

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

1. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's vision in 2004 to build an inclusive society with many peaks of success has inspired many who call Singapore home. It is said that the maturity of a society is reflected in the way it treats and supports those who are disadvantaged. It is on these premises that the Enabling Masterplan is built upon, focusing on a very special group of people in our country – those with disabilities and who should be supported to reach their full potential and be included as part of Singapore.

2. Disability affects not only the individuals concerned. It also affects their family members and others who care for them. Many persons with disabilities (PWDs) do not reach their full potential in life because of barriers that arise from their physical environments, attitudes of society and the lack of education and employment opportunities.

VISION

3. Our vision is for Singapore to be an inclusive society where PWDs are given the opportunity to become equal, integral and contributing members of society. Children with special needs will receive effective intervention and education services to maximise their potential and opportunity to eventually work and contribute to society. There will be equal opportunities for PWDs in employment. More PWDs will achieve self-reliance through work.

4. PWDs will be appreciated and respected for their differences, and will live with dignity in the community. Families will be empowered to care for their disabled members. Parents are reassured as they age and eventually pass on, that care will be forthcoming for the well-being of their special needs children. The physical environment will be barrier-free. PWDs who are enabled through the efforts of the community will, in turn, help their families and contribute back to society.

5. The public, people, and private sectors will work together with PWDs and their families to achieve our vision. The disability sector will bring out the best of the "Many Helping Hands" approach where each party will contribute in the area it is best at.

APPROACH

6. To achieve this vision, the Committee has adopted a life stage approach (from birth to adulthood) when reviewing services and programmes in the disability sector.

7. The Committee has also consulted extensively. We sought the views of PWDs, families, Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs), professionals and practitioners in the field, and employers. We deliberated on the feedback and benefited from the valuable insights from the ground.

ENABLING MASTERPLAN 2007-2011 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

More Effective Leadership through Setting up of an Office on Disability

8. Disability issues are becoming increasingly complex. They cut across different disciplines and will require more than the traditional helping hands of MCYS, NCSS, VWOs and families. The existing landscape in which the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) take the lead in all disability issues does not appear to fully maximise the expertise of each Government ministry to support and include PWDs in Singapore. Many persons with disabilities can in fact be educated and trained to work and contribute to society. Therefore, it is important to have greater involvement of other government ministries and industry players in disability issues.

9. The Committee recommends the **setting up of a national office on disability. It is proposed that the office could be placed under the purview of a coordinating Minister. The office will have senior leaders from MCYS, the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), reflecting the inter-ministry approach needed.** The office will facilitate the realisation of the shared vision articulated earlier. It will develop and implement the national strategy for disability, and work with relevant ministries, NCSS, VWOs, and the private sector. The office will have the mandate and resources to manage disability issues holistically, focusing initially on early intervention, education and employment. It will be responsible for tracking the implementation of the accepted recommendations in this masterplan. **MCYS will serve as secretariat.**

10. The Committee firmly believes that **early intervention, education and employment are critical areas that must be addressed if more PWDs are to be enabled to lead independent lives and become contributing members of society. Thus the office on disability is to be supported by a governing panel on early intervention and education, and a panel on employment.**

11. The Committee recommends that an **Early Intervention and Education panel be set up within this office with senior leaders from MOE,**

MCYS, MOH, NCSS and the relevant VWOs and other stakeholders. The Panel will be responsible for creating a quality education system appropriate to the child's needs and abilities, and maximise his potential and employability. It is proposed that **MOE and MOH take ownership and lead in integrating education and the supporting therapy services with active consultations from the other stakeholders.** MCYS and NCSS will provide social service support to the children and their families, an area which is equally vital for successful child outcomes.

12. **The other panel would be an Employment Panel co-led by the MCYS and MOM/ the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA).** It should comprise employer representatives, key industry players, relevant ministries and statutory boards, NCSS and relevant VWOs. MOM's leadership will ensure the vital link to employers and industries so that the training and supply of PWD manpower will match the demands of the industries. Employment will be made on a business case basis, and PWDs should be remunerated competitively according to their productivity. WDA will assist in facilitating employment and training for industry. MCYS and NCSS will take ownership of social service support to PWDs in employment, and lead in breaking down attitudinal barriers in employment. MCYS, NCSS and the relevant VWOs will advise the panel on the suitability of jobs and job training for PWDs.

13. There are overlaps in elderly and disability issues. Seniors become frail as they age and disabilities can set in. PWDs themselves age and join the ranks of the seniors. As there should not be a duplication of functions and strategies, we propose that where elderly and adult disability issues overlap, such as in the areas of accessibility in the physical environment and transport, it should be addressed as part of the elderly framework. **MCYS should coordinate and ensure synergy, as both the elderly and disability portfolios come under the Ministry.**

14. To further strengthen the Many Helping Hands approach, the Committee recommends active corporate involvement and philanthropy.

Early Intervention and Education

15. In early intervention and education, the Committee believes it is timely to turn the focus from primarily building capacity in previous years to developing quality and excellence. **The Committee has identified six strategic thrusts** underlying the suite of recommendations presented for more effective early intervention and education of children with special needs. These are: **leadership revamp; planned and purposeful integration; quality programme and staff; empowerment of family caregivers; transition management and funding of enabling services.**

16. **The Committee recommends that instead of the social-service sector, MOE and MOH should take leadership in integrating needs and**

services in education and therapy support of children with special needs. Working closely with local and overseas disability experts from either the VWOs or other appropriate agencies, they will be in a position to better identify, evaluate and develop effective and scalable early intervention and special education models. MCYS and NCSS can continue to play a complementary role in providing social service support to the children and their parents. All these, put together well, will make that crucial difference in ensuring successful child outcomes.

17. **There should be greater integration between the hitherto separate mainstream and special school systems. The Committee proposes the formal adoption of a Continuum of Education Models that encourages optimal physical, social and academic integration, instead of the traditional segregated ‘special school’ or ‘mainstream school’ model.** In the longer term, for the purposes of inclusion and greater cost-effectiveness, best-practice models such as ‘special schools within mainstream schools’ should be encouraged and given official support. Formal partnership agreements between mainstream and special schools to target specific integration areas should form a regular feature in the education scene. Official recognition and tangible support should be given to mainstream schools which undertake sustained inclusive efforts in partnering special schools.

18. **To ensure consistent quality of programmes and staff, the Committee recommends the development of a shared framework for school/ programme excellence.** Curriculum units should also be put in place to install curriculum frameworks and enhance the quality of the curricula used in the various early intervention centres and special schools for the best achievable education outcomes.

19. **Children should be systematically assessed before being placed into either mainstream or specialised settings.** They should be adequately prepared before they transit to employment or tertiary institutions. To this end, the age limit for special school should be **extended up to the age of 21 for those who can benefit.**

20. Early Intervention services are expensive but essential. The Committee supports the principle of means testing but **recommends that the Government should review the funding of the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) services. Due to the higher cost of early intervention, it is proposed that every citizen child should receive a fixed basic subsidy, with an additional means-tested subsidy for the needy.**

Employment

21. The Committee recommends a fundamental shift in the employment paradigm to one based on industry needs and business case. It supports the notion that PWDs must be given optimal opportunities to be prepared and trained for sustainable employment.

22. **A structured “value-chain” employment framework should be adopted as follows:**

- a. **Assessment / Placement** – Vocational assessment and job placement are crucial in ensuring job fit for the PWDs. The current structure of one centralised vocational assessment and job placement centre is inadequate given the wide span of disabilities. **The Committee recommends separate Vocational Assessment / Job Placement programmes for those on the autism spectrum disorder; intellectual disabilities; and physical, sensory and other disabilities respectively.**
- b. **Training** – **The training programmes for PWDs should be based on industry requirements and where possible, lead to recognised certification.** This will enhance the employability of PWDs. **The Committee recommends that skills training should be with employment training bodies like the National Trade Union Congress’ Skills Development Institute.** The Institute can partner relevant VWOs for support and transition management of the PWD clients. The Committee also endorses the recent initiatives of the Infocomm Development Authority and the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING Singapore) to fund industry-relevant training in information technology and food manufacturing for PWDs. It looks forward to more of such training initiatives.
- c. **Support** – **The ENABLE Fund would be renamed “The Open Door” Fund.** This would reduce confusion at the ground with the ComCare Enable scheme, which is not a disability-linked scheme. The criteria for “The Open Door Fund” should be relaxed to allow more companies to participate and hire PWDs.

23. **The Committee recommends setting up of an Employers’ Network.** The network will comprise employers who have successfully employed PWDs as well as those who will champion the employment of PWDs. The Singapore Human Resource Institute would also be involved to advise on employment practices and guidelines. The Singapore National Employers Federation has agreed to be the secretariat.

Empowering the Family

24. The family must always be the first line of care and support to ensure the best outcomes for PWDs. **To enhance families' capability in caregiving, the Committee recommends a training grant for caregivers to attend specialised training. The Committee also recommends that the foreign domestic worker levy concession be extended to PWDs who cannot independently carry out activities of daily living and need additional caregiver assistance.**

25. Parents are concerned and want to plan for the financial security of their children with special needs. A Parents' Workgroup on Enhancing the Financial Security of Persons with Special Needs had submitted its recommendations to the Government in October 2006. **The Committee endorses the Parents' Workgroup's recommendations.** The recommendations were, inter alia, to provide free financial planning and legal education to parents of children with special needs, to set up a non-profit special needs trust, to allow the Central Provident Fund (CPF) to be used as a savings mechanism for children with special needs, to ensure basic health schemes such as Medishield and Eldersshield to cover and accord benefits to PWDs on an equal footing with the non-disabled and to establish a one stop body on financial security.

Community-Based Services and Residential Care

26. There are families who face difficulties in caring for their disabled family member especially when the primary caregivers age or have passed on. The Committee notes that this is one of the pressing concerns raised by the Parents' Workgroup. While institutionalisation should be the last resort, the Committee acknowledges that there must also be alternative care options available to these families. **The Committee recommends more residential options for PWDs who require the necessary help.** This includes setting up of Group Homes and Hostels.

Disability Sports

27. The Committee has identified three strategic thrusts for sports for PWDs: sports excellence; sports for all; and sports for rehabilitation. **The Committee recommends increasing the resources allocated to the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) to enhance its capability to promote sports for all, sports excellence and sports for rehabilitation.** SDSC should be supported by the Singapore Sports Council (SSC), the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) and MCYS, MOH, MOE and NCSS.

Barrier-Free Accessibility

28. To enable PWDs to participate fully in all aspects of life, obstacles and barriers to accessibility in the built environment need to be eliminated. This should apply to private and public buildings, indoor and outdoor facilities including schools, institutions of higher learning, medical facilities and workplaces, and private buildings. Services and programmes can only be accessed by PWDs if there is a barrier free transport system. **The Committee recommends that the Government expedites the implementation of the wheelchair-accessible public transport system, which is to be fully achieved only in 2023.** If it is not possible to do so, the Government and NCSS should study how to develop an affordable and viable alternative transport arrangement for PWDs in the interim.

Public Education

29. In addition to physical barriers, there are also social barriers to overcome. Flawed perceptions of PWDs must be corrected. **The Committee recommends that MCYS' Disability Awareness Public Education (DAPE) campaign should be sustained as a year round programme.** The Community Development Councils (CDCs) and grassroots bodies should be involved to enhance the outreach in the community.

Manpower Management

30. **The Committee recommends that the Government should build up the supply of skilled manpower for disability services.** MOE should work with institutions of higher learning to step up training places at the polytechnics and universities. Government can tap on experts in the disability-specific centres of excellence recommended in paragraph 31 below to hone the skills of professionals to teach and support PWDs. To further augment the efforts, MCYS and NCSS should consider introducing training awards to attract talent to the sector. Interim measures such as overseas recruitment should also be considered. NCSS should conduct regular reviews of their salary guidelines for VWOs to ensure that salaries are competitive.

31. **The Committee also recommends that the Government works together with NCSS and relevant VWOs to develop expertise in disability in Singapore.** These would include developing expertise in the VWO sector, among local professionals and academics as well as tapping on foreign experts. **There should be centres of excellence for the different disability groups** to ensure there are advances and best practices in education, therapy and services. Such centres can reap good benefits that will not only support the PWDs, but also potentially grow a viable disability and special education industry to benefit our economy.

CONCLUSION

32. The Committee has gone beyond the 3P (People, Private and Public Sectors) approach to a 5P approach (People, Private and Public Sectors as well as Parents and PWDs themselves). This gave all stakeholders a voice at a national platform. The key recommendations are described in greater detail in the ensuing chapters.

33. The Committee's goal is to address the challenges faced by PWDs while creating opportunities for them so that PWDs will be fully included in our society.