

# MSF'S FORWARD SINGAPORE CARE PILLAR ENGAGEMENTS - A SUMMARY

Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong launched the exercise on 28 Jun 2022 to review and refresh our social compact, and chart a roadmap for the next decade and beyond. The exercise was organised along six pillars - Empower, Equip, Care, Build, Steward, Unite.



MSF's Care pillar launch at SG Cares Community Network on 20 Oct 2022 with Minister Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development, and Eric Chua, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth, and Social and Family Development.

## MSF's Care Pillar engagements focused on:

**1** Supporting social mobility of lower-income families.

**2** A) Enabling **persons with disabilities**.

B) Strengthening **families with young children**.

**>4,400**

**SINGAPOREANS REACHED\***

**24**

**ENGAGEMENTS HELD BETWEEN OCT 2022 TO AUG 2023\***

\*Across breakout group discussions, panel discussions and polls.

### Key groups engaged

- ▶ Lower-income families
- ▶ Persons with disabilities and their caregivers
- ▶ Social service agencies (SSAs)
- ▶ Corporates and social enterprises
- ▶ Philanthropists, donors and volunteers
- ▶ Students from Post-Secondary Education Institutions (PSEI)
- ▶ Academia
- ▶ General public

# 1. Supporting Lower-income Families



Minister Masagos Zulkifli at SG Cares Community Network on 20 Oct 2022.

## How can we collectively uplift lower-income families?

Singaporeans recognised the effort lower-income families were making in various areas to achieve stability, self-reliance and social mobility, and the challenges they faced. Examples of such areas include:



### Children's Education

**Preschool enrolment and regular attendance** to give children a good start.

**Strong parental involvement** in **children's educational journey**, paired with **community support**.

Programmes that provide guidance and role modelling, e.g. mentorship, tutoring, after-school programmes, courses on life skills and planning for the future.



### Employment

**Stable income from employment** leading to savings.

**Access** to **career guidance**, **social capital** and **networks**.

**Flexible working arrangements** that allow families to **balance work with familial commitments**.



### Financial Stability

**Financial literacy** to better **manage expenditure**, **debt clearance** and **savings**.

With financial stability, families will be more able to pursue personal development and longer-term goals.



### Savings

**Savings** to eventually **move out of public rental flats** and **own a home**.

# What has been implemented to enable social mobility in Singapore?



Students at MSF's engagements with PSEIs on 11 Nov 2022.

ComLink provides comprehensive, convenient and coordinated support to families with children living in public rental housing, to uplift their circumstances and empower them to achieve stability, self-reliance and social mobility.

## Actions taken:



### Children's Education

1

**Policies and initiatives that encourage enrolment and consistent attendance in school ensure that children start off on the right footing (e.g. KidSTART, UPLIFT)**

“KidSTART provides children with greater access to more literacy and social experiences.”

2

**Community-led programmes that provide a suitable environment for children to flourish socially, academically and physically (e.g. internships, mentorships), and exposure to varied opportunities that widen pathways to success.**

“A learning corner which provides children educational and academic support – including martial arts training.... They need to develop holistically, be more confident, make new friends in a safe and healthy environment.”

# What has been implemented to enable social mobility in Singapore? (continued)



## Actions taken:



### Employment

**Opportunities to upskill and build social capital and networks (e.g. career coaching)**

“...relevant skills upgrading and career coaching enhance our low-income families' employment functioning and employability.”



### Financial Stability

**Assistance and subsidies help lower-income families cover their basic needs (e.g. ComCare, financial subsidies / in-kind assistance)**

“ The financial aid provided is ample if families know where and how to seek assistance.”



### Savings

**Government grants and community savings matching programmes that support home ownership.**

“ Enabling lower-income families to be a homeowner rather than staying in a rental flat forever. It will help the lower-income families to move up the social status by being a homeowner, thereby reducing inequality.”

# What are some suggestions Singaporeans have when it comes to social mobility?



## Ideas for the Government & community:



### Children's Education

- ▶ **Government support to encourage preschool attendance with enrolment incentives and more parental leave days.**
- ▶ **More affordable and accessible preschools, and provide additional learning support to children.**
- ▶ **Counselling and peer support groups for families – equip them with mental wellness skills and develop healthy relationship behaviours.**

“Community agencies can work with the school to encourage children to be more regular in attendance.”

“Tap on volunteers / befrienders / mentors to help with the attendance for children.”



### Employment

- ▶ **Community jobs-matching, mentorships, and career guidance, to access jobs with better pay and progression prospects.**
- ▶ **More inclusive hiring practices.**

“Corporates to allow flexible work arrangements so that caregiving issues are covered.”

# What are some suggestions Singaporeans have when it comes to social mobility?

(continued)



SG Cares Community Network on 11 Sep 2023 with Minister Desmond Lee.

## Ideas for the Government & community:



### Financial Stability

- ▶ **Government to review social assistance to mitigate the “cliff effect”, where individuals remain in lower-paying jobs to qualify for financial assistance.**
  - ▶ **Shift the mindsets of lower-income families regarding financial planning, equip them with financial literacy skills, and better manage debt.**
  - ▶ **More financial assistance, e.g. through community fundraising, to help lower-income families manage rising cost of living.**
- “People are of the opinion that financial planning is only for the wealthy, but low-income families need to be introduced to these skills to encourage them to do better in life. Financial literacy, planning and budgeting – teaching parents how to do this is important.”
- “Financial planning through savings, insurance... Greater clarity on how they should be repaying their debts or their spending habits.”



### Savings

- ▶ **Financial literacy programmes and community initiatives that aid home ownership, e.g. budget match savings.**
- “Instead of pure rental, we should encourage and help lower-income families to save up for down payment and rainy day fund.”



Minister Masagos Zulkifli at a panel discussion with corporates on 17 Apr 2023.

### Provide better coordinated and targeted services

#### Challenge:

**Lower-income families face complex and interlocking challenges. Each family has their own unique circumstances and issues.**

#### Ideas mentioned:

- ▶ **Better coordinated services among partners and agencies to reduce families approaching multiple SSAs for support.**
- ▶ **Proactive outreach to identify those in need.**
- ▶ **Befrienders will journey with families on a longer-term basis, coupled with comprehensive case support that considers the circumstances and needs of each family holistically.**

“We see a lot of lower-income families struggling with multiple complex needs ... like family violence, employment issues, children not attending school, family members or loved ones being incarcerated. No single agency can solve all their problems. We have to come together and work together.”

“Caseworkers need to actively engage these families in conversations to better understand their needs, and to communicate and coordinate these needs to the agencies involved.”

### Recognise personal agency and effort to do better for themselves

#### Challenge:

**Perception that lower-income families are simply receivers of aid, rather than as active agents with aspirations/goals to do better for their families / themselves.**

#### Ideas mentioned:

- ▶ **Support that honours the families' personal effort and dignity to achieve more, e.g. co-develop action plan and journey with families to encourage and motivate them.**
- ▶ **Foster a “pay-it-forward” culture (for former low-income families to share their experiences).**
- ▶ **Supplement and recognise families' efforts as they work towards stability, self-reliance and social mobility.**

“Providing incentives, such as gift vouchers and rebates to lower-income families when they hit certain milestones, like holding a permanent job for six months, to encourage them to further improve their life situation.”

“We need to assess how we may shift giving in a manner that can be sustained. It would reduce the reliance on services and give more people the autonomy to be the change.”

## Youths' views on strengthening social mobility



Students presented their recommendations at MSF's Care pillar appreciation event with PSEIs on 29 Sep 2023 with Minister Masagos Zulkifli and Minister of State Sun Xueling.

270 students from PSEIs were engaged through focus group discussions. 16 of these students volunteered to build on ideas their peers had raised and presented their recommendations to MSF.

### Ideas mentioned:

- Strengthening support for disadvantaged families to work towards empowerment and self-reliance, such as by enhancing financial literacy;**
- Increasing awareness of, and access to, social support;**
- Broadening definitions of, and adding more pathways to success; increasing the dignity and respect accorded to lower-wage occupations and ensuring access to a wide variety of careers.**

“Provide leadership skills to all students and not just those who are academically inclined.”

“Do not narrowly define success based on academic performance. Everyone can be successful in their own ways, in their respective fields. Better recognition for people in the “hands” and “hearts” industry, not just those in the “head” work.”

“Address social stigma about “head” jobs being better than “heart” / “hand” jobs. Showcase more stories of what goes unnoticed and unappreciated e.g. behind the scenes, day in the life of.”



Students at MSF's Care pillar appreciation event with PSEIs on 29 Sep.



# 2a. Enabling persons with disabilities



Engagement with the Disability Sector on 1 Apr 2023.

## How can we build an inclusive society where persons with disabilities can participate fully?

Singaporeans want to build a caring and inclusive society where persons with disabilities can participate fully as **integral and contributing members of society**.

**Here are some ways that we could work together to enable persons with disabilities.**

### Actions taken:



#### More support for families caring for persons with disabilities

1

Earlier and upstream intervention to identify and support children with developmental and special educational needs.

“ Reasonable salary grants to employers help in hiring special education teachers.”

2

More information on care facilities/homes, financial assistance to reduce out-of-pocket expenses, and helping families access such resources more easily.



## More support for adult persons with disabilities

- 1 More employers to hire inclusively and provide supportive and flexible work arrangements that leverage strengths of persons with disabilities.
- 2 Initiatives that support employability and independent living e.g. in-community training centres that offer vocational training and care, disability-inclusive infrastructure.

“Independent living allows persons with disabilities like myself to live our lives to the fullest. Having support schemes and services within reach will help us in this journey towards independence.”

### What are some suggestions Singaporeans have when it comes to enabling persons with disabilities?

#### Ideas included:



Eric Chua, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth, and Social and Family Development, at breakout group discussions with the disability sector on 1 Apr 2023.



## More support for families caring for persons with disabilities

#### Enhance support and inclusivity for children with special needs:

- ▶ **Early intervention at a young age.**
- ▶ **More information on financial assistance and support programmes to manage cost of long-term care.**
- ▶ **More childcare services.**

“In order to create a Singapore that is more inclusive, it should start with educating young children. Allowing children with disabilities to be part of the mainstream preschool by having more disability-friendly environments - tables that accommodate wheelchair-bound children, environments that suit / cater to children with disabilities.”

#### Decrease barriers for families with persons with disabilities to access resources:

- ▶ **More vacancies in care facilities / homes.**
- ▶ **Financial support for transport to care services and out-of-pocket expenses.**
- ▶ **Bring primary healthcare to disability homes, volunteers to step in when needed.**
- ▶ **Consolidate and coordinate services so persons with disabilities can avoid multiple assessments of verifying their disability.**

“The permanently disabled (e.g. lost a limb, lost a hand etc.) should not be asked to verify their condition again as it is very insulting.”

# What are some suggestions Singaporeans have when it comes to enabling persons with disabilities? (continued)



Minister of State Sun Xueling at engagement with PSEI students on 15 Nov 2022.

## Ideas included:



## More support for adult persons with disabilities

### Increase inclusive hiring models:

- ▶ Government to introduce regulation and guidelines for inclusive employment.
- ▶ Government to offset financial barriers for employers hiring persons with disabilities, e.g. offset rentals and transport, partial salary support, tax breaks.
- ▶ Employers to hire with inclusivity in mind.
- ▶ Redesign jobs to leverage on strengths of persons with disabilities, e.g. micro jobs, coaching and mentorship.

“It would have to be a guided process, perhaps link companies who are already adopting inclusive disability-friendly workplace practices with new companies, consider assigning them as mentors. Introduce more workshops to guide employees on how to provide support to people with disabilities, the dos and don'ts.”

### Increasing physical and digital accessibility for them to live independently:

- ▶ Government to create more inclusive public facilities, e.g. public transport, areas for work and play.
- ▶ Digital accessibility to be further developed, e.g. websites with inclusivity-friendly features.

“Conscious and extensive roll-out of inclusive adaptations and universal design to everyday supermarkets, gyms, cafes, etc.”



Eric Chua, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth, and Social and Family Development, at breakout group discussions with the disability sector on 1 Apr 2023.

# Further ideas on enabling persons with disabilities



Engagement with MSF staff on 2 Aug 2023.

## Encourage integration into society by sharing stories of persons with disabilities to highlight challenges and successes

### Ideas mentioned:

- ▶ Share stories of persons with disabilities - their challenges and successes.
- ▶ Raise awareness of and build understanding towards invisible / harder to spot disabilities.
- ▶ Engage inclusive companies to share their experience on hiring persons with disabilities.

“When we work with persons with disabilities, we choose to see what they are capable of and allow them to thrive at their own pace ... One way is to celebrate organisations who have employed persons with disabilities and tell their story of how this person has thrived in that organisation.”

# 2b. Strengthening Families with Young Children



Engagement with Community Partners on 16 Nov 2022 with Minister Masagos Zulkifli.

## What does a Singapore Made For Families look like?

Singaporeans shared these views:



### Parents who are able and equipped to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for their children

- ▶ Programmes that impart parenting and child raising knowledge.
- ▶ Better work-life balance, e.g. more leave for parents, and flexible work arrangements.



### Strong community network to support parents and child rearing

- ▶ Community support groups that help families manage challenges of sustaining marriages and building families.
- ▶ More befrienders and mentors to step up to support families.

# What are some suggestions Singaporeans have for strengthening families with young children?



SPS' brown bag engagement with REACH's Advisory Panels and students from MSF's PSEI engagements on 3 Oct 2023.

Ideas included:



## Equip Parents

**Challenge:**

**Parents find it difficult to balance work and familial commitments.**

“ I think **more needs to be done such as longer duration of maternity and paternity leave, more opportunities for flexible work options** (e.g. working from home if children are on school holidays), for parents to be at home and with their children emotionally.”

- ▶ Government to encourage flexible work arrangements.
- ▶ Explore having more parental leave days for mothers with young children.
- ▶ Look into having equal parental leave for single parents.



## Community Support

**Challenge:**

**Parents need more information on parenting and child development, and more support in child and elderly caregiving duties and costs.**

“ Many young parents have challenges with child-raising and minding. **Free or subsidised parenting programmes** can be mounted for young parents who are 1st time parents or having a 2nd child. **Counselling could also be provided to help them plan ahead.**”

“ Single parent families struggle the most as they sacrifice the time they spend with their children when working. We can fill the gaps by pooling common services / spaces for child minding services in community areas.”

- ▶ Programmes and parent support groups to support parents with their children's development.
- ▶ More vacancies in affordable childcare and eldercare services that are conveniently located, and longer childcare operating hours.
- ▶ In-community support groups to help parents deal with family and marriage issues, especially parents from non-traditional family structures, e.g. single parents.
- ▶ Befrienders and mentors in the community, e.g. neighbourhood groups, workplaces with family culture, etc.

# In summary, how can different parts of Singapore come together to help ...



Students at MSF's engagements with PSEIs on 2 Feb 2023.

## Lower-income families



### GOVERNMENT

- ▶ Increase preschool attendance through subsidies and incentives for parents.
- ▶ Increase number of preschool vacancies.
- ▶ More financial literacy programmes to guide families to save towards home ownership.
- ▶ Shift towards empowering families and building their self-reliance.



### SSAs / PSEIs / CORPORATES

- ▶ SSAs to support lower-income families with financial literacy programmes.
- ▶ Corporates to impart knowledge through mentorship. eg. PSEIs.
- ▶ Employers to provide flexible work arrangements and support inclusive hiring.
- ▶ Better coordination of services between agencies.



### INDIVIDUALS & COMMUNITY

- ▶ Lend experience and expertise through coaching or role modelling.
- ▶ Provide support in funds and in-kind assistance.
- ▶ Recognise personal agency, strengths and efforts of lower-income families.
- ▶ Share resources and networks.

# In summary, how can different parts of Singapore come together to help ... (continued)



Engagement with Community Partners on 16 Nov 2022 with Minister Masagos Zulkifli.

## Persons with disabilities and families with young children



### GOVERNMENT

- ▶ Encourage inclusive hiring practices that support working parents, and persons with disabilities, e.g. through incentives.
- ▶ Inclusive infrastructure.



### SSAs / PSEIs / CORPORATES

- ▶ Employers to adopt inclusive hiring practices and workplace environment.
- ▶ Better coordination of services between agencies to support persons with disabilities.
- ▶ SSAs to develop parenting and child development programmes.
- ▶ More affordable and conveniently-located childcare and eldercare services, with longer operating hours.



### INDIVIDUALS & COMMUNITY

- ▶ Share stories of persons with disabilities - their challenges and successes.
- ▶ More support resources for persons with disabilities and their families.
- ▶ Community support groups e.g. parent support groups, befrienders and mentors.