

Disability Social Work Symposium



The first Disability Social Work Symposium was held on 18 May 2018 at Rainbow Centre. 120 social workers from the disability sub-sector gathered to celebrate the launch of the Disability Social Work Chapter under the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW).

The Disability Social Work Chapter evolved from a group called The Wakened Giants (TWG). TWG was birthed in 2014 and consists of social work leaders from the disability sub-sector who have a strong desire to build up social work expertise within this sub-sector.

Guest of Honour, Ms Ang Bee Lian, Director of Social Welfare, MSF, shared 4 points that disability social workers should take note of in the course of their work.

Purpose: be purposeful in what you do, always anchor all that you do on the purpose behind your work. Having a purpose will help you to stay focused and deliver well.

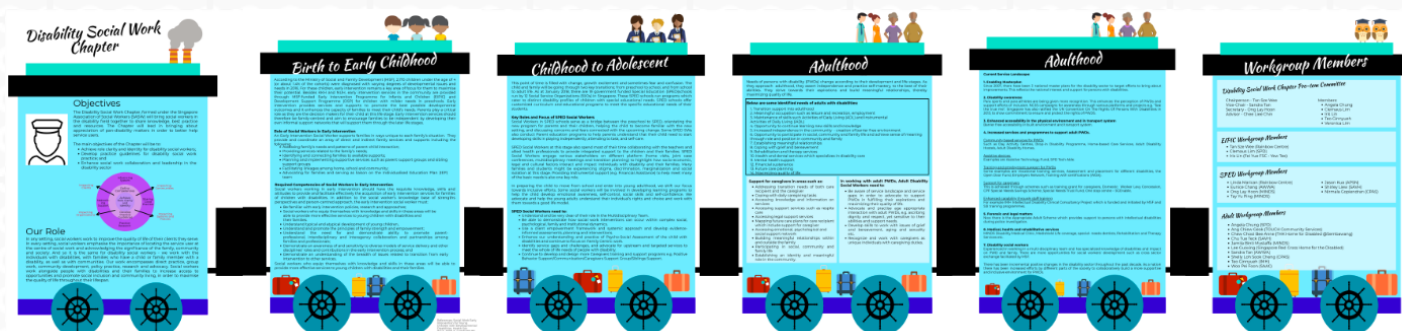
Person: be person-centred in your work. This is especially important in the disability sub-sector. Consider things from the user's perspective and deliver services to the last mile. Service delivery must ensure a good user experience.

Process: this is about processes, systems, structures and standard operating procedures. How we communicate is key to all the above. It is also important to keep up-to-date and to work with current information that is available.

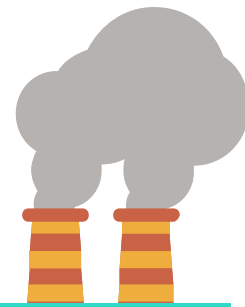
Stickability: keep ideas simple so that they "stick".



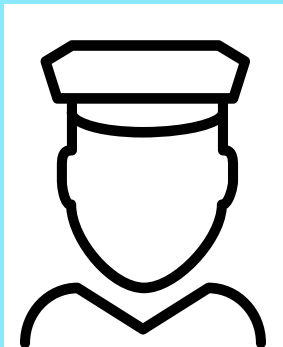
Poster Presentation from the Symposium



Disability Social Work Chapter



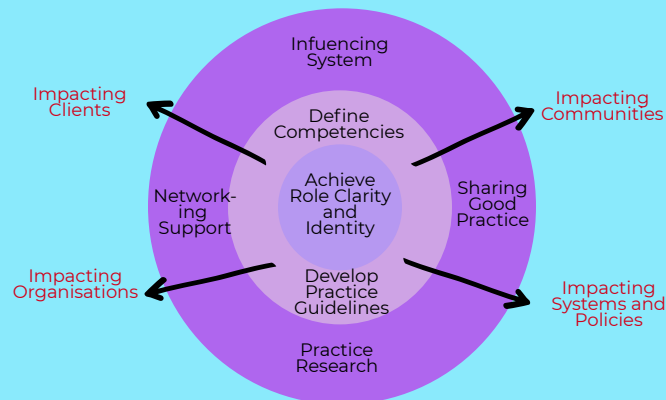
Objectives



The Disability Social Work Chapter, formed under the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) will bring social workers in the disability field together to share knowledge, best practice and resources. The Chapter will lead in bringing about appreciation of pan-disability matters in order to better help service users.

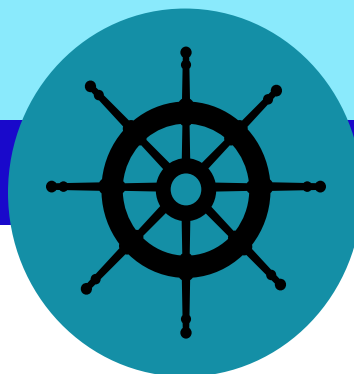
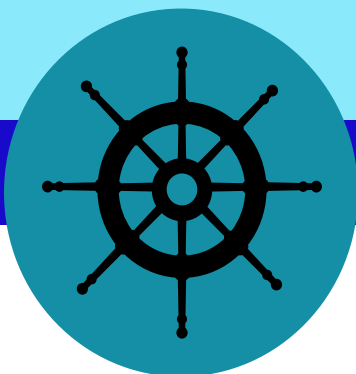
The main objectives of the Chapter will be to:

- Achieve role clarity and identity for disability social workers;
- Develop practice guidelines for disability social work practice; and
- Enhance social work collaboration and leadership in the disability sector



Our Role

In any setting, social workers work to improve the quality of life of their clients they serve. In every setting, social workers emphasise the importance of locating the service user at the centre of social work and acknowledging the significance of the family, community and society. And so it is the same for disability social workers - we work with the individuals with disabilities, with families who have a child or family member with a disability, as well as with communities. Our work encompasses direct practice, group work, community development, policy practice, research and advocacy. Social workers work alongside people with disabilities and their families to increase access to opportunities and promote social inclusion and community living, in order to maximise the quality of life throughout their lifespan.





Birth to Early Childhood

According to the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), 2,170 children under the age of 4 (or about 1.4% of the cohorts) were diagnosed with varying degrees of developmental issues and needs in 2016. For these children, early intervention remains a key area of focus for them to maximise their potential. Besides KKH and NUH, early intervention services in the community are provided through MSF-funded Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) and Development Support Programme (DSP) for children with milder needs in preschools. Early intervention provides services and supports to promote the best possible developmental outcomes and it enhances the capacity of families to meet their child's needs. Parents play a critical role as they are the decision makers for their child at this life stage. Early intervention services should therefore be family-centred and aim to encourage families to be independent by developing their own informal support networks that will support them through the later life stages.

Role of Social Workers in Early Intervention

An Early Intervention Social Worker supports families in ways unique to each family's situation. They provide and coordinate an array of direct and indirect family services and supports including the following:

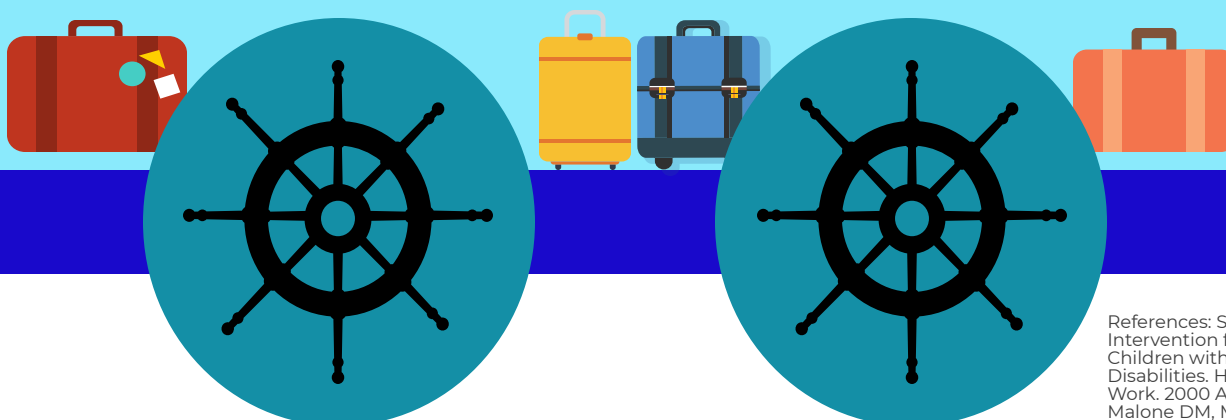
- Assessing family's needs and patterns of parent-child interaction;
- Providing services related to the family's needs;
- Identifying and connecting families to available supports;
- Planning and implementing supportive services such as parent support groups and sibling support groups
- Facilitating linkages among home, school and community;
- Advocating for families and serving as liaison on the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) team

Required Competencies of Social Workers in Early Intervention

Social workers working in early intervention should have the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to provide and facilitate effectively the acquisition of early intervention services for families of children with disabilities. In addition to the social worker's knowledge base of strengths perspectives and person-centred approach, the early intervention social worker must:

- Be familiar with early intervention policies, research and approaches;
- Social workers who equip themselves with knowledge and skills in these areas will be able to provide more effective services to young children with disabilities and their families.
- Understand typical and atypical development of young children,
- Understand and promote the principles of family strength and empowerment;
- Understand the need for and demonstrate ability to promote parent-professional, interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration and partnerships among families and professionals;
- Demonstrate an awareness of and sensitivity to diverse models of service delivery and other disciplines' roles and contributions in the early intervention process; and
- Demonstrate an understanding of the breadth of issues related to transition from early intervention to other services.

Social workers who equip themselves with knowledge and skills in these areas will be able to provide more effective services to young children with disabilities and their families.





Childhood to Adolescent

This point of time is filled with change, growth excitement and sometimes fear and confusion. The child and family will be going through two key transitions; from preschool to school, and from school to adult life. As at January 2018, there are 19 government funded Special Education (SPED) schools run by 12 Social Service Organizations (SSOs) in Singapore. These SPED schools run programs which cater to distinct disability profiles of children with special educational needs. SPED schools offer customized curriculum and educational programs to meet the specific educational needs of their students.

Key Roles and Focus of SPED Social Workers

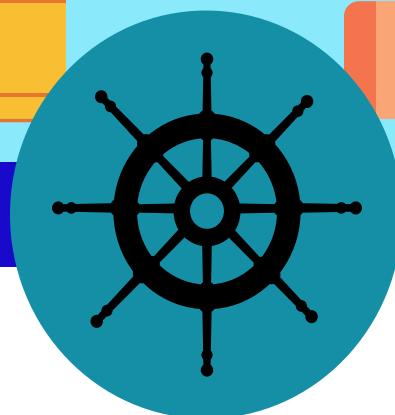
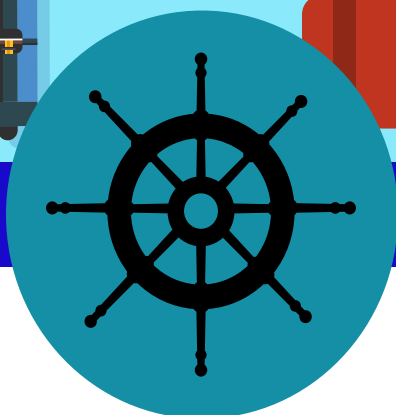
Social Workers in SPED schools serve as a bridge between the preschool to SPED, orientating the new program for parents and their children, helping the child to become familiar with the new setting, and discussing concerns and fears connected with the upcoming change. Some SPED SWs also conduct Parent education programs to help parents understand that their child need to start developing skills in playing independently, attending to task, and self-care.

SPED Social Workers at this stage also spend most of their time collaborating with the teachers and allied health professionals to provide integrated support to the children and their families. SPED Social Workers engage various stakeholders on different platform (home visits, joint case conferences, multidisciplinary meetings and transition planning) to highlight how socio-economic, legal and cultural factors interact and impact individuals with disability and their families. Many families and students might be experiencing stigma, discrimination, marginalization and social isolation at this stage. Providing Instrumental support (e.g. Financial Assistance) to help meet many of the basic needs is also one key role.

In preparing the child to move from school and enter into young adulthood, we shift our focus towards inclusive efforts. Some social workers will be involved in developing learning programs to help the child develop emotional awareness, self-control, social skills and self-confidence. We advocate and help the young adults understand their individual's rights and choice and work with them towards a good life model.

SPED Social Workers need to:

- Understand and be very clear of their role in the Multidisciplinary Team.
- Be able to demonstrate how social work interventions can occur within complex social, psychological, family and institutional dynamics.
- Use a client empowerment framework and systemic approach and develop evidence-informed assessments, planning and interventions.
- Enhance our understanding and practice of Psycho-Social Assessment of the child with disabilities and continue to focus on Family Centric work.
- Identify service gaps and challenges, and advocate for upstream and targeted services to meet the whole of life needs of people with disability.
- Continue to develop and design more Caregivers training and support programs e.g. Positive Behavior Support/Communication/Caregivers Support Group/Siblings Support.





Adulthood

Needs of persons with disability (PWDs) change according to their development and life stages. As they approach adulthood, they assert independence and practice self-mastery, to the best of their abilities. They strive towards their aspirations and build meaningful relationships, thereby maximizing quality of life.

Below are some identified needs of adults with disabilities:

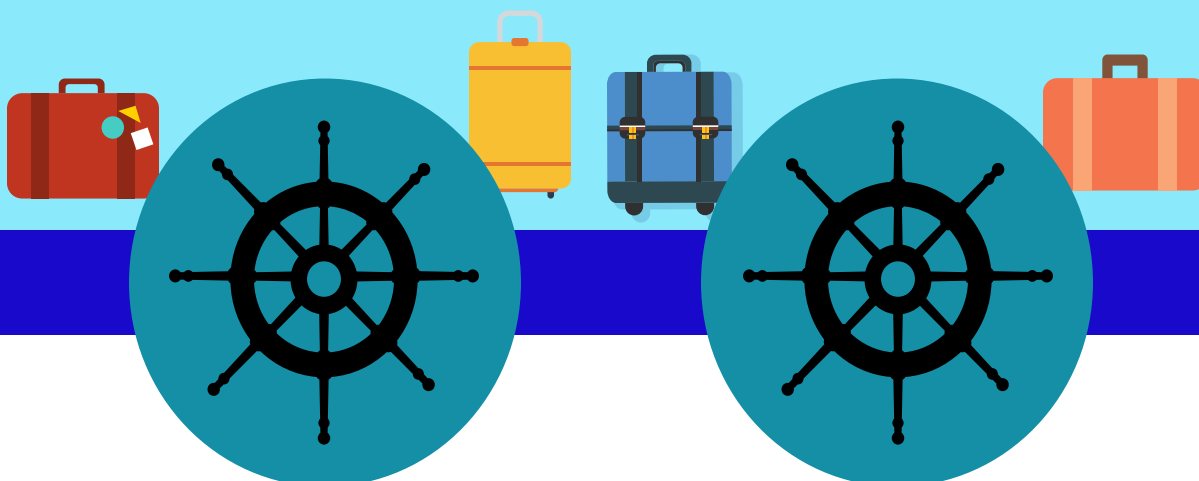
1. Transition support into adulthood
2. Meaningful occupation such as leisure and recreation, employment
3. Maintenance of skills such Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)
4. Opportunity to continue learning new skills and knowledge
5. Increased independence in the community - creation of barrier free environment
6. Opportunity to participate in social, community and family life and achieve sense of meaning through role and position in community and family
7. Establishing meaningful relationships
8. Coping with grief and bereavement
9. Rehabilitation and therapy services
10. Health and dental services which specializes in disability care
11. Mental health support
12. Financial sustenance
13. Future care planning
14. Maximizing quality of life

Support for caregivers in areas such as:

- Addressing transition needs of both care recipient and the caregiver
- Coping with daily caregiving tasks
- Accessing knowledge and information on services
- Accessing support services such as respite care
- Accessing legal support services
- Mapping future care plans for care recipient which include support for caregiver
- Accessing emotional, psychological and social support network
- Building meaningful relationships within and outside the family
- Participating in social, community and family life
- Establishing an identity and meaningful role in the community.

In working with adult PWDs, Adult Disability Social Workers need to:

- Be aware of service landscape and service gaps in order to advocate to support PWDs in fulfilling their aspirations and maximizing their quality of life.
- Advocate and practise age appropriate interaction with adult PWDs, e.g. ascribing dignity and respect, yet sensitive to their abilities and support needs.
- Develop skills to work with issues of grief and bereavement, aging and sexuality etc.
- Recognize and work with caregivers as unique individuals with caregiving duties.





Adulthood

Current Service Landscape:

1. Enabling Masterplan

Since 2007, there have been 3 national master plans for the disability sector to target efforts to bring about improvements. This reflects the national interest and support for persons with disabilities.

2. Disability awareness

Para sports and para athletes are being given more recognition. This enhances the perception of PWDs and support efforts of inclusion. NCSS campaigns for awareness through various platforms and projects e.g. "See the true me". Singapore has also ratified the UN Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities in 2013, to show commitment to ensure and protect the rights of PWDs.

3. Enhanced accessibility in the physical environment and in transport system

Barrier free accessibility in built environment and transport system.

4. Increased services and programmes to support adult PWDs.

Community based services for PWDs

Such as Day Activity Centres, Drop-in Disability Programme, Home-based Care Services, Adult Disability Hostels, Adult Disability Homes.

Assistive devices

Examples are Assistive Technology Fund, SPD Tech Able.

Training and employment support for PWDs

Some examples are Vocational training services, Assessment and placement for different disabilities, the Open Door Fund, Employers Network, Training with certifications (WDA).

Support for caregivers

This is achieved through schemes such as training grant for caregivers, Domestic Worker Levy Concession, CPF Special Needs Savings Scheme, Special Needs Trust Fund, One stop centre – SGEnable.

Enhanced capability through staff training

For example IMH Intellectual Disability Clinical Consultancy Project which is funded and initiated by MSF and SSI training programmes.

5. Forensic and legal matters

Now there is the Appropriate Adult Scheme which provides support to persons with intellectual disabilities during police investigation.

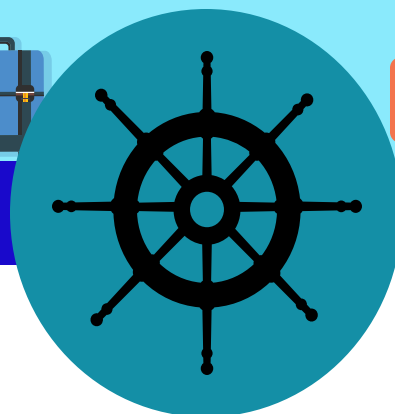
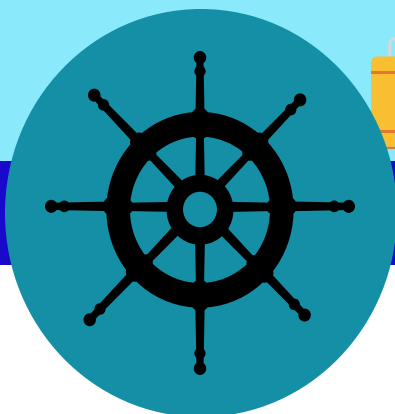
6. Medical, health and rehabilitative services

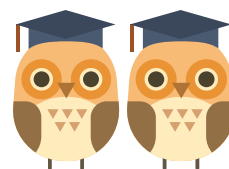
MINDS Disability Medical Clinic, Medishield Life coverage, special- needs dentists, Rehabilitation and Therapy Services etc.

7. Disability social workers

Experienced in working in a multi-disciplinary team and has specialized knowledge of disabilities and impact on PWD and family. There are more opportunities for social workers' development such as cross sector exchange facilitated by MSF.

There has been incremental positive changes in the disability sector throughout the past decade. As a nation there has been increased efforts by different parts of the society to collaboratively build a more supportive and inclusive environment for PWDs.





Workgroup Members

Disability Social Work Chapter Pro-tem Committee

Chairperson - Tan Sze Wee
Vice-Chair - Sandra Tan
Secretary - Ong Lay Hoon
Advisor - Chee Lee Chin

Members:

- Angela Chung
- Clemaus Lim
- Iris Lin
- Teo Ginnyueh
- Veronica Lim

EIPIC Workgroup Members

- Tan Sze Wee (Rainbow Centre)
- Clemaus Lim (SPD)
- Iris Lin (Fei Yue FSC - Yew Tee)

SPED Workgroup Members

- Linda Marican (Rainbow Centre)
- Eunice Chang (AWWA)
- Ong Lay Hoon (MINDS)
- Tay Yu Ping (MINDS)
- Jason Kua (APSN)
- Shirley Liew (SAVH)
- Nirmala Gopiendran (CPAS)

Adult Workgroup Members

- Angela Chung (SPD)
- Ang Chiew Geok (TOUCH Community Services)
- Chew Chooi Bee Anne (THK Home for Disabled @Sembawang)
- Chu Tue Teck (SAVH)
- Jamila Binti Mustaffa (MINDS)
- Lee Guoxing (Singapore Red Cross Home for the Disabled)
- Sandra Tan (AWWA)
- Shelly Loh Sook Cheng (CPAS)
- Teo Ginnyueh (IMH)
- Woo Pei Foon (SAAC)

