e.g., grass cutting, evictions to sales cleaning, pumping out flooded

basements to mould abatement, boarding windows to replacing roofs).

https://www.facebook.com/AFSMaryland/

- **Metta Integration Wellness:** Wellness, massage, yoga co-operative.
  www.metta-wellness.com/

- **Mera Kitchen Collective:** Food catering or restaurant that is co-operatively owned by refugee and immigrant women.
  www.mera.kitchen/

- **Red Emma's:** Co-operative bookstore and café that also runs The Baltimore Free School, a grassroots, collectively run and community-funded project, with a classroom inside Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse. Building upon a long tradition of horizontal organizing, collaborative learning and participatory education, they believe that the empowerment of people of all ages and backgrounds to share and learn is vital to the health of any community. https://redemmas.org/cafe/; http://freeschool.redemmas.org/

- **Joe Squared:** Worker-owned restaurant and bar for people who love food, drink, music, art and community located in the Station North Arts & Entertainment District. https://www.joesquared.com/

4. LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

4.1 Solutions that aspire to structural change mean dealing with the problem "all at once"

The established model for social services in Singapore has been to break a complex social problem down into its constituent parts, so that we might find useful intervention points. With this rational model, those qualified to provide interventions are those who have engaged in specialised research and training to develop deep understanding in their particular domains. However, this knowledge developed within a narrowly defined domain may under-estimate the role needed in understanding of other related dimensions of complex social issues. One unintended consequence is that some service providers — in particular those that are under-resourced — could address social issues in a one-dimensional manner. For example, if youth are not doing well in school, we provide tuition. If families have no money, we provide financial aid. If people have mental health issues, counsellors can talk to them; and when those issues become more intractable, then perhaps we would involve more specialists like a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. The key appeal of dealing with the problem "all at once" is the recognition that these issues may be interconnected. For example, a troubled youth may have limited capacity to pay attention at school when their family is in crisis, and a trauma may persist for the longer term even after a crisis has been resolved. Thus, disregarding how each aspect of these people's lives fundamentally impacts the other aspects will inevitably result in the failure of one-dimensional interventions (notwithstanding other considerations on the resourcing required to deal with associated problems "all at once).

Service provision also means that solutions could result in problems being addressed sequentially. There is an impulse to pick "low-hanging fruit" to show "quick success" before attempting to deal with other related issues so that there is an ability to "scale" our efforts. By the time a client is poor, financial assistance and skills upgrading is often insufficient to make much of a dent in their complex circumstances. From a resourcing as-a-whole perspective, it is clear why some professionals could look to solutions further "upstream", hoping to prevent such problems in the first place — such as a financial literacy programme that can help educate people before they fall into hard times; practising healthy eating and exercise that can help prevent the epidemic of obesity; and imparting good character education in schools that can prevent delinquency and crime. Tuition for disadvantaged children is often conceived of in a parallel manner, where it is hoped that one intervention done early on will lead to a series of other positive outcomes later, for instance, doing well in school may improve relationships with teachers, help secure a good job, and eventually improving the family's financial circumstances. Once articulated, service providers understand this one-thing-leads-to-another theory of change cannot solve all the pain points, because the structural environment does not shift due to one lever. Nevertheless, these are hopeful narratives that persist in the changing background of our unquestioned assumptions.

4.1.1 Reflections from participants

- **Fang Xinwei, Singapore Children's Society**

  "In Singapore, we teach our clients how to be a good worker in order to earn a living, but Kate [Khatib] is teaching them how to be an owner, learning about accounts, making an investment and creating pathways for them to become a worker-owner. I see the parallels between BAP and the co-operative movement that BRED is trying to cultivate — they believe in empowering the powerless and ensuring that the material needs of the powerless are met while doing so. The organisations we met tend to have a people-first approach; they regard their people holistically (not just in terms of a single dimension, e.g., grades or attendance rates) and within the unique circumstances they are in (not just in terms of an abstractly defined problem domain, e.g., 'youth dropout'), and seek to thoroughly understand their actual needs or interests. Jay [Gillen] pointed out that the teens he works with want to look good, buy cell phones and clothes, and go on dates. If adults or professionals denigrate these as subordinate needs, the youth may not show up at all.

  The BAP believes that social change needs to happen concurrently across the pillars of economic, education and political change. Their solution is elegant and meaningful. Disadvantaged African American youths are paid a wage to come teach math to slightly younger cohorts, because otherwise they may need to be 'flipping burgers' to make a

living elsewhere because they need the money. Paying them a wage ensures that they show up, and they now get to earn a living doing knowledge work instead of physical labour. They are given some training in a pedagogy that works for their community. While they are teaching, they solidify their own foundations in math, and they can teach using language and references that are culturally familiar to their community. While they are at it, BAP teaches the youth public speaking and community organising so that they can take collective action for themselves. They successful protested the setting of a juvenile detention centre and made the case that the money could be better used for education instead. Therefore, the suggestion is that all the key pillars for change should be tackled as a whole, otherwise you might as well not try — what they articulate as 'all at once, or not at all'. Acting only on a single dimension — giving tuition (education); or offering jobs (employment); or expecting the youth to organise for their community without any financial return — will not shift the circumstances in any meaningful way, such that you might as well not do it at all."

- **Aidaroyani Adam, MENDAKI**

"When I went to listen to the Algebra Project, I was at first frustrated because I want to hear what the programme is about, what is the structure, what happens step by step, but they spent most of the time talking about everything except the math. Eventually I realised that it is

not about the math. They were using math to challenge deeper systemic issues. This challenged my mental model and I realised that we tend to rush to try and solve the problem and not spend enough time understanding the issues and connecting with the stakeholders. There is a need to understand what the problem is, the structures and also our own mental model. In Singapore, we think we are 'youth-led' but we are actually very top down. These issues I see here are not new issues in Singapore, but the essence is different; how we live and implement the things we say. It is about taking a step back, listening intently to the stakeholders' needs and paying close attention to how we think about it. BAP is really trying to get the youth to make a future for themselves."

- **Kenneth Heng, Solve n+1**

  "What is the market value of meaningful work? Is it possible to get rewarded for work that is valuable? For the social service sector, good work is often compensated with the responsibility of more work. Monetary provisions are positioned and justified as operations costs rather than being viewed as valuable skills.

  In the case of a market economy, valuable skills are sought after and demand enables monetary rewards for value. This is one of the reasons why a thriving market economy would have more disruptive and innovative initiatives, with people constantly improving themselves and creating value for others.

I'm inspired by BAP's commitment to protect this. By acknowledging the market value of students and paying them above the minimum wage for their intellectual skills, it creates much intangible value for the students. I see the confidence they have for their work as I speak with the teenagers who are part of the leadership team.

I see glimpses of practising monetary rewards for community value across the various co-ops. I acknowledge that this was built on the sacrifices of many, and the mess that they had to navigate for it. But it also seems that their conviction to valuating and paying for community value has paid off in the long run."

- **Faith Aw Yong, Tote Board**

"I saw the power that comes about when members of a community feel and see the issues in their world, and then generate particular social responses within their specific political and socio-economic contexts. In Baltimore, certain individuals recognised the injustices in their system, and found ways to empower the very people they want to help. In the process, they created systemic shifts because they addressed the issue at its root, within its context."

4.2 Structural solutions often require collective action and clear-mindedness about the long game

To truly achieve structural change, the whole community would need to be able to get ahead, instead of just individuals doing so. The youth leaders of BAP are conscious of the fact that their fates are intertwined and tied to their community, and that their community's problems are structural problems, so they learn to organise and take collective action. Their commitment and solidarity with their community is so high that Jamal Jones sacrificed a better-paying job to continue as Co-Director of BAP, even when he is now above 25 years old and does not even have any voting rights in the organisation.

This means we need to safeguard against unintended or well-meaning co-optation into a system that individualises social problems. To Jones, mentoring programmes offered by White-led organisations can be considered a kind of "indoctrination" because a Black youth is taught to walk, talk and behave in specific ways in order to get ahead. And when they do get ahead, they do so at the expense of distancing themselves from their culture and heritage, and the real question is whether they still see their fates intertwined with their community, or do they now regard their success the result of their individual striving or the help they received from a programme. The grandmama in BAP even suggested that "Obama is the Black face to White power", bringing home the point that a Black president does not mean the community has been liberated. Framing success in individual terms simply reinforces structural disadvantages, or what they consider to be a system of oppression. A youth-

run enterprise, if taken over by the state, may also become a new vehicle for extractive economics (see p.167 of *The Power in the Room* by Jay Gillen). There is a palpable sense that the Black community is better off teaching themselves than relying on programmes such as Teach for America (see p.171 of *The Power in the Room* by Jay Gillen).

Both BAP and BRED therefore keep at arm's length organisations that may undermine their vision or do not share their collective vision for the long game. Social cause and community are very much at the forefront of their work, and they are not easily distracted by opportunities or resources that bring them away from it. For instance, BRED is considering not supporting a co-op because the U.S. Department of Defense is the latter's main client, and BRED does not want to "fund the war machine". To BAP, it is very clear that their objective is nothing short of the liberation of African Americans from an oppressive system. To Khatib, it is clear that their objective is nothing short of the dismantling of the capitalist system, so that all companies are worker-owned co-ops.

4.2.1 Reflections from participants

- **Justin Lee, IPS**

  "But for me and many of us, I'm ashamed to admit that it is not always clear what our objectives are. We have professional interests, we 'go with the flow' to find projects that are opportunistic and look good for our CV, we will take money if it is offered. How often have we taken

funding to do something just because it will look good for our CVs, possibly because it's a prestigious organisation that is offering it? When do we consider the structural meaningfulness and systemic potential of all we do?"

- **Kenneth Heng, Solve n+1**

  "In recent Forward SG conversations, it was noted that there are emerging and unprecedented complexities that our nation has to navigate. One is how we as a nation can maintain our social compact in civic society alongside market economy forces, especially on community matters that require intentional investments?

  This means that every stakeholder within the social service sector needs to intentionally push past traditional forms of social services and co-create new socio-economic models that will enable vulnerable communities to take more leadership of their own situation.

  I wonder if we as a nation will have the conviction and heart to build systems and models based on intangibles like trust and collaboration, rather than purely on governance and track record. That will grant newer entities like Solve n+1 a more enabling space for us to co-create with others — to unlock more stakeholders' power to act and create."

4.3 Building parallel institutions and engaging with alternative paradigms

In order to create solutions that can fully express their values and vision, our Baltimore hosts have opted to build parallel institutions instead of seeking reform of the current system. Gillen suggests that "communities need to stay at arm's length from public bureaucracies" and focus on "parallel institution building" (see p.125 of *The Power in the Room* by Gillen). Sometimes compromises are made when seeking to work within the system and a kind of unknowing co-optation happens that dilutes the value of the work. This does not mean that you do not work with the system — for instance, BAP does offer programmes for Baltimore City Schools — but it would be much harder to create a proper, and in their view, more ideal alternative within the current system. For example, it would be much harder to institute peer-to-peer learning in normal schools because it is a regime premised upon individual competition and standardised testing. The question is whether you still have something worthwhile after those compromises are made, or whether your vision has been inadvertently co-opted into the dominant institutional logic. Similarly, worker-owned co-operatives are an alternative to investor-led profit seeking firms, and the vision of these vehicles of social change and economic inclusion are best expressed when they develop in parallel. "In parallel" does not necessarily mean "against" but offering an "alternative". It does not mean "complementary" either, because those who create alternative parallel institutions are clear that something is wrong with the current system. When successful, worker co-ops win the argument against investor-led profit-seeking by demonstrating social and economic value rather than through ideological debate. When successful, peer-to-peer learning demonstrates the power of unlocking a community's

learning capacity rather than through the criticism of the education system or rallying against the tuition industry.

Engaging in alternative paradigms also entails rethinking our language use and the politics of acceptable discourse. We observed that the organisations we visited were framing, thinking, and talking about the issues they faced in a discourse less familiar to non-profit practitioners in Singapore. Our non-profit practitioners have been educated in non-profit management and public administration literature — the language of science and evidence. The people we talked to were speaking as activists and were framing the issues in a no-holds barred way of communication. They told us that Black people are "fighting against white supremacy" and "resist the police because the police are killing our children". Gillen described the current education system as a "scam" and teachers as "tricksters and con-artists" because they justify who should be on top, as well as their own position (see pp.101–2 of *The Power in the Room* by Gillen). Instead of the language of philanthropy, they use the language of civil rights and social justice; it is not "donations" but "reparations" ("you owe us what is due"). Depending on your own background and inclination, this can be considered dangerous language from radical troublemakers or legitimate and just.

Whatever the background, such straight-talking does help to clarify the underlying issues by putting them in starker terms. The ability of professionals to have empathic understanding of community circumstances is limited if we

insist on reframing this language to fit the mainstream non-profit discourse. Consider the emotional richness, the personal stakes and the artful expressivity lost if the same issues are articulated in such terms as "we are empowering disadvantaged youth" or "we are helping to uplift our communities". When this happens, the voice of the community is at risk of being replaced by the perspective of the professional.

In Singapore, civil society actors are at times referred to as "activists" and "changemakers", depending on the context in which they are brought up and depending on who is speaking. Literature on non-profit management, public administration and social innovation is encouraged more often than literature that will lead them to discover the commons, interest-free money, or degrowth (even when there are no clear structural barriers for individuals to pursue these topics). These are alternative paradigms that can challenge existing worldviews and perspectives even as their solutions may not be completely replicable in Singapore society.

4.3.1 Reflections from participants

- **Siti Adriana Muhamad Rasip, NCSS/AMKFSC**

    "I feel that addressing this issue of giving voice to the marginalised would require strategic ways of addressing to fit the socio-political context. Since the language used in Baltimore could be more 'rights-

based' and 'radical' in a way, it would be our role to bridge this and adapt it in Singapore, for it to be more 'palatable' and what the community might be ready for. It might be framed differently for it to have greater reception and 'political acceptability' but in essence, it could be the same thing. Framing it strategically would be important. Ultimately, what's important is that our idea gains momentum and traction and for it to not backfire and get clamped down, ultimately disadvantaging the communities further.

Is there a specific model of advocacy that's more effective in Singapore? For example, could creating more intentional spaces for beneficiaries to co-create or decide on key decisions with regard to social assistance/interventions be a good start?

My sensing is also that for an idea to gain traction in Singapore, we always need to produce some kind of results first. Probably we would also have to 'walk the talk' and couple talk together with action of working on that idea. Then people will start rallying around the idea and get substantial support. Maybe we can start to build a co-operative first among home-based businesses in Singapore, evaluate the results and make the case for more of these to happen?

At the same time, I am also not saying that we should not advocate for more revolutionary ideas, but in more gradual protracted ways. We

could also try to push the boundaries slowly and a bit more by seeding ideas that could be revolutionary in our daily conversations with colleagues, at different public platforms, management meetings, etc. A wise senior once told me of this analogy, which I think is apt in this context: to imagine ourselves as a circle within a square (parameters set by the socio-political context) and how we as circles can try to expand and push the parameters and expand the square. I think that there could also potentially be a window of opportunity here to seed more 'radical' ideas with the Forward Singapore initiative for a more renewed social compact that's more inclusive."

- **Fang Xinwei, Singapore Children's Society**

  "In Singapore, are we comfortable to engage activists that have spoken up again the government? Media has portrayed them as troublemakers that do not represent the mainstream ideas. Are they shallow and just good at making noise? Without having the opportunity to get to know them, I might not even want to engage. Over here, through this exchange, I see what the activists are doing in Baltimore. I realised that we share common value and beliefs and are working to address common concerns. I'm wondering if we can create more conversations in Singapore for such alternative ideas to be exchanged."

- **Vincent Ng, A Good Space Co-operative**

"The support structures for co-ops in Baltimore seem more mature and innovative compared with Singapore. The giving of funds through Seed Commons as non-extractive loans doesn't just mitigate the risk for the co-op lending the money, it sends a very strong signal of affirmation and support for the co-op's work. Besides lending funds, the provision of technical knowledge specific to starting a co-op such as how to setup structures that enable democratic decision making is also a huge form of support that was lacking when I incorporated A Good Space as a co-operative. Could the Singapore National Co-operative Federation (SNCF) play this role, like how BRED does for the co-operatives in Baltimore?

Perhaps the Registry of Co-operative Societies should be the ones looking at co-op governance, doing things like PDPA workshops, while SNCF can play the role of an Enterprise Singapore for co-ops, looking at technical support for business modelling and helping co-ops access other ways of fundraising beyond its own grants. One of SNCF's key aims is to recruit more youths to join the co-op movement, and Enterprise Singapore has seen much success attracting young entrepreneurs through their various grants, mentorship, market access and incubation programs. I think if SNCF or someone can play this role, it will lay a very fertile soil for more co-ops to emerge in Singapore."

4.4 Community building means putting relationships first, checking professional power, and supporting positions even there is disagreement

Many of the organisations take a relationships-first approach. For instance, the Appalachian Field Service does not see its people as "employees", nor even as worker-owners alone. If someone is struggling with addiction recovery, they rally around the person. Kate Khatib shared how someone from Appalachian Field Service violated parole and she and her colleagues helped to secure a public defender by drawing on their personal connections to help the person. On the other hand, it is hard for us to imagine any funder in the non-profit sector in Singapore — organisations that typically have the power to set key performance indicators and frameworks for grantees to follow — engage with their grantees at their level and provide such support.

Thus, it is important for professionals in the non-profit sector to be aware of power dynamics between themselves and their stakeholders and check their professional power. It is easy to pay lip service to empowerment; even co-opt the spirit of community building through professional logic. We can empower youth and communities only when they agree with professional view of what they should be doing or achieving.

Meaningful empowerment might mean supporting communities even when there is disagreement. BAP's model challenges the notion that the adult (or expert) knows the best solution, and suggests that perhaps the best solution is the one in which people are part of in a meaningful way. "What if the youths

make a bad decision?" was a question that many of our fellow study trip participants had in mind. The elders in BAP give advice to the youths and share the potential consequences of their decisions, but ultimately the youths can decide and they bear the consequences. Even if the elders disagree with the decisions that the youths make, they step back and respect the process. "The best way to give ownership to an oppressed group is to show support even if you disagree with them, that's how they know they have power," said Victory Swift, one of the elders of BAP that we met. Jamal Jones, BAP's Co-Director, shared a recent story where after much effort, he had raised US$50,000 in funding from a foundation for BAP to use whichever way it wanted. While he wanted to use the money to develop programmes, the youths wanted to use all of it to pay tutors who had been owed salaries during COVID-19 (Jones himself was also owed salaries). Despite his disagreement with the decision, he respected their decision; and the youths had to acknowledge that because they made this decision, BAP would not have any funds for programme development unless more money was raised. In the long term, the elders believe that as the youths make "wrong" decisions, they eventually learn how to make better decisions.

4.4.1 Reflections from participants

• **Sarah Sulaiman, Pertapis Centre for Women and Girls**

"The hosts at Algebra Project embody the philosophy of 'connect before they correct'. I want to be able to champion this and put it into practice especially in youth residential setting.

The youths that I am working with are largely youths who have experienced traumatic childhood experiences within their biological families. These youths present a range of challenging behaviours within their different environments (e.g., schools, home, social life). They are less responsive to traditional behavioural management and benefit more from regulatory and relationship-based parenting.

Sometimes the temptation to jump straight to the teaching is always the innate response — the correcting or defending bit. But the teaching is much easier to implement if we connect first."

- **Rachel Loh, Fei Yue Community Services**

"Besides education, our youth have other needs such as the livelihood needs of their households and their own social needs. In Singapore, we seem to set aside more resources to develop education for our youth than cater to their other needs. I wonder if we could find out the actual needs of our youths, especially the youth that are less engaged in education and employment. I also wondered if these youth have similar needs or different needs from the youth who are more engaged in school. It would be interesting to find out if we, as adults, could take on a position to let the youth speak, where their views would not be dismissed. As professionals, sometimes we may disagree or have different perspectives from the youth. I observed that in BAP, the adults

adopted a non-judgmental leadership style to provide guidance to the youth only when they requested. This is a shift in the mindset and a practice in humility, to acknowledge that professionals do not always know better."

- **Lin Weiting, SGEnable**

"Empowerment as a means or as an end? Perhaps from a service provider's point of view, it is easy to render empowerment as merely a means to an end — we only empower people so that they can get jobs but we do not value empowerment in itself. What are the implications of this? Is finding their voice more important, or the ends of it? Do we denigrate voice because it doesn't achieve what professionals think are meaningful outcomes?"

- **Fang Xinwei, Singapore Children's Society**

"We often filter things through the lens of a social worker instead of hearing directly from the youth. But BAP has a meeting every day to hear from the youth. Appalachian Field Service also has many meetings to connect. Every time I attend my cell group meetings, we don't have an agenda, we just hang and talk. But in formal social services programmes, there are many steps within needs assessments as well as other programme phases."

- **Siti Adriana Muhamad Rasip, NCSS/AMKFSC**

  "One of my observations in the social service sector is that a lot of assistance and interventions for beneficiaries are largely premised on 'needs' or 'problems', rather than leveraging their strengths to improve their quality of life. Professionals are also often the one planning the interventions and programmes, as though we are the 'experts' who know what's best for the communities. However, professionals see the world through a lens that's full of privilege and might not even understand the realities lived by beneficiaries to plan effective interventions. Beneficiaries themselves, in drawing from their own expertise of their 'lived experience' can be meaningful contributors, active co-creators or even decision-makers towards interventions that are more sustainable, meaningful and effective.

  As such, it was really interesting to me when Victory [Swift, from BAP] shared that in the BAP, adults step back to let the youths decide and make decisions even when the former knows the decisions may not be the right ones. They step back and act as a consultant and guide to advise the youths to help them make the decisions. Reflecting on it, underpinning that action takes a lot of trust and belief in the strengths and capacity of the youths to make decisions for the organisation. The BAP was designed in a way that activated beneficiaries to become contributors and impart knowledge of mathematics to the community in a way that was culturally relatable and nuanced.

The BAP conversation also reminded of my personal experience working with youth at a community hub. I found them to always be willing to help and extend a helping hand — even to other community members who might require support. It was really to my shock when I found out that from another community member that these youth were known as 'troublemakers' in school. This really goes to show how an environment or structure can be purposed and shaped to leverage the strengths and harness potential. Intentional spaces can be created for strengths to be leveraged, for example, in the case of the youths, we had a donation of food rations that came, and I asked them what we should do with it. The youths responded by saying that they would like to go around the neighbourhood to check, door-to-door, which residents might require the rations. And they eventually did the distribution on their own. This idea came from them, not imposed on them in any way by any adults or professionals.

Perhaps in adapting BAP to the local Singapore context, first and foremost, practitioners would first have to shift their mental models — of trust towards beneficiaries and their abilities to be meaningful co-creators and contributors to the community, rather than mere passive recipients of assistance."

- **Kenneth Heng, Solve n+1**

"Building relationships always require some form of risk and vulnerability. If I want to build a connection with someone, I risk being rejected and more. Our social service sector's processes over the years seems to have become more sterile in the name of governance and transparency. Where we focus on filling out forms in front of families who have changing and complex circumstances. We complete our work, close cases and move on to another case. The cycle repeats.

Seeing various NGOs and community-based co-ops in Baltimore reminds me that community work requires the hard and heart work of building relationships. Their success is as transformative as it is fragile. Because it depends on people, and people don't always succeed. Their acknowledgement of it allows an environment that is forgiving and one that constantly seeks to learn and co-create together.

As ironic as it sounds, perhaps we need the more of the 'social' in our social service sector."

5. POST-TRIP IMPACT

Based on the reflections and learnings from the trip, IPS and the participants have come up with some possible pilot projects and areas for collaboration.

5.1 Social and Educational Equity Network

http://wiki.socialcollab.sg/index.php/Social_and_Educational_Equity_Network_(SEEN)

IPS has been exploring with NIE's Centre for Research on Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP), MENDAKI and SINDA on forming an informal network made up of research centres, social service agencies and other relevant stakeholders who are interested in the learning experiences and educational outcomes of the disadvantaged communities they serve.

- **Background**: Ethnic self-help groups and many social service agencies are all engaged in some kind of tuition programmes or interested in the educational outcomes of disadvantaged communities they serve. While they recognise the importance of keeping up to date with scientific developments, they lack the ability or bandwidth to navigate and interpret this knowledge base. Research centres like Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP), The HEAD Foundation and IPS Policy Lab can act as **knowledge brokers** that help to translate research or spell out the practical implications of these

developments. Such a network will also help these centres identify possible partners for collaborative projects or evaluation studies.

- **Focus or Scope**: For a start, the focus could be on community organisations or social service agencies, i.e., an outside-of-school focus. This could be after-school care, or a social service agency or community organisation's work with disadvantaged youths or low-income families. Therefore, the focus can also be skewed towards low-performing, lower-track learners or at-risk groups — rather than learning in general.

- **Possible Objectives**:

  1) Knowledge translation and sharing: Translate academic or research findings and spell out practical or policy implications; create a solutions hub or knowledge base relevant for community organisations.

  2) Design and programme development: Explore, co-create and pilot innovative or evidence-informed programmes that community organisations can undertake.

  3) Asset mapping and networking: Understand all relevant players, their interests, projects and plans; having a list of possible partners to engage with and tap from.

- **Possible Members**:

    1) IPS Policy Lab, NIE CRPP, The HEAD Foundation;

    2) SINDA, MENDAKI, CDAC;

    3) social service agencies (e.g., Fei Yue, Singapore Children's Society, etc. that all have some kind of tuition programme);

    4) agencies that run after-school care

- **Possible Activities**:

    1) Roundtables — networks or meet-ups: Depending on what the objective it, this can be more formalised (e.g., seminar to disseminate research findings) or more informal (e.g., to get to know different partners and their interests). Possibly members can rotate hosting; and all members will suggest agenda items for each meet-up which they will all consent to.

    2) Co-creation workshops: To ideate and develop collaborative projects

    3) "Ask the experts" clinic: For social service agencies to ask programme design questions to experts in child development, learning and pedagogy.

    4) Study trips

- **Possible Structure of Network**:

1) Members of this network can co-design the purpose and structure of the network — including naming the network; defining its scope or focus (e.g., learning for the underserved or low-performing groups); membership rules or guiding principles (e.g., who can be a member? Who can invite members? How will members make decisions?); means of communication and how to share information with one another (e.g., mailing list, WhatsApp, Google groups, etc).

2) Decisions can be made collectively through a consent process (e.g., sociocracy, which Dr Justin Lee can help facilitate) and sub-circles of the network can be formed (e.g., a "peer learning circles" community of practice) for those interested in niche topics.

- **Possible Process**:

  1) Send out an invitation or "feeler" to relevant non-profits or social service agencies to understand what their interests might be and whether they would be keen to participate in such a network. There could be a simple survey to surface questions they would like answered, to suggest possible functions of such a network, and indicate whether they might want to play an organising role in it.

  2) Have a preliminary network design meet-up with a few of the key organisations that are interested, especially those who indicate interest in playing an organising role. (Possibly CRPP, IPS Policy Lab, The HEAD Foundation, SINDA, MENDAKI).

5.2 Peer-Learning Community of Practice

There are various social service agencies that are interested in understanding more about the potential of peer-to-peer learning where a non-expert facilitates learning for a group, and also possibly piloting it for their own organisation. Beyond Social Services have started such a project, SINDA is planning a pilot with IPS, and others (e.g., Fei Yue) have indicated interest.

Those who would like to try to start or facilitate peer-to-peer learning for their communities would benefit from a community of practice (COP) that shares resources, frameworks, processes and also insights from their individual projects.

Like Baltimore's SEED network, members of this COP can similarly make decisions collectively on the purpose and structure of the COP. If useful, the COP can be a sub-circle of the larger network, depending on whether members think it is a good idea, since it can potentially be a stand-alone COP.

5.3 Translating the pedagogy of the National Algebra Project to Singapore's context

We learned from the Baltimore Algebra Project that they have a way of teaching math that is quite different from classroom teaching. It seeks to situate math within the experiences of youth from disadvantaged, primarily African American youth. Therefore, learning about distance or speed might involve actually taking

a bus. We discovered this when we visited Baltimore, which has a National Algebra Project (https://algebra.org/wp/) that have done work to articulate and formalise this approach.

IPS has asked whether NIE's CRPP will be interested to help understand and translate this mathematics pedagogy that the Algebra Project has used to our local Singapore context. We have also started exploring whether CRPP's research scientists or some educators would be able to go there and understand what they do — and figure out whether it can be adapted and if so, how this can be done.

5.4 Worker-Owned Co-Operatives

- **Lobang Lobang by Fang Xinwei:** This pilot initiative aims to match out-of-work women with income-generating opportunities. Connectors will source for income-generating opportunities that are available in the community and match them with women who are looking for work. Through this initiative, we hope to build a community where members actively support one another

- **Cleaning Co-op by Kenneth Heng:** This project looks to utilise co-ownership as a model to create more income opportunities for low-wage earners. The service model created will allow low-wage workers to outsource key expertise required for them to succeed, such as

cashflow, marketing and payroll. The initiative involves having a management associate or the equivalent to equip and enable participants to make decisions together on how to maintain and service their contracts.

5.5 Other Participants' Initiatives

- **Vincent Ng, A Good Space Co-operative:** "I have organised a virtual sharing session inviting Justin [Lee], Kenneth [Heng], Sylvia [Phua], Rachel [Loh] and other trip participants to share their learning and reflections with an audience of changemakers and co-operatives in Singapore. The link to the sharing can be found here: https://youtu.be/mV9p76vdIEo (46mins 28secs)."

- **Jenna Luen, SHINE Children and Youth Services:** "In Singapore, there are many good programmes with noble intentions and initiatives. Many of these programmes have gone through rigorous programme design and conceptualisation. Over time, some of these interventions depend heavily on the professional assessment of the workers rather than the voices of the youths. Thus, it is important for helping professionals to continue to understand the real needs, wants and hopes of our hopes, to incorporate their voices as part of the intervention. An up-to-date needs assessment about youths from youth's perspective is important in order to inform practices."

- **Siti Adriana Muhamad Rasip, NCSS/AMKFSC:** "How might we start experimenting with a form of co-operative in a more protected environment or a 'sandbox'? Can social service agencies and funders start this as an initiative to help low-income families who might be interested to own businesses? It could be a social service agency or a start-up acting as an incubator, providing the capital in the form of grants, and finally having the co-operative spin off on their own after they make profits or are self-sustainable. Would social service agencies be ready to do this?"

- **Kenneth Heng, Solve n+1:** "I believe that there is some potential for Singapore to consider deploying a BAP equivalent. The radical nature of inclusion through co-creation, empowerment and transactions could be a powerful way of engaging the communities who are disinterested in math and even other issues. Here are some factors that I submit for consideration:

    o Singaporean children (regardless of economic status), do not generally have an incentive to generate income. Parents from lower-income families may not exhibit interests in having their children create new sources of income. This societal trait may inhibit the work of a BAP-equivalent *if* the only incentive is finances. Because there is little precedent for paying students in intellectual work, this concern may be less relevant.

- o BAP's mode of organising relies on a community of shared personal conviction (i.e., emancipation of the black community) and ownership. This may not be so easily replicated in a country with generally good governance and lack of consensus of the various issues.

- o Funders might need to manage a different manner of assessing impact — through consensus and witness rather than quantifiable outcomes. As we may require more adult chaperones and coordinators, it may result in a costlier pilot; both in time and resources.

- o BAP-equivalents may not purely be for education, it could also change the way internships and vocational equipping is done."

ANNEX: Reflections on benefits of the overseas study trip and immersion in study trip

- **Lin Weiting, SGEnable:** "Everyone was in 'study mode' and had an exploratory mindset."

- **Vimala Devi Athmalingam, Fei Yue Community Services:** "Stimulating; saw and experienced lots of things [that I] haven't seen before. Trip allowed [me] to have deeper conversation with Sheena [Lim] and Rachel [Loh], even though [we're] from same organisation. [I] felt that there was so much discussion with colleagues."

- **Vincent Ng, A Good Space Co-operative:** "Someone once said that 'we cannot change what we cannot see'. This study trip has enabled me to see so many new possibilities and expanded my worldview significantly on the potential of co-operatives. Before this trip, I had only read about worker co-operatives and democratic decision-making structures in books. As a direct result of observing the co-operatives we visited on this trip — how they generate income, structure their membership and make collective decisions, I can start seeing new ideas I can try to get my co-operative 'unstuck' from some of the issues we are facing. While an expansion of possibilities is not concrete action and outputs, I do feel this change in worldview can be so precious because it lays the ground for actions that were not possible before."

- **Rachel Loh, Fei Yue Community Services: "**Through the cultural immersion of being present to witness the actual action taking place, my worldview and knowledge of youth programmes and funding were expanded through conversing with the current users and leadership team of various programmes, and listening to their journeys of programme planning, development and implementation. I could bring back my learning and experiences such as peer-to-peer learning with various participants. We had many opportunities to get to know the trip participants as fellow participants of the study trip instead of just our organisations. We exchanged ideas and possible collaborations to further promote the spirit of learning from the users (e.g., young persons) directly and how the young persons' experiences could change how we design our programmes to enhance their learning and subsequent decisions to their lives. This cultural immersion provided the space, a physical and mental space for us to connect face-to-face, and get to know the person first."

- **Jenna Luen, SHINE Children and Youth Services:** "The trip provides a platform to form a network of like-minded people to come together and have cross fertilisation of ideas and concepts. The physical visits allow us to put aside our work, give time and mental space to think, reflect and discuss more deeply beyond a normal formal setting. Having a physical visit despite the COVID-19 situation, helps to form relationships and hear first-hand in an authentic manner of what other organisations are doing."

- **Kenneth Heng, Solve n+1:** "The study visit has allowed a participant-driven learning where questions could be asked freely that lead to a deeper understanding of various concepts and more importantly the application possibilities of them. The learning has enriched the way Solve has imagined our homeless work with the Open Home Network, so we will look into applying some of the BAP practices in enabling communities to problem solve and work together to support persons in crisis. I think this trip was a brilliant initiative for co-learning across various stakeholders. It was insightful for me to learn alongside a diverse group."

- **Cai Dewei, IPS:** "Getting the chance to visit the co-op, getting to chat with them and witnessing how they operate, such informal settings really help to open up a conversation among the participants. This is something that felt different, compared with the usual formal roundtables and conferences where conversation stops after it ends. Whereas after this trip, I am seeing the participants taking initiative to link up with one another to continue this conversation."

- **Sarah Sulaiman, Pertapis Centre for Women and Girls:** "Developing trust among non-profits, corporations and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Constant communication — not limited to just

meetings to update KPIs, but genuine platform for collaboration — is important to build up enough experience with each other to recognise and appreciate the common motivation behind our different efforts. We need time to see that our own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem."