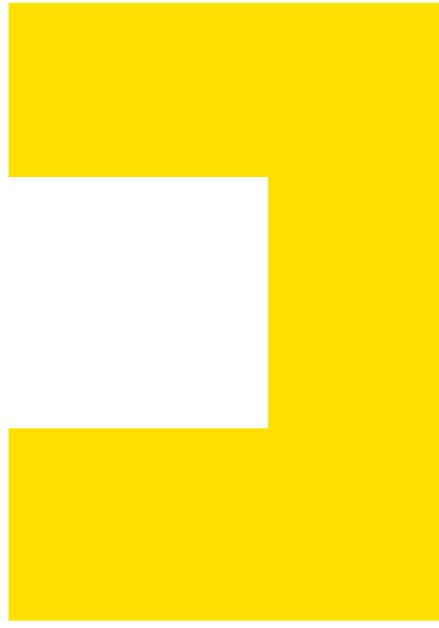


MM

WE
ARE

**AMPLIFYING
THE VOICES
OF OUR YOUTH**

YOUTH CONVERSATIONS 2019



Contents

4

Minister's Message

**DEAR YOUNG
SINGAPOREANS**

6

Executive Summary

THIS IS OUR TIME

14

Narratives of Success

**WE ARE REDEFINING
OUR OWN VERSIONS
OF SUCCESS**

23

Lifelong Learning

**WE ARE CHANGING
COURSE AND
LEARNING
DIFFERENTLY**

27

Mental Health

**WE ARE REWIRING
MINDSETS**

32

Race & Religion

**WE ARE CALLING
OUT RACISM FOR
WHAT IT IS**

45

Environmental Sustainability

**WE ARE TRASHING
OUR OLD WAYS**

36

Social Equality

**WE BELIEVE THAT
EQUALITY IS NOT A
LUXURY**

49

Geopolitics

**WE WANT TO SHAPE
THE FUTURE OF THE
REGION**

41

Social Inclusivity

**WE ARE REMOVING
THE INVISIBLE
CLOAK**

53

Youth Message

**VOICES THAT
MATTER**

55

NYC Opportunities

YOU ARE MORE

Dear Young Singaporeans

a message from Grace Fu

GENERATION ME OR GENERATION WE?

Society is often quick to pin labels on you, our youths—the “Strawberry Generation”, “Generation Me” and more. They claim that you bruise easily, are not able to face challenges and feel deeply self-entitled.

I disagree with these labels.

I believe that you are a great force for positive change. While you may think and operate differently from the previous generations, I know that you care very much about our society. I have seen how you have brought valuable perspectives, fresh ideas and solutions to the many challenges we as Singaporeans face. I have also seen many of you step up and take the lead to effect change in our community. With your passion and sense of purpose, I believe we can shape a brighter future for Singapore, together.

Your Voice Matters

My Ministry and the National Youth Council started the Youth Conversations in response to your desire to be heard, to be empowered and to have a greater stake in our future. The Youth Conversations provides you with a safe space for dialogue and sharing of diverse views, based on mutual respect, an openness to listen and the desire to understand one another better. Since April 2018, as many as 8,000 of you, from all walks of life, came forward to share your views with other youth and policy makers. You engaged in meaningful discourse with fellow youths and the government about the challenges you and other citizens face as a nation.

I trust that those of you who participated walked away with broader perspectives and an understanding of national issues. This is crucial for us to have a shared vision of how we want to progress as individuals, a society and a nation.

The conversations should also reach out to more of our young people, with more diverse backgrounds. Look out for the Digital Youth Conversations that will be launched later in 2019. This will give you more opportunities to participate and expand your networks with other online communities.

Turn Conversation Into Action

Conversations must yield opportunities for collaboration and action. Many of you have already done so by forming new communities, and together, translating some of the ideas into collaborative action. I am glad to see some of you stepping up to create positive and tangible impact. I hope more of you can similarly step up, take action in areas you are passionate about, and support one another's efforts. The National Youth Council is ready to support you by providing access to information, networks and the necessary resources. We will also be creating access for our youth leaders to partner directly with agencies on policy issues that matter to them.

Later this year, we will be launching the SGYouth Action Plan, which encapsulates your views, dreams, and aspirations for Singapore, from what you have shared through the Youth Conversations and other platforms. We will work together with you to translate your feedback into policy changes, and support you to lead initiatives in areas that you and other young Singaporeans care about.

Every single action, no matter big or small, counts. Lead your own conversations and catalyse actions with your friends to bring about the change you want to see. Be ambitious, not only for your own aspirations, but also for the collective good of our nation. I am confident that you will rise up to the challenge.



Yours,

Grace Fu

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth
Chairperson, National Youth Council

THIS IS OUR TIME

Our times are not easy. As young Singaporeans living in the 21st century, our world is changing very quickly around us. Every day in the news, there are new technological disruptions, new shifts in global powers, new pandemics, new trends, new threats—the list is never-ending.

It wasn't that long ago that the world seemed united around the promise of borderless trade and travel. Today, globalisation has produced its winners and losers. World leaders have won elections by riding the waves of nationalism and populism, driven by populations increasingly weary of being overlooked. As a result, the walls between nations are getting taller. And can we talk about climate change? We don't need to be scientists to see how out of whack the weather has become.

In the short span of a few years, we've seen our home change dramatically. There are new housing estates, new MRT lines, new buildings, and new schools created from shrinking cohorts. This quickening pace comes with escalating expectations. Do well in school but don't stop there, lifelong learning is the way to go. Don't stick to traditional courses, go for a broad-based education. But focus on the growth sectors, which also keep changing, mind you. Get an overseas stint but come back. And please have children, two or more if you can.

This time is messy, but it is ours.

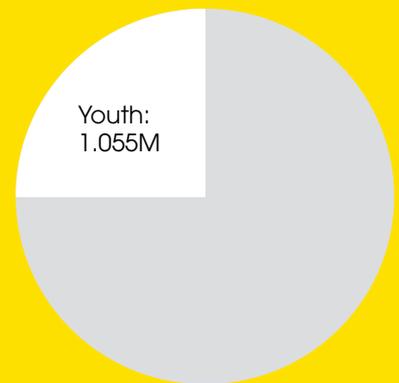
Today, 42% of the world population is under 25 years of age. Here in Singapore, every one in four persons is under 35 years of age, numbering over 1 million. We are the future Singapore, so we have to build on foundations laid by those before us, and continue to adapt and create the rules that we will hold on to as a people. We have to chart the path ahead, the dreams we want to chase and the home we will build together.

We aren't doing this from scratch. Compared to young people living in other parts of the world, we are fortunate to have an effective system, good education, accessible healthcare and above all, peace.

Life in Singapore is good and we can make it even better.

YOUTH IN SINGAPORE¹

Resident Population:
3.994M



1 million

There are over 1 million youth residing in Singapore, making up approximately 1/4 of our resident population.

Youth is defined as persons aged

15 to 35
years old

YOUTH HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE AND PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY



consider helping the less fortunate and contributing to society as important life goals²



youth (aged 15–24) have volunteered in the past year³



youth have participated in at least one civic activity in the past year⁴

From April to June 2018, youth voted on statements provided by one another, in response to the question

“AS A YOUTH IN SINGAPORE, WHAT ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT?”⁵

Here is what we voted for:

- Inclusivity
- Pathways to Success
- Active Citizenry
- Environment & Sustainability
- Governance & Politics
- Education & Learning
- Jobs & Economy
- Cost of Living
- Mental Health
- Marriage & Parenthood

There are great opportunities for connection and action like never before. With a few clicks, we can reach out to like-minded people, and we can start a movement and hear the voices of many more resounding back.

A video of a turtle with a straw up its nostril can change how we live our daily lives. A 26-year-old can tell world leaders at a United Nations climate summit that they aren't doing enough. Singapore youth are indeed ready, and are taking action.

We have what it takes to be extraordinary. We lead the world in Math and Science scores, we top Asia in employment, education and entrepreneurship mobility, and our people are passionate about making a difference.

We can bridge that gap between hope and reality. And that is why we came together for the Youth Conversations in 2018—a platform that allows for us to speak up on what we believe in, deliberate with one another, and to partner policy-makers to create solutions on issues that we care about.

In all of these sessions, we heard from youth who were different from us, with different life stories and experiences. We heard from youth outside the room, through digital tools that brought in diverse views and perspectives. And we were heard by experts and policymakers who wanted to know what we thought.



of us participated in online polls, contributing some 3,000 statements casting close to 140,000 votes on topics of discussion that mattered to us—aspirations for young people, doing more for the environment, building an inclusive society, mental health, and geopolitics.



of us joined 30 Youth Conversations on these topics, diving into issues and listening to voices and perspectives that we never considered.

OUR ASPIRATIONS AND CONCERNS

During our conversations, we shared how our aspirations are different from our parents, and how we are discovering different pathways for ourselves in life, while balancing family and societal expectations and practical needs. We're fuelled by our curiosity and passion as we learn, and want to forge our success stories on our terms, without letting stress overwhelm us.

"One of the first things we did was the values board, where we tied a string between opposing values. The idea is that there is no one definition of success that you might have as an individual. It's more of how your values interplay and there are different tensions that exist. I think one good example is work-life balance—do you want to spend more time at work, or with family and friends, or doing things that you like?"

—Pay Leon Khee, participant at the Youth Conversation on Narratives of Success

"How should we define Success?"

Our journey uncovered the complexity of success, particularly the difference between how society defines success, and how we see it. For many of us, nowhere is this tension more keenly felt as when our parents tell us what they expect of us. For most of us, success is being able to chase our dreams, to grow and discover ourselves in the journey toward our goals whether we reach them or not, and finding happiness in the experiences of life. It is our hope that Singapore will encourage new dreams, different pathways and provide support to help us achieve them.

"When was the last time you learnt something new?"

Learning does not stop after school. We shared similar views on the importance of learning, particularly with the fast pace of change today. Given our commitments to work, family and friends, learning is often the last thing on our minds. When we do decide to commit the time and money, it's a tough choice between professional upgrading for career advancement and a personal interest that we are passionate about.

But for something so personal, the onus falls on us to take charge of our own path and at our own pace. Society can play a part by providing the resources, networks, and support for us to tap on when we find the right circumstances.

"What should we do to address mental health in Singapore?"

The stress of juggling our dreams and life's demands can take a toll on our mental health. The proportion of people who have experienced a mental disorder has increased over the past few years, with depression emerging as the most common. We brainstormed about what more could be done for mental health in Singapore—whether it's putting out more positive stories of persons in recovery, having public figures

talk openly about mental health, or broadening education among young people and their parents. The stigma of an invisible ailment makes it so much more difficult for sufferers to seek help.

The Conversations led to action. Two of us came together to start The SOAR Initiative (School of Ability and Recovery), that aims to foster mental wellness and reduce stigma in the community through education. Many of our peers who participated have also stepped up to form a resource panel for the Health Promotion Board, giving feedback on their publicity, programmes and collaterals for mental health. Youth Corps Singapore has also strengthened education and equipping for youth volunteers passionate to make a difference in this area. There are so many possible avenues to make difference if we choose to step up and stand in the gap!



"During the youth convo, we were very thankful for a safe space created for the participants. Because of that, the youth felt safe to share their personal struggles with mental health. It was very encouraging to see our youth rising up and having courage to share their personal struggles and lend their trust and support to fellow peers who are facing similar problems."

— Cho Ming Xiu, participant at the Youth Conversation on Mental Health. Together with his friends, Ming Xiu started Campus PSY—a mental health literacy training programme aimed at equipping youths to better support their peers with mental health issues.

TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

We want to build an inclusive Singapore, with space and love for those who are different. Across class, age, race, religion, and where we come from, Singapore must be big enough for all of us to belong. We understand that it won't be easy. But we care, and see what others might not—the casual racism of a “joke”; the uneven opportunities enjoyed by different people in society; and invisible people whom we might conveniently forget.

“What should we do about racism?”

Together we reflected on how common casual racism can be, and how often it goes unacknowledged. We struggled with what we should do in those situations and challenged each other to be courageous against the status quo. We reaffirmed the importance of honest conversations so we can build a deeper appreciation for our diversity. Not everyone had a personal experience of racism or discrimination, but everyone made an effort to understand how it mattered.

“Is life fair?”

Our Conversations touched on how inequality and exclusion can cut across many labels, because all of us have multiple identities—race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, choice of career, or disability. Too often, we talk about inequality when we are really asking for fairness. And fairness and inclusion are ideals that we strive towards even if it will never be perfect. But that doesn't mean we should accept the status quo. There is room for us to make a difference, as did Clarence Ching, who started Access, a programme that focuses on tackling education inequality in Singapore through providing greater equality of opportunities, mentorships and apprenticeships for students. Whether we start by looking at our own mindsets and attitudes, or our institutions and policies, what matters is that we start. Through our actions, we can build the future we want to live in.

“I think there are no real one-off solutions. Education as a long-term approach is key, so it is important to continue to organise such events where students and youth of different backgrounds can come and interact, to really understand each other's experiences, which can open up new perspectives on these issues.”

—Sujandren Alaghimanvalan, participant at the Youth Conversation on Race and Religion

“How can we show migrant workers in Singapore that we value them?”

Our dream of an inclusive Singapore extends to the invisible workers in our midst. The Youth Conversation on Migrant Workers was a learning journey for us to the ‘homes’ of the migrant workers at the Tuas View dormitory, hosted by migrant worker ambassadors. This was followed by a panel discussion with representatives comprising policy makers and authorities.

Among the participants, many of us were already working with migrant workers in our school or volunteering in projects. We asked candid questions on the adequacy of housing regulations and paths to resolve employment disputes. We wrestled with the trade-offs and implications to what had seemed like straightforward tweaks to employment legislation. We left with a better understanding of the issue and a deeper conviction that as youth, we can do more to help the invisible workers among us.

OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

For many of us, the threat of climate change is a growing concern. We are increasingly dedicating ourselves to sustainability efforts, and we see advocacy gaining momentum. While we understand that environmental sustainability might not be at the top of everyone's minds, we want to challenge our society to do better, to create a more sustainable environment for everyone and for future generations.



“What can we do to fight Climate Change?”

We came together over two Youth Conversations on Climate Action and Zero Waste. While we all came to the conversation with different starting points, with some of us leading local sustainability efforts, and others just starting to think about these issues, we all agreed that we needed to do more to bring Singapore towards becoming a zero-waste nation.

We may have strong views on fighting climate change, but through the process of dialogue, we also recognised that sustainable practices to reduce waste must consider other perspectives. Take banning straws for example—we can and must step up our efforts to reduce usage of plastic straws, but this must not come at the cost of other's needs, such as people with disabilities. We walked away from these conversations with a stronger conviction to do more in our daily lives, be it learning how to recycle right, or starting conversations with our family and friends.

“What is Singapore's place within ASEAN?”

The insightful discussion opened our eyes to the inter-dependence among ASEAN member states and the considerations behind our foreign policy. Most of us gained a broad understanding of Singapore's position within the region and that made us think about how we can be Singapore's ambassadors in our circles and professional networks. This topic held special significance because of Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2018.

What did we make of all these Youth Conversations? As we listened deeply to each other and connected on the issues that matter to us, three key insights about us youth emerged:

3 KEY POINTS EMERGED FROM THE 2018 YOUTH CONVERSATIONS

1. Youth are not apathetic

They want to find out more, about many issues that concern them. They want to hear from policy makers about what was really going on behind the scenes, about the dilemmas, trade-offs and other considerations. Among the participants, more than four in five were new to the National Youth Council, keen to expand their perspectives. After the conversations, 79% indicated they had a better understanding of issues that Singapore faces.

2. Youth want to make a difference

In fact, some are already initiating action on the ground across issues and causes. But there are many more youths who aspire to make a difference, but who may lack the awareness, opportunities, resources and networks.

3. Youth want to be engaged through different modes, reflecting their diversity and versatility

Not all need to engage in deep face-to-face conversations to gain an appreciation of the issues that matter to them, or to contribute. Many more youths participated digitally through social media and online polls. Time is a precious resource.

YOUTH CONVERSATIONS GAVE PARTICIPANTS OPPORTUNITIES TO HEAR AND APPRECIATE NEW PERSPECTIVES

86%

were more aware of other citizens' views and perspectives, which might be different from their own

87%

were more appreciative of what they had in common with others

FROM CONVERSATION TO ACTION

We want Singapore, our little Red Dot, to continue to be exceptional, and help shape a world that is even better than today's. We want to inspire our children and our children's children to achieve more.

This report charts our journey through the Youth Conversations. It describes the hopes and ideas of young people stepping up to make a difference in our own way. But we can only do so much by ourselves. We need to partner with the rest of Singapore as we find our way forward.

**This is our time.
And we claim it.**



WE ARE

**REDEFINING
OUR OWN VERSIONS OF
SUCCESS**

WE NEED A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT SUCCESS AND FAILURE, TO SUPPORT THE DIVERSITY OF OUR ASPIRATIONS. HELP US DREAM BIGGER.

WE ARE REDEFINING SUCCESS

It wasn't so long ago that your proudest moment was seeing us stand up and take our first steps. How we made you smile when we called you 'Ma' and 'Pa' for the first time. We see the milestones you lovingly laid out for us: doing well in school, finding a girlfriend or boyfriend, getting a degree, landing a good job, getting married, and having kids. We know that you want the best for us. You mean so much to us, and how you see our choices shapes how we see ourselves and our narratives of success.

We appreciate you and others journeying alongside us as mentors and friends—to advise, support and even challenge us in our pursuits. However, we also ask that you take the time to understand how complex our world has become, and that you give us space to define what success means for ourselves.

TOP 10 LIFE GOALS THAT ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO YOUTH

The 2016 National Youth Survey showed that while careers are important to youths, it was secondary to learning and acquiring new skills. Earning lots of money surprisingly came in 5th in the list. Youth also value helping the less fortunate and being able to contribute to society.

Home ownership	70%
Strong family relationships	70%
Learn/acquire new skills	62%
Successful career	59%
Earn lots of money	46%
Help less fortunate	41%
Contribute to society	40%
Get married	36%
Have children	35%
Good religious life	31%



WHAT YOUTH VALUE

These findings were similarly reflected in a series of online polls on the topic of success for the Youth Conversations. Over 500 respondents defined success as broader than getting good grades, traditional jobs and financial stability. Instead, youths strive for non-conventional goals, such as personal development, caring for their well-being and seeking out purposeful experiences.



“What I shared about was really how to align both passion and purpose. With passion being what makes you happy, brings you joy, and purpose being how you can contribute to others and to the wider community with the things that you are passionate about.”

—Jared Kong, an in-house lawyer and part-time DJ, on how he brought together his passion with a rewarding career



“I grew up in a typical family, where I’d come home with a 92% and my parents would ask, what happened to the other 8%? I was at the height of my career at 22, and yet, I realised I was unfulfilled, still looking for that missing 8%. I thought passion meant I had to suffer for my craft, but now I realised that passion has to graduate to compassion, a connection to something larger than yourself.”

—Inch Chua, a singer-songwriter on how she took a break at the height of her career to rediscover a balance of pursuing passion and self-exploration.

This Is What Success Means To Us

In a 3-part series that took place over 5 sessions and 7 months, we explored what success means to us. Here are the key takeaways from our conversations.

1. Success is more multi-dimensional than what it used to be.

There is a difference in how we see society defines success and what we believe success should be. We think that society values success in the domains of studies, career, finance, family and having a place of our own. But as youth, we also place great value on personal learning and growth, freedom, passion, meaning and emotional well-being. And for society as a whole, we would be successful if we are compassionate, kind and caring.

We are pragmatic, and we know money is important to fulfil basic needs. We have families to support and bills to pay. But what we also seek is a broader definition of success and more diverse pathways to get there. Our pathways and choices may appear at times competing and contradictory, but what we learn and experience within the journey is just as important as the destination.

That is why many of us live in the complexity of having to navigate the tensions in life. We are aware of the need to responsibly fulfil practical needs; at the same time, we want to live for more. While this path is not easy, we believe that we can determine our successes and create the meaningful lives that we desire.

“When it came to domains of success defined by us, most of us chose personal factors like family, finance, spirituality and emotional well-being. On the other hand, domains of success defined by society tend to be more objective-driven, such as career and studies [...] I found myself relating with stories about the dilemma of choosing courses in school or carving own career paths, all while balancing expectations from family and friends.”

—Jocelynna Seah,
Youth Conversation participant

“I used to think there shouldn’t be a tension between any of the worlds, and that I should only choose one of those worlds. In this session, I had to think about what would be the best of these two tensions. When I thought about it, I realised I’ve already been doing that in my life, like juggling and balancing between these two worlds. It made me realise that I shouldn’t be so adamant about just choosing one world. It really gave me this objective view of my life.”

—Ng Sze Min,
Youth Conversation participant

HOW WE THINK SOCIETY VIEWS SUCCESS, AND HOW WE VIEW SUCCESS

Top 3 Domains of Success According to Society

Our views on societal definitions of success focus on these few domains:

- Career/Work
- Finance/Money
- Studies
- Family
- House/Belongings

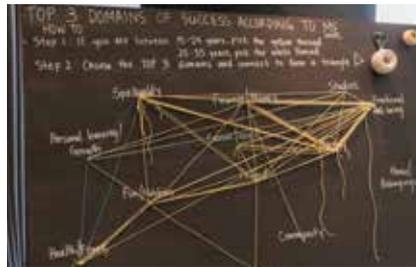
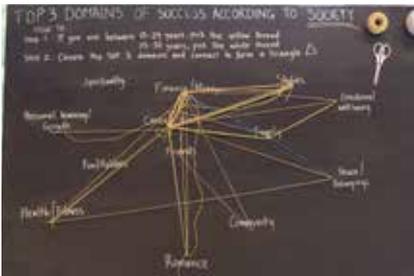
Top 3 Domains of Success According to Youth

Our goals, however, are much more varied:

- Emotional well-being
- Personal learning/growth
- Family
- Finance/Money
- Spirituality



Clement Tan, a participant who had a conversation with his parents after the Youth Conversations



“I think my parents and I realised there are differences between our expectations of how I should lead my life. While my mom made her choices based on what she thought was ‘natural’ or ‘best for my future’, I believe that these implicit narratives of ‘natural’ and ‘best’ are based on some sort of social norm of her generation.

2. Believe in us.

We are grateful for our families. Nothing beats having your love and support. We know you want the best for us, and it is not easy to let us do something different, new or uncertain. Allow us to take ownership of our choices, and have the space to discover and learn. It’s okay to let us fall; we will pick ourselves up and find our way in life, as you did too.

At our conversations, many of us voiced our desire to be able to define, for ourselves, what success means. We believe we can chart our own paths and create opportunities.

During our conversations, we also heard from others who found a balance between pursuing their dreams and meeting the expectations placed on them. They shared about difficult conversations they had with their parents about their tensions. It reminded us that having such open communication with our own parents is important and deeply empowering.

On hindsight, although I realised that the intention of what she did was for my own good, I would have preferred that the execution of what she did was more tactful. As a young kid and now a young adult, it may still be hard to discern the intentions of the giving party from the sentiments of the receiving party.

I think this is what may be causing the tension between parents and youth now. For example, parents say, ‘you must get good grades’. And then, the child feels his worth is only tied to the grades. But implicit in that statement is the nuanced understanding that our society, especially government institutions, use grades as the meritocratic leveller to determine who gets the job and who doesn’t, which in turn determines who gets a stable income and ultimately, lives a ‘more comfortable’ life.

Maybe it’s the silent concession of the parent to the realities of an institution that has and is still focused on grades. Or maybe it’s the generic Asian mentality of having a measurable medium of comparison between two things.”

WHAT IF YOU COULD TELL YOUR PARENT YOUR INNER FEARS?

We penned letters to our parents on what we didn't dare to say.

Dear Mum / Dad

I wish you would...

Accept that sometimes what I want to do may not fit into your ideas of "success" and I might NOT want to be a doctor.

I wish I didn't have to carry the burden of what is expected of me :")

I love musical theatre.

Dear Mum / Dad

I wish you would...

believe. Believe that I might not shine as bright as you hoped, I still am my own person & still look/feel amazing, like this beautiful picture. Remember I always love you

Dear Mum / Dad

I wish you would...

LET GO OF YOUR FEARS, INHIBITIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS OF HOW LIFE SHOULD BE AND BE WHO YOU ARE MEANT TO BE, AND I CAN DO THE SAME TOO.

Dear Mum / Dad

I wish you would...

encourage me more. Stop comparing me to others and just help me in discover my strengths when I was younger.

Now I will thrive on my own terms.

3. In redefining success, we should also redefine failure.

We want to redefine and be more accepting of failure, but still it's tough to not worry about failing. We are also pragmatic and see that conditions out there can be competitive and sometimes unforgiving. Also, we might have to strive harder than before for the same goals. But that's life and we can accept it.

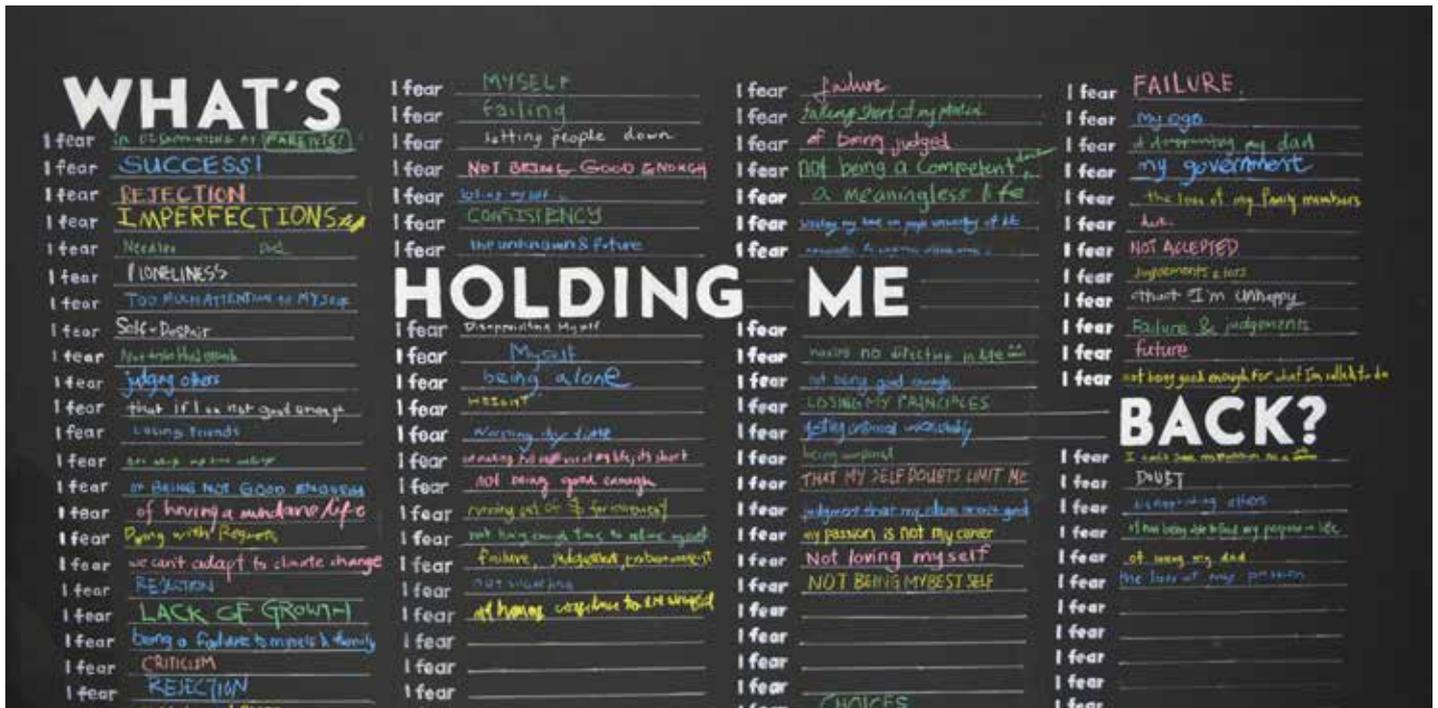
As we try to redefine the notion of failure for ourselves, we'll need to deal with the stigma around not being good enough and the fear of being judged if we make a misstep. In Singapore where standards are high, expectations can be daunting.

But failing is naturally part of growing and learning, and we know these anxieties can hold us back from reaching our full potential. Yet, overcoming these anxieties is easier said than done, and it would help if society can progressively shift its perspective of failure as necessary growth experiences.

We recognise that it will take courage to forge our own paths, and to persevere in the face of circumstances. Hearing the stories of fellow youth who have overcome failure gives us hope and inspires us to take charge of our own journeys.

We want to be brave and open in the face of unknowns, to explore opportunities and possibilities, to overcome our self-doubt, and to see failures as opportunities towards success. We see in each other courage, perseverance, passion and purpose.





At the final Youth Conversation on Redefining Success, Together, we shared what we believed was holding us back.



“I’ve faced quite a number of rejections and failures throughout our 5-year journey. Courage and perseverance are often not loud and dramatic—they are often quiet and made up of many small steps that shows a firm resolution to keep trying.”

—Jumaiyah Mahathir, co-founder of Halalfoodhunt

Jumaiyah was one of the resource persons who shared with participants how her team kept their chins up despite their challenges. Despite rejections by investors and many setbacks, Halalfoodhunt is now an established halal food directory in Singapore.

“In the booth where we expressed our ideal successes for Singapore, pasted were distinct goals that we would not have considered successes a decade ago, like “empathy” and “acceptance” [...] Indeed, the idea of success encompassing the achievement of certain career ideals was challenged by the sheer variety of hopes and dreams that participants had, even those beyond the workplace [...] If such discussions can lead us toward a society that is more accepting of different ways people think of success, perhaps thoughts of successes and failures may be less distressing and burdensome, especially to youth like myself who do not know much about what we want to achieve just yet.”

—Grace Neo, Youth Conversation participant

4. As a society, we want to be more inclusive, compassionate and kind.

Redefining success is not an individual pursuit. Our personal success is defined in relation to our friends, family and society. In the final conversation, we saw that our individual life choices determine the nature of our society. And so, standing at the nexus of the present and the future, we want to live a life with a larger purpose and to be able to make a difference in our community.

We hope for a Singapore that values and appreciates our different perspectives, skills and talents. In one of the group activities in our conversations, nearly 7 in 10 of us expressed a wish for Singapore to be more inclusive, kind and compassionate—a broader narrative of success.

OUR REFLECTIONS AND HOPES FOR OURSELVES AND SINGAPORE

I am *Chew Si Min*
and to me, success means:
being happy and caring about other people's happiness

I care about *education*
and a successful Singapore should:
give students opportunities to explore interests outside academics like in theatre, arts, music, etc

I am *Melissa*
and to me, success means:
Doing my best in all that I strive to achieve

I care about *Youth Development*
and a successful Singapore should:
have a more connected community platform to voice and/or share success, failures, learnings and stories

I am *Abdullah*
and to me, success means:
Living a meaningful life, learning and experiencing as much as possible

I care about *contentment*
and a successful Singapore should:
be a place where everyone has the opportunity to do what they want and be supportive of each other

I am *Jun Jie*
and to me, success means:
doing what you love no matter what others may say or how society might define success to be

I care about *my loved ones*
and a successful Singapore should:
embrace different talents and aspirations regardless of background, social status or interests

I am *Jack Kong Jing Kai*
and to me, success means:
bring out the best within ourselves

I care about *the future*
and a successful Singapore should:
be a more caring, comprehensive, inclusive, cohesive, open-hearted, open-minded, and meaningfully peaceful and harmonious society

I am *Glorisa*
and to me, success means:
adhering to your own goals (can be passion, purpose) and being satisfied with your achievements

I care about *social issues*
and a successful Singapore should:
work hand in hand. Listen, understand and empathise with each other, taking action to make impact on disadvantaged people. Be Kind.

I am *Jerry*
and to me, success means:
accepting and loving yourself on your own terms

I care about *smiles*
and a successful Singapore should:
embrace gratitude, appreciation, and celebration of life and people.

I am *Izzanzurin*
and to me, success means:
making my parents proud of me and taking very good care of them when they come to old age

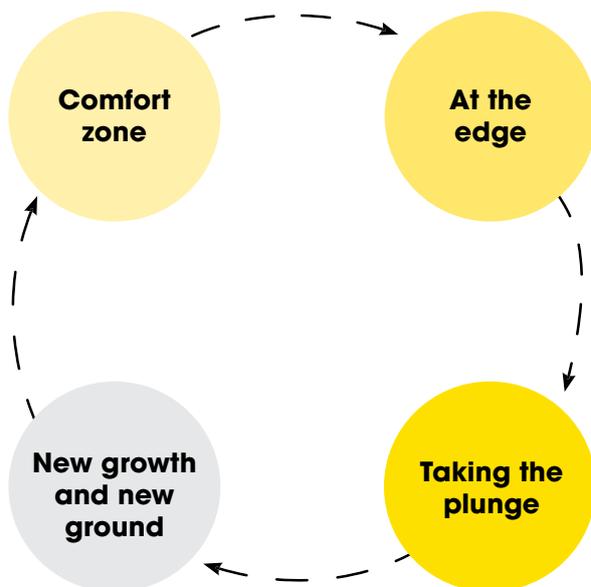
I care about *the people of Singapore*
and a successful Singapore should:
continue doing what it means to be successful

5. Success is not a destination; it's a journey.

Life is a constant negotiation of opposing values and priorities. In meeting fellow youth who came for the conversations, we've come to realise that we are all at different points, moving at our own pace.

Many of us start out uncertain and unsure because we haven't quite figured out what we want and what drives us. We are quite comfortable where we are; beyond this, we haven't yet asked ourselves the hard question of how far we are willing to go and how much we are prepared to risk.

Some of us are standing at the edge, we have some idea of what we want, but still we are held back by the weight of our own fears and that of others' expectations. We do not want to disappoint ourselves or those who love us. We are finding it scary to take the leap into the unknown, as we do not know if we will find success.



Some of us have made it across the abyss and found our own version of success. We did not always know that we would make it, but today we find ourselves, on solid ground of our own making. But life is not all peaches and roses once we land; having reached a personal milestone, we keep going on this journey, onwards to new challenges, new discoveries.

Some of us have chosen to take that leap into the unknown, and are swimming in fear and self-doubt. We're not sure if we will achieve our dreams but we are trying. While the fear is great, we are committed to who we want to be and emboldened by those who have succeeded before us.

"During the session, I was surrounded by people who have made it, and youth like me who are searching for roads that lead to the discovery of their passion and purpose. It was a safe space to explore multiple possibilities of our lives and take small steps in the midst of uncertainty to create new possibilities for ourselves."

— Marielle Descalsota,
Youth Conversation participant



Samuel Choo,
Youth Conversation participant

At one of the Youth Conversations, Samuel shared his experience with fellow participants, hoping that others might find strength from his story. Samuel mixed with the wrong company during his formative years and was sentenced for drug abuse to a year in military prison during his National Service.

During his time in prison, his family would travel every month without fail from the east to the west to visit him. That was the turning point which made him realise the love his family has for him.

Following his release, Samuel cut ties with bad company and has stayed drug and smoke-free. He is currently pursuing his studies and is grateful that his family did not give up on him and had constantly been supporting him to bounce back in life.

To Samuel, success is about not letting his family and friends down and keeping the promises he has made.



“Being constantly tired and stressed became the norm for me. It got to the point that I couldn’t see any other possibility than the reality that I was living. Throughout my first clinical year, I felt insignificant, and often stuck in the identity that I was never enough—never smart enough, never hardworking enough.

After a summer of intrapersonal work, it made me realise that I had every choice and ability to live a life of my own calling. A group of us started Project HAY (How Are You?) after a life-changing summer that we had with a dear mentor who taught us about social emotional learning. The 6 of us shared our personal journeys, and we realised that this was an issue that so many of our peers were going through, yet no one ever speaks about.

Through Project HAY, we hope to someday see our community care for ourselves as much as we do for our patients. Until then, we will still be working tirelessly to see that happen.

To you, I’d want to say “Have courage dear heart”. You don’t necessarily have to make a huge change, but imagine the few people whose lives you’ve changed for the better just because you did what you did.”

—Mak Wei Zhi,
Youth Conversation participant



A youth athlete and aspiring professional sportsperson, Diane recalled a powerful point shared at the Youth Conversation panel discussion on Redefining Success, Together.

“Mr Alex Soh (a life coach) said that his idea of success is about having happiness and health. This is meaningful for me. You can’t buy happiness or health. Having both are more important than other forms of material wealth. Doing track and field makes me happy, even if it is not something that other people would consider a proper career. One thing I learnt from the Youth Conversation is not to let the views of others decide what success means to me.”

—Diane Hilary Pragasam,
Youth Conversation participant

This Is Our Time; Redefine Success with Us.

It’s hard not to compare in Singapore, but if we want a more inclusive and accepting society, that change starts with us. It starts with the recognition that all of us have different starting points in life, with our own paths to lead. Our collective choices and pathways add up to the collective story of us.

Through the Youth Conversations on Success, it became clearer what success means to us as a generation. But it takes more than us youth talking among ourselves. It would be naive to think that the current notions of success held by many in our society can be changed overnight.

We hope our parents and society will hear us. Better yet, be our friends and mentors. Journey with us as we redefine and push the boundaries of what it means to be successful for ourselves and Singapore.

This is our time, come redefine success with us.

WE ARE
CHANGING
COURSE AND
LEARNING
DIFFERENTLY

WE CAN FIND THE JOY OF LEARNING IF WE TAKE CHARGE OF HOW WE LEARN.

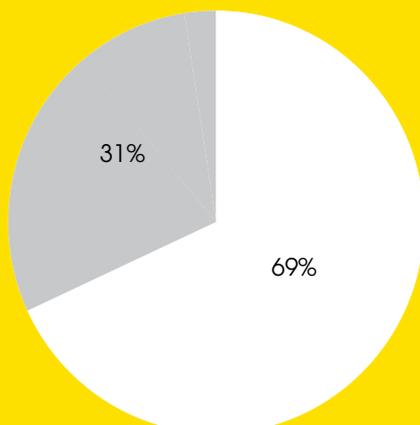
WE ARE RETHINKING LEARNING

We spend over a decade sitting for tests and exams, being told that we need to do well in school to do well in life. When we finally graduate from school and step out into the working world, it feels like yes, *now* is when our lives can finally begin.

Reality kicks in when the job hunt begins. Suddenly, all those years of formal education seem barely sufficient to score us an interview. Things are moving so quickly these days that what we learnt in school might be outdated by the time we graduate. New skills are emerging as quickly as old ones become obsolete. When we land a job, we are told that we need to upgrade to stay relevant, because if we don't, we will get left behind.

DO YOU THINK WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING/HAVE LEARNT IN SCHOOL IS PREPARING YOU WELL FOR THE WORKFORCE?

- Unsure/Disagree that learning helps to prepare for the workforce
- Agree that learning helps to prepare for the workforce



Every year, salary guides tell us which professions are the most promising, and every year, the pecking order changes. We would love to know what the future skills that we need are, so that we can get there in due time, but no one has such prescience. And so, we can only try our best to keep learning, whether through short courses, part-time studies or from mentors at work. It's our best bet against an uncertain future.

We Are Gearing up for an Unknown Future

Among the top life goals for youth, 'Acquiring new skills and knowledge' comes in 3rd after 'Having a place of our own' and 'Maintaining strong family relationships'. Our strong emphasis on learning was

also reflected in a Youth.SG poll in April 2018. Among 376 respondents, 7 in 10 agree that learning prepares us for the future.

The same poll also highlighted our fears regarding the relevance of our formal education. 7 in 10 were either unsure or disagreed that learning in school had sufficiently prepared us for entry into the workforce. This underscores our attitudes towards learning, particularly young working adults among us who have graduated from the structured education system and entered the workplace.

Across two Youth Conversations on Lifelong Learning sessions in 2018, we came together to discuss the challenges we face and to brainstorm ideas on how we might better support young working adults.

Challenge 1: We don't have enough time or energy

Holding down a full time job can drain the life out of us. At the end of a work day, we barely have enough time or energy for much else. Learning is often reduced to short news articles or nuggets of interesting facts that we scroll through on our mobile phones. Anything more than that becomes a serious commitment that we have to carefully consider.

With little time or energy, learning often becomes a chore. Those who pursued part-time degrees talked about the personal discipline they had to exercise and sacrifices they had to make in order to pursue their learning. On bad days, it's easy to do just enough to get by.

"I'd succumbed to being nothing more than another drone reading emails, checking for social media updates, and perusing media releases."

—Rice Media article, "Why Do I Feel Dumber As I Grow Older?" Said Every Singaporean Ever"⁶

Challenge 2: We can't decide if we should prioritise learning something useful or something that we enjoy

For some of us, formal certification is a fundamental part of our on-going professional development, and a necessary step for career progression. For the rest of us with career paths that are more varied, the multitude of options makes it difficult to choose what to pursue. No one knows what skills might be needed four years from now, so what we think might be our next career break might just be irrelevant by the time we are done.

Conversely, we need to decide if picking up something that we enjoy might have a bigger return on our mental wellbeing, even if it may not improve our earning ability. With limited time and energy, negotiating learning priorities is a challenge.

"We are advancing so fast as a society. I guess what we need to do is to grab hold of every opportunity to learn. For example, I work as a pharmacist and part of my job is to dispense medicine accurately. Now with technology, this process is being automated in order to minimise error. Instead of learning how to dispense medicine, I need to learn how to operate such machinery."

—Nirmal Bhai,
Youth Conversation participant

Challenge 3: We don't know it all

Much as we don't like admitting it, we don't know everything in our professed areas of expertise. And it takes a certain kind of maturity to acknowledge weaknesses; it demands vulnerability that some of us may yet not be brave enough to admit. Our fear or misplaced pride can stand in the way of learning new things.

"[Let] yourself know that it is okay to fail, that you can learn through failures... embracing the fact that you are not good enough, that you need to learn new things, and have the ability to move forward from it."

—Youth Conversation participant

9 in 10

Respondents preferred to learn through non-traditional approaches where they attend courses relevant to their personal interests, learn from their peers, engage in online learning platforms, or have a personal mentor.

Compared to learning through traditional approaches such as in a classroom setting, new learning formats allow us to set our own pace and style of learning, and are hence more engaging and authentic.

WHAT DOES LEARNING MEAN TO YOU?

Learning through non-traditional approaches

- 21%** Attending any course out of passion/personal interest
- 21%** Listening to other people share their life stories/experience
- 13%** Reading online (lifestyle, entertainment content, fiction books, etc)
- 13%** Having a personal mentor
- 12%** Watching documentaries
- 10%** Reading online (news, research papers, etc)

Learning through traditional approaches

- 10%** Attending courses to obtain professional work-related certification



1. Learning is a journey

We engage in introspective reflection, make sense of our experiences and struggles, and draw insights for ourselves. It is through this journey that we grow and understand ourselves.



2. Learning feeds our passions

We pursue our interests and do not limit ourselves to what is conventional.



3. Learning is part of everyday life

We see learning as a cornerstone of our lives, and not just the classroom. It is part of all our interactions with others and the things we observe.



4. Learning is driven by purpose

We assess the usefulness and relevance of the knowledge we gain by how it helps us keep pace with changes and circumvent challenges in the world. More importantly, we learn best when we have a sense of purpose for what that knowledge is for and how it can make a positive impact on the world and those around us.

We Are Rediscovering the Joy of Learning

Equipping ourselves with new learning approaches and mind-sets will support us better in our learning journey. Through the Youth Conversations, it became clear that while competition motivates many of us to learn, this anxiety is tiring and counter-productive. We want to rediscover our love for learning by taking charge of our own learning journey, whether through new subjects, skills or formats.

Beyond tangible programmes, we are embracing different mind-sets towards learning. From our group discussions at the Youth Conversations, we came to realise that the joyful learning mind-sets we have are expressed in these different ways.

We Never Stop Learning

This new mind-set is in truth quite old. Henry Ford said that “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80”. There’s a similar Malay saying—“Pelajar Sepanjang Hayat”—which means “student for a lifetime”. Both maxims are quoted often, probably because they hold a grain of truth.

Learning is evidence of an aspiring young mind, one that is never satisfied with his or her lot in life. There are undoubtedly challenges in pursuing lifelong learning, but we can overcome them. We will expand the possibilities open to us in an uncertain world with the seeds of a joyful learning mind-set, paired with the blessing of divine discontent that drives us to always do better.

WE ARE

**REWIRING
MINDSETS**

WE WANT TO TALK OPENLY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH —IT’S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT AND IT’S OKAY TO SEEK HELP.

STRESS IS PART OF OUR LIVES

Our challenges are manifold. We stress about our studies, stress about our relationships, stress about money, stress about work, stress about our future, and stress about our health. In a vicious cycle, this stress in turn affects our health. There’s just no running away from stress. So, we deal with it in the best way we know. We share our problems with our family and friends, on social media, and we get by. But sometimes, when it gets a bit too much, our mental health takes a hit.

The National Youth Survey 2016 found that youth experience similar stressors across our life stages, with top three stressors remaining the same across the 2013 and 2016 study.

According to the Singapore Mental Health Study 2016, the proportion of people who have experienced a mental disorder has increased from 1 in 8 to 1 in 7 over recent years.⁷

The Singapore Mental Health Study 2016 also found that depression is the most common mental disorder, with 1 in 16 people suffering from it at least once in their lives.

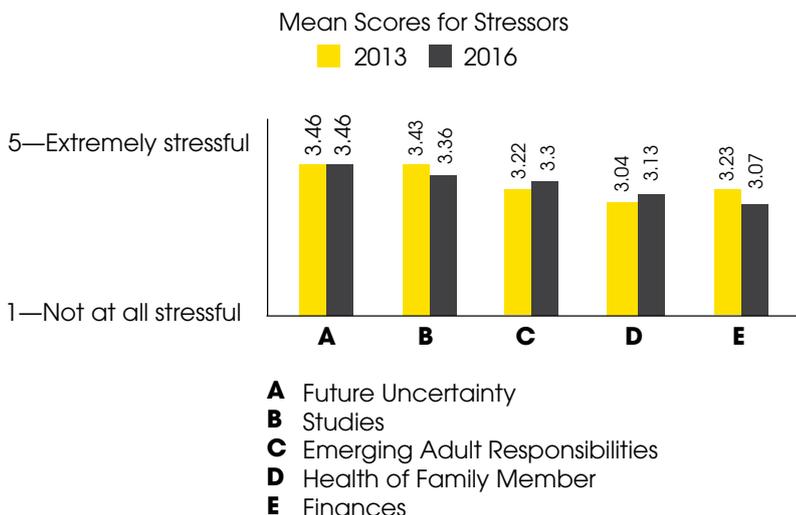
The same study also found that the proportion of people suffering from mental disorders *not* seeking help remains high, with more than 3 in 4 people suffering in silence.

"In working with patients suffering from mental illness, we found that social stigma is a major block for them, in getting back to their previous lives, and being accepted. Even though they had significantly recovered from their mental illnesses, they were still not accepted back into their homes."

—Team M.U.S.E.

YOUTH ARE STRESSED OVER THE FUTURE AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES⁸

Rating from 1—Not at all stressful, to 5—Extremely stressful



Team M.U.S.E from Youth Corps Singapore filmed a social experiment video inviting passers-by along Orchard Road to reach out to someone suffering from schizophrenia with a simple act of giving a high five. The short video gives a glimpse of the stigma that people suffering from schizophrenia face, and the compassion in all of us.

The Issue Is Stigma

A 2018 survey by the National Council of Social Service found that 6 in 10 people have a misconception that mental health conditions are caused by a lack of self-discipline and willpower. Furthermore, 5 in 10 people indicated that they are unwilling to live with, live nearby or work with a person with a mental health condition.⁹

It doesn't have to be this way.

We want those of us suffering from mental disorders to know that it is okay, and that they will be supported. Living with a mental disorder is already so difficult, and it shouldn't be tougher than it already is.

Fighting the stigma starts with education to help youth and the people around us understand what mental disorders are. And because mental disorders are invisible, we will teach Singaporeans to be more compassionate towards others who are different.

"I think it's very important to question our own biases, insecurities and fears, because these are the underlying factors in mental health stigmatisation. When we have that awareness within ourselves, it would be easier for us to recognise how and what we want to contribute."

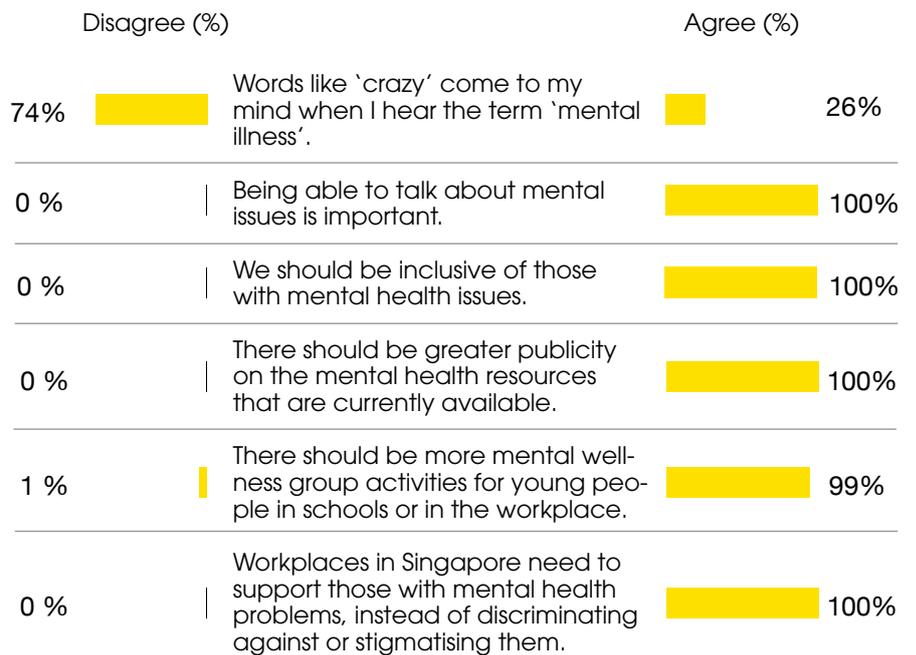
—Nawira Baig, mental health advocate

MORE SUPPORT, MORE AWARENESS, MORE INCLUSIVITY



A poll conducted with 170 youths on mental health issues found that the majority feel that more support is needed for young people in schools and workplaces

They also felt that more could be done to increase awareness on mental health issues, destigmatise mental health, and create a more inclusive society



TOGETHER, WE ARE CALLING FOR SINGAPORE TO TAKE ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH.

1. Let's use social media campaigns to spread awareness

about the issue and learn how to support our friends in their times of need.

2. Let's put out more positive stories

and show how sufferers have recovered to lead fulfilling lives.

3. Let's rebrand mental health terminology

to be more positive.

4. Let's humanise the issue and encourage sufferers

to step out of the shame to seek treatment.

5. Let's care for the caregivers,

who support sufferers through their journey.

Put the Positive Word Out

Over the years, there has been increased attention on mental disorders. In 2016, the #Howru campaign saw celebrities showing their support for World Suicide Prevention Week by wearing a black plaster on their inner wrists. In 2018, Channel NewsAsia Insider produced a 4-part documentary series on depression, drawing attention to how it affects students, working adults, women, and the elderly.

In the Youth Conversation on Mental Health, close to 50 passionate students, volunteers, mental health professionals and working professionals came together to share what more could be done for mental health in Singapore.

We Care About Mental Health

Among us, there are many who care passionately about changing things for the better.

Through their social experiment video, the members of Team M.U.S.E met volunteers who wanted to be a part of their project, and challenge the stigma against schizophrenia. The honest responses of strangers

in their video also uncovered the inherent compassion in Singaporeans.

Through the Youth Conversation on Mental Health, the insights and ideas were shared with relevant government agencies including the Health Promotion Board (HPB) Mental Health and Strategic Planning team, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) Community Mental Health Division, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) Youth Alliance Team, and the Public Service Division's Moments of Life Families Programme Office.

Many of these participants have also stepped up to form a panel of resource persons for the Health Promotion Board to provide feedback for HPB's programmes and collaterals, share insights about mental health-related issues among young people, and raise awareness of HPB's initiatives in their own networks.

"It was heart-warming to see everyone very open to the concept and to see people come up to give a high five. Even though there was a low number of high fives in the beginning, there was still acceptance from people for who they are."

—Eddie Chan, Team M.U.S.E

Through this Youth Conversation, Ying Ying, 32, and Geraldine, 27, came together to start a project called The SOAR Initiative (School of Ability and Recovery), that aims to foster mental wellness and reduce stigma in the community through education. They reached out to more people to join them and more than 20 people from all walks of life responded to their open call. Starting in January 2019, they are running a series of workshops titled “Slowing Down” to help participants learn how to take care of their mental health.

“I think that education, honest conversations and meaningful interactions with persons in recovery will really make a difference in breaking down that ‘us’ versus ‘them’ barrier to sort of level the playing field for different stakeholders in the community.

The response to SOAR’s workshops has been quite good, people turned up, and they gave good feedback about the content of the workshop, and the quality of the trainers, so I think that’s quite heartening for me, knowing that there is so much support from the ground.”

—Lee Ying Ying, co-founder of the SOAR Initiative

Championing Mental Health

Also happening in 2019 is a series of film screenings by Sherman Ho from the Happiness Initiative. Supported by the National Youth Fund, the “Happiness Film Festival” is a series of film screenings and Q&A sessions that aim to make it easier to talk openly about personal struggles with mental health.

With more of us stepping up to champion mental health, Youth Corps Singapore has also strengthened education to equip youth volunteers passionate to make a difference in this area. Along with

other agencies like NCSS and AIC, they’ve also lent support to youth groups like Campus Psy and Hush Teabar.

As the closing event for the Mental Health Awareness Singapore Learning Series in 2018, Campus Psy organised “Stay Woke Youth Fest” in the National University of Singapore to get students to learn more about mental health.

Campus Psy has also joined forces with 8 other organisations to collectively design solutions to address mental health issues among children and youth, with the support of the Singapore Tote Board.

“I felt that there is progress in terms of youths and young adults coming forward to talk about mental health issues. There is more awareness and more advocacy done in terms of events, or even dialogues like the Youth Conversations on mental health by NYC and Youth Corp. which is a good sign, because a few years back, there weren’t such open discussions or open dialogues on mental health issues; people weren’t talking about it, it’s like a taboo topic. Even now, there’s still prevalent stigma. But you realise, youth and young adults are more forthcoming because they see a lot of campaigns going on, like for example, the recent beyond the label campaign by NCSS.”

—Cho Ming Xiu, co-founder of Campus PSY



Photo credit: Youth.SG

“I also think it’s very important to bring mental health literacy to school.

We have physical education, and I think we should also have mental health education in schools.

They go hand in hand.”

—Nawira Baig, mental health advocate

We Can Fight the Stigma

Stress will always be in our lives. Our struggles today may not be for basic needs like those of our grandparents’ generation, but they are challenging nonetheless. While life in Singapore is fast-paced and demanding, it doesn’t have to be at the expense of our mental health.

Now, we need everyone to support us in spreading the word and fighting the stigma. Help us make a difference.

**WE ARE CALLING OUT
RACISM
FOR WHAT IT IS**

WE ASPIRE TO BE A SENSITIVE AND SENSIBLE SOCIETY, THAT TALKS OPENLY ABOUT OUR DIFFERENT RACES AND RELIGIONS.

CAN DIVERSITY BE OUR STRENGTH?

Five days a week, we grew up reciting “Regardless of race, language or religion”—a ritual that marked the start of every school day. Our pledge to embrace our multi-cultural society has been drummed into our being. We easily identify diverse ethnic celebrations and happily join in the festivities—visiting our friends’ homes, dressing in traditional garb, visiting Chinatown, Geylang Serai or Little India, or greeting someone in another language.

But beyond reciting the Pledge and celebrating festivities, how much do we really know about each other? How much of what we think is factual, and how much of it is based on prejudice? How aware are we of privilege, stereotypes and racism, and how can these exist when we pride ourselves on our racial harmony?

We Are Diverse

As Singaporeans, we are among the most culturally diverse in the world.

According to a study of more than 200 countries by Pew Research Centre, Singapore scored the highest on the Religious Diversity Index.¹⁰ That was 5 years ago. The makeup of Singapore’s population continues to evolve. From 2007 to 2017, families became more culturally diverse, with the percentage of inter-ethnic marriages rising from 16% to 22%.¹¹ Among youth, the proportion of minorities has increased from 23% in 2000 to 28% in 2018,¹² and more than half of the new citizens and permanent residents who joined us in 2017 were under 30.¹³

Young people in Singapore are also more comfortable than before with others of different backgrounds, and have more close friendships with people of different races, religions and nationalities.

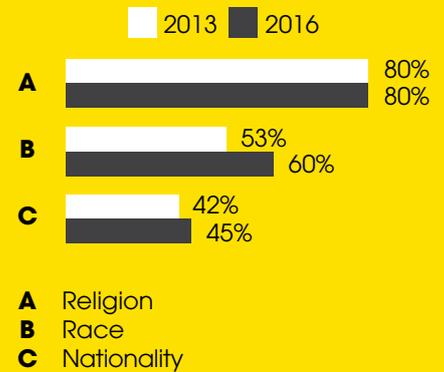
Call It What It Is

Just because we celebrate Racial Harmony Day, it doesn’t mean that we are truly celebrating diversity. And for minority groups in Singapore, their lived experiences do not always match up to our espoused ideals and values.

Racism does exist, even though we sometimes find it hard to see it in ourselves.

MORE YOUTH WITH DIVERSE FRIENDSHIPS¹⁴

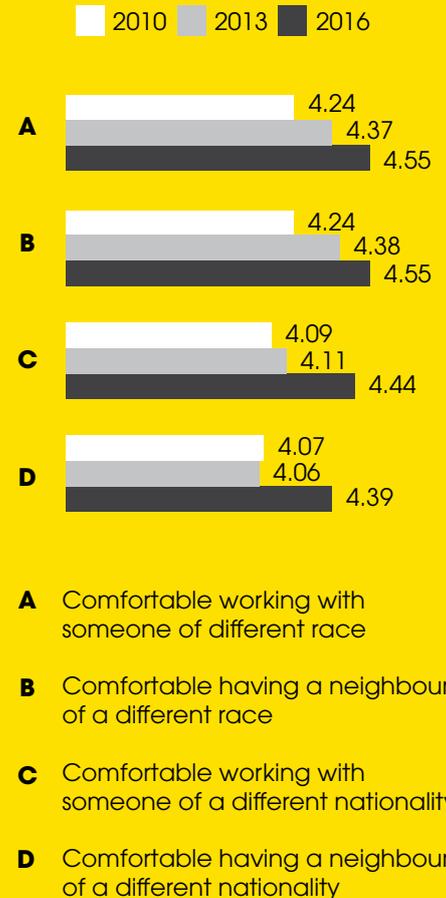
% of youth who have a close friend of a different...



YOUTH ARE MORE RECEPTIVE TOWARDS DIVERSITY¹⁵

Rating from 1—Strongly disagree to 5—Strongly Agree

Mean Scores for Social Attitudes towards Race & Nationality





Sujandren was inspired to do his part to fight casual racism after attending his first Youth Conversation on Race and Religion. The frank exchanges and activities highlighted insensitivities that hit close to home. He returned as an assistant facilitator for subsequent Youth Conversations on Race and Religion, and continues to volunteer in a partner organisation to create safe spaces for youth to express and appreciate different views.



An active volunteer at OnePeople.sg, Hafez was a facilitator at a Youth Conversation on Race and Religion session. Fair-skinned due to his mixed heritage, this allowed Hafez to overhear an eye-opening conversation while returning home from school in his uniform. Assuming that he could not understand them, a Malay couple standing within earshot remarked in Malay that Hafez must be “very smart to be able to attend that school” and lamented that their child would not be able to because he or she was not “smart enough” to do so. Hafez was deeply affected by that incident as he realised very acutely that racial stereotypes have real effects, limiting our courage to support our children’s pursuit of their dreams.

According to a 2017 study on Race Relations by Channel NewsAsia and the Institute of Policy Studies, nearly half of Singaporeans acknowledge that racism is still a problem in Singapore. More than 2 in 5 believe in some form of negative racial stereotypes. And yet, almost 3 in 4 do not see themselves as racist.¹⁶

In a Youth.SG poll of 1,462 youths in 2017, an overwhelming 9 out of 10 respondents felt that Singaporeans are racist. Does this mean that younger Singaporeans are becoming more aware of racial and religious sensitivities, and are attuned to more subtle forms of racism?

We want to be a part of this change. In our Youth Conversation on Race and Religion, we opened a safe space to talk about a topic many deem too sensitive to broach, and to share our own stories. What struck us was how common casual

racism is among us, and how we might have unknowingly hurt our friends through our words and actions.

Racism is not always clear-cut discrimination, like not offering a job to someone because of race. Oftentimes it’s less overt, like making a joke or a passing comment about someone’s skin colour or beliefs. This sort of casual racism while usually not ill-intended, can still cause hurt. Casual racism is still not okay.

Because casual racism can be so common, the discussion revealed how we are often not even aware of it. We end up saying things that perpetuate racial and religious stereotypes, and demonstrate a lack of respect for someone else’s identity.

Being ignorant of our own prejudices means that we sometimes hurt others even though we never

"They joke that only my eyeballs and teeth can be seen when the lights are switched off."

KNOW WHAT IT MEANS

Racism: Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed towards someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior (Oxford English Dictionary)

Casual racism: A form of racism that is less overt. It refers to conduct, often not ill-intentioned, involving negative stereotypes or prejudices about people on the basis of race, colour or ethnicity (Australian Human Rights Commission)

Stereotype: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing (Oxford English Dictionary)

Prejudice: Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience (Oxford English Dictionary)

Racial discrimination: When a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities as others in a similar situation, because of their race, their country of birth, their ethnic origin or their skin colour (Australian Human Rights Commission)

imagined we would. We are working to become more self-aware, so that we can avoid such behaviours.

It's Not Easy to Break the Silence

We learnt that it is hard to challenge someone who has made a casual racist remark, whether we are personally offended by it, or whether we feel it might hurt another person. For one, we feel strong social pressure to accept that this is the way of life in Singapore. In addition, we may be seen as too sensitive or having no sense of humour if we choose to speak up. No one wants to be a wet blanket, or to put our friendships on the line.

Often, this tension we live with leaves us torn between speaking out or keeping the peace. If complicity doesn't cause grievous hurt, it is easier for us to let it go in silence. Yet, we know that in choosing silence, the person remains ignorant of their stereotypes and prejudices, and we are responsible for this.

We want to be able to talk about these issues openly and honestly, even if it feels uncomfortable.

It's Not All Bad

"A friend was told to remove her hijab at her workplace. I felt upset and thought it was unjust for her."



Photo credit: CommaCon Campaign

Let's Talk About Race. Honestly.

At 'Honest Conversations Hijab 101 —What are your views?', around 30 participants from different walks of life shared their honest views on the wearing of hijabs and tudungs, and learnt about its religious significance. Organised as part of the CommaCon Campaign, it was just one in a series of public engagement sessions on sensitive and contentious issues such as racism, terrorism, national identity and socio-economic division.



Photo credit: CommaCon Campaign

Through the Youth Conversations, many of us also got to know about different efforts and many of us chose to volunteer our time and energy towards building greater racial and religious understanding in Singapore.

One such initiative is Roses of Peace, an annual youth-driven ground up movement that aims to bridge the gap in Youthfaith discourse and promote interfaith messages of peace, love and harmony. Participants celebrate Singapore's interfaith harmony by sharing thousands of roses with members of the public. Each rose is attached with greeting cards bearing messages of peace, love, and harmony from religious luminaries of all faiths. Roses of Peace also runs volunteer workshops, youth forums, interfaith conferences and leadership symposiums.

In addition, OnePeople.SG runs courses and camps for people of different races, religions, and nationalities to simply come together and bond. Every year, they organise the Orange Ribbon Walk which invites the community to lend their support for racial harmony. More than just a walk, it is an opportunity for participants to meet new people with different perspectives, and learn more about inclusivity and embracing diverse cultures.

Just Start; We will Make a Difference

We are not so idealistic as to expect racism, casual or otherwise, to be easily eradicated. But that doesn't mean that we want to continue pretending that it doesn't exist. It's important for us acknowledge it exists, and that is just the start.

We are not alone. This next chapter of our multi-cultural Singapore is for us to write. But all of us will need to put in effort to keep reflecting, keep talking, keep understanding, and keep acting to make a difference. Only then will we get to that place where we can say that diversity is truly our strength.

**WE BELIEVE THAT
EQUALITY
IS NOT A
LUXURY**

WE WANT A SINGAPORE THAT IS KIND, INCLUSIVE AND FAIR. WE WANT FAIRNESS IN SPITE OF THE UNFAIRNESS IN LIFE.

THESE ARE THE INEQUALITIES WE EXPERIENCE

Life should be fair. But it's not, and that doesn't feel right with us.

"Even though it isn't very obvious in Singapore, traditional families have different levels of expectation based on gender."

"Highly paid jobs are only for people with degrees."

"Those born poor find it difficult to move up the ladder."

"Older generation of working poor versus young millennials [who have] a brighter career and life trajectory."

—Youth Conversation participants

We see and know exclusion, and that's not right too.

"I believe there is inequality in etiquette, in how certain people present themselves and treat others. The material possessions we may have that seemingly define 'success', it all means nothing if one is not inherently good and empathetic [towards] others."

We Want to Do Something About It

Some of us embarked on learning journeys that helped us to empathise a little better with experiences different from our own. Others got involved in simulations such as Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Dialogue in the Dark, to live as someone without sight and find our way around. Some of us volunteered with organisations which serve those different from us, so we can touch lives and in doing so, learn what life is like for

others. Even more of us read articles and watched videos, grasping for understanding. In 2018, social researcher Dr Teo You Yenn's book *This is what Inequality Looks Like* opened discussions around the topic. The documentary "Regardless of Class" by Channel News-Asia Insider hit close to home, as we empathised with the dreams of students from different educational streams. And we didn't stop there. We questioned our own reactions and challenged media portrayals as stereotypes.



Photo credit: Channel NewsAsia

Moderated by Senior Minister of State Dr Janil Puthuchear, the CNA Insider video “How Kids See Class Differences” sparked debate after it showed an exchange between Normal and Express stream students about the topic of class difference.

The video discussion took to online media platforms, highlighting the conversation between two Normal (Technical) stream students—Muhammad Sufa Aniq and Muhd Nadiy Razin—and an Integrated Program student—Maniyar Kareena Tushar—who shared their honest thoughts about closing the gap on class difference.



Photo credit: Mothership.sg

We learnt that the issues are complex and intertwined with history, philosophy and human psychology, and that answers will depend on the kind of Singapore our generation wants to build. But we believe that speaking to and, more importantly, listening to one another are crucial steps in figuring out how we can help make a difference.

So we spoke, and we listened.

Please Mind the Gap: This Is What We Learnt About Inequality

The Youth Conversation on the topic “Is Life Fair?”, a collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), opened up a space for us to have these conversations. We explored inequality and exclusion on a personal level, and went through a poverty simulation exercise to experience radical inequality and what it meant to be excluded from economic, educational, and social opportunities, even if for a brief moment. We also grappled with the question of whether inequality and exclusion are institutional, societal, or cultural, and shared our own experiences and observations of unfairness and exclusion in Singapore.

These conversations opened us up to lives beyond our own circles, and helped us understand some of the deeper forces beneath instances of inequality or exclusion. We might not all have agreed on everything, but we all learnt something.

1. We learnt that we still don't fully understand inequality and exclusion

The experience of inequality and exclusion is deeply personal, even subjective and complex. It can emerge from any type of background. We listened to many stories of those among us who experienced inequality and exclusion by virtue of their family background, the school they went to, their race, gender, sexual orientation, choice of career or disability. There were stories about inequalities of wealth and power, but also stories about inequalities in treatment and in dignity. These stories were eye-opening and heart-breaking, but many of them were also stories of incredible strength and indomitable courage. Hearing these stories both humbled

and inspired us. Humbled by the complexity and enormity of the issue, we were also inspired enough to make us want to act.

2. We talked about the difference between equality and fairness

We know that some circumstances may be unequal but there are opportunities to let everyone have a fair chance of succeeding. For instance, students with medical conditions are given more time during major examinations to allow them to compete fairly with other students.

What emerged through our conversations was that those currently excluded did not want equality, or at least not in the sense of “others have so much and I should get more”. Instead, what they wanted was fairness—a fair shot at the same things everyone else had, even if they had to work themselves to the bone to get there.

This became especially clear to us during one of the Youth Conversation sessions where participants went through a poverty simulation exercise. Some of us had far fewer resources in the simulation environment than others, and much of the frustration we felt was not at how others had more, but at the systemic factors that made it more difficult for us to have fair chances to also try and succeed, no matter how hard or cleverly we worked. It was fairness we realised we wanted, not equality.

"My main takeaway from the activity is that in desperate times, individuals can resort to unthinkable measures just to provide for themselves. Even though I've worked with lower income individuals [during my] national service [stint], today I've experienced it for myself what this feeling was like."

—Youth Conversation participant

3. Some felt that the status quo was satisfactory, but others wanted change

Some of us saw Singapore as a fair and inclusive society, where people could succeed regardless of family background, race and gender. In a digital poll on social inequality involving 300 participants prior to this conversation, 2 out of 5 were more receptive towards unequal outcomes if there were equal opportunities.

Others (64%) felt that Singapore could be doing better. They explained how the odds were stacked against people with family problems or who could not get into the right schools. They raised that subtle differences, such as whether your family speaks English or Mandarin at home, had an impact on your career options. Even the things that we talked about among our friends, shaped our ambition in our dreams—whether we aimed to study in brand name schools or we aimed just to graduate.

Clarence Ching, who was also a co-organiser of Bridge the Gap, a youth-led initiative that was a precursor to the Youth Conversations, shared that it was precisely this reason that motivated him to speak out:

“For myself, I came from the Normal Academic stream (NA), so I spent five years in secondary school and then moved on to polytechnic. So I think it was the NA experience that shaped my thinking, there were conversations about how NA kids were not as good as Express kids, and I think that I felt the lowest in secondary school. We were discriminated against, teachers felt that we were not good enough, and resources were allocated towards the ones who were perceived to do well, rather than students who were passionate in a certain field. So I felt very strongly for it, and that is why in the middle of the year, we decided to [organise] Bridge the Gap. It stems from my NA experiences, and I think that there were not enough narratives of Normal Academic students speaking out and sharing their experiences. So, I felt that I wanted to share their stories through these conversations.”

—Clarence Ching,
Youth Conversation participant

4. Some thought the issue was institutions and policies, others felt it was culture and mind-sets

Some of us traced inequalities and exclusions to our institutions and policies—they argued that inequalities and exclusions were woven into the fabric of society. Some of us shared about preferential hiring practices for candidates from brand name schools and networks, which goes against the grain of meritocracy that we stand for.

Others thought that the main issue stemmed from cultures and mind-sets. They saw the stigmatising of people in certain jobs (“If you don’t study, you’ll be a road sweeper next time.”) and the unwillingness of communities to help those in need as the central issues.

Both sides ended up agreeing that it was a little bit of both. While institutions and policies could inadvertently lead to certain inequalities and exclusions, cultures and mind-sets reinforce and perpetuate these inequalities and exclusions.

“I think the main takeaway is that issues are complex, and hence it is difficult to come to a solution as well. However, I think what we can do is stop thinking about dollars and cents but about the more human side of things—how to help those underprivileged other than just offering financial support?”

—Youth Conversation participant

5. We agreed that, as individuals, we could make a difference

Whether institutionally or culturally, we recognise that we have to start somewhere. Some of us committed to volunteering with needy communities and being more considerate of where we went for meals with friends.

“Not to eat [at] too expensive [a] place if my friend cannot afford it.”

—Youth Conversation participant

Others among us spoke of acknowledging those who were often invisible, such as our school custodians or neighbourhood cleaners, and treating them better. Our commitments boiled down to a willingness to think and act better and, as one of us quoted, to “be the change you want to see”.

“Putting myself in other people’s shoes by being less quick to judge people’s behaviours and being more aware of how behaviours can possibly exclude people unconsciously.”

—Youth Conversation participant

In summing up the conversations, Yuvan Mohan, one of the designers and facilitators for the sessions, shared his thoughts on why he found the conversations meaningful:



“I think what that brought out was differing perspectives. It formed quite a unique platform, because they do not [normally] have an opportunity to discuss these issues with diverse individuals. If they were to do it of their own accord, it would be within their own social networks.”

Yuvan Mohan is the Co-Chair of the Young ChangeMakers (YCM) program under National Youth Council (NYC). He supports youth by providing coaching and funding for their initiatives. He was also a facilitator for the Youth Conversations.

This Is the Singapore We Hope to See

We are young, and the future belongs to no one but us. It is we who will have to build a Singapore which is kind, inclusive and fair.

We believe that we can accord equal human dignity to everyone, regardless of wealth, grades or disability. We believe that we can—each one of us—become a little more inclusive and a little more open to others, reaching out across divides, outside our zones of comfort. No one needs to stand alone.

Yes, many of the issues are complex, but we believe that simple actions founded on these principles can make a difference.

Life may not always be fair, but together, we can make it less unfair.

**WE ARE
REMOVING
THE
INVISIBLE
CLOAK**

WE CAN'T BE AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY IF WE DON'T TREAT EACH AND EVERY PERSON WITH DIGNITY, CITIZEN OR NOT. THAT RESPONSIBILITY BELONGS TO ALL OF US.

STRANGERS AMONG US

We see them, how could we not? The ones who came from lands near and far. The ones we subconsciously avoid brushing shoulders with, and whose stories are sometimes forgotten in our frenetic city lives. Lest we forget, many of the skyscrapers in our city were built by their hands, just as our homes were built by our immigrant forefathers.

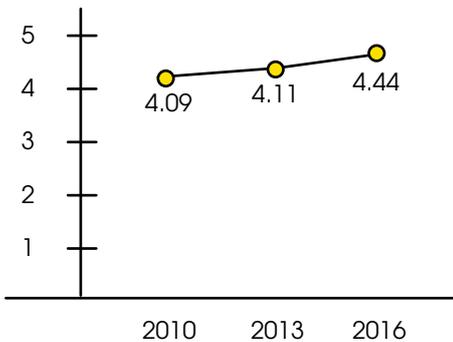
In the 2018 Credit Suisse Youth Barometer study, racism and xenophobia were ranked 5th among concerns of young Singaporeans between 16 to 25 years old.¹⁷ This was echoed in a 2018 Youth Conversation digital poll with many of us highlighting the need to appreciate the 'invisible' workers in Singapore. Compared to our seniors, we are also more comfortable with others of different races and nationalities, and we are ready to take action to support migrant workers among us.

"They build our homes. They're part of our community but they are largely unseen. I think we owe something to them [...] I think we need to understand they are like us fellow human beings. If not, we will be like other places in the world where there's more xenophobia... because we stereotype people."

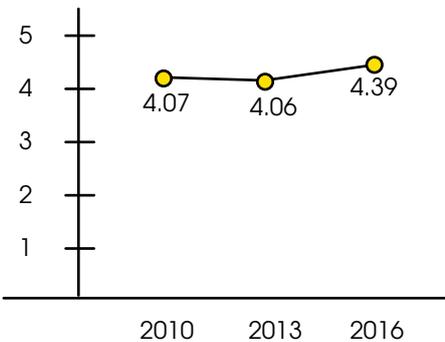
—Dr Goh Wei Leong, co-founder of HealthServe

YOUTH ARE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH OTHER NATIONALITIES¹⁸

Mean ratings of comfort with working together with someone of a different nationality



Mean ratings of comfort with having someone of a different nationality as a neighbour



In 2016, a group of final year students from Nanyang Technological University published a video of four foreign workers reading hurtful on-line comments about them. Titled “Migrant workers respond to comments made by Singaporeans”, the video hoped to bridge the social gap between low-wage migrant workers and Singaporeans. The hurt reactions of these individuals prompted indignant responses from viewers sympathetic to the perspectives of the interviewees.

Across social media, there are many more powerful videos of us showing our appreciation in different ways. This is how we are showing that this matters to us and how we are working to change attitudes towards migrant workers.



Photo credit: Nanyang Technological University

“I really hope those foreign workers who read the negative comments also got to read the positive ones (like the dude who read the ‘I do not feel safe at all’ comment). Imagine if they were called to do this video only to be forced to read all those hurtful comments.”

“I think if Singaporeans have an issue with foreign workers, they should step up to the plate and voice their concerns to the government instead of venting their unhappiness on the innocent migrant workers. They are human beings just like any of us are, they’re just trying to make ends meet for their families.”

—online comments in response to the video



Photo credit: The Hidden Good

“Thank you for building our school!”
 —Nani, Sherilyn, Genevieve, Celine, Yiwei and Yipin

A group of students from Haig Girls School did not want the migrant workers who had built their new school to go unappreciated. Mentored at the Hoodie Lab by The Hidden Good, they captured the process of how they connected with them and expressed their heartfelt appreciation.



Photo credit: Youth.SG

“We know them as migrant workers, but we don’t see them as individuals with their own stories to tell.”
 —Idette Chen

In 2017, Idette spent four months in migrant worker dormitories and in Little India to develop her short film titled “Bangla”, a piece that scrutinises foreign-local relationships with migrant workers to create awareness of and empathy for the personal stories they have to share.

In the Youth Conversation on Migrant Workers, over 40 of us went on a guided visit to the Tuas View Dormitory. Hosted by migrant workers, we had a first-hand view of their homes and how they lived.



Photo credit: NTU Magazine HEY!

“For any society to change, the innovators—the 2.5% of the society—must step up. And the youth in Singapore make up more than 2.5% of our people. So, if we take a step, that is going to create a ripple in this society. And we are all going to work towards that society.”

—Sazzad Hossain

Sazzad Hossain was only 11 when his family migrated from Bangladesh to Singapore. In his youth, he struggled with English, which prevented him from getting into school. It also made him keenly aware of how language can be a barrier in assimilation. As he made friends with the migrant workers in his neighbourhood, Sazzad realised that they, too, faced similar issues. That drove him to establish the Social Development Initiative (SDI) Academy, which trains new migrant workers in basic English.

“The living conditions... I had a better understanding after chatting with them. I see efforts in making the dorm a 'home' for the workers. There can be more ways to help them.”

—Youth Conversation participant

This was followed by a candid conversation with policy makers from the Ministry of Manpower, Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management, Migrant Workers Centre, and Landlease Asia Holdings, moderated by Sazzad Hossain. The panel did not shy away from difficult questions ranging from the adequacy of housing regulations to the pathways for resolving employ-

ment disputes. We gained a better understanding of the improvements being made and how youth like us can step up to do our part in supporting the wellbeing of migrant workers among us.

Among all these passionate youth, Cai Yin Zhou is a leading example. The 2017 Singapore Youth Award winner, who lived in Geylang all his life, felt compelled to offer a different perspective to the negative stereotypes of the area. He started “Back Alley Barbers”, offering free haircuts to migrant workers so that they could send more of their salaries back home. In another initiative called “Migrant Mail”, Yin Zhou and a group of volunteers collected handwritten letters from migrant workers along with polaroid photos of them to send to their loved ones.



Photo credit: Cai Yin Zhou

We Believe All This Adds Up

Besides the projects that made a splash on social media, there are many more youths who have made a difference in the lives of the migrant workers. Over the years, the National Youth Council’s Young ChangeMakers programme has seen many self-initiated projects for migrant workers and people working at the fringes of our society.

With each effort, we are a step closer to making Singapore a welcoming host for our foreign friends and building the inclusive Singapore we wish to see.

**WE ARE
TRASHING
OUR OLD WAYS**

CONCERNS OVER SUSTAINABILITY IN SINGAPORE¹⁹

In 2017 alone, we generated

>7.7mil
tonnes of waste

1.6mil
tonnes of domestic waste

a **third** of which is made up of packaging

50%

of this packaging is made of plastic, of which **only 6% is recycled**



810 mil
kg of food waste

equivalent to more than **54,000 double-decker buses!**



60,000

tonnes of electronic waste

equivalent to **73 mobile phones** per person



40%

of our recycling bin deposits are **non-recyclables**—with food and liquid waste often contaminating other recyclables

79%

of our domestic waste gets **incinerated**, with incinerated ash making its way to our only landfill—Semakau landfill—which will run out of space by **2035** at this rate

Simply put, our current rate of waste generation is not sustainable. **We need to stop.**

WE HAVE TO FIND A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO OUR WASTE PROBLEM TODAY. AND IT NEEDS TO WORK FOR EVERYONE IN SOCIETY.

WE ARE TRASHING OUR OLD WAYS

In a city like Singapore, we find ourselves surrounded by convenience. From cheaply-available clothing to hot packaged meals delivered right to our doorsteps, we have gotten used to getting what we want on demand.

Scrolling through social media sometimes feels like viewing a never-ending advertising campaign for all the things we don't have, and a reminder of what our friends do have. With affordable consumer goods everywhere, it is hard not to feel at least a little pressured to keep up with the latest trends. But just as quickly as we give in to our impulses, shiny new things begin to lose their allure. Before we know it, we're tossing out the "old" to make way for the new.

We hardly think about the environmental cost of such rampant consumerism—of tossing away the single-use plastics we use, the clothes we have or the packaging that most of our consumer products come in. But these seemingly insignificant actions that we take on a daily basis *add up*.

We Are Stepping up to Lead the Fight

In this era of heightened global concern over sustainability and climate change, a number of us in Singapore are dedicating ourselves to local sustainability efforts. Alongside individuals like Lastrina and Zyn Yee, as well as groups, such as the Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA), we are taking steps to be

more sustainable and lead the fight against climate change.

But hey, we admit that not all of us are so "woke". Many of us are just starting to realise the impact of our non-action. Not all of us are quite ready to give up everyday conveniences, but we are curious to listen, and we want to do better.

It was against this backdrop that we came together for two Youth Conversations, one at the Singapore Youth Conference on the field of Climate Action, and the other a standalone session on Zero Waste. From the get-go, these sessions were designed by youth, not just as echo-chambers, but welcoming spaces for differing views, as well as honest and constructive discussion.

And discuss we did. The more experienced among us spoke of our perspectives and how we are actively making eco-conscious personal choices and adopting sustainable behaviours. For the newbies to the sustainability front, it was a chance for us to learn from

experienced peers and to understand how we could get involved in meaningful action. Throughout our conversations, we refrained from judging others. We all have to start somewhere. Eventually, many of us also realised that taking action wasn't such a tall order, and it really was as simple as learning how to recycle right, or encouraging our Moms, Dads, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbours to do the same. How environmentally conscious we wanted to be boiled down to our personal choices.

Throughout our dialogues, it was heartening to witness how keen we were to hear each other's takes on the issue. And we didn't think that sustainability could be blind to anyone's needs. Take banning straws—during the Youth Conversation on Zero Waste held in July 2018, a heated debate made us realise that a complete ban might make life difficult for some people, such as the disabled. Offering her personal story on the unfeasibility of a ban of straws, one participant shared:

"I think, for me, I did think about the disability thing when this topic came up for discussion, because my brother is disabled, and he has many disabled friends. When I started selling re-usable straws, a girl wrote in to me, saying that straws are a big part of her life, because she is disabled. It is difficult for her to do without one, and for many like her in the disabled community, it is a necessity. [...] Everyone else can do without straws, except for disabled people. We don't have to be so extreme and deny giving straws out completely."

— Youth Conversation participant

Fighting climate change does not mean advocating for a blanket ban on straws just because it's the trendy thing to do. We realise that sustainable practices and efforts to reduce waste must consider the needs of our wider society.

We Hold Ourselves to a Higher Ideal

We know that we as individuals can do better. So where do we go from here? At the Youth Conversations, we spoke about moving beyond discussion to action, for more of us to step up and do something. It was heartening to hear how 18-year-old Zyn Yee continues to persevere in her Straw Free Singapore movement in spite of her challenges. She collaborated with BYO Bottle SG (Bring Your Own Bottle) and Hwa Chong Green Council to organise a Youth For Change conference on 19 January 2019. Tammy Gan, one of the Zero Waste Youth Conversations participants who is fiercely passionate about eco fashion, worked with other youths to organise a 2-day Eco Fest in NUS on 29 to 30 January 2019, and held Singapore's first ever thrift store for men on 16 March 2019. Through actions like theirs, we hope to see more conversations in our communities, for our family and friends to be convinced why their actions towards sustainability, however small, are important.

We also appreciated the presence of public authorities at these conversations who listened to what we had to say. However, we can do more than exchange views, and we want to partner the government to give sustainability a greater push. That is why some of us, as a result of these conversations, are starting to directly partner the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) and the National Environment Agency (NEA) to bring Singapore closer towards our vision of becoming a zero waste nation. While we are just getting started, we appreciate that they are open to listening and working with us.

Some might say that we are too idealistic, and we may not be reflective of the views of society at large. Perhaps. But, if we don't hold society to a higher ideal today, we would only have ourselves to blame when it's too late.

WAYS TO BE MORE SUSTAINABLE²⁰

1. Reduce electrical and electronic waste

- Buy only what you need
- Repair instead of replace
- Donate usable items
- Recycle at designated collection points

2. Reduce food waste

- Buy, order, and cook just enough
- Use up leftover ingredients
- Donate excess food

3. Reduce packaging waste

- Refuse and reduce disposables where possible
- Bring reusable bags, containers and utensils
- Choose products with less packaging
- Reuse used containers

4. Recycle right

- Check the labels on the blue bins to find out what recyclables to put in
- Make sure your recyclables do not contain food or liquids
- Place all types of recyclables together in the blue bins without sorting them—items in blue bins will be sorted centrally before being recycled
- Avoid including clothes, shoes and stuffed toys as these are not recyclables—donate them to others if they are in good condition



Photo credit: TODAYonline

Chat with Nor Lastrina Hamid, Founding Member of Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA)

The Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA) is a platform that encourages young people in Singapore to fight climate change. SYCA seeks to build a community of active and bold citizens who take ownership of and responsibility for creating a sustainable Singapore.

Nor Lastrina Hamid is a founding member of the SYCA, which she established in December 2015. In 2015, she delivered a bold and rousing speech at the Paris Climate Conference, urging all nations to commit to the global battle against climate change and take action. Lastrina and the SYCA partnered MEWR and NYC to host a conversation on climate action at the Singapore Youth Conference in April 2018. At this conversation, Lastrina shared her knowledge on climate change and climate action in the conversations, emphasising the importance of climate advocacy through education and awareness to create an enduring impact.

We sat down with Lastrina for her take on actions and initiatives that can effectively tackle climate change.

Q: What are, in your opinion, the top few actions and initiatives that can effectively tackle climate change?

Lastrina: **First, we should transform our community centres into green hubs.** In 2016, Choa Chu Kang community centre (CC) reopened after upgrading works that transformed the centre into a greener space. The CC now boasts green features, has adopted multiple green solutions (e.g. using energy-saving LED lights), and runs regular “green” events. I believe that instead of stopping at this, every single CC in Singapore should be turned into greener spaces that not only serve as visible reminders of how we can do better, but also educate people on how we can help fight climate change.

Second, we need to build a sustainable support ecosystem.

There are already a number of climate advocacy groups working on zero-waste initiatives. But one such initiative that stands out for its sustainable model is Green Nudge, a local environmental group founded by youth advocates Heng Li Seng and Tan Wan Ting. They put in a lot of effort into branding their initial ground-up proposal, which helped them win funding from the #OCBC-Cares Fund for the Environment. Other green initiatives should adopt a similar approach of attracting corporate funding and volunteers through good marketing and branding. Such business organisations

can also offer marketing or business strategy workshops to these eco-groups to help them market themselves better and scale their efforts sustainably.

Third, we need to change mindsets.

I strongly believe that we can do more than just getting people to switch to using more eco-friendly products. Instead, we can encourage people to change their fundamental consumerist mindsets by showing them that they can be content with less. This will be a more sustainable and transformational way of tackling climate change.

LET'S TALK

Visit SYCA at their Facebook page (@sgyouthclimateaction) for more info!

**WE WANT TO
SHAPE**

**THE FUTURE
OF THE REGION**

SINGAPORE'S PLACE IN THE WORLD? IN THE HEART OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, AT THE TABLE OF ASEAN.

CARVING OUT OUR NICHE IN THE WORLD

We may be young, but we want to play our part in charting Singapore's course in our region and the world. We can help Singapore stay connected and relevant, and competitive yet collaborative. This is crucial for our nation's continued survival as a small country with limited natural resources and an economy that depends on free trade and open markets.

The Youth Conversation on Geopolitics we had with Dr Tan Wu Meng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), gave us plenty of food for thought on how youth are empowered to shape the future of our region. Key issues that emerged included how Singapore can strike a balance between competition and collaboration, as well the stake youth have in ensuring the enduring success of ASEAN.



With ASEAN set to become the world's fourth largest economy by 2030—after the United States, China and the European Union²¹—there is tremendous growth potential for us to tap on. In fact, there are many new growth areas in technology, start-ups and new business models, many of which are fronted by young people like us.



“What struck me were the depth and themes of the questions... the questions were well-thought through and some were thoroughly researched [such as] Singapore’s place in Asia and the region, [and] how Singapore will adapt to global changes.”

— Jeshier Loi, a young entrepreneur and business owner, on the questions and opinions raised by other youth during the session.

We Recognise the Importance of ASEAN

As a country with limited natural resources but considerable influence as a hub for many key sectors, Singapore has set its sights on becoming a key business centre and an innovation-led economy in the ASEAN region. To achieve that vision, it is important for youth in Singapore to build our capacity to take advantage of opportunities that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will bring in its wake.²²

It is important for us to recognise how ASEAN as a regional body can play a critical role in coordinating this within our region.

We have seen how ASEAN remains resilient and innovative over the past 52 years since its founding in 1967. Through consensus and non-interference, the ASEAN community has achieved political stability, peace and economic development. Today, ASEAN is fast becoming a major economic force in Asia and a key driver of global growth, with its young population, growing middle class and rapid urbanisation. While we continue to preserve our ASEAN centrality and identity, it is equally important for all ASEAN peoples to broaden and deepen economic integration, foster closer political cooperation and harness people-to-people interactions. This will strengthen ASEAN’s interdependence, connectedness and relevance in a competitive world. The ASEAN way and the benefits this brings to the region is a tide that lifts all vessels, including Singapore’s.

Recognising the value of regional collaboration, our Youth Conversation acknowledged Singapore’s stake in creating shared regional interests and complementary relations by maintaining its policy of being friends with everyone and enemies with no one.

We Want to Be Asia-Ready.

Three crucial competencies emerged from our conversation: the ability to see opportunities in the region, the appreciation of Singapore’s unique value to the region, and the skills and confidence to collaborate with our regional counterparts.

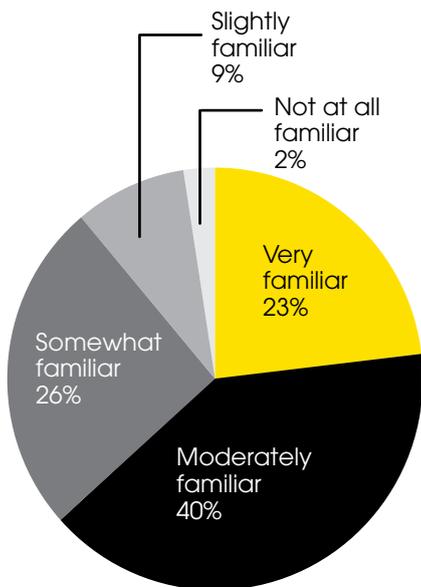
And there’s definitely a lot more young people can do to bridge the gap between Singapore and our neighbours. For a start, we can take action by getting more Singaporeans to understand our regional opportunities and developments better.

Daryl Neo, co-founder of a local technology company, considers it paramount for young Singaporeans to join companies with a large pan-ASEAN presence.

With a region of 630 million with more than half of the population under 30 years old,²³ ASEAN is a vast market with boundless potential. Citing the example of how the Jakarta stock market surpassed Singapore for the first time in 2018, Daryl shared further that “many [Singaporean] youth do not see the growth opportunities in ASEAN [...] if we were to refocus our lens on future jobs with high returns, we’ll need to look at where the young people are.”

SINGAPOREANS ARE GENERALLY NOT AWARE OF REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

A 2016 survey by the Singapore Institute of International Affairs²⁴ found that Singaporeans are generally not familiar with or aware of opportunities and developments around the region.



“By joining companies that operate across ASEAN, they would also learn about local business practices there. For example, my managers go down to the ground and encounter third-parties who ask for inducements. Most of them don’t even realise when a bribe has been asked for, or how to politely say no. All these are hard knocks that they learn from, and from there they grow wiser. The point is, you have to work in a company that operates across ASEAN to know all of these.”

—Daryl Neo, entrepreneur

Practically, youth can harness these advantages by active participation whenever there are opportunities for regional exchanges or internships with companies based in countries in ASEAN. Having conversations about ASEAN in schools and the media, as well as travelling to ASEAN countries, allows us to better understand our ASEAN neighbours and recognise opportunities for growth and collaboration in the region.

We also hope for more opportunities to widen and deepen our policy perspectives through various government programmes and initiatives. This will equip us to be better ambassadors for Singapore.

On an individual level, taking action to become Asia-ready could also be just as simple as picking up a third language that’s relevant to living and working in South-East Asia such as Thai, Vietnamese or Bahasa Indonesia, rather than European languages such as French or German.

If youth like us start developing cultural awareness and forging greater connectivity with our ASEAN peers early on, there’s so much more we can build for the years ahead.

We Can Be Singapore’s Ambassadors

Many of us already have good friends within the region, including people we met in school, on overseas exchange programmes, played *League of Legends* with or met on social media. With growing trade and migration, some of us already have family members and relatives across the region. Why not build on our networks of goodwill and friendship to let us do more as ambassadors of Singapore and ASEAN?



Echoing this sentiment was Yuvan Mohan, 30, a finance professional:

“Another theme from the discussion was how interconnected ASEAN countries are with Singapore. During the session, Dr Tan Wu Meng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) asked us who had friends and relatives from ASEAN countries. Almost everyone raised their hand. He mentioned that this is a simple yet powerful instance of how each of us have personal ties to ASEAN. This resonated with me as while I have friends in ASEAN, it has been a while since I have met up with them. It is high time I do so.”

Interactions between people take place most naturally in social settings. Amidst the backdrop of rising tensions between neighbours and superpowers, youth can play an ambassadorial role that is equally or arguably even more important than official channels. After all, as leaders who will inherit the future of Singapore, the time is now for us to get involved and start connecting!



VOICES THAT MATTER

Thoughts by Ms Sujatha Selvakumar, Member of the 15th National Youth Council

A good conversation has an incredible ability to expand our minds, build empathy, strengthen relationships and give us new perspectives and ideas. So, I love the fact that this initiative is called the Youth Conversations! Personally, it is a privilege to be able to be part of this meaningful initiative by the National Youth Council.

"Sometimes the greatest adventure is simply a conversation."

—Amadeus Wolfe

As a participant, I enjoyed the innovative use of tools and activities to engage us. The conversations literally came alive through an array of modalities such as real time visualisations and activities that allowed us to explore the tension between what we wanted and what was expected of us.

Even though many conversations were taking place simultaneously among the young people, they always felt intimate. I could see the careful design of the session and effort of the facilitators trying to honour the voices of the individual, the group and the collective by keeping the conversation spaces open, devoid of judgement, safe and enriching. This allowed us to hear a wide range of thoughts and sentiments in an open and authentic manner.

For me, I resonated with the desire to explore identity and purpose, and the willingness to redefine success to be inclusive of spirituality, time with family and mental wellbeing. I also connected deeply with the willingness to forgo personal satisfaction and invest in collective good, like forgoing the convenience of single use plastic packaging so that all of us can have a cleaner and more sustainable environment.

What was really encouraging to see was the willingness of fellow participants to set aside many hours over several weekends to explore issues around inclusivity and pathways to success, amongst others. I suppose we were willing to make time because the topics were decided by youth and the conversations were designed by youth for youth. This meant that our voice mattered.

I'd like to encourage the National Youth Council to continue reaching out actively to include youths from all walks of life and neighbourhoods, and consider holding conversations in the heartlands. There is so much potential in Youth Conversations to connect us together for a larger collective vision, regardless of our diverse views and backgrounds.

The conversations also presented opportunities to discover fellow young Singaporeans seeking to make a difference. I met and heard about young people who were compelled to act beyond the conversation—their stories are so inspiring! Going forward, I also hope the government can partner our youth more actively to build the Singapore we want to see, because our voices matter.

The energy is infectious, the wisdom is ample, and the conviction is deep. So, from one youth to another, I hope you will put on that dreamer's hat and take that positive step to go on a journey together with the rest of us to shape what tomorrow can be! See you at the next conversation or in action!



To find out more about the Youth Conversations, visit youthconvo.sg.

YOU ARE MORE

Have an idea that you want to turn into reality?
 NYC offers opportunities and a range of funding schemes to help you bring a project idea to life.

YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS (YCM)

Champion your causes and make a difference to the community.

The YCM grant supports youth initiated projects that benefit the Singapore community and society. Projects will be reviewed and evaluated by a group of youth curators.

The YCM grant provides seed funding of \$5,000 or up to 80% of total allowable project cost, whichever is lower, for approved projects.

Youth who are interested can attend monthly Open Mic sessions to pitch their ideas and solutions for various identified community needs and meet like-minded youth who are passionate about contributing to the community.



NATIONAL YOUTH FUND (NYF)

Interested to kick-start a youth initiative that co-creates social change to benefit the community?

The NYF supports ground-up youth initiatives to champion community and social causes through partnerships with Youth Sector Organisations (YSO) including youth social enterprises, schools, institutes of higher learning (IHL) and other community partners.

The NYF supports Youth Programmes, Capability Development, Youth Leadership Development and Research projects that deepen the understanding of salient youth issues or trends.

SINGAPORE-ASEAN YOUTH FUND (SAYF)

Create a better community not only in your own backyard, but all over ASEAN with the SAYF. Join hands and promote ASEAN youth interaction and greater mutual understanding with other YSOs. Network with one another, share best practices and partner one another in joint youth projects to foster greater community building efforts.

The SAYF aims to promote greater interaction among ASEAN youth. It supports projects led by youth organisations which foster unity and forge friendship among ASEAN youths, and increase awareness and understanding of ASEAN culture.

LET'S TALK

For more information about NYC grants or explore partnerships with us, visit nyc.gov.sg.

REFERENCES

- 1 “Singapore Residents By Age Group, Ethnic Group and Sex, End June, Annual.” *Singapore Department of Statistics*, 2017, data.gov.sg/dataset/resident-population-by-ethnicity-gender-and-age-group. Accessed 10 Mar. 2019.
- 2 “A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth.” *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/innitiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 3 “Individual Giving Survey 2016.” *National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)*, Singapore, www.nvpc.org.sg/resources/individual-giving-survey-2016-findings. Accessed 10 Mar. 2019.
- 4 “A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth.” *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/innitiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 5 National Youth Council Singapore, “Youth Conversations Study 2018.”
- 6 Yeoh, Grace. “‘Why Do I Feel Dumber As I Grow Older?’ Said Every Singaporean Ever.” *Rice Media*, 13 Aug. 2018, ricemedia.co/culture-life-every-singaporean-i-feel-dumber-i-grow-older/. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.
- 7 Choo, Cynthia. “More People in Singapore Have Experienced a Mental Disorder in Their Lifetime, Study Finds.” *TODAY*, 11 Dec. 2018, www.todayonline.com/singapore/more-people-singapore-have-experienced-mental-disorder-their-lifetime-study-finds. Accessed 20 Feb. 2019.
- 8 “A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth.” *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/innitiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 9 “Many in Singapore Unwilling to Live or Work with People with Mental Health Conditions: Survey.” *Straits Times*, 8 Sep. 2018, www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/many-in-singapore-unwilling-to-live-or-work-with-people-with-mental-health. Accessed 20 Feb. 2019.
- 10 “Global Religious Diversity: Half of the Most Religiously Diverse Countries are in Asia-Pacific Region.” *Pew Research Centre*, Apr. 2014, p. 4, www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/04/Religious-Diversity-full-report.pdf. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 11 “Statistics on Marriages and Divorces, 2017.” *Singapore Department of Statistics*, 2017, p. 8, www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/population/smd2017.pdf. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 12 “Singapore Residents By Age Group, Ethnic Group and Sex, End June, Annual.” *Singapore Department of Statistics*, 2017, data.gov.sg/dataset/resident-population-by-ethnicity-gender-and-age-group. Accessed 10 Mar. 2019.
- 13 “Population in Brief 2018.” *Singapore Department of Statistics*, 2018, www.strategygroup.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/population-in-brief-2018.pdf. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 14 “A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth.” *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, p. 1, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/innitiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 15 “A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth.” *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/innitiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 16 Mathews, Mathew. “Key Findings from the Channel NewsAsia—Institute of Policy Studies Survey on Race Relations.” *Institute of Policy Studies*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, 2017, lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/cna-ips-survey-on-race-relations_summary_190816.pdf. Accessed 10 Mar. 2019.

- 17 "2018 Credit Suisse Youth Barometer." *Credit Suisse*, 27 Aug. 2018, p. 40, www.credit-suisse.com/corporate/en/responsibility/dialogue/youth-barometer/download-center.html. Accessed 20 Feb. 2019.
- 18 "A Snapshot of Our Singaporean Youth." *National Youth Survey 2016*, National Youth Council, 2016, www.nyc.gov.sg/-/media/mccy/projects/nyc/files/in-initiatives/resource/2017-stats-handbook/nys2016.ashx?la=en&hash=E59C4C2E31818B6A7BD9A1A-2101643408CEAEA27. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 19 "Year Towards Zero Waste." *Towards Zero Waste Singapore*, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources Singapore, 25 Feb. 2019, www.towardszerowaste.sg. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.
- 20 "Year Towards Zero Waste." *Towards Zero Waste Singapore*, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources Singapore, 25 Feb. 2019, www.towardszerowaste.sg. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.
- 21 "Transcript of speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the 27th World Economic Forum on ASEAN in Hanoi, Vietnam." *Prime Minister's Office Singapore*, 12 Sep. 2018, www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/pm-lee-hsien-loong-27th-world-economic-forum-asean-hanoi-vietnam. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 22 Yahya, Yasmin. "ASEAN in good position to seize opportunities Fourth Industrial Revolution will bring: PM Lee." *Straits Times*, 12 Sep. 2018, www.straitstimes.com/politics/asean-in-good-position-to-seize-opportunities-fourth-industrial-revolution-will-bring-pm. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
- 23 "Major Infrastructure Projects Gain Momentum." *Investing in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) 2017*, ASEAN and Allurentis, 2017, pp. 32-4, asean.org/storage/2017/01/Investing-in-ASEAN-2017-.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2019.
- 24 Lim, Hank, Sivashangari Kiruppalini and Andrea Lee. "What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN People? Survey Findings from Singapore." *Voices of ASEAN: What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples? ASEAN@50*, Vol. 2, 2017, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, p. 258, www.eria.org/ASEAN_at_50_Vol_2_Full_Report.pdf. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019.
-

