

Singapore: Connecting Hearts

“Fostering the sense of the community spirit for the future sustainable community design”

Final Presentation
50th IATSS FORUM



Community Design Project by “Super Breakthrough” Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the first time, Singapore, a relatively developed country in ASEAN, was selected as a group study project of IATSS Forum. The theme of this year's project is "Sustainable Community Design". While other ASEAN countries share the similar problems like cleanliness, environment, lacking of facilities or capacity, our group found that Singapore has an interesting common issue of mindset that happens when the country gets too globalized or grown too fast. It is an issue commonly faced by developed nation, which is the lack of physical interaction among neighbours due to change in lifestyle and being too reliant on technology to connect for work or leisure. In order to design a sustainable community, our group sees a need to firstly have a community with strong sense of community spirit and the stakeholders are willing to come together to solve common issues.

The objectives of our "Singapore: Connecting Hearts" Project are to raise the awareness of the key principles of the sustainable community design and roles of the people in the community, and to change the mindset of the people in terms of the community involvement and sustainable community design in terms of community spirit and sense of ownership. We have selected an area in Singapore with approximately 5,000 residents to approach: Tampines West, Zone 2.

We developed the four stages towards fostering community spirit among the residents, in preparation for community design project to take place. The four stages are 1) empowering the existing active resource people or the volunteers 2) needs assessment 3) encouraging the majority of the residents, and 4) evaluation. For the sake of implementation, we will divide the implementation of our Project into Phase 1 (Stage 1 & 2) and Phase 2 (Stage 3 & 4).

At the end of the Project, we aim to see a stronger sense of pride and ownership towards the community which is crucial for sustainable community design. However, the people should be the ones to design their own community. As other ASEAN countries are also on the path of development, our Project can be replicable in other countries in the future.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

What is Sustainable Community Design?

When we first approached the topic of sustainable community design, we are not too sure what exactly does community design means. The seminars and workshops conducted by the School of Community on the 6 steps for planning community design, case studies of Japanese community design projects from historical and socioeconomics perspectives and field trips to Toba City and Moku Moku Farm gave us better insights and understanding of what is the concept of community design. Hence, with the information we gathered from the above, our group has concluded the definition of what community design means to us. It is the process in which the local people come together to initiate, plan, organize and take actions in order to solve the common issues of the community.

So how essential is community design to a society? Firstly, a thriving and engaged community that does well in terms of the ability to access to social and economic resources in the community is well-connected among the stakeholders such as local people, government and non-profit organizations. The local people in a healthy community have a sense of pride and ownership, with strong community spirit and willing to look out for one another in the neighbourhood. Such community will take on community design to improve the quality of life in the community. Hence, in order for community design to take place, we must first have a community that has strong sense of community spirit and the stakeholders are willing to come together to solve common issues.

Key Fundamental of Sustainable Community Design

Before we started on the project proposal on community design, 6 members shared the cases they worked on before coming for the forum. Cases of successful/unsuccessful community design and the observation of the community we live in were presented and explained. From the cases we shared, we realized that the key fundamental on why community design projects are unsuccessful or unable to take place, is that the local people do not see the need to do their part to make the community a better place for all to live in. They do not know their neighbours and are unable to form pride and attachment to the community as there is basically no relationship among the local people due to a lack of interaction.

Defining the Problem

In our discussion on the country to work on our project proposal, it is of interest to the members that as a developed nation, Singapore has been working on building social capital to empower residents to take ownership of their communities since independence in 1965. In the early years, the effort to foster racial harmony and social cohesion among the various races was very successful as people were more dependent on each other in the neighbourhood for daily necessities and to help keep an eye over the children. However, as the nation develops, the community spirit that was built up in the early days seems to be disappearing due to the change in lifestyle and technology. Singapore has one of the highest percentage of internet and social media users in the world. Singaporeans have become too reliant on technology to connect for work or leisure that they become not as comfortable with social interaction anymore. However, technology is supposed to complement human interactions. Instead, it has taken over the front seat in many aspects of their lives. Also, in exchange for greater convenience and “better” living experience in the public housing estates, lifts were built at every floor, many levels with direct access to car parks replaced the common corridors, and removed the seats at the common space in the new public housing designs reduce the physical interactions amongst neighbours, which is not conducive for building community spirit

With this background information on Singapore, it is reaffirmed that fostering a strong sense of pride and ownership towards the community is essential and crucial for community design project to be implemented and be sustainable.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Objectives

After identifying the key factor to the success of community design, we discussed on the process of how might we catalyse the formation of memories and relationships so that people can develop pride and how might we facilitate their sense of belonging and ownership of their community.

The group started the project proposal by defining the objectives of the project, which are

1. To raise the awareness of the key principles of the sustainable community design and roles of the people in the community
2. To change the mindset of the people in terms of the community involvement and sustainable community design in terms of community spirit and sense of ownership

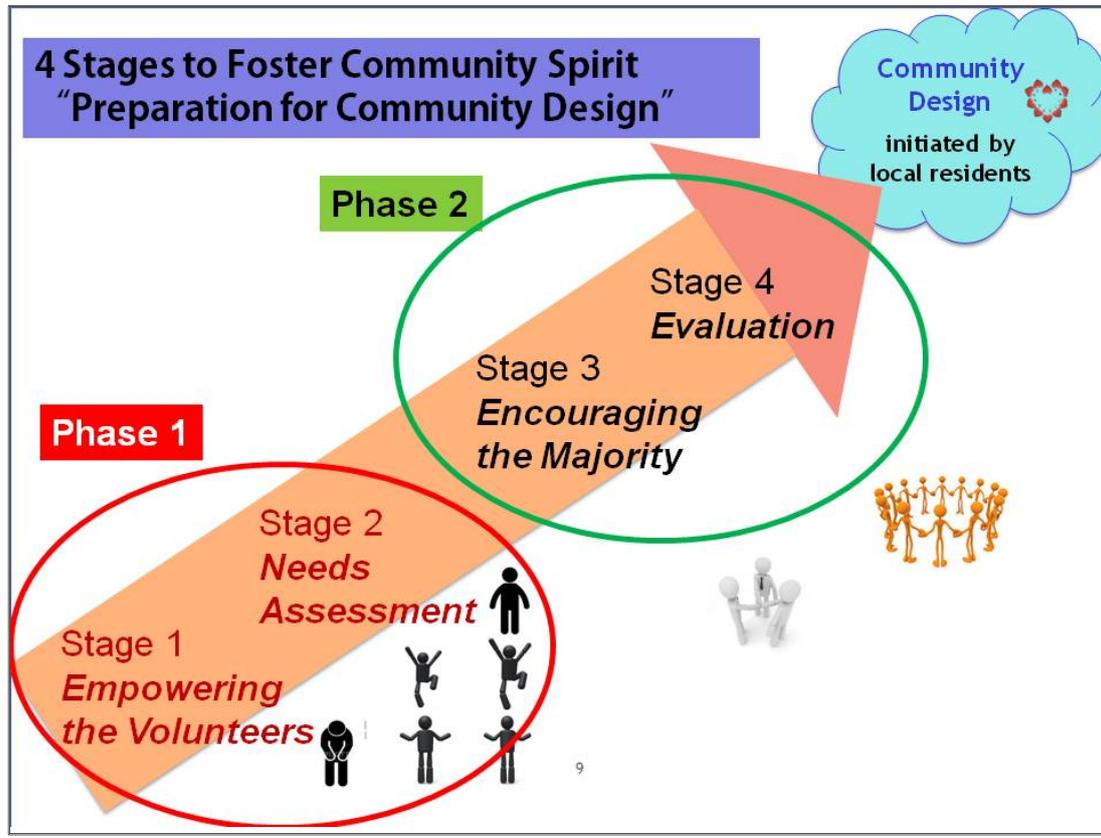
Selection of Target Area in Singapore

Singapore is a densely populated nation and more than 80% of the people stay close to each other in public housing. Targeting the whole nation is too ambitious to carry out the project and hence, selecting a particular public housing estate with approximately 5,000 residents is a good starting point to pilot the project. Tampines West, one of the 87 constituencies in Singapore consists of 8 residential zones. Each residential zone has approximately 5,000 residents and one of the zones was selected for our study.

Principles of 20:60:20

To begin with, we used the principle of 20%: 60%:20%. The principle simply means that in a community, the percentage of active residents is about 20% , 60% of the residents are participative and need to be nudged or motivated to take initiative and the last 20% are residents who will simply not be interested in the community no matter what you do. With this principle, we identified our main target for the project to be 20% of active residents and 60% who could be empowered to take a step forward in contributing to the community as our first priority. The other 20% of the inactive residents will be our second priority.

Four Stages towards Fostering of Community Spirit



Stage 1 & 2 (Phase 1): Empowering the Volunteers & Needs Assessment

After we have set our objectives and our main target, we developed the four stages towards fostering community spirit among the residents, in preparation for community design project to take place. For the four stages, it is further divided into two phase. Stage 1 and 2 will be carried out in the Phase 1 as it is the most crucial step to start the project with a good foundation. We understand that to propose any social projects in the community, we need to understand the needs of the community by hearing from the people in the community. We need to know their sense of pride towards their community, their behaviour towards neighbourliness and the tipping point for them to take initiative on their neighbourhood and environment issues. With the 20% active residents whom some are active volunteers in the community, we could leverage on their network and empower them to carry out the needs assessment of the community. The volunteers will be briefed on the project and trained to conduct the needs assessment for 54 selected residents through home visits.

The residents will be selected based on age group, occupation and if they have or do not have children. The permutation of the three criteria will ensure a well represented selection for the profile of the community.

Stage 3 & 4 (Phase 2): Encouraging the Majority and Evaluation

In the Phase 2, we will focus on stage 3 and stage 4. Stage 3 will be gathering the active residents to encourage the majority through a mechanism to connect and build relationship among the residents and stage 4 will be the evaluation of the project to determine the effectiveness of the process we developed. With the insights gathered from the interview, we would be able to categorise the residents into the 3 types of residents, which is active, middle level and passive. The results from the needs assessment would help us determine which profile of residents are likely to be active, middle level and passive. With such classification, we would be able to identify the active residents, to motivate them to step forward to engage those who are participative and connect with them and build relationship. The needs assessment could also give us more information on the lifestyle of the residents and what kind of community activities they would like to be involved in. However, someone who is interested in an activity but not taking part is also highly possible as people will only open up and interact only if they have a sense of familiarities and comfort with the people in the neighbourhood. Therefore, it is crucial to start the relationship building process by developing the mechanism to facilitate the “get-to-know-you” process. This could be done through creating platforms and opportunities for interaction on daily basis.

Since most Singaporeans are familiar with social media, it makes a lot of sense for the community to be able to communicate in Facebook to share information in the community and interact virtually. However, to ensure that the elderly and the non IT savvy residents are also connected, personalised letters could be sent to them and messages could be posted on common space. Inspired by the “Kairanban” system in Japan, information and attendance for community activities could be circulated through the use of a common kit for information on activities and residents could indicate their attendance on the kit before passing it on to their neighbours. In this way, neighbours will have an opportunity to knock on each other door and start small conversation based on the community activities organise for them.

Children can be good connectors as people usually will not reject a conversation initiated by them. By encouraging the parents to allow their children to strike a conversation with neighbours starting with festive greetings can help break the ice between neighbours.

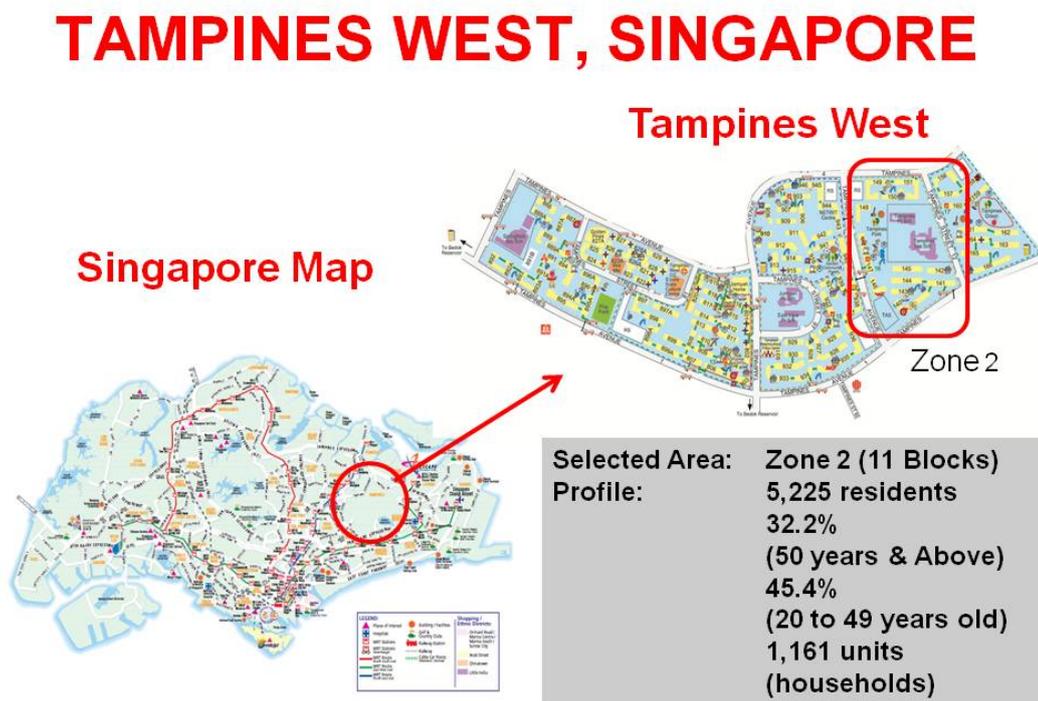
This is also a good learning platform for the children to improve their social and communication skills.

Finally, it is necessary for the organisers of mass community events to conduct icebreaking activities at the beginning of each event, so that the residents can make new friends in the neighbourhood, and not just attending the activities with their families and friends without knowing anyone new in the community.

After the implementation of the needs assessment and prototyping, we could evaluate the effectiveness of the project so that we could identify the gaps and look into improvement of the project. The evaluation will be done by random sampling of 250 residents, using the same set of interview questionnaire for needs assessment.

Background of target area:

- Selected Area: *Zone 2, Tampines West constituency, Singapore*



- Demographic Profile:
 - 5,225 residents
 - 32.2% of the residents are 50 years old and above
 - 45.4% of the residents are 20 to 49 years old
 - 11 blocks, 1161 units (households)

- Social Profile:
 - Educated population
 - Highly dependent on technology
 - Fast-paced lifestyle
 - Ageing population
 - Minimal physical interaction among neighbours on daily basis
 - Generational gap between the elderly and young

Problems, Causes and Effects:

- *Problems and cause:*
 - Lack of opportunities for physical interaction among neighbours due to the structure of public housing where lifts were built at every floor, many levels with direct access to car parks replaced the common corridors, fast-paced lifestyle and technology which create an environment that is not conducive to build stronger communities and connections.
- *Effects:*
 - Foundation is not strong enough to initiate the sustainable community design

ACTION PLAN

STAGE 1: EMPOWERING THE VOLUNTEERS

This activity aims at building the capacity of the volunteers on the project overviews and tapping them for the interview with the target residents. Basically, this action is the foundation and core pillar of the community design project which focuses on the engagement of the people in the project planning, facilitation and implementation. 20 existing active volunteers who had been set up will be briefed through the following techniques and themes.

-Orientation

The orientation activity will be conducted with the volunteers and the project team in order to create good working atmosphere. The idea is that the two groups will be working together for the attainment of the project objectives. In this event, there will be ice breaking games, group dynamics and facilitation workshops.

-Project Overview

A lecture on the community design concept and project overview will be conducted as well for the volunteers to get better understanding of whole project and its objectives. The activity will be a combination of lecture-discussion, presentation of community cases, workshops and group dynamics for a better understanding of the subject matter.

-Objectives of the Home Visit

The volunteers must have a good understanding of why we need to do the community needs assessment. The objectives of the home visit, which is the core activity for the needs assessment part, will be the highlighted in this activity. Facilitation skills will be needed for this activity and some workshops.

-Contents of the Questionnaire

A walk through of the questionnaire will also be done, together with the volunteers. They must have clear views of the key items that need to be collected from the sample residents.

The objectives of each item must be understood by the interviewers so that they will know the value of getting feedback from the respondents during the actual interview.

-Workshop for the field work

After knowing the contents of the questionnaire, a workshop will be done on the processes of doing the interview. In this activity, the interviewers will learn the guided steps and proper actions before, during and after the interview.

-Role play

Finally, the interviewers will have to try to simulate the actual interview through role-playing. The objective of this is to help the group understand the possibilities and what more to expect in the actual interview so that there will be time to improve more on the processes of doing the actual interview.

STAGE 2: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Why do we do needs assessment?

Needs assessment is a systematic process for determining and addressing needs between current conditions and desired conditions. This can be an effective tool to clarify problems and identify appropriate interventions or solutions (Wikipedia).

Therefore, proper understanding of the local community people's mind – what they think, what they do, what they need, what makes them happy are essential in developing programs that will further spur community involvement.

What are the objectives of the needs assessment?

1. To identify people's sense of pride;
2. To determine the behaviors towards neighborliness; and
3. To know the tipping point on taking initiative on neighborhood and environment issues.

What are the steps of doing needs assessment?

A. Preparation and Planning

1. Scope

The needs assessment will basically focus on Tampines West Constituency Zone 2 which consists of 5,225 residents for the interview purpose. Based on the profile of the residents, most of them (45.4%) who are 20 to 49 years old and 32.2% are 50 years old and above.

Total number of residents	5,225
Residents who are 50 years old and above	32.2%
Residents who are 20 to 49 years old	45.4%
Total number of units (households)	1,161
Total number of blocks	11

2. Sample Selection and Sample Size

For this particular study, a purposive sampling technique will be conducted wherein particular groups of people will be characteristically represented according to these profiles: age groups, type of occupation, and presence of children.

Age	Occupation	Presence of Children
Young Adult (16-29)	Unemployed	Children (Yes)
Adult (30- 49)	PMETS (White Collar)	w/out Children (No)
Elderly (50 & above)	Skilled Work (Blue Collar)	

The logical reason to select the samples purposively is the necessity to hear from certain group of people in the community of their needs/wants and be able to customize a program or activity that will attract them to come out and take part in community. Basically, the study would include 54 residents with the combined profile characteristics to come up with representations of all target respondents. Below are the possible combinations of the target respondents:

Combinations	No. of Samples
1. Elderly - Unemployed - with Children	3
2. Elderly - PMETS - with Children	3
3. Elderly - BW - with Children	3
4. Adult - Unemployed - with Children	3
5. Adult - PMETS - with Children	3
6. Adult - BW - with Children	3
7. Young Adult - Unemployed - with Children	3
8. Young Adult - PMETS - with Children	3
9. Young Adult - BW - with Children	3
10. Elderly - Unemployed - without Children	3
11. Elderly - PMETS - without Children	3
12. Elderly - BW - without Children	3
13. Adult - Unemployed - without Children	3
14. Adult - PMETS - without Children	3
15. Adult - BW - without Children	3
16. Young Adult - Unemployed - without Children	3
17. Young Adult - PMETS - without Children	3
18. Young Adult - BW - without Children	3
Total Respondents	54

With the help of the volunteers and with the existing data information from the People's Association, the respondents will be purposively selected.

3. Tools/Methods

There are different ways of obtaining information for the needs assessment. The methods could include experimentation, readings, listening, observation, interview, letter, telephone call, questionnaire, research on the internet and focus group. For this needs assessment study, a face-to-face interview during the home visits will be conducted with the aid of a questionnaire guide.

4. Key Items for the Guided Questionnaire

The indicators for the key data items will be based on fostering community spirit, changing mind set, neighborliness, sense of pride, and taking initiatives in the community.

General Profile	In-depth Sensing
Age	Social Involvement (Frequency)
Gender	Reason why/ why not?
Occupation	Relationship/Communication
Presence of Children (How many)	Reason why/why not
Hobbies	Daily routine
Years of residency (period of stay)	Concerns/issues
	Activities (what kind of)
	Response to their issues

B. Collecting and Handling Information

Pre-interview:

The selected volunteers will be familiarized with the interview contents and the process of the interview through the mock interview.

During Interview:

The following guideline for the interview will be informed to the interviewers so that they will be able to conduct their interview successfully in the professional manner.

Step1: Greet the interviewee in a friendly manner. Avoid too much small talk and maintain a professional image.

Step2: Explain the precise purpose of the interview. What do you want to find out? Let the interviewee know that his or her input will be valued.

Step3: Ask your questions. Use open questions (who, what, when, why, where, how), and try to avoid yes/no answers. Listen and show you understand. Then follow up with secondary questions. Give the interviewee time to answer. Cover one topic at a time; try not to ‘hop about’. Empathize – do not judge or be seen to take sides.

Step4: Sum up the interview to check your understanding of facts, opinions and circumstances.

Step5: Thank the interviewee for his or her co-operation.

Step6: Double checking the quality and quantity of your findings

Post interview:

After the reporting and gathering of relevant insights is done, the residents will then be classified into active, middle and passive groups depending on the result of the needs assessment.

Classifications of People/Residents after the Interview:

1. Active (maybe already in-place)
2. Middle Level (so-so)
3. Passive (don't care)

The idea is then for the active and middle levels to take action for the rest (passive) to take part in the community planning & activities. From these groups, we can then customize actions/programs based from the needs of the residents. Our target citizens will be the active and the middle level. However, if the passive are willing to join we will also welcome them. This result will then need to be combined with the existing data from the People's Association in order to get the concrete interpretation to minimize the discrepancies. The result of the interview will also be kept as the data for the evaluation stage of the project.

C. Reporting & Gathering of Relevant Insights

- Crosscheck with objectives
- Evaluating findings
- Prioritizing findings
- Checking findings

STAGE 3: ENCOURAGING THE MAJORITY

This stage will be organized based on the collected data and analysis of the stage 2, need assessment, in order to engage them in the community. It is very important to make them have the sense of familiarity and comfort before they will open up and building relationship.

It is quite uncertain on the number of people to work with and what sort of events or activities we will use to encourage them. However, the prototype might probably give us some ideas to get a better picture of the planned action. It is divided into two categories: communicative activities and mass events.

The communicative activities will empower the children by making them as the connectors to

knock on their neighbours doors on the festivals and the birthdays to break the ice among the residents.

The mass events as such include the competitions, sports and carnivals. It is important to notice that an ice breaking game will be introduced at the beginning of each activity. Moreover, a few popular communication mediums will be introduced as the mean to communicate the information to the target people.

Facebook: the Facebook fan page will be created for the residents to interact and access to information of the community

Kairanban: activity information and registration kit to share information about community activities and for residents to pass it on to their neighbours after they have read the information and indicate their attendance.

Personalized letters: the children will also involve to distributing the letters in hands to the target citizens who might not be able to have access to the facebook and other information tools.

Posting messages in common space: In addition to the above means of communication, another traditional option which perhaps still work to post the messages in the common spaces like the announcement boards, community common space like stair walls, etc.

STAGE 4: EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

At the end of the program, an evaluation of the success and effectiveness of the customized activities will be conducted to identify the gaps and to further improve the methods. We would like to somehow see the following results: increasingly reached target audience and increasingly engaged target. If we reach the target results or not, there is a need to know people's feedback on the community programs – their views, their suggestions, and their feelings towards the community activities. Hence, the need to do the evaluation is essential as well.

Objective of the evaluation/assessment:

- To measure the effectiveness of the program implementation

- To identify the gaps of the program implementation
- To see for future improvement of the program

What to evaluate?

Community Spirit - Positive (Good) / Negative (Bad)

- a. Participation Rate
- b. Interaction (Whether Active or Not)
- c. Initiative (Output/Contribution to Community Planning)
- d. People's sense of pride
- e. Behaviors towards neighborliness
- f. Tipping points on taking initiative on neighborhood

How to evaluate?

- Sampling method: Random Sampling
- Data collection method: questionnaire/survey

PROJECT TIMELINE, ACTORS AND BUDGET

Activities	Actors	Duration (Months)	Cost
1. Empower Volunteers	SBT	1	\$300
1.1 Briefing-Orientation on Project			
1.2 Training/s and Mock Interview			
2. Needs Assessment	SBT & V	5	\$1,700
2.1 Preparation and Planning			
2.2 Collecting and Handling Information			
2.3 Reporting & Gathering of Relevant Insights			
3. Encourage Majority	SBT & V	12	
3.1 Preparation and Planning			
3.2 Identification of Subgroups			
3.2 Connecting People			
3.3 Mechanisms/Programs			
4. Evaluation/Assessment	SBT & V	3	
4.1 Why?			
4.2 What?			
4.3 How?			
TOTAL		21	\$2,000

* *SBT* - Super Breakthrough

V - Volunteers

POST SCRIPT

Lessons Learned through the Group Study

Big Challenges in the Group Study:

1. Different opinions, different perspectives for the Project
2. Language barriers
3. Too broad thinking
4. Limited time for discussion
5. Not enough detailed instruction were given
6. Misunderstanding between group members
7. Conflicts occurred

How to Overcome the Challenges

1. Settle down the conflict and try for resolution
2. Proceed the GS by Unity and Solidarity
3. Respect every ideas, opinions of every participants
4. Giving the chance to quiet and left behind group members to speak out
5. Keeping the project on the right track by using facilitation skills
6. Have mutual understanding
7. Set the time and agenda before the group study
8. Have frequent break time during group study
9. Support the facilitator by all group members

Lessons Learned through the Group Study

1. Conflict resolution
2. Respect diversity
3. Facilitation skills
4. Time management
5. Right usage for maximize the capacity
6. Presentation skills
7. Discussion skills

CONCLUSION

The key fundamental of the sustainable community design is a strong and well-connected community with local people coming together to take action to create an ideal living experience that they can take pride in and care for. Connecting Hearts project aims to help foster stronger community spirit in Tampines West, through four important stages: **Empowering volunteers to conduct needs assessment to find out their sense of pride, behavior towards neighbourliness, and what is the tipping point for them to take initiative for their community, encouraging the majority and evaluating the project.**

The first two stages of the project will be empowering the existing active residents who are already involved in the community to gather insights of the needs of the residents and determine what will trigger them to participate and take initiative to do something collectively for the community. In the third stage, with better understanding of the profile of the residents and their needs, we will be able to facilitate physical interaction among the neighbours through various platforms such as social media, community information kit, personalized letters, messages posted on common spaces and children as connectors to break the ice among neighbours with festive greetings. The last stage will be conducting an evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the project. The ideal outcome is to see a stronger and well connected community where the local residents could come together and develop their own sustainable community design.

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Thank you very much.



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