



# ASPIRING FUTURES

BRIDGING DREAMS  
TO ACTIONS

COMPENDIUM  
**2024**



# MENDAKI Symposium 2024

## ASPIRING FUTURES: BRIDGING DREAMS TO ACTIONS

The MENDAKI Symposium is a annual event that convenes policymakers, researchers, educators, professionals, and practitioners to foster a vibrant exchange of ideas within our community. This year's theme, **Aspiring Futures: Bridging Dreams to Actions**, reflects our commitment to transforming the diverse aspirations of Singaporean youth into tangible outcomes.

Amidst a rapidly evolving societal landscape, the aspirations of our youth – spanning education, career, mental wellbeing, and sustainability – demand our focused attention and action. These aspirations do not exist in isolation; they are supported and shaped by the critical involvement of families, friends, and community networks, all pivotal in helping youth realise their potential.

We were honoured to have **Ms Grace Fu**, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment and Minister-in-Charge of Trade Relations, as our Guest of Honour, who delivered an inspiring Keynote Address for this year's Symposium. We also welcomed esteemed guests **Mr Masagos Zulkifli**, Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health, Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs and Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI ("MENDAKI") and **Mr Zaqy Mohamad**, Senior Minister of State for Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Manpower, and Deputy Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI, whose insights and leadership continue to guide our initiatives.

The Symposium featured insightful discussions beginning with **Youth Aspirations**, where we explored how Singapore's sociocultural environment influences the educational and career goals of our youth. Highlights from MENDAKI's Muslim Youth Aspirations study provided empirical insights into these dynamics. The session on **Youth Mental Wellbeing** addressed the critical impacts of external pressures on mental health, emphasising the importance of comprehensive support systems facilitated by government, institutional, and community efforts. This year, the Symposium concluded with an engaging Fireside Chat, where the hosts engaged thought leaders, policymakers, and youth to bring their diverse perspectives on youth aspirations and mental wellbeing.

As we reflect on the rich discussions and insights shared, MENDAKI hopes that the knowledge gleaned from the discussions would be beneficial, guiding policy changes that will advance the aspirations of youth and their mental wellbeing. MENDAKI will continue in our efforts to empower and navigate the community towards success.

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**GUEST OF HONOUR**  
**MS GRACE FU**

**MINISTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND  
THE ENVIRONMENT & MINISTER-IN-CHARGE  
OF TRADE RELATIONS**

**Ms Grace Fu** graduated with a Bachelor of Accountancy (Honours), and subsequently obtained a Masters of Business Administration from the National University of Singapore. She began her career in 1985 with the Overseas Union Bank, and later with the Haw Par Group, in the areas of corporate planning, financial controls and business development.

In 2015, Ms Fu was appointed Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, and Leader of the House. She also chaired the National Integration Council, National Youth Council, and sat on the board of the People's Association. In July 2020, Ms Fu was appointed Minister for Sustainability and the Environment. In January 2024, Ms Fu concurrently assumed the responsibility as Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations.



**MS SITI KHADIJAH  
SETYO RS**

**MANAGER**  
**RESEARCH & DESIGN, YAYASAN MENDAKI**

**Ms Siti Khadijah Setyo RS** is the Manager of Research and Design at MENDAKI. Her role involves conceptualising and managing research projects, analysing national policy trends and strengthening partnerships with MENDAKI's stakeholders. She also co-authored the Alternative Report on Singapore for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and attended the 81st UNCRC meeting in Geneva.

Khadijah holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her academic journey was marked by rigorous coursework and a capstone project focused on "Effective Regulatory Ecosystem of School Education in India," reflecting her interest in policy analysis and its practical implications.



## MR NUR HAZEEM NASSER

**FOUNDER**  
THE SIGNPOST PROJECT

**Mr Nur Hazeem Nasser** is a post-graduate student pursuing his Master in Public Policy (MPP) and Master of Science (MSc) in Sociology at the University of Oxford on the Rhode Scholarship. He also holds a B.A. (Honours) from Yale-NUS College. He is the founder of two nonprofits: ALittleChange in 2016 which focuses on parent-child relationships in low-income families, and The Signpost Project (TSP) in 2019 which helps tissue peddlers in Singapore. He remains active in TSP, with TSP being a founding member of the Ministry of Social and Family Development's Vulnerable-in-Community Network. For his non-profit work, Hazeem has received The Diana Award and Community Cares Award. He is also the outgoing Impact Officer of the World Economic Forum Global Shapers Hub in Singapore.



## MR DANIAL HAKIM

**PRESIDENT**  
MENDAKI CLUB

**Mr Danial Hakim** has over 8 years of experience overseeing impact-driven projects related to youth empowerment, legal assistance, and uplifting the Malay/Muslim community. He is currently the President of MENDAKI Club, which runs career-centric and youth development programmes for youths, overseeing around 350 volunteers and impacting almost 3000 beneficiaries each year. Danial is also a board member of Yayasan MENDAKI, and concurrently holds leadership roles in other community organisations. In addition, he is a founding member of PEGUAM, a newly-formed organisation which provides legal awareness and guidance services to the public.



## MR DAVID CHUA

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**  
NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

**Mr David Chua** was appointed as the first Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Council (NYC), an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). NYC oversees two key operational divisions - Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) and Youth Corps Singapore. NYC drives holistic youth development at the national level, in partnership with public and private sector agencies. It engages young Singaporeans, sends them overseas for growth and exposure, tracks youth trends and capacity builds youth sector organisations. David is also the Chairman of the Board of Directors at \*SCAPE, a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) under MCCY, that runs aspirational programmes for youth. Prior to joining NYC, David served for 22 years in the Singapore Armed Forces.



## MS TASNEEM ABDUL MAJEED

**MENTAL HEALTH AMBASSADOR**  
BEYOND THE LABEL

**Ms Tasneem Abdul Majeed** is an NUS Psychology graduate and sibling caregiver with a keen passion for disability and youth mental health advocacy. In recent years, she has actively contributed to the community through various external events. She has partnered with several local organisations such as Rainbow Centre, CaringsG, SG Enable, and Caregiver's Alliance Limited (CAL); advocating for greater mental health support for families with special needs children, especially siblings. As an ambassador for mental wellness organisations such as Resilience Collective and Beyond the Label (BTL), Tasneem also aims to shatter the stigma surrounding mental health in Singapore. Currently serving as a Special Education Needs (SEN) Officer under the Ministry of Education (MOE), Tasneem's future goal is to become a leader in disability advocacy. Her future plans include promoting greater community support for families of children with special needs, as well as proposing initiatives to enable better integration of special needs students into mainstream classrooms.



## DR SYED HARUN ALHABSYI

**CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST  
AND MEDICAL DIRECTOR**  
THE STARFISH CLINIC OF PSYCHIATRY  
& MENTAL WELLNESS

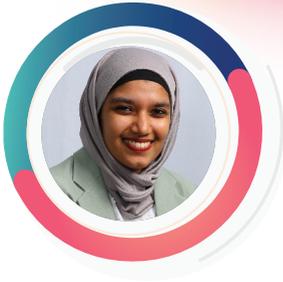
**Dr Syed Harun Alhabsyi** is a Consultant Psychiatrist & Medical Director of The Starfish Clinic of Psychiatry & Mental Wellness. He is currently serving as a Nominated Member of Parliament, is the Honorary Secretary of the Singapore Psychiatric Association and is a member of Health Promotion Board's Mental Wellbeing Resource Panel. He is also a member of the Singapore Mental Wellbeing Network; a national network that serves to improve community and peer support through broader citizen-based interventions, and to strengthen mental health literacy, wayfinding of resources and de-stigmatisation in mental health. Dr Syed Harun also holds various community appointments, including as President of Lembaga Biasiswa Kenangan Maulud and Council Member of the National Youth Council. He is also a Visiting Consultant to the Institute of Mental Health & Woodlands Health, and remains a passionate advocate in ensuring access to mental healthcare in the community.



## MS IVA AMINUDDIN

**DIRECTOR**  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE,  
CIVIL SERVICE COLLEGE SINGAPORE

**Ms Iva Aminuddin** is a career public service learning and organisational change practitioner. She is currently the Director of the Learning and Development Office, Civil Service College Singapore (CSC). Her work is currently focused on uplifting L&D capabilities in response to the rapidly evolving external environmental context to meet future Public Service needs. Iva also has experiences in leadership development, organisational change and innovation; and Public Service Transformation both within the Singapore Public Service and via regional capability development projects funded by UNDP, World Bank and ADB for governments in ASEAN and South Asia. She was a pioneer in the development of role-play simulation and serious games capabilities in the Singapore Public Service and was identified as Agile 50: World's Most Influential People Revolutionising Government (Futuristic Minds) in 2021. She was a former executive committee member of MENDAKI Club and was actively involved in youth leadership development initiatives with MENDAKI Club as well as the Young Sikh Association (Singapore).



## MS ATTIYA ASHRAF ALI

**VICE-PRESIDENT 1**  
MENDAKI CLUB

**Ms Attiya Ashraf Ali** is Vice-President 1 of MENDAKI Club, a youth-led organisation that brings together our community of Malay/Muslim young professionals and students through programmes that enable personal and professional development. She mainly oversees the women's chapter, MGirl, the PEER Community Programme and the data operations of the organisation. Professionally, Attiya works at Ernst & Young as a consultant focusing on Sustainability and Social Impact. During her spare time, Attiya likes to unwind by running and spending time with family.



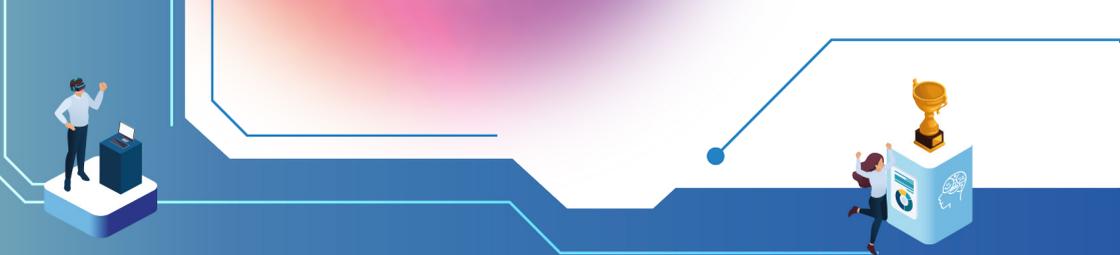
## MR ZHIN SADALI

**TV PRESENTER & ACTOR**  
THESMARTLOCAL

**Mr Zhin Sadali** is a TV presenter, actor and content creator. Since he began his journey as a YouTube talent for TheSmartLocal in 2018, Zhin has constantly worked in perfecting his craft both as a social media content creator and in front of the camera. Since then, he has embarked on multiple milestones, landing his first lead role in a drama in 2022, hosted Singapore's countdown in 2023 and is currently the host for MediaCorp Suria's weekly live talk show, Manja. His social media accounts feature a more intimate setting, where he shares weekly recipes in a series called 'Bujang Things' which has since gained eyeballs from audiences in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. He uses his social media platform following to advocate for Mental Health Awareness, spreading kindness and a growing journey in his line of work.

# OPENING REMARKS





# OPENING REMARKS

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli**, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health, Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs, and Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI,

**Mr Zaqy Mohamad**, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Manpower & Ministry of Defence and Deputy Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI,

**Mdm Zuraidah Abdullah**, CEO of Yayasan MENDAKI,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. I am happy to join all of you at the 8<sup>th</sup> MENDAKI Symposium.

## IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

While I am heartened to see many youths among the audience today, something that weighs heavy on my mind is climate change. It is a reality that we simply cannot ignore. It is not something that will happen 30 years down the road. It is already happening today. We are experiencing warmer temperatures globally. It is quite clear that temperatures are going up.

How does this impact us? We are receiving frequent reminders of climate change through unprecedented weather events in cities around the world. From the record-breaking Hurricane Beryl which ripped through the Caribbean and is now slamming into Texas, to severe floods in parts of China and Brazil, to a scorching 51.8 degrees Celsius temperature in Mecca recently, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries. In Singapore, 2023 was our 4th warmest year on record, and it has been forecasted by the Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS) that 2024 could be an even warmer year than 2023. Already scientists are telling us that temperatures for June 2024 is going to be record-breaking around the world. I am sure many of us agree that we are feeling the brunt of the weather these days.

BY **MS GRACE FU**

MINISTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
& MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF TRADE RELATIONS

at **MENDAKI Symposium on 10 July 2024**  
at **Sands Expo & Convention Centre**



These weather events and weather changes cause devastating results such as deaths, injury, damage and loss of property and even uncertainties in global food supply due to a reduction in crop yield. We are not merely victims of climate change. Decades of burning fossil fuels for energy, industrialisation and unsustainable deforestation and consumption practices have contributed to the climate change which we experience today. We are the cause of climate change.

## **CLIMATE ACTION**

These events send a clear message on the pressing need for immediate action. In Singapore, we have pledged to peak emissions before 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050. Achieving net zero is a whole-of-nation effort, involving the public and private sectors, communities, as well as individuals. That is why we launched the SG Green Plan 2030 in 2021, which charts concrete targets in five Pillars over the next 10 years that will position us to achieve our long-term net zero emissions aspiration by 2050. We are increasing our carbon tax rate and introducing new policies to decarbonise our economy, energy and households.

## **AVIATION SECTOR**

As an aviation hub, Singapore is playing our role in decarbonising the aviation sector by scaling up Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), a cleaner alternative to traditional jet fuel used in airplanes. Flights departing from Singapore will be required to use SAF from 2026. We will aim for a 1% SAF target for a start, with the goal of increasing it to 3 to 5% by 2030, subject to global developments and the wider availability and adoption of SAF. It is not just about airlines wanting to do it. The supply of SAF also has to come on stream, and in time. SAF is expected to contribute around 65% of emissions reductions needed by aviation to achieve net zero by 2050.

## MARITIME SECTOR

In the maritime industry, Singapore is also playing a leading role in catalysing the development and uptake of zero and near-zero emission solutions. The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), with the support of industry partners and the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) conducted the world's first ship-to-containership methanol bunkering operation in July 2023, followed by a more complex simultaneous methanol bunkering and cargo operation in May 2024. We have also conducted the world's first use of ammonia as a marine fuel in March 2024 within the Port of Singapore, onboard the Fortescue Green Pioneer. By switching away from conventional marine fuels to these cleaner alternative fuels, we can significantly reduce carbon emissions generated from the maritime industry. We have also established five Green and Digital Shipping Corridors (GDSCs) along key shipping and fuel supply routes with like-minded partners in Asia, Europe, and North America. These GDSCs serve as a test bed environment for pilot projects and facilitate stakeholder collaboration towards a more sustainable maritime industry.

Climate action has been focused on climate mitigation, which are efforts and ways to reduce climate greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce the effects of climate change, adaptation is a topic that is very much talked about in the climate circuit. Because while we are mitigating, we must also prepare for warmer temperatures. The world also needs to focus on climate adaptation – to adapt to the effects of climate change which we are already feeling and to adapt to greater unpredictability of the weather system which affects our food sources and water supply.

In Singapore, we are reviewing and refining our adaptation plans to incorporate the latest climate projections from our Third National Climate Change Study (V3), which has projected higher temperatures, more wet and dry extremes, and accelerating increase in mean sea levels. For example, to enhance our flood and coastal resilience, we are carrying out studies to explore different solutions, including the 'Long Island'. This is a stretch of new land is going to be reclaimed, creating a new boundary that will protect us from coastal floods, and new land for us. We also have to ensure our food resiliency, and we do so through a multi-pronged approach. Complementing import source diversification and stockpiling, is the 'grow local' basket, which through productive, climate resilient, resource efficient local food production, acts as a buffer against disruptions to food imports. This is about building capability, the know-how to grow in a climate resilient way. For this, we have set the aspiration of the "30 by 30" vision, to build up our agri-food industry's capability and capacity to produce 30% of our nutritional needs locally and sustainably by 2030.

Despite accounting for just 0.1% of the world's emissions, Singapore is doing our part to support climate action internationally. We are committed to supporting and accelerating the transition towards a net zero future in Singapore, in the region, and beyond. For example, we are actively contributing to blended finance initiatives in the region, and have signed carbon credit Implementation Agreements with Papua New Guinea and Ghana, which will help spur the development of international carbon markets.

At COP-28 last year, Singapore played a key role in facilitating the conclusion of the first Global Stocktake which reviewed the world's progress towards meeting the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal. No effort is too small. Despite our size and constraints, Singapore continues to punch above our weight and contribute to international efforts. In addition, Singapore is committed to supporting fellow developing countries in their efforts to address climate change through capacity-building assistance. Under the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), more than 150,000 officials from over 180 countries and territories have been trained in topics such as climate adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk management, and green finance. The Sustainability Action Package (SAP) was launched under the SCP in 2022 to focus on sustainability themes, including green project management, low carbon development and carbon markets. To date, we have organised 45 courses for over 1,000 participants under the SAP.

## **THE ROLE OF YOUTHS**

Youths have a significant role to play in Singapore's sustainability journey and fight against climate change. Initiatives led by governments, businesses and community organisations provide youths with resources, mentorship, and a conducive environment to have a stake in their future and champion issues they care deeply about.

One initiative led by the Government is the Climate Youth Development Programme (CYDP). Co-led by the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, the National Climate Change Secretariat and the National Youth Council, the programme was established in July 2023 to strengthen partnership with the youth community in advancing climate action for sustainable development. Through the inaugural programme last year, 40 youths had the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skillsets and networks to contribute to Singapore's sustainability efforts through conversations with climate change advocates, policymakers, and related events such as the Singapore International Energy Week 2023, Ecosperity and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) COP28.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) launched the Youth for Environmental Sustainability, or YES Leaders Programme, to bring together partners from the People, Public and Private to address environmental issues through innovative solutions and collaborations. Launched in 2023, the programme offers our youth leaders a unique opportunity to channel their passion for the environment into tangible projects with meaningful impact. We are also seeing youths and organisations tapping on the SG Eco Fund to drive ground-up sustainability initiatives in their community, in areas ranging from waste reduction and recycling to community growing of food.

One such project is by the Malay Youth Literary Association, which started a “Youth Eco Action” project to create awareness on environmental sustainability among youths through interactive activities such as pairing clean-ups with cycling and kayaking, gardening and waste upcycling workshops, and farm tours. I encourage youths who are keen to work on environmental initiatives to come forward and apply for the SG Eco Fund to carry out your projects. We have also partnered with MOE, such as through the SG Perspectives series, to engage the youths so that they can better understand Singapore’s context and policy considerations.

To the youths, I know it might sound daunting or you might not know where to start, but there are those who have gone before you.

We have Ms Farah Sanwari, who is an active youth leader who co-founded FiTree, an Islamic environmental group; and Repair Kopitiam, an initiative involving repair enthusiasts who believe in giving used appliances a second life. I had the honour to present Singapore’s Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at United Nations in New York with Farah. She presented Singapore’s report card on the SDGs. She added richness to the discussions, and for the community, the people sector to be represented.

Meanwhile, Mr Muhammad Ibnur Rashad is the founder of social enterprise Ground Up Innovation Labs for Development (GUILD) and has conducted workshops to educate the public on recycling waste plastics into 3D-printed planters, which were used to create a floating garden system.

I would like to mention a third person – Naeem Nadzri. As you may know, Singapore played a leadership role at the sessions at COP-28 where I co-facilitated negotiations on mitigation. When I was co-facilitating, I noticed this young man taking notes. I found out later that he was there as a youth leader in our Climate Youth Development Programme. Naeem is really an inspiring person to me. I found that his work in sustainability, in understanding treatment and extraction of useful materials from our waste is very relevant.

If we are able to extract the useful items from our waste, give them a second or third life, that is how we can reduce the need to mine even more. Every time when we change to a new electronic device, we are part of the reason why pits are being dug up. When you see photos of huge mining operations, where we are digging several tens of metres down into the earth to extract resources and causing environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, clearing of land. You and I are part of the cause. If we are able to give the resources endless life by recycling, extracting resources, separating the waste, then we can minimise the harm caused to the environment.

Youths are in the middle of action. From the three examples that I gave, you can see they are involved in community awareness, community engagement, and are putting their aspirations into action. They are going into the science and technological part of it to find new solutions. And there is really a whole range of different ways for us to enter the field of sustainability and climate change. This is really an area where your aspirations and your dreams can be put into action in a very seamless way.

## CONCLUSION

In 2050, how old would you be? What future do you want your children to grow up in? Start today to own the future, shape the future, so that the future will be what you want it to be. That is why youth involvement is so important. You have the runway ahead of you. Own the future and put your aspirations into actions.

Thank you very much.

Source:  
*Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment*





The State of Youth in Singapore 2021: Youth and Their Diverse Priorities published by the National Youth Council highlighted that since 2013, the fundamental life goals of young Singaporeans – such as maintaining strong familial ties, acquiring new skills and knowledge, and having a successful career – have remained steadfast. Reflecting similar sentiments, MENDAKI's Muslim Youth Aspirations study observed an emphasis on career goals over academic achievements. Youth also expressed concern about the escalating cost of living, the quest for a balanced work-life dynamic, and the challenges posed by environmental and mental health issues. In its efforts to support youth in achieving their diverse aspirations, the Government continues to pledge its support for the youth, aiming to diversify paths to success and implementing educational reforms that mitigate the focus on academic qualifications. This evolving landscape forms the backdrop of our exploration on how young people today navigate their aspirations.



# SESSION 1: YOUTH ASPIRATIONS





# KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING MUSLIM YOUTH ASPIRATION & ACHIEVEMENT

## NOTES

### 1. MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY:

- a. Based on Census of Population 2020, more than 30% of the Malay resident population are aged between 15 and 35 years old.
- b. Through MENDAKI's interactions with youth, we found that Muslim youth are unsure how to achieve their aspirations or lack confidence to pursue their aspirations.

### 2. APPROACH OF THE STUDY:

- a. There were two phases to the study. Phase 1 involved one-on-one in-depth interviews with 18 Muslim youth across different age groups and educational level. Phase 2 involved a face-to-face survey with 1,024 Muslim youth.
- b. The in-depth interviews aim to contextualise Muslim youth aspirations, their plans to achieve their aspirations, and the factors that influence their aspirations and plans.
- c. The face-to-face survey aims to identify the opportunity areas that MENDAKI should prioritise.

## FINDINGS

### 3. ASPIRATIONS AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE LIFESTYLE GOALS

- a. Career and academic achievements are the gateway to realising familial and lifestyle aspirations.
- b. Muslim youth may not have adequate exposure to and information regarding careers options.
- c. To achieve these aspirations, it is important to have the ability to identify the right career aspiration and education pathway.

BY **MS SITI KHADIJAH SETYO R S**  
**MANAGER**  
RESEARCH & DESIGN, YAYASAN MENDAKI



#### 4. TOP ASPIRATIONS AMONG MUSLIM YOUTH:

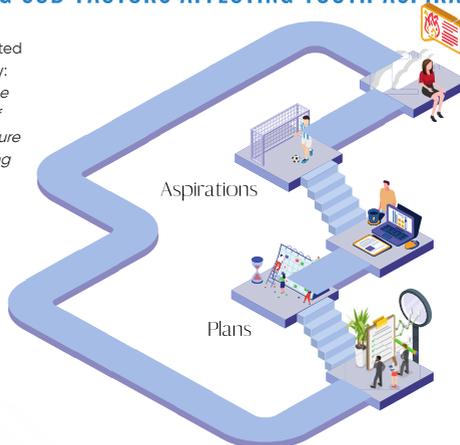
- a. Academic aspirations: To acquire new skills and knowledge outside of the formal education system, and to attain higher educational qualifications
- b. Career aspirations: To have a successful career, some want to be a business owner, others want simply to be employed

#### 5. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PERCEIVED ACHIEVABILITY OF ASPIRATIONS:

- a. Motivation: How much do they want to achieve their aspirations?
- b. Planning: What are the steps they take to achieve their aspirations?
- c. Self-Efficacy: How confident are youth of their abilities to achieve their aspirations?
- d. Having said the above, family still plays a very important role. Youth need to find ways to share about school and work with their family members.

#### 6. THE UNDERLYING SUB-FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

This framework is adapted from the following study:  
*How do adolescents see their future? A review of the development of future orientation and planning* (Nurmi, 1991)



**Motivation**  
shapes and drives aspirations

**Planning**  
derives specific plans to achieve the aspiration

**Self-efficacy**  
assesses confidence in carrying out plans to achieve the aspirations

## 6. THE UNDERLYING SUB-FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

### a. Prior Success:

- Experiencing prior success allows youth to be more confident in achieving their academic aspirations.
- This can be in the form of commendation, praises, doing well in school tests. Higher educated mothers are more likely to praise their children in their academic aspirations as compared to lower educated mothers.
- Younger Muslim youth may not have had many opportunities to achieve prior success in their academic aspirations. Concerted efforts to create opportunities for youth to feel success, regardless of how small the successes are, will help encourage them.
- Muslim youth who received MENDAKI study loans felt that they were more resilient when it comes to overcoming challenges in their career aspirations.

### b. Role Models:

- Muslim youth are inspired by academic achievers who resemble them. Role models should be relatable (i.e., someone like them)
- Fathers with higher education qualifications are more likely to be a source of inspiration to their sons.
- Mentoring makes a difference – more mentored youths received inspirations in career options and education pathways.
- Having said this, mentors are stronger at inspiring career options than education pathways.



## TAKEAWAYS FROM PANEL DISCUSSION:

01

### THE EVOLVING DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

- a. The traditional conception of success may be dated in today's world.
- b. Technology and climate change have created greater uncertainty throughout the economy.
- c. Academic success is no longer a straightforward path towards success. Instead, success in today's world requires a multidisciplinary skill set to adapt to emerging challenges.
- d. More emphasis should be placed on other sectors like sports, the arts, etc. as success has become increasingly viewed as multifaceted. This creates a confidence boost for youth whose strengths do not lie in academics, paving the way for them to work on their strengths.
- e. The community needs to step up and encourage youth to build on their strengths. Youth will grow in confidence and be more goal-driven in a supportive environment.
- f. MENDAKI and its partners will continue to work together to connect youth to existing resources that will elevate their position. MENDAKI's #amPowered mentoring programme helps to connect secondary and tertiary students with role models.



02

## PROVIDING GREATER SUPPORT TO YOUTH THROUGH ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

- a. Role models and mentors are key to helping youth to overcome setbacks by reframing setbacks as little successes. Setbacks could then be perceived as learning experiences on the path to achieving their aspirations.
- b. Setbacks could be taken as lessons for youth to build on their existing skill sets and/or to expand their skill set. Youth should be encouraged to step out of their comfort zone to seek out other potential skills to add to their repertoire of skills.
- c. Some youths are hesitant to accept assistance due to dignity or the belief that there are people out there who are in greater need than them. Thus, more groundwork needs to be done to build trust and rapport with families with youth to have them participate in community initiatives and open up about their problems.
- d. Having a buddy/friend serving as a "pacemaker" – these role models provide inspiration and create a benchmark for the youth to aspire towards.

03

## PARENT-YOUTH GENDER DYNAMICS AND YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

- a. Both fathers and mothers serve as role models for their children.
- b. Mothers are perceived to be more nurturing as they offer more praises than fathers.

04

## THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF AGE RANGE ON YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

- a. Younger youth are more academically-driven and their focus is on achieving good grades. These youth are keen to explore opportunities about possible career paths. MENDAKI plays an instrumental role by connecting them to mentors where they could gain insights into the various industries.
- b. Older youth (aged 20 and above) are more focused on achieving their career aspirations and networking opportunities. For these older youth, MENDAKI offers the Professional Networks, which are sharing sessions by industry experts as well as organisation representatives. This helps youth to grow their network, understand the career landscape, and fulfil their career aspirations.

05

## THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH ASPIRATIONS

- a. Social media encourages social comparisons, contributing to the experience of anxiety and a lack of confidence with one's social status.
- b. Creating something of their own and taking ownership helps in the development of self-assurance for youth.
- c. Important for youth to identify their interests and decide on the type of person or group they want to be a part of. This provides them with a purpose in life.
- d. Family plays an important role and youth need to find ways to share about school and work with their family members.

The 2021 National Youth Survey conducted by National Youth Council found that Singaporean youth ranked the environment and sustainability among the top five issues that require more attention. As Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, there were questions from the floor concerning the environment that were addressed to Ms Grace Fu and the other panellists.

06

## SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

- a.** A common misconception is that costs of sustainable practices are passed on to the consumer, thus making it more expensive.
- b.** Engaging in sustainable practices does not have to be costly. For example, consumers could practise sustainability in their daily habits by reducing food waste and electricity consumption.
- c.** Under the Climate Friendly Households Programme, the government has provided every HDB household with \$300 worth of Climate Vouchers for the purchase of energy- and water-efficient products. These Climate Vouchers could be redeemed for household products like energy-efficient lightbulbs and fixtures, enabling households to both save cost and practise sustainability.
- d.** Given the hybrid mode of working that is pervasive now, electricity consumption at offices could be scaled down. This ensures minimal electricity wastage, and businesses and companies may save cost and be environmentally sustainable at the same time.
- e.** Youth play an important role in educating their community on the importance of sustainability and facilitating the switch to energy-efficient appliances in their households.





The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported a significant 25% increase in global mental health issues in the first year following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the profound impact of social isolation and disrupted routines. This rise has particularly affected young individuals, highlighting an urgent area of concern. In Singapore, the Government has recognised the growing mental health challenges faced by its youth, compared to earlier generations, and remains committed to enhancing well-being and building resilience among this vital demographic. This commitment is pivotal for nurturing a resilient nation. Nonetheless, aligning community perspectives with governmental initiatives is fundamental to effectively addressing and supporting youth mental health. This section explores these dynamics and steps being taken to foster a supportive environment for the youth.



## TAKEAWAYS FROM PANEL DISCUSSION:

### FAMILIAL FACTORS AND ITS EFFECT ON YOUTH MENTAL WELLBEING

Mental wellbeing is derived from the complex interaction of protective and risk factors. Protective factors are influences that promote the experience of mental wellbeing while risk factors impair the psychosocial functioning of the individual. According to the Health Promotion Board's *A Guide to Building Mental Wellbeing of Children and Youth*, the family environment comes with its own set of protective and risk factors. For example, a supportive family and good parent-child relationships promote the wellbeing of children and youth in the family. Recognising that these factors exist and raising it up for discussion is the first step to improving youth mental wellbeing in the context of the family.

01

#### STRENGTHENING THE PARENT-CHILD / YOUTH RELATIONSHIP

- a. The process of building a relationship
  - Relationships between parent and children have to be built daily, and not just on big events or certain days.
  - Friends might be the first person that children/youth turn to for support, but parents will always be in their trusted list of people.
- b. Parents as role models for their children
  - Be intentional, not incidental, about routines.
  - Be honest about their struggles.
  - Standing alongside their children instead of being above them.

02

## THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT WITHIN A HOUSEHOLD

- a. Singapore's progress affects each generation differently, with each generation adopting different worldviews and values
- b. In Singapore, filial piety entails three to four generations living together in a household:
  - Youth are influenced by western ideals and may feel misunderstood by their parents
  - Parents with traditional beliefs may believe that youth are not receptive to their advice
- c. Multiple ideologies within a household could lead to tension and clashes, resulting in the youth's experience of loneliness

03

## PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

- a. Youth perception of the institution of family is shifting over time
- b. Social media enables people to be more connected than ever. However, people are increasingly becoming more socially isolated
- c. Engaging in purposeful activity and spiritual pursuits in real life helps build resilience

## EFFECTS OF SCREEN TIME AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON YOUTH MENTAL WELLBEING

According to a review by the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore, children screen usage has rapidly expanded over recent years. Benefits and disadvantages are associated with this trend. Children could benefit when they co-view educational content with their parents. Conversely, early and prolonged screen usage affects brain development and executive functioning, with its effects cascading to adolescence and adulthood. Society has to tread the fine line between recognising children and youth as digital natives and the detrimental effects of prolonged screen time and social media usage on mental wellbeing.

04

### THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF SCREEN TIME

- a. Recommendation is to limit screen time to less than an hour a day, prevent its usage during meals, and to avoid its use an hour before bedtime.
- b. Parental monitoring and guidance are crucial in educating children on the benefits and harms of prolonged device usage.

05

### CHILDREN/YOUTH AS DIGITAL NATIVES

- a. Schools are implementing the use of technology such as iPads into educational settings, emphasising its increasing relevance to students.
- b. A student's sense of self-esteem is rooted in technology, by how they stand among their peers by their possession (or lack thereof) of certain digital devices.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

### a. Pros:

- Connecting with peers from the past.
- Connecting with people that have similar issues (e.g., support group for parents with special needs children).

### b. Cons:

- During our grandparents' time: Comparing with people in their vicinity (i.e., neighbours).
- During our parents' time: Comparing with people from other countries.
- During the present time: Observing influencers living lavish lifestyle owing to their brand deals and sponsorships. Youth may believe that they are languishing by being born ordinary.



## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

In 2023, the Inter-agency Taskforce on Mental Health and Wellbeing launched Singapore's National Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy. Services and support for youth mental wellbeing is one of the areas that the Taskforce consulted the public on. This underscores the increasing importance of youth mental wellbeing to the government and the wider community.

07

### PEER SUPPORT GROUPS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

**a.** How youth seek help

- Youth tend to seek help in this order: peers, parents, professionals.
- Most mental health support services adopt peer support practices.

**b.** Availability of peer support services

- At institutes of higher learning, peer support programmes are offered to students seeking help (e.g., the PitStop Principles introduced by The Office of Student Affairs at the National University of Singapore).
- In primary schools, peer support groups are facilitated by teachers or psychologists.
- In 2016, the National Council of Social Service, in collaboration with the Institute of Mental Health, launched the Peer Support Specialist Programme. The programme empowers people with mental health conditions to harness their lived experiences to support others on their recovery journeys

**c.** Effectiveness of peer support services

- The awareness that there are different avenues of peer support services available is more important than the availability of these services.
- Youth tend to think that the only help available is through the Institute of Mental Health (IMH).





Today's youth are navigating a complex landscape, where their enduring goals of building strong family connections, acquiring essential skills, and securing successful careers are met with the realities of an increasing cost of living, the need for a balanced work-life dynamic, and growing environmental and mental health concerns. These factors collectively shape the aspirations and wellbeing of young Singaporeans, making it imperative to discuss not just the aspirations themselves but the holistic support structures that enable their realisation.

In this Fireside Chat, we engaged thought leaders, policymakers, and youth representatives who bring diverse perspectives on how these aspirations can be supported through innovative educational reforms, community empowerment, and policy adjustments that prioritise mental and emotional wellbeing.



# FIRESIDE CHAT: A CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH





# FIRESIDE CHAT

## ROLE OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN SHAPING ASPIRATIONS

1. **Mentorship and Family Influence:** There seemed to exist a profound impact of mentors and family support in shaping personal and professional trajectories was emphasised. Encouragement and guidance from mentors and familial support during challenging times are crucial in providing the foundation for success.
2. **Community Support:** The community around youth offering both emotional and practical support is important. Engaging with a supportive community can help youth overcome personal adversities and achieve success.

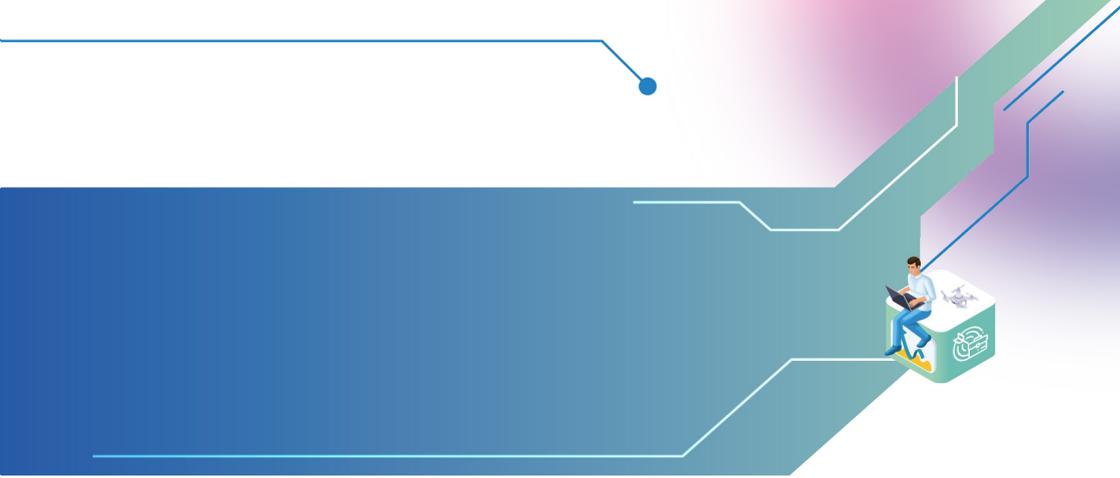
## NAVIGATING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

1. **Influence of Role Models:** Role models play act as inspiration and motivation to individuals pursuing ambitious goals. Youths are limited by the experiences they see and hear. There is a need for institutions and community leaders to highlight and promote diverse role models who reflect varied paths to success to broaden youth perspectives on potential life courses and inspire them to explore unconventional paths.
2. **Building Resilience:** Dealing with personal and academic challenges effectively at a young age requires resilience and adaptability. Some youth expressed their experience with overcoming financial difficulties, family responsibilities, and educational hurdles – universal challenges faced by youths.



## FOSTERING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

1. **Access to Mental Health Resources:** Although access to mental health resources is not limited, some youth find it difficult to find specialised help that is affordable. Help is often available at a high price, out of reach for students and youth just entering the workforce. Beyond mental health resources, youth also exchanged personal coping strategies like involvement



in sports, hobbies, and spiritual practices. These mechanisms help manage stress and contribute to overall mental wellbeing.

2. Inclusive Environment: The need for destigmatising mental health issues remains at the forefront of discussions. Encouraging open conversations and fostering a non-judgmental attitude towards mental health struggles within communities and workplaces were discussed as critical steps forward.

## REFRAMING ASPIRATIONS AND SUCCESS

1. Broadening Definitions of Success: As the government has moved towards an expansion of the definitions of success, it is necessary for communities and employers to adopt a similar approach to include diverse and non-traditional pathways. The evolving landscape calls for a re-evaluation of what success looks like, acknowledging personal fulfilment and social impact alongside educational and career achievements.
2. Aligning Education and Career Aspirations: With the rapidly changing job market and societal needs, there was a consensus on the need to align educational systems and career planning. This emphasised the need for flexibility in educational paths and career transitions, which are essential for meeting the aspirations of modern youth.

## CONCLUSION

The Fireside Chat underscored the multifaceted nature of youth aspirations and the importance of a supportive and adaptive framework to aid young individuals in navigating their paths. It highlighted the collective role of mentors, families, communities, and policymakers in providing the necessary tools and environments for youth to thrive.

# NOTES





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