

Policy 2024 Digest



Youth Aspirations



MENDAKI Policy Digest 2024

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MENDAKI Policy Digest 2024

CEO's Foreword

In our rapidly evolving world, the aspirations of young people are both a mirror reflecting societal hopes and a catalyst for future progress. The drive, ambition, and dreams of our youth shape the trajectory of economies, communities and cultures. These aspirations are deeply personal, multifaceted, and influenced by a myriad of factors, from personal experiences to societal norms. Understanding and nurturing them requires a nuanced exploration of the diverse forces that inspire and empower the younger generation.

At Yayasan MENDAKI ("MENDAKI"), we are committed to nurture a Community of Success and provide the support to help our youth achieve their full potential, knowing that their successes contribute to the progress of our community. Through our comprehensive range of programmes – including the MENDAKI Tuition Programme, mentoring initiatives and leadership development opportunities – as well as KelasMateMatika to help them bond as their children's first teachers – we are dedicated to support our youth at every stage of their lives. Whether it is to excel in academics, build successful career pathways, or nurture personal growth and succeed as young parents, we aim to provide the tools and guidance necessary for youth to turn their aspirations into reality.

Before youth can achieve their goals, they must first define them. Our mentoring programmes play a pivotal role in this process, offering structured opportunities where aspirations can be clarified, and potential pathways explored. By connecting youth with mentors they could relate to, we facilitate the drawing of inspiration from role models, gaining essential social and emotional support, and developing valuable social networks.

To deepen our understanding of how best to support our youth in achieving their academic and career aspirations, we conducted a study in 2024 on 'Muslim Youth Aspirations'. The findings reaffirm the transformative power of mentoring and the significance of relatable role models. These insights also underscore the importance of enabling our youth to experience small but meaningful successes – experiences that build confidence, resilience and a growth mindset. We are heartened by the study's validation of our mentoring efforts, and we remain committed to growing our Professional Networks to cultivate a larger pool of dedicated mentors and advocating opportunities for our youth.

I hope MENDAKI's Policy Digest 2024 will inspire readers with the remarkable stories of our contributors and provide valuable insights into how we can collectively support the aspirations of our youth. I extend my sincere gratitude to the contributors and series advisors who have enriched this publication with their wide experiences and varied perspectives.

Let us continue to nurture the dreams of our young, and empower and navigate the Malay/Muslim community towards success.

Zuraidah Abdullah

Chief Executive Officer
Yayasan MENDAKI

Editor's Note

Youths are the lifeblood of society, holding the potential to shape a vibrant future. As stewards of this future, it is our responsibility at MENDAKI, together with the wider Malay/Muslim community, to empower our young people. By providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset, we prepare them to navigate and thrive in a world that is increasingly complex and uncertain. This sentiment was echoed by Mr Alvin Tan, Minister of State, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Ministry of Trade and Industry, in the Committee of Supply 2024 debates, underscoring our community's early focus on youth as key to building a better Singapore.

In this spirit, the 2024 edition of the MENDAKI Policy Digest is dedicated to exploring **Youth Aspirations**. This year, we delve into topics that resonate deeply with today's youth – those who are inquisitive, passionate, and driven by diverse dreams and passions. The landscape our youth navigate today is markedly different from that of previous generations, filled with unique joys and challenges. It is imperative that we understand their needs and struggles so that we may identify the best way forward to help our youth achieve their aspirations.

Section I of the Policy Digest explores how youth express and pursue their aspirations in two main areas: "me", focusing on their personal and professional growth, and "us", focusing on their involvement in community and civic engagements. In this section, we have also included the findings from the Muslim Youth Aspirations Study conducted by MENDAKI highlighting the pivotal role that education and career aspirations play on the personal and professional growth of our Malay/Muslim youth. Section II of the Policy Digest provides a summary and analysis of key national policy initiatives in education, family & housing, community & youth, economy & employability, and the elderly.

We trust that the articles within will offer valuable insights and spark meaningful discussions and reflections on Malay/Muslim youth aspirations. We would like to express our gratitude to all writers for their invaluable contributions. This publication also owes its success to the unwavering support of Mr Masagos Zulkifli Masagos Mohamad, Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, and Chairman, MENDAKI, Mr Zaqq Mohamad, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Manpower, and Deputy Chairman, MENDAKI, and Mdm Zuraidah Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer, MENDAKI, whose guidance continually inspires rich discourse and community advancement.

Ho Wai Leng Laurant

Editor

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Section I

Youth Aspirations

Shaping the Future: Navigating the Aspirations of Today's Youth



Nur Iryani Halip

Ms Iryani Halip is a Senior Research Officer at MENDAKI. She recently completed her Master of Science degree in Business Analytics at National University of Singapore. Her research interests primarily focus on the behavioural insights affecting employment and employability of youth and adults. Since 2021, Ms Iryani led MENDAKI's Employment & Employability Study and the Muslim Youth Aspirations Study.

Abstract

The Muslim Youth Aspirations Study conducted by MENDAKI aimed to identify key drivers and barriers affecting the academic and career aspirations of Muslim youths. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis and qualitative insights, the study evaluates how cultural, socioeconomic, and educational factors are shaping these aspirations.



Youth represent not only the promise of tomorrow but are also active contributors to the dynamics of today.

Introduction

In an era of rapid societal changes and technological advancements, the aspirations of young people form the blueprint of the future. Across the globe, youth aspirations span a broad spectrum—from entrepreneurial ambitions and artistic pursuits to technological innovations and civic participation. These aspirations are not just individual dreams but are indicative of the evolving priorities of entire generations, pointing towards emerging trends and future societal shifts.

Over the past decade, while ‘to acquire new skills and knowledge’ and ‘to have a successful career’ remained as two of the top five ‘very important’ life goals, today more youths deemed ‘to be actively involved in sport’ and ‘to be actively involved in volunteer work’ as ‘very important’ (National Youth Council, 2021). As such, understanding and supporting these aspirations is crucial for policy makers, educators, and community leaders to facilitate a landscape that can nurture the potential of youth and ensure a prosperous societal future.

Youth represent the promise of tomorrow and are active contributors to the dynamics of today. Their aspirations, when adequately supported, can lead to significant breakthroughs benefiting both the individual and the broader community. However, barriers such as socioeconomic constraints, limited access to resources, and cultural misunderstandings can hinder the realisation of these aspirations. It becomes imperative for community-focused organisations and policy makers to address these challenges.

Drawing from the comprehensive findings of the Muslim Youth Aspirations Study conducted by MENDAKI in 2023 this article zeroes in on the educational and career goals of Singapore’s Muslim youth, offering insights into tailored interventions in MENDAKI’s programmes.

About the study

This study was initiated to gain a deeper understanding into the aspirations of Malay/Muslim youth, which is crucial for crafting effective and culturally relevant programmes. These young individuals, face specific challenges that require tailored support mechanisms. Educational disparities and differential career outcomes have underscored the necessity for targeted community-driven support, with MENDAKI playing a key role in addressing these issues.

The primary motivation behind this research is to provide a robust empirical foundation to help shape effective support structures and initiatives aimed at empowering Muslim youth. By capturing the aspirations and identifying the obstacles these youth face, the findings inform decisions on how to best support their educational and career pathways. This effort aligns with broader objectives of enhancing community development and ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to succeed, contributing positively to Singapore's diverse society.

Insights from this study are intended to assist community leaders, educators, and programme designers in developing interventions that effectively meet the needs and ambitions of the Malay/Muslim youth.

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach, encompassing three distinct phases: (i) Phase 1 – in-depth interviews, (ii) Phase 2 – quantitative survey, and (iii) Phase 3 – solution-focused focus group discussions. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the aspirations and their influencing factors, followed by the identification of opportunities for intervention.

Educational disparities and differential career outcomes have underscored the necessity for targeted community-driven support, with MENDAKI playing a key role in addressing these issues.

Key Findings

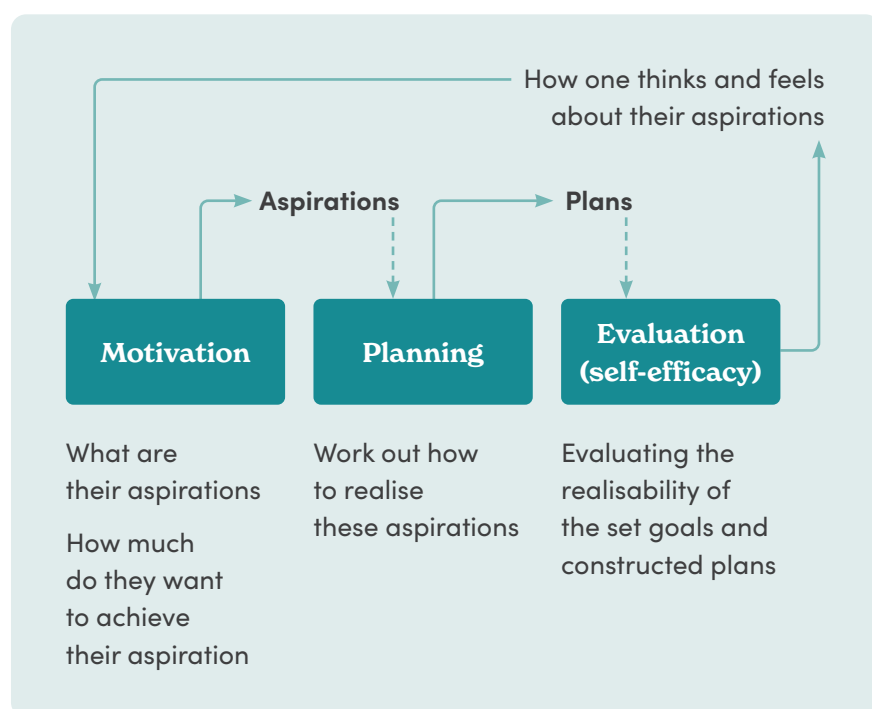
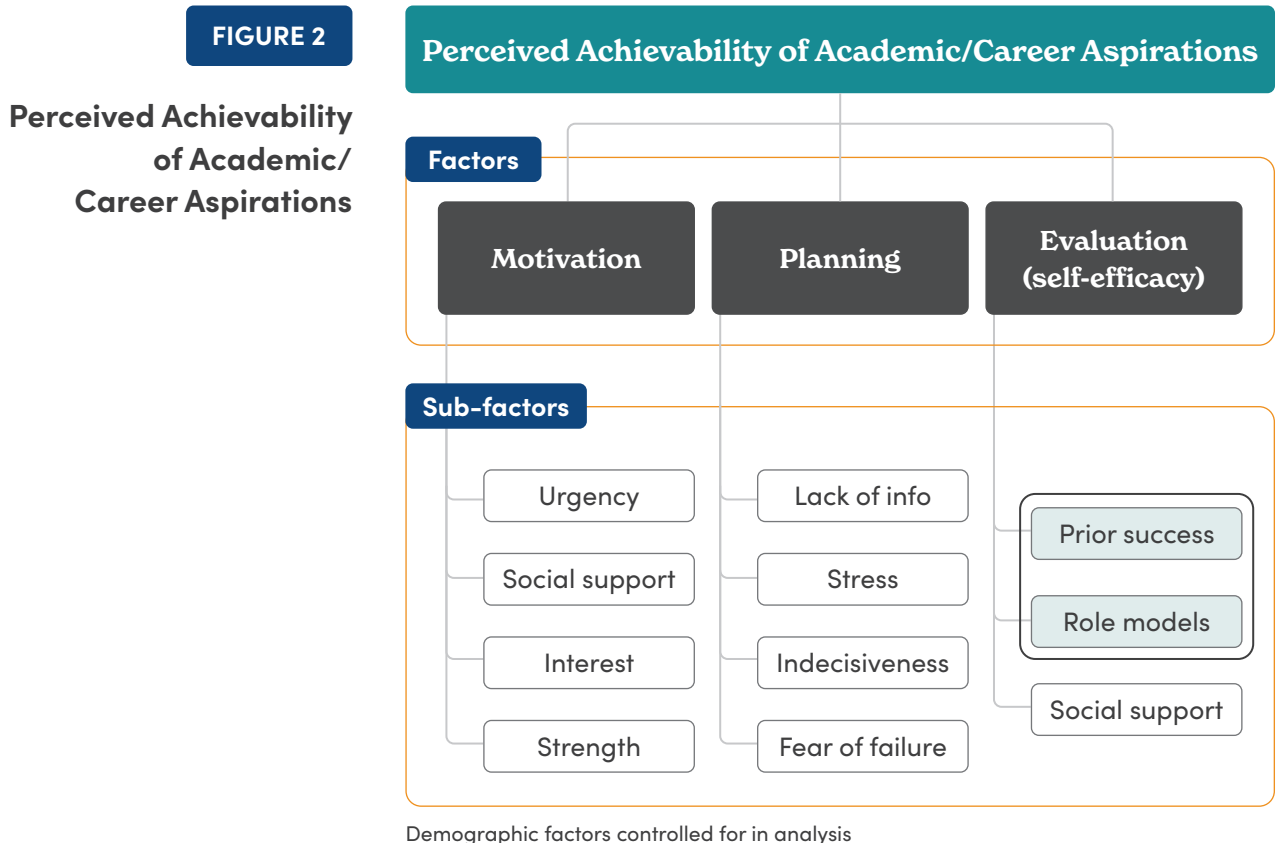


FIGURE 1

Framework

By adapting a framework by Nurmi (1991), the perceived achievability of youth's aspirations is influenced by their motivation towards the aspiration, planning for the aspiration, and their self-efficacy (see Figure 1).

The discussions from Phase 1 of the study identified sub-factors that affected each of the three factors (see Figure 2). The sub-factors that affected motivation were urgency, social support, interest and strength. The sub-factors that affected planning were information available, decision-making, stress management, and resilience. For self-efficacy, the sub-factors were social support, role models, and prior success.



Key Findings

In this piece, we will prioritise our discussion on the sub-factors that are most influential in driving the outcome. We looked to identify key sub-factors that more strongly influence youth's perception of achieving their academic and/or career aspirations but are unfortunately lacking in Muslim youth in our sample.

To determine how influential a factor was, it had to have an odds ratio of more than one and had to be statistically significant. To determine how poorly a sub-factor performed, it had to have a performance score of less than 75%. Performance scores were based on the percentage of top three box score (T3B) for seven- and six-point scale questions and top two box score (T2B) for five-point scales.

Looking at the constructs of self-efficacy and uncovering the sub-factors that most influenced self-efficacy, it was found that for academic aspirations, presence of a role model and prior success were sub-factors that were influential but lacking in Muslim youth, whereas for career aspirations, only prior success was an influential sub-factor.

Importance of Role Models

Analysis of the data showed that mentorship programmes significantly boost the presence of inspiring figures in the lives of young people. Among those who were aware of but did not participate in any mentorship programme, 39% reported feeling inspired by role models in their academic pursuits. This percentage increased to 48% for those who were aware and participated in the programmes. Similarly, in the realm of career aspirations, the impact of participation is even more marked: 42% of those aware but not involved in mentorship felt inspired, compared to 55% of those who participated.

These figures emphasise the substantial impact of mentorship on youth, particularly in terms of career guidance. Mentorship provides not just inspiration but also practical support and information about career options, which is particularly valuable. Many young individuals report a knowledge gap in linking academic achievements to career success, a gap that mentorship can help bridge.

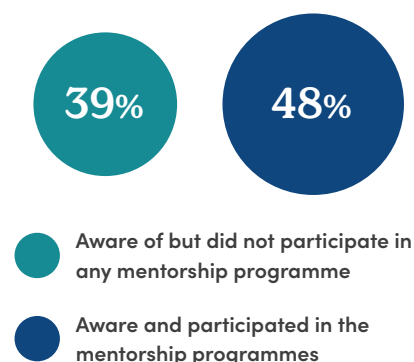
Given these findings, mentorship programmes, such as #amPowered by MENDAKI, not only serve as a catalyst for motivation and inspiration but also play a critical role in equipping youth with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate their future career paths effectively.

Since 2019, the Youth Mentoring Office (YMO), under M³ Focus Area 3, has introduced various iterations of mentoring programmes targeted at different age groups from #amPowered@MENDAKI Tuition Scheme and #amPowered@M³ Towns for upper secondary students to #amPowered@Institute of Technical Education (ITE) catering to first-year students at ITE Colleges.

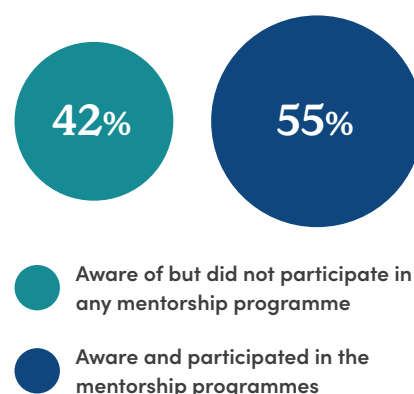
MENDAKI Club, a registered society affiliated with MENDAKI, has developed similar mentoring programmes such as MARA Mentoring, for undergraduates keen to join a community of professionals from various industries, and PEER Community Programme, a six-month long structured mentorship programme that aims to provide support, encouragement and positive role models for secondary school students.

Since its inception, YMO has trained and deployed over 1,600 mentors to support more than 5,700 mentees through various mentoring programmes under M³ Focus Area 3.

Percentage of youth feeling inspired by role models in their academic pursuits



Percentage of youth feeling inspired by role models in their career aspirations



By integrating more comprehensive mentorship opportunities, communities can enhance their developmental programmes, ensuring that young people are not only inspired but are also well-informed and prepared to make strategic decisions about their educational and career trajectories. This approach not only enriches the individual lives of these youth but also contributes to the societal goal of fostering a well-prepared, ambitious, and skilled future workforce.

Importance of Celebrating Success

The Muslim Youth Aspiration Study also found that younger youth, under the age of 17 years old, were least likely to have experienced prior success. This is compared to older youth, who were more likely to agree that they have experienced prior success. While this may seem apparent, if experiencing success allows youth to feel more confident in achieving their academic aspirations, enabling them to experience success earlier may improve youth perceived achievability of their aspirations.

As part of MENDAKI's continued efforts to recognise the efforts and success of Malay/Muslim students and youths, Anugerah MENDAKI was introduced to encourage and recognise students who have achieved exceptional results in both academic and non-academic fields. Anugerah MENDAKI recognises and honours Muslim students who have done exceptionally well in the national examinations at PSLE (Primary School Leaving Examination), GCE (General Certificate of Education) 'N', 'O', 'A' Levels and International Baccalaureate Diploma. Awards are also presented to recipients of Anugerah Cemerlang MENDAKI, Anugerah Belia Cemerlang MENDAKI, Academic Achievement Award, Special Achievement Award for Excellence (Non-Academic) and Anugerah Gemilang MENDAKI. This year, on 19 October 2024, MENDAKI recognised and honoured 500 students and youth for their achievements.



Apart from award ceremonies such as Anugerah MENDAKI, the findings from Phase 3 of the Muslim Youth Aspirations Study revealed that respondents also valued verbal affirmations from their family members and teachers. While these personal acknowledgments were most cherished, a smaller group of respondents also appreciated celebratory gestures, such as enjoying a family dinner out or receiving public commendation. These insights underscore the significant impact of personal and direct forms of recognition on youths' motivation and self-esteem.

The impact of affirmation and acknowledge from the people closest to the youth is profound, influencing not just the self-esteem and motivation of the youth but also shaping their future educational and professional trajectories. Hence, all MENDAKI's #amPowered mentoring programmes are grounded on the Gift-Centred Mentoring (GCM) philosophy. The GCM approach focuses on discovering and nurturing the unique individual gifts of participants. Through celebrating the strengths of their gifts and acknowledging their experiences, participants are empowered to achieve the milestones in their lives.

The GCM approach differs from traditional programme delivery, where there is usually a practice of encouraging through incentives. With the GCM approach, the focus is on the gifts that manifest through participants' actions. The GCM approach allows participants to be recognised for their efforts, talents and strengths, which helps develop their confidence and resilience.

Similarly, KelasMateMatika (KMM), a key initiative by MENDAKI, is designed to enhance the role of parents in nurturing early educational successes, specifically in early numeracy. This programme is pivotal in teaching parents how crucial their active involvement is in recognising and celebrating their children's achievements, no matter how small. By focusing on Mediated Learning Experience techniques, the programme equips parents with the skills to effectively compliment, acknowledge, and affirm their child's efforts, which are essential for fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-worth in young learners.

The emphasis of the programme is on the critical importance of early experiences of success, which are foundational in building a child's confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Through KMM, parents learn to create a supportive home environment where positive feedback is a consistent feature. This reinforcement helps children develop a positive attitude towards challenges and learning, reinforcing the effort rather than the outcome.

Moreover, the skills parents acquire through the programme enable them to recognise and nurture their child's potential by providing specific, positive feedback on their efforts and strategies. This not only boosts the child's motivation but also enhances their engagement with more challenging academic material. The experience of being acknowledged by one's parents fortifies the child's educational foundation, setting a precedent for future learning endeavours and shaping their approach to education and personal development.

Conclusion

The aspirations of Muslim youth in Singapore are influenced by a variety of factors including familial expectations, community values, and personal ambitions. The study uncovers a strong inclination towards higher education and professional careers, reflecting a broad ambition to achieve socio-economic advancement and contribute positively to society. However, the study also notes significant hurdles, such as a lack of role models and guidance in fields outside of traditional careers, which can stymie potential growth and development.

As a cornerstone of community support, MENDAKI has implemented various programmes aimed at overcoming these barriers. From mentoring programmes and tuition programmes to career guidance workshops, MENDAKI's initiatives are designed to empower youth by providing the necessary tools and support systems to help them navigate their educational journeys and career paths effectively.

As a cornerstone of community support, MENDAKI has implemented various programmes aimed at overcoming these barriers.

While this article focuses on the educational and career aspirations of Muslim youth, it is part of a broader discourse that encompasses the varied aspirations of all youth. The insights provided here should serve as a catalyst for other articles in this digest, each exploring different facets of youth aspirations. By understanding and addressing the specific needs of diverse youth groups, society can pave the way for a future that is not only envisioned but also shaped by the younger generation.

Educators, community leaders, and policymakers are encouraged to consider the findings and strategies discussed here as they formulate more inclusive and supportive frameworks for youth development. As we continue to explore the diverse aspirations of youth in subsequent articles, let us remain committed to transforming these aspirations into tangible outcomes that benefit not just the youth but society as a whole.

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Did You Know?

1

Youths' important life goals have remained largely unchanged since 2013.

TABLE A1

Youths' "Very Important" Life Goals Over Time

	2010	2013	2016	2019
	(n=1,268)	(n=2,843)	(n=3,531)	(n=3,392)
To maintain strong family relationships	71%	74%	70%	68%
To have a place of my own ^a	NA	70%	70%	65%
To acquire new skills and knowledge	57%	65%	62%	53%
To have a successful career	66%	61%	59%	51%
To travel the world ^b	NA	NA	NA	41%
To earn lots of money	48%	46%	45%	36%
To help the less fortunate ^a	NA	41%	41%	34%
To have a good personal spiritual/religious life	27%	36%	31%	33%
To contribute to society	NA	39%	40%	30%
To get married	35%	39%	36%	29%
To have children	34%	37%	35%	27%
To be actively involved in sports	17%	18%	18%	21%
To discover, design or invent something new	13%	17%	17%	16%
To start my own business	19%	22%	21%	14%
To be actively involved in the arts	8%	13%	12%	11%
To be actively involved in local volunteer work	4%	12%	10%	10%
To migrate to another country	5%	10%	11%	9%
To be actively involved in overseas volunteer work	4%	9%	8%	6%
To be famous	7%	6%	6%	4%

Notes:

^a Items are new to NYS 2013.

^b Item is new to NYS 2019.

Source: National Youth Council. (2021). *Youthsg 2021: The State of Youth in Singapore, 2021 – Youth & Their Diverse Priorities*. <https://publuu.com/flip-book/94509/283662>

2 Work Aspirations

Asia and the Pacific



Most important criteria when considering job opportunities



Biggest concerns about job prospects when applying for a job



Source: Gardiner, D., & Goedhuys, M. (n.d.). Youth aspirations and the future of work. *International Labour Organization*. <https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/intserv/working-papers/wp008/index.html#ID0E5IAC>

3 Mentoring Programmes

a



Mentoring Programmes are effective in improving behavioural, social, emotional, and academic outcomes for youth, with mentored individuals typically exhibiting positive gains.

b

Mentoring proves beneficial across various developmental stages, from early childhood through adolescence, demonstrating its broad applicability and flexibility as an intervention strategy.



c



Programmes that include adult volunteers, older peers, or group formats have shown significant levels of effectiveness.

d

Effective mentoring can impact multiple domains of a young person's functioning simultaneously, improving crucial outcomes of policy interest, such as academic achievement test scores.



e



The study emphasises that mentoring has the capacity to serve both promotion and prevention aims, helping to advance the developmental trajectories of young people in diverse and meaningful ways.

4 Gift-Centred Mentoring (GCM)



a

Helping to build a mentor-mentee rapport.

b

Helping mentees to open up so mentors can gain better understanding on their personal thoughts and feelings.



c

Enabling mentors to discover their mentees' unique gifts or talents.



d

Creating a safe setting for mentees to share about their wounds.



e

Building camaraderie and establish a sense of community among mentors and mentees.



Source: Yayasan MENDAKI, Youth Mentoring Office, Youth Mentoring Connection, Mahzam, R., Hai, M. F. A., Kadir, M. M., Elias, N. M., Baker, N. B. A., & Hussain, S. N. A.-H. M. (2021). *The gift of mentoring*. Youth Mentoring Office. https://1601995032.rsc.cdn77.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/The-Gift-of-Mentoring-A-Guide-for-Mentors_2022.pdf

Navigating Life's Detours – How Setbacks Shape Aspirations



Hilal Iman Bin Mohammad

Hilal Iman Bin Mohammad is a second-year law undergraduate at the National University of Singapore, where he is a recipient of the Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship to Encourage Upgrading (LKY-STEP) Award. Before this, he earned a Diploma in Business Management from Nanyang Polytechnic and a Diploma in Culinary Skills from SHATEC Institutes. In 2023, he received the Anugerah Gemilang MENDAKI (Pinnacle Award).

Abstract

In life, we often find ourselves on unexpected paths, especially when challenges force us to reroute. My journey began with setbacks during my GCE O-Level (O-Level), which closed many traditional doors. In this article, I share how these early obstacles led me from culinary school to discovering my passion for law during National Service. I highlight the unconventional educational paths that ultimately brought me to the National University of Singapore Law School (NUS Law). By sharing how I navigated through these challenges with motivation and perseverance, I hope to provide practical advice and encouragement to students striving to stay on track in their educational pursuits. I will discuss (i) the evolution of my aspirations, (ii) the crucial role of determination in overcoming obstacles and fostering personal growth, and (iii) why embracing failures and relying on community support are essential for lasting success. Each point will be accompanied by an oft-cited Malay proverb that illustrates the key themes of my journey.



For a child, these aspirations are rooted in idealism; for a student, they depend on academic performance and grades; and for an adult, they shift towards practicality and realism.

Introduction

Early educational challenges can leave lasting scars, shaping a person's journey in profound ways. It is natural to take this period of failures and extrapolate these experiences into a broader narrative of self-doubt, which can dampen motivation and resilience. Yet, many opportunities exist to confront these difficulties. A single point of failure should never dictate the trajectory of one's life.

1 Dekat tak tercapai, jauh tak berantara. (Close but out of reach, far but without barriers.)

The meaning of the above proverb is *"sesuatu yang kita inginkan tetapi tiada berdaya mencapainya."* This translates to "we desire something but lack the *daya* to achieve it." The richness of the Malay language is reflected in the word "*daya*", which encompasses various meanings, including "power," "energy," and the capacity or ability to act.

Indeed, becoming a lawyer has always been a childhood dream of mine; however, pursuing this goal after failing the O-Level not once but twice—and after attending culinary school—felt nearly impossible. In other words, I lacked the *daya* for it.

I have realised that few things are as constantly in flux as one's career aspirations. For a child, these aspirations are rooted in idealism; for a

student, they depend on academic performance and grades; and for an adult, they shift towards practicality and realism. Having traversed these three stages, one must ponder: how does one find the *daya* to reconcile the dreams of childhood with the realities of adulthood? That was the challenge that I have had to face myself.

The starting point for my journey dates to the first time I sat for the O-Level examination. My poor results—a staggering net aggregate score of no less than 30—were the result of various factors: distractions, a lack of appreciation for the importance of education, and youthful naivety. Convinced that I should not waste my O-Level academic resources, I decided to retake the examinations as a self-study private candidate the following year. Unfortunately, my results were nearly the same. Any idea of attending law school after this should be immediately extinguished as failing the O-Level is not in line with the typical trajectory of a law undergraduate.

I then found myself with limited options and struggled with a lack of self-confidence in my academic abilities. My poor performance left me with access to only a few courses at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), none of which sparked my interest. Not from a position of privilege, but out of necessity and a distant passion for cooking, I enrolled at SHATEC Institutes to pursue a Diploma in Culinary Skills. After completing my studies, I worked as a cook for a year, dedicating myself to becoming the best chef I could be.

I subsequently enlisted in the Singapore Police Force upon receiving my National Service (NS) enlistment letter. During Basic Police Training, I was placed in a squad that came from different walks of life. Consequently, I could not relate to my bunkmates' stories of camps and experiences in co-curricular activities (CCA) from their polytechnic days since I never had those experiences. Additionally, I vividly remember feeling out of place and dejected as they received notifications on their phones about their university admissions and discussed their excitement among themselves. Although the experience deepened my feelings of inferiority about my academic abilities, I was genuinely happy for them and grateful that NS allowed me to live vicariously through their stories.

Throughout my NS training, studying criminal law was truly enlightening. I found myself drawn to the criminal statutes and procedures, acutely aware that the knowledge I was gaining had significant real-world implications for people's lives. My deep interest in the subject led to my receiving the Best in Professional Studies Award for outstanding performance in the academic examinations. Receiving the award may not necessarily be monumental to others, but for me, it was a crucial boost to my self-confidence. Competing alongside my squadmates, each of us striving for the same recognition, made me realise that academic qualifications mattered far less than our determination and commitment in that moment. This experience reinforced in me the idea that, when given a level playing field, our potential to succeed often depends more on effort and resilience than on prior credentials.

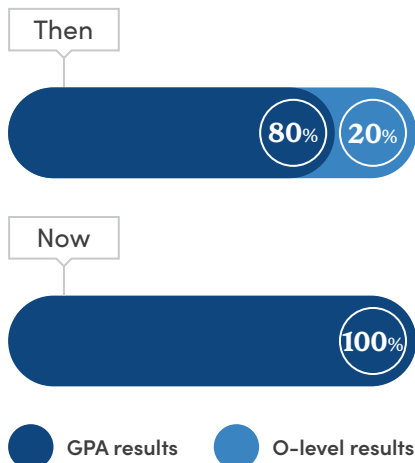
Having traversed these three stages, one must ponder: how does one find the *daya* to reconcile the dreams of childhood with the realities of adulthood?



Subsequently, I was posted as a Ground Response Force Officer, where I gained firsthand insight into the law's role in shaping society, the state's authority over individuals, and the intricacies of human behaviour. These experiences led me to make a firm promise to myself: I would, and must, attend law school, as the prospect of studying and working in the field of law was appealing.

Thus, aspirations are not static; they can evolve, be revisited, or even replaced by paths we believe to be more aligned with our true selves. Although I initially lacked the *daya* to pursue my dream of going to law school and opted for a career as a chef, I never abandoned my childhood aspiration. In fact, my experience in NS only fortified that aspiration. I became determined to avoid future regrets and commit fully to overcome the 'what ifs' that had lingered in my mind. While it may seem foolish to cling to such a radical and childish aspiration from when I was young, I resolved to honour it regardless.

NUS relies solely on polytechnic students' GPA scores for admission



2 Di mana ada kemahuan, di situ ada jalan. (Where there's a will, there's a way.)

The proverb above conveys the idea that "determination can help find solutions to challenges". My journey involved careful planning, persistence, and no small amount of luck along the way. I kept an open mind, considering different paths and trying to anticipate obstacles, which allowed me to navigate some challenges more effectively. Here, I share my thought process and the strategies that guided me to law school.

In my final year of NS, I researched NUS Law's four-year Bachelor of Laws (LLB) programme and its entry requirements. Among the qualifications accepted are the Singapore GCE A-Level (A-Level), the International Baccalaureate (IB), and the Singapore Polytechnic Diploma. I decided to pursue the diploma pathway because meeting the required scores for NUS Law through the A-Level or IB poses significant challenges, especially without several years of essential subject knowledge, ongoing evaluations, and tutoring. While it is trite that only a small number of polytechnic graduates make it into NUS Law, I saw the pursuit of a polytechnic diploma as valuable in and of itself, regardless of the outcome. I knew it would offer me the chance to broaden my knowledge and grow in ways that would serve me well, wherever my path led.

While researching polytechnic entry requirements, I discovered two pivotal education policy changes. The first announcement came from the Minister for Education, stating that A-Level graduates who do not meet the entry requirements for Autonomous Universities would be eligible for module exemptions in polytechnics, effectively reducing their diploma course duration to as short as two years. To qualify for these exemptions, students must achieve the necessary grades in relevant A-Level subjects and fulfil the same graduation requirements as other polytechnic students, including internships. The second announcement was NUS' decision to no longer consider polytechnic students' overall O-Level results for admission, instead relying solely

on GPA scores. Previously, the GPA contributed 80% to the University Admission Score, with O-Level results accounting for the remaining 20%. This shift aims to better recognise late-bloomers and those excelling in polytechnic programmes.

Equipped with this knowledge, I promptly applied for private A-Level that same year, eager to capitalise on these policy changes. This allowed me to bypass the O-Level and pursue credit exemptions in polytechnic. In retrospect, it was the combination of these policy adjustments and the lucky discovery of these news articles that guided me to this pivotal moment. I hope these efforts to broaden entry requirements continue, as they allow students who may have faced setbacks to find new opportunities in the education system.

Unfortunately, I had little time to study during NS. I attempted to study at night, but it was challenging and exhausting. I had to wait until I completed my NS in mid-August to focus on my studies, even though the exams were scheduled for November, leaving me with just two months to prepare. I scoured the internet, especially marketplaces like Carousell, for study notes, relying on self-study. I underestimated the copious amounts of study material required for subjects like H2 Economics and H2 History, especially considering that the Singapore A-Level is notoriously difficult due to their dense content. At one point, I found myself studying the Cold War and the United Nations using Wikipedia as my primary resource. The anxiety of knowing that any aspect of the extensive syllabus could be tested weighed heavily on me. I studied day and night, driven by desperation. I knew that if I failed, I would return to being a cook after my NS, which would mean sidelining my aspirations. Thankfully, I ended up passing all my subjects and met the requisite grades for credit exemptions from the polytechnic courses. This A-Level experience felt isolating, and I longed for a sense of community. However, such communities typically only exist within private institutions that offer A-Level preparatory courses. I hope there will be increased support for adult learners seeking to re-enter the education system through this self-study pathway.

Then the moment arrived when I had to apply to the polytechnics, and I confidently submitted my applications for the business courses, believing that I would excel in them. However, to my dismay, I was rejected by all the polytechnics except for Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), which kept my application pending. This was particularly frustrating since I had contacted each polytechnic before registering for my A-Level and received confirmation that they would accept private candidates' A-Level result for the credit-exempted course pathway. The uncertainty of my application outcome made me question whether my efforts in taking the A-Level would be enough, which was a humbling reminder of how unpredictable the process can be.

Just a few days before the official start of the polytechnic academic year in April, I received a phone call from the course convenor at NYP. She inquired about my educational journey and expressed concerns about my unconventional path, questioning whether I could handle the



If she had not given me a chance, I might not have reached where I am today. The old adage, ‘you only need one person to believe in you to change your life forever’, truly rings true here.

rigour of polytechnic coursework. Hoping for a fair chance, I shared my journey and explained how my A-Level results reflected my effort and determination. After our conversation, just four days before the first day of school, I received the news: I was accepted and officially matriculated into the 2-Year Diploma in Business Management programme. If she had not given me a chance, I might not have reached where I am today. The old adage, ‘you only need one person to believe in you to change your life forever’, truly rings true here. I hope polytechnics continue to support applicants from unconventional backgrounds, setting aside initial concerns about their ability to catch up, as many just need that one opportunity to prove themselves.

Navigating polytechnic as an older student among younger peers was a challenging experience, especially since we came from different life experiences. Having completed NS and worked in a fine dining kitchen, I found that my sense of discipline and focus was shaped by those experiences. I approached this difference as an opportunity to connect and collaborate, learning from each other’s perspectives and adjusting my approach to fit in with the group.

Moreover, I quickly realised that fundamental skills like writing reports and delivering effective business presentations were introduced in the first year, leaving me at a significant disadvantage. I vividly remember grappling with even the simplest tasks, such as formatting a simple bibliography in a Microsoft Word document. Nevertheless, I made sure to seek help whenever I encountered something I did not understand, studying diligently, and giving my best in every examination.

In those two years, I also sought out CCA and programmes that would bolster my resume and prepare me for the Law admissions written test and interviews, which often focus on general practical considerations and philosophical questions related to current affairs. I took on the role of Vice-President of the Current Affairs and Debate Club, representing NYP in debate and policy writing competitions, which further enriched my experience.

Furthermore, the Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy (TTFS) Scheme from MENDAKI significantly eased my financial worries, allowing me to concentrate fully on my studies and engage in student activities.

With the support of my lecturers and classmates, I was able to do well in my programme and complete it successfully, graduating at the top of my class.

However, another barrier emerged when I learned that, at that time, NUS Law required polytechnic graduates to achieve at least an A2 grade in the O-Level examination. Faced with this challenge, I decided to enrol in the General Education (GE) Programme at ITE for evening English classes. I signed up primarily because the programme was heavily subsidised; I only had to pay about \$30 for the classes and the final exam. I strongly encourage others considering taking the O-Level to explore this option.

After meeting the necessary requirements, I applied to NUS Law, successfully completing the written test and interview, and gained acceptance into the programme. It was a fulfilling moment that made me feel the journey was worth it, despite all the challenges.

In essence, I developed a strategy that became my guiding light. As a current mentor at #amPowered@ITE, I often feel a deep unease when my mentees express uncertainty about the future, revealing that they have no clear next steps. However, I cannot blame them; I once stood in their shoes and remember having a “go with the flow” mindset until I realised I was drifting without direction. For those contemplating their educational or career trajectories, it can be helpful to create a roadmap that identifies potential challenges, outlines strategies for addressing them, and takes into account contingencies to stay on track. While the odds may seem daunting, having a clear plan and the determination to see it through can truly make all the difference.

3 Malu bertanya sesat jalan, malu mengayuh perahu hanyut. (Feeling shy to ask will lead to losing your way; feeling shy to paddle will cause the boat to drift.)

The proverb conveys a powerful message: “If you hesitate to ask questions, you risk making mistakes; if you don’t put in the effort, you will undoubtedly face difficulties”. There are two key aspects to this. First, it emphasises the importance of asking questions and seeking support from community members who can help you achieve your goals. Second, it underscores that hard work is essential until you reach your final objective. This requires perseverance and a recognition that failures are not permanent but part of the journey.

On the first aspect, upon realising that my trajectory in polytechnic could potentially qualify me for shortlisting in the NUS Law admissions interview and written test, I understood that this was merely the first step in a competitive journey. At the admissions interview and written test stage, academic qualifications take a backseat, as performance on the assessments becomes the primary factor for admission. Given that these assessments encompass a broad range of topics and cannot be approached through conventional study methods, I sought to deepen my understanding of the process and its requirements. To this end, I participated in the “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop organised by the MENDAKI Club Legal Chapter and the Young MENDAKI Club. During this workshop, I had the opportunity to connect with current Malay/Muslim (MM) NUS Law students, known as “Melawyus”, who shared strategies for excelling in the admissions assessments. Additionally, I engaged with NUS Law alumni who are now practising lawyers, benefiting from their mentorship and insights into the legal profession. They have also connected me with lawyers outside the MM community, who are now providing me with valuable insights into potential practice areas and legal career pathways. This experience highlighted that many members

For those contemplating their educational or career trajectories, it can be helpful to create a roadmap that identifies potential challenges, outlines strategies for addressing them, and takes into account contingencies to stay on track.

of the MM community are eager to assist each other, underscoring the value of seeking mentorship from those who have navigated what can often feel like a confusing and opaque process.

Regarding the second aspect, I have come to recognise the significance of cultivating a growth mindset. This perspective is essential to avoid paralysis in the face of failure and to persistently dedicate oneself to a goal, even amidst repeated setbacks. After all, success is often inseparable from failure; without experiencing setbacks, one may fail to recognise the true value of achievement. I often found myself comparing my journey to that of my contemporaries, many of whom had already secured full-time employment while I was still pursuing my studies. Additionally, I grappled with the concept of sunk-cost fallacy. Having invested two years in taking my O-Level, completing three years of culinary school, and dedicating two years to NS, I questioned the rationale behind making a drastic shift towards an entirely different path, especially one with a desired outcome that seemed speculative and uncertain. The arduous nature of my journey thus far led me to question whether I was truly suited for academic life and if my decision to continue my tertiary education after NS was indeed the right one. However, I am grateful that I pressed on. Recognising the impact of the sunk-cost fallacy encouraged me to focus on making the most of my efforts going forward, instead of dwelling on the time already invested.

Yet, it is essential to recognise that each individual's circumstances are distinct and deeply personal. For some, it may be necessary to reevaluate their paths due to factors beyond their control. This is because not everyone has the privilege to pursue their aspirations without constraint. Ultimately, what holds the greatest significance is the acknowledgment that one has devoted their best effort, finding a sense of fulfilment in the journey itself. From this foundation, one can progress at their own pace, taking small yet impactful steps toward realising their aspirations, whatever they may be.

Conclusion

I do not presume to define success or prescribe a singular path to it. Indeed, one does not need to gain admission to a university or attain a conventionally prestigious or high-profile position to achieve success. Rather, success is a deeply personal concept, shaped by individual aspirations and circumstances. It involves the pursuit of one's own goals and the ability to transcend one's challenges, ultimately leading to a sense of dignity, fulfilment and happiness.

From my own journey, I have learned that a combination of self-determination, luck, and unwavering support from those who believe in you can make a profound difference. Therefore, it is essential to become your own staunchest advocate and conduct thorough research into your chosen pathway, actively seek out opportunities, and forge connections with a diverse range of individuals—beginning with those in your immediate community and extending beyond.

From my own journey, I have learned that a combination of self-determination, luck, and unwavering support from those who believe in you can make a profound difference.

Did You Know?

Mr Hilal Iman Bin Mohammad has benefited from the resources and programmes of MENDAKI. You, too, could benefit from these same resources and programmes.

Let us turn to the Tertiary Tuition Fee Subsidy (TTFS) and the “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop that were referenced in the article.

TTFS Scheme

The TTFS scheme is an education subsidy for Malay students, which covers their tuition fees at local government tertiary institutions. The TTFS scheme is part of the Government’s constitutional commitment to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote the educational interests of the Malays. Education is seen as the most effective lever towards securing the progress and socioeconomic advancement of the Malay community. TTFS ensures that students in financially challenged families are not denied access to higher education.

MENDAKI has enabled thousands of students to pursue their educational aspirations over the years. An estimated 2,500 to 3,000 students received TTFS support for their tertiary level education on a yearly basis. Over the last 10 years, the number of Malay students in the various tertiary institutions has also doubled (refer to Table below):

Highest Qualification Attained	Year 2010	Year 2020
University	5.5%	10.8%
Diploma and Professional Qualification	9.8%	16.9%
Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary)	15.8%	19.8%
Secondary	27.5%	23.5%
Below Secondary	41.4%	28.9%

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics. (2021). *Census of population 2020, statistical release 1: Demographic characteristics, education, language and religion*. <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.pdf>

MENDAKI remains committed in its mission to empower and navigate the Malay/Muslim community towards success.

TTFS recipients, like Mr Hilal, have returned to give back to the community. For example, they volunteer for YOUTH@M³ events as facilitators for breakout sessions, emcees, and other support during MENDAKI events.

“Being a Legal Eagle” Workshop

The “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop is an annual workshop conducted by MENDAKI Club (MClub). MClub is a community of Malay/Muslim young professionals and students who are engaged in general affairs concerning the community, Singapore and the world.

The “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop is conducted for secondary and pre-university students (e.g. junior college, polytechnic, ITE). The objectives of the workshop are to introduce participants to the legal framework and landscape in Singapore, raise awareness of being a lawyer as a future profession, and provide a taste of lawyering skills through hands-on activities. Facilitators from various universities and backgrounds, and at different stages in their legal careers are brought in to lead the workshop.

Participants are first brought through a demonstration of the cross-examination process. After which, they are put in the hot seat of cross-examining witnesses using a simulated set of facts. The exercise is followed by a courtroom simulation where participants are required to craft arguments and present submissions to facilitators that role-played as judges on a panel.



Mr Hilal facilitating a group discussion for the “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop in 2024.

Source: MENDAKI Club

Participants have provided positive feedback for the programme:

“I think the facilitators were the best part. They were very helpful and sincere in their interactions, and genuinely wanted to share and help people consider the legal sector.”

“MENDAKI Club should organise this more and I am sure more students will benefit from this.”



Besides “Being a Legal Eagle” workshop, MClub also offers a variety of programmes for secondary and post-secondary students. Find out more about our programmes in the infographics below.



ABOUT US

MENDAKI Club, or MClub is a registered society in Singapore, affiliated to the Malay/Muslim Self-Help Group Yayasan MENDAKI. We seek to support the Malay/Muslim community's youths and young professionals by enabling them to launch and sustain impactful and fulfilling careers, while providing them with the space and opportunity to be part of a community that will enable them to personally and professionally grow.



Our Impact



> 2,800
unique participants each year

5

flagship programmes



> 350
programme & ad-hoc volunteers



> 20
partner schools & organisations

Post-Secondary

MARA

Supports Malay/Muslim youth in launching and sustaining successful careers while building a hub of aspirational professionals committed to serving the community.

mGirl Co.

One-stop platform for Malay/Muslim women, empowering them in their professional development and personal growth.

Future Leaders Initiative (FLi)

Focuses on leadership development and networking for Malay/Muslim community volunteer leaders while them with skills and knowledge for the future.

Secondary

PEER Community Programme

Provides Malay/Muslim youths with support and mentorship to foster meaningful relationships and focuses on holistic growth.

Explore

Exposes students to critical soft skills and goal-setting beyond academics while encourages exploration of personal interests and create opportunities for meaningful, career-related conversations with peers.



Volunteer or Participate
COME JOIN US!

linktr.ee/mclubsg



Dr Shamsuri Juhari

Prior to founding Nusantara Connect Pte Ltd, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri Juhari was a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. His research focused on the local Malay/Muslim community, specifically in relation to the issues of identity, family, education, and employability. Dr Shamsuri has taught students across diverse backgrounds and abilities – from at-risk youth to high-ability students. He has also facilitated curricula at the Secondary, International Baccalaureate, Undergraduate and Masters levels. Dr Shamsuri received his PhD in Education from the University of Birmingham in the UK. He holds a BA and Masters in Sociology from the National University of Singapore, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the National Institute of Education, as well as an Advanced Diploma in Human Resource Management from Griffith University. His perspectives are often sought by the news media where he has contributed numerous interviews. He has also participated in current affairs programmes like 'Detik' Berita Mediacorp.

Finding Success in the Workforce: Empowering Youth from Singapore's Malay Community

Abstract

This article explores the challenges that Malay/Muslim youth face in Singapore as they navigate their educational and career pathways. Despite significant progress in fostering ethnic integration and inclusivity, challenges that may hinder equitable access to opportunities remain. Drawing on qualitative data from a study of Malay/Muslim workers, this article explores possible barriers such as limited access to educational resources, mentorship, and professional networks, as well as perceptions of workplace discrimination. The discussion highlights the importance of targeted intervention, including structured career planning, mentorship programmes, and enhanced access to upskilling initiatives like SkillsFuture. By addressing these gaps, the article outlines practical solutions for empowering Malay/Muslim youth from humble backgrounds to overcome challenges and better contribute to Singapore's workforce and society.



Singapore's commitment to meritocracy and inclusivity has contributed significantly to promoting equality and fostering opportunities for all.

Introduction

Singapore's commitment to meritocracy and inclusivity has contributed significantly to promoting equality and fostering opportunities for all. However, it is useful to explore if within this overarching framework, whether particular communities face noticeable challenges. Research does indicate that some challenges exist for the Singapore Malay/Muslim community. Mathews (2022) highlighted that despite the country's meritocratic system that is designed to promote equal opportunities for all, the Malay/Muslim community does face additional structural barriers. Teng (2023) in her study, *Pathways to Meaningful Careers*, identified the difficulties faced by Malay students of the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) in their transition into the workforce due to issues of education and skills gap, and the lack of support structures.

This article builds on data gathered from a study titled *Understanding the socio-cultural factors which shape the decision-making processes of Singaporean Malay/Muslim workers with regard to employment and training* (Juhari, 2023). Among its other objectives, the research was conducted to explore the socio-economic challenges faced by Singaporean Malay/Muslim workers, particularly focusing on how cultural and social backgrounds shape their employment decisions. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative

surveys with qualitative data gathered from focus group discussions (FGD) and life history interviews with Malay/Muslim workers across different profiles. In total, the research project involved more than 1,200 respondents from Singapore Malay/Muslim community. The focus in this article will be on the qualitative responses from participants under the age of 25 years old, and for some older respondents, the recollection of their experiences when they were part of the age bracket.

This article seeks to highlight areas where targeted intervention, ground-up strategies, and initiative refinements can help ensure that no one is left behind in Singapore's pursuit of inclusive progress.

A Foundational Challenge

Education has long been regarded as a cornerstone of social mobility in Singapore's meritocratic system. While significant strides have been made in ensuring access to quality education for all, some disparities can exist. For Malay/Muslim youth, the disparities could be compounded by financial constraints that limit access to supplementary academic resources, such as private tuition and enrichment programmes, which can be useful in navigating Singapore's competitive education system.

Participants in the study reflected on these challenges, with one respondent sharing:

My family couldn't afford tuition, so I had to rely on school and whatever help I could get from my friends.¹

Such a sentiment supports the findings of an earlier study on *Parents' Perceptions of the Singapore Primary School System* by Mathews, Lim, and Teng (2017). The research surveyed 1,500 Singaporean parents to explore various aspects of the primary school system, including parental stress related to their children's education. While these challenges are not unique to the Malay/Muslim community, they may be more pronounced given the community's socio-economic profile. The rise of 'parentocracy' — where a child's educational success is increasingly influenced by parental resources rather than individual merit—further exacerbates these inequalities. This term will be further explained in the next section of this article.

Additionally, the lack of role models and mentors within the community amplifies these challenges. For many Malay/Muslim youth, the absence of professionals within their family or social circles limits their exposure



¹ Self-Help Groups like MENDAKI run tuition programmes to support students from low-income backgrounds. MENDAKI's tuition programme is available for students from Primary 1 to Secondary 4 at a cost of \$10 per annum. It benefits more than 9,400 students in 2024.

to diverse career pathways. This gap in mentorship leaves them uncertain about their future prospects. One interviewee, a polytechnic student, shared:

I didn't have any career guidance in school, and I had no idea what options were available to me after I graduated.²

Without structured career planning or exposure to role models, many youth gravitate towards familiar but limiting career paths. For example, retail and security roles are often chosen due to their accessibility, but these roles offer limited opportunities for progression.

A 30-year-old housewife, reflecting on her time in the retail industry, expressed regret:

My family are all retailers... Even those young in age, lah... We are all retailers. My cousin, he's a [jewellery store] manager — big boss... Then my cousin, a girl, she's a retailer also. Previously, she worked at this accessories shop. So, retailer. So then, yah, most of my cousins are all retail side so that's why I like, 'Okay, you know, let's join the family trademark (sic), lah!

Another participant who also went into the retail industry straight after graduating from secondary school explained:

I took a job in retail right after my N-levels because it was easy to get into. Now, after a few years, I'm stuck in the same place with no opportunities for promotion.

These narratives highlight the importance of addressing both structural and social factors that influence educational and career outcomes.

These narratives highlight the importance of addressing both structural and social factors that influence educational and career outcomes. By enhancing access to academic resources, mentorship programmes, and early career guidance, it is possible to better support Malay/Muslim youth in realising their full potential.

² Education and Career Guidance (ECG) is available to all students in MOE schools (primary schools, secondary schools and junior colleges), polytechnics, and ITE. ECG is delivered through an ECG curriculum complemented with access to the MySkillsFuture portal, ECG experiences and ECG counselling services.

<https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/20201006-career-guidance-to-all-students>

<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education-in-sg/our-programmes/education-and-career-guidance/education-and-career-guidance-in-schools>

Family and Community Support in Education

Family and community support play an essential role in the academic and career success of students, particularly in fostering resilience and ambition. For Malay/Muslim youth, this support is often deeply rooted in emotional encouragement from families, even when financial and educational resources are limited. One participant remarked:

My parents were supportive, but they couldn't do much beyond offering encouragement. We didn't have the means to pay for extra help.

This echoes findings from research by Mathews (2017), which tells us that parents from low-income households often lack the knowledge and resources to guide their children through the education system effectively.

In Singapore, this can be seen in the way parents with better economic capital are able to provide additional educational support for their children, such as private tuition classes and enrichment classes. According to Tan (2014), these parents can afford to invest in resources that give their children a competitive edge in the high-stakes education system. It creates a divide where children from less affluent families – and subsequently do not have access to such resources – are disadvantaged from an early age.

Compounding these challenges is the growing prevalence of 'parentocracy' in Singapore. This term describes how parents' socio-economic resources have increasing influence over their children's educational outcome, compared to the children's individual merit. These dynamics risk undermining the meritocratic ideals of Singapore's education system, making it harder for students from lower-income families to compete on a level playing field (Chia, 2017).

To bridge these gaps, external support systems have become crucial. Organisations such as MENDAKI have stepped in to provide targeted assistance to Malay/Muslim families. Programmes like the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) offer affordable academic support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them close the gap and achieve better educational outcomes. Additionally, initiatives like mentorship programmes and career guidance workshops, offered by MENDAKI and other organisations, aim to provide Malay/Muslim youth with the resources and networks needed to succeed.

However, more can be done to expand these initiatives. For example, outreach efforts could focus on identifying and supporting students who are at greater risk of falling behind academically. By broadening the scope and reach of these programmes, community organisations can play a pivotal role in levelling the playing field and empowering Malay/Muslim youth to realise their aspirations.



This reliance on informal networks often confines Malay/Muslim youth to industries where their social circles have provided them with connections, like retail or security.

Barriers Beyond School and Education

The challenges faced by such Malay/Muslim youth extend beyond the classroom, affecting their ability to secure stable and fulfilling careers. Limited access to professional networks and opportunities in high-growth industries often restricts their career prospects. One participant shared:

It's hard to get a good job when you don't know the right people. Many of us rely on family or friends to help us find work, but that (itself) limits our options.

This reliance on informal networks often confines Malay/Muslim youth to industries where their social circles have provided them with connections, like retail or security.

Additionally, perceptions of workplace discrimination remain a significant concern. One respondent reflected:

I was passed over for promotions multiple times, and I couldn't help but feel it was because of my ethnicity.³

Data from the study revealed that 20.7% of respondents felt they had been treated unfairly in the workplace due to their race or skin colour (Juhari, 2023). These experiences, though subtle, contribute to the perception of a 'glass ceiling' that limits career progression. Research conducted by AWARE (2022) further supports these findings, indicating that perceived racial discrimination is one of the most common forms of workplace bias experienced in Singapore.

Additionally, research by the Institute of Policy Studies (Mathews, 2016) has found that workers of Malay and Indian ethnicity report higher levels of perceived discrimination in workplace promotions and career advancements. As mentioned by respondents in our study, they must then accept the situation or work harder to overcome the obstacle to achieve the same career outcomes as their Chinese counterparts.

The Singapore government has made strides in addressing these challenges through initiatives like the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP). Upcoming legislation to codify anti-discrimination guidelines into law represents a critical

³ On 8 January 2025, the Workplace Fairness Bill was passed in Parliament. The Bill will complement the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGEFP) to ensure no worker is left unprotected from workplace discrimination.

<https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2025/passing-of-workplace-fairness-bill-marks-next-step-in-building-fair-and-harmonious-workplaces>

step forward, providing workers with stronger legal protection and encouraging fair employment practices (Abu Baker, 2021). Community-driven solutions also play a vital role in overcoming these barriers. Mentorship programmes and professional networks, such as MENDAKI Professional Networks, provide critical support by connecting Malay/Muslim youth with industry professionals who can offer guidance and open doors to new opportunities. By leveraging these resources, youth can build the social capital needed to succeed in diverse industries.

Through a combination of policy reforms, organisational changes, and community-driven initiatives, Singapore can work towards creating a more equitable environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, can achieve their career aspirations.

Career Planning

Structured career planning plays a crucial role in helping youth navigate their transition from education to meaningful employment. However, Malay/Muslim youth from humble backgrounds may lack access to such guidance during their formative years, often leaving them unaware of the diverse career pathways available. One respondent shared:

I didn't have any guidance after school, so I just took the first job I could find in retail. Now, I feel like I'm stuck with no clear path forward.

To address this, schools and community organisations can play complementary roles in equipping youth with the tools they need for effective career planning. This includes school-organised comprehensive career planning workshops, that expose students to diverse fields and emerging industries. These workshops can also include practical activities such as skills assessments, goal setting, and mock interviews to prepare students for their professional journeys.

Community organisations like MENDAKI can amplify these efforts by offering mentorship programmes, job placement services, and internships in growth sectors such as technology, sustainability, and healthcare. Initiatives like the MENDAKI Professional Networks provide platforms for youth to connect with experienced professionals, offering invaluable insights and guidance as they navigate the complexities of career development. By investing in structured career planning, both at the school and community levels, we can empower Malay/Muslim youth to make informed decisions, pursue opportunities in high-growth sectors, and achieve their full potential in the workforce.



Community organisations, such as MENDAKI, have played a critical role in offering guidance and raising awareness about the potential benefits of international work.

Solutions and Recommendations

Addressing these concerns requires a multi-faceted approach. Community organisations, such as MENDAKI, have played a critical role in offering guidance and raising awareness about the potential benefits of international work. MENDAKI's #amPowered mentoring programme and MENDAKI Club's Mara mentoring programme, for instance, helps Malay/Muslim youth access mentors and career advice to broaden their horizons. The initiative offers structured mentoring to accelerate the career growth of undergraduates, providing them with access to industry professionals who can guide them in career development and encourage them to consider global opportunities.

By implementing these solutions, Singapore can support Malay/Muslim youth in achieving their aspirations while fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Empowering individuals through targeted initiatives will not only enhance their contributions to the workforce but also strengthen the nation's social fabric.

Conclusion

The journey toward ensuring equitable opportunities for Malay/Muslim youth in Singapore requires a multi-faceted approach that acknowledges both their unique challenges and the broader societal context. While the government has made significant strides in promoting ethnic integration and inclusivity, there remain nuanced challenges that warrant targeted interventions.

By investing in early career guidance, expanding access to educational resources, and fostering professional networks, we can empower Malay/Muslim youth to pursue their aspirations confidently. Community-driven initiatives, supported by progressive policies and organisational reforms, play a vital role in bridging existing gaps and enabling these youths to realise their full potential.

As Singapore continues to evolve as a meritocratic and inclusive society, it is essential to ensure that no one is left behind. A collective commitment — spanning individuals, organisations, and policymakers — will not only uplift the Malay/Muslim community as a whole but also contribute to the nation's social cohesion and economic resilience. With the right support and opportunities, all youth can thrive as valuable contributors to Singapore's future.

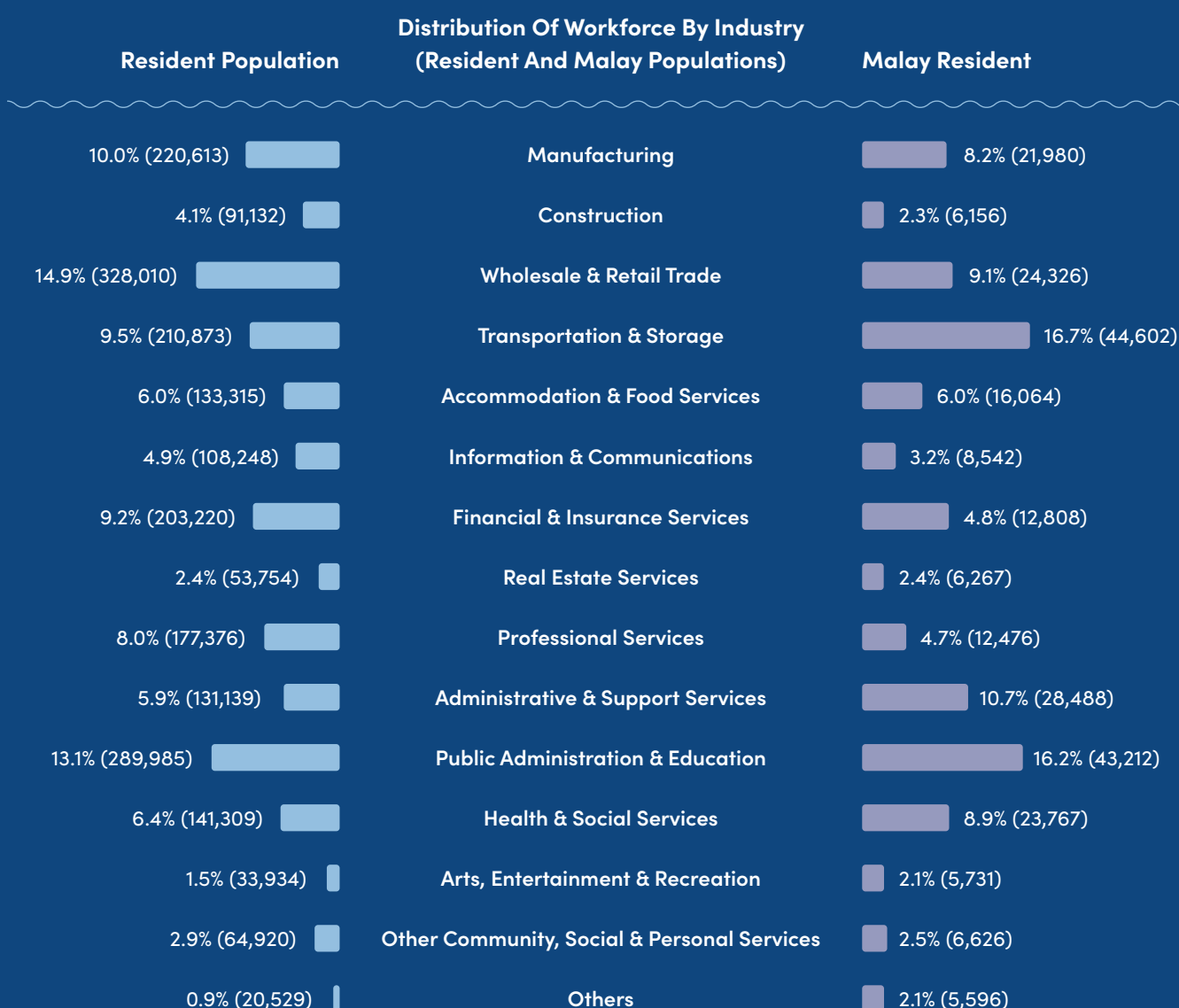
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Did You Know?

This lack of early guidance often results in Malay/Muslim youth opting for familiar but limiting career choices, such as entering industries with low barriers to entry, like retail and security.

- Based on the Census Population 2020, the resident Malay population was predominantly in Transportation and Storage (16.7%), followed by Public Administration and Education (16.2%), and Administrative and Support Services (10.7%).
- The National resident population was predominantly in Wholesale & Retail Trade (14.9%), followed by Public Administration and Education (13.1%), and Manufacturing (10.0%).



These testimonies highlight the importance of external support systems, such as community organisations like MENDAKI, which provide support to the educational progression of Malay/Muslim students through scholarships, tutoring, and mentoring programmes.

Programmes and Assistance by MENDAKI

MENDAKI launched the #amPowered mentoring programme for upper secondary MTS and ITE students in 2022. Through this mentoring programme, MENDAKI aims to:

- Equip youth to remain in school, progress to the next level and graduate from school;
- Be goal-oriented and aware of education and career pathways; and
- Establish a strong network and be well-connected.

#amPowered Mentoring Programme

In 2023, MENDAKI successfully trained and matched over

300 mentors

with more than

1,500 mentees



The lack of access to professional networks further limits the career prospects of Malay/Muslim youth, particularly those from lower-income background who may not have connections in high-growth industries. Addressing this requires both community-driven solutions and government interventions aimed at creating more inclusive hiring practices.

MENDAKI Professional Network (PN)

MENDAKI Professional Network aim to groom next generation community and industry leaders, and leverage community assets to accelerate our collective success.

- Through the networks, professionals will be able to **connect** with other professionals, build and enhance their **career capital**, including leadership and tap on opportunities to **contribute** to the community.
- Within each professional networks, a Core Team led by a Lead and Assistant Lead, is formed to spearhead the engagements among the professionals within the network. The Core Team is responsible for organising

activities and engagement sessions to enhance networking among the professionals in the sector, creating awareness among the youth on the various sectors of works and attracting them to join the sector upon graduation as well as enable or pilot ground-up projects that will benefit the community.

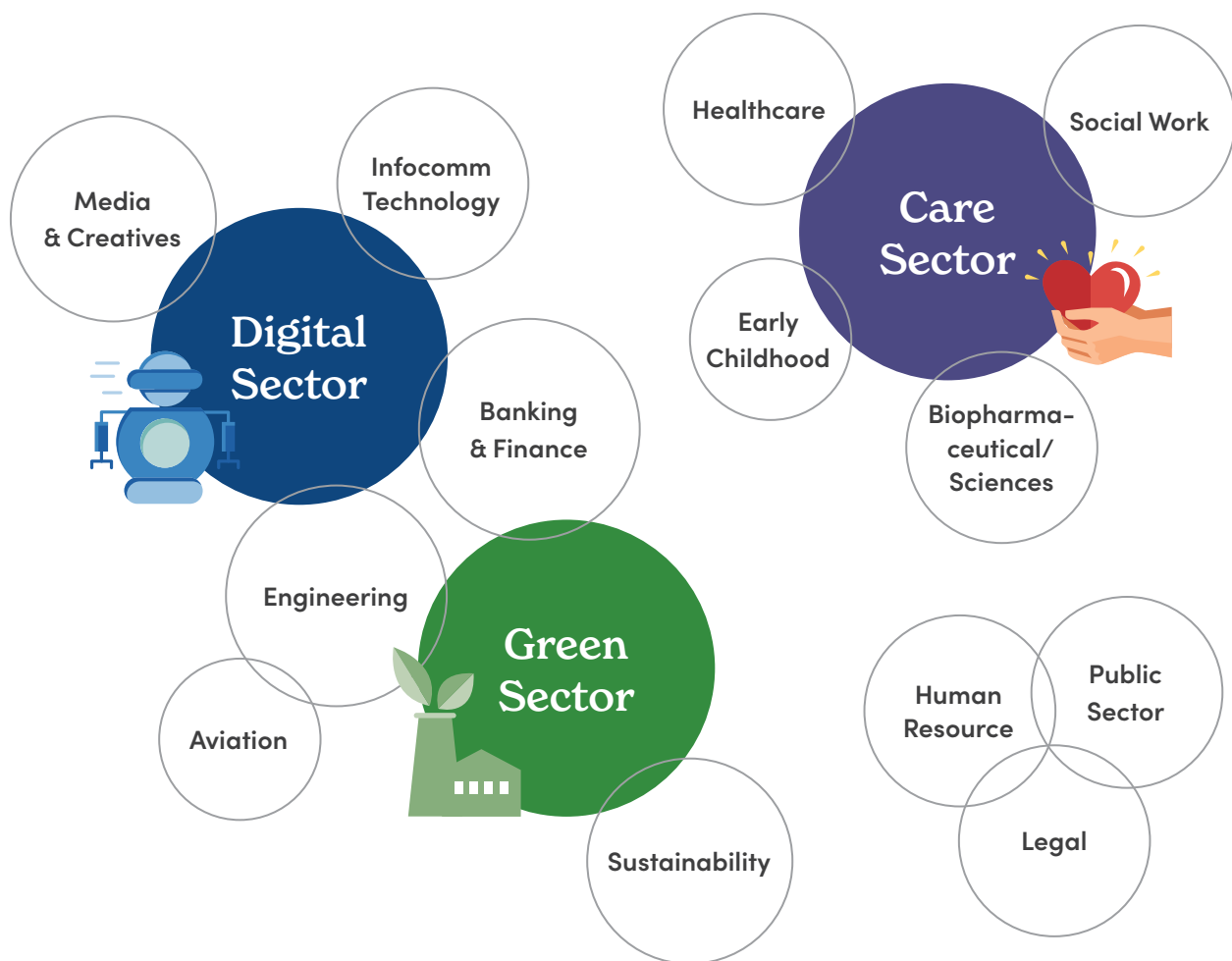
- Between 2022 and 2024, MENDAKI has connected with over 850 Malay/Muslim professionals in the Care, Green, and Digital sectors and formed a total of 13 PN. MENDAKI leverages the expertise of professionals in these networks, who are eager to make a positive difference in the community.
- Professionals can join the main MENDAKI PN LinkedIn page or look out for the annual #MakingConnections event in July to learn more about MENDAKI PN and how they can be involved in its activities.



MENDAKI Professional Network LinkedIn
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14134485/>



13 Focus Sectors (by Dec 2024)



National-Level Programmes and Assistance

Aside from initiatives directed to create opportunities for networking and gaining social capital, MENDAKI strongly recommends youth to tap on national-level programmes and assistance schemes. Introduced in 2015, all Singaporeans aged 25 years and above will receive an opening SkillsFuture Credit of \$500¹. From 1 May 2024, Singaporeans aged 40 years and above will receive a SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career) top-up to pursue a substantive skills reboot. This is a key component of the SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme.

The Singaporean government's SkillsFuture initiative offers opportunities for lifelong learning and skills upgrading.

Base Tier

- For all Singaporeans aged 25 years and above
- S\$500 opening SkillsFuture Credit does not expire
- A one-time top-up of \$500 was provided to those aged 25 and above in 2020. This top-up will expire at the end of 2025
- Can be used for a wide range of SkillsFuture Credit-eligible courses



Mid-Career Tier

- For Singaporeans aged 40 years and above
- **NEW** Top-up of \$4,000 SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career) that does not expire.
- The course list will be available on MySkillsFuture from 22 April 2024.
- **ENHANCED** A one-time top-up of \$500 was provided to those aged between 40-60 years (inclusive) in 2020. The expiry date for this top-up will be lifted. Any balance from the 2020 top-up will be merged with the new \$4,000 top-up.
- Can be used for about 7,000 selected courses that support substantive upskilling and reskilling.



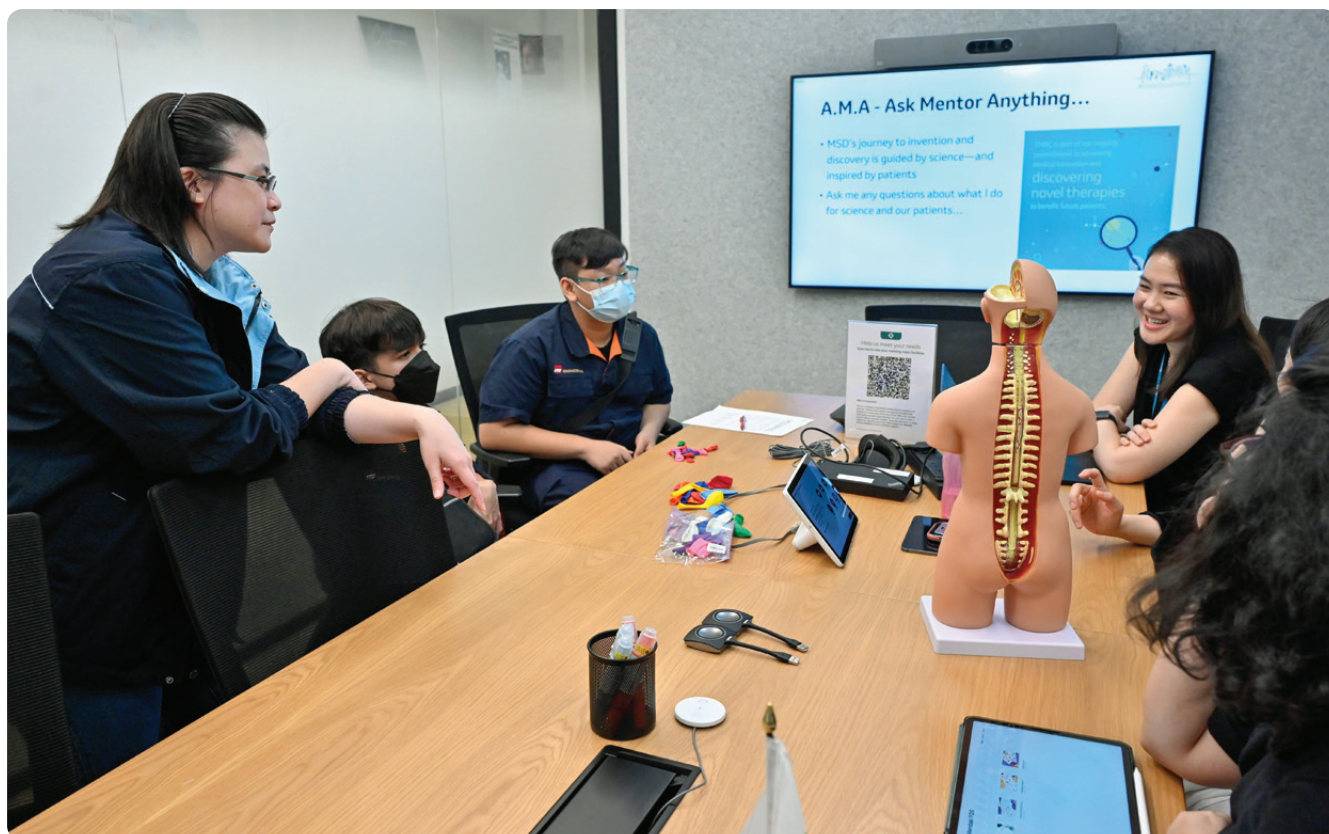
¹ SkillsFuture Singapore. (n.d.). *SkillsFuture Credit*. <https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg/initiatives/early-career/credit>

My Journey into Healthcare and Beyond



Dr Norhisham Bin Main

Dr Norhisham Bin Main is the Head of Division & Senior Consultant, Division of Supportive Care & Palliative Medicine, Department of Medicine at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. He also serves as the current Vice-Chairman of the Chapter of Palliative Medicine Physicians (2022- 2024) of the Singapore College of Physicians. He was also a council member of Singapore Hospice Council from 2016 to 2022. Dr Norhisham was also the President of the Muslim Healthcare Professionals Association (MHPA), dedicated to building a network of healthcare professionals who practice medicine guided by Islamic principles.



Like most people, not all of my interviews went well and resulted in the expected outcome. Following my enrolment, I applied for awards and scholarships to help finance my varsity studies.

Today, education and career guidance are readily available in our schools. Education and Career Guidance counsellors explore education goals and identify learning needs to map possible education paths and, subsequently, a career. The availability of such counselling guidance contrasts with the past when guidance was usually from parents, teachers, or seniors.

I am thankful that my teachers identified my strengths and shared advice that helped shape my future. When it came to selecting university courses, I considered their advice and my parents' perspectives when choosing my course of study - Medicine.

When I received the letter that shortlisted me for an interview as part of the medical school admission, I consulted my parents for guidance again. That was my first-ever major interview. I recalled that I had to seek permission to book out from camp to attend the interview and rehearsed mentally how I would approach the interview while enroute there. Thank God I cleared the interview and soon enrolled at the National University of Singapore.

Like most people, not all of my interviews went well and resulted in the expected outcome. Following my enrolment, I applied for awards and scholarships to help finance my varsity studies. Sadly, the applications and interviews for scholarships fell through. One organisation offered me an alternative - an interest-free loan for the duration of my course. I accepted it as there were other costs to consider, like textbooks and miscellaneous fees. It worked out for me as I was already fortunate enough to receive tuition fee subsidies.

When it came to books, other students from our senior years would pass their books to juniors once they finished and cleared their exams. Additionally, I turned to available low-cost textbooks, which helped reduce expenditures. These were known as English Language Book Society (ELBS) student edition books, which were released through ELBS. They released quality books at reduced prices for students in developing countries.

My undergraduate years were fun. The first year involved conceptualising a float for NUS' Rag and Flag Day. There were also song fights where we challenged other faculties in singing and cheering. We cheered till our voices were hoarse. Within our faculty, we had inter-year competitions, from sports to drama performances. There were the Malaya University – National University of Singapore (MUNUS) annual games when the faculty of medicine from both NUS and University Malaysia would take turns hosting students at their campus for friendly competitive sporting events.

There was less time for play from our third year onwards as we started clinical rotations in various departments at different hospitals. Two of these hospitals no longer exist – Changi Hospital and Toa Payoh Hospital. More modern facilities have since replaced them.

After five years of undergraduate studies involving tutorials, lectures, bedside teaching, and postings to various hospitals and clinics, I graduated as a doctor to enter the working world.

That first year of work as a house officer was a real eye-opener into what life would be like as a doctor. The hours were long. There were on-call duties every few days. Being on-call meant sleepless nights carrying out responsibilities. Regular work continued the next day, regardless of whether I had adequate rest or sleep. We could go off in the afternoon after being on-call when the situation permits. Clearly, this is no longer the situation now with changes to the on-call system. Junior doctors end their day earlier after being on-call.

Having friends to weather through those times made it so much easier to bear. I recall going for Hari Raya visits with my friends and falling asleep from fatigue at times as I was post-call. My kind friends would wake me whenever I fell asleep, and it was time to go to the next house. This is the spirit of Raya and friendship!

Colleagues, from nurses to therapists, helped, too. Starting out in a busy ward with new protocols and people may seem daunting to a newbie. Asking for advice and tips from those around eases the learning required. The work does require everyone's effort and contribution to help the admitted patients. It does not take much to realise that we are part of the ward team that works to help each patient. Teamwork does make the work better!

Even as a full-fledged doctor, learning does not stop. There is ongoing continuing medical education. Clinical departments have weekly

After five years of undergraduate studies involving tutorials, lectures, bedside teaching, and postings to various hospitals and clinics, I graduated as a doctor to enter the working world.

teaching sessions ranging from topic reviews and journal article reviews to mortality reviews. Some departments made it compulsory for staff to attain a specific minimum attendance at these sessions. That is no longer necessary today as doctors must earn continuing professional education points from such sessions to maintain their practice licence.

I learnt the value of having good mentors and how to mentor others. A senior doctor who taught me as a student gave me excellent advice – not rushing into training but taking the opportunity to have breadth and depth with each clinical rotation. I must agree that was the best advice ever. Each clinical rotation became an opportunity to learn directly from the senior doctors, deepen knowledge, hone skills and gain experience.

There are tough postings not only from a clinical perspective but also from the workload and complexity of care. Some may view the workload as challenging due to its manpower structure, which consists of only medical officers and no junior house officers to augment the team. This happens when it is a subspecialty posting, and the care is complex. I had several of such postings, which gave me good exposure and experience that I still value today.

One such posting was with geriatric medicine. It opened doors into a different world for me. Although there were only three medical officers, we bonded together through hard work and rough days. How well did we bond? Our teamwork was such that we could see a late admission together and complete it not only efficiently but also effectively. Our ward nurses could ask any of us on work matters so that patient matters are attended to, expediently. We ensured our work was done before lunch, even if it meant a late lunch together. It was one-for-all and all-for-one effort. We would also not leave a 5 pm admission for those on-call to ease the burden for those on duty. I had the utmost respect for my two fellow medical officers and their work ethic and teamwork. Today, one is a family physician with a general practice clinic; the others are a haematologist and a geriatrics and palliative physician working in public hospitals.

Little did I know that that geriatric clinical posting would motivate me to become a geriatrician a few years later. I completed my postgraduate exams that qualified me for specialist training. By then, I had also completed a postgraduate diploma in palliative care. Having to choose from various possible specialities was like being at a crossroads.

Incidentally, my first exposure to palliative care was during that same posting to the geriatric department. My consultant had just returned from his Health Manpower Development Programme (HMDP) in palliative care. His enthusiasm and passion for geriatrics and palliative care were most inspiring. It helped to have other consultants trained in palliative care within the department. Even the head of the department was among the pioneers of palliative care in Singapore. Working with them helped me develop a different perspective on medicine – it is not about saving lives all the time but about the dignity and comfort of those facing a life-limiting illness. It is also not about dying but living



well despite a terminal illness. Whenever an aged person is admitted ill and confused, treatment can help them improve and recover. However, even the best available treatment cannot always help them. At this time, physicians must learn to recognise this and maximise the patient's comfort. For some reason, the patient sometimes really does know better about themselves. When we give them a voice and listen, they will share their sense that their time is up. They do not seek longevity but seek comfort. They hope not to suffer and wish for their family to be at peace.

Working with seniors is interesting. They have a wealth of experience with stories of the past that are truly amazing. Some have lived through the world war in Asia and share about life during that period. Some were activists during Singapore's tumultuous times after separation and independence. There is another side to the story they share of that challenging period. Others have dark histories of being involved in gangs, secret societies, and even using opium dens. Regardless of their past, they acknowledge life's fragility and mortality in their golden years.

With our rapidly ageing population, issues related to older people have come to the forefront. Falls, frailty, impaired cognition and degenerative conditions on a background of chronic illnesses take a toll on them. Screening programmes help to identify emerging health issues for earlier intervention. Education on various age-related conditions creates awareness and overcomes myths associated with ageing. Active ageing programmes keep them healthy and connected. Geriatricians collaborate with multiple agencies in the community to enhance these programmes and mitigate the impact of ageing.

In recent years, the need for palliative care has become more apparent. With awareness of palliative care and how it helps, more are asking it. This is not only for the silver generation but also for those with a life-limiting illness.

The focus of my work has shifted in this direction to help meet their needs. Many people have the misconception that palliative care means it is the end with no other treatment. The truth is that palliative care helps people live well despite their illness as they create their legacies and eventually die peacefully. This care positively impacts the patient and their families and loved ones. Therefore, palliative care is not all doom and gloom as people celebrate their lives and start living life again beyond treatments and their illnesses.

To further palliative care development, I immerse myself in the training of other doctors so they may deliver palliative care to their patients in their settings. These doctors may be general practitioners working in a GP clinic, polyclinic or home care. Specialists in other fields are also learning more about palliative care to serve their patients better.

Apart from doctors, I teach medical students as a lecturer and tutor at NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. The undergraduate students are attached to my team to learn how to provide care to patients. Bedside manners and communications are among the finer points of care that

Apart from doctors, I teach medical students as a lecturer and tutor at NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. The undergraduate students are attached to my team to learn how to provide care to patients.



we share with our students. These are in addition to the usual knowledge and skills that they must acquire as part of their training so that they may become more empathetic and compassionate in care delivery when they become full-fledged doctors.

Periodically, I would have students contact me for an opportunity to do a job shadow. These students are keen to explore the healthcare industry as a potential career. Students arrange job shadows through the education office within my institution, which coordinates and supports the administration of such activities. Those who job shadow my team will also shadow the different members of my multi-disciplinary team in their day-to-day work. When they are with the various multi-disciplinary team members, they view the care delivered from that perspective. This helps them appreciate the diverse roles of the healthcare team in the care of patients.

In recent years, I volunteered my time to give back to our community. Most significantly, I volunteered with MHPA, which focuses on bringing together Muslim professionals in healthcare to further the health of our Muslim community. MHPA has and continues to hold various programmes, such as health screening and health talks, to raise health literacy. Historically, these programmes have involved members and students who are still in their undergraduate years in medical, nursing, pharmacy and other allied health schools. The Covid-19 pandemic brought these to a standstill and resumed progressively with virtual seminars and events. Activities have since normalised now.

Our students have maintained their interest in MHPA and are committed to organising the annual Muslim Healthcare Outreach Programme (MHOP). This programme continues to attract students from our madrasahs, junior colleges and polytechnics. Even upper secondary students have attended. Healthcare professionals support this programme by sharing their experiences and offering job shadow opportunities. At the organisational level, MENDAKI collaborates with MHPA to support MHOP.

MHPA has adopted newer approaches in its community outreach. Partnering with other like-minded agencies has increased our reach to the community. The collaborations facilitate access to other programmes and services. For example, our good relationship with MENDAKI is a definite enabler in this. MENDAKI, through its network of professionals, eases the building of bonds with others. Cross-disciplinary exchanges occur during their networking events, which lead to further collaborative efforts.

I recently handed over the reins of MHPA and stepped down as its President. The connections built are enduring. Other doors have opened, and I am now venturing further beyond. Thus, my journey continues.

Did You Know?

Career Guidance

In a youth study done by the Institute of Policy Studies, they found that **youth desire greater support in terms of career development, career guidance and navigating career switches:**

- The top three areas to address in this respect include:

The availability and accessibility of development opportunities to remain employable and relevant

Cited by
36%

Career guidance, mentorship and support during the school-to-work transition and beyond

Cited by
34%

Support for switching fields and or industries

Cited by
30%

Our Career Guidance Officers (CGO) at the YouthSpace at the ITE Colleges play a primary role in ensuring final year / graduating students in ITE receive support in venturing to their new academic progression and promote progressive pathway. Resources such as resume and email writing, face-to-face interview skills, grooming ethics are some of the skills shared with the students to prepare them for interview and the workforce, be it for internship or Work-Study Diploma.

Our CGO also foster good relationship with stakeholders, connect students to relevant ITE personnel such as Student Welfare Officer, Health Promotion Board, Student Services, Customer and Visitor Centre and others.

The Future Of... Series (FOS) is a series of interactive sessions conducted by MENDAKI where students engage industry professionals to gain first-hand industry insights, changes to work and economic landscape, and the necessary 21st-century skills to thrive in the future economy.

The series aims to:

- Highlight education and career pathways for students to make informed decisions upon graduation
- Partner youths in their education by bridging them to beneficial partners, opportunities, and resources
- Heighten awareness of skills required (beyond paper qualifications)



Source: Wewalaarachchi, S., & Xing, E. (2023) *Singapore Perspectives 2023: Work Panel 8: The Meaning and Value of Work: Taking a Cross-Generational Perspective*. <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/sp2023-panel-8-report.pdf>

MENDAKI Study Loan

MENDAKI offers interest-free study loan, which is available to Muslim students, who require financial aid to pursue a full-time diploma or degree course at government institutions locally. The interest-free study loan helps to partly finance their tuition fees.

More information can be found here: https://www.mendaki.org.sg/assistance_landing/study-loan-full-time-local/

Did you know that 3,952 Malay students in University in Year 2020 took health science?



Recruitment of doctors in Singapore

90%

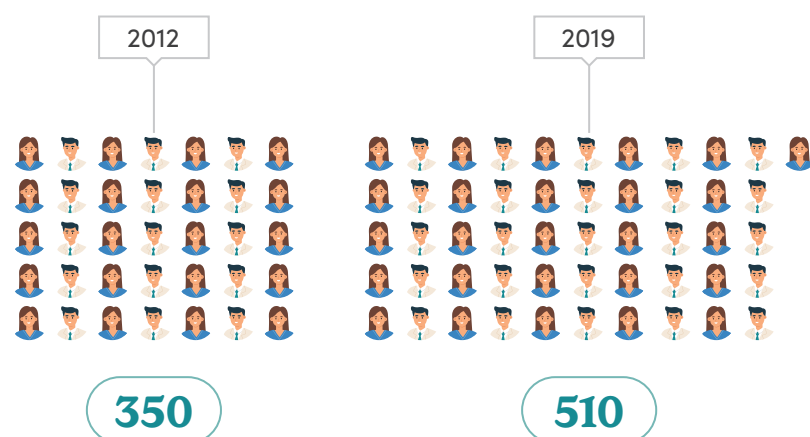
Over 90% of junior doctors recruited annually by the Ministry of Health Holdings (MOHH) company of Singapore's public healthcare clusters annually are local.



700

MOHH recruits about 700 junior doctors to support the needs of Singapore's public healthcare institutions every year.

Between 2012 and 2019, Singapore's medical schools increased their combined intakes by 45% from 350 in 2012 to about 510 in 2019.



+45%



The Straits Times (2022, October 1). *Over 90% of junior doctors hired are local: MOH Holdings.* <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/over-90-of-junior-doctors-hired-are-local-moh-holdings>

Intake, Enrolment and Graduates in Singapore in year 2023

Did you know that the total number of intakes for medical students for year 2023 were 431, enrolment were 2,270 students, and graduates were 441 students? This is in contrast with intakes for medical students for year 2022 which were 461 students, enrolment were 2,301 students, and graduates were 421 students. There seem to be an increase in intake and graduation of medical students compared to previous year.

Year	Intake	Enrolment	Graduation
2022	461	2,301	421
2023	431	2,270	441

Below are the list of courses and their respective intakes, enrolment and graduates for year 2023 in Singapore for full time students.

Courses	Intake	Enrolment	Graduates
TOTAL	21,370	81,006	19,162
Accountancy	1,131	4,430	1,286
Architecture, Building & Real Estate	298	1,610	465
Business & Administration	3,033	12,391	3,037
Dentistry	80	319	59
Education	208	644	166
Engineering Sciences	5,396	18,927	4,257
Fine & Applied Arts	391	1,459	370
Health Sciences	1,149	3,911	948
Humanities & Social Sciences	3,496	14,884	3,918
Information & Technology	3,701	12,918	2,492
Law	520	1,954	447
Mass Communication	155	656	169
Medicine	431	2,270	441
Natural & Mathematical Sciences	949	3,419	875
Services	370	1,152	232

Sources:

Ministry of Education. (2024). *Education Statistics Digest 2024*. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/about-us/education-statistics-digest-2024.pdf>

Ministry of Education. (2023). *Education Statistics Digest 2023*. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/about-us/education-statistics-digest-2023.pdf>

Empowering the Youth: The Future of Policymaking



Muhammad Firdaus Bin Kordi

Firdaus is a Partnerships Officer at MENDAKI. He majored in Building and Project Management at Singapore University of Social Sciences. He also completed his Specialist Diploma in Advanced Composites and Diploma in Materials Science at Republic Polytechnic (RP). Prior to joining MENDAKI, he was an Assistant Contracts Manager with Land Transport Authority (LTA) and a Materials Science Research Assistant with RP. He currently volunteers with various organisations such as the People's Association (PA), MENDAKI Club (MClub), and National Youth Council (NYC). His interests include active citizenry, environmental sustainability, and eating.

Abstract

This article explores the significance of youth engagement in policymaking, emphasising its importance in youth representation in formal processes such as the formulation of present and future policies. It highlights how government agencies, academia, and other stakeholders must build a certain level of trust and bridge gaps between themselves and youth through such engagement. This article also shares the writer's point of view as a panel member of NYC — an initiative that amplifies young voices, enables them to contribute meaningfully to societal progress, and appreciate the complexity of policymaking and public service.



Policymaking is a long and complex process involving various stakeholders from government agencies, businesses, academia and citizens, each coming with their different interests and resources (California State University Long Beach, 2002).

Introduction

Launched by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and NYC, Youth Panels are one of the channels that young Singaporeans and the government could come together and co-create policies. At the Youth Policy Forum in August 2024, these youth worked with various government agencies to research, deliberate, and propose policy recommendations. Their findings and recommendations will be presented to the relevant ministries and tabled in the Parliament in 2025.

As Singapore gears up to celebrate 60 years of independence in 2025, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong announced the SG60 engagement sessions with youth by MCCY and NYC (Goh, 2024). This underscores the government's commitment to shared values like multiculturalism and resilience. Such an initiative is essential to bring in more youth to collaborate with government agencies to share their visions and aspirations of the future.

Policymaking is a long and complex process involving various stakeholders from government agencies, businesses, academia and citizens, each coming with their different interests and resources (California State University Long Beach, 2002). Their views shape the policies that are either goal-oriented or purpose-driven, designed and implemented to respond to current and potential issues and challenges faced by the country (Hudson et al., 2019). For instance, Singapore faces an ageing population, rising cost of living and healthcare, and impact of

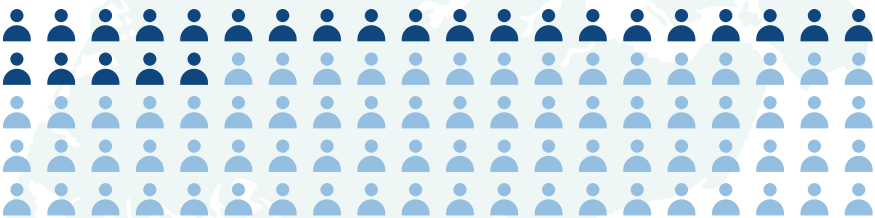
climate change. As we move toward an era of greater uncertainty with violence, conflicts, and huge divisions amongst the people in other parts of the world, we must continue to find innovative ways to involve more stakeholders to shape policies that matter to them in today's context to strengthen Singapore's stable and peaceful multiracial country.

Why Youth in Policymaking Matters?

In an article published by the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (n.d.), it notes that every segment of the population must be represented in politics. The authors warned that, when youth are disengaged from the decision-making process, a huge proportion of society has limited voice and influence in the decisions that affects them. Consequently, youth may feel neglected by the government, possibly destabilising democracy and widening conflict dynamics amongst different age segments. Youth form a large share of the global population and yet only 2.8% of global parliamentarians are aged 30 or under (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Arguably, if the views of youth are not being acknowledged, the policies implemented are unlikely to reflect their political priorities and perspectives. In other words, when the youth leaders are ignored and not given a seat at the table, governments are likely to have little to none youth advocacy.

Youth voices in policymaking can make a significant impact on the future. MCCY defines youth as those “aged 15 to 35 years old” and as of end June 2024, they make up 25% of Singapore's population (Department of Statistics Singapore, n.d.). Additionally, those aged 30 to 34 years-old form the largest age group in the population and will cause potential long-lasting socio-economic implications due to a considerable demographic shift as they age. The segment is likely to become the future leaders of Singapore with vast amount of knowledge and experiences. If their ideas and concerns are not addressed today, they will inherit a future that would be challenging to navigate.

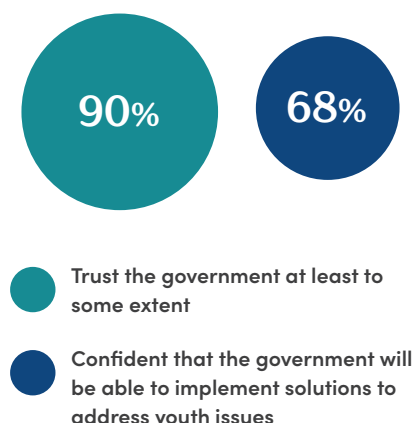
Percentage of youth in Singapore's population as of end June 2024



Source: Department of Statistics Singapore, n.d.

Additionally, those aged 30 to 34 years-old form the largest age group in the population and will cause potential long-lasting socio-economic implications due to a considerable demographic shift as they age.

Level of Youth's Trust in The Government



Joint Study by IPS Social Lab and NYC in 2022

It is paramount that the government build a certain level of trust with youth. In a joint study conducted by Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab and NYC (2022), it was found that 90% of the youth trust the government at least to some extent and 68% are confident that the government will be able to implement solutions to address youth issues. When the youth are involved in the early stages of policy design, it gives a positive indication that the government is committed to hearing their views. When it comes to policies that matter to youth, the government must be committed to act on their ideas and solutions and to respond to their concerns. Nonetheless, it takes time and some “engineering” for youth to build trust in the government. Perhaps through youth education and curriculum, youth could be better informed about the policymaking processes. This, in turn, sets the tone of youth engagement in policymaking – it is a long and tedious process, and their solution may not be implemented immediately. This is emphasised by Mr Ng Soon Kiat, Associate News Editor at *Lianhe Zaobao*, during the Singapore Perspectives 2024 “Youth” Conference by IPS (Mak, 2024).

Forms of Youth Participation in Policymaking

In Singapore, there are various platforms for youth engagement such as workgroups, dialogues, and youth panels, to encourage young people to share their lived experiences and concerns. These concerns, subsequently, shape their vision of the future. For meaningful participation, these engagements must exhibit characteristics of transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability (OECD, 2017).

The success of such participation leverages critical questions: Who is in the room? What are their intentions? Are they representing themselves or are they speaking on behalf of their community? Additionally, factors like ethnicity, gender, age, education, and professional background must be considered to ensure that the youth present are representative of the wider youth demographic (OECD iLibrary, 2021).

Government agencies, community leaders, and academia should also be involved in such engagements to facilitate a meaningful conversation and provide the necessary resources for effective outcomes.

Roger Hart’s (1992) Ladder of Participation framework could be used to conceptualise youth participation in policy making. The framework is designed to model how trust is built, guidance is provided, and youth are empowered to take meaningful actions. It can align with the developmental and societal roles of young people in policymaking. In Hart’s (1992) framework, it emphasises the ethical and meaningful participation ranging from non-participation to genuine engagement where young people can initiate and direct action. A similar adaptation of Hart’s framework is OECD’s version of Forms of Youth Participation as shown in Table 1 which identifies “informing the youth” as the lowest form of youth participation and “empowering the youth” as the highest form of youth participation.

	Modality
Informing (Low Form)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent communication from media outlets, internet, etc.
Consulting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Dialogues • Focus Group Discussions
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-facilitation and co-conducted consultations • Internship programmes in Ministries or public institutions • Collaboration in research: data gathering, report writing
Empowering (Highest Form)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth parliament • Youth-initiated and -led consultation or campaigns • Youth-organised and managed programmes with full responsibility for implementation

TABLE 1

Forms of Youth Participation

A notable example of “informing” was during the Covid-19 pandemic, where news platforms and social media played a crucial role in disseminating information about Singapore’s circuit breaker measures.

In Singapore, youth can engage in various forms of participation. Policies are effectively communicated through new media platforms, making information readily accessible. Policymakers and government agencies also act as enablers, providing young people with the necessary resources to inform themselves of and understand policies and their rationale. Some examples of effective informing are Budget and National Day Rally speeches where efforts are made to engage the public with key highlights and infographics. A notable example of “informing” was during the Covid-19 pandemic, where news platforms and social media played a crucial role in disseminating information about Singapore’s circuit breaker measures.

An example of Consulting, Collaborating, Empowering can be seen in the case study of youth engagement in policymaking through the NYC Youth Panel.

Case Study: A Perspective as a #GreenHacks Youth Panel.

Background and Journey as a Youth Panel Member

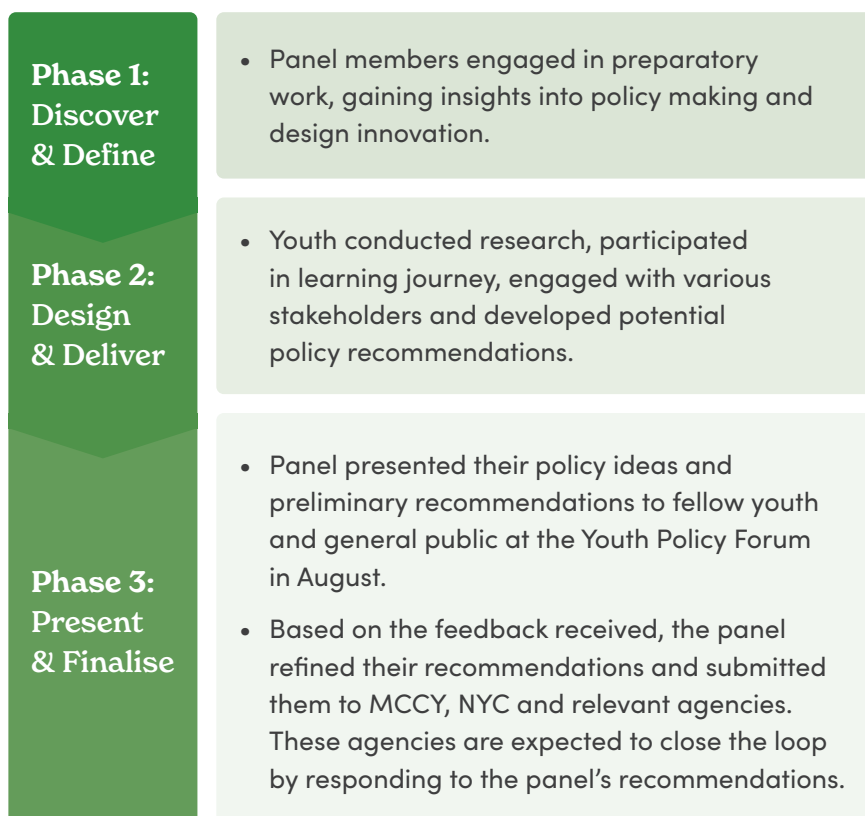
My passion for active citizenry and community involvement drives my inspiration to be part of this Youth Panel. I believe that my voice as a youth and minority in Singapore is important to be represented as it triggers positive change for a better Singapore.

Since the onset of Covid-19, I have developed a deep interest in creating positive change and contributing to my community. During that period, I was searching for ways to occupy my weekends and channel my energy productively. I discovered opportunities to engage with various government agencies through my exploration process. I began participating in workgroups and focus-group discussions, and I quickly grew to love the process, especially the chance to meet new people and learn from their perspectives.

The #GreenHacks panel that I participated in had about 40 members, including advisors, panel leads, and consultants. The panel brought together a diverse mix of individuals, ranging from secondary school students to working professionals across various disciplines such as environmental sustainability, education, technology and social services.

The Youth Panel journey was divided into three distinct phases (NYC, n.d.):

FIGURE 1
Youth Panel Journey

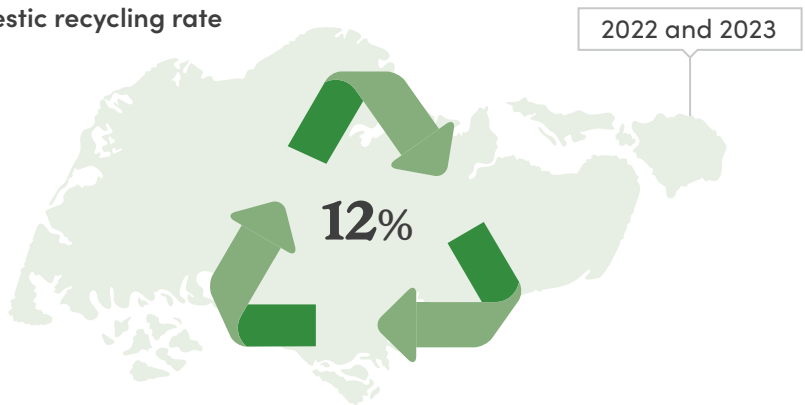


My journey as a panel member has been a rollercoaster experience. It encompasses panel meetings, desk research, stakeholder engagement, deliberations and presentations, and not forgetting the endless hours of online meetings.

#GreenHacks Problem Statement

The #GreenHacks Panel has chosen to explore alternative recycling solutions and initiatives to increase Singapore’s recycling rate while reducing contamination in the process. According to the National Environmental Agency, the domestic recycling rate¹ in 2022 and 2023 stood at just 12%, whilst the overall recycling rate² has declined significantly since a decade ago to 52% from 62% (Ganesan, 2024). Despite existing recycling infrastructure such as Bloobins (Clean and Green Singapore, n.d.) and campaigns like Recycle Right (Clean and Green Singapore, n.d.), progress remains muted. Alarmingly, the lifespan of Pulau Semakau landfill has been revised downwards to 2035 (Choo & Abu Baker, 2023), raising the questions: are our incinerators more efficient than the materials recovery facilities?

Domestic recycling rate



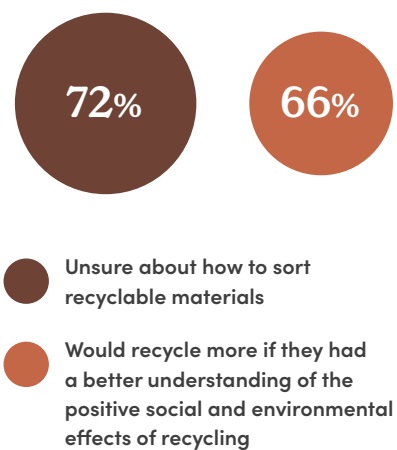
Source: National Environmental Agency

#GreenHacks Preliminary Recommendations (NYC, n.d.)

Through the panel’s research and engagement, we have identified that the lack of public awareness and willingness to recycle correctly surfaced as top challenges when it comes to recycling.

The panel had commissioned a survey through Milieu Insight to understand the level of involvement among Singaporeans with recycling as well as their motivation and challenges in being more mindful about reduce, reuse, and recycle. Based on the 1,000 responses they received, two interesting findings emerged: 72% of Singaporeans were unsure about how to sort recyclable materials and 66% would recycle more if they had a better understanding of the positive social and environmental effects of recycling.

Level of involvement among Singaporeans with recycling



Survey through Milieu Insight

¹ Domestic recycling rate refers to only the recycled household waste from residential area through the blue bin, recycling chutes and other recycling initiatives for residents whilst non-domestic recycling rate refers to recycled wastes from all other sectors and this includes industries from construction, manufacturing and businesses.

² Overall recycling rate refers to both domestic and non-domestic recycling rates.

In response to these challenges, the panel has proposed the three-pronged approach of Information, Infrastructure and Involvement, as illustrated below:



The panel is confident that these strategies can guide the public to recycle right, improve recycling rates, and reduce contamination rates.

Personal Reflection as Panel Member

The collaborative nature of the Youth Panel initiatives, where youth work alongside like-minded individuals and policymakers to co-create impactful solutions, resonated deeply with me. I believe that developing effective and inclusive solutions requires a diversity of expertise, perspectives and ideas. Meeting and engaging directly with stakeholders felt more meaningful to me as compared to simply writing letters to our Members of Parliament.

Before joining the Youth Panel, I had high hopes and expectations for the impact that we as youth could have on sustainability-related policies and initiatives. I believed that we could bring fresh perspectives, innovate, and bring a sense of urgency to drive meaningful conversations. While I still firmly believe in the power of youth to create change, my journey on the panel has given me a deeper understanding of the complexities, trade-offs and challenges involved in policymaking.

Through this experience, I have gained valuable insights into how policies are formulated, including the level of research and evidence required to substantiate the problem statements underlying these policies. Our panel met with the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment for a context-setting session to align our goals with theirs. I was tasked to co-lead the research team so that we could build a strong knowledge base when designing our public survey on their habits and challenges of recycling as well as helping the policy deliberation and writer team to curate the recommendations and writing the policy paper.



I was honoured to represent the panel in presenting our preliminary recommendations to Prime Minister (PM) Lawrence Wong and Minister Edwin Tong at the Youth Policy Forum in August 2024. Initially, I felt a mix of nervousness and pressure upon learning of my nomination. However, with thorough practice during the preparatory session with the panel leads and members, my confidence grew.

During the interactions with PM Wong, he appeared to be supportive of our recommendation, particularly expressing interest in the outcomes of 800 Super's segregated waste bin trials. He was impressed by our prototype for a "Recycling Label". The public response to the "clear recyclable label" recommendation has been positive, with many appreciating the push for producers to inform consumers about product recyclability, fostering better recycling habits.

Diverse perspectives, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving are invaluable. All of us have something to bring to the table, new ideas and unique solutions. The experience has taught me the importance of empathy, respect and inclusivity, where all contributions are valued.

Benefits of Youth Engagement in Policymaking

This has been a transformative journey both personally and professionally. As I stepped into this role, I quickly realised that it was more than just voicing opinions but also about collaborating and listening to drive meaningful change. It also challenged me to think critically and strategically when engaging with various stakeholders. Hence, it has assisted me in developing resilience and adaptability in the face of complex issues. This experience showed me the importance of youth involvement in shaping policies to be inclusive and forward-looking.

In essence, when youth participate in co-curating engagements, we develop essential soft skills such as teamwork, decision-making, and social competencies. Connecting with our peers through civic conversations, brainstorming sessions, and ideation activities further strengthens our social capital. Additionally, when we feel that our views and needs are heard, we experience a sense of inclusion and respect, fostering self-awareness and identity. As mentioned in the previous section, youth involvement in the policymaking process helps us understand and appreciate the work of the government, promoting transparency and accountability. Involving the youth creates a sense of ownership over policies and initiatives. This cultivates and empowers them to contribute meaningfully to societal development.

During the interactions with PM Wong, he appeared to be supportive of our recommendation, particularly expressing interest in the outcomes of 800 Super's segregated waste bin trials.

Conclusion

Youth engagement in policymaking is pivotal to building a progressive and inclusive society. By engaging and involving youth in the process, policymakers can harness fresh perspectives and ideas to address complex societal challenges. Creating structured platforms for civic participation such as workgroups and panels empower the youth to take ownership of their future.

As a member of Youth Panel, my experience of youth empowerment through meaningful engagement has been transformative. Involving youth in policymaking can bridge generational gaps, inspire social responsibility, and cultivate leaders and is thus not just an investment in the present but a commitment to a sustainable, inclusive future.

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Did You Know?

Youth participation in policymaking allows youth to be engaged in formal processes where they have a voice in formulating the present and future of politics.

Based on the National Youth Council's National Youth Survey 2021, younger Singaporeans (15-24 years old) are more active in civic participation across most topics than older youths.

	15-19 (n=716)	20-24 (n=804)	25-29 (n=926)	30-34 (n=946)	Overall (n=3,392)
Civic Participation					
Actively discussed social or political issues with others offline	45%	47%	42%	39%	43%
Signed a petition	36%	33%	25%	19%	27%
Attended an event in support of a social or political issue (e.g. Earth Hour)	25%	22%	16%	18%	20%
Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community (e.g. organising a fundraising event, an awareness campaign)	17%	12%	11%	10%	12%
Attended a discussion on social affairs (e.g. Youth Conversations)	15%	9%	9%	7%	10%
Created and posted original content online related to a social or political issue	15%	10%	8%	9%	10%
Important Social Issues					
Global warming/Environmental Issues	51%	40%	37%	39%	41%
Mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, depression, etc.)	40%	41%	38%	33%	38%
Racism and discrimination	42%	37%	29%	29%	34%
Lack of youth representation on public issues	11%	6%	5%	4%	6%

Highest Participation

Lowest Participation

The #GreenHacks panel that I participated in comprised approximately 40 members, including advisors, panel leads, and consultants. The panel brought together a diverse mix of individuals, ranging from secondary school students to working professionals across various disciplines such as environmental sustainability, education, technology and social services.



In MENDAKI, we have our Professional Networks (PN) programme that facilitates such sharing sessions. The PN plans sharing sessions throughout the year, supporting professionals in growing their networks and facilitate their contribution efforts to the community. Earlier this year, MENDAKI hosted a networking session with professionals from the Sustainability sector. The session was graced by Mr

Sharael Taha, Member of Parliament for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC.

If you are currently in or interested in a career in sustainability, click the QR code to find out more about MENDAKI PN for the Sustainability Sector.



In Singapore, there are various platforms for youth engagement such as workgroups, dialogues, and youth panels, to encourage young people to share their lived experiences and concerns. These concerns, subsequently, shape their vision of the future.

MCCY and NYC have been engaging youth voices through the Youth Action Plan. As part of the upcoming 60th anniversary of Singapore's independence, MCCY and NYC are expanding this through the SG60 Youth Engagements, encompassing three main areas of Racial and Religious Harmony, Sustainability & Environment, and Mental Health. To share your voice for the next 60 years of Singapore's journey, visit @paym.youths on Instagram.

Section II

Policy Scans

Education

- ✳ Enhancing Preschool Affordability
- ✳ Curriculum Changes
- Changes to Tertiary Education Admissions

Enhancing Preschool Affordability



Full-day childcare fee caps for Anchor Operator (AOP) and Partner Operator (POP) centres will be lowered by \$40, to \$640 and \$680 per month respectively (before GST).

- With existing basic and means-tested subsidies, monthly out-of-pocket fees will be between \$3 and \$441 (See Tables 1 and 2 for details)
- The fee caps will be lowered further in 2026, so dual-income families with a child in AOP full-day childcare will pay around the equivalent of primary school and student care fees



TABLE 1

Full-day Childcare expenses at an AOP centre with a revised fee cap of \$640 (\$698 after GST)

Gross monthly household income of	Current		From 1 Jan 2025	
	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy
\$3,000 and below		from \$3		\$3
\$3,001 to \$4,500		from \$25		\$25
\$4,501 to \$6,000		from \$115		\$85
\$6,001 to \$7,500	\$741 (after GST)	from \$185	\$698 (after GST)	from \$143
\$7,501 to \$9,000		from \$255		from \$208
\$9,001 to \$10,500		from \$315		from \$272
\$10,501 to \$12,000		from \$365		from \$339
Above \$12,000		from \$441		from \$398

TABLE 2

Full-day Childcare Expenses at a POP Centre with a revised fee cap of \$680 (\$741 after GST)

Gross monthly household income of	Current		From 1 Jan 2025	
	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy
\$3,000 and below	\$785 (after GST)	from \$18	\$741 (after GST)	\$3
\$3,001 to \$4,500		from \$45		\$25
\$4,501 to \$6,000		from \$145		\$101
\$6,001 to \$7,500		from \$225		from \$181
\$7,501 to \$9,000		from \$255		from \$251
\$9,001 to \$10,500		from \$355		from \$311
\$10,501 to \$12,000		from \$405		from \$361
Above \$12,000		from \$485		from \$441

Lower-income families will benefit from increased childcare subsidies (See Table 3 for details)



TABLE 3

Full-day childcare expenses at an Anchor Operator (AOP) centre with enhanced preschool subsidies for lower-income families

Gross monthly household income of	Current		From 1 Jan 2025*	
	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy	Monthly fees before subsidy	Monthly fees after subsidy
\$3,000 and below	\$741 (after GST)	from \$3	\$698 (after GST)	\$3
\$3,001 to \$4,500		from \$25		\$25
\$4,501 to \$6,000		from \$115		\$85

*Fees will be lower as full-day childcare fees will be lowered from 1 Jan 2025.

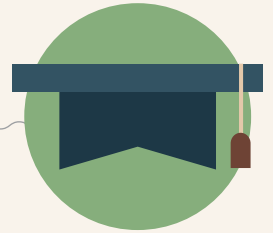


Curriculum Changes

Gifted Education Programme (GEP)

The current form of the GEP in primary schools is replaced with a new approach to stretch students with higher abilities.

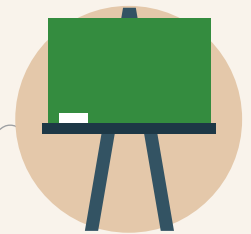
- Equip schools to identify their high-ability learners
- Each primary school will have its own programmes to stretch students in their areas of strength and interest
- Students will continue to remain in their own primary schools



Full Subject-Based Banding (Full SBB)

Full SBB is part of MOE's ongoing efforts to nurture the joy of learning and develop multiple pathways to cater to the different strengths and interests of our students.

- Full SBB has been fully implemented since 2024
- Students can expect the following changes:
 - » Consolidated examination timetable
 - » From 2027, the new Singapore-Cambridge Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination will replace both N- and O-Level examinations
 - » Graduating students will sit for the SEC examinations at their respective subject levels (i.e. G1, G2, G3)



Higher Mother Tongue Learning

More students will be allowed to study Higher Mother Tongue languages (HMTL) in Secondary 1.

- Currently, students must obtain either the following to study Higher Mother Tongue at Secondary 1:
 - » A PSLE overall score of 8 or better
 - » A PSLE overall score of 9 to 14 with a Mother Tongue score of AL1/AL2 or at least a merit in Higher Mother Tongue
- From 2026, students can take up HMTL in secondary school as long as they obtain AL1/AL2 in their Mother Tongue, or a distinction or merit in HMTL at PSLE





Changes to Tertiary Education Admissions

Polytechnic Year 1 admission criteria

Currently, for admission to Polytechnic Year 1, students must take five G3 (i.e., 'O'-Level equivalent) subjects, which are computed into their ELR2B2.

- From the 2028 intake, students can use a G2 subject to compute their ELR2B2 score for admission to Polytechnic Year 1

From 2028

2 'Relevant G3 subjects'

ELR2B2

English Language G3

1 'Best' G3 subject + 1 'Best' G2 or G3 subject

1 G2 subject can be counted as 1 [B] subject. If you take a G3 subject, it will be mapped to G2.

G3 Grade	MAPPED TO	G2 Grade
A1, A2, B3		1
B4, C5, C6		2
D7		3
E8		4
9		5
		6

Family, Social Development & Housing

- ✦ Empowering Low-Income Families
- ✦ Strengthening Families
- Changes to Housing Policies

★ Empowering Low-Income Families

ComLink+ aims to uplift lower-income families with children towards stability, self-reliance and social mobility (3S).

- As part of the Forward SG exercise, MSF announced the shift from ComLink to ComLink+, which entails two key enhancements:
 - » Introduction of dedicated family coaches to coach, motivate and journey with families over the long-term. To better support ComLink+ families, MSF is recruiting about 200 more family coaches from current pool of about 120
 - » Providing additional financial support to families that do their part to improve their life outcomes via ComLink+ Progress Packages. These packages aim to recognise and supplement the efforts of ComLink+ families to improve their children's preschool education, employment, household finances, and progress towards home ownership



Stability

Self-reliance

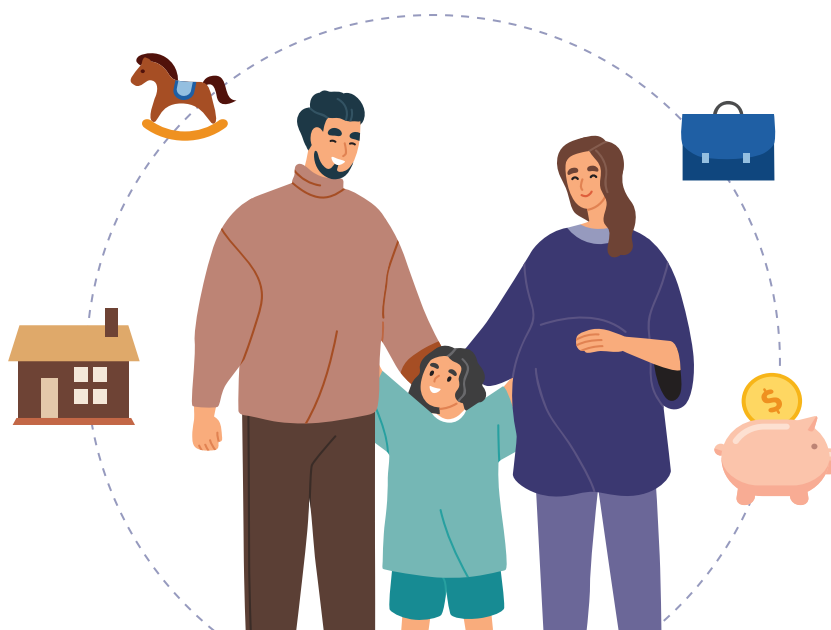
Social mobility



Current coaches, ~120



To add more coaches, ~200





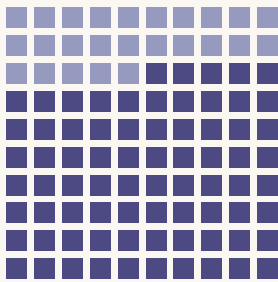

Today, ComLink+ serves about **10,000** families with children in public rental housing

From March 2024, ComLink+ will be extended to other lower-income families on KidSTART and UPLIFT Community Network (UCN), who are not residing in public rental housing. The aim is to onboard around 3,000 eligible families on KidSTART and UCN to ComLink+ over the next few years.

The ComLink+ Package for Preschool was rolled out in the second half of 2024. With this first ComLink+ Package, eligible ComLink+ families can get a total of up to \$3,700 worth of Child Development Account (CDA) top-ups for each child as follows:

- A one-time top-up of \$500 to the CDA of each child who is enrolled in preschool in the year the child turns 3. Children in ComLink+ families who were born in 2021 or later will be eligible to receive this benefit
- A \$200 top-up for each quarter for each child aged 3 to 6 years old who attends preschool for at least 75% of the school days
- All ComLink+ Package top-ups to the CDA enjoy matching contributions from the Government. This means each child can start primary school with up to an additional \$7,400 in their CDA
- The funds in the CDA could be used for medical services at healthcare institutions, vitamins and supplements at pharmacies, eye care products at optical shops, etc.

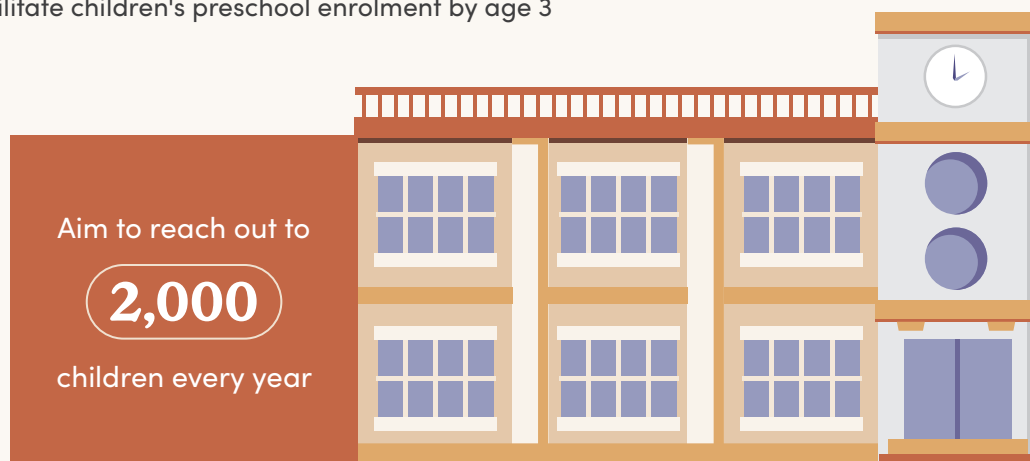


<p>One-time top-up of</p> <p>\$500</p>  <p>3 years old</p>	<p>\$200</p> <p>top-up for each quarter</p>  <p>3 to 6 years old</p>	 <p>Attend preschool for at least 75% of the school days</p>	<p>Start primary school with up to an additional</p> <p>\$7,400</p> 
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Preschool Outreach Programme

Expansion of Preschool Outreach Programme to more children from lower-income families.

- Encourage and facilitate children's preschool enrolment by age 3



Strengthening Families

Families for Life (FFL)

FFL offers a wide range of programmes to enhance and enrich family relationships.

- Families for Life @ Community initiative to be expanded from 9 to 18 towns
 - » More families will benefit from FFL marriage and parenting programmes, support and resources
- Increased access to FFL parenting programmes and resources for lower-income parents with children in AOP preschools
 - » Customised delivery of FFL parenting programmes and additional support to facilitate attendance to equip lower-income parents with skills
 - » Aim to reach 50% of lower-income families in AOP preschools by 2027

Families for Life
@ Community



+9 towns



Policy changes to paternity leave and shared parental leave

Strategy	Before	After
Paternity leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 weeks mandatory 2 weeks voluntary 	All 4 weeks mandatory
Shared parental leave	Husbands can share up to 4 weeks of their wife's maternity leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 1 Apr 2025: +6 weeks From 1 Apr 2026: +10 weeks

More paid leave for parents

Parents will get **30 weeks** of paid leave in total under the enhanced schemes.

	Now:	From Apr 1, 2025:	From Apr 1, 2026:	
New shared parental leave	Mums can share up to 4 weeks of maternity leave with husbands	6 weeks of shared leave, on top of maternity leave	10 weeks of shared leave	10 weeks +

- Equally split between parents, but can be reallocated within 4 weeks after the child’s birth
- Leave to be taken within first 12 months of the child’s birth

Mandatory govt-paid paternity leave	2 weeks of govt-paid leave + 2 weeks (voluntary basis)	4 weeks of mandatory govt-paid leave	4 weeks +
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Maternity leave	Remains unchanged	16 weeks =
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Total parental leave by 2026:

30 weeks

Source: National Populations & Talent Division

Changes to Housing Policies

BTO flat application priority extended to singles

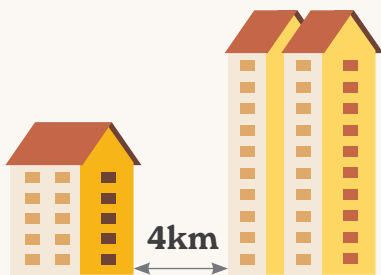
- Singles applying for BTO flats will get similar priority access as married couples when they buy a home near or with their parents

NDR 2024

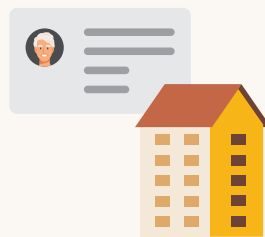
BTO flat application priority extended to singles

Currently, priority access is given to only married couples and their parents buying new flats to live with or near each other.

How priority access works now



Apply for a BTO project **within 4km of your parents' or child's home**



If you are applying to live with your parents or child, their names must be included in the flat application



After collecting the keys to your new flat, your parents or child **must continue** to live with you or within 4km of your new flat throughout the flat's minimum occupation period

Source: HDB

Enhancements to the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS)

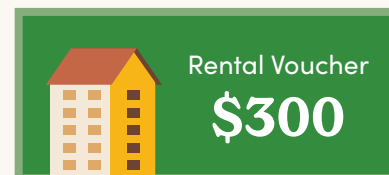
The PPHS provides eligible families renting a HDB flat or bedroom from the open market a rental voucher of \$300 per month to defray the cost of their rental.

- The scheme is available for new HDB flat applicants whose household incomes are \$7,000 and below, while they are waiting to collect the keys to their new flats. Married couples with at least one child aged 18 and below, including expectant parents, receive priority in the allocation of flats
- To meet the current demand, HDB has doubled the supply of PPHS flats since 2021 to 2,000 units, and will further double it to 4,000 units by the second half of 2025

Household income

\$7,000

and below



Enhancements to the Fresh Start Housing Scheme

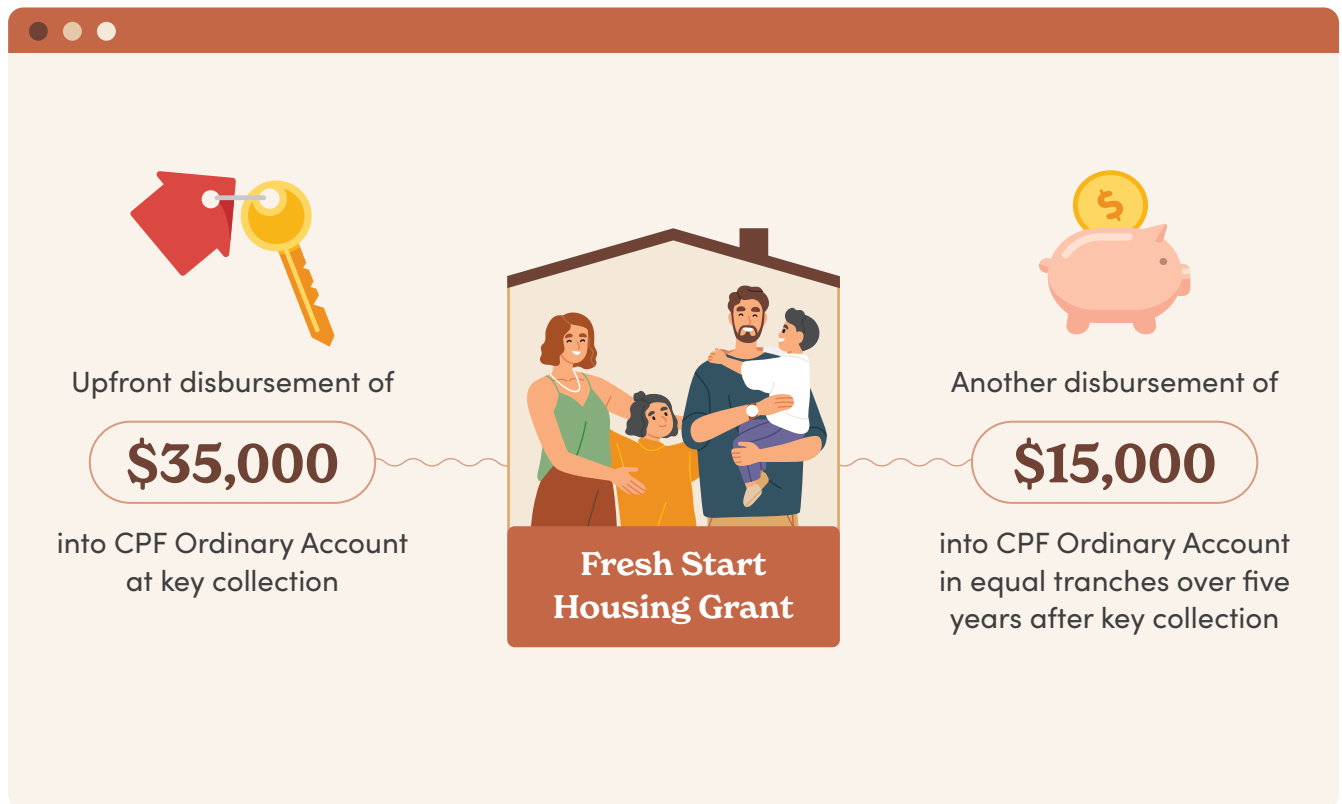
The Fresh Start Housing Scheme was introduced in 2016 to help rental tenants who are second-timers with children and who are currently staying in public rental flats, to buy a home of their own again.

- Compared to first-timers who receive substantial housing subsidies to buy their first flat, second-timer families receive less subsidies
- The Scheme takes a targeted approach to help these families buy a 2-room Flexi flat to start afresh in a new home

HDB will further enhance the Fresh Start Housing Scheme through the following measures:

- The Fresh Start Housing Grant will be increased from \$35,000 to \$50,000
 - » Eligible families will receive an upfront disbursement of \$35,000 into their CPF Ordinary Account at key collection
 - » Another \$15,000 will be disbursed into their CPF Ordinary Account in equal tranches over five years after key collection

- Besides 2-room Flexi flats with lease lengths ranging from 45 to 65 years, Fresh Start families now have the option to buy 3-room flats with the same lease lengths
 - » These shorter-lease 3-room flats will be more affordable than those on 99-year leases, ensuring families still have a home for life



Community and Youth

✦ Mentoring

✦ Initiatives for Youth

Mentoring



Mentoring SG

Mentoring SG is a movement that aims to create a thriving mentoring culture in Singapore, so that every youth can find growth opportunities amid life transitions, and be empowered to fulfil their fullest potential.

- Launched by DPM Lawrence Wong on 9 December 2022, the Mentoring SG movement will support youth from diverse backgrounds as they undergo pivotal life transitions, by offering mentoring opportunities that build tenacity, soft skills, and knowledge, as part of career and personal development. To drive this movement, NYC has set up a Mentoring SG Office to:
 - » Expand structured mentoring opportunities for youths by forging more partnerships among schools, corporates, mentoring organisations;
 - » Establish a first-stop portal to help mentors and mentees find suitable opportunities tailored to their needs; and
 - » Build capabilities among interested mentors by providing training and resources, and sharing best practices
- Launch of Mentoring for Youth – a Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications, WSQ-accredited course, which equips mentors with effective facilitation and communication skills through scenario-based practices
- Embarking on a research study to measure the impact of mentoring programmes and partnerships

Initiatives for Youth

Youth Action Challenge

The Youth Action Challenge (YAC) is a key thrust of the SG Youth Action Plan, empowering youth to champion ground-up initiatives in partnership with government, businesses, and community organisations.

- Over the past 5 seasons, more than 1,000 youth and over 280 youth projects have received funding to tackle issues such as sustainability, social isolation, and mental wellbeing



Youth Panels

Youth panels provide a platform for youth to have a greater say in policymaking.

- 140 youth from diverse backgrounds
- A good mix of schooling youth and young working adults
- Youth have a direct role in deciding the issues that the Youth Panels would address
- These panels receive support from government agencies throughout their term – including access to agencies' policy considerations, expertise, and data to inform their policy deliberations

Economy and Employability

- ✦ Upskilling and Reskilling Initiatives
- ✦ Financial Support for the Involuntarily Unemployed
- Industry and Employment Trends

Upskilling and Reskilling Initiatives

SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme (SFLP)

The SFLP provides greater structural support for mid-career Singaporeans aged 40 years and above to pursue a substantive skills reboot and stay relevant in a changing economy.

- Support to defray course fees:
 - » From 1 May 2024, Singaporeans aged 40 and above will receive a SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career) top-up of \$4,000, which does not expire
 - » The top-up can be used to defray out-of-pocket fees for selected courses that support upskilling or reskilling
 - » This is in addition to the existing Mid-Career Enhanced Subsidy (MCES), which offers subsidies of up to 90% of the course fee for MOE/SSG-funded programmes for Singaporeans aged 40 and above

SkillsFuture Mid-Career Training Allowance

Full-time course:

Up to

\$72,000

(\$3,000 / month) over a period of 24 months

Part-time course:

To be announced



Enhancements to the Career Conversion Programmes (CCP)

\$7,500 per month

\$5,000 per month



For **mature or long-term unemployed workers** who are eligible for up to 90% salary support, the salary support cap will be raised from \$6,000 to \$7,500 per month.

For **other CCP participants** who are eligible for up to 70% salary support, the salary support cap will be enhanced from \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month.

Currently, CCP reskilling support is limited to employees presently in at-risk or vulnerable job roles. Going forward, support is provided for any existing employee taking up growth jobs identified under the Industry Transformation Maps or Jobs Transformation Maps.

ITE Progression Award (IPA)

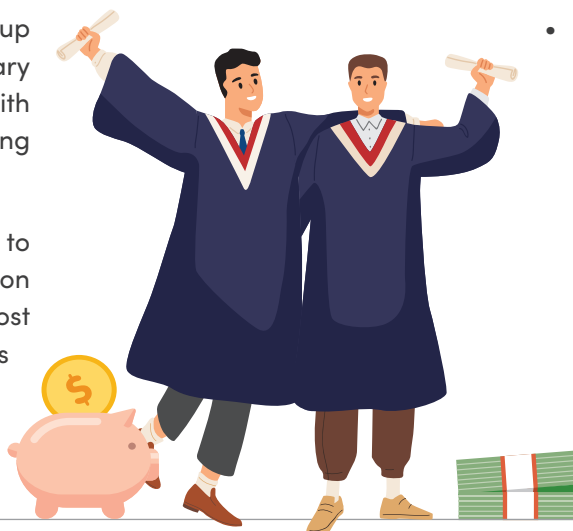
The IPA supports ITE graduates to attain a diploma earlier to secure better progression prospects in their chosen professions.

Aged 30 and below

Singaporean ITE graduates

Above 30 and already enrolled in a diploma

- Receive a \$5,000 top-up in their Post-Secondary Education Account to help with the upfront costs of obtaining a diploma
- Receive a \$10,000 top-up to their CPF-OA upon completion of their diploma to boost savings for longer-term goals



- Receive a \$10,000 top-up to their CPF-OA upon completion of their diploma to boost savings for longer-term goals



Financial Support for the Involuntarily Unemployed

SkillsFuture Jobseeker Support Scheme

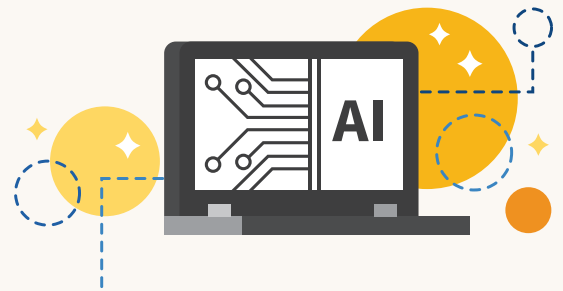
- Temporary financial support to lower- and middle-income workers to reskill
- Up to \$6,000, over a period of up to 6 months



Industry and Employment Trends

Artificial Intelligence (AI) initiatives launched to uplift Singapore's economic potential

MDDI (then MCI) announced several AI initiatives to power Singapore's next bound of economic growth:



- New initiatives to nurture AI research talent
- An investment of over \$20 million in the next three years to increase the number of SG Digital Scholarships and overseas internships in AI roles
- An investment of up to \$500 million into securing high-performance compute resources for AI innovation and capability building
- Launching a Generative AI x Digital Leaders Initiative to provide businesses with access to GenAI expertise and resources
- The publication of Advisory Guidelines on the use of Personal Data in AI Recommendation and Decision Systems

The shift towards Skills-Based Hiring

IMDA and the TIP Alliance launched the Skills-Based Hiring Movement, together with a handbook providing practical guidance for firms to attract, assess and develop tech talent based on competencies.

- The Skills-Based Hiring approach aligns with Forward SG to embrace learning beyond grades
- Schools are working to ensure students in tech gain more industry-relevant experience

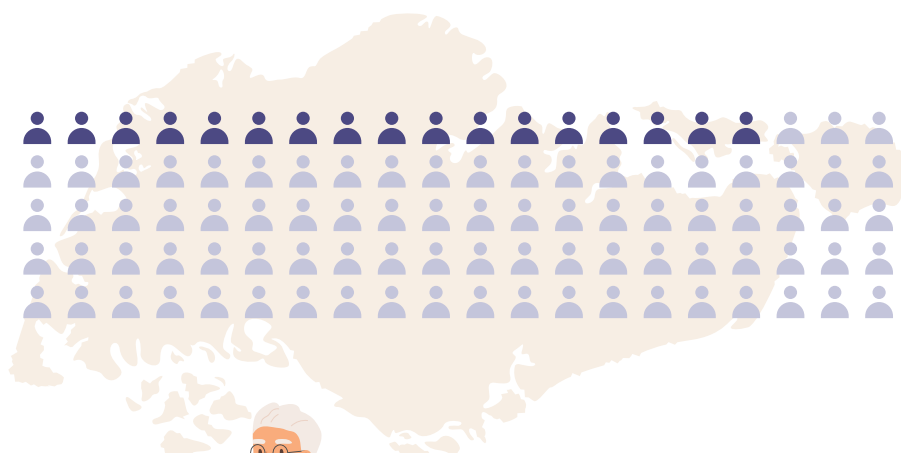
Elderly and Health

- ✦ Elderly Resident Statistics
- ✦ Initiatives for Elderly Residents

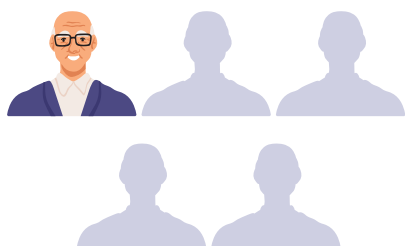
Elderly Resident Statistics

Ageing Singapore

17 to 18 percent of the Singapore population is now aged 65 and above.



Older seniors aged 85 and above will need more support:



1 in 5

has difficulties with 3 or more Basic Activities of Daily Living



60%

are frail to severely frail



4%

are at higher risk of social isolation

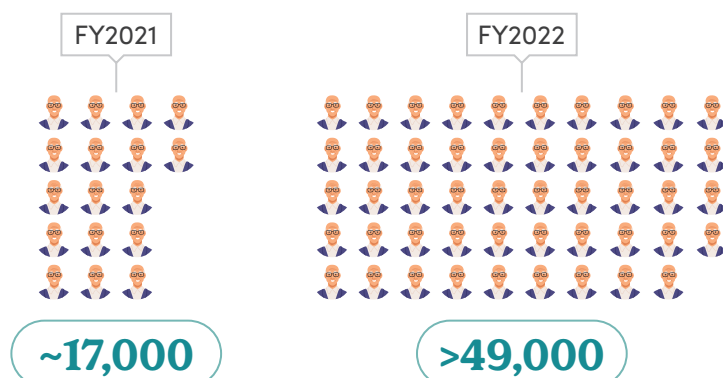
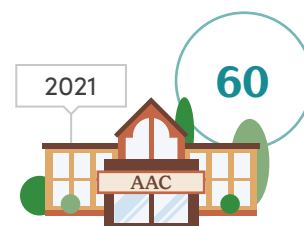
MOH has implemented the Healthier SG and Age Well SG programmes last year to address these issues.

✦ Initiatives for Elderly Residents

Progress of Active Ageing Centres (AAC)

An AAC is a drop-in social recreational centre that extends support to seniors living nearby in the community. It is a go-to point for seniors to have the opportunity to build strong social connections, take part in recreational activities, and contribute to the community as they wish.

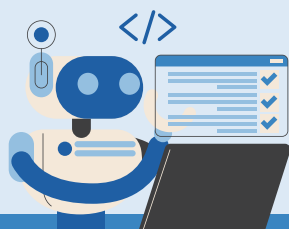
- The number of AAC has more than tripled from 60 in 2021 to 208 today
- The number of seniors engaged and taking part in AAC activities per year has more than doubled, from about 17,000 in FY2021 to more than 49,000 in FY2022
- Engagement of seniors is improving fast. One in five AAC has engaged more than 30% of seniors in their assigned populations



Number of AAC x3.5
Number of seniors x2.9

AAC activities are getting more varied and interesting

Seniors at NTUC Health AAC are learning to code robotics and teaching other seniors how to do the same.



Montfort Care's Goodlife Studio at Bukit Purmei trains seniors in carpentry and woodworking.



Senior Volunteerism

The Silver Generation Office has recruited thousands of senior volunteers, which are known as Silver Generation Ambassadors (SGA).

- SGAs engage other seniors in their homes and community places, check on them, and connect them to relevant government schemes
- In April 2023, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) implemented a pilot programme for Silver Guardians, where they recruited, trained, and matched volunteers to AAC
- Silver Guardians co-facilitated active ageing programmes such as Chair Zumba, music workshops, art & craft programmes, robotics and coding classes, etc.
- 400 volunteers have been recruited as Silver Guardians
- AIC will scale up its efforts to recruit, train and match about 2,400 Silver Guardians by 2028

Silver Guardians

400

volunteers recruited

To recruit, train and match about

2,400

by 2028



