

The power of shared perspectives: Service-learning reflections from a skills training initiative supporting the employability and self-advocacy of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs)

Teo Yi Xuan¹, Rachel Soh Pin Jie²

¹ School of Business, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore
Email address: yxteo004@suss.edu.sg

² School of Humanities & Behavioural Sciences, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore
Email address: pjsoh003@suss.edu.sg

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Service-Learning: Strategies for facilitating sustainable community partnership through community engagement

Abstract

This conference paper presents the reflections of Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) students and the staff members of their Community Partner organisation, relating to their experiences in a Service-Learning initiative supporting the employability and self-advocacy of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs). In Singapore, PWIDs face discrimination in the job market due to a lack of awareness and understanding from the general public. Hence, the students-led service-learning initiative The Levelled Field (TLF) was set up to provide a safe space for PWIDs to develop in-demand skill sets for better employment opportunities. Through its pilot run, PWID youths were tasked with creating several employment-related deliverables using Canva, a popular graphic design software. The core objective of TLF is to provide skills training to support the employability and self-advocacy PWIDs. Additionally, TLF aims to execute the principles of service learning in which students contribute their time and resources in meaningful service activities, while promoting the students' academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. A post-pilot survey of ten students and three staff members from the Community Partner organisation was conducted to gather their reflections for a thematic analysis. The Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (KELC) served as the theoretical framework for formulating the survey questions.

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The analysis revealed three major themes: (1) Development of understanding for PWIDs; (2) Appreciation for community-based learning and the value of service; and (3) Attitude towards inclusive employability.

Students and staff shared the general consensus that PWIDs demonstrated the potential of learning the relevant in-demand skills. Journeying with TLF, the students and staff learned to appreciate how to serve the community meaningfully by learning to address on-the-ground needs. The reflections would be considered as TLF designs its second run, amplifying the success factors which are aligned with the major themes revealed. Ultimately, their shared perspectives had, in turn, spurred TLF to recognise the importance of having an inclusive employment environment in Singapore — leaving no one behind.

Keywords: People with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs), Community Engagement, Experiential Learning, Employment, Self-Advocacy

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Glossary

Term	Definition
MINDS	Movement of the Intellectual Disabled Singapore
TLF	The Levelled Field
PWIDs	Persons with Intellectual Disabilities
OLOV	Our Lives Our Voices
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
SPED	Special Education
KELC	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
Beneficiaries	Clients from MINDS
Participants	Surveyees: Ten SUSS Befrienders and Three MINDS Staff

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Preface

Beneficiaries from the Movement of Intellectually Disabled Singapore (MINDS) went through a ten-weeks pilot conducted by The Levelled Field (TLF) which aimed to develop in-demand employment skills. There were ten sessions in the pilot: nine sessions focused on creating a business card, a deck of slides and a resume using Canva, a graphic design platform, while one session focused on Cyber Awareness skills to aid the beneficiaries in navigating the digital space safely. The sessions were held on Zoom in light of the pandemic restrictions. An assigned befriender will teach the topic for the week in the main breakout room. Afterwards, the participants and bfrienders will be separated into two breakout rooms, where another befriender will go over the topic step by step, giving clients a more tailored approach to the content.

The Levelled Field (TLF) is a youth-led initiative which aims to level the playing field for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs) in terms of employability. It was birthed when one of the co-founders had an encounter with a special needs candidate who was applying for a marketing role but did not possess the relevant skill sets that she was looking for. Since their successful pilot run, TLF is looking to scale up its impact to bridge the gap between PWIDs and mainstream opportunities while empowering them to reach their fullest potential and lead meaningful lives.

The **Movement for the Intellectually Disabled Singapore (MINDS)** is a prominent social service agency in Singapore dedicated to supporting Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs). MINDS plays a vital role in providing education and comprehensive support for both children and adults. They offer specialised lessons tailored to the unique learning requirements of children with intellectual disabilities. While for adults, MINDS provides a range of training and development programs designed to enhance their skills and enable them to pursue meaningful employment opportunities. Additionally, by fostering collaboration and communication with caregivers, MINDS ensures that the support provided is comprehensive, holistic, and aligned with the individual's specific needs.

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Our Lives Our Voices (OLOV) is a self-advocacy programme within MINDS with the objective to empower PWIDs to make decisions that affect the trajectory of their lives. Through conducting activities, the OLOV sessions aim to enhance the PWIDs' self-confidence while promoting their independence, which aids them in expressing their desires and preferences to promote autonomy, self-expression and determination.

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Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention classifies a disability as an impairment which hinders Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to complete certain activities and impacts their quality of life (CDC, 2020). Singapore's co-ordinating body for PWDs, SG Enable, classifies disabilities into four categories:

- 1) **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A neurodevelopmental disorder which affects one's ability to communicate and interact socially.
- 2) **Intellectual Disabilities (ID):** A disability that is defined by having an intelligence quotient (IQ) of 70 and below which affects an individual's ability to learn and acquire knowledge.
- 3) **Sensory Disabilities:** Disabilities that affect an individual's senses such as sight and hearing.
- 4) **Physical Disabilities:** Disabilities that hamper one's ability to execute bodily functions relating to mobility or dexterity.

Having a disability is bound to affect one's quality of life (*not limited to*) such as employment, education, social belonging. That goes for 169,200 people in the Singaporean population, where the disability rate in Singapore stands at 3% (SPD, n.d.). While the employment rates for PWDs have improved over the years due to government policies such as the Enabling Masterplan 2030, there are existing societal and physical barriers that prevent PWDs from accessing certain jobs and advancing their careers (Smith, 2021).

Among the PWD community, Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs) have a harder time finding employment as compared to people with physical disabilities, given that employers might perceive them for lacking capacity to pick up *normal** skills. However, these preconceptions are often unfounded and many observers noted that PWIDs are capable individuals that have the abilities to perform well in their jobs when given the right opportunities and support (Ang, 2022). Even though the potential of PWIDs are prevalent, the social stigma attached to

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PWIDs often translates to lower expectations, affecting their access to education and training, limiting them from gainful employment.

To fill this employment gap for PWIDs in Singapore, The Levelled Field (TLF) was created to provide a safe and inclusive space for PWIDs to develop in-demand skill sets for better employment opportunities. The pilot program launched by TLF provided practical and industry-relevant sessions where PWID clients were able to produce employment-related deliverables, such as a resume, business card, and deck of slides.

Through the passing weeks of the program, TLF was able to foster close bonds with the clients. These relationships played an important role in the development of the clients' soft skills especially in communication. By building rapport and trust with the clients, TLF was able to offer them a safe space where they could explore the skills without the fear of judgement and criticism. The newfound skills not only helped them to communicate more effectively but it improved their confidence, allowing them to articulate themselves more clearly and confidently when communicating with the befrienders. Evidently, TLF was able to serve as a catalyst to offer clients the opportunities to grow and succeed in their personal and professional lives.

**normal: hard/software and skills required in day-to-day jobs*

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Methodology

Research Objectives

There is an increasing recognition to support people with disabilities in developing employability skills to access mainstream opportunities in recent years (Ang, 2022). However, there is a lack of literature and strategies to address the challenges faced pertaining to PWIDs' development for employability. Additionally, The Levelled Field is a pioneering initiative within Singapore's ecosystem, focused on providing in-demand skill sets for PWIDs. Given the relatively recent introduction of this concept, there is a scarcity of information and research surrounding it. Therefore, it becomes imperative to meticulously document and assess the work accomplished in order to pave the way for enhanced services and support for PWIDs in the future.

Participants: Besides befriending PWID clients, the student befrienders taught them in-demand skills while the MINDS staff provided expertise and guidance to the TLF team. Their experience of interacting with clients made them ideal candidates for participation in our survey, as they were the ones who taught the in-demand skills and understood them on a deeper level.

Research Method

The survey respondents consist of 10 student befrienders from SUSS and 3 staff from the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled Singapore (MINDS). They were invited to complete post-pilot surveys online at the end of the pilot run. The respondents pool include 6 females and 7 males aged between 21 and 34 from different backgrounds.

**Caveat: The data collected is not representative of the whole Singaporean population*

Two separate surveys were being administered, one for each group. Our surveys include a total of 18 (Befrienders) & 12 (MINDs staff) questions across three sections (*see Appendix A*) to cover the following themes:

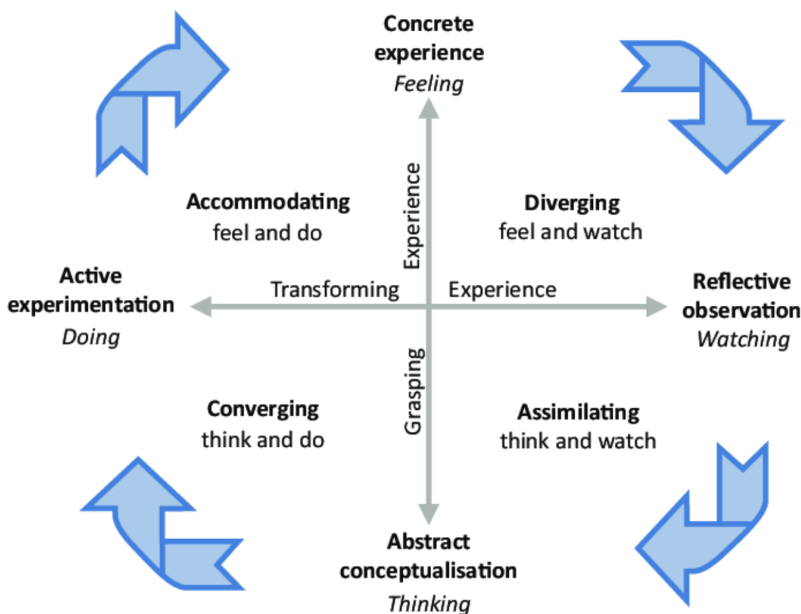
1. Development of empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives.
2. Appreciation for community-based learning and the value of service.

3. Enabling the public at large to work towards inclusive employability.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (KELC)

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (KELC) was used as a theoretical framework for formulating the survey questions. This framework focuses on the importance of how individuals can learn from experience through four stages (Mcleod, 2023):

1. Concrete Experience - Going through a new experience
2. Reflective Observation - Individuals reflects and analyses the experience
3. Abstract Conceptualisation - Analysing experience to derive new theories
4. Active Experimentation - Putting concepts learned into practice



Using the survey questions, we collected information about participants' concrete experiences, including 1) teaching in-demand skills to PWIDs, 2) their reflections on these experiences, 3)

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their ability to internalise and reflect on the experiences they had, and 4) the willingness to apply what they had learned.

The KELC framework value-added to our study by providing direction and ensuring that our survey questions were focused on the key steps of the learning cycle and the whole concept of service-learning (*see Appendix B*). Moreover, it helped us analyse the results and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences:

1. Perspectives on the ability of PWIDs in learning in-demands skills
2. Challenging participants of the preconceived notions and biases about PWIDs (Before and After the program)
3. Influence of participants willingness to be more involved in community service

These insights share a similarity with the KELC framework. The first point demonstrates “Concrete Experience”, where participants had direct interactions with PWIDs and witnessed their capabilities and potential to acquire new skills.

The second point corresponds to “Reflective Observation” and “Abstract Conceptualisation”. Therefore, this exposure seeks to challenge the preconceived notions and biases held by the participants, where participants are able to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of PWIDs. By reflecting on their experiences, participants are able to develop a deepened understanding and empathy towards PWIDs and reframe their perceptions about them.

Therefore, this helps to break down any existing barriers and negative connotations held towards PWIDs, and promotes a more inclusive and supportive community.

Lastly, the third point correlates to “Active Experimentation” where participating in the sessions have increased their awareness and willingness to be more involved in community service and serving PWIDs. Taking on the role as befrienders and core team members not only provides them with the platform to share their skills and knowledge but also fosters personal growth, gain awareness of the issues faced by PWIDs and also understanding the value of community service.

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Results

The process of data collection through the survey has been completed, and the collected data has undergone thorough analysis. This analysis was conducted to extract pertinent findings that are highly relevant to our report. The following results will be shared through 3 major themes identified.

1. Development of understanding for PWIDs

Understanding individuals with intellectual disabilities (PWIDs) is imperative for promoting social inclusion, challenging prevailing stereotypes, and providing necessary support to mitigate disparities. This cultivates awareness and empathy, facilitating positive shifts in public attitudes and fostering the integration of PWIDs into society.

Lack of interactions with PWIDs

Among the 13 student and staff participants, 7 individuals reported having interactions with PWIDs beyond their involvement with The Levelled Field (for students) or outside of their work life (for staff). However, the remaining 6 participants stated that they had not encountered any interactions with PWIDs.

Out of the 7 participants who had interactions, 5 of them had only brief interactions primarily as observers. These interactions occurred during previous community services, while using public transportation, attending church services, and in other similar situations.

Interestingly, the other 2 individuals among the 7 reported having personal connections to PWIDs through their relatives, specifically their cousin and brother, who have autism.

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These highlight a general lack of direct interactions with PWIDs among Singaporeans, with only a small subset having personal connections which are likely key factors that drove them to join the project. This suggests that there may be a limited level of familiarity and understanding regarding the capabilities, challenges, and needs of PWIDs among the larger group.

Understanding - Capabilities

Among 10 of the student participants, 6 of them had the perception that PWIDs will have a hard time learning and might not be able to understand and gain the skills taught. Some were concerned about the difficulty of the lessons whereas others had doubts about the learning capabilities of PWIDs.

Student F explained:

“I had my doubts if the advocates would be able to understand the teachings, especially since it was online, it would be harder for the transfer of learning to occur.”

Student H stated:

“I believed it would be too difficult for the clients to learn.”

In contrast, the other 3 students were mainly concerned about the mechanics behind catering the lessons to the PWIDs, while the remaining student was confident that PWIDs will be able to learn what is taught.

However, when asked about their shift in perception since the start of the project, 4 out of 6 of the student participants mentioned that PWIDs are more capable than what they perceive of them.

Student D stated:

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“My stereotypes of this community have been eliminated. I understand that there are different levels to one's disabilities and they in fact, could learn and perform day-to-day tasks effectively.”

Student F elaborated:

“But turns out, they were actually fast learners and very co-operative with us. It is just how we present to them that matters, such as the language and the pacing. But apart from that, they are able to grasp the concepts fast and co-operated with us well during the lessons, which also made our job easier.”

On the other hand, the remaining 2 participants felt that although PWIDs might not be as capable as us, abled individuals, but with the right support system, they will be able to better integrate into our society and live independent lives.

Student A explained:

“The special needs community consists of people who are very much capable of living independently and learning more developed skills, if society is willing to give them the opportunity to learn and with the right mentors to guide them through the journey of navigating the real world.”

In addition to the students involved, staff members who are highly acquainted with PWIDs and our specific clients also provided feedback on their observations of the clients' abilities following the program. 2 out of 3 of the staff participants expressed feelings of astonishment and contentment.

Staff A mentioned:

“We always know they are capable of learning new skills and receptive to new social interactions. But for some of them, we were relieved to see that they could follow the sessions and not feel too overwhelmed.”

Staff C stated:

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“I was pleasantly surprised by how tech-savvy some of them were especially “

The remaining staff shared his believe of the abilities of PWIDs and commended The Levelled Field’s approach.

Overall, these observations highlight the importance of challenging preconceived notions and providing inclusive learning environments that cater to the specific needs of PWIDs. They also emphasise the potential for PWIDs to learn and contribute to society, given the right support and opportunities. The positive experiences of the participants and the staff members affirm the effectiveness of having the right approach in empowering PWIDs.

Understanding - Social

Among the student participants, 6 out of 10 of them felt that they gained a better idea of how to interact with PWIDs. 3 out of 6 of them explicitly said that PWIDs are more similar to us than different.

Student J stated:

“Our clients are not that much different from us and that being too cautious might prevent us from getting to know them better”

Additionally, 2 out of 10 participants mentioned that they are more empathetic towards PWIDs after getting to know the advocates better as individuals rather than only seeing them for their disability.

Student C stated:

“I’m more empathetic towards them & understand why they react to certain situations”

Student D stated:

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“I can better empathise and interact with PWIDs after TLF. I would be able to display increased awareness and inclusivity when I face PWIDs in public.”

Through The Levelled Field’s programme, student participants were able to foster a greater understanding of PWIDs, breaking down barriers and promoting more empathetic and inclusive interactions. It highlights the transformative impact of personal connections and interactions in dispelling misconceptions and fostering genuine connections with PWIDs.

2. Appreciation for community-based learning and the value of service.

Appreciating community-based learning and the value of service helps provide students with a holistic educational journey and cultivates a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the special needs community. These help students develop empathy, compassion and foster social inclusion, enabling them to understand and be aware of the clients’ needs.

8 out of 10 student participants agreed that participating in the pilot run had egged them in wanting to volunteer with disability organisations and initiatives that champion special needs.

Student E mentioned:

“It was a very meaningful and fulfilling experience to see what the advocates achieved in just ten sessions. So, it would be nice to participate in more initiatives that support people with disabilities and do my part in causing a positive impact for them.”

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Student A mentioned:

“TLF gave me an insight on what it's like to interact with PWIDs and it was a positive one. I was able to witness how my simple action made a significant impact on their lives.”

Additionally, when asked if they would start their own projects, 2 out of 10 student participants mentioned that they would be interested to do so.

Student D mentioned:

“I used to create projects/startups for profits only. After joining TLF, it inspires me to create projects that could positively impact people with special needs as well.”

As for the other 8 student participants who said otherwise, contributing factors include having personal commitments to logistical concerns being deterrents to starting their own project. Nevertheless, the student participants mentioned that they were still keen on supporting existing special needs initiatives.

Support from Community Partner (MINDS)

Community Partners play a pivotal role in Service-Learning projects given the vast amount of subject-matter expertise they have on the beneficiaries. In turn, the knowledge provided from Community Partners based on real-life experiences also acted as feedback for improvement for subsequent sessions - value-adding to the appreciation of community-based learning and the value of service.

Student participants concurred on the importance of having a Community Partner, as evidenced in their positive feedback pertaining to having MINDS as a community partner. All student participants agreed that having MINDS as the Community Partner has made an impact on TLF's efforts.

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Student A mentioned:

“Given that this was our first time interacting with PWIDS (for most of us at least), they ended every session with positive feedback on our volunteers' performance and the lesson content..... They also provided assistance for us during the lesson when they observed our volunteers having issues communicating ideas to the PWIDs.”

Student J mentioned:

“MINDS partners that were involved during the sessions demonstrated effective examples as to how to allow our clients to open up to us and become more comfortable”

By incorporating Service-Learning into the school curriculum and partnering with organisations like MINDS, this created a holistic and enriching educational journey for students, as they actively resolve issues and the community's needs.

Student I mentioned:

“Thanks to TLF and the school mandating community engagement, it forces me to come out to ‘be the one’ that is physically involved.”

Moreover, the appreciation of community-based learning and value of service is reciprocal, as also seen in the MINDS staff. All 3 of the staff participants agreed that TLF has not only made a positive impact on the OLOV initiative and the PWID community but it has also benefited staff on a personal level.

Staff A mentioned:

“To make self-advocacy happen, we need more like-minded community partners to join on this journey of co-creating innovative solutions and collaborative platforms to engage our self-advocates and empower them to be more seen and heard.”

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Staff C stated:

“There is so much that can be learnt mutually if we are interested in knowing and growing with each other as a person, and not being focused merely on completing a task as a volunteer (i.e. teaching skill sets via Canva).”

3. Attitudes towards inclusive employability.

As prevailing stereotypes and barriers may hinder full participation of people who are disabled in the workforce, it is essential to provide a deeper understanding of the attitudes towards inclusive employability. The technical and emotional aspects will be examined in this section.

Technical (Skills)

When asked how TLF impacted the lives of the beneficiaries, 9 out of 10 of the student participants mentioned the importance of teaching the relevant skills to PWIDs. The unanimous feedback indicates that acquiring these skills serve as a crucial stepping stone for PWIDs in securing gainful employment in the workforce.

Student I mentioned:

“I believe we have equipped them with skills required to create an opportunity for the workforce. Resume, CV and portfolio are gateways or portals to the workforce which everyone should be equipped with.”

Emotions (Thoughts)

When asked about their motivation to join TLF, student participants had varied reasons for joining TLF, ranging from personal experiences with the special needs community to wanting to be part of something that was nascent in Singapore. Collectively, the 10 student participants shared a common objective to advocate for equal opportunities for PWIDs and promote inclusive employability in Singapore.

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Student A mentioned:

“I want to build a better and more understanding society for my younger cousin when he grows up and enters the workforce so he has more opportunities to work.”

Student C mentioned:

“There isn’t really a programme in Singapore that gives PWIDs the opportunity to find gainful employment that helps them to earn a stream of income & reach their dreams.”

Recommendation

The research conducted has shed light on the public’s receptiveness and willingness to support PWIDS and embrace them as members of society. However, a fundamental inquiry remains concerning the readiness of Singaporeans being able to accept PWIDs in white-collar job settings, given the presence of preconceived notions among individuals. Therefore, our recommendations will focus on 1) Early Education on Inclusivity, 2) Community Collaborations and 3) Institutionalisation.

1. Early Education on Inclusivity

Our findings highlight a significant deficiency in opportunities for the general public to interact with PWIDs. There is a limited understanding of PWIDs due to various factors, resulting in fear or mistreatment of individuals different from the normative population.

The prevailing perceptions regarding PWIDs can be attributed to the limitations within the mainstream education system in Singapore. The absence of opportunities for students to interact meaningfully with PWIDs in their formative education years have resulted in a lack of awareness and understanding. Consequently, this knowledge gap has perpetuated

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instances of cyber/bullying and marginalisation, as students struggle to approach and engage with PWIDs due to their unfamiliarity with different disabilities.

Therefore, integrating disability education into mainstream education is therefore imperative, especially in early childhood and primary education. By introducing age-appropriate and inclusive curriculum content, young learners will develop a genuine understanding of PWIDs and embrace diversity and inclusion at an early age. The exposure to diverse perspectives and fostering inclusive values from an early stage has the potential to nurture a generation that views PWIDs as valued members of society, preventing the perpetuation of stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Hence, this is relevant for the next run of TLF's programme, where more targeted participant groups can be identified. Early Childhood Education students, for instance, are crucial to teaching and interacting with young children. This then enables them to have the ability to positively influence and shape the mindset of the young children, fostering acceptance and inclusivity towards PWIDs. This is also in line with the government's initiative of having inclusivity coordinators in pre-schools, which is a positive landscape change (Co, 2021).

Lastly, early education on inclusion does not only stop with institutions. Parents, as the social safeguards for their children, also bear a critical responsibility to prioritise diversity and inclusion in early education on recognising its significance alongside academic development and fostering an inclusive mindset from an early stage.

2. Community Collaborations

Early education plays a crucial role in nurturing an inclusive mindset among the younger generation, but the responsibility to foster inclusivity should not end there. Higher

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education institutions also have a significant role to play in the ongoing integration of PWIDs.

Capacity-building initiatives can be implemented to integrate PWIDs into society. To further remove the segregation of mainstream students and students with intellectual disabilities, it is essential to establish meaningful connections. An example will be to have interschool collaborations as it is a practical and effective solution to promote interactions and foster partnerships. SPED Schools and mainstream schools can organise joint programs and activities. This creates a platform for students from different backgrounds to come together, interact, and collaborate.

Some possible activities include sports events and art workshops which fosters participation and teamwork, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of one another and appreciate each others' differences. These collaborations not only cultivate inclusivity, but it also allows students to gain personal growth, mutual support and skill development.

Moreover, interschool collaborations provide a valuable opportunity for schools to exchange knowledge and experiences. Through exposure to diverse learning environments and social interactions, schools can discover improved teaching methods and create more conducive learning spaces for their students. This mutual exchange of ideas and experiences breaks down barriers, fosters empathy, and nurtures a more inclusive and supportive community.

When it comes to facilitating the interschool collaborations, TLF can play a vital role as a bridge, coordinating and facilitating smooth collaborations between schools. Given the limited manpower in both mainstream and special needs schools, external groups like TLF can provide valuable support, enabling greater involvement and participation from schools in these collaborative efforts. In light of the gradual recovery from COVID-19, TLF recognises the need to adapt its approach according to survey responses that suggest

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in-person interactions can improve learning. Thus, TLF plans to integrate insights gained from its online format during the pandemic into the face-to-face engagement of its next run, in order to create an enriched learning experience. This strategic shift aims to optimise learning outcomes and ensure a more holistic and effective learning environment for beneficiaries. Additionally, TLF's experience in inclusive education and working with PWIDs can provide valuable insights and recommendations. TLF can share their best practices and strategies bringing value into collaborations, contributing to successful implementations.

3. Institutionalisation

Our results have shown immense support towards inclusive employment. However, without the active participation from key stakeholders like SPED schools and employers, it is difficult to advocate for equitable change. As such, fostering true equity requires the institutionalisation of inclusive hiring practices. SPED schools and employers must actively institutionalise and integrate inclusive policies and procedures into their organisational frameworks, thereby solidifying their commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible workforce.

SPED Schools

Although opportunities for new initiatives available for PWIDs are slowly rising, the lack of manpower in SPED schools to match PWIDs to suitable courses is an additional concern. Typically, PWIDs go through a fixed process to segregate them into a specific industry they are more inclined to, these sectors include cooking, baking, gardening and retail. However, PWIDs that present talent in other areas will be offered external opportunities. For instance, an individual with exceptional talent seen in his baking courses is handpicked and offered art related courses. Yet, these individuals that are handpicked are restricted to a small amount. Hence, others who were not given a chance to discover their talent in other areas are constrained to mainstream courses.

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Employers

This pattern is also seen in the employment sector where a selective approach is practised on hiring the “cream of the crop”. By implementing hiring quotas for people with intellectual disabilities (PWIDs), organisations can proactively address this issue, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 8 (*Decent Work and Economic Growth*) and 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*) - reshaping hiring dynamics and promoting inclusive employment. Organisations can fulfil their commitment by investing in PWIDs and providing them with training and career advancement opportunities, ultimately ensuring an inclusive and equitable workplace.

As a new ground-up initiative, TLF may not have the capacity to institutionalise other organisations directly. However, TLF has the power to influence and inspire other small organisations like itself to create significant change - also known as the multiplier effect.

The multiplier effect refers to the idea that the impact of TLF's efforts can extend beyond its own initiatives. By demonstrating the effectiveness and success of its approach, TLF can inspire and motivate other similar organisations to adopt similar strategies and principles to embody inclusivity. Utilising prominent platforms, such as conferences, can help operationalize this approach and inspire others to embrace inclusive practices. Presentations at influential events such as the 9th Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Service-Learning serve as exemplary opportunities to spread knowledge, share experiences, and impact a larger audience, thus fostering social change and advancing inclusive education.

Ultimately, this creates a ripple effect, leading to a broader and more profound transformation of society as multiple organisations working together achieve the same goal.

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Limitation

Despite being recognised as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, there is a significant gap in published research or literature documenting the experiences and needs of PWIDs in Singapore. This dearth of comprehensive data on the challenges faced by PWIDs hinders the ability to fully understand their needs and design impactful programs to address them. As a result, community organisations like TLF initially lacked a macro-perspective on the strengths and abilities of PWIDs, which is crucial for developing effective and tailored programs.

Due to the fact that this was a pilot run, the data collected was not representative of the entire Singaporean population since only 10 student befrienders and 3 staff members completed the survey. Therefore, the findings of the surveys might induce participant bias and affect the generalisability of the findings in the wider context.

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Appendix A**Profiles of Survey Participants**

Student Befrienders			
	<i>Age (as of 2023)</i>	Gender	Details
Student A	23	Female	Course: Undergraduate in Marketing Designation for pilot run: Marketing & Communications
Student B	25	Female	Course: Undergraduate in Marketing Designation for pilot run: Secretary
Student C	24	Female	Course: Undergraduate in Marketing Designation for pilot run: Marketing & Communications
Student D	22	Female	Course: Undergraduate in Business Analytics Designation for pilot run: Finance and Logistics Lead
Student E	24	Male	Course: Undergraduate in Human Resources

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			Designation for pilot run: Volunteer Manager
Student F	24	Male	Course: Undergraduate in Human Resources Designation for pilot run: Befriender
Student G	23	Male	Course: Undergraduate in Supply Chain Management Designation for pilot run: Volunteer Befriender
Student H	24	Male	Course: Undergraduate in Supply Chain Management Designation for pilot run: Volunteer Befriender
Student I	27	Male	Course: Undergraduate in Finance Designation for pilot run: Volunteer Befriender
Student J	21	Female	Course: Undergraduate in Human Resource Designation for pilot run: Volunteer Befriender

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MINDS Staff			
	<i>Age (as of 2023)</i>	Gender	Details
Staff A	34	Female	Programme Executive
Staff B	35	Male	Assistant Trainer
Staff C	32	Male	Assistant Manager

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Target Group	Question	ELC1 - CE	ELC2 - RO	ELC3 - AC	ELC4 - AE
All	Outside of MINDS, state briefly what interactions do you have with persons with special needs in 2022?	x			
All	How did your role contribute to TLF?	x	x		
CE Students (10 pax)	What were some of the challenges you faced during the programme? Therefore, how might you address similar challenges in the future if you encounter them again?	x			
All	What were your initial thoughts when you heard that a group of students were going to teach PWID Canva skills?		x		
CE Students (10 pax)	What made you want to join TLF?		x		
All	How have your perceptions of the special needs community changed since the project ended? (CE Students) / Did your perception of the advocates change after the project? (MINDS Staff)		x	x	
All	How do you think TLF has impacted the lives of advocates?		x	x	
CE Students (10 pax)	What was your biggest takeaway from joining the sessions? (E.g. Skills/Public Speaking/Communication etc.)			x	
All	Can you recall a moment in the program that evoked strong emotions in you? Please describe that experience.		x	x	

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CE Students (10 pax)	How were the OLOV sessions beneficial to you in helping to conduct the pilot run sessions?			x	
All	Do you feel the partnering group students have made impact to the OLOV initiative? Elaborate. / Do you feel having MINDS as the community partner have made an impact to TLF's efforts? Elaborate.			x	
All	Has TLF empowered you to do more for the community? (E.g. wanting to volunteer with disability organisations/participate in causes that champion disabilities in the future)				x
CE Students (10 pax)	Has TLF inspired you start your own project?				x
CE Students (10 pax)	How do you see yourself applying the new skills acquired from TLF to your daily lives?				x
All	Is there anything you want to add on? For instance, how TLF has impacted your life		x	x	x

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