A Good Space x Forward Singapore Conversation

Consolidated Report

Date: Saturday, 18 February 2023
Time: 2.00pm - 5.00pm
Venue: 109 North Bridge Rd, Level 5, Singapore 179097
Pillars Covered: Equip, Care, Steward, Unite

Executive Summary of Context
 Background Information After attending some Forward Singapore conversations hosted by grassroots organisations and government agencies, some members of A Good Space saw value in gathering a focused group of changemakers to contribute our insights and ideas to the FSG movement, as part of our continued social mission to encourage active citizenry.   About the Event 37 participants across the People, Public and Private Sectors came to discuss topics in 4 specific FSG Pillars. Because we wanted the session to be focused on people with experience leading a changemaking project or volunteering for any social issue / community, we intentionally chose to publicise the event through our personal networks.

The conversation for each Pillar was facilitated by 2 members of A Good Space, themselves changemakers with experience in that particular pillar. They scoped the discussion question for each pillar with guidance from the SG Partnerships Office, trying to touch on topics that have either yet to be discussed or could benefit from more insights.

The pillars and discussion questions were:

- **Equip Pillar:** How can we shift the mindset of parents to cultivate better well-being for students and teachers?

- **Care Pillar:** How might we better support caregivers, especially those from disadvantaged families or are caring for vulnerable persons (e.g. different-abled, person in recovery from mental health condition)?

- **Steward Pillar:** How might we path the way for founders, funders and the 3P sectors (public, private and people) to work better together in environmental action while balancing economic needs?

- **Unite Pillar:** How might we improve migrant-local relations to create a Singapore where everyone feels belonged to ensure Singapore's continued stability and prosperity?

Because most participants had some experience with the topics, we intentionally spent a large part of the session talking about our aspirations for each pillar and generating 40+ ideas for what the government, community and private sector can do. A summary of the insights and ideas is provided in the report below.

Beyond this report, we hope to engage Political Office Holders in April 2023 in closed-door sessions to surface and discuss the feasibility of putting these ideas into action. Because we are all changemakers, we are excited to do our part in creating a better society.

About A Good Space Co-operative Limited

A Good Space (AGS) is Singapore's first co-operative to unite concerned citizens as a collective changemaking force to design meaningful solutions for good. We currently have 34 members representing 11 different social issues and communities who collectively share resources, ideas, and collaborate on projects.

From jointly raising $1.12 million to provide short-term financial assistance for vulnerable families during the pandemic to rallying businesses, government agencies and NGOs to create solutions to make Singapore a more welcoming place for migrant workers, AGS' members believe in working together for greater impact than they can do alone.

We are deeply grateful to the SG Partnerships Office, in particular Ms Dawn Yip and Mr Jeffrey Ong, for their strong support in bringing this conversation to life.

Equip Pillar
Discussion Question: How can we shift the mindset of parents to cultivate better well-being for students and teachers?

Facilitated by:
- Sherman Ho, Co-Founder, Happiness Initiative
- Sin Melia, Early Childhood Educator
- Louis Puah, Founder, Praxium
- Kuah Ting Ting, Educator

Group's Aspiration Statement[1]

We want a system where students feel the joy of learning, have access to the opportunities which enable that, and have the self confidence and self agency to know that they have control over their own future.

Observations of Current Situation[2]

1. **Positive improvements have been made from the education system in the past** - through components like CCE lessons, student-initiated learning, ungraded programs, Values-In-Action and increased awareness on mental health

2. **Student well-being remains a big challenge because different stakeholders face different challenges** -
   a. "It's hard to have enough time for myself". Students feel defined by their academic achievements and see an increased workload in academics and having to pursue achievements in extracurricular activities. While schools have counsellors, they feel 'out of reach'. In contrast, friends are within reach but are often not equipped with the necessary skills and resources.

   b. Schools face challenges in effectively teaching students to care for their mental well-being. Teachers are overworked and may pass on stress to their students and some schools have a lack of access to guidance counsellors.

   c. Parents are unsure of what's right - how to ensure their child's mental health while still focusing on school work. There is a push and pull relationship with teachers.

3. **Broadening definition of success is a work in progress** - several agencies have already been working on this since the Our Singapore Conversations back in 2015 and it remains a work in progress. Academic success is largely used to deem one's worth and students face societal judgement when pursuing unorthodox academic paths such as the arts. People feel there is a lack of equal opportunities

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[1] This is an aspiration articulated by the participants when asked: "What does a 10 look like?"
[2] This is a summarised version of participant responses to the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think we are doing as a country in this issue and why?" (for more details, read the detailed notes for each Pillar)

and resources for all - only students who 'fit in' or do better academically get better resources. There could be more opportunities and inclusive school settings for all groups of students.

<u>Suggestions Made by the Group for the Public Sector</u>

1. Enhancing facilitation of non academic learning experiences in schools – such as VIA and Design-thinking and job shadowing that excites students to think "Can I do this again?", instead of just going through the motions.

2. Focus on providing student well being centric experiences (e.g. end school earlier or start school later, create more non-academic learning opportunities that students can choose, coupled with a strategic reduction of academic subjects / workload.

3. More project-based learning to help students learn self / peer / team management. Practice processes such as iterative grading (receive initial grade and can submit after working with feedback) and pair work (for peer support to check each other's work)

4. Shift assessments away from Academic grades through the reduction of hiring based on grades for civil service, measuring KPI of students and teachers differently and setting our own educational standards, beyond aligning to international standards.

<u>Suggestions Made by the Group for the People Sector</u>

1. Focus on training for parents to equip them to make a difference. Start holistic parent support groups that don't fixate on tuition, DSA, etc (topics that may be toxic and induce pressure), anchored by a formal PSG Committee in school. There should be an "accreditation" or "verified user" kind of mindset so that the group has legitimacy. Schools/Official agencies such as MSF, MCCY, CDAC can verify/legitimise PSG whatsapp groups, even provide incentives for participation such as negotiated discounts with businesses, to prevent toxic traits on whatsapp groups

2. Shift focus from academic pursuits, prioritise learning over grades, have "fun" SkillsFuture credits where people can learn about fun stuff regardless of whether it can improve productivity

3. Increase mentorship programmes for children, involving adults, peers and school seniors as positive role models

<u>Suggestions Made by the Group for the Private Sector</u>

1. Incentivise/fund/regulate student internships, job shadowing,mentoring and supporting alternate institutions such as forest schools.

2. More family friendly policies for families to spend more time together (e.g. early time off for meals with family), and staff engagement sessions, such as family/parenting workshops, by HR departments to reach out to parents that usually do not attend workshops by schools or self-help groups.

3. Reduce emphasis on academics when hiring, giving attention to skills and character.

Care Pillar
Discussion Question: How might we better support caregivers, especially those from disadvantaged families or are caring for vulnerable persons (e.g. different-abled, person in recovery from mental health condition)?

Facilitated by:
- Toh Kian Beng, Co-Founder, The Ubuntu Space
- Lai Si Yu, Co-Founder, The Ubuntu Space

Group's Aspiration Statement

Caregivers to have choice (e.g. having a supportive workplace that empowers one to cope with caregiving without being forced to outsource duties; having neighbours-based care options) and be connected with support groups themselves, such that caregiver burnout is reduced, and support for caregivers can become more fiscally sustainable.

Observations of Current Situation

1. **The formal healthcare system has yet to fully synergise with, and benefit from, ground-up decentralised caregiving initiatives.** The launch of HealthierSG aims to pivot away from hospitals and clinics, and individuals can be better supported to share the load, by becoming caregivers to their neighbours.

2. **Caregiving remains stuck as shadow work.** Caregiving can often be unpaid, under-provisioned for (e.g. no annual leave allocated for taking care of one's aged parents), and not formally recognised with credential signals of one's caregiving competencies. Many may mistakenly undervalue caregiving or fail to recognise the full workload of caregiving.

3. **The struggles of caregiving takes a toll on mental wellbeing in multiple ways.** Caregivers may feel lonely and unseen, working adults may feel squeezed by caregiving demands of the young and old, and people with care needs may feel disempowered. Many may see caregiving as a burden and not the joy nor privilege it can be.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Public Sector

1. Strengthen caregiving in the SkillsFuture framework. Create credentials so that caregivers can explicitly signpost their skills. This allows others to trust them, and helps in getting paid for their work.

2. Introduce mandatory caregiver leave. Provide more flexible work arrangements to support caregiving duties, without compromising one's career. Encourage caregiving, trust workers to make the right call, and provide more autonomy. Provide incentives for corporates to follow the lead of the civil service.

3. Celebrate caregivers as role models. Raise awareness and start conversations on how each and every one of us are caregivers.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the People Sector

1. Create support systems and support groups, for caregivers and those with care needs to connect, share stories, and promote mental wellbeing.

2. Build up one's own neighbourhood into an ecosystem of care, with a village of friends, doctors, neighbours etc. Connect with each other, find out who has which skillsets, explicitly signpost skills, and offer assistance. Help others with caregiving, beyond one's own family and traditional structures. Cut across varied communities.

3. Change one's own mindset and shift the culture. Recognise and reward caregiving. Be more open, understanding and supportive to caregivers and those with care needs.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Private Sector

1. Introduce and strengthen more inclusive policies and benefits to support employees with caregiving:
   a. Empathy for challenges faced at home, e.g. give time off, resources like bursaries or loans
   b. Build a culture where there is an understanding that there are overlaps between work and life
   c. Schedules and structures that show caregiving is productive/part of daily life (part of self-care)
   d. Child/parent-minding in office

Steward Pillar
How might we path the way for founders, funders and the 3P sectors (public, private and people) to work better together in environmental action while balancing economic needs?

Facilitated by:
- M. Ibnur Rashad, Founder, [Ground Up Innovation Labs for Development](#)
- Lee Zhong Han, Founder, [We Tell Stories](#)

Group's Aspiration Statement

Using the metaphor of a forest, picture Singapore as a nation where sustainability is the root and soil, upon which the economy and society can grow, build and rest.

Observations of Current Situation

1. **Amongst the masses, the recognition of how urgent and personal the issues are, is not strong enough.** Even now, eco-friendly considerations may still be relegated to secondary priorities - good-to-have but not must-have.

2. **We need to do more to progress from limited good practices to an encompassing way-of-life and frame-of-mind.** Civilisations, communities and countries overseas, such as Japan and the indigenous in New Zealand, can serve as instructive examples for Singapore.

3. **We are still thinking, buying, making and building for the here and now.** Consumerism remains seductive, even when "more" isn't necessarily "better". "Use and dispose" is untenable in the long run, we need to embrace circularity and we need to build things to last, and build for the good of the environment.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Public Sector

1. How might Singapore expand its role in the United Nations (UN), to assume larger environmental responsibilities as a developed economy?

2. Require social and environmental provisions in building bids, which Singapore currently does inconsistently, in contrast to the UK's requirements across the board. Refurbish not rebuild.

3. With a social credit system, enforce policies and habits on citizens, akin to fines for unreturned meal trays.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the People Sector

1. Change your mindset in multiple ways:
   a. More is not better. Consumerism is unfashionable.

b. Encourage more and shame less. Having more people improving as imperfect, incomplete stewards is better than having a shaming culture with few purists and ambassadors.

c. Environmental stewardship is about an all-encompassing frame-of-mind and way-of-life, on top of the one or two habits.

2. Change your practices in multiple ways:
   a. Demand accountability from polluting industries and the government.
   b. Stop wish-cycling and stop thinking of upcycling as making art.
   c. Learn what happens to items when you "recycle".

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Private Sector

1. Support community enterprises

2. Buy back the trash your company generates, e.g. reverse vending machines, buy back bottles, pay people for returning packaging

3. Launch and encourage more worker-owned companies and cooperatives where "people > profit", e.g. Mondragon

4. Introduce environmental initiatives beyond incentives and offsets, where we reduce our footprint in our day-to-day activities.

Suggestions Made by the Group for Tri-Sector Action

1. Participate in Regenerative Financing Models built on blockchain and decentralised autonomous organisation (DAO).

Unite Pillar
How might we improve migrant-local relations to create a Singapore where everyone feels belonged to ensure Singapore's continued stability and prosperity?

Facilitated by:
● Chua Ningpei, Founder, IamInvisible
● Saw Moses Aung, Student, Ngee Ann Polytechnic

Group's Aspiration Statement

Where all in Singapore are treated equitably, and live in an integrated and inclusive environment.

Observations of Current Situation

1. **It remains easy and seductive to "other" the migrant community, as expendable (human) resources.** Singaporeans may on one hand make xenophobic, racist and/or demeaning comments, while on the other hand benefit from the migrants in Singapore, via the young and healthy workforce (e.g. construction sector workers), globalised economic opportunities (e.g. job opportunities for Singaporeans in MNEs because Singapore remains attractive to MNEs by allowing them to hire skilled foreign labour, amongst other reasons), and larger government budget (as migrants in Singapore contribute tax revenue). It remains easy to forget that it is mutually exclusive, and hence impossible, to benefit from migrants while wishing them away. Letting such sentiments simmer untackled threatens to erode Singaporeans' approval of our current social contract on the economy, which requires a large foreign workforce of around 1.3 million.

2. **Presently, Singapore is not a global leader in the treatment and Standard of Living (SOL) of migrants, yet.** For specific issues with their living and working conditions, Singapore can learn from other countries in becoming more hospitable.

3. **Current mindsets, cultures and discourse may be problematic, particularly as the issue is fraught with personal economic anxieties for Singaporeans who may feel threatened in their social position or economic security by migrants.** The discourse may be stuck in zero-sum thinking, of what we can extract from migrants as numbers, as opposed to treating them as humans equally deserving of opportunities to thrive.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Public Sector

1. Intensify protection, legislation, enforcement action and penalties, to improve the conditions that migrants experience. The government remains uniquely important as the sole actor to wield legislative and enforcement power. Improve accessibility for legal representation and healthcare, for migrants.

2. Curate and publish statistics, for civil society to utilise to advocate for the importance of migrants in Singapore.

3. Create opportunities for cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. Build integrated infrastructure to fight the NIMBY mentality, in contrast to separate recreation centres.

4. Budget more for migrants, who have been contributing to our budget.

Suggestions Made by the Group for the People Sector

1. Take the initiative to educate yourself about the numerous ways migrants contribute to Singapore, and the issues migrants face. Look in your own environments to see less-visible groups.

2. Relentlessly call out, but not cancel, harmful practices towards migrants by errant employers. Nudge people to do better, rather than just naming and shaming.

3. Change your choice of words, e.g. from "maid" to "a fellow human being".

Suggestions Made by the Group for the Private Sector

1. Ensure fair wages and humane treatment of migrant workers, e.g. insurance, welfare, living conditions, workload.

2. Promote cultural exchanges and inclusion education at the workplace. Specially cater a table for low-wage migrants (e.g. cleaning staff) during D&D celebrations, rather than distributing leftover food to them as an afterthought.

3. Shift mindset to treat migrants like you would treat your own children. Do not subject migrants to conditions you would not wish upon your own kin.

Suggestions Made by the Group for Tri-Sector Action

1. Invite migrants to have a seat and voice at the table. Citizens and corporations can invite them to events, while the government can invite them to consultations like ForwardSG.

Summary List of Facilitators Involved

Overall Experience Design:
- Douglas O'Loughlin, Principal, The Dao of Thriving
- Vincent Ng, General Manager, A Good Space Co-operative

Equip:
- Sherman Ho, Co-Founder, Happiness Initiative
- Sin Melia, Early Childhood Educator
- Louis Puah, Founder, Praxium
- Kuah Ting Ting, Educator

Care:
- Toh Kian Beng, Co-Founder, The Ubuntu Space
- Lai Si Yu, Co-Founder, The Ubuntu Space

Steward:
- M. Ibnur Rashad, Founder, Ground Up Innovation Labs for Development
- Lee Zhong Han, Founder, We Tell Stories

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