

**MENDAKI
SYMPOSIUM
2025**

**COMPENDIUM
2025**

Catalysts for Change:

Mobilising Communities,
Empowering Futures



PREAMBLE

MENDAKI SYMPOSIUM 2025

Catalysts for Change: Mobilising Communities, Empowering Futures

The MENDAKI Symposium stands as our cornerstone annual gathering – bringing together policymakers, researchers, educators, professionals, and practitioners in a vibrant exchange of ideas that strengthens our community. This year's theme, “**Catalysts for Change: Mobilising Communities, Empowering Futures**”, underscores our collective commitment to recognise and harness the transformative power of parents and community partners in shaping the trajectory of our children and youth.

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, the traditional boundaries between formal education, family support, and community engagement are increasingly interconnected. The challenges facing our young people, from navigating academic pressures to developing resilience in an uncertain world, require collaborative solutions that transcend individual stakeholders. This symposium theme recognises that sustainable change emerges not from isolated efforts, but from the synergistic power of mobilised communities working in concert. By examining how various stakeholders can serve as catalysts for transformation, the symposium aimed to identify innovative approaches that amplify collective impact and create lasting pathways to success for our future generations.

We were honoured to have **Ms Indranee Rajah**, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, and Second Minister for Finance and National Development, as our Guest of Honour, who delivered the Opening Remarks for this year's Symposium. We also welcomed esteemed guests **Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim**, Acting Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs, and **Mr Zaqy Mohamad**, Senior Minister of State for Defence and Manpower and Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI.

Dr Fannie Khng, Senior Education Research Scientist from National Institute of Education, opened with “Mobilising Communities around Families”, by examining the essential interplay between policy support and community ownership in strengthening family ecosystems.

Through dynamic discussions, participants shared valuable insights on enhancing community support for parents while exploring what it truly means for youth to feel valued and heard within their communities.

The second session, “Igniting Youth Potential”, featured a joint presentation by Mr Zuldaniel Zulkarnain from MENDAKI and Dr Chung You Jin, Associate Professor at Singapore University of Social Sciences, who shared findings from their collaborative research on Positive Youth Development among MENDAKI youth.

As we reflect on the insights shared during the Symposium through this Compendium, MENDAKI hopes that the knowledge gleaned from these conversations will inform policy changes that better support future generations. We remain committed to empowering our community and navigating pathways towards collective success.

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SESSION 1

Mobilising Communities around Families



PANELLIST

Ms Indranee Rajah

Minister, Prime Minister's Office
Second Minister for Finance and
National Development

Ms Indranee Rajah is the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. She is also Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for National Development.

In the Prime Minister's Office, Ms Rajah assists Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong in the National Population and Talent Division and oversees the Marriage & Parenthood portfolio.

Under her Finance portfolio, Ms Rajah is involved in the development of the Government's fiscal policies, including chairing the Green Bond Steering Committee, which looks at Singapore's Green Bond Framework. As Second Minister for National Development, she is involved in the formulation of Singapore's housing and development policies.



PRESENTER & PANELLIST

Dr. Fannie, Khng Kiat Hui

Deputy Centre Director and Senior
Education Research Scientist
Centre for Research in Child
Development, National Institute
of Education (NIE), Nanyang
Technological University (NTU)

Dr. Fannie, Khng Kiat Hui is Deputy Centre Director and Senior Education Research Scientist at the Centre for Research in Child Development, NIE, NTU, Singapore. Interfacing developmental cognitive psychology, education, and science of learning, her research interests include: the role of executive functions (EF) and self-regulation in learning, performance, and well-being; their longitudinal development; and mind-body integration interventions such as breathing-, movement- and mindfulness-based activities that enhance EF, self-regulation and well-being in educational settings. She is also interested in how child environmental sensitivity interacts with environmental contexts, including mindfulness in caregivers (i.e., mindful parenting and teaching), and the co-development and interaction between early EF and motor skills.



PANELLIST

Dr Xander Ong

Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Fathering

Prior to joining Centre for Fathering, **Dr Xander Ong** held various roles at ECON Healthcare Group, including Head of Development and Head of Strategy. Dr Ong has a PhD in International Business and a Bachelor of Business with First Class Honours from Monash University, Australia. He is married to Chloe and they have a son, Samuel born in January 2023 and another baby due in November 2025. Dr Ong has strong convictions about the importance of the active engaged role of the husband and father in families and is excited to be at the forefront of the DADs for Life and MUMs for Life movements to inspire dads and support mums to strengthen their families.



PANELLIST

Ms Jane Lee

Director
Service Management Division
KidSTART Singapore Ltd

Ms Jane Lee has worked with the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and government and local government agencies in New Zealand for over 20 years. She has experience in policy development, programme planning and implementation in social assistance, health promotion, community development. She is passionate about poverty related issues and making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families. In the last few years, she has been involved in the conceptualisation, implementation and scale up of KidSTART nationwide and is currently with KidSTART Singapore Ltd.

SESSION 1

Mobilising Communities around Families



MODERATOR

Ms Noretta Jacob

Founder, Safar Training and Consultancy
Assistant Lead, MENDAKI Professional Network for Early Childhood Education

Ms Noretta Jacob has been an early education educator (ECE) for the last 15 years working with very young children, parents, and fellow passionate ECE educators in both the commercial and community sectors. With a deep interest to excel in this industry, she decided to pursue her bachelor's degree, under a local scholarship with SIM University in 2012, majoring in early childhood with management.

SESSION 2

Igniting Youth Potential



PRESENTER & PANELLIST

Dr Chung You Jin

Associate Professor, School of Social Work and Social Development
Singapore University of Social Sciences

Dr Chung You Jin is an Associate Professor at the School of Social Work and Social Development of the Singapore University of Social Sciences. Her research area covers community mental health, cultural/social identity and integration, workplace resilience and social work education.



PRESENTER & PANELLIST

Mr Zuldaniel Zulkarnain

Lead Data Analyst
Research and Programme Evaluation Office, Growth Group
Yayasan MENDAKI

Mr Zuldaniel Zulkarnain is a Manager in the Research and Programme Evaluation Office in MENDAKI, serving as the Lead Data Analyst. He has over 6 years of experience conducting research and consulting for both commercial and public sector clients locally and internationally. Before joining MENDAKI in 2024, he was an Analytics Lead at a Fortune 500 company. He was also an Anugerah MENDAKI recipient in 2010.

SESSION 2

Igniting Youth Potential



PANELLIST

Mr Erundee Prayitna

Head, Engagement and Outreach
Centre for Fathering

Mr Erundee “Wan” Prayitna is a passionate advocate for active fatherhood, both in his personal life and through his work in the community. As the Head of Development & Outreach at the Centre for Fathering – Dads for Life (CFF DFL), Wan plays a key role in advancing the organisation’s mission to encourage involved and nurturing fatherhood across Singapore. Beginning his journey as a volunteer in 2015 and joining the staff in 2016, he has since become a driving force in engaging fathers, especially within the Malay Muslim community, to build stronger family connections.

Grounded in a “shared responsibility” parenting model, Wan walks the talk at home—taking charge of school routines, discipline, and household tasks in partnership with his family. He’s known for creating meaningful bonding moments through simple, intentional practices such as weekend adventures, bedtime storytelling, and stargazing chats with his children. Through community outreach and media engagements, he champions the belief that when fathers are present and engaged, families and societies thrive.



PANELLIST

Mr Hilal Iman

Law Student
National University of Singapore

Mr Hilal Iman is a rising third-year law undergraduate at the National University of Singapore and a recipient of the Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship to Encourage Upgrading (LKY-STEP) Award. In 2023, he received the Anugerah Gemilang MENDAKI (MENDAKI Pinnacle Award) in recognition of his achievements. He had earlier graduated top of his cohort with a Diploma in Business Management from Nanyang Polytechnic. Before that, he completed a Diploma in Culinary Skills at SHATEC Institutes and worked in the culinary industry. His academic journey began with setbacks, having failed his O-Levels twice.



MODERATOR

Mr Johann Johari

Assistant Director
Planning, Vital Group
Yayasan MENDAKI

Mr Johann Johari was the Assistant Director of Planning where he oversees the organisational development of Yayasan MENDAKI. Prior to that, he was the Assistant Director of Future Ready, to develop youth and young professionals and equip them with relevant skills. Mr Johann has served in MENDAKI for 17 years. Mr Johann holds a Masters in Non-Profit Management from the Singapore University of Social Science. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Political Science from the University of Western Australia (UWA).



OPENING REMARKS

MENDAKI SYMPOSIUM 2025

OPENING REMARKS

Catalyst 1: THE FIRST LINE OF SUPPORT

FAMILIES

Empowering youths starts from home

Kelas Matematika (KMM):
Upstream Intervention Works!

FAMILIES are the building blocks of our society and the key foundation of our social compact.

9 in 10 children

did not require Learning Support in Mathematics (LSM) in Primary One

Parental confidence in teaching numeracy skills jumped from

70% to 95%

STRENGTHEN YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

Since 2021, KMM has benefited over

11,000 parents & children

MS INDRANEE RAJAH

Minister, Prime Minister's Office
Second Minister for Finance and National Development

Catalyst 2: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

COMMUNITY

Broader Support for Development

COMPLEMENTARY ROLES

Community and role models play a larger part in youth development from 15 years old and beyond.

#amPowered:
Mentorship & Goal Setting



"Future of..." Series:
Industry Insights



From 2021 to 2024

Deployed close to
1,900 mentors
to support more than
7,900 youths

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Ensuring our children can become the best versions of themselves.

JOIN THE VILLAGE: VOLUNTEER WITH MENDAKI TODAY!

OPENING REMARKS

By Ms Indraneel Rajah

Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for National Development

Mr Zaqq Mohamad, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Sustainability and Environment & Ministry of Defence and Chairman of Yayasan MENDAKI,

Mdm Zuraidah Abdullah, CEO of Yayasan MENDAKI,

My parliamentary colleague, Acting Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs **Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure to join all of you at this year's MENDAKI Symposium.

Background of Symposium and 2025's Theme

This event has been organised annually since 2017 to facilitate the exchange of ideas and research among different community stakeholders of all ages and backgrounds, such as academics, practitioners, professionals, and members of the public.

This year, the Symposium's theme is **"Catalysts for Change: Mobilising Communities, Empowering Futures"**, with a focus on the development of children and youths.

With this in mind, I want to speak about two important pillars of support in fostering positive youth development, namely families and the wider community.

Families: Empowering Youths Starts From Home

In my Parliamentary Motion on Supporting Singaporeans in Starting and Raising Families earlier this year, I had emphasised the importance of supporting families as a top national priority.

Families are the building blocks of our society. They form the first line of support in difficult times. They are also a key foundation of our social compact, and they are the ones that most influence the child in the early years of child development and throughout the teenage years and beyond.

In the same vein, families are a cornerstone in ensuring the positive development of our children and youth.

It is heartening to see MENDAKI's continued focus on empowering families through your education and outreach efforts.

Through its KelasMateMatika programme or KMM for example, MENDAKI conducts workshops and activities for families with preschool children aged between four to six years old.

At KMM, parents also go through curated sessions which provide them with the skills to teach their children basic numeracy concepts.

Since 2021, KMM has benefited over 11,000 parents and children.

Based on MENDAKI's evaluation of the programme in 2023, nine in ten children who undergo KMM did not require the additional Learning Support in Mathematics or LSM programme when they entered Primary One, up from eight in ten children the year before.

LSM is a specialised early intervention programme rolled out at MOE primary schools for Primary One to Four students who need additional help with Mathematics.

Let me share with you the story of Mdm Suhartati Saimun. In 2023, Mdm Suhartati took part in KMM sessions with two of her children, Tengku Maryam and Tengku Uthman. After completing the programme, Mdm Suhartati could see an improvement in her children's learning skills and confidence level. KMM has helped her daughter, Maryam, to be school ready in 2024 as she entered Primary 1.

Thanks to KMM, parents like Mdm Suhartati gained confidence not only in their child's numeracy abilities but also in their own ability to better support their children's educational journey.

Before going through KMM, about 70% of parents felt they were confident in teaching their children numeracy skills. This figure jumped to 95% after undergoing the programme.

KMM's results validate two important points: that upstream intervention produces positive results, and that supporting parents and families leads to good outcomes for children.

Programmes such as these complement the Government's support to families in raising and supporting their children – from birth to their early years, and youths as they progress through school.

Education opens doors – not just for individuals, but for families as a whole. This is why we must make sure that every child in Singapore can access quality education, regardless of their background or their starting point.

Today, education in our national school system and Institutes of Higher Learning is highly subsidised. Every Singaporean child receives over \$200,000 in education subsidies from pre-school through to secondary school.

Students from lower to middle-income families are also able to access various financial assistance schemes offered by the Government, schools and institutions.

But education goes beyond textbooks and classrooms. At home, our children learn the values that shape who they become – resilience from watching their parents overcome challenges, compassion through acts of kindness, and the confidence that comes from having a strong support system.

A strong family foundation can help nurture our children and youths to fulfil their potential.

Community: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Next, the community. The broader community also plays a part in supporting our children’s development.

As the old saying goes, “it takes a village to raise a child”. A recent quantitative finding from a study on Positive Youth Development conducted by MENDAKI and the Singapore University of Social Sciences confirms this.

A survey of over 600 secondary school students from the MENDAKI Tuition Programme found that while parents played a more significant role in youths’ development up till 14 years of age due to the need for clear roles and encouragement from parents, the community and other adult role models played an even larger part in their development from 15 years old and beyond as they begin to seek validation and support from others.

These findings highlight the complementary roles the family and the community play in raising our youth. I understand that more insights from this study will be presented later.

As Singapore’s pioneer self-help group, MENDAKI has played a pivotal role in ensuring the progress of the Malay/Muslim community for over four decades.

In recent years, MENDAKI has stepped up its efforts in partnering community stakeholders, volunteers, and professionals to support youth development through comprehensive programmes.

One example is the #amPowered initiative, which helps youths identify their strengths and set meaningful goals through mentorship programmes and sessions. This programme also exposes youths to various professions to help them make more informed decisions for their future careers.

From 2021 to 2024, MENDAKI’s Youth Mentoring Office and its partners trained and deployed close to 1,900 mentors to support more than 7,900 youths.

Another example is the “Future of...” series which MENDAKI organises to allow youths to engage directly with industry experts to gain valuable insights into evolving market trends and the essential skills required to thrive in today’s labour market.

This is very meaningful work, and I encourage everyone to consider contributing your time and efforts to MENDAKI’s programmes to help uplift our next generation. For those who are already doing so, a big thank you.

Conclusion

Families and the wider community are fundamental building blocks that our children rely on as they grow and mature. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that these building blocks remain strong and sturdy, to help the next generation become the best versions of themselves.

I hope that today’s event will provide you with some insights on opportunities to collaborate with MENDAKI and like-minded organisations, and to inspire you to do so, in support of these meaningful causes.

Thank you very much and have a good day ahead.

Source: Prime Minister’s Office Singapore





SESSION 1

MOBILISING COMMUNITIES AROUND FAMILIES

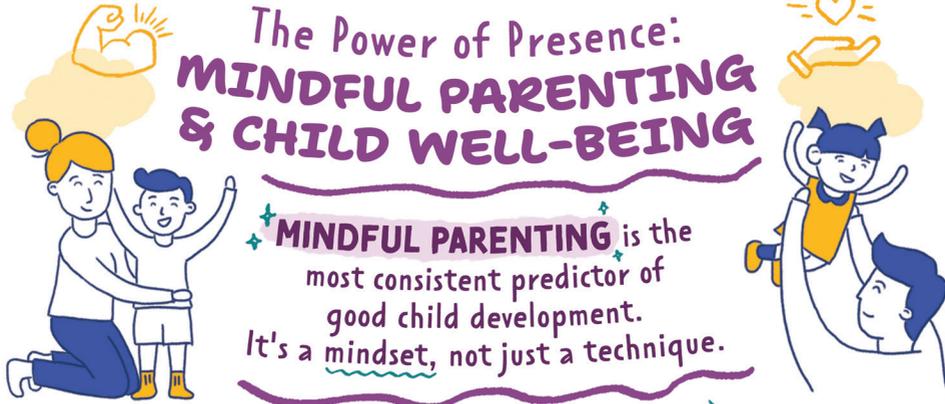
The responsibility of child development has largely been on schools and parents as separate entities. Schools and other government programmes have been actively engaging children and providing early childhood intervention. Families, on the other hand, have been evolving – the role of fathers have changed, and Dr Fannie Khng’s study showed that being present with full attention as a mindful parent was the most consistent predictor of good child development. In addition, countries that invest in early childhood and family policies see long-term returns in child development, social mobility, and community resilience¹. Central to these discussions is the Singapore Government’s proactive role as a catalyst – facilitating family-friendly policies, supporting community organisations like MENDAKI and the Centre for Fathering, and promoting work-life balance through flexible work arrangements and parental leave schemes. These efforts underscore a broader national commitment to nurturing resilient families and cohesive communities through inclusive, evidence-based strategies.

¹ UNESCO & UNICEF. (2024). Global report on early childhood care and education: The right to a strong foundation. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/right-strong-foundation-global-report-early-childhood-care-and-education>

MENDAKI SYMPOSIUM 2025

MOBILISING COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

The Power of Presence: MINDFUL PARENTING & CHILD WELL-BEING



MINDFUL PARENTING is the most consistent predictor of good child development. It's a mindset, not just a technique.

- 1 Being present with full attention.
- 2 Non-judgemental acceptance and compassion for self.
- 3 Emotional awareness and self-regulation.
- 4 Emotional awareness and compassion for child.

Children thrive when they feel **seen and heard**. Outcomes include:

HIGHER prosocial behaviour
GREATER self-esteem

BE INTENTIONALLY PRESENT and COMPASSIONATE in daily interactions

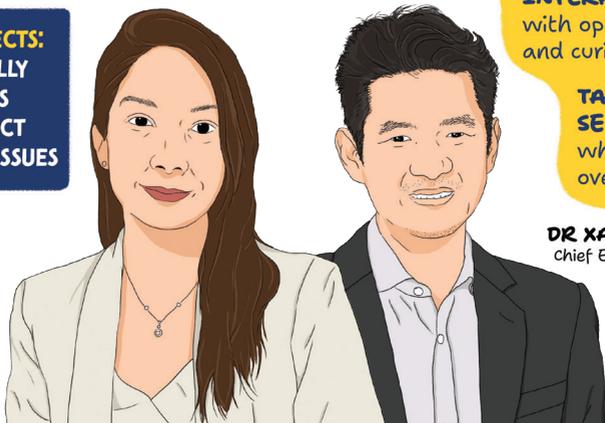
APPROACH EACH INTERACTION with open mind and curiosity

TAILOR SELF-CARE when overwhelmed

PROTECTIVE EFFECTS:
BEING EMOTIONALLY PRESENT REDUCES NEGATIVE CONDUCT AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES



DR. FANNIE, KHNG KIAT HUI
Deputy Centre Director and Senior Education Research Scientist
Centre for Research in Child Development



DR. XANDER ONG
Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Fathering

Catalysts for Change: MOBILISING COMMUNITIES AROUND FAMILIES



The Government acts as a **PROACTIVE CATALYST**
They promote:

- FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS (FWA)**
- PARENTAL LEAVE SCHEMES**
- FINANCIAL SUPPORT (BABY BONUS, CDA)**



Fathers are shifting from the traditional breadwinner role to being emotionally present caregivers.

STRATEGIES

- ENCOURAGE PEER LEARNING**
- STRUCTURED/ UNSTRUCTURED FAMILY TIME**

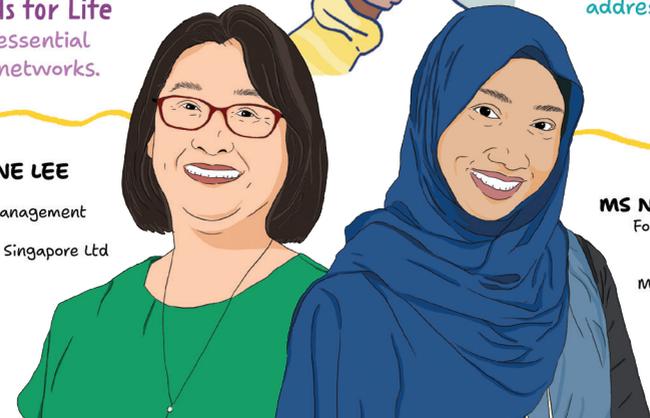
KidSTART targets **low-income families** (ages 0-6) for early childhood development. Organisations like **Centre for Fathering** and **Dads for Life** provide essential support networks.



Educators must foster connected and supportive environments. Parents and teachers need clear boundaries and roles.

UPLIFT Programme addresses absenteeism and strengthens family-school engagement.

MS JANE LEE
Director
Service Management
Division
KidSTART Singapore Ltd



MS NORETTA JACOB
Founder, Safar Training and Consultancy
Assistant Lead,
MENDAKI Professional Network for Early Childhood Education

MINDFUL PARENTING and Child Well-being

Presented by Dr Fannie, Khng Kiat Hui

Deputy Centre Director and Senior Education Research Scientist
Centre for Research in Child Development
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University



ABOUT THE STUDY

a. Motivation of the study

Parenting today is more complex than ever. With rising screen time, social isolation, and exposure to harmful content, children face new challenges to their emotional and psychological well-being. This study explores how mindful parenting – being present, aware, self-regulated, and compassionate – can positively shape parent-child relationships and improve child outcomes.

b. Approach of the study

The research used the **Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting (IM-P) scale** to assess how parents interact with their children daily (1286 preadolescents). Researchers used path analysis to examine how different aspects of mindful parenting relate to different indicators of child well-being, while accounting for factors like socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, and gender.

FINDINGS

a. Key Findings

- i. Four Dimensions of Mindful Parenting emerged in Singapore:
 1. Being present with full attention to the child.
 2. Non-judgemental acceptance and compassion for self.
 3. Emotional awareness of self and self-regulation in parenting.
 4. Emotional awareness of and compassion for child.
- ii. Compared to fathers, mothers reported higher emotional awareness and compassion for the child, but less non-judgemental acceptance and compassion for themselves and less being present (possibly due to household responsibilities).

iii. In general, children, whose parents practised mindful parenting, showed

1. Higher prosocial behaviour,
2. Greater self-esteem, and
3. Better well-being.

b. Factors Influencing Positive Child Developmental Outcomes

i. Parenting Style: Mindful parenting leads to more positive well-being outcomes in children

c. Key Insights:

- i. Connectedness Matters: children thrive when they feel seen and heard – both at home and in school
- ii. Protective Effects: Being emotionally present with your child is associated with less negative conduct and emotional issues in the child
- iii. Cultural Nuances: mindful parenting may look different across societies, but its core benefits remain consistent

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS

- a. Parents can start by practicing on being intentionally present and compassionate. Small changes in daily interactions may lead to improvements in your child's well-being.
- b. Policymakers can support programmes that recognize and promote mindful parenting, together with emotional literacy, in families.
- c. Mindful parenting is not just a technique - it is a mindset. By cultivating awareness, compassion and intentionality, we can help create conditions that support stronger parent-child bonds and nurture resilient, emotionally healthy children.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

From panel discussion

With Minister Indranee Rajah, Dr Fannie Khng, Dr Xander Ong and Ms Jane Lee
Moderated by Ms Noretta Jacob

On Mobilising Communities around Families

1. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT:

a. Policy & Financial Support

- i. The government provides various family-friendly policies to support parenthood in different areas of life that includes education, work-life balance, career and more.
- ii. Financial assistance schemes are available to support families in need such as Baby Bonus and Child Development Account (CDA).
- iii. The UPLIFT Programme by MOE aims to address absenteeism and strengthen family-school engagement.

b. Work-Life Balance & Employment Support

- i. Childcare, paternity leave, and the recently shared parental leave are advocated to support working parents.
- ii. Flexible work arrangements are advocated through the mandatory Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA).

c. Community Mobilisation & Programme Design

- i. The government facilitates community-based dialogues to co-create family support solutions, ensuring that the policies are all-inclusive and accessible.
- ii. KidSTART is a targeted programme for low-income families with young children, focusing on early childhood development and family well-being.



2. PARENTAL ROLES & MINDSETS:



a. Policy & Financial Support

- i. Fathers are increasingly shifting from traditional breadwinner roles to being emotionally present caregivers.
- ii. However, some barriers to fathers' involvement include generational biases, patriarchal norms, and lack of emotional modelling.
- iii. To enhance fathers' involvement, fathers can be encouraged to attend community engagement and peer learning, promoting both structured and unstructured family time, and supporting fathers through affirmation and autonomy in their parenting roles.

b. Parenting Practices

- i. Parents should recognise and acknowledge when they feel overwhelmed and respond with appropriate self-care.
- ii. Parenting strategies must be tailored to each child's developmental and emotional needs.
- iii. Screen time should be used purposefully, with access to quality content and active parental engagement.
- iv. Instead of screentime, parents are encouraged to promote hands-on activities such as nature exploration, and curiosity-driven learning.

c. Home & School Dynamics

- i. Challenges may be exacerbated when there is poor discipline at home. For example, parents who allow their children to be absent from school may inadvertently reinforce the idea that going to school is not important.
- ii. On the other hand, having a lack of support and resources may also lead to some students not going to school, for example, being absent from school due to sibling care-giving responsibilities.
- iii. Parents need to work with the school teachers, but should not overstep the boundaries. Strong parent-teacher relationships with clear boundaries and roles are essential for supporting children's development.

3. COMMUNITIES:



a. Support Networks & Initiatives

- i. Fathers are supported through initiatives like Centre for Fathering, Dads for Life, and Bapa Sepanjang Hayat.
- ii. Virtual and in-person communities provide platforms for accessible and inclusive peer learning and emotional engagement.

b. Community-Based Programmes

- i. KidSTART is able to reach out through the ecosystem partnerships with agencies such as KKH, NUH, SSOs, and FSCs.
- ii. These community organisations promote mindful parenting through outreach and accessible resources.

c. Engagement Challenges & Strategies

- i. Families most in need may face barriers to accessing support due to lack of awareness or engagement.
- ii. Peer support and community learning are encouraged to help parents share coping strategies and build resilience.



References

1. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES

- a. The government acts as a catalyst in mobilising communities, especially for lower-income families.
- b. They provide various family-friendly policies and financial schemes such as baby bonus, Child Development Account (CDA), financial assistance.
- c. In addition, the government also promotes work-life balance through childcare, paternity, and shared parental leave.
- d. Flexible work arrangements are being advocated to support organisations, as evinced by the new mandatory Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements.
- e. There are ongoing programmes to facilitate dialogue for community-based solutions.

2. REDEFINING FATHERHOOD: SHIFTING MINDSETS AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

- a. There is a shift among fathers from being the traditional breadwinner in the family to being more present to the emotional support needs of the children and spouse.
- b. Fathers are increasingly supported through initiatives like Centre for Fathering, Dads for Life, and Bapa Sepanjang Hayat, as well as through virtual and in-person communities that foster peer learning and emotional engagement.

3. KIDSTART'S IMPACT

- a. KidSTART targets low-income families with children of ages up to six years old.
- b. The programme helps to tackle issues relating to early childhood development, health, and parent-child relationships.
- c. KidSTART builds trust and empathy in the community through partnerships with agencies like KKH, NUH, SSOs, FSCs, to address tangible needs of beneficiaries.

4. EMBEDDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN COMMUNITIES

- a. Organisations and community partners can promote mindful parenting through accessible resources and community outreach.
- b. However, there is a challenge as those who need support most may not engage due to barriers in access or awareness.

5. EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON SUPPORTING FAMILIES

- a. Early intervention helps children transition across education levels.
- b. The current key issues are poor discipline, truancy, and siblings-caregiving responsibilities at home.
- c. Programmes like UPLIFT (MOE) aim to understand and address absenteeism.
- d. There is also a need to understand the importance of parent-teacher relationships in terms of having clear boundaries and roles.

6. BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR FATHER INVOLVEMENT

- a. Barriers:

Father involvement is often hindered by generational biases, patriarchal norms, and a lack of emotional modelling, which can limit fathers' ability to engage meaningfully in caregiving and family life.

- b. Strategies:

To enhance father involvement, fathers can be encouraged to attend community engagement and peer learning, promoting both structured and unstructured family time, and supporting fathers through affirmation and autonomy in their parenting roles.

7. SUPPORTING INFANT CARE AND MINDFUL PARENTING (0-3 YEARS)

- a. Parents should recognize when they feel overwhelmed and respond appropriately.
- b. Child-caring strategies must also be tailored to each child's needs.
- c. Encourage community learning and peer support for coping and strategy sharing.

8. MANAGING SCREEN TIME

- a. Excessive screen time can negatively affect the developing brain, leading to cognitive delays, emotional instability, and structural changes in brain development.
- b. Parents should use screen time in a purposeful and supportive way, providing access to quality content rather than relying on it solely as a substitute for meaningful engagement.
- c. Parents should also promote hands-on activities, nature exploration, and taking advantage of their children's curiosity-driven nature.



SESSION 2 IGNITING YOUTH POTENTIAL

The 2025 Youth STEPS study by National Youth Council (NYC) and Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) highlighted that 72% of Singaporean youth are hopeful about their future¹. Despite this optimism, they face emotional and social pressures – from navigating digital spaces to managing expectations and seeking adult guidance. Youths' strengths are often overlooked, as many research areas tend to focus on risk factors and challenges – particularly within the field of youth development. The joint study on Positive Youth Development (PYD) research explores key developmental areas and underscores the importance of gift-centred mentoring, emotional resilience, and inclusive community support. Initiatives such as MENDAKI's #amPowered mentoring programme exemplify Singapore's strategic investment in youth development, helping youths move beyond rigid success narratives to discover purpose, build connections, and contribute meaningfully to society.

¹ National Youth Council & Institute of Policy Studies. (2025). Youth Study on Transitions and Evolving Pathways in Singapore (Youth STEPS).

MENDAKI SYMPOSIUM 2025

IGNITING YOUTH POTENTIAL

Igniting Potential: SHIFTING TO A GIFT-CENTRED APPROACH

STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH:
Moving from a deficit view (focusing on problems) to exploring what enables youth to thrive.



4 Key Drivers of YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

1. Feeling Valued in the community.
2. Support from adults (teachers, mentors, relatives).
3. Inclusion in family decision-making.
4. Presence of Positive Adult Role Models.

Gift-Centred Mentoring (GCM)



ADAPTATION IS KEY:

Younger teens (13-14) seek guidance from family. Older teens (15-17) seek inspiration from community figures.

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MR ZULDANIUL ZULKARNAIN

Lead Data Analyst, Research and Programme Evaluation Office, Growth Group

Supporting Their True North: RESILIENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE

SHIFT THE QUESTION:

Instead of asking youth

ask
WHAT JOB DO YOU WANT?

or
WHAT PROBLEMS DO YOU WANT TO SOLVE?

HOW DO YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?

SOCIAL MEDIA contributes to **stress** through social comparison.



Support must be intentional and consistent. Adults should model healthy coping and encourage open conversations.

ROLE OF PARENTS

Portray **openness** and be **non-judgmental** to encourage children to seek advice. For larger households, strive for **individualised attention**.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Support must come from **all levels** (individuals, communities, workplaces, government). Workplaces need **flexible arrangements** and policies to support evolving family roles.

ROLE OF MENTORS

Build trust by **sharing personal experiences and challenges** normalize struggles and foster connection. Walk alongside youth rather than positioning yourself as superior.

MR ERUANDEE PRAYITNA

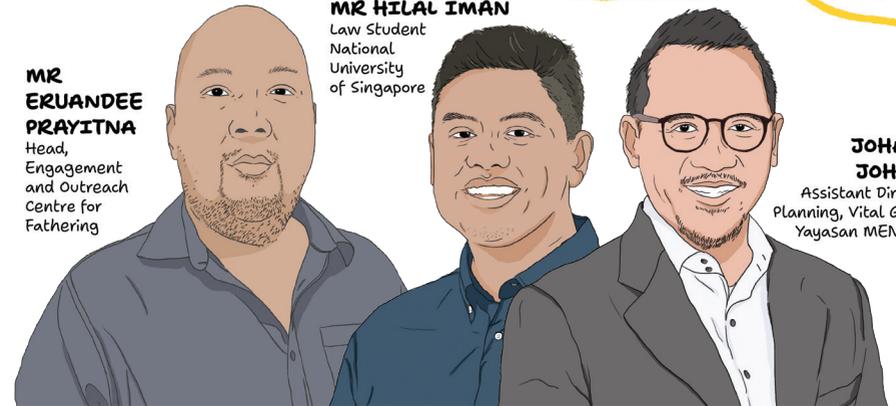
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POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT/ FROM TUTORING TO THRIVING:

Understanding What Drives Positive Development Among MENDAKI Youth

Presented by **Dr Chung You Jin**

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Singapore University of Social Sciences

And **Mr Zuldaniai Zulkarnain**

Lead Data Analyst,
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ABOUT THE STUDY

- a. Motivation of the study
 - i. Over 30% of the Malay resident population in Singapore are aged 15–35, representing a vital segment of the community.
 - ii. MENDAKI's engagement with youth revealed that many struggle with confidence and clarity in pursuing their aspirations.
 - iii. Singaporean youth reported lower self-concept and confidence compared to peers in Southeast Asia.²
 - iv. The study aimed to shift from a deficit-based view (focusing on problems) to a strength-based approach, exploring what enables youth to thrive.
- b. Approach of the study
 - i. Based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which emphasizes strengths, relationships, and opportunities.
 - ii. Conducted in four phases:
 1. Conceptual research and pilot survey design with 109 MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) youth.
 2. Quantitative survey with 615 MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) youth.
 3. Qualitative research to deepen insights.
 4. Synthesis and consolidation of findings.
 - iii. Two key models used:
 1. 5/6Cs of PYD (Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring, Contribution)
 2. Developmental Assets Framework

² Gomez-Baya Diego, Kozina Ana, Buenconsejo Jet Uy and Muñiz-Velázquez José Antonio. *Frontiers in Education*. (2025). The mediating role of the 5Cs of PYD in the relationship between grit and academic adjustment in Spanish undergraduates.

FINDINGS

- a. Positive Youth Development Factors Identified and Categorised into Two Groups
 - i. External Levers:
 1. Community empowerment
 2. Authoritative social structures
 3. Social network support
 - ii. Internal Development Areas
 1. Prosocial values
 2. Interpersonal self-determination
 3. Self-concept
 4. School belonging
- b. Top 4 drivers of Youth Development
 - i. Feeling valued in the community
 - ii. Support from adults (teachers, mentors, relatives)
 - iii. Inclusion in family decision-making
 - iv. Presence of positive adult role models
- c. Gender differences
 - i. Boys show more confidence and prefer hands-on involvement.
 - ii. Girls value inspirational support and emotional connection.
- d. Age differences
 - i. Younger teenagers (13 to 14 years old) seek guidance from family.
 - ii. Older teenagers (15 to 17 years old) look for inspiration from community figures. They also showed stronger interpersonal relationships, likely due to emotional maturity and peer bonding.
- e. Household size differences

Youth from larger households may benefit from more individualised attention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMES

- a. Programmes should be adapted to different age groups and gender needs.
- b. Emphasize community-based inspiration and family inclusion.
- c. Support initiatives that build confidence, self-concept, and emotional resilience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

From panel discussion

With **Dr Chung You Jin**, **Mr Eruandee**,
Mr Hilal Iman and **Mr Zuldaniel Anxary**.
Moderated by **Mr Johann Johari**.

1. REFRAMING SUCCESS AND CAREER PATHWAYS

- 
- Adults are encouraged to unlearn outdated beliefs about linear success paths. Instead of asking youth “what job do you want?”, ask “what problems do you want to solve?” or “how do you want to contribute?”
 - Stepping away from the conventional understanding of success includes accepting that a rewarding career comes in many forms.
 - This reframing helps youth align their aspirations with purpose and community impact.

2. YOUTH ASPIRATIONS AND GUIDANCE

- 
- Youths in Singapore are motivated by personal goals, often referred to as their “true north.” Their journey toward these goals is shaped by small, intentional steps.
 - Parents play a crucial role in guiding youth by evaluating their evolving interests and supporting them through a strength-based approach that balances passion with capability.



3. ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 
- Social media is a double-edged tool for youth – while it offers connection, it also contributes to stress through social comparison and the pressure to meet perceived milestones or “social clock”, such as getting a BTO or being married in the late 20s or early 30s.
 - Social media usage has also contributed to a culture of constant comparison and unrealistic expectations. Platforms, including professional ones like LinkedIn, promote a “hustle culture” that glorifies perfection and continuous achievement, leading to some youths feeling inadequate or left behind.
 - This environment fosters perfectionism and performance pressure, amplified by societal and parental expectations. The result is often perfection paralysis – a phenomenon in which the fear of not measuring up prevents youths from taking any action, let alone meaningful ones.
 - Paradoxically, instead of motivating, social media can demotivate. Upward comparisons erode self-worth, especially when success stories appear unattainable. For some youths, especially those facing exclusion or chronic disengagement, even achieving what is considered “average” may represent significant progress.
 - In terms of social media support, some youths would use applications like ChatGPT, to cope with stress and may hesitate to seek help from parents unless parents demonstrate openness and emotional availability. This is where the role of emotional support from parents come in – the need to discern information instead of relying on socio-cultural nomenclature.

4. ROLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



- a. Emotional support should be intentional and consistent. When parents, teachers, and mentors offer non-judgmental support, model healthy coping, and encourage open conversations, youths are more likely to develop emotional regulation and problem-solving skills.
- b. For parents: portray openness and present opportunities for children to come to them for advice. This includes being approachable, non-judgmental, and actively listening to their children's concerns.
 - i. For youths in larger households, parents could try to provide and cater for more individualised attention. This helps children feel seen and valued, especially in environments where attention may be divided.
- c. For mentors: build trust and effective emotional support with mentees through the sharing of their personal experiences and challenges. This fosters connections and normalise struggles, making youths feel understood rather than judged.
- d. However, inviting youths to share personal stories must be done with care. Without a clear purpose or follow-up, revisiting painful experiences can be harmful. Their voices should be valued not just for insight, but for shaping solutions.
- e. Support is most impactful when it includes guidance and agency – helping youths take meaningful steps forward and contribute to improving systems for themselves and others.

5. MENTORING APPROACHES AND IMPACT



- a. Organisations such as Bapa Sepanjang Hayat (BSH) and MENDAKI adopt a solution-focused mentoring approach that emphasizes youths' strengths and future goals rather than problem correction.
- b. Effective mentoring is built on trust and connection, allowing youth to open up gradually and meaningfully.
- c. Mentors are encouraged to walk alongside youths rather than position themselves as superior, fostering a more collaborative and empowering relationship.

6. MENDAKI'S MENTORING PHILOSOPHY



- a. MENDAKI adopts a Gift-Centred Mentoring (GCM) model, which is a solution-focused approach that emphasizes youth strengths, aspirations, and future goals rather than problem correction.
- b. GCM model
 - i. Empowerment through Strengths & Identity
Youth are supported to discover and grow their core gifts – unique strengths, talents, and values. Challenges or “wounds” are acknowledged, with emphasis placed on healing through empowerment and positive identity formation.
 - ii. Purposeful Mentoring & Goal Setting
Mentors build trust through consistent support and shared experiences, guiding youth in setting meaningful, future-oriented goals aligned with their values and aspirations.
 - iii. Community & Belonging
Youth are connected to a supportive ecosystem of mentors, peers, and resources, reducing isolation and reinforcing a sense of purpose and belonging.
- c. MENDAKI's mentoring programmes (#amPowered@MTS and #amPowered@ITE) also integrate mentoring with academic and career guidance. Youth receive help navigating post-secondary pathways, building transferable skills, and accessing financial or emotional support.





7. SUPPORTING YOUTH FACING CHALLENGES

- a. Youth facing challenges are encouraged to engage in introspection and self-improvement – becoming better versions of themselves.
- b. Building social capital through mentoring and networking events can also empower youth and help them navigate biases.



8. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES AND NETWORKS

- a. Youth benefit from exposure to diverse networks and resources, especially through “weak ties” – connections outside their immediate circles. Increasing awareness of available pathways and opportunities is essential to broaden youth’s perspectives and career options.
- b. At MENDAKI, the Professional Networks (PN) initiative is designed to foster such connections among professionals. Within the PN, professionals also play a role in uplifting youth such as mentoring students in #amPowered or coach or speak at talks to inspire youth.



9. WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR EVOLVING FAMILY ROLES

- a. As family dynamics evolve, particularly in parenting roles, there is a need for flexible work arrangements and supportive workplace policies.
- b. While some fathers prefer working from home or taking on more household duties, others may choose to work from the office. Ultimately, families should be empowered to decide what works best for their unique circumstances.
- c. As family roles continue to evolve, support must come from all levels of society – individuals, communities, workplaces, and government. Every choice a family makes in balancing work and caregiving deserves respect, free from stigma or judgment.





IN-TABLE DISCUSSION

TOPIC 1

Being Seen & Heard – What does feeling valued mean to youths?

To youths, what does it mean to feel valued?

Youths feel valued when they feel that they are heard, respected, and trusted. It involves having their opinions acknowledged, their efforts affirmed, and their identities recognised - especially when they pursue interests outside conventional paths. Youths feel valued when adults show genuine interest in their passions, offer constructive feedback, and create safe spaces for self-expression without judgment.

It also includes being given autonomy, responsibilities, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making. Recognition through awards or praise, connection to mentors, and platforms to showcase their talents further reinforce their sense of worth. Importantly, youths seek emotional validation, inclusive communication, and affirmation - especially in environments where traditional parenting styles may limit their voice.

Ultimately, feeling valued means being seen not just as recipients of guidance, but as active contributors with unique strengths, deserving of trust, empathy, and space to grow.

What can be done to help youths feel valued by their parents?

To help youths feel valued, parents should foster trust, respect, and open communication. This means listening without judgment, validating their perspectives, and creating safe spaces for honest conversations - even about mistakes. Parents can empower youths by entrusting them with responsibilities, involving them in family decisions, and acknowledging their efforts and achievements more than their shortcomings.

Adopting a mindful parenting approach - shifting away from fear-based methods - encourages emotional safety and growth. Parents should also be intentional in spending quality time, showing genuine interest in their children's passions, and recognising their unique strengths and love languages. By engaging youths as equals, supporting their autonomy, and affirming their identities, parents can nurture a sense of belonging and self-worth.



What can be done to help youths feel valuable by Community Partners?

Community partners can help youths feel valued by giving them meaningful roles and responsibilities - such as leading projects, planning events, or volunteering in neighbourhood initiatives. This fosters a sense of ownership and allows youths to see their contributions making a real impact. Engaging youths through gift-centred mentoring, recognising their talents, and creating platforms for self-expression builds confidence and self-esteem.

Intentional efforts to listen to their ideas, solicit feedback, and follow youth trends ensure that programmes remain relevant and inclusive. Providing safe spaces, peer support, and opportunities to fail and learn are also key to nurturing trust and resilience. By collaborating with youths, valuing their strengths, and involving them in solution-building, community partners can empower them to grow, connect, and thrive.

What can be done to help youths feel valued by their peers?

Peers play a vital role in helping youths feel valued by fostering inclusion, emotional support, and mutual respect. This means listening to each other's pressures, especially those amplified by social media, and creating safe spaces for honest conversations. Sharing common interests like sports, gaming, or volunteering helps build stronger bonds and a sense of belonging.

Peers can affirm each other's efforts, celebrate small wins, and avoid unhealthy comparisons. Encouraging healthy competition, forming study or interest groups, and being present during both challenges and successes nurtures confidence and self-worth. By recognising each other's strengths, offering support, and engaging in shared activities, youths can grow together and feel genuinely valued within their peer networks.

TOPIC 2

Bridging the Gap – How might we enable community partners to better support parents?

What pressures make parenting more challenging?

Parenting today is shaped by a complex web of pressures that make it increasingly challenging for many families. A major source of stress is **the rising cost of living**, including the high expenses associated with education, healthcare, and daily necessities. These financial burdens are compounded for parents in the **sandwiched generation**, who are simultaneously caring for young children and aging parents. Many parents also struggle with **time constraints**, as they juggle work commitments, caregiving responsibilities, and household management, often at the expense of quality family time.

Academic pressures are another significant challenge. Parents face stress when their children are preparing for national examinations like the PSLE or O-levels, and they often feel responsible for ensuring their children succeed academically. This is further complicated by **peer pressure and societal comparisons**, where children - and by extension, their parents - feel the need to keep up with others in terms of achievements, enrichment activities, and material possessions. The **influence of social media** intensifies this, exposing children to unrealistic standards and creating additional challenges for parents trying to guide them effectively.

Parents also report difficulties in **managing screen time and technology use**, especially when children are more drawn to digital engagement than family interactions. While research may support limiting screen time, translating that into convincing explanations and enforceable boundaries is a persistent struggle. Additionally, **communication gaps between parents and schools** can make it hard to stay involved in a child's education, particularly when children disengage or fall behind.

There are also **emotional and psychological pressures**. Parents often question what it means to be a "good parent," navigating between traditional values and modern parenting philosophies like gentle parenting. This internal conflict is heightened by **external expectations** from family, friends, and society. For some, **mental health concerns**, both their own and their children's, add another layer of complexity. Parents of children with special needs, such as ADHD, face even greater demands and often lack sufficient community support.

Finally, the **changing societal landscape**, including the rise of dual-income households and the evolving role of technology in education (e.g., AI and big data), creates uncertainty about how best to prepare children for the future. Many parents feel they are

constantly adapting, navigating decisions without adequate institutional support or community guidance.

In essence, parenting pressures today stem from a combination of **economic, social, emotional, and technological factors**, all of which intersect to create a demanding and often overwhelming environment for families.

What programmes, resources, or community initiatives have you encountered that address parenting pressures?

Several programmes address parenting pressures, yet awareness and accessibility remain barriers. **MENDAKI's** mentoring and coaching efforts, and **KidSTART's** support for lower-income families through home visits and early childhood development stood out. However, many parents remain unaware of such initiatives or feel too overwhelmed to access them.

Seminars for parents were also highlighted as useful, particularly because of the structured approach and accessibility. Other notable efforts include **Families for Life** activities, **Project ARIF**, and the **IncludeSG website by AWWA**, which provides parenting resources. **ComLink** and **Family Coaches** were also recognised for their proactive outreach and ability to identify family "blind spots," helping parents who may be in denial or unaware of their needs. These programmes are most effective when paired with practical support, such as financial incentives to offset income loss from attending sessions.

Schools also play a significant role, especially during key academic transitions like PSLE and O-levels, by organising talks and support sessions for parents. However, there is a noted lack of public outreach and awareness campaigns to promote these resources. Community-based platforms such as **Reddit**, **parents' group chats**, and **social media** were also cited as informal yet valuable sources of support and information-sharing among parents.

Additionally, initiatives like **Food from the Heart**, which provides food packs through schools, help alleviate basic needs and indirectly reduce parenting stress. One-to-one counselling services at community centres were also appreciated for offering personalised support tailored to each family's unique situation.

Overall, while numerous programmes exist, their impact remains constrained by low visibility and insufficient flexibility to meet families where they are—both logistically and emotionally.

Bridging the Gap – How might we enable community partners to better support parents?

Which of these has been most and least effective?

Personalised social workers who engage regularly with families are among the most effective interventions. Their consistent presence and ability to journey alongside families help build trust and provide tailored support. Similarly, **school outreach and counselling programmes** were seen as effective because they are accessible and embedded in children’s daily environments, making them more relevant and impactful. Support schemes that address **immediate financial needs**, such as **ComCare** and **Zakat**, were also praised for their direct and tangible benefits to families under stress. The **Triple P parenting programme** was noted for its accessibility, which makes it easier for parents to participate. Additionally, **religious and community-based activities**, such as those organised by churches and mosques, were seen as valuable for promoting family bonding and social cohesion.

On the other hand, **general parenting programmes** were frequently cited as least effective. They tend to attract already motivated parents, while missing those most in need- families lacking the capacity or awareness to engage. **Private sessions** also underperform when insufficiently tailored to individual contexts. **Programmes with rigid schedules** pose challenges for families juggling caregiving responsibilities without support systems such as extended family. This inflexibility excludes precisely those who would benefit most from adaptable formats.

Overall, respondents emphasised that the **effectiveness of any intervention depends heavily on outreach efforts and how well the support aligns with a family’s current needs and capacities**. There is a strong call for more **flexible, creative, and customised delivery formats**, such as home-based or one-on-one sessions, and group programmes that include childminding support. Some also pointed out that interventions must be designed with an awareness of **broader systemic issues**, such as low wages and limited family support, which can undermine even well-designed programmes.

NOTES





MENDAKI SYMPOSIUM COMPENDIUM

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