

REPORT ON THE “YOUTH: CREATING OUR FUTURE” CONSULTATION EXERCISE

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1. The “Youth: Creating Our Future” consultation exercise was conducted between 14 August 2004 and 25 September 2004 to encourage young Singaporeans to share their aspirations and dreams for themselves and Singapore, and to suggest ways to realize some of their ideas. In total, some 2,100 youth participated in the exercise. Some 1,300 participated in the 16 focus groups and 5 mass forums; while 800 provided inputs, via email (620), SMS (165), phone (10) and fax (5). Most of the views and feedback gathered during the exercise are presented in this report. The list of organizations which participated in the discussions is at the Appendix.

(A) VISION FOR SINGAPOREAN YOUTH AND SINGAPORE

2. The key elements of the youth’s vision for Singaporean youth and for Singapore as a nation are as follows:

3. ***Youth with the passion to pursue their dreams.*** Many spoke strongly about the need for youth to have the passion, space and opportunities to pursue their diverse dreams and aspirations. Expressions of this ideal include: “Youth who are driven by their beliefs”; “Youth who can be who they want to be”; youth who “express themselves, show their individuality to society, to be noticed, respected in their own strengths and to be able to make a difference somewhere.” They hoped for an environment where “youth dared to dream and dared to fail”; and a place where setbacks can be accepted and there is space and support for diverse interests and dreams, for example to pursue a career in the arts or sports. Young Singaporeans also aspired for a society that places less emphasis on academic qualifications and material success.

4. ***Youth who are self-reliant, resilient and street smart.*** While some commented that Singaporean youth should be supported by their parents, families, schools and society in pursuing their passions in life, many also felt, at the same time, that Singaporean youth should also be more self-reliant and resilient. Described by one participant as the “MRT generation – a smooth ride”, Singaporean youth, according to many young participants, need to be more independent, purposeful and broaden their outlook beyond their academic studies, in order to achieve their dreams, and compete globally. Youth should also be encouraged and supported to venture abroad.

5. ***Youth who are engaged in the community and connected to the nation.*** Many youth painted a vision of a more caring and compassionate society where youth and other Singaporeans actively volunteer and contribute to society through a variety of causes. To encourage this, there should be a diverse range of

volunteering opportunities that can tap into youth's interests and needs at different stages of their lives (e.g. as students, working adults and young parents). Some youth sought more opportunities and space to engage in shaping national issues, and to some this includes political activism and the space to air diverse and opposing views. Several others sought to define national symbols and to shape national identity in ways that youth could better relate to.

6. ***A supportive environment for marriage and parenthood.*** Youth recognized the need for continuing and greater efforts to encourage and support Singaporeans in marriage and parenthood. The range of support extends from financial incentives, pro-family employment policies and support services, to recognizing the roles and contributions of stay-at-home mothers, singles and grandparents in raising and supporting their families.

7. ***An inclusive society where no one is left behind.*** Calls were made by youth for Singapore and Singaporeans to provide more help and extend greater acceptance to Singaporeans who may be older, disabled, poorer, and ex-offenders, in areas such as employment, education, and social services. Contributors also called for greater efforts to facilitate the integration of the elderly and the disabled within our society, such as making buildings and the physical infrastructure more accessible. Some participants advocated for employment opportunities to extend equally to all Singaporeans, regardless of attributes such as race, gender, or religion. Some singles felt that they should be given more recognition and assistance, given their contributions to their families, the economy and society.

8. ***A vibrant economy and conducive environment for entrepreneurship.*** Young Singaporeans felt that our regulatory environment and policies should support Singaporeans in venturing abroad, both in terms of opportunities and also in fostering the mindset of risk-taking, a "can-do" spirit and innovation. This applies to not just business but also other pursuits (such as the arts, and sports careers).

9. Overall, many youth expressed the desire for more space and opportunities to pursue their aspirations, whether it is their personal dreams such as a career in the arts; contributing back to society through community work and pursuing social causes; or shaping the nation's future by being involved in national issues.

10. Most of the specific concerns and suggestions raised by the youth participants are further elaborated in the rest of this report. The key concerns and suggestions as expressed by a fair share of youth participants are presented in boxed text, while details of other views and suggestions are captured in the paragraphs that follow the boxed text.

(B) KEY THEMES AND SUGGESTIONS

(I) EDUCATION ISSUES

MORE HOLISTIC, DIVERSE AND FLEXIBLE EDUCATIONAL ROUTES AND CURRICULUM

11. Young Singaporeans called for less focus on academic achievements; a broader and more diverse curriculum that not only nurtures minds, but also hearts and practical skills; and more opportunities for the non-elite, non-academically inclined and minority students to develop and reach their potential. In the words of one participant, we currently adopted a “functionalist” approach towards education, tailoring the curriculum to the economic sectors’ needs. Many commented that stress on academic performance left them with little time to pursue their passions in non-academic fields, such as music and the arts. Some were too preoccupied with studies to keep abreast of national issues and participate in community work.

12. Many contributors felt that the academic curriculum should be expanded to include practical skills, and they had various suggestions such as public speaking skills, more internships, work attachments and financial management. A few other participants suggested that teachers should be left to focus on the teaching of the curriculum, instead of having to multi-task by teaching non-academic subjects such as creativity and running Community Involvement Programme (CIP) activities in schools. A few noted the value of Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) and uniformed groups, and proposed that students be given more freedom to choose their CCAs, instead of confining participation to top students for certain CCAs.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES, ASPIRATIONS AND BACKGROUNDS

13. Many spoke about the need for ***more diverse and flexible educational paths to cater to youth with varying abilities and aspirations***. Some ideas related to the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and polytechnic students include: increasing the admission quota to enable more polytechnic students to attend local universities, and expanding the ITE admission criteria to include non-academic requirements such as aptitude and personality tests. Several youth also called for more opportunities for polytechnic graduates (as compared to GCE ‘A’ Level holders) to get scholarships for tertiary education.

14. Several youth felt that ***out-of-school youth should be offered more development opportunities to upgrade their skills and to pursue further education later in life***. For youth at-risk, a dedicated unit at the Ministry of Education (MOE) could be set up similar to the one for the Gifted Education programme, to identify and motivate such youth. Such youth could also benefit from opportunities to join youth expeditions, which will encourage them to better appreciate the life opportunities they have after the overseas experience. A few

others suggested that more opportunities, such as participation in student forums, youth events, and learning of third language, should be extended to students who are not necessarily the top students or in the mainstream schools, e.g. EM3 students and those with average academic results.

15. In terms of **educational opportunities for ethnic minorities**, a participant perceived that madrasahs should be given more opportunities to be represented in national programmes and activities. Several Indian participants spoke on the need for more government assistance to increase the number of kindergartens that offered Tamil language, to enable their children to learn their mother tongue. A few others suggested that scholarships be made available for Malay language students, to level the playing field with Special Assistant Plan (SAP) students.

16. Other views on **expanding the type of educational opportunities** include: allowing home schooling as another option for parents by removing the disadvantage home schoolers faced in not being able to earn CCA points; setting up a Free school to provide classes for working adults; reviewing the starting age of streaming which is currently too early; setting up a National Polytechnic Examination Board to oversee the accreditation of polytechnic examination standards and division of diplomas; and encouraging youth to study at local universities by removing restrictions on the use of tuition grants if the course of study is changed. Another asked for more opportunities for overseas education and exposure, say by allowing individuals' Central Provident Fund (CPF) to be used to finance overseas education.

ROLE OF TEACHERS, SCHOOLS AND THE CURRICULUM

17. There were also comments on **the role and development of teachers, and the role of schools and the curriculum in nurturing our youth**. These include: fostering development of life skills through camps, emphasizing interpersonal skills and overseas exchanges (including more funding to neighbourhood schools); and making boarding school compulsory for secondary school students paid via Edusave, to encourage independence. Others asked for open and constructive communication among students and teachers at all levels; rewarding incremental improvement in studies; offering flexible and various subject combinations; and "bringing the school curriculum out of the classroom". Improving the status, salary and benefits of early childhood educators was also proposed, given the importance of early childhood education; and another idea was to set up regional relief teacher centres to offer more assistance to school teachers. Other suggestions include allowing students to earn CCA points through participation in religious and social groups; and having more regular inter-school and inter-educational stream dialogues to encourage learning and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds.

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

18. Issues related to ***varying the method of and criteria for educational assessment*** were also raised. These include: creating alternatives to exams for self-assessment; rewarding students for character building virtues; and changing the format of GCE 'O' and 'A' Levels, e.g. have more non-examinable electives.

19. One participant suggested that the school ranking system be replaced by an internal quality control process, such as the school excellence model, as the expanded school evaluation criteria in the ranking process would generate even greater pressure for schools to compete on broader terms beyond academic performance. Unlike the Monopoly Game where there were winners and the losers were penalized, another participant felt that we should instead aspire to a scenario where everyone wins and can play a part, where no one is deemed a failure but everyone just ends up with different points.

(II) ASPIRATIONS OF YOUTH

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

20. Many participants felt that a narrow definition of success based on academic and material achievements, coupled with a fear of failure and a conformist mindset, stifled the youth's desire to pursue his or her passion in less conventional fields. While some commented that it was necessary to juggle between getting an education and pursuing one's passion (perhaps later in life), others felt that this would compromise their pursuit to excel in their area of interest; and affect our ability to produce world-class Singaporeans in different fields. One participant said that we should aim for "high peaks instead of high averages" to help diversify Singapore's capabilities.

21. Many contributors said that the family, society and Government had to play their part in changing current mindsets on the definition of success. Without redefining what success meant, youth would be deterred from taking calculated risks, exercising their creativity and moving into uncharted territory. Most felt that we should expand the definition of success, to include achievements say in creativity, arts and sports excellence.

22. Other suggestions raised by various youth include: educating parents and employers on the need to support a more holistic development of youth beyond grades to recognize potential and performance, and encouraging youth (especially non-academically inclined youth) to discover what they are good at. There was however a participant who felt that we should leave it to each individual to define success on his or her own terms.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA

23. The youth felt that the media not only influenced the social perceptions of the definition of success and the perceptions of youth, it was also a powerful channel to reach out to more youth and strengthen the youth voice. Therefore, the ***media should be more conscious of the opinions and perspectives they were putting across*** in shaping the minds of the youth. A few were concerned about the effect of media coverage in shaping the meaning of success, and our self-perceptions as Singaporeans. For example, the media could provide more balanced coverage of the arts and our youth's achievements in other fields, to influence society's definition of success. By focusing mostly on those international rankings where Singapore did well, a participant felt that the media could generate a false sense of superiority and arrogance among Singaporeans, when in fact other countries are fast catching up or even overtaking us in other areas.

24. There were various suggestions to start a newspaper or publication that caters to the interests of the youth and allows them to express their views. This could be in the form of a newspaper column or a weekly supplement "by youth, for youth, and about youth" where youth could express frank views, and serve as a regular update on youth interests and activities.

(III) ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

25. Contributors hoped for an economy that would generate opportunities for all groups of Singaporeans. There were concerns regarding the employment prospects of older workers and new graduates; financial security for older and less skilled workers; and a level playing field for non-Chinese speaking workers. Some felt that employers should broaden their recruitment criteria beyond academic qualifications, to consider personal character, relevant experience, and a track record in community service. A few others called for more help for unemployed or retrenched workers. Most contributors felt that the Government has an important role to play in these areas.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

26. Some Indian and Malay participants expressed concern that the growth of China could lead to employers placing greater emphasis on fluency in the Chinese language in their recruitment of workers. They were concerned that this could affect their job prospects, and possibly lead to some form of discrimination. A few narrated their encounters with employers who had apparently rejected their applications on grounds of language or race. Some suggested having more active government efforts to ensure fair job advertisements, and an independent commission to monitor job advertising and serve as an appeals channel.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

27. A few participants suggested that more needed to be done to enable out-of-school youth to upgrade their skills to remain employable; link them up with supportive informal groups, and give them opportunities to go on overseas expeditions to enable them to better appreciate the life opportunities they have. Several participants suggested ways to develop and provide more opportunities to out-of-school youth. Ideas include: offering more affordable skills upgrading courses for youth or modifying the Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) or Worker Improvement through Secondary Education (WISE) programmes; and setting up a dedicated fund similar to the Edusave to provide career guidance, mentoring and seed funding.

ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

28. Most participants recognised the need for Singaporeans to sharpen their entrepreneurial skills in order to compete globally. It was felt that our youth had to nurture their instincts from young, and this was a challenge given that some of our youth were “over-protected” and “conditioned” to be followers rather than leaders or innovators.

29. Some pointed out that the Government could do more to simplify business procedures, exercise greater flexibility, and support local enterprises so that more enterprises can flourish and even develop into global brands. We need wider efforts to discover and develop young Singaporeans with potential to be our new generation of entrepreneurs.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND OUTSOURCING OF SERVICES

30. One suggestion was that Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING) could expand its assistance beyond grants and training to offer sales and marketing solutions. The Government’s online business services also need to be more accessible to some local businesses which are more comfortable with the Chinese language. Another participant felt that the Government should be clear about whether it positioned itself as a genuine investment partner or a competitor in certain commercial sectors. One idea was to form a committee to identify non-strategic areas that could be outsourced to the private sector to lower operating costs; and integrate and redesign government agencies through outsourcing.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES TO ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

31. Suggestions on the ***infrastructure and resources required to encourage entrepreneurship*** include: setting up a “Singapore Entrepreneurship Village” that provides infrastructure to set up business, or an overheads subsidy scheme to help lower operational costs for start-ups; forming a Young Entrepreneurs’ Club; giving more assistance to help young entrepreneurs brand their products globally; allowing conversion of Housing and Development Board (HDB)’s void decks into offices or shops; lowering the minimum age to register a business; reducing the tax rate on new companies and sole proprietorships; and offering greater protection of intellectual property rights of the entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by adopting the U.S. model of a petty patent scheme.¹

NURTURING ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

32. Some participants offered suggestions to ***develop entrepreneurship skills among youth***, such as: school activities, like flea markets for youth to test out business ideas; corporations to offer seed funding to students to put their ideas and entrepreneurial skills into action; provision of mentors for aspiring young entrepreneurs; and job attachments for Normal Stream (Academic/Technical) students with local entrepreneurs.

(IV) ENGAGING YOUTH IN DIVERSE SECTORS

SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

33. Many suggestions were made on supporting sports development among youth, in the areas of sports excellence, school sports, and sports facilities. Various youth expressed interest in sports and called for more support, resources and facilities to diversify the range of sports, nurture our local sports talent from young, help the talented pursue professional sport, and prepare for life after retirement from competitive sports.

SPORTS EXCELLENCE AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

34. On ***developing our sports talent***, there were calls to do more to identify and groom local sports talent instead of focusing just on foreign talent. Suggestions include providing an equivalent of the President’s Scholarship for sports to send local athletes to world renowned sports schools; more sustained efforts and funding to support school soccer teams and scouting for talented young players; alignment of objectives among National Sports Associations and

¹ The scheme allows registration of patents for a 5-year period.

Physical Education programmes in schools to promote sporting excellence; and introducing a full-time Bachelor of Sports Studies in one of our local educational or sporting institutions to augment our pool of sports professionals. To encourage youth to take up professional sport, and citing the experience of Tan Howe Liang, a participant felt that the Government should provide meaningful opportunities to national athletes after they retire from competitive sports, by adapting the schemes common in America or Australia. Another idea was to give sportsmen CPF contributions as reward for winning competitions.

SPORTS FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

35. On the ***types of sports activities and sports facilities***, several participants proposed to diversify the types of sports supported in Singapore (e.g. extreme sports, floorball, new types of air and sea sports) and improve the resources, support and recognition to these sports. A few youth suggested that more multi-purpose courts and school sports fields be provided to encourage youth of different races to play sports together. Another called for Saturday to be made the nationwide Sports Day, and to provide more recreational sporting activities as an avenue for family bonding.

36. Other comments focused on the role of schools in developing sports participation among youth. For example, more time slots for Physical Education lessons would give students more exposure to sports; and sports could be developed into a full subject in schools, and not just remain as a CCA.

SUPPORTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS

37. There was also interest expressed by various youth about developing the arts. Several youth spoke passionately about their interest in pursuing the arts, which they felt were hampered by the over-emphasis on academic achievements, limited funds, facilities and opportunities for local arts events and budding artists. They perceived arts as an important avenue for learning and self-expression and a source of national pride, and called for more recognition and resources to nurture the youth's potential in the arts. While Singapore had made efforts to establish itself as an arts hub, some youth perceived that not enough was being done to support local artists and to promote various arts forms. The relatively high cost of arts education and expensive venue fees at the Esplanade acted as deterrents to aspiring artists. In their view, the Government should invest more in arts infrastructure to lower the cost of arts performances, and enliven the arts scene by making arts more accessible to the general public. Several youth felt that our achievements in the arts, e.g. Choir Olympics should be equally celebrated and not given less priority than sports.

38. Other ideas related to the arts and culture include: providing more cultural exchange programmes for students and adults; providing more spaces for artists to pursue and showcase their work at no extra cost to them, to nurture a more creative and artistic citizenry; and offering an art space managed by youth supported by the government, that offers “internship programmes, job opportunities, empowerment, ownership and hope.”

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND PROMOTING OTHER SOCIAL CAUSES

39. Some participants advocated ***more efforts to protect our scarce environmental resources and to promote social causes*** such as animal rights and helping the elderly and needy. One contributor proposed for a long-term environment programme (such as Australia’s AusAid programme) which supports and encourages youth participation in developmental, environmental and conservational efforts in developing countries. Another youth commented that youth should internalize a culture of recycling to protect the environment, and that efforts were needed to inculcate the importance of conservation efforts and waste minimization.

(V) CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AMONG YOUTH

NURTURING RESILIENT AND SELF-RELIANT YOUTH

40. Various contributors expressed concern that some Singaporean youth lack purpose beyond striving for their grades. They felt that these youth had, to some extent, been conditioned by their parents and the educational system, and suggested that they capitalise on available opportunities to leave their comfort zones, and try new things. The fighting spirit and the ability to thrive in a dynamic environment were important qualities that had to be nurtured from young, and parents can start by “walking the talk” and encouraging their children to be more adventurous. Our citizens had to be more proactive and feel they are empowered to change things, and start doing so by influencing their peers and immediate environment. Several participants viewed overseas expeditions and community work as a good way to foster resilience and character development among our youth. Through exposure to developing countries, youth may also better appreciate Singapore as their home.

41. Suggestions on how we could ***develop life skills among youth*** include: sports clinics to enable social skills development; offering fun activities for youth to relax at Community Centres and schools; and more active recruitment drives to join uniformed groups, which were seen as a good way for youth to learn adaptive skills. The community could be involved in teaching the young creativity and character building, by empowering residents as opposed to grassroots leaders. Moral education and spiritual teachings could also promote graciousness and reinforce character development among youth; and help address juvenile delinquency.

ROLE OF FAMILY IN NURTURING YOUTH

42. Many participants recognized the core **role of the family in nurturing the youth, and in supporting them to pursue their dreams**. Thus they felt that educational reforms must be accompanied by a change in the mindsets of parents, to recognize the importance of the holistic development of their children beyond academic studies. They also thought parenting education and more opportunities for parent-child bonding should be further encouraged. Media and role models from various fields such as sports, the arts and education, could help to promote the importance of a well-rounded education, among the less educated Malay families in particular, where greater awareness was needed. Malay-Muslim parents, their elders and Malay-Muslim organizations could do more to encourage Malay youth to sustain their religious development while pursuing academic and economic excellence. Spirituality, it was felt, had a key role to play in fostering character development.

(VI) MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD

PRO-FAMILY INCENTIVES, ENVIRONMENT AND RECOGNITION

43. There were various ideas and suggestions on how to **further encourage and support marriage and parenthood among young Singaporeans**. Some suggestions focused on extending more assistance and incentives to encourage young Singaporeans to get married and pay for early childhood education, as well as more family support facilities and direct incentives for grandparents. A few spoke about the need to relieve the burden on employers and for fathers to take on a larger role in parenting responsibilities (which can be encouraged by introducing paternity leave of say four weeks). A few called for extending the baby bonus incentives beyond the fourth child or to all children aged below three, and to assist those families with young children who had “missed the boat” in qualifying for the baby bonus.

44. Several contributors, some stay-at-home mothers themselves, wished to see **more respect and support accorded to stay-at-home mothers**. They cautioned against delegating parental responsibilities to foreign maids, grandparents and infant care and childcare centres. A good family environment with parental attention, especially nurturing from mothers, was important in order to bring up stable, happy and well adjusted children.

45. Several contributors pointed out that **singles should not be left out** given the focus on married couples, since they too supported and took care of family members, and thus should be helped too (e.g. by extending cash rebates and medical benefits valid for married siblings to singles who live with and take care of their parents).

46. Suggestions on **ways to encourage marriage** include: universities to make it mandatory for students to stay in hostels, to encourage socializing; and Social Development Unit (SDU)/ Social Development Service (SDS) membership to be given free to all singles (Singaporeans and Permanent Residents) working in the government and private sectors. Tax rebates could also be given to local companies that encourage their single workers to participate in SDU/SDS activities. Graduates should not be restricted to SDU events and vice-versa. One contributor remarked that money spent on the Romancing Singapore campaign should be channelled to the Baby Bonus funds to encourage couples to procreate, as the campaign was not necessary or effective in his view.

47. In the area of **pre-school and childcare**, ideas ranged from more subsidies for pre-school education and infant care/childcare; revising the current kindergarten schedule to a full-day session; to subsidizing local domestic help for parents because foreign maids might not be able to teach and discipline children.

48. Some feedback also called for **more pro-family incentives and assistance**, such as more government subsidy on In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) treatment; extending more Baby Bonus benefits to parents of adopted babies; and more financial assistance, e.g. housing loans to encourage Singaporeans to start families early. One teenager felt that more public education on the joys that children bring, would be more effective in changing women's mindsets, than monetary incentives alone.

49. A few contributors acknowledged the **role of children in supporting their parents and families**. Suggestions include: requiring children to contribute a certain percentage of their earnings to their parents' Medisave for the first 5-6 years upon receiving CPF; allowing each sibling to use their Medisave to pay up to 35% of their parent's medical bill; allowing higher tax relief for maintaining parents and for cash payment of parent's medical bill, which includes GST; and giving married couples who want to stay with their parents, housing grants to buy larger flats.

50. To **encourage grandparenting**, a few felt that they should be given direct financial incentives, as the grandparent caregiver relief only benefits working mothers.

(VII) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AMONG YOUTH

PROMOTING MORE ENGAGING AND DIVERSE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

51. The feedback revealed a general desire among youth for participation in and contribution to the community. But many youth also said they lacked information on opportunities to participate. Despite ongoing efforts to promote volunteering, some youth said they did not know how to find out about volunteering opportunities. The lack of time due to academic pursuits was also cited as a reason by non-volunteers.

52. Many comments revolved around the need for community involvement activities, including the school Community Involvement Programme (CIP), to be more engaging, meaningful, and impactful. Many youth agreed with the spirit and intent of school CIP, but cautioned that it should not degenerate into a matter of “clocking the hours” to meet the CIP quota. Various contributors emphasized the need for community involvement activities to mobilize students’ interests and strengths so that the activities would be more fun and relevant; supporting volunteering beyond the schooling years; and incentivising or recognizing volunteer efforts. One contributor remarked that “we need to provide more positive outlets to let them [youth] prove that they count; to the society and themselves.”

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMME IN SCHOOLS

53. A specific suggestion was to allow students to design their own CIP activities and promote more spontaneity, instead of solely relying on a formal process of writing project proposals before carrying them out. Another suggested that students active in CIP could try to encourage and influence other students to participate. A few participants felt that parental support was important to encourage CIP participation, and thus they should understand the objective of CIP in schools, so that they will support activities for character development. Another idea was to pair up able-bodied students with their peers with disabilities through a long-term buddy system. Yet another felt that CIP should be incorporated into the primary school education curriculum with 2 to 3 hours per week dedicated to community service to cultivate the spirit of giving. One youth said that schools should open doors to non-government organizations to involve students in their activities as part of CIP. A closer relationship among schools and the community groups would help to integrate community involvement into students’ daily lives.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION AND RECOGNITION

54. Suggestions to ***encourage and recognize volunteer participation*** include launching a volunteer movement to organize events such as the National Day Parade or Elections Day instead of relying on the army or police force. A “volunteer passport” could be given to volunteers that serves as endorsement of volunteer participation by MOE (during the schooling period) and volunteer organizations (outside of school). Besides the Corporate CIP, government officers could be encouraged to come up with their own innovative community or volunteer projects. Saturday-offs could also be used for community projects.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES

55. At the grassroots level, several participants commented that ***Residents’ Committees and Community Centres had to modify their current approach and activities*** to appeal more effectively to youth and encourage their community participation. At the constituency level, projects and suitable activities could be

developed to harness the energies and ideas of youth, e.g., by organizing hip-hop dance instead of line-dance to attract the younger target group.

(VIII) BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

56. Many youth commented on the need for greater inclusiveness towards Singaporeans, in particular those belonging to the lower-income, elderly, single, disabled, and ex-offender communities.

LOW INCOME AND LESS SKILLED SINGAPOREANS

57. Some participants felt that there was ***room to do more to help the low-income and older Singaporeans***, even as we continue to promote self-reliance and self-help among Singaporeans. One suggestion was for the Government to sponsor start-up funds for the poor to help them set up bazaar stalls to engage in small trade. Another idea was to set aside a portion of CPF contributions for unemployment benefits.

SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

58. Several comments were made that the Government should do more to help older Singaporeans cope with old age, in terms of financial and healthcare expenses, elder-friendly facilities, social and community support services. More assistance is also necessary to help young Singaporeans (who may be either married couples or singles) to cope with supporting elderly family members.

59. On ***financial security and managing healthcare expenses***, suggestions include: allowing more flexibility in the repayment of medical expenses for the elderly, such as installment schemes; and for Government to guarantee a minimum CPF sum for all elderly Singaporeans, by topping up the shortfall at a predetermined age, if the elderly meets criteria such as efforts to seek employment.

60. There were several suggestions related to housing ***facilities for the elderly***, such as to build more studio apartments with elder-friendly facilities and to provide more community support to cater to the growing trend of independent elderly living alone. Housing precincts should integrate facilities for the young and old, so as to encourage community bonding. Some off-shore islands could be developed into retirement villages, with cheaper housing and lower living cost, for the retirement purposes of the post-independence generation. These villages may come with basic medical facilities.

61. In terms of ***social and community support services***, one felt that mobile geriatric care support would be beneficial for the elderly, more so if subsidised by the Government. Another contributor encouraged the development of more

community care services by non-government organisations (NGOs) in the areas of mental health management and dedicated hospice services.

SUPPORT FOR SINGLES

62. A participant pointed out that ***singles were not adequately catered for in current policies and incentives*** although they too contributed to supporting their married siblings, in taking care of their parents, and in adding value to the economy and society. A few felt that the singles did not receive adequate support although they formed the backbone of society and the economy.

INTEGRATING WITH THE DISABLED

63. The feedback from the disabled youth and other Singaporeans centred on the desire for people with disabilities (PDs) to be treated as equals with other Singaporeans, and to recognize their contributions. Participants called for government policies, and various areas including the education system, the media, public facilities and the transport infrastructure to be more disabled-friendly.

64. Suggestions include setting up a body to oversee the inclusion of every societal group in policy-making. In particular, a body could be established to advocate for the welfare of people with disabilities. Another suggested that the television programmes provide sign language and subtitles for news programmes. Several youth pointed to the need for a more seamless public transport system, disabled-friendly buses, transport subsidies to offset the high cost of private transport. It should also be administratively easier for PDs to renew their disabled parking labels and obtain permits to import customized vehicles, such as those that allowed steering with legs.

65. A few others called for greater efforts to integrate PDs into mainstream schools, promote employment opportunities for PDs, and sensitize Singaporean children and youth to the needs and abilities of PDs. For example, there was a suggestion to educate young children on interacting with PDs by including modules about the disabled community in the school social studies curriculum.

66. We should also shift the focus away from disabilities to the abilities of PDs, as pointed out by several contributors. For instance, recognition should be given to the achievements by exceptional disabled Singaporeans, such as our representatives at the Paralympics. A few suggested to change public mindsets about PDs by enabling more PDs to get involved in community service, as this would showcase their abilities and profile their contributions and presence.

67. Other suggestions include: extending the maid levy reduction scheme and offering tax rebates to families with PDs to alleviate the financial burden; and

providing research funds and grants to boost disability research efforts, e.g. on the development of assistive devices.

GREATER INCLUSIVENESS OF AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

68. Some participants were concerned that the emphasis on Mandarin could alienate the ethnic minorities and propagate a Chinese identity among Singaporeans. A few questioned whether more open discussion about race and religion should be encouraged to engender deeper understanding and stronger ties among our communities. One suggestion was for the youth chapters of the different religious groups to work hand-in-hand to organise community projects and inter-religion camps to promote unity and religious harmony.

RE-INTEGRATING EX-OFFENDERS

69. While ex-offenders acknowledged that they needed to play their part in seeking a new life, they called for society to be more understanding, and for more rehabilitation and employment opportunities, so that they can reintegrate with, participate in and contribute to society.

70. Ex-offenders sought shorter or alternative sentences (e.g. home detention or community work) for offences, as longer sentences would affect their character development and ability to adapt to society after release. They also suggested more programmes to help inmates develop a positive attitude towards life; to allow ex-offenders to perform National Service; and to seek employment in the Civil Service. A few felt that ex-offenders who did not re-commit crimes after a certain period should have their criminal records erased, to boost their chances of seeking employment.

INCLUSIVENESS FOR THE GAY COMMUNITY

71. Several participants commented on the gays' place in society. While a few of them called for more measures to make gays feel more included in society, such as decriminalizing homosexuality and giving gay couples equal rights as heterosexual couples, others were concerned with the growth of the gay lobby in Singapore, and called on the government to focus more on family development.

(IX) YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL ISSUES

MOTIVATION OF YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE TO NATIONAL ISSUES

72. While a fair share of youth expressed national pride, others pointed out that some Singaporean youth are apathetic about national issues, and that this was in sharp contrast to foreign youth who were more outspoken and well-informed about their country. Several others felt that youth were not apathetic and some may grow out of the state of apathy when they matured as adults. To some participants, however, this apathy had to be tackled to avoid our youth becoming “more of consumers in their own country rather than full participating citizens.” In general, the youth desired more transparency from the government, more “freedom” to express their ideas including diverse and opposing political views, and through political activism. Some thought that youth were generally keen to engage in more discussions on national topics, but to do so intelligently, they required more information about national issues, and more platforms to engage with political leaders and the policymakers in the civil service. More awareness could be raised about national issues, the various roles of political office bearers and how the Government works, for example in schools. We had to dispel the perception that youth are “to be seen and not heard”.

73. A few commented that the Government needed to challenge the mindset of some youth who were cynical and guarded about sharing their views, and convince people (and not just youth) of its genuine interest and sincerity in listening to what youth had to say, and to dispel the impression that the constructive views gathered would not be acted upon. All youth, and not just the academically able, should have their views heard and opportunities to engage on national issues. Some felt that the bureaucracy would also need to be more flexible and open, so as to support the Government’s willingness to engage young Singaporeans. Otherwise, it might end up as the bottleneck or “black hole” that prevents good ideas from getting implemented. A few youth remarked that it was difficult for Singaporeans to feel ownership and a stake in Singapore, when their “views were not being respected and appreciated”, while another commented that many youth “practice self-censorship” as they perceived that the government restricted free speech.

AVENUES TO PARTICIPATE IN AND INFORMATION ABOUT NATIONAL ISSUES

74. Specific suggestions ranged from providing more avenues (such as discussion forums and seminars) and information about government and policies, to empower youth to voice their views on national issues.

- a) **Political leaders.** One suggested a regular TV forum where the public could have dialogues with the political leaders. A non-partisan platform or website could be provided for youth to have substantial discussions and debates on issues pertaining to the future and development of

Singapore, and for them to present their recommendations to the Government, or express their views through the media. There could be regular dialogue sessions between Members of Parliament and student leaders from the neighborhood schools.

- b) **Civil Service.** Youth should have more direct communication with the civil service which should listen to their views on policy issues (that are not necessarily confined to youth-related issues). Policy working groups could be formed that involve citizens from the start of the policy development process. Ministries could conduct road shows to schools to educate the students on their functions.
- c) **Schools.** Several youth suggested teaching politics and government as a school subject in secondary schools, to create awareness and generate interest in shaping the future of Singapore. Some youth could be included as part of Singapore's delegations to United Nations events, for exposure. Large scale seminars could be organised to allow students to (i) listen to other student-presenters share their views on national issues; (ii) role-play certain key personnel in the government; (iii) share research findings on "A day in the life of ... (a government leader); and (iv) debate the implications of national policies.

75. In terms of political participation, there were several suggestions to lower the voting age to allow youth to vote, so as to raise their political awareness, involvement and ownership in the political process. One suggestion was that these votes need not be counted in the elections, but could provide feedback on the political choices of youth. Some youth felt that the rules governing the expression of ideas, including views opposed to the Government, should be reviewed. Youth should be able to freely express their views without criticism and scrutiny, suggested one participant. Another idea was that more information about opposition parties and spontaneous set-ups of objective think tanks, policy centres and media should be encouraged.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

76. A few pointed out that the Government should recognize good ideas regardless of the age of the contributor, rather than accept ideas simply because they were from young Singaporeans. In its drive to engage youth, the Government should not forget the older generation that has contributed to building the nation, said one contributor. To raise the quality of public consultation, another suggested to inform participants of the points spoken at the sessions; and to allow feedback and suggestions to go straight to the heads of Ministries, to minimise filtering of views.

(X) ROOTED AND GLOBALLY ORIENTED YOUTH

YOUTH AND ROOTEDNESS

77. To some young Singaporeans, what defined Singapore as a nation was somewhat unclear, as we were still a young nation. Others suggested that local symbols and icons such as Singlish and local hawker food were more readily identifiable. They sought more leeway and space for youth to define the national icons that they could relate to, and to shape national identity on their own terms. Some participants suggested that National Education could be taught in a more “interactive and exciting style”, so that students could better relate to the lessons learnt. A few dismissed National Education as government propaganda or political history, which youth could not relate to.

78. One idea was to organise a nation-wide project or competition inviting participation from various youth organisations and schools to create a fun, vibrant and colourful image for "Home Building in Singapore". A few contributors suggested that female citizens should be allowed to participate in National Service together with their male counterparts, to facilitate social bonding. Another asked Government to grant dual citizenship to children of overseas Singaporeans.

GLOBALLY ORIENTED YOUTH & VENTURING ABROAD

79. Many participants recognized the value of overseas exposure and stints to develop youth’s resilience and independence. The focus of discussions was on what the Government could do to enable the youth to venture overseas, broaden their life experiences, and develop independence and networks. Several participants called for more opportunities for international or regional exposure, over and above existing exchange programmes. Such opportunities would also prompt youth to think about the critical political and social issues of interest to non-Singaporeans, and give them the opportunity to explain and clarify Singapore’s policies to foreigners.

80. A few suggested that the achievements of overseas Singaporeans be highlighted and recognized, and more platforms, e.g. an online portal or events by Singapore embassies abroad be provided for overseas Singaporeans to stay connected to Singapore. Other ideas include: adapting overseas schemes where working adults get paid leave for a year to pursue their dreams, such as travelling, looking after the family or setting up business, with the unemployed filling up their jobs in the meantime; and reviewing existing policies which are too inflexible to allow young Singaporeans to venture out.

**Organisations that Participated in Feedback Sessions
Of the Youth: Creating Our Future Exercise**

Group	Name of Organisations
Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) and Youth Organisations (YOs)	<p>Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Central Singapore CDC High Five Youth Alumni, Heartware Network, National Youth Achievement Award Gold Award Holders' Alumni, People's Association Youth Movement, Singapore Girl Guides Association, Student Volunteer Corps, Young Leaders Foundation, Re:V@amp (Youth For Youth), People's Association Youth Movement, North West CDC, Outstanding Youth in Education Award winner, North West CDC Young Leaders Council,</p> <p>Institutes of Technical Education</p> <p>Anderson Junior College, Meridian Junior College, Nanyang Junior College, National Junior College, Pioneer Junior College, Raffles Junior College, St. Andrew's Junior College, Victoria Junior College, Yishun Junior College, Jurong Junior College, Temasek Junior College</p> <p>Singapore Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic, Nanyang Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic</p> <p>NUS Students' Political Association, NUS University Scholars Club, NTU Feedback Unit, Singapore Management University, UK Singapore Students' Council</p>
Youth Developers	<p>NYC's Service-Learning Practitioners' Network, Touch Community Services, School, Poverello Teen Centre, Raleigh Society, Sembawang Family Service Centre, Student Care Service Hougang Centre, T-Net Club, Sunlife Youth Development Centre</p>
Chinese Community Groups	<p>Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, Kim Mui Hoey Kuan, Singapore Hainan Hwee Kuan, Singapore Hainan Goh Clan Association, Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, Singapore Kwangtung Hui Kuan, Singapore Lam Ann Association, Singapore Loo Clan Association, Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, Tung Ann District Guild, Hokkien Clan Association LDDS</p> <p>Mandarin Junior Chamber (Singapore), Mandarin Toastmasters Clubs, Reading Development Association (Singapore)</p>

Group	Name of Organisations
	<p>Bukit Timah Community Club Literary Centre, Singapore Association of Writers, Singapore Literature Society</p> <p>Bodhicitta Musical Group, Amber Band Group, Stage Pal</p> <p>Punggol North Grassroot Organisation, The Main Works (Joo Chiat CC Youth Executive Committee)</p> <p>Buddhist Youth Group, NUS Buddhist Society, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, Singapore Chinese Teachers' Union</p>
Malay Community Groups	<p>People's Association Malay Activity Executive Committees</p> <p>Alistiqamah Mosque, Ghufran Mosque, Madrasahs, Malay Youth Literary Association, Mendaki Club, Majlis Pusat Pertabuhan-Pertabulahn Budaya Melayu Singapura, MUIS, Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore, Perdaus, Ship for Southeast Asian Youth Programme International Singapore, Yayasan Mendaki, Young Women Muslim Association</p>
Indian Community Groups	<p>People's Association Indian Activity Executive Committees</p> <p>SINDA, NUS Indian Cultural Society, Young Sikh Association, Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League</p>
Women's Groups	<p>Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, Singapore Nurses' Association, Singapore Association of Women Lawyers, Young Women Christian Association of Singapore, Institute of Mental Health, Bukit Batok East Community Club, Jurong Green Community Club, People's Association Women's Executive Committees</p>
Singles Group	<p>Social Development Unit Social Development Service</p>
Disability-related VWOs	<p>Down Syndrome Association Singapore, Handicaps Welfare Association, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Singapore Association for the Deaf, Society of the Physically Disabled, Special Olympics Singapore</p>

Group	Name of Organisations
Youth Entrepreneurs and Working Adults Group	Association of Small And Medium Enterprise, Fei Yue Community Services, Junior Chambers of Singapore, Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association, Young Men's Christian Association of Singapore, Awakening Productions, The Adventus Consulting, Care Community Services Society, Project Bridge, Project 180 (Youth Services), Innovators And Entrepreneurs Association, The Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre, Talent King Scouting, Singapore Malay Chambers Of Commerce And Industry
Young Social Entrepreneurs	Children-At-Risk Empowerment Association Singapore, Environmental Challenge Organisation, GEN Acts, Heartware Network, Millennia Institute, Promise Works, Re:V@mp, Singapore Youth Hunt (Youth For Youth 2003), Singapore Volunteer Corp, Theatrix (Youth For Youth 2003), Youth for Youth Project (Yfy) 2004 Committee, Youth for Youth Project (Yfy) 2004 Advisory and Resource Panel
Secondary Schools	Anderson Secondary School, Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), Bowen Secondary School, Canberra Secondary School, Catholic High School, Changkat Changi Secondary School, CHIJ – St Nicholas Girls' School, Damai Secondary School, Dunman High School, Ghim Moh Secondary School, Greenridge Secondary School, Hai Sing Catholic School, Hong Kah Secondary School, Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary School, Loyang Secondary School, Marsiling Secondary School, Mayflower Secondary School, Methodist Girls' School, Nanyang Girls' High School, Nan Hua Secondary School, North View Secondary School, Northbrooks Secondary School, Raffles Girls' Secondary School, Raffles Institution, River Valley High School, Singapore Chinese Girls' School, St Hilda's Secondary School, St Joseph's Institution Swiss Cottage Secondary School, Tanjong Katong Girls' School, The Chinese High School, Westwood Secondary School, Zhonghua Secondary School
Youth-at-risk	Kaki Bukit Prison Centre Inmates Probationers