

— SINGAPORE —

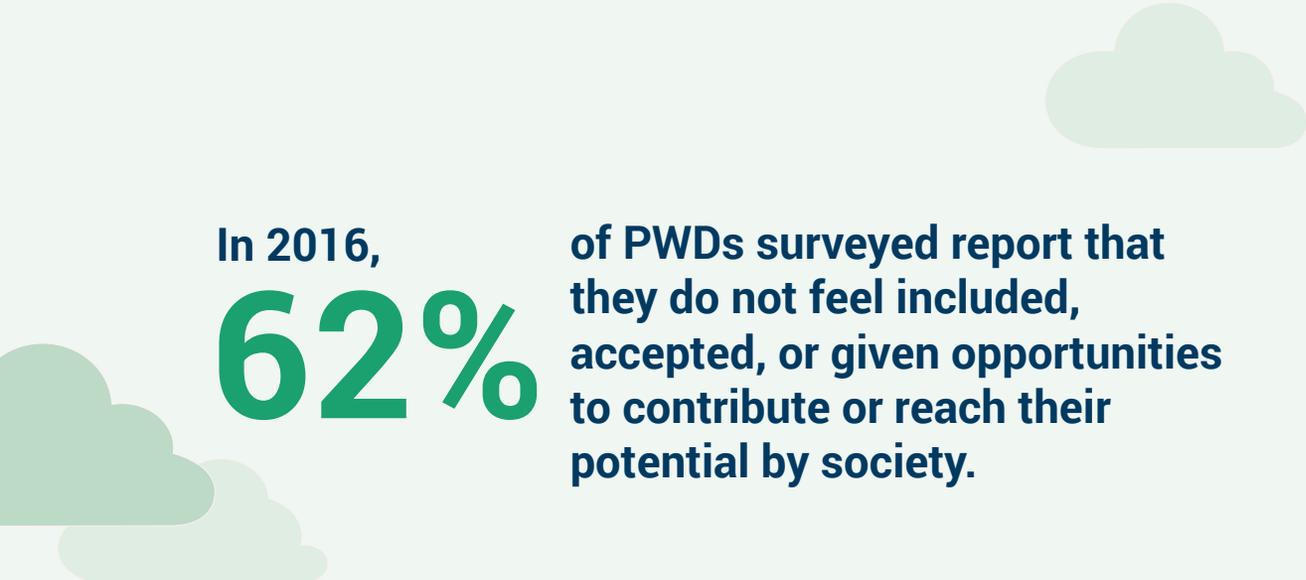
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# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

IN SINGAPORE



In 2016,  
**62%** of PWDs surveyed report that they do not feel included, accepted, or given opportunities to contribute or reach their potential by society.

People with disabilities (PWD) form a sizeable group in our population<sup>1</sup>. They account for 2.1% of the student population, 3.4% of 18-49 year olds and 13.3% of those over 50 years old in Singapore<sup>2</sup>. According to a study by the National Council of Social Services in 2016, 62% of PWDs surveyed reported that they do not feel included, accepted, or given opportunities to contribute or reach their potential by society<sup>3</sup>. If Singapore is to have an inclusive society, we need to better understand the people in our community with different disabilities, especially their experiences and issues faced in navigating daily life.

Disabilities fall into four main categories: developmental, physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. Developmental disabilities are those that occur in early developmental stages and usually last throughout a person's lifetime<sup>4</sup> such as autism, Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities. Sensory and physical disabilities could be congenital (developed before or at birth) or acquired later in life resulting from a disease or accident. Examples of sensory disabilities include hearing and visual impairments; physical disabilities on the other hand comprise a wide range of limitations to an individual's mobility, dexterity

or physical functioning such as those resulting from muscular dystrophy and spinal cord injury. Multiple disabilities occur when a person experiences two or more areas of significant impairment. This includes conditions such as cerebral palsy which can affect intellectual development and physical mobility.

Even within these four categories, there is a significant diversity in the way disabilities manifest as well as their severity. Many physical disabilities are visible, but some sensory and intellectual disabilities may not be.

The Singapore government's **3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017 – 2021)** references the **World Health Organisation Quality of Life (WHOQOL) Framework** as a guiding framework to provide recommendations and proposed strategies to creating a more inclusive society for PWDs. Singapore has also been a signatory to the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** since 2012<sup>5</sup>. Within the UNCRPD, there are 50 articles affirming principles including PWD's civil rights and freedoms, accessibility, integration, and social protection. The spirit of the UNCRPD reflects the social model of disability, and marks the shift in attitudes and approaches towards



PWDs. In the social model, disability does not indicate the lack of ability but rather the inability of society to accommodate the needs of the disabled<sup>6</sup>.

In alignment with the government’s approach, this landscape review uses the UNCRPD and WHOQOL as the basis to explore the issues and needs of PWDs in Singapore. The list of issues explored within this document is non-exhaustive, but based on media and academic reports, as well as ground validation with academics and expert practitioners. This will be updated as more needs surface and information becomes available. The list is organised according to the articles in the UNCRPD, as categorised in the table on the

following page. The tables also show the number of charities that we see as currently addressing the issues in each category.

The team is grateful to the following individuals for their support and guidance in the preparation of this review:

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<sup>1</sup> Varma, Ankita. (2016, Jun 12). Being upfront with disability. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/being-upfront-with-disability>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development. (2017). 3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017-2021). Retrieved from <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Varma, Ankita. (2016, Jun 12). Being upfront with disability. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/being-upfront-with-disability>

<sup>4</sup> Facts about developmental disabilities. (2015). In Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/facts.html>

<sup>5</sup> Disabled People’s Association. (2015). Singapore and the UNCRPD. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Singapore-and-UN-CRPD.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Zhuang, Kuan Song. (2010). A voice of our own: Rethinking the disabled in the historical imagination of Singapore. Thesis, History, National University of Singapore, Singapore: National University of Singapore, 156



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# Issue framework for People with Disabilities in Singapore

Based on UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and WHO Quality of Life Framework

The table shows the number of charities that we see as currently having programmes addressing the issues in the personal domain of a PWD's life.

Personal	No. of charities
<b>Civil rights and freedoms [S, NP, O]</b> PWDs have the right to life and equal treatment by the law	2
<b>Rights and protection of women and children with disabilities [S]</b> Women and girls with disabilities should be treated equally as others	0
<b>Access to healthcare services [S]</b> PWDs have the right to enjoy the same range, quality and standard of affordable healthcare	12
<b>Mobility [S, NP, O]</b> PWDs can move about independently at an affordable cost	9
<b>Home and family [S, NP]</b> PWDs should have equal rights to marriage, family and personal relationship according to their will	10
<b>Work and employment [S, NP, O]</b> PWDs have the right to work. This can be achieved by: having laws that promote fair employment practices; helping them find, keep and get better jobs	14

**Total no. of charities (as of December 2016): 54**

Note: The letters S, NP and O in square parenthesis refer to the players currently active in addressing this issue in some way: S=State, NP=Non-profit, O=Others (including corporates and social enterprises)

# Issue framework for People with Disabilities in Singapore

Based on UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and WHO Quality of Life Framework

The table shows the number of charities that we see as currently having programmes addressing the issues in the personal domain of a PWD's life.

Immediate Environment	No. of charities
<b>Standard of living [S, NP, O]</b> PWDs have the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to housing and financial independence	8
<b>Choices, independent living and community integration [S, NP]</b> PWDs should have the freedom of choice on who they live with and where	22
<b>Accessibility [S, O]</b> PWDs should be able to access public spaces easily	0
<b>Sports and leisure [S, NP, O]</b> PWDs have the right to participate and enjoy sports, recreation and leisure activities	11
<b>Education and information [S, NP]</b> PWDs should have the opportunity to express, seek and receive information	23

**Total no. of charities (as of December 2016): 54**

Note: The letters S, NP and O in square parenthesis refer to the players currently active in addressing this issue in some way: S=State, NP=Non-profit, O=Others (including corporates and social enterprises)

# Issue framework for People with Disabilities in Singapore

Based on UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and WHO Quality of Life Framework

The table shows the number of charities that we see as currently having programmes addressing the issues a PWD may face in society.

Public Space	No. of charities
<b>Emergencies - (Art 11, QOL - Environment) [S]</b> PWDs should be protected during dangerous or emergency situations	1
<b>Participation in public and political life [S]</b> PWDs can take part in public and political life, such as voting in elections	0
<b>Public education [S, NP]</b> Society should know more about PWDs so that they will learn to respect the rights and dignity of PWDs	7
<b>Information to develop services [S, NP]</b> Information and data should be collected to develop better programmes and services for PWDs	2

**Total no. of charities (as of December 2016): 54**

## Why should you care?

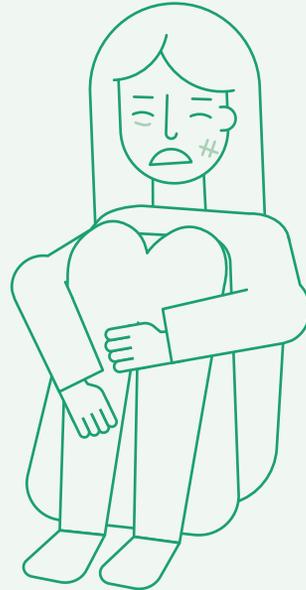
People with disabilities still face numerous hurdles in receiving fair treatment. Abuse takes many forms, including psychological maltreatment, neglect, sexual assault, financial exploitation, and physical violence. Having a disability and being bullied has a compound effect on the individual's well-being as it can result in additional mental and emotional distress.

### **Public awareness and support for abuse and bullying of PWDs is low.**

There is low public awareness of abuse and bullying amongst PWDs, and few resources for victims, parents and teachers. Non-profit organisations that support people with disabilities do not currently offer specific programmes or services to help victims of bullying. Reports made by PWDs on abuse are often not taken seriously enough and investigated thoroughly. Specialised facilities for PWDs who have been abused and need to be removed from their caregivers are also inadequate.

### **PWDs often cannot recognise or articulate bullying or abuse.**

Many cases of abuse of PWDs remain undetected or unreported because PWDs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities might not be aware that they are being abused. Seeking help might also be impeded by any physical or intellectual disabilities they may have. Moreover, reporting abuse becomes a challenge if the perpetrator is a caregiver or in a position of power, as victims' accounts might not be taken seriously<sup>7</sup>.



# What you need to know

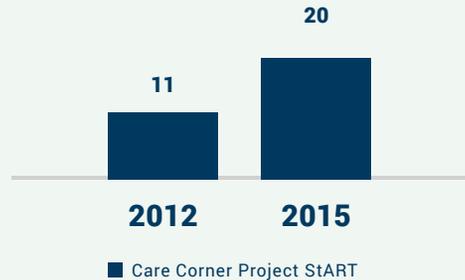
## Abuse of PWDs by family and caregivers has been increasing.

Over the past 5 years, the number of cases of abuse of adult PWDs by family members has almost doubled<sup>8</sup>. This is, in part, likely a result of better detection of abuse by people in the community. A 2016 report in the Straits Times provided a timely reminder, highlighting the case of an elderly man with intellectual disabilities who had been physically abused for at least a decade before hospital staff noticed his cuts and bruises<sup>9</sup>.

## No. of cases of abuse of PWDs handled by TRANS Safe Centre



## No. of cases of abuse of PWDs handled by Care Corner Project StART



## Children with disabilities are considered easy targets by schoolyard bullies

Studies in the US observed that children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their typically developing peers<sup>10</sup>. Children with disabilities may be perceived as vulnerable and weak by typically developing children due to their limited or slow physical movement, sensory impairments or social skill challenges<sup>11</sup>. According to Lien Foundation's Inclusive Attitudes Survey (2016), almost half

of the children with special needs do not have typically developing friends<sup>12</sup>.

'Pranks' pulled by peers on children with disabilities can be life-threatening. For instance, the story of a child who suffers from severe haemophilia, a disorder where blood does not clot properly made local headlines in 2016. Although his classmates knew he could bleed to death if injured, some still tripped him or pulled his chair as he tried to sit<sup>13</sup>. Bullying and social stigmatisation are also among the main concerns of youth with disabilities in tertiary education<sup>14</sup>.

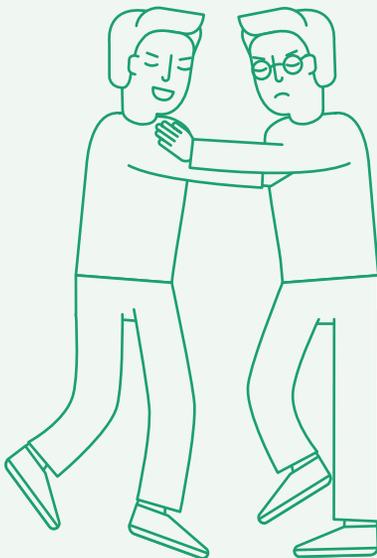
## What's being done and how can you help?

### Community efforts to address general family violence and abuse

There are three voluntary welfare organisations that specialise in addressing family violence and abuse: **PAVE**, **Safe Centre**, which focuses on elderly abuse (including elderly PWDs) and **Care Corner Project StART**, which deals with abuse cases involving vulnerable persons. Project StART has also been training hospital staff, grassroots leaders and people working with the disabled to detect abuse.

### Community efforts to support school bullying

Currently, there are no non-profit organisations that specifically address bullying of children with disabilities. The **Singapore Children's Society's Bully-Free programme** conducts public and school outreach to address school bullying. **The Coalition Against Bullying Singapore** also provides e-consultation and resources for victims, parents and teachers. However, bullying of PWDs is not the primary focus of these organisations.



## Singtel - Cyber Wellness Curriculum for Children with Special Needs

Singtel launched the Cyber Wellness Curriculum for Children with Special Needs in 2016 with the release of the Cyber Wellness Toolkit for Special Education Schools. It was created for students with intellectual disability to help them learn to develop safe online habits and identify dangers in the digital world, such as cyber bullying and harassment. This is the first cyber wellness curriculum for SPED schools. It comprises of a thumb drive with resource materials for the teachers, and three levels of workbooks for students seven to 18 years old, covering four main themes most relevant to them: cyber relationships, online information, time management online, and online harassment and cyber bullying. The toolkit was developed over 10 months in collaboration with TOUCH Cyber Wellness and three Singtel Touching Lives Fund beneficiary schools – APSN Chaoyang School, APSN Tanglin School and MINDS - Lee Kong Chian Gardens School.

The Singtel Cyber Wellness Amazing Race is another cyber wellness programme for children with special needs and aims to introduce students to responsible online behaviour in a simple manner, helping them learn simple tips on cyber wellness and how to stay safe online.

### Impact:

The toolkit is meant for children with special needs from 7-18 years old that are attending special education schools. This curriculum has the potential to help the more than 9,600 students with disabilities among the student population.

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Source: Singtel. (2016). Singtel Cyber Wellness Toolkit for Special Education Schools. Singtel. Retrieved from <https://www.singtel.com/about-us/cyberwellness/special-needs>

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<sup>7</sup> Mokhtar, Faris. (2015, Aug 10). Abuse cases involving disabled go largely unreported: Social workers. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/abuse-cases-involving/2041324.html>

<sup>8</sup> Tan, Theresa. (2016, Mar 13). More cases of vulnerable adults being abused by their families. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-cases-of-vulnerable-adults-being-abused-by-their-families?login=true>

<sup>9</sup> Zhuang, Kuan Song. (2010). A voice of our own: Rethinking the disabled in the historical imagination of Singapore. Thesis, History, National University of Singapore, Singapore: National University of Singapore, 156

<sup>10</sup> Bullying and harassment of students with disabilities. (2016). In *Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Centre*. Retrieved from <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/students-with-disabilities>

<sup>11</sup> Ong, Winston, & Elliot, John M. (2010). Young adults' recall of school bullying. Research Monograph No. 9. Singapore Children's Society.

<sup>12</sup> Lien Foundation. (2016). Inclusive Attitudes Survey (Part 2). Retrieved from [http://lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Inclusive%20Survey%20Part%20-%20Press%20Release%20Lien%20Fdn%20Final%](http://lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Inclusive%20Survey%20Part%20-%20Press%20Release%20Lien%20Fdn%20Final%20)

<sup>13</sup> Tai, Janice. (2015, May 8). Living with invisible disabilities. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/class-pranksters-forgot-he-could-bleed-to-death?login=true>

<sup>14</sup> Leong, John. (2016, Nov 5). Manpower, infrastructure not an issue: Janil on compulsory education for special needs children. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/manpower-infrastructure-not-an-issue-janil-on-compulsory/3264620.html>

# PROVISIONS FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

## Why should you care?

Assistive technologies (AT) are available for PWDs but there are several challenges in bringing the right kind of support to people.

### **There is a lack of awareness of the wide range of AT devices available.**

With rapid advancement of technology and the wide range of AT devices, it is difficult to keep up with the latest equipment in the market.

According to SG Enable, PWDs and employers are often not aware of what is needed, suitable or even available<sup>15</sup>. Thus only a few explore AT options, and generally only when it is urgent. Even then their searches heavily depend on the information they receive from doctors or non-profit organisations<sup>16</sup>.

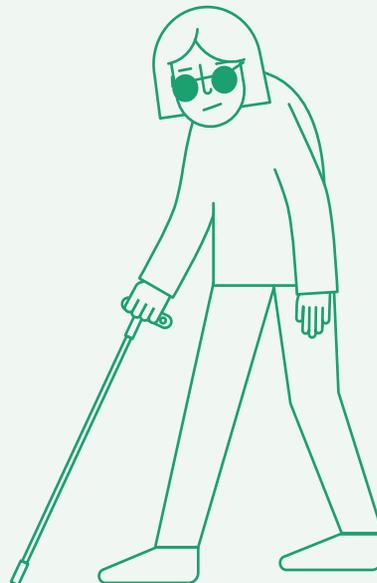
### **The high cost of the more technologically advanced AT devices impedes access, especially in the workplace.**

A single AT device can cost thousands of dollars, putting them out of reach of many PWDs, caregivers, schools and companies, particularly small businesses<sup>17,18</sup>. Even though the government offers financial assistance and subsidies such as Assistive Technology Fund (ATF)<sup>19</sup>, those from middle income households are not eligible. Increasing demand has resulted in some price reductions, but many companies remain reluctant to purchase these devices<sup>20</sup> because of high maintenance and repair costs, as well as the possibility of lowered productivity in the event of the breakdown of the AT. This in turn, creates challenges for PWDs in the workplace and they may not be able to take up certain job opportunities.

### **Children with disabilities have limited and variable access to AT in school and home.**

In schools, even special education (SPED) schools, children with disabilities tend to have limited skills and use of AT. Teachers are not always trained to use or facilitate children's use of AT. Yet, children's use and mastery of AT devices in schools depend on teachers' familiarity and competence<sup>21</sup>.

AT equipment available in schools and at home may be different; hence, the skills children with disabilities acquire in school are not always put into practice at home<sup>22</sup>. For instance, SPED schools may provide AT devices that assist with the computer literacy of children with visual impairments. However, these children are unable to use their computers at home as they do not own such AT devices. As such, their understanding of AT is basic and their usage of the equipment is limited.



# What you need to know

The term Assistive Technology (AT), is an umbrella term for assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices for PWDs<sup>23</sup>. This includes equipment, software programmes or product systems that improve or maintain the functional capabilities of PWDs<sup>24</sup>. AT can range from simple devices such as crutches and adapted pencil grips to more technologically advanced devices such as voice recognition programmes and screen enlargement applications<sup>25</sup>. AT devices enable PWDs to be a part of our increasingly technological world. They enhance PWD's independence, productivity, comfort, and ability to participate in school and the workplace<sup>26</sup>.

## Access to AT is limited

Despite the potential of AT to improve PWD's well-being, the World Health Organisation estimates that in low-income and middle-income countries, only about 5-15% of people who require AT have access to them<sup>27</sup>. There are no existing statistics in Singapore on the number of PWDs who require AT and have access to it. However, access to AT in Singapore is impeded by its high cost, a lack of awareness and trained personnel<sup>28</sup>.

## There are several misconceptions around AT

Although AT encompasses different types of equipment, it tends to be associated with more high-end and technological devices. This misconception suggests that simpler and more cost-effective AT options are often overlooked even if they can be an enabler in PWDs' daily lives<sup>29</sup>.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## Cost subsidies for AT

**SG Enable's** ATF subsidises up to 90% of the cost of AT devices. Since August 2015, the funds can also be used to purchase AT for daily living and rehabilitation, and not just for school or work use. The monthly household income per capita cap for eligibility has increased from \$1,500 to \$1,800. The lifetime cap for subsidies was also increased to \$40,000 so that PWDs could replace faulty AT devices or buy new ones if their needs change over time<sup>30</sup>.

## Improvements in AT literacy

In addition to providing financial assistance, government initiatives and non-profit organisations have taken steps towards improving AT literacy. **Tech Able** at the **Enabling Village**, a resource centre that showcases AT devices, provides information on AT options available to PWDs and training on how to use them.

Similarly, several non-profit organisations such as the **Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore**, **Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped** and the **Society for the Physically Disabled** also have in-house AT clinics and centres that offer consultation, assessments and training of AT equipment.

## Microsoft – Enable Ireland’s Assistive Technology Training Programme

Enable Ireland’s assistive technology training programme, The Foundations in Assistive Technology Level 6 Course, is conducted at Microsoft Ireland’s Sandyford campus. This programme is accredited by the Dublin Institute of Technology and is designed to meet the needs of adults with disabilities as well as their families and carers. The 2017 course involves a minimum commitment of four full weeks, three days face-to-face training as well as 80 hours of on-line learning. Programme funders, employers, educators, Enable Ireland staff and representatives of other service delivery agencies are also able to attend.

### Impact:

365 graduates have come through the programme in the 13 years that Microsoft has supported it. Overall, Enable Ireland Assistive Technology Training Services train 1,000 students per year and the multiplier effect of the programme’s direct reach is approximately 24,000 individuals with disabilities per year. With Microsoft’s €2.53 million worth of software donations since 2012, Enable has also been able to benefit from the cost savings and improve performance accruing from technological enhancements in operations.

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Source: Microsoft Empowers Enable Ireland’s Digital Transformation (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.enableireland.ie/resources/news/microsoft-empowers-enable-ireland%E2%80%99s-digital-transformation>

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<sup>15</sup> In conversation with SG Enable

<sup>16</sup> NVPC interview with SGEnable. (2017, Mar 22)

<sup>17</sup> In conversation with SG Enable

<sup>18</sup> Wong, Meng Yee, Kok, Noel Hwee Chia, and Boon, Hock Lim. (2015). How Practically Usable are Assistive Technology Devices for Users with Disabilities in Singapore?. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Volume 20(5): Pp 65-70.

<sup>19</sup> Disabled Peoples Association. (2016). *Achieving Inclusion in Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Incusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> In conversation with SG Enable

<sup>21</sup> Wong, Meng Yee, Kok, Noel Hwee Chia, and Boon, Hock Lim. (2015). How Practically Usable are Assistive Technology Devices for Users with Disabilities in Singapore?. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Volume 20(5): Pp 65-70.

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<sup>23</sup> Disabled People’s Association. (2016). *Achieving Inclusion in Education: Understanding the needs of students with disabilities*. Disabled People’s Association. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Incusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Assistive Technology Industry Association. (2016). What is AT?. *Assistive Technology Industry Association*. Retrieved from <https://www.atia.org/at-resources/what-is-at/#what-is-assistive-technology>

<sup>25</sup> Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (n.d). *What are some types of assistive devices and how are they used?*. Retrieved from <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/rehabtech/conditioninfo/Pages/device.aspx>

<sup>26</sup> Wong, Meng Ee and Cohen, Libby. (2012). Assistive Technology Use amongst Students with Visual Impairments and Their Teachers. *National Institution of Education*. Retrieved from [https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/nie-research/nie\\_research\\_brief\\_12-005.pdf?sfvrsn=2](https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/nie-research/nie_research_brief_12-005.pdf?sfvrsn=2)

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organisation. (2016). Assistive devices and technologies. *World Health Organisation*. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/disabilities/technology/en/>

<sup>28</sup> Chua, Alfred. (2016, Dec 9). The Big Read: Technology helps break down barriers for workers with disabilities. *Today Online*. Retrieved from [http://m.todayonline.com/singapore/big-read-technology-helps-break-down-barriers-workers-disabilities?cx\\_tag=similar&cid=lg:recos:similar:standard](http://m.todayonline.com/singapore/big-read-technology-helps-break-down-barriers-workers-disabilities?cx_tag=similar&cid=lg:recos:similar:standard)

<sup>29</sup> In conversation with SPD

<sup>30</sup> Goy, Priscilla. (2016, Jul 21). More people with disabilities tapping enhanced tech fund. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-people-with-disabilities-tapping-enhanced-tech-fund>

## Why should you care?

Caregivers of PWDs face several challenges: apart from the physical demands of providing care for their loved ones, they also have to ensure they have the requisite special skills, financial resources, and access to a reliable support network, amongst other concerns.

### There is no consolidated system to support caregivers.

There are various forms of piecemeal support for caregivers of PWDs, ranging from various financial grants and schemes, to information about the range of services and support offered by NPOs catering to the various forms of disabilities. However, there is often confusion about what is available, and to whom. The 3rd Enabling Masterplan has proposed the introduction of a one-stop portal that provides information on service, caregiving, self-care assistive technology and well-being as a support system for caregivers in order to overcome this issue<sup>31</sup>.

### Caregivers receive 'symptomatic help', which is limited.

The knowledge and level of assistance received by caregivers is dependent on the experience and knowledge of the providers they meet. Often they have to work with different case workers across the PWD's life trajectory, leading into additional emotional stress. Caregivers who have poor assistance thus are often not able to access available resources<sup>32</sup>.

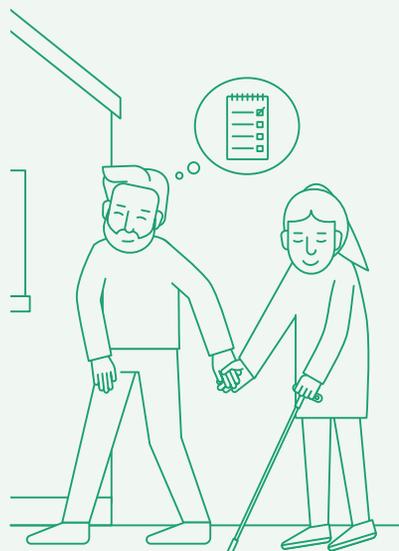
The assignment of one case worker for each PWD, for his/her entire lifetime as well as the integration of various secondary caregivers such as social workers and medical personnel with primary caregivers, both past and present, would alleviate the burden on caregivers. In addition to peer support groups for caregivers, more support services to alleviate both structural, socio-economic and socio-emotional challenges could also be formulated.

### Some programmes are unaffordable.

Caregivers are also unable to afford existing support programmes due to high costs of service and low levels of subsidies. Programmes are more cost-efficient for middle or high income groups, who can afford to recruit foreign domestic workers to help alleviate the caregiving burden. Cost considerations mean that low-income caregivers are only able to access available programmes in the short term.

### People who care for PWDs cannot avail of caregiving leave from their companies.

The 3rd Enabling Masterplan suggests the implementation of caregiving leave<sup>33</sup>. Another suggestion was for Singapore to adopt caregiving leave and caregiving allowance for all working adults<sup>34</sup>. However, these are not yet common practices.



# What you need to know

Caregivers can broadly be categorised into two groups: (i) professional caregivers, which include doctors, nurses and social workers and (ii) family caregivers, which can include spouses, children, grandchildren, siblings and foreign domestic workers hired by their families<sup>35</sup>.

## The caregiving population in Singapore is increasing.

There are an estimated 210,000 people aged between 18 to 69 providing care to a family member or peer, with this number expected to rise in the coming decades<sup>36</sup>. A common sight these days are ageing and elderly caregivers unable to provide for their disabled kin, who are also growing older, with the same intensity and quality as before. 70% of caregivers (which includes those who care for the elderly and disabled) in Singapore are above the age of 40 years old, and 10% are between the ages of 60 and 69 years old<sup>37</sup>.

## Caregivers' needs are heterogeneous

Although there are positive benefits to family caregiving such as witnessing the progress and development of their disabled loved one, the negative impacts are also well-documented. These can include strains on physical and socio-emotional well-being, lack of financial stability, access to resources and other forms of assistance. Juggling employment and caregiving responsibilities can also be stressful, especially when care arrangements have to sync well with work and family responsibilities.

The impact of these variables can result in situations where caregivers are depressed, exhausted, stressed, helpless and even isolated<sup>38</sup>. The 3rd Enabling Masterplan aims to shine a brighter spotlight on these heterogeneous needs by recognising and enabling the critical role of caregivers.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## Range of financial assistance schemes

The Caregivers Training Grant, an annual \$200 subsidy for caregivers to attend training courses; the Foreign Domestic Worker Grant, a monthly offset of \$120; and the Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession, a lower monthly levy fee for those hiring a helper for a disabled family member are amongst the more well-known schemes available.

There are also social and public assistance schemes provided by ComCare, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Aimed more at the disabled elderly, these schemes target intermediate and long-term care offered by VWOs and also include free medical treatment<sup>39</sup>. In addition, the Special Assistance Fund supports the purchase of assistive equipment for lower-income families<sup>40</sup>.

## Several information portals on available resources and services

Although there are many information portals with resources for PWDs and caregivers, they cover different areas e.g. pertaining to the area of disability or the NPO authoring the portal. Currently, **SG Enable** provides the most comprehensive information covering financial assistance, hospital and training support. The **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)** also publishes a consolidated list of assistance schemes covering transport, disability care, legal and other forms of community help<sup>41</sup>.

NPOs such as **Caregivers Alliance** and **AWWA** also provide information, referrals, skills training and other support services for caregivers.

## Physical and socio-emotional support for caregivers

According to the NCSS Respite Care Study (2014), caregivers suffer from poor mental health, especially if there are weak social structures supporting them, if they juggle multiple dependents and/or are employed. The 2017 Budget announcement suggests that the government is cognisant of these issues and will focus on improving employment and caregiver support, including setting up a Disability Caregiver Support Centre aimed at providing information, planned respite and peer support groups.

For now, the foreign worker grant seeks to alleviate the physical burden on caregivers. Peer support groups are also available via NPOs such as the **SPD** and **AWWA** while others such as **TOUCH Caregivers Support** provide home-based and other support services.

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<sup>31</sup> Qi Lim Jia. (2016). 5 Year Roadmap Moots More Help For Caregivers of Those with Disabilities, *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-5-yearroadmap-moots-more-help-for-caregivers-of-those-with/3380726.html>.

<sup>32</sup> National Council for Social Services and fuelfor. (2016). Who Cares? Transforming the Caregiving Experience in Singapore. Singapore: National Council for Social Services.

<sup>33</sup> Qi Lim Jia. (2016). 5 Year Roadmap Moots More Help For Caregivers of Those with Disabilities, *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-5-yearroadmap-moots-more-help-for-caregivers-of-those-with/3380726.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Email interview with AWWA by SMU students

<sup>35</sup> Mehta, Kalyani. (2005) Family caregiving for older persons in Singapore. National University of Singapore, Department of Social Work, Presentation retrieved from [www.fas.nus.edu/rg/doc/family/family\\_older.ppt](http://www.fas.nus.edu/rg/doc/family/family_older.ppt)

<sup>36</sup> Basu, Radha. (2013, Sep 27). Singapore's caregiver crunch. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapores-caregiver-crunch>

<sup>37</sup> Zheng Z. (2011). Caregiving in Singapore. Ministry of Health. Retrieved from [https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications\\_and\\_papers/health/ssnsep11-pg12-14.pdf](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications_and_papers/health/ssnsep11-pg12-14.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Li, Andrew, Shaffer, Johnathan and Bagger, Jessica. (2015). The Psychological Well-Being of Disability Caregivers: Examining the Roles of Family Strain, Family-to-Work Conflict, and Perceived Supervisor Support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. Vol 20(1): Pp 40-49.

<sup>39</sup> Singapore Silver Pages. (2016). Introduction to Public Assistance. Agency for Integrated Care. Retrieved from <https://www.silverpages.sg/financial-assistance/others/Public%20Assistance>

<sup>40</sup> Children, Youth & Family Services, Service Planning & Development Group. (2015). Assistance Schemes for Individuals and Families in Social and Financial Need. National Council for Social Services. Retrieved from [https://www.ncss.gov.sg/NCSS/media/NCSS-Documents-and-Forms/NCSS%20Internal%20Documents/AssistanceSchemes\\_1.pdf](https://www.ncss.gov.sg/NCSS/media/NCSS-Documents-and-Forms/NCSS%20Internal%20Documents/AssistanceSchemes_1.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Qi Lim Jia. (2016). 5 Year Roadmap Moots More Help For Caregivers of Those with Disabilities, *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-5-yearroadmap-moots-more-help-for-caregivers-of-those-with/3380726.html>.

## Why should you care?

PWDs seeking employment face numerous challenges in the workplace and in the job market.

### Misconceptions about the productivity of PWDs as employees are common.

Negative attitudes towards PWDs in the workplace include viewing them as incapable, dependent on others or an economic liability<sup>42</sup>. Often PWDs are hired not based on considerations of their capability to fulfil the job requirements but as a 'form of corporate social responsibility or simply to reduce their dependence on foreign labour and comply with Singapore's employment quotas'<sup>43</sup>.

### Structural and social barriers in the workplace inhibit PWD employment.

Structural barriers include poor accessibility and below market wages while social barriers constitute of discrimination in the workplace and a lack of flexible work arrangements. Companies need to be more receptive in hiring, training and providing accommodations in the workplace for their staff with disabilities. This includes allowing caregivers to accompany PWDs in the workplace.

### Workplace and employer discrimination are widespread.

In a study by SMU Change Lab, PWDs reported instances of workplace and employer discrimination, ranging from poor treatment due to their disability to lower wages for identical work roles as able-bodied colleagues<sup>44</sup>.

Compensation for PWDs, particularly those working in sheltered workshops, with wages comparable to market rate is a recognised issue. Current compensation in sheltered workshops has sometimes been likened to an allowance more than a salary, and needs to be raised in acknowledgement of PWDs' contribution to the workforce<sup>45</sup>.

### There are few workplace insurance and aid schemes available.

Most companies do not provide insurance for PWDs. Although company insurance policies cover acquired illnesses and accidents which may result in disabilities, most employers do not insure staff with pre-existing disabilities<sup>46</sup>. Even before securing a job, PWDs are therefore at a disadvantage in terms of workplace opportunities and benefits available to them.



## Employers lack awareness on the workplace accommodations needed for PWDs

Many employment opportunities are unsuitable for PWDs, for reasons such as offices that are not wheelchair friendly or the absence of personalised job support for people with intellectual disabilities. These issues perpetuate the low employment rate of PWDs<sup>47</sup>. Jobs such as printing, packing and book binding that used to be available to PWDs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, have been automated as more companies have turned to technology to increase their productivity. As a result, the employment options available to PWDs has gone down<sup>48</sup>.

## Limited opportunities for PWDs to upgrade and develop skills relevant for knowledge economy.

As Singapore shifts towards a knowledge-based economy, there is increasing focus on jobs in research and information systems but skills-training for PWDs in these sectors is sparse. Training for PWDs mainly emphasises hospitality or F&B skills, and while training and rehabilitation centres would be interested to diversify their programmes to accommodate PWDs with interests in other sectors, they do not have sufficient resources to do so<sup>49</sup>. There have also been cases of PWDs and their families who are not convinced of the long term benefits of training programmes and employment. For example, Friends of the Disabled Society (FDS) faces a low uptake rate of their Skills and Entrepreneurship Programme.



# What you need to know

## The PWD employment rate is low.

According to the 3rd Enabling Masterplan, PWDs form only 0.1% of the private sector workforce<sup>50</sup>. Over 60% of PWDs surveyed in 2016 by the National Council of Social Services reported that they were not included in the workplace or that they were not given opportunities for professional development<sup>51</sup>.

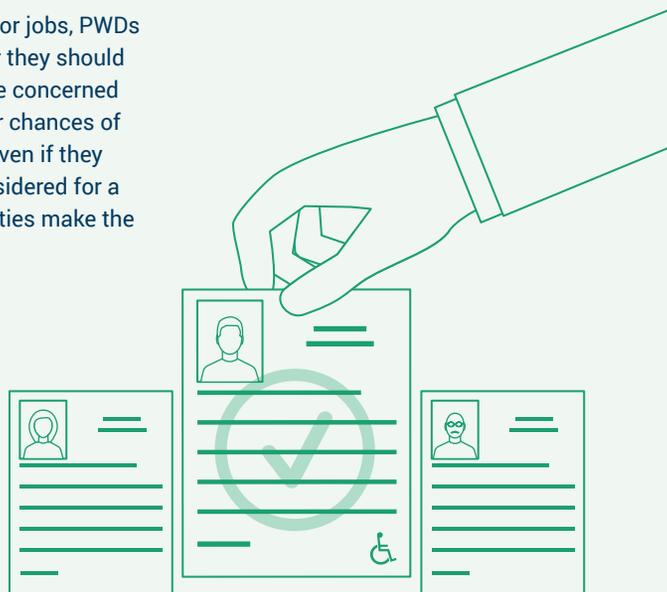
Since the launch of the Open Door programme in 2014, a government-funded scheme by the Workforce Singapore and MSF, and administered by SG Enable, that supports employers who hire and train PWDs, more than 850 PWDs have gained employment. Over 1000 working professionals have also undergone training to understand disabilities through other SG Enable initiatives<sup>52</sup>. In spite of this, many PWDs continue to face difficulties in securing and remaining in their jobs.

## PWDs worry that disclosing their disabilities might lead to rejection.

During the process of applying for jobs, PWDs may be conflicted as to whether they should disclose their disability. They are concerned that doing so would reduce their chances of being called for an interview<sup>53</sup>. Even if they do get an interview and are considered for a job, PWDs feel that their disabilities make the chances of securing it low.

## Workplace integration can be challenging.

Open employment, or employment in non-segregated and mainstream environments, can also pose a unique set of challenges for PWDs. Inflexible work arrangements and failure to accommodate disabled staff's specific needs may impede their comfort and productivity in the workplace. With open employment, the difficulty also lies in managing 'job carving' or the adaptation of an existing job scope, or breaking down tasks by grouping them<sup>54</sup>. This includes the use of assistive devices, specialised equipment and adjustments to job scopes or work hours<sup>55</sup>. Some PWDs may also require the help of their caregivers at the workplace to access restroom facilities or to ease their transition into employment, especially for people with intellectual disabilities and autism<sup>56</sup>.



# What's being done and how can you help?

## Support for employers

The **Open Door programme** and other **SG Enable** initiatives provide support to employers who hire and train PWDs. This includes on-the-job training and job redesign grants as well as workshops on managing disabilities. In addition, the government-run Workfare Income Supplement Scheme (WIS) provides cash and CPF payouts to supplement the wages and retirement savings of PWDs<sup>57</sup>.

## Support for would-be PWD employees

Several non-profit organisations also provide job matching, job placements and career guidance services to PWDs. These organisations include **Bizlink**, **Society for the Physically Disabled**, **Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore** and the **Autism Resource Centre's Employment and Employability Centre**.

Social enterprises such as **Joan Bowen Café**, **Laksania** and the **Movement for the Intellectually Disabled's (MINDS)** shop, have also been set up to create job opportunities for PWDs. Companies such as Uniqlo, Han's and KFC, with its Toa Payoh branch being operated by hearing impaired staff, are also known for their inclusive hiring practices.

<sup>42</sup> **Disabled People's Association**. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in the Workplace. *Disabled People's Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Employment-merged.compressed.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> **Poh, R.** (2013, Dec 6). Workers With Disabilities Face Greater Difficulties In Job Searches. *Society for the Physically Disabled*. Retrieved from <http://www.spd.org.sg/updates/detail/workers-with-disabilities-face-greater-difficulties-in-job-searches-140.html>.

<sup>44</sup> **Raghunathan, Ranjana, Balambigai Balakrishnan, Catherine J. Smith, and Mumtaz Md Kadir.** (2015). "People with Physical Disabilities in Singapore: Understanding Disabling Factors in Caregiving, Education, Employment and Finances." SMU Change Lab, June. [http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien\\_reports/8](http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_reports/8)

<sup>45</sup> **Raghunathan, Ranjana, Balambigai Balakrishnan, Catherine J. Smith, and Mumtaz Md Kadir.** (2015). "People with Physical Disabilities in Singapore: Understanding Disabling Factors in Caregiving, Education, Employment and Finances." SMU Change Lab, June. [http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien\\_reports/8](http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_reports/8)

<sup>46</sup> **In conversation with Professor Kenneth Poon, National Institute of Education.**

<sup>47</sup> **Qi Lim Jia.** (2016). 5 Year Roadmap Moots More Help For Caregivers of Those with Disabilities, *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-5-yearroadmap-moots-more-help-for-caregivers-of-those-with/3380726.html>.

<sup>48</sup> **Tai, Janice.** (2015, May 18). People with disabilities losing jobs to technology. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/people-with-disabilities-losing-jobs-to-technology>

<sup>49</sup> **Yap, A.** (2013, Dec 3). Why S'pore needs disability legislation. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/why-spore-needs-disability-legislation?singlepage=true>

<sup>50</sup> **Ministry of Social and Family Development.** (2017). 3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017-2021). Retrieved from <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>51</sup> **Mohandas, Vimita.** (2016, Nov 20). Improving workplaces for special needs employees. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from [http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/improving-workplaces-for-special-needs-employees/3304778.html?cx\\_tag=morestories4ucna&cid=tg:recos:morestories4ucna:standard#cxrecs\\_s](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/improving-workplaces-for-special-needs-employees/3304778.html?cx_tag=morestories4ucna&cid=tg:recos:morestories4ucna:standard#cxrecs_s)

<sup>52</sup> **Singapore Silver Pages.** (2016). Introduction to Public Assistance. *Agency for Integrated Care*. Retrieved from <https://www.silverpages.sg/financial-assistance/others/Public%20Assistance>

<sup>53</sup> **Poh, Royson.** (2013). Workers with disabilities face greater difficulties in job searches. *SPD*. Retrieved from <http://www.spd.org.sg/updates/detail/workers-with-disabilities-face-greater-difficulties-in-job-searches-140.html>

<sup>54</sup> **NVPC Interview with SPD**

<sup>55</sup> **Qi Lim Jia.** (2016). 5 Year Roadmap Moots More Help For Caregivers of Those with Disabilities, *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/new-5-yearroadmap-moots-more-help-for-caregivers-of-those-with/3380726.html>.

<sup>56</sup> **Kok, Xing Hui.** (2014, Aug 4). Allaying carers' fears one issue in finding work for disabled people. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://m.todayonline.com/singapore/allaying-carers-fears-one-issue-finding-work-disabled-people>

<sup>57</sup> **Disabled People's Association, Singapore (DPA).** (2015). *Achieving Inclusion in the Workplace*. Research & Publications, Singapore: Disabled People's Association, Singapore (DPA), 35.

## Why should you care?

With the increasing life expectancy of PWDs and a declining natural population, more and more PWDs will be unlikely to have family caregivers to look after them. If PWDs are not equipped with the appropriate skills, they may struggle with the challenges of everyday living with minimal support. In fact, in NCSS's 2015 Quality of Life (QOL) Survey, it was discovered that what PWDs desired the most for their improvement was independence<sup>58</sup>.

### PWDs' level of independence often depends on their caregivers

Caregivers' views on PWDs' independence ultimately determine the level of support they demand from available welfare options. While some are happy to explore disability hostels, others are uncomfortable with placing their disabled relative with outsiders for any amount of time<sup>59</sup>.

At the same time, caregivers may find the level of engagement at day activity centres inadequate for PWDs. Expanding services beyond recreation to also develop clients' cognitive and social abilities would allow these centres to be more than just day-care facilities but also places where PWDs can learn, explore and find opportunities for growth and fulfilment.

### Financial independence brings PWDs one step closer to independent living

While financial independence is not necessarily a viable option for all PWDs, more can be done to ensure that the long-term financial needs of PWDs are addressed. This is particularly important for those with ageing caregivers. In fact, PWDs who are able to engage in gainful employment are motivated to do so by a desire for some degree of financial independence. Financial services are not always accessible to PWDs however. For example, a blind customer is unable to operate an individual account, with banks insisting a joint account with a family member. General banking services such as phone banking are also inaccessible to those who are hearing-impaired<sup>60</sup>.



# What you need to know

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), for a person with disabilities to have a comfortable standard of living, he or she must have equal access to nutrition, sanitation and public housing. This includes equal access to protection or poverty reduction programmes<sup>61</sup>. Extending this to include the concept of independent living, it suggests the right and freedom to define one's own terms of living.

## Housing options are limited for independent living by PWDs in Singapore

Housing is a vital component of independent living, alongside other aspects such as health, employment and even choice and control over information, support and advocacy received<sup>62</sup>.

The housing options for PWDs seeking to live separately from their families include one community group home, three adult disability hostels and as of 2016, eight adult disability homes<sup>63</sup>. In general, community group homes are suitable for PWDs requiring minimal support as these are in designated disabled-friendly rental flats, while adult disability homes provide long-term residential care for neglected PWDs or those whose caregivers are no longer able to provide care<sup>64</sup>. The community group home and hostels currently serve those with intellectual disabilities, while the homes cater to those with physical or multiple disabilities<sup>65</sup>.

At present, waiting time for a place in the latter is six to 12 months<sup>66</sup>, although MSF hopes to reduce this somewhat by increasing admissions from 650 to 1,600 by 2018<sup>67</sup>. In addition, by 2018 it is expected that the first home for those with intellectual disabilities, co-developed by MSF and St Andrew's Autism Centre, will be completed.

For those who live with their caregivers, there is a range of day facilities to explore. In 2016, there were 21 day activity centres for adults with disabilities, some of which offer drop-in programmes and other forms of customised support for clients<sup>68</sup>. While the drop-in programme focuses more on social and recreational training activities, the day activity centres aim to maximise a PWD's independence, including preparation for employment in sheltered workshops. At these workshops, PWDs who do not have the skills and competencies required for open employment are financially compensated for routine task-based activities<sup>69</sup>.

## PWDs and caregivers are often unable to save

A study done by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation on the physically disabled in Singapore in 2015 identified their three main sources of financial support as being paid work, parents and siblings and their main financial outlays as being for medical

expenses, transport costs and the cost of employing a domestic worker as a caregiver. Only 16% of those interviewed for the study were able to put aside savings of some sort<sup>70</sup>. The possibility to explore more diverse saving options, for instance a co-funded savings plan for the PWD, his/her caregivers and the government, is currently lacking.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## Adult Disability Homes

Disability homes provide long-term care for PWDs, especially those without caregivers. For example, the **Red Cross Home for the Disabled** offers residential care for those with severe and multiple disabilities and the **Thye Hua Kwan Homes for the Disabled and for Disabled Adults** offer residential care for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

VWOs such as the **Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)** and **TOUCH Community Services** run adult disability hostels for those under the age of 55 and possessing intellectual disabilities. Besides the provision of meals, these centres routinely engage social workers, counsellors and occupational therapists to support the various needs of their clients<sup>71</sup>.

Meanwhile, DACs provide respite care for a few days per week for those who are unable to receive employment. Examples include **Metta Welfare Association, Autism Association and Christian Outreach for the Handicapped**, which cater to those with physical and intellectual disabilities<sup>72</sup>.



## Deloitte and Rocky Bay

Deloitte is a long-time supporter of Rocky Bay, a leading provider of disability services that aims to optimise the quality of life for PWDs in Western Australia. Deloitte provides expertise via board representation, skilled volunteering, pro-bono services and Impact Day activities. Deloitte volunteers apply their skills, knowledge and expertise to a variety of hands-on and skilled volunteering projects, such as landscaping at Independent Living Units, supporting Rocky Bay clients to participate in community activities and strategic support in the development and expansion of Employment and Assistive Technology programmes.

### Impact:

Rocky Bay provides support for over 3,000 people of all ages living with disability.

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Source: Rocky Bay Corporate Partnerships. (2017). *Rocky Bay*. Retrieved from <http://www.rockybay.org.au/support-us/corporate-partnerships/>

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<sup>58</sup> SG Enable. (2017). Enabling Lives Initiative Grant. *SGEnable*. Retrieved from <https://www.enablinglives.sg/apply-for-grant>

<sup>59</sup> NVPC Interview with SGEnable. (2017 Mar 21).

<sup>60</sup> Disabled People's Association. (2013). Access to Banking Services Seminar. *Disabled People's Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Seminar-Evaluation-Report-full-version.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Division for Social Policy and Development Disability. (2016). Article 28: Adequate standard of living and social protection. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-28-adequate-standard-of-living-and-social-protection.html>

<sup>62</sup> Yap, A. (2013, Dec 3). *Why S'pore needs disability legislation*. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/why-spore-needs-disability-legislation?singlepage=true>

<sup>63</sup> Ng, Kelly. (2015, Mar 14). More places at day activity centres for adults with autism, disabilities. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/more-places-day-activity-centres-adults-autism-disabilities>

<sup>64</sup> SG Enable. (2017). Adult Disability Homes. *SGEnable*. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-adults/homes-for-adults-with-disabilities/>

<sup>65</sup> SG Enable. (2016). Adult Disability Hostel Matrix. *SGEnable*. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/uploads/Matrix%20-%20Hostel.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> NVPC Interview with SGEnable, 21 Mar, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Chan, Luo Er. (2016, Mar 24). 6 to 12 months' waiting time for adult disability homes: Faishal Ibrahim. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/6-to-12-months-waiting/2634116.html>

<sup>68</sup> Ng, Kelly. (2015, Mar 14). More places at day activity centres for adults with autism, disabilities. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/more-places-day-activity-centres-adults-autism-disabilities>

<sup>69</sup> SG Enable. (2017). Services for Adults with Disabilities. *SGEnable*. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-adults/>

<sup>70</sup> Raghunathan, Ranjana, Balakrishnan, Balambigai, Smith, Catherine and Kadir, Mumtaz Md. (2015). People with Physical Disabilities in Singapore: Understanding Disabling Factors in Caregiving, Education, Employment and Finances. *Lien Centre for Social Innovation Reports Vol 6-2015*.

<sup>71</sup> Poh, Royson. (2013). Workers with disabilities face greater difficulties in job searches. *SPD*. Retrieved from <http://www.spd.org.sg/updates/detail/workers-with-disabilities-face-greater-difficulties-in-job-searches-140.html>

<sup>72</sup> Lin, Yi Han. (2013, Aug 28). New drop-in programme for disabled allows caregivers to take a break. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-drop-in-programme-for-disabled-allows-caregivers-to-take-a-break>

## Why should you care?

Despite efforts by government bodies and non-profit organisations to raise awareness on disability, there is a continued lack of understanding of the issues and concerns of PWDs.

### Disabilities are vast and varied

More efforts are needed to raise awareness and combat the lack of information and understanding of disability. There is also a need to recognise PWDs for their capabilities and not just their disabilities.

### Integration is not inclusion

People tend to include PWDs into mainstream environments without taking into account their needs or choices. Instead of merely integrating PWDs into public spaces, these environments need to be made accessible, inclusive and safe for PWDs. Those who wish to include PWDs in programmes or events should actively consult them in the planning stages, especially when these services are intended to have direct impact on their lives<sup>73</sup>.



# What you need to know

Social inclusion ensures that everyone has opportunity to participate in all aspects of life to the best of their abilities and desires, regardless of whether or not they have a disability<sup>74</sup>. Stigma is the lack of social inclusion, resulting in discrimination against people with disabilities (PWD) because of their disabilities. In Singapore, 62 % of PWDs surveyed reported that they do not feel included, accepted, given opportunities to contribute or reach their potential by society<sup>75</sup>.

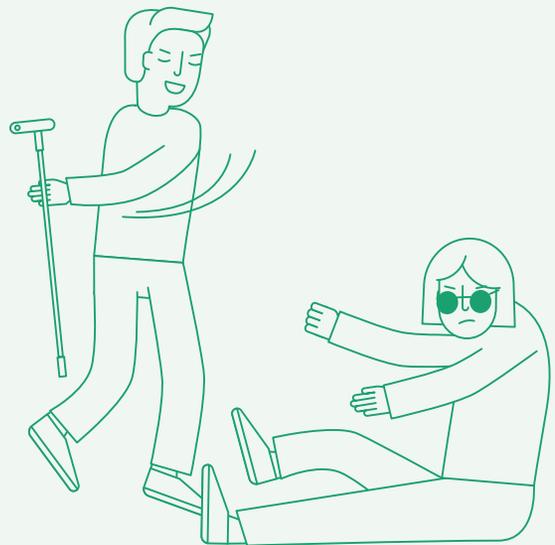
Although the idea of an inclusive society appeals to most people in Singapore, disability itself is met with apprehension. 64% of the public are willing to share public spaces but not interact with people with special needs<sup>76</sup>.

## **Stigma and discrimination towards PWDs affect numerous aspects of their lives, from school to the workplace.**

PWDs are unfairly treated and excluded from opportunities in mainstream society, on the basis of their disability. As mentioned in issue #1 on 'Abuse and Bullying of PWDs', almost 1 in 2 children with special needs do not have typically developing friends<sup>77</sup>. In Lien Foundation's Inclusive Attitudes Survey (2016), more than half of parents with children with special needs also stated that pre-schools were unwilling to take their children<sup>78</sup>.

## **Stigma towards PWDs is also evident in employment opportunities.**

More than a third of the public surveyed reported that they would not hire PWDs if they were employers<sup>79</sup>. Besides experiencing difficulties in securing employment, many PWDs also feel that people do not expect them to excel at their jobs because of their disability.



# What's being done and how can you help?

Two types of barriers actively being addressed are: the physical 'hardware' barriers and the 'software' in terms of negative attitudes towards disability.

## Addressing physical "hardware" barriers

The increase in inclusive spaces creates opportunities for people with and without disabilities to engage with one another. This includes Singapore's first inclusive kindergarten, **Kindle Garden by AWWA**, **iFit inclusive gym** and the **inclusive playgrounds** in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park and Canberra Park. By the end of 2017, there will be 11 inclusive playgrounds island-wide for children with disabilities and their typically developing peers to enjoy together<sup>80</sup>.

## Overcoming "software" barriers

Public education programmes such as **NCSS's 'See The True Me' campaign** aim to address the 'software' by raising awareness on disability. PWDs featured as part of the campaign highlight who they are, rather than the disability they have. The **Purple Parade**, an annual parade celebrating special needs is another public engagement platform that promotes inclusion and the importance of access to equal opportunities for PWDs. **The Disabled People's Association (DPA)** and **Rainbow Centre** also conduct talks in schools, offices and organisations on promoting a more inclusive and accessible society for PWDs.



## ANZ Bank - Founding Sponsor of the Attitude Foundation

ANZ supports the Attitude Foundation in Australia as a principal partner by providing financial help and skilled staff to support the Foundation's operations. The sponsorship aims to shine a light on people with a disability within the community. The Attitude Foundation was created to relieve discrimination of people with disabilities in Australia through inclusion, integration and empowerment in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

### Impact:

The Foundation's mission is to give a voice to the 4 million Australians with disabilities by sharing powerful stories to drive a material change in attitudes and lives.

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Source: Attitude Foundation. (2015, Sept 25). Attitude Foundation and ANZ announce 2 year Partnership. Attitude Foundation. Retrieved from [http://www.attitude.org.au/attitude\\_foundation\\_and\\_anz\\_announce\\_2\\_year\\_partnership](http://www.attitude.org.au/attitude_foundation_and_anz_announce_2_year_partnership)

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<sup>73</sup> Lee, Justin and Wong, Fung Shing. (2015, Oct 20). Ask the disabled how best to include them. *IPS Commons*. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsccommons.sg/ask-the-disabled-how-best-to-include-them/>

<sup>74</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). Disability Inclusion. *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability-inclusion.html>

<sup>75</sup> Varma, Ankita. (2016, Jun 12). Being upfront with disability. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/being-upfront-with-disability](http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/being-upfront-with-disability)

<sup>76</sup> Blackbox Research. (2016). Inclusive Attitudes Survey Pt 2: Views of the Parents of Children with Special Needs. *Lien Foundation*. Retrieved from <http://kidsfirst.sg/pdf/inclusive-attitudes-survey-part2.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Tai, Janice. (2016, Jun 3). People with disabilities in the spotlight. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight)

<sup>78</sup> Lin, Yi Han. (2013, Aug 28). New drop-in programme for disabled allows caregivers to take a break. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-drop-in-programme-for-disabled-allows-caregivers-to-take-a-break>

<sup>79</sup> Tai, Janice. (2016, Jun 3). People with disabilities in the spotlight. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight)

<sup>80</sup> National Parks. (2015, Aug 22). Care & Share Movement Grant Enabled Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park inclusive playground to be launched with first-of-its-kind wheelchair-accessible play equipment. *National Parks*. Retrieved from <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/news/2015/8/bishan-ang-mo-kio-park-inclusive-playground-to-be-launched>

## Why should you care?

Navigating public spaces and transportation on a daily basis is often a challenge for PWDs.

### Access for the physically-disabled

Many of the older buildings in Singapore are not wheelchair-accessible. Ramp access, where available, is often inconvenient with ramps being too high or having too many turns. While there are some disabled-friendly vehicles such as buses, not all bus stops or pick-up points on their routes are equally accessible<sup>81</sup>.

### Access for the visually-disabled

Tactile surface indicators, Braille plates in lifts and the announcement of station names have improved the accessibility of public train services for the blind. However, the lack of public signage and other communication barriers mean that access to information is still limited. Many transport personnel and business owners still forbid entry to guide dogs on public transport and eateries, even though they are legally entitled, igniting debate on whether a comprehensive anti-discrimination law should be enacted to counter similar issues<sup>82</sup>.

### Access for the aurally-disabled

Communication barriers are common for the deaf, even if their less visible needs tend to go unnoticed. Since communication and social interaction are substantial problems for them, verbal emergency announcements or news in public places are insufficient. Visual alarms and better signage are required to counter this<sup>83</sup>.

### Accommodating those with developmental disabilities

Little has been done to address how to help or interact with those who suffer from developmental disabilities. These are not outwardly apparent, and when manifested through behaviour, may deter others from rendering help.

### Engaging transport operators

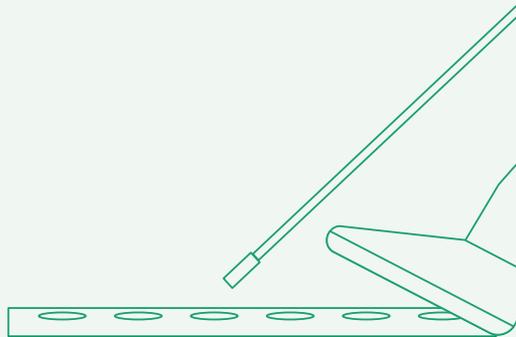
More can be done by transport operators to provide sensitivity training and disability awareness training for MRT staff and bus captains. DPA encourages training in disability etiquette, people-first training and getting familiar with guide dogs accompanying the visually-disabled. Without service staff understanding the importance of treating disabled passengers with respect, no amount of technological or infrastructural changes can amount to much.

The lack of access to transport information can be improved by providing the layout of MRT stations, emergency protocol and vehicle breakdowns to the disabled through various forms in Braille and visual cues. To plan journeys better, mapping could be done for disabled-friendly services such as bus stops and interchanges<sup>84</sup>.

## What you need to know

Access to public infrastructure is defined by both public facilities built with consideration for those with special needs, as well as transport options and schemes catering to the disabled. Ostensibly, this is a relatively easy issue to address in supporting citizens with special needs. And yet, even with concession schemes, alternative transport options and building of accessible facilities, there remains much to be improved on. As a gauge, there are an estimated 28,000 visually-impaired individuals in Singapore, but only seven who are guide-dog users<sup>85</sup>.

The three main obstacles to equal access to public infrastructure are: the coverage of legislation, the limitations or possibilities of the urban built environment and public attitudes. Under the UNCRPD, enabling PWDs to participate in all aspects of life can be facilitated through ensuring all buildings, roads, transportation systems and outdoor facilities are PWD-friendly. Besides this, there should be adequate information, communication and guidelines, which PWDs are able to access through information and communication technologies<sup>86</sup>.



# What's being done and how can you help?

## Existing legislation

Both the Environmental Public Health Act and Rapid Transit System Regulations now permit guide dogs into food establishments, toilets of licensed premises and on public transport. However, there are no punitive measures or recourse options available should the legislation be flouted.

## Upgrades to physical infrastructure

On the physical front, Singapore has largely improved since 2013, with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) upgrading public transport facilities. For example, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA)'s Code of Accessibility was revised in 2013 to create more accessible and inclusive buildings for those with disabilities<sup>87</sup>. LTA also expanded the Green Man Plus scheme, covering 500 pedestrian crossings by 2015, which allowed more PWDs to cross the road<sup>88</sup>.

## Improvements to public transportation

Public transport bodies have been progressive with their disabled-friendly facilities. For example, LTA has fit 80% of their MRT stations with barrier-free access routes while close to half have extra lifts. Almost all pedestrian walkways, taxi and bus shelters are barrier-free and almost all buses are wheelchair accessible, with a mission for 100% coverage by 2020<sup>89</sup>. It has also set up sheltered walkways – extended up to a 400m radius– which is especially helpful on rainy days. There are also several subsidies and concession schemes available. These include the monthly concession pass for

persons with disabilities and subsidies such as the taxi subsidy scheme administered by SGENable and VWO transport subsidies that allow for 50-80% off travel fares<sup>90</sup>.

However, there is room for improvement with respect to the commuter experience of those with special needs. There is a consensus amongst those interviewed by DPA<sup>91</sup> of the unsatisfactory help given by bus captains, taxi drivers and commuters who lack sensitivity, decline to provide assistance or even obstruct those in wheelchairs<sup>92</sup>. These attitudinal barriers prove to be more challenging than refitting physical infrastructure.

## Improving accessibility of private properties

Private properties such as hotels have some way to go – as of 2017, only twelve hotels and resorts have received a four or five-star accessibility rating for user-friendliness levels, according to the Building and Construction Authority's Friendly Building Portal<sup>93</sup>. This is even with relatively low benchmarks, where new hotels must only have one accessible room for every 100 rooms<sup>94</sup>.

## Community advocacy

Various charities such as the **Disabled People's Association (DPA)**, **The Singapore Association for the Deaf (Sadeaf)**, **Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH)** and the **Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD)** routinely provide suggestions and advocate for better accessibility options.

## Uber and SG Enable – Complimentary UberX Rides for PWDs

Uber, in partnership with SG Enable offered 1000 complimentary rides to PWDs as well as their caregivers as part of an initiative in 2014. This initiative was in response to the recognition that transportation is challenging for PWDs and their caregivers, particularly elderly caregivers who are less mobile and find public transport challenging. As part of the partnership, Uber collaborated with SG Enable to facilitate transport arrangements for persons with disabilities to the Enabling Employers Awards Gala Dinner on April 24, 2014, as well as other events for persons with disabilities and the community.

### Impact:

1,000 complimentary UberX rides for PWDs and their caregivers in 2014.



Source: Terence Ng, (2014, Apr 21) Uber to provide free rides to persons with disabilities; partners with SG Enable. Retrieved from <https://e27.co/uber-to-provide-free-rides-to-persons-with-disabilities-partners-with-sg-enable/>

<sup>81</sup> Raghunathan, Ranjana, Balakrishnan, Balambigai, Smith, Catherine and Kadir, Mumtaz Md. (2015). People with Physical Disabilities in Singapore: Understanding Disabling Factors in Caregiving, Education, Employment and Finances. *Lien Centre for Social Innovation Reports* Vol 6-2015.

<sup>82</sup> Yap, Alvan. (2013, Sep 13). Allowing guide dogs with the blind is a right, not a privilege. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/voices/allowing-guide-dogs-blind-right-not-privilege?page=1>

<sup>83</sup> SADEAF. (2012). Mini Enabling Masterplan 2012. Singapore Association for the Deaf. Retrieved from <http://sadeaf.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Mini-Enabling-Master-Plan-SAdeaf.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> Disabled Peoples Association. (2016). Achieving Inclusion in Education. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Inclusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> Abu Bakar, Jalelah. (2016, Jan 4). More places open to guide dogs. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-places-open-to-guide-dogs](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-places-open-to-guide-dogs)

<sup>86</sup> Disabled People's Association. (2015). Singapore and the UNCRPD. In Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Singapore-and-UN-CRPD.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development. (2017). 3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017-2021). Retrieved from <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>88</sup> Tai, Janice. (2016, Jun 3). People with disabilities in the spotlight. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/people-with-disabilities-in-the-spotlight)

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.lta.gov.sg/content/ltaweb/en/public-transport/system-design/enhancing-physical-accessibility-for-all.html>

<sup>90</sup> SG Enable. (2017). Transport. *SGEnable*. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/schemes/transport/>

<sup>91</sup> Ng, Jorain. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in Transport. Disabled People's Association. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Achieving-Inclusion-in-Transport.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Disabled Peoples Association. (2016). *Achieving Inclusion in Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Inclusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> BCA. (2017). Friendly Building Search. Retrieved from <http://www.bca.gov.sg/friendlybuilding/FindBuilding/FriendlyFeatures.aspx>

<sup>94</sup> Goy, Priscilla. (2016, Jul 4). Making life easier for the disabled: What Singapore can learn from Sweden. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/hotels-features-for-disabled-benefit-all](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/hotels-features-for-disabled-benefit-all)

## Why should you care?

Sports and recreation help fuel the development and utilisation of a PWD's creative, artistic, physical and intellectual potential. Providing not just the facilities but also opportunities and pathways is imperative to promoting PWDs' well-being.

### Disability sports in Singapore

It was not until Paralympians such as Yip Pin Xiu and Laurentia Tan won their medals that Singaporeans sat up to take notice of disability sports. While the 3rd Enabling Masterplan showcases an extensive effort to improve the infrastructure and capabilities of the current disability sports landscape, there are other existing barriers that must improve in tandem.

### Current barriers to PWD participation in sports

Public support for disability sports and use of community training facilities is currently weak. Without a concerted effort from PWDs, their parents and the public, it is unlikely that PWDs' use of communal facilities will be tolerated, much less encouraged and nurtured.

The lack of transport and the financial cost of participation also hamper disability sporting efforts. For those who are not able to travel independently, getting to and from sports venues requires additional caregiving and transport provisions. The costs of training and equipment can also be prohibitive, unless more schools or workplaces subsidise or facilitate participation.

## What you need to know

### Despite the benefits, participation rates are low

When national swimmers Yip Pin Xiu and Theresa Goh arrived home with their medals after the Paralympic Games in 2016 they were greeted with a celebratory parade. However, according to the Sports Index 2015, only about one-third of PWDs engage in any kind of sport on a regular basis. This low rate of participation has been attributed to a general lack of awareness about disability sports and their related benefits even among PWDs<sup>95</sup>. Where opportunities are available, they tend to be through disability sports associations,

in partnership with VWOs, SPED schools and National Sports Associations.

In 2015, an inter-agency Committee for Disability Sports was convened to look into ways to encourage PWDs to pick up sports. Using the 2015 ASEAN Para Games as an example, the Disability Sports Masterplan, launched in 2016, aims to work in three areas, namely expanding access and opportunities for participation, developing organisational and professional capabilities and building awareness through advocacy and collaboration<sup>96</sup>.

## Funding for disability sports has improved

Disability sports funding has improved since the 1980s, when athletes had to cover all costs themselves. Today, the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) receives 2.31 million in government funding, and offers three funding schemes for athletes – the Final Push programme, spexScholarship and the Race to Rio 2016 programme<sup>97</sup>. These cover monthly stipends for athletes and have allowed them to go overseas for training and exposure.

## Sports facilities and infrastructure are being developed

SportsSG, which oversees all sports activities under MCCY, has initiated Centres of Expertise to provide disability sports programmes and facilities such as inclusive gyms for PWDs within ActiveSG sports centres. The first was launched in Delta in 2016<sup>98</sup>. Four more centres are slated to open in Queenstown, Sengkang, Toa Payoh and Jurong West<sup>99</sup>.

Opportunities to compete are also being expanded through the establishment of leagues or competitions which can be sustainable platforms for local athletes to compete regionally and globally. Relatedly, the Masterplan aims to facilitate collaborations between mainstream and SPED schools to enrich disability sports programmes<sup>100</sup>.

## Developing capabilities of coaches

The skills and technical expertise of professional coaches need to be upgraded to help them apply their skills to the needs of PWDs effectively. Within mainstream and SPED schools, physical educators can also be better equipped with knowledge and skills to help PWDs acquire better physical competencies, where they are able<sup>101</sup>. Another area where professional capacity can be developed is in using sports for rehabilitation. The Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) has been discussing this possibility with hospitals and rehabilitation centres. Although the objective of sports is different from mere rehabilitation, it is potentially a way to help patients regain confidence<sup>102</sup>.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## Government-led initiatives

Currently there are several ministries and statutory boards involved in disability sports, namely the **Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth**, **Sport Singapore (SportSG)**, **Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC)** and **Deaf Sports Association (DSA)**. Together with other member organisations, SDSC offers programmes for PWDs from different disability groups in 18 different sports. It also offers training and development for competitive athletes. Meanwhile, DSA caters exclusively for the deaf or hard of hearing. Finally, **Special Olympics Singapore (SO)** provides those with intellectual disabilities opportunities to learn, train and compete in Olympic-type sports.

## Community efforts

There are also NPOs such as Equal Ark, which work with PWDs through equine therapy for rehabilitation and reintegration purposes. Others, such as ground-up initiatives like **Running Hour**, which is now an inclusive sports co-operative promotes the integration of PWDs with those who are not through running. Participants vary across disability groups and includes those who have intellectual, physical and even visual disabilities. Another group, **Deaf Dragons**, is a competitive dragon-boating team under a social enterprise, Society Staples, which also aims to connect PWDs with the wider community through fitness activities<sup>103</sup>.

## Singapore Press Holdings and Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC): National Para-Swimming Championship (NPSC)

The SPH Foundation has sponsored the annual NPSC since 2010. The NPSC aims to create opportunities for PWDs to swim at a competitive level and serves as a platform for SDSC coaches and officials to scout for potential candidates to nurture and enlist into the National squad to represent Singapore in regional and international competitions. Previous participants include National Paralympians such as Theresa Goh, a multiple-gold medallist at the ASEAN Para Games and Yip Pin Xiu, the first Singaporean to win a Gold Medal at the Paralympics.

### Impact:

Annually, over 100 para-athletes from 18 special schools, associations and clubs are expected at the event.

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Source: Pitchian, S. (2016). SPH Foundation National Para Swimming Championships 2016. In *Singapore Disability Sports Council*. Retrieved from <http://sdsc.org.sg/events/sph-foundation-national-para-swimming-championships-2016/>

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<sup>95</sup> Ng, Jorain. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in Transport. *Disabled People's Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Achieving-Inclusion-in-Transport.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> Disability Sports Master Plan. (2016, Jun 1). In *Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth*. Retrieved from <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/en/Topics/Sports/Articles/DSMP.aspx>

<sup>97</sup> Low, L.F. (2015, Nov 28). The Big Read: Disabled athletes get their day in the sun, and others hope to follow. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/sports/big-read-disabled-athletes-get-their-day-sun-and-others-hope-follow-0>

<sup>98</sup> Matthews, H. (2016, May 31). First Centre of Expertise for Disability Sports launched in Sengkang. *Channelnews Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/first-centre-of-expertise/2831776.html>

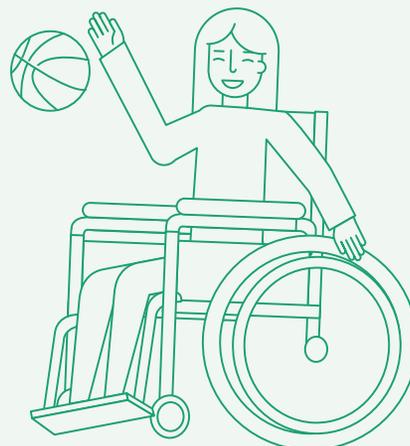
<sup>99</sup> Masterplan launched to increase sports participation among disabled. (2016, Apr 14). *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/master-plan-launched-to/2695018.html>

<sup>100</sup> Ng, Jorain. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in Transport. *Disabled People's Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Achieving-Inclusion-in-Transport.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> Ng, Jorain. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in Transport. *Disabled People's Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Achieving-Inclusion-in-Transport.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Leong, W.K. (2015, Dec 14). How people with disabilities can discover the athlete in them. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/how-people-with/2344166.html>

<sup>103</sup> Lee, V. (2015, Apr 16). Girl behind Deaf Dragons. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://women.asiaone.com/women/parenting/girl-behind-deaf-dragons>



## Why should you care?

Educational needs for disabled preschoolers vary according to the type of disability. For example, those with physical disabilities may only need assistive equipment to enable their integration into mainstream pre-schools, while those with intellectual or multiple disabilities may need an entirely separate curriculum.

### Lack of educational options and trained professionals

Besides the lack of affordable pre-school options and places for an increasing population of children with special needs, there is also the issue of the lack of qualified manpower and trained expertise. This talent shortage is related to slow professionalisation of the sector, which includes low remuneration and occupational prestige. Many are deterred from entering the field due to the high cost of course fees and a lack of awareness of needs.

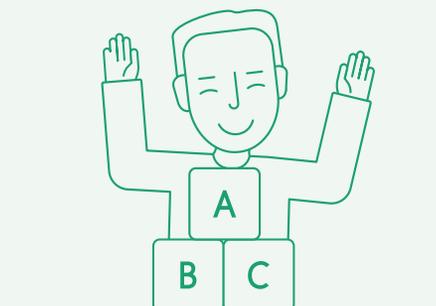
The VWOs-Charities Capability Fund helps to offset course fees up to 80%, but there are some conditions for eligibility<sup>104</sup>. There is also a brain drain to the mainstream health and private education sectors which offer more competitive remuneration packages<sup>105</sup>.

### Need for improvement in mainstream schools

The **Integrated Child Care Programme (ICCP)** in mainstream pre-schools needs to be improved, with more quality expertise, targeted interventions and better acceptance and inclusion of those with special needs in classrooms.

### Limited physical and social infrastructure

Although the government announced an increase in places for children in need of early intervention, most centres still face a lack of physical and social infrastructure<sup>106</sup> and are unable to meet the growing demand. In addition, centres that promote inclusive learning environments usually cost more to attend, and these prices can be prohibitive for those from low and middle-income families.



# What you need to know

## There is a high demand for special needs pre-schools

When Kindle Garden opened its doors in January 2016, there was already a waiting list of 100 children with special needs after the current 30% reserved for them had been taken up. Operated by AWWA in cooperation with Lien Foundation, the 'values-based, inclusive and non-discriminatory learning environment'<sup>107</sup> was a breath of fresh air for disabled children aged 6 and below.

Options like these are increasingly significant as more and more preschoolers are diagnosed with developmental issues. In fact, between 2010 and 2014, there was a 76% increase for development delays, autism spectrum disorders among others<sup>108</sup>. As of 2015, there are about 7,000 children aged 6 and below with developmental difficulties<sup>109</sup>.

## There are piecemeal options for disabled preschoolers, depending on the severity of their developmental needs.

The **Development Support Programme (DSP)** for example is aimed at for those with mild developmental needs. The programme comprises learning support or therapy intervention and covers literacy, language as well as social development<sup>110</sup>. For those with more severe developmental, intellectual, sensory or physical disabilities, there is the **Early Intervention Programme for Infants & Children (EIPIC)** which seeks to maximise a child's growth potential while limiting secondary disabilities. Those seeking to integrate their child with mainstream peers can choose the **Integrated Child Care Programme (ICCP)** which is able to accommodate a range of intervention services and includes regular parent-teacher feedback sessions<sup>111</sup>.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## EIPIC Centres have long waiting lists

The 17 existing EIPIC centres are run by VWOs such as **Rainbow Centre, AWWA, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities** and **Fei Yue** among others. However, parents who cannot afford to wait for a position in those centres, where waiting time can be up to six months, have some limited but expensive options via private operators. These include Melbourne Specialist International School and Wee Care<sup>112</sup>. Kindle Garden, a collaboration between Lien Foundation, SG Enable and AWWA, is Singapore's first inclusive school serving all children with special needs. It is also the first to involve nurses, social workers and psychologists in developing an inclusive pre-school model.

## There are some government-led subsidies

Some subsidies and grants available include the Assistive Technology Fund and the Enhanced Pilot for Private Intervention Providers. The latter is administered by MSF and is specifically for families enrolling their children to private centres.

## Community Educational Support Services

Other organisations that provide educational support services for children with special needs include NPOs such as **Care Corner Educational Therapy Service, Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf), Handicaps Welfare Association (HWA)** among others. Besides providing information, they also provide advice on proper assistive equipment.

## Barclays Bank - Rainbow Centre Early Intervention Programme

The Rainbow Centre Early Intervention Programme (EIP), a holistic intervention programme serving children with disabilities from birth to six years of age, works with a variety of corporate partners to strengthen community ties and provide support to the schools, the kids, and their families.

In 2014, Barclays Bank employees volunteered weekly at one of the EIP campuses, helping prepare lesson materials as well as general upkeep tasks throughout the centre. The bank also organised a sports-themed camp for students with moderate to high support needs and their families.

### Impact:

577 students from the two campuses at Margaret Drive and Yishun Park were served through these various recreational and volunteering activities.

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Source: Rainbow Centre. (2015). Annual Report 2014/2015. Retrieved from <http://www.rainbowcentre.org.sg/FIN/RC%20-%20Annual%20Report%202015%20low%20res%201%207%20later.pdf>

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<sup>104</sup> Charity Portal. (2016). VCF Training Grant. Retrieved from <https://www.charities.gov.sg/Grants/VWOs-Charities-Capabilities-Fund/Pages/VCF%20Training%20Grant.aspx>

<sup>105</sup> NVPC Interview with NIE. (2017, Mar 10).

<sup>106</sup> Singapore Budget 2012. (2012, Feb 17). Accessed February 28, 2017. Retrieved from [http://www.singaporebudget.gov.sg/budget\\_2012/pe.html](http://www.singaporebudget.gov.sg/budget_2012/pe.html).

<sup>107</sup> Goy, P. (2016, Mar 31). Inclusive pre-school, with programmes for special needs children, oversubscribed within 3 months of operations. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/inclusive-pre-school-with-programmes-for-special-needs-children-oversubscribed>

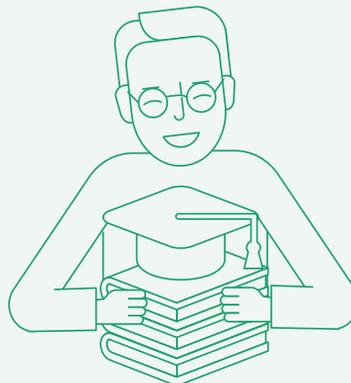
<sup>108</sup> Ng, J Y. (2016, Feb 15). More preschoolers diagnosed with developmental issues. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/more-preschoolers-diagnosed-developmental-issues>

<sup>109</sup> Philomin, L. (2015, Feb 7). The Big Read: For special needs children, pre-school is not a given. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/big-read-special-needs-children-pre-school-not-given-0>

<sup>110</sup> Development Support Programme (DSP). (2015). In SG Enables. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-children/development-support-programme-dsp/>

<sup>111</sup> Integrated Child Care Programme (ICCP). (2015). In SG Enables. Retrieved from <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-children/integrated-child-care-programme-iccp/>

<sup>112</sup> Charity Portal. (2016). VCF Training Grant. Retrieved from <https://www.charities.gov.sg/Grants/VWOs-Charities-Capabilities-Fund/Pages/VCF%20Training%20Grant.aspx>



## Why should you care?

Most Singaporeans are not aware of how to interact with children with special needs, resulting in their consistent marginalisation. Lien Foundation's survey found that a third of Singaporeans do not have a disabled person in their social circles, while only 1 in 10 is sure about how to interact with a child with special needs<sup>113</sup>. In addition, 64% of Singaporeans are only willing to share public spaces with disabled children, but not interact with them.

### Mainstream educators and students lack understanding of how to engage with PWDs

According to the Disabled People's Association (DPA), one of the root causes of the obstacles and challenges faced by children with special needs in accessing educational pathways has been the general attitudes of both educators and mainstream students. More needs to be done to ensure that mainstream educators and students understand how to accommodate disabilities and interact without aggression, pity or ignorance. As of 2017, MOE plans to look into studying models that will foster better interaction between SPED and mainstream schools.

### High turnover of Allied Educators is a concern

The quality of training provided to Allied Educators and the higher turnover rate in the profession need to be addressed. Besides the pre-service courses at NIE, upskilling can be done to expand both theoretical and practical knowledge.



## What you need to know

There are only 20 Special Education (SPED) schools in Singapore serving an average of 300 students between 7-18 years old per school of different types and severity of disability. These are run by 13 voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs), which receive funding from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and NCSS to run their programmes.

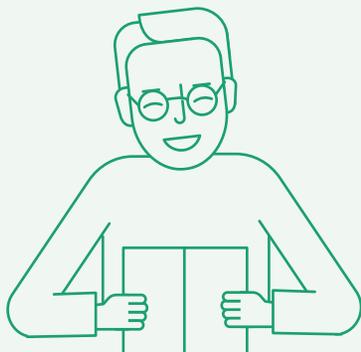
There are also various policies and programmes supporting disabled students from early intervention, pre-school to their entry into mainstream schools. However, due to various barriers, whether in the form of policies, practices, environment or the attitudes of policy makers, educators, peers and members of the public, none of these options are holistic.

### **There are various educational trajectories for disabled students, depending on the type and combination of disabilities they have.**

Those who have sensory disabilities are eligible to join certain mainstream secondary schools. Students with intellectual disabilities (SWIDs) may join vocational educational programmes, which lead to ITE Skills (ISC) or WDA Workforce Skills (WSQ) certification<sup>114</sup>. As of 2019, all children with special needs aged 6 to 15 will have to attend school in a revision to the Compulsory Education Act, a change from the current context where 25% of disabled children who have moderate to severe disabilities are exempted from it.

### **Few mainstream schools offer facilities for students with special needs**

There are currently only three mainstream secondary schools offering facilities and programmes for students who are visually and hearing impaired respectively, and 32 secondary schools that have programmes for those with physical disabilities<sup>115</sup>. In addition, as of 2016, only 55 primary schools and 87 secondary schools (inclusive of the 32 mentioned earlier) have been outfitted with full disabled-friendly facilities, such as provisions like walking ramps and other support features<sup>116</sup>.



## Allied Educators provide specialist support in mainstream classrooms

Since 2004, students with certain disabilities have been supported by Allied Educators who develop, implement and monitor processes to meet their needs and behavioral challenges<sup>117</sup>. There are currently 400 Allied Educators in 190 primary and 69 secondary schools supporting 18,000 children with special needs<sup>118</sup> who attend mainstream schools (4 % of the total school population)<sup>119</sup>. However, the turnover rate has been high due to issues such as unclear job scopes, low remuneration and the lack of career progression<sup>120</sup>. The perception of lower work status vis-à-vis MOE teachers is also a concern. Without the specialist support that these allied educators provide, the burden on MOE teachers to support students with and without special needs concurrently is high<sup>121</sup>.

## Mainstream students lack skills to interact with special needs classmates

A third issue relates to peer support. Mainstream students who lack knowledge of and social etiquette in dealing with disabled peers could potentially end up bullying them. This can create friction and reinforce existing stereotypes against disabled peers.

## Not all families can afford SPED education

With compulsory and 'inclusive' education for all disabled children being introduced as part of the Compulsory Education Act, one of the main considerations is the affordability of SPED schools. Although miscellaneous fees are kept low, fees for those with more special needs can rise to \$350 a month. That aside, financial aid schemes can still be unfair to middle-income families, where means-testing only applies to those with severe disabilities. In fact, Lien Foundation's Inclusive Attitudes Survey (2016) found that 43% of 830 parents did not receive any financial help from the government<sup>122</sup>.

## SPED schools face recruitment challenges

There is increasing demand for qualified teachers to fill up SPED school positions, but recruitment is challenging<sup>123</sup>. Teaching in SPED schools requires physical and emotional resilience, as educators often have to focus more on managing behavioral issues rather than stimulating students' intellects. As SPED teachers do not come under the purview of MOE, teachers cannot access the same salary scales and opportunities of mainstream educators<sup>124</sup>. On the other hand, qualification requirements are less stringent than those imposed by MOE. Critics of this dual system have been pushing for the government to assume complete financial and hiring responsibility of the SPED sector, as opposed to having a mix of VWOs running different schools.

## Some SPED schools facilitate school to work transition programmes

As of 2014, five SPED schools have started a school-to-work transition programme that identifies students capable of finding post-school employment or training opportunities. 40 students from Pathlight, APSN Delta, Grace Orchard, Metta and Minds Woodlands Gardens schools were part of this pilot programme. SG Enable works with both students and their families in securing job or training placements, including structured internships<sup>125</sup>.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## SPED curriculum and service provision is improving

The launch of the SPED Curriculum Framework in 2012 sets a common direction for all SPED schools and prioritises character and citizenship education as their foundation. The VWOs currently running SPED schools include the **Association for Persons with Special Needs, Metta Welfare Association, Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDs)** and **Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)** among others. Some of these organisations also offer before and after school care services for children with special needs.

## Community efforts aim to raise awareness

On the advocacy front, **Disabled People's Association (DPA)** has sought to address issues faced by disabled children entering both mainstream and special education pathways. SG Enable, an aggregator for disability services, is also a one-stop centre in understanding programmes and provisions for disabled students.



## NatSteel-SPD Education Programme Bursary Awards and Aspiration Awards

NatSteel established the bursary programme in partnership with SPD in 1985 to help students with disabilities from low-income families pay for school-related expenses in mainstream schools. NatSteel began sponsoring the SPD Youth Aspiration Award in 2014, which aims to encourage youths with disabilities to pursue their interests in visual or performing arts, sports or community service through a grant of \$5,000. The award is open to youths with physical and sensory disabilities from Secondary One to Universities.

### Impact:

Since 1985, more than 3,800 bursaries amounting to \$3.2 million have been awarded to students with disabilities from primary to tertiary levels including those at ITE, pre-universities, junior colleges, polytechnics and universities.

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Source: NatSteel-SPD Education Programme Bursary Brings Youth Closer to His Dreams. (2016, Jan 17). In *SPD*. Retrieved from <http://www.spd.org.sg/updates/detail/natsteel-spd-education-programme-bursary-brings-youth-closer-to-his-dreams-601.html>

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<sup>113</sup> Lien Foundation. (2016). *Inclusive Attitudes Survey Part 1*. Retrieved from [http://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20-%20Inclusive%20Attitudes%20Survey%20Part%201\\_30May16.pdf](http://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20-%20Inclusive%20Attitudes%20Survey%20Part%201_30May16.pdf)

<sup>114</sup> Education Path. (2016, Apr 12). In Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/special-education/education-path>

<sup>115</sup> Resources to support mainstream students with special needs. (2016, Nov 30). In Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/support-for-children-special-needs>

<sup>116</sup> Disabled Peoples Association. (2016). *Achieving Inclusion in Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Inclusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Resources to support mainstream students with special needs. (2016, Nov 30). In Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/support-for-children-special-needs>

<sup>118</sup> Lim, J Q. (2016, Aug 11). Rising number of students with special needs in mainstream schools. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/rising-number-of-students/3033364.html>

<sup>119</sup> Namely dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

<sup>120</sup> Fang, J. (2015, Feb 7). The Big Read: In mainstream schools, children with learning disabilities still face challenges. *Today Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayonline.com/big-read-mainstream-schools-children-learning-disabilities-still-face-challenges-1>

<sup>121</sup> Disabled Peoples Association. (2016). *Achieving Inclusion in Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Inclusion-in-Education.pdf>

<sup>122</sup> Goy, P. (2016, Dec 1). Special needs gaps in 'every child matters'. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/special-needs-gaps-in-every-child-matters>

<sup>123</sup> Foo, J Y. (2016, Nov 5). MOE hopes to attract more special education teachers. *The New Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.np.sg/news/singapore/moe-hopes-attract-more-special-education-teachers>

<sup>124</sup> Resources to support mainstream students with special needs. (2016, Nov 30). In *Ministry of Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/support-for-children-special-needs>

<sup>125</sup> Teng, Amelia. (2014, Nov 12). Five special education schools start new school-to-work transition programme. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from [www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/five-special-education-schools-start-new-school-to-work-transition-programme](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/five-special-education-schools-start-new-school-to-work-transition-programme)

## Why should you care?

Ms Christine Keung has irritable bowel syndrome and needs to use the toilet designated for PWDs. As her medical condition is not apparent, she has been subject to scolding and harsh judgement from people who believe she is getting an unfair advantage when using the toilet in public<sup>126</sup>.

### Less visible disabilities are a double-edged sword.

The most prominent signifier of disability is a wheelchair, resulting in a continued lack of awareness of less visible disabilities such as intellectual disabilities and sensory impairments<sup>127</sup>. Although they are less likely to draw unwanted attention, they may also not get the same support as people with more visible disabilities such as being given seats on public transportation or allowances at work or in school. More efforts to understand and educate the public on the specific needs and concerns of people with less visible disabilities are required to combat the stigma these individuals face.

### People with less visible disabilities experience difficulty in securing jobs

Several social enterprises such as **Laksania**, **Professor Brawn Café**, **BlISSE** and **Soul Food** have been set up to create employment opportunities for people with autism and intellectual disabilities. However, segregated work places should not be the only option for people with less visible disabilities. With a better understanding of these disabilities, companies would be better equipped to hire people with less visible disabilities and to create a more inclusive work environment for all.

## What you need to know

### The lack of awareness of less visible disabilities generates negative public response

There are a number of disabilities, including irritable bowel syndrome that are not immediately noticeable. These less visible disabilities include autism, intellectual disabilities, dyslexia, and hearing impairments. Atypical behaviour exhibited by people with autism or intellectual disabilities tends to be judged negatively and invites suspicion, apprehension and the avoidance of others<sup>128</sup>.

### Autism is among the more prevalent disabilities that are less visible.

One in 150 children in Singapore are diagnosed with autism<sup>129</sup>. In addition, about 1 in 1000

babies in Singapore are born with hearing loss each year<sup>130</sup>. Our ageing population may also increase the prevalence of hearing impairments as about 50% of those 80 years and above tend to experience significant hearing loss<sup>131</sup>.

### Even when symptoms of a less visible disability are manifested, they tend to be misunderstood.

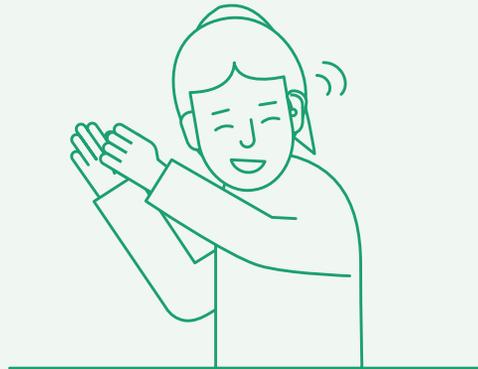
A child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who does not pay attention in class may be punished for his/her “misbehaviour” as his/her difficulties are neither recognised nor understood<sup>132</sup>.

# What's being done and how can you help?

## National-level initiatives to support those with less visible disabilities

Organisations such as the **Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)** also provide employment opportunities for their clients through their social enterprises. The **Employability & Employment Centre** by the **ARC** provides employability training, job placements and job support for youth and adults with autism.

Public education programmes to raise awareness on less visible disabilities are also conducted by non-profit organisations such as the **Singapore Association for the Deaf** and **ARC**.



## Schools and resources

Schools for children and youth with autism and intellectual disabilities offer academic, life readiness, and vocational skills as part of their curriculum. These schools include **Pathlight School, Grace Orchard School** and **Eden School**. VWOs like the **Autism Resource Centre (ARC)** also offer teaching of life skills such as functional communication to children with autism, which is rarely provided by private firms in the free market<sup>133</sup>.

VWOs like **Very Special Arts (VSA)** and **St. Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC)** who offer educational programs for the less visibly disabled, face high turnover rates of teachers<sup>134</sup>. The teachers face a demanding job which often pays low wages causing them to leave. Close rapport between students and teachers then needs to be replicated all over again after a change in staff.

## Sesame Street Workshop - “See amazing in all children”

In 2015, Sesame Street Workshop launched “Sesame Street and Autism: See amazing in all children” to raise awareness and understanding on autism. By working with several non-profit organisations, including Autism Speaks, Sesame Street introduced a new muppet with autism, Julia. The stories and videos from this campaign explain autistic behaviours in a way children can understand. This initiative also provides free online resources for parents and teachers to start conversations about disabilities, particularly less visible ones, with young children.

### Impact:

The National Bureau of Economic Research has suggested that Sesame Street is the largest and least-costly early childhood intervention in the US. The “See amazing in all children” has also been described as a potentially game-changing educational tool for demystifying and destigmatising autism. This initiative was presented at several Council for Exceptional Children conferences to over 6,000 special education professionals. It has been well received by these professionals, many of whom are interested in using the resources in their schools.

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Source: Sesame Street launches major autism initiative. (2017). Sesame Workshop. Retrieved via <http://autism.sesamestreet.org/about-this-initiative/>, <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/press-releases/sesame-street-launches-major-autism-initiative/>, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/julia-the-autistic-muppet-game-changer/414277/>

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<sup>126</sup> Tai, J., Kok, X H. (2016, May 8). ‘Your son has special needs? So do my dogs’. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/your-son-has-special-needs-so-do-my-dogs>

<sup>127</sup> **International Symbol of Accessibility.** (n.d.). In *Ri Global*. Retrieved from <http://www.riglobal.org/about/intl-symbol-of-access/>

<sup>128</sup> Goy, P. (2016, Dec 1). Special needs gaps in ‘every child matters’. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/special-needs-gaps-in-every-child-matters>

<sup>129</sup> **Disabilities & Special Needs.** (2016, Dec 20). In *Ministry of Social and Family Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>130</sup> Boh, S. (2014, Sep 26). Don’t shrug off sign language, say groups. *Asia One*. Retrieved from <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/dont-shrug-sign-language-say-groups>

<sup>131</sup> **About Deafness.** (2017). In *Singapore Association for the Deaf*. Retrieved from <http://sadeaf.org.sg/about-deafness/introduction/>

<sup>132</sup> Goy, P. (2016, Dec 1). Special needs gaps in ‘every child matters’. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/special-needs-gaps-in-every-child-matters>

<sup>133</sup> **Interview with Autism Resource Centre by SMU students**

<sup>134</sup> **Interview with VSA and SAAC by SMU students**

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