Children's SOCIETY
Caring for the Future

A Guide to Youth Drop-In Centres

Reflections from Research and Practice

Developed by:
Author: Chee Thow Wei Liat (Assistant Director)
Editor: Lin Xiaoling (Deputy Director)
Layout and design: Belinda Tan (Visual Communications Designer)

Content

Preface

In 2018, Singapore Children's Society was planning to set up its fourth youth drop-in centre. A team of social service professionals was tasked to look into this. When the team met up for their first discussion, these questions came to mind:

- Was there a need for a youth drop-in centre within this community? If so, what kind of services should we provide?
- What kind of interior design would facilitate the kind of services we would like to provide?
- How do we design programmes that are grounded in social work principles and outcomes, yet are appealing to youths who might come with expectations of fun, autonomy and other reasons we do not immediately understand?
- Should we create programmes using a one-size-fits-all approach? If not, how do we decide what kind of intervention is suited to a youth's needs?
- With tailored interventions, how do we then evaluate our services and programmes when beneficiaries are receiving different interventions?

We then embarked on a needs assessment in order to establish community touch points and build programmes that can suit the needs of our youths. The Positive Youth Development Framework provided us with a set of outcomes that these programmes should work towards, and a set of principles to guide how these programmes should be run. Next, mindful that our youths have different needs and strengths, intentional efforts at rapport building and assessment helped us to tailor interventions for each youth.

Youths with no presenting issues are empowered to co-create developmental programmes that are useful and appealing. Youths with identified issues, such as mental health or conflict with the law, can be helped early so as to prevent these issues from escalating. However, the implementation of this approach could vary in form depending on the ecosystem that the centre operates in. Support systems could be better as compared to another and this would affect the types of programmes, as well as how they are carried out, in different youth centres.

Singapore Children's Society currently runs five community-based drop-in centres around the island, as well as 11 school-based drop-in centres. We had previously launched a guide for Youth Drop-In Centres (Singapore Children's Society, 2011) as a resource for practitioners in the field. This present guide aims to build on the previous edition by tapping on our experience in the setting up of drop-in centres in Chai Chee (VOX) and Radin Mas (The FORT) in 2015 and 2018 respectively.

This guide comprises sections on the various aspects of work involved in running our youth centres and school-based drop in centres. Each section seeks to present in detail the challenges we experienced, and the reflections and research that we have found to be relevant in tackling these challenges. Our recommendations are summarised at the end of each chapter for easy reading. When read as a whole, this guide outlines our service model.

Finally, it is our wish that this new guide can continue to provide helpful and practical tips for social workers looking to build new centres to serve our youths.

Community Needs Assessment

Hearing from Community Stakeholders

Before setting up a new centre, the first thing we did was to find out whether there was a need for a youth drop-in centre in the community. Hence, we spoke to a wide range of stakeholders. They included Family Service Centres, Schools, Social Service Offices, Police and more.

Having worked closely with the community for long periods of time, these stakeholders were able to offer unique insights into the community's assets and needs. Taking reference from Simons (1999), our team planned the stakeholder meetings in the following manner:

1. Define the purpose
2. Establish a timeline
3. Identify participants and set up meetings
4. Generate the questions
5. Select the facilitator/ notes taker
6. Conduct meetings
7. Interpret and report results

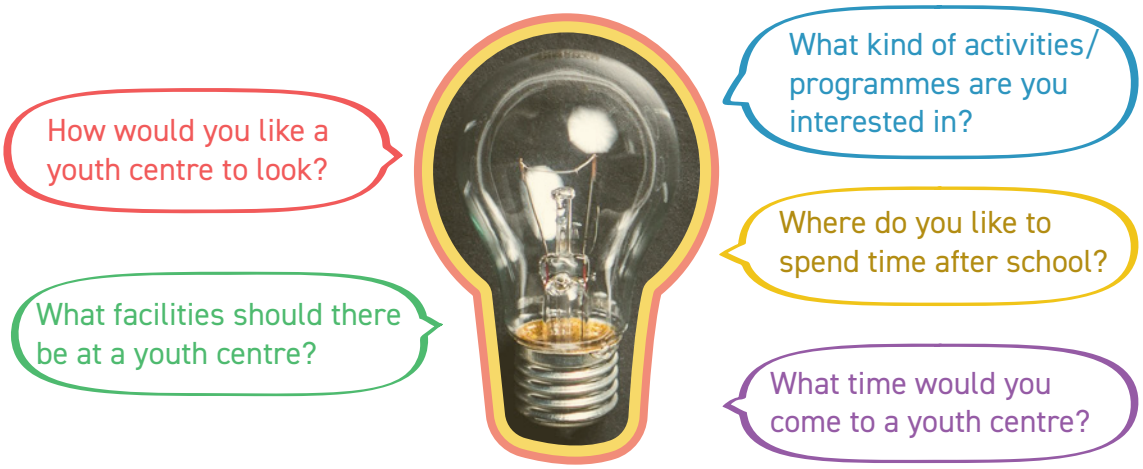
To find out whether there is a need for a Youth Centre in the community, we asked the following questions:

1. What are the existing services/programmes that your agency provides to youths?
2. What are some of the youth related issues that you have observed in your work?
3. If we set up a youth centre, how would you recommend for the centre to be run?

With their inputs, we were able to identify the potential gaps that we should try to plug with our programmes. An illustration of the analysis that we conducted is provided in Annex A.

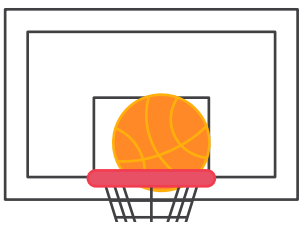
Hearing from the Youths

Besides speaking to the key stakeholders in the community, we also wanted to consult the youths who live, study or hang out in the community. Getting their inputs would help to better shape the centre's design and programmes to be appealing. Essentially, we planned to get their inputs on the following:



For the survey, our experience suggests that it will be helpful to keep the questions close-ended and to provide as many options as possible as youths were often not keen to elaborate on their preferences without being prompted. These options were based on our workers' sensing after interacting with our youths.

In order to reach as many youths as possible to have a good representation of the views of the youths in the community, we worked closely with the schools to implement the survey.



Besides working with the schools, our workers also found it helpful to survey youths at basketball courts, void decks and other hotspots frequented by youths. Hence, a survey was designed in consultation with colleagues from our research team. The survey is attached in Annex B for reference.

Consolidating Responses from Stakeholders

The data collected was extremely useful in guiding the design of our centre's programmes. This process was also a good way to publicise and create awareness about our upcoming centre with the youth community. This data was also fed to the selected architects to guide their design of our space. Annex C outlines how some of these data was consolidated across the sample while Annex D shows how some of the data was further broken down for insights into differences that could be found across age, gender, race and academic streams.

Box Story: The creation of VOX, a youth drop-in centre in Chai Chee

Design of programmes that suits the needs of the community

- Annex A shows that while there were already some programmes for youths provided in the community, there could be more interest-based programmes and activities that would appeal to the youths.

Design of programmes that appeals to target group

- Although 40% of the entire sample chose soccer as a preferred sport in Annex D, 53% of male youths chose soccer compared to just 26% of female youths. Other activities should be considered if the centre is trying to reach out to more female youths.

Design of a space that appeals to the youths

- Annex C shows that a café facade was preferred and provides insights into the kind of equipment to procure prior to set-up.
- It also illustrates a great diversity in youth interests, suggesting the need for a centre design with movable parts that can cater to different interest groups.

Generating publicity and interest

- The data collection process was a good way to generate awareness of the centre via both stakeholder and youth engagement.

Needs Assessment: An Ongoing Process

From experience, we know that youths' interests are constantly evolving. While a needs assessment could obviously pick out useful trends prior to the setting up of a centre, the ecosystem in which the centre operates in is also constantly shifting.

At a more macro level, new policies or the introduction and exit of support systems could change the outlook of the community. At a micro level, our youths and their families are constantly developing in their own unique ways too.

After the centre is set up, a smaller scale needs assessment should be an ongoing process to ensure that our services remain relevant for our clients.

Recommendations

1. Plan and execute a needs assessment prior to setting up a youth centre.
2. Engage relevant community partners to understand issues, resources and other insights.
3. Engage youths in the community to find out about their needs and preferences.
4. Consolidate and use findings when designing the centre's look and layout, as well as its programmes.
5. Make needs assessment an ongoing process to ensure that the services remain relevant for the community.

Annex A: Hearing from Community Stakeholders - An Illustration

1. **Existing Service Provision**
   We mapped out the various types of programmes provided by youths in the community to avoid duplication of efforts to serve the youths.

Existing services/ programmes provided for youths	Extent of provision
Casework and Counselling	3 FSCs operating in the community
Activities (e.g. fishing, cycling)	1 youth agency 1 FSC
Talks and workshops	1 youth agency 1 Neighbourhood Police Centre
Mentoring	1 youth agency 1 Neighbourhood Police Centre
Rehabilitative programmes for youths (e.g. school absenteeism and minor offences)	2 youth agencies

Key takeaway:
Each agency typically provided programmes for youths with a specific need using a fixed medium of the agency's choice. When a youth's needs or interest shift, the youth must approach another agency with a programme that suits him/ her. Hence, VOX aspired to provide a range of programmes so that a youth does not have to move around different agencies when his or her needs and interests shift.

2. Concerns about Youth Behaviours

We understood from the community stakeholders about the range of issues and behaviours that they are particularly concerned about so that we can develop programmes to target these concerns.

Examples:

Issues/ Concerns	Observations
Noise/ attention seeking behaviour	2 schools and the Neighbourhood Police Centre expressed their concerns about youths loitering at void decks possibly because they do not have a conducive environment at home.
Experimentation with drugs	3 schools and a FSC were concerned that loitering could lead to negative influence and perpetuate substance abuse behaviours amongst the youths.
Gangs-related issues	1 school and a FSC were concerned that youths loitering at void decks could fall prey to gangs looking to recruit youth members.

Key takeaway:

Given the diversity of concerns, there was an apparent need for a mechanism that can suss out each youth's unique strengths and needs prior to intervening. This brought about the introduction of client assessment in the drop-in space and the eventual adoption of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool.

3. Recommendations from Stakeholders

Types of activities/ programmes	Rationale
Drop-in space for youths to hang out after school	2 FSCs and a Neighbourhood Police Centre felt it was important to create a drop-in space that is warm and inviting so that youths will want to hang out there after school instead of loitering around the common areas.
Youth initiated projects	1 school and 2 FSCs said that interest-based activities have been well-received by youths in the past. It would be even better if the youths can be given the opportunity to initiate projects that they are interested in.
Linking youths with part-time employment opportunities and career counselling	1 FSC felt that this would help youths from low-income families improve their family's financial situation and be motivated to focus on long-term goals.

Key takeaway:
These recommendations helped to shape the programme design at VOX. A platform was created so that youths could tap on the centre's budget to initiate interest groups that they were passionate about. Besides working with a bistro to bring employment opportunities to youths, an in-house programme called VOX café was eventually created to help youths pick up work-related skills and attitudes via a pseudo work environment within the centre.

Annex B

Hello! Singapore Children's Society is setting up a youth centre at Blk 44 Chai Chee Street. We want to hear from you! This survey will be important for us to design facilities and programmes that best cater to youths like you. Please put a tick in the box beside the option that best represents what you feel. You can tick more than a box for every question.

Demographics

Age: ☐ 10-12YO ☐ 13-14YO ☐ 15-16YO ☐ 17-18YO ☐ >18YO

Race: ☐ Chinese ☐ Malay ☐ Indian ☐ Others: _____

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Address: Street Name E.g. Bedok North Ave 3 _____

School: _____

1. How would you like a youth centre to look?

☐ Like a cafe ☐ Like a dance/music studio ☐ Like a library ☐ Like an art studio

☐ Others: _____

2. What facilities should there be at a youth centre?

☐ Computers/laptops ☐ Gym equipment ☐ Game consoles ☐ Stage/sound equipment

☐ Pool table ☐ Table soccer ☐ Sports equipment ☐ Food/drinks ☐ Storybooks

☐ Band instruments (drums, keyboard, guitars) ☐ Others: _____

3. What kind of sports are you interested in?

☐ Soccer ☐ Basketball ☐ Tchoukball ☐ Floorball ☐ Volleyball ☐ Netball

☐ Rock climbing ☐ Skateboarding ☐ Stunt bike ☐ Cycling ☐ Bodybuilding ☐ Running

☐ Muay Thai ☐ Kickboxing ☐ Others: _____

4. What kind of arts related activities below are you interested in?

☐ Drumming/Percussion ☐ Guitar ☐ Band jamming ☐ Hip Hop ☐ Break dancing

☐ Singing ☐ Art and Craft ☐ Graffiti ☐ Others: _____

5. Which of the activities/programmes below are you interested in?

☐ Pedicure/Manicure ☐ Career guidance/planning ☐ Counselling ☐ Supervised studying

☐ Outdoor trekking ☐ Yoga/pilates ☐ Gaming ☐ Language lessons (Korean, Japanese etc)

☐ Furniture design with recycled materials ☐ Movie screenings ☐ Board/card games

☐ Part-time jobs ☐ Others: _____

6. Where do you like to spend time after school?

☐ Cafes ☐ Shopping centers ☐ Soccer/basketball courts ☐ LAN shops/arcades ☐ Home

☐ School ☐ Void decks ☐ Fast food restaurants ☐ Skate parks ☐ Parks ☐ Part time jobs

☐ Others: _____

7. What time will you come to a youth centre?

☐ 9am - 12pm ☐ 2pm - 6pm ☐ 7pm - 10pm ☐ 10pm - 1am ☐ I don't think I will go to the centre

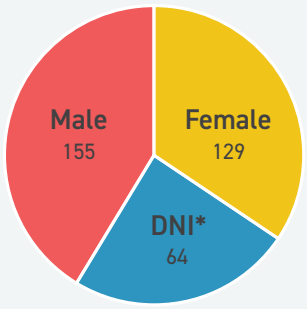
Reason: _____

Annex C

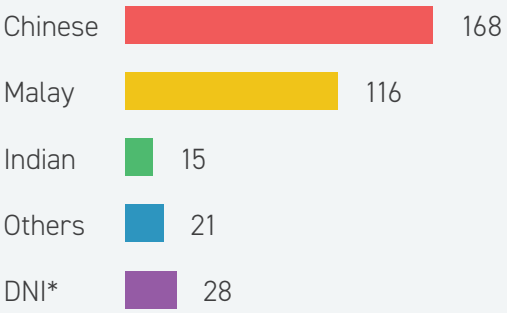
Sample Breakdown (N = 348)

Demographics

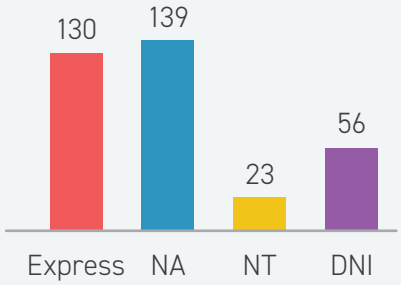
Gender



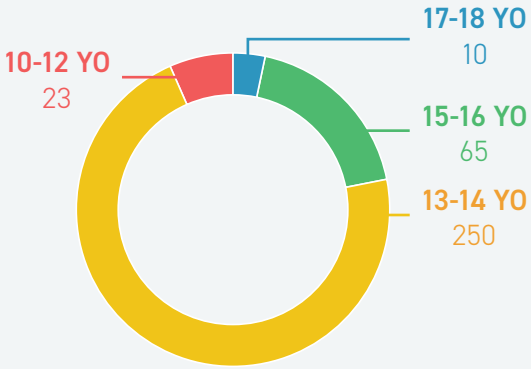
Race



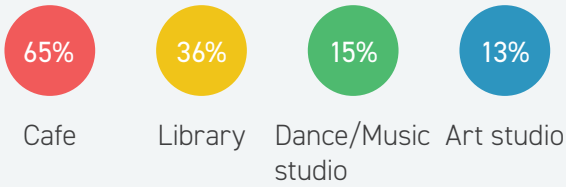
Academic stream



Age



How would you like a youth centre to look?

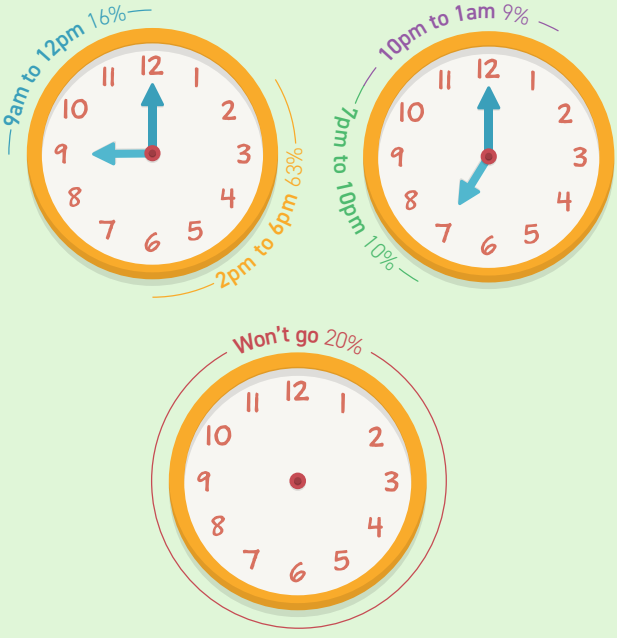


*Did not indicate

What facilities should there be at a youth centre?

78% Computers	76% Food and drinks	57% Sports equipment
57% Game consoles	49% Gym equipment	43% Band equipment
38% Pool table	36% Board/card games	33% Stage/sound equipment
32% Table soccer	23% Books	

What time will you come to a youth centre?



Annex D

Subgroup		% of subgroup												
		Soccer	Tchoukball	Volleyball	Rock Climbing	Short Bike	Body Building	Muay Thai	Basketball	Floorball	Netball	Skateboarding	Cycling	Running	Kickboxing
ALL (N =348)		40%	12%	19%	32%	11%	18%	16%	43%	33%	26%	24%	53%	29%	18%
Gender	Male (N=155)	53%	11%	15%	28%	15%	24%	21%	45%	30%	15%	24%	49%	28%	21%
	Female (N =129)	26%	13%	24%	40%	6%	9%	9%	45%	42%	45%	29%	64%	31%	12%
Race	Chinese (N=168)	27%	13%	23%	33%	12%	15%	13%	53%	30%	27%	27%	55%	36%	17%
	Malay (N =116)	57%	12%	13%	36%	14%	22%	18%	31%	38%	27%	24%	52%	22%	22%
	Indian (N=15)	47%	0%	20%	27%	0%	20%	13%	47%	20%	33%	20%	60%	27%	7%
	Others (N=21)	92%	19%	19%	33%	10%	19%	38%	38%	52%	29%	33%	52%	33%	33%
Age	10-12YO (N=23)	35%	9%	17%	39%	13%	9%	4%	52%	30%	26%	22%	65%	35%	13%
	13-14YO (N=250)	39%	15%	22%	35%	11%	16%	14%	47%	38%	31%	26%	56%	32%	17%
	15-16YO (N=65)	46%	3%	9%	20%	11%	25%	18%	32%	15%	12%	20%	42%	22%	20%
	17-18YO (N=10)	50%	0%	0%	30%	20%	40%	40%	10%	10%	10%	20%	40%	20%	40%
Educational stream	Express (N=130)	40%	16%	32%	38%	12%	15%	15%	51%	43%	38%	29%	55%	32%	15%
	NA (N =139)	40%	12%	14%	32%	12%	17%	17%	41%	26%	22%	24%	55%	29%	20%
	NT (N =23)	52%	0%	4%	9%	4%	17%	17%	43%	22%	0%	13%	39%	26%	13%

Framework Selection

Do We Need a Framework?

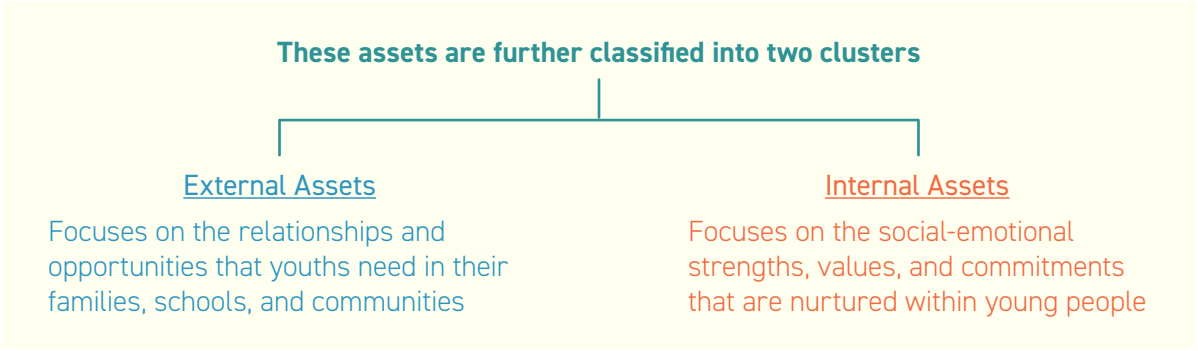
After completing our needs assessment, the next question was whether we needed a framework to underpin our programmes and interventions. What outcomes should our programmes target? Are these outcomes and trajectories evidence-based? What principles should guide us in the way we interact with our youths and design our programmes?

While we can always fall back on the Singapore Association of Social Work Code of Professional Ethics (SASW, 2017) and the Ethical Principles Screen (Dolgoff, Loewenberg, & Harrington, 2005), are these sufficient given the diverse disciplines of youth workers in Singapore? If not, what frameworks can supplement these to give us a better understanding of how to work with the youths?

Beyond a clear set of outcomes and principles, does the framework offer any insight into evaluation? Is there a tool available in the literature that is evidence-based yet cost efficient? This section seeks to outline some of the existing frameworks that could be helpful in running a youth centre.

The Developmental Assets Framework

One of the most researched frameworks on youth work is arguably the Developmental Assets (DA) Framework by Search Institute. The framework has identified 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed.

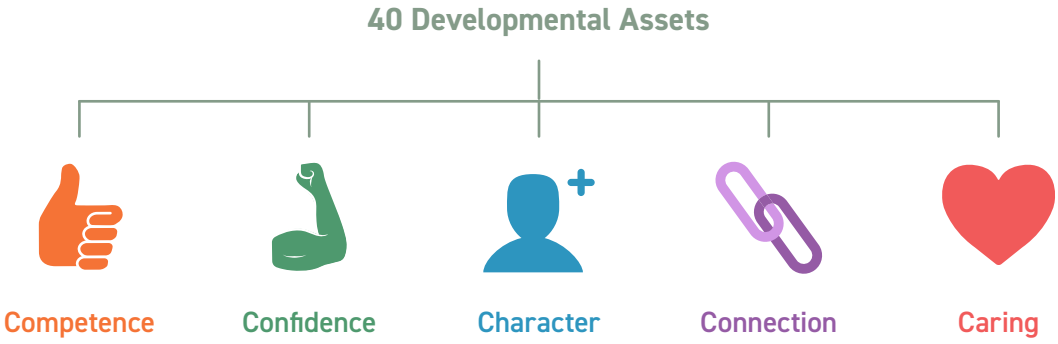


Research on these 40 assets has found that youths reporting higher amounts of these assets performed better on a huge variety of outcomes. Youth with higher developemental asset scores had lower rates of substance abuse, violence and depression, as well as higher rates of school attendance, physical health and delayed gratification (Stevens & Wilkerson, 2010). In fact, Scales & Leffert (1999) found that these findings remained significant even after controlling for confounding factors like socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Together, this body of research clearly articulates that a youth centre's programmes should aim to cultivate developmental assets in the short run such that an accumulation of these assets can lead to positive long-term outcomes.

In terms of evaluation, the Developmental Assets Profile created by Search Institute is available. Besides being developed from a strong body of evidence, this tool has been widely used and researched (Dubois, et al., 2011). While this tool has been found to be robust empirically, one other factor for consideration is its cost of implementation. Charges for the usage of the tool and data analysis are available on Search Institute's website.

Lerner's PYD Framework

Lerner's Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework builds on research from the DA Framework, grouping the 40 developmental assets into five clusters of outcomes called the 5Cs, namely Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection and Caring (Jelicic et al., 2007; Phelps et al., 2009).



Similar to the DA framework, the PYD framework also hypothesises that youths who have more of these 5Cs were more likely to contribute positively to their families and communities. Youths who have less of the 5Cs would be more likely to develop personal, social and behavioural risks (Lerner, 2004).

While similar in prescribed outcomes, what sets the PYD and DA frameworks apart is that the PYD framework also stipulates a set of principles that practitioners should follow (Hamilton, 2004). These principles are summarised by Dotterweich (2015) in her PYD manual:

1. Focus on strengths and positive outcomes
   Take a strengths-based rather than deficit-based approach

2. Youth voice and engagement
   See youths as partners in decision-making

3. Strategies that involve all youths
   Support and engage all youths rather than just the high-risk or gifted ones

4. Community involvement and collaboration
   Collaborate to promote organisational/ community change

5. Long-term commitment
   Provide ongoing, developmentally appropriate support

With regard to evaluation, a wide range of tools are available in the literature. In a recent review by Olenik, et al. (2015), 47 different tools were being reviewed based on issues like conceptual relevance, validity, reliability, user-friendliness, cost, and availability (the full review is available for download on www.usaid.gov).

Five tools were eventually shortlisted for use by USAID. Of these, we found the PYD tool by Lerner to be quite useful. The full version of the tool with 80 items was originally created by Richard Lerner and later shortened by Geldhof, et al. (2014). This tool and its scoring key are available for use with permission from Richard Lerner at no cost. The shorter versions, PYD Short Form and PYD Very Short Form, have 17 and 34 items respectively.

ACT! SG Framework

The ACT! SG Framework is adapted to the context of at-risk youth programmes in Singapore. Developed in accordance with the Boston After School and Beyond "Achieve-Connect-Thrive" framework, this framework has identified 13 core skills that youth programmes should pursue as outcomes. These core skills are further divided into the three domains: Achieve, Connect and Thrive.

In this framework, it is hypothesised that mastery of these three domains of skills is needed for the youth to attain success in school and life (NCSS & CYGO, 2018). Although the framework does not articulate a series of principles that practitioners should adhere to, it is derived from positive youth development practice and encourages practitioners to take a strength-based and person-centered approach.

Besides spelling out a set of potential programme outcomes, this framework also offers the ACT! SG Tool which can be utilised for programme evaluation. It is available in both short (39 items) and full form (75 items). This tool can also be complemented with additional questions from the ACT! SG (Sports) Tool and the ACT! SG (Arts) Tool if your programme has a sport or art component to it. These evaluation tools, their analysis template and the framework's user guide are all available for download without cost via the following website:

https://www.msf.gov.sg/about-MSF/our-people/Divisions-at-MSF/Social-Development-and-Support/Documents/ACT-SG/ACT-SG-Framework-and-Tools-User-Guide.pdf

Recommendations

1. Research and identify relevant frameworks that articulate clear outcomes and principles that can guide your practice.

2. Research and identify relevant evaluation tools that measure the outcomes outlined in the frameworks you are exploring.

3. Select a framework and evaluation tool after considering their research, cost and feasibility of implementation.

4. Use selected framework and tool to guide your programme design and set evaluation mechanisms in place.

Our Service Model

Potential Service Models

In a review of Street Outreach for at-risk youths in Singapore, Ng (2015) lists four distinct service models for youth work, namely youth outreach, case management, drop-in centre and befriending/mentoring. He breaks down the features that differentiate these four models in figure 1 below.

	Youth outreach	Case management	Drop-in centre	Befriending and mentoring
Client selection	Targeted by outreach workers	Varied referral	Self-selected clients	Varied referral
Service objectives	Focused, e.g. behavioural prevention, school/ work engagement	Focused, e.g. to develop resilience, mobilise resources	Broad, e.g. to provide safe space for social activities	Broad, e.g. to build life skills and confidence
Service setting	Non-agency settings with community integration	Agency based, with community links	Agency based	Non-agency settings
Service model	Explicit, flexible, and sustained intervention by professionals through in situ encounters	Planned intervention at both client and system levels by professionals through scheduled sessions	Unstructured leisure activities or recreational classes that may be supervised by professionals	Support, guidance, and advice by peers or other adults through loosely structured encounters
Formal service contract and termination	No	Yes	No	Yes

Fig 1

Dilemmas on the Ground

While the table above neatly classifies youth services into four different models, Ng (2015) notes that variations could exist amongst individual services. Our experience suggests that there is indeed a need to deviate from the abovementioned drop-in centre model, as adhering to it could present various dilemmas to our practitioners.

For example, having overly broad objectives make the research, design and evaluation of programmes challenging. A broad outcome, such as creating a safe space for social activities, also begs the question of whether there is a need to deploy professionals. Such workers are costly and could easily burn out if they

cannot make sense of their own work from a social work perspective. Even when the outcomes are scoped, unstructured activities often do not provide a clear intervention trajectory to reach these outcomes. Finally, while structured programmes or mentoring might meet the developmental needs of some youths, they could be insufficient for youths with rehabilitative needs whereby the issues are often systemic and require casework. The drop-in centre then finds itself in a dilemma of having to decide whether to intervene, if it does not have capacity or capabilities in casework and counselling or case management. On the other hand, social service practitioners (SSPs) in the centre would often have built strong rapport with such youths, putting them in a prime position to intervene. When such cases are referred out entirely, agencies on the receiving end, like FSCs, would have to build rapport from scratch. This is counterproductive for all parties involved.

Beyond our experience, there is also research that supports the need for a service model that is dynamic and flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of different youths. For example, while the longitudinal 4-H study by Lerner, et al. (2012) found that the 1030 participants who had attended 4-H programmes built using the PYD framework did better in a wide range of outcomes than controls as a group, Lewin-Bizan, et al., (2010) analysed the same set of data and found a diverse range of complex trajectories when mapping these outcomes across age.

Essentially, the research suggests that youths varied greatly in how they responded to the 4H programmes over time in terms of depression, positive youth development, levels of community contribution and risk behaviours. These findings led the researchers to advocate strongly for a need to understand individual and ecological factors when planning youth programmes, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.

A Blended Model

Combining research and the experience of our workers on the ground, Singapore Children's Society has created a blended intervention model that involves various phases. Details of the different phases will be elaborated in subsequent chapters. These phases are illustrated below:

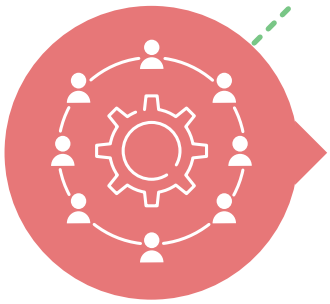
Relationship Building —
The interior design of the drop-in space is driven by the needs analysis of youths and community partners.

The strategic use of space and placement of engagement tools in these spaces facilitate relationship building prior to the assessment.

Outreach —
The intentional use of trending hashtags, posts and live feed creates a "fun" branding and increases visibility amongst the youth community. This approach complements and amplifies the physical modes of outreach like school talks, booths, etc.

Assessment —
Opportunistic assessment is done during conversations to avoid being too intrusive. Structured decision-making is guided by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Singapore tool.

Assessment recordings are stored in client's electronic case file for holistic intervention planning.



Developmental Group Work —
A strengths-based approach to group work based on the Positive Youth Development Framework gives us the opportunity to promote positive value and traits in our youths, and reduce the likelihood of them participating in risky behaviours.

Youths are encouraged to initiate group activities to increase participation rate, while the workers attached to the groups facilitate incidental learning. Structured group work with session plans are subsequently introduced with the consent of the youths.

Casework and Counselling —
For youths with casework and counselling needs, the worker coordinates a case conference with different helping systems for master action planning.

Agencies can then leverage on one another's expertise and existing client-agency rapport for an efficient and systemic intervention.

Recommendations

1. Make assessment a part of your service model to find out your youths' functioning in different systems.

2. Design intervention plans based on each youth's needs and strengths after assessment.

3. Use developmental programmes to facilitate positive youth development in youths with no presenting issues. These programmes could employ incidental learning, structured group work, or a mixture of both.

4. For youths with presenting needs, work with partners like the Family Service Centres, School Counsellors, etc to co-create case plans for coordinated and targeted casework intervention.

5. As the needs and strengths of youths may change over time, developmental work and casework could converge and complement each other in some cases.

Client Assessment

Tools that Guide Assessment

As explained in the previous section, youths with varying levels of risk and needs come to a drop-in centre. Hence, it is important to conduct assessment before deciding which intervention is suitable for a particular youth. Having said that, we initially found it difficult to articulate what exactly our workers would be assessing when they enter the drop-in space to interact with the youths. Without a clear idea of what to look out for, how can our social service professionals effectively seek out opportunities in their interactions with our youths to ask the right questions and formulate their assessment?

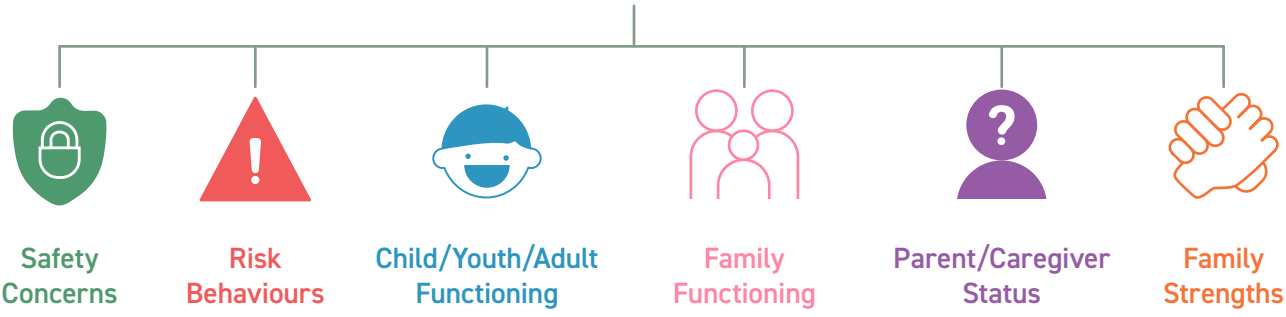
To tackle this issue, we needed a tool to guide our assessment. Primed with the tool's domains and concepts, the social service professional can then intentionally engineer their conversations to retrieve the information that they are looking for. However, our experience suggests that there are unique characteristics of our setting that prevent the administration of the entire tool. Our social service professionals might not be able to gather information in all the necessary domains due to a lack of rapport or opportunity. Sessions could also be impromptu and fluctuate in length, depending on the youth's willingness to carry on with the conversation. Although there are challenges in using assessment tools, we have found the principles and concepts laid out in the tool to be immensely helpful in guiding our workers in their assessment as well as communicating with partners like FSC workers when we are working on a common case. Such tools are also helpful in tracking the progress of a case.

The following section outlines some of the tools that we have found helpful in assessment. A brief transcript of a conversation between a youth and our social service professional is also used to illustrate how assessment could be done in a drop-in centre setting.

Family and Adult Support Tool

One helpful tool is the Family and Adult Support Tool (FAST). FAST is a multi-purpose information integration tool that is designed based on communication theory. It is also designed to be the output of an assessment process.

Using FAST as a guide, workers can be primed to look out for information in the following domains

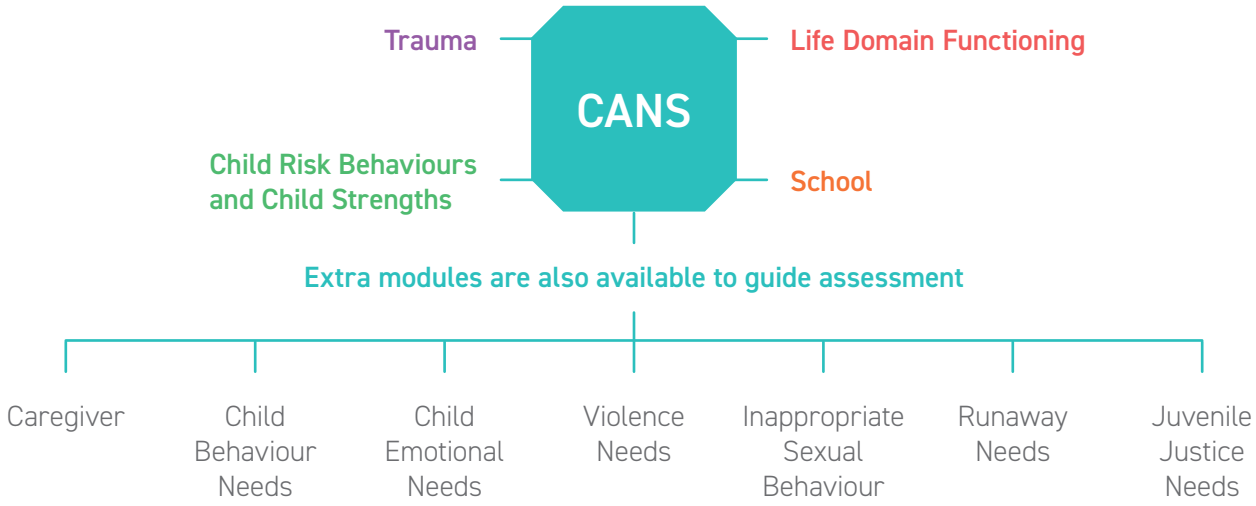


Other than these main domains, supplementary items are also available to assess the family's interaction with systems like medical agencies, criminal justice, etc. These domains originated from the FAST developed by Lyons (2009). This tool was later adapted by social work practitioners for use in Singapore (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2015).

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)

Besides FAST, another tool that could lend structure to assessment is the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool. Originally developed by Lyons (2004), CANS was also adapted for use in Singapore (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2015).

While CANS and FAST share many similarities, the domains of assessment differ, with CANS having an additional focus on children and youth.



Moving forward, CANS has been selected as the tool to be used by all our community and school-based drop in centres given its additional focus on children and youth over FAST.

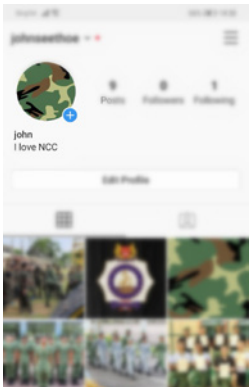
Using Tools in Practice

Our workers initially found it challenging to conduct assessment in a drop-in setting. This is because unlike youths who are mandated to attend counselling, our clients are voluntary and they do not always respond well to scheduled sessions. Our agenda as social service professionals in a drop-in setting is assessment and eventually intervention, but this agenda does not always align with our youths'. This sentiment is in line with what the literature says, that youths rarely initiate or willingly seek intervention as they are passive in connecting themselves to services (Bouvier, 2007).

In the following sections, we will use the FAST tool as an example to illustrate further on how assessment can be done in two different spaces in the drop-in centre setting.

Assessment in Cyberspace

Social media has helped to bridge the distance between us and the youths, providing much information needed for our assessment in the process. While youths are often reluctant to share information in person without existing rapport, they are highly receptive to having our social service professionals follow their social media accounts, which are rich spaces for mining assessment data. The following three images depict different social media posts that offer insights into assessment.



The image on the left is an Instagram profile.

In terms of education functioning, the youth seems to be healthily engaged in his school's co-curricular activity. He also seems to have developed a strong peer support network within this activity, suggesting that he is doing well in social functioning.

This youth does not appear to be high in priority for the centre to engage and work with.

The second image is an insta-story post from another youth's account. While the image itself does not offer much, the caption reveals information about parent/caregiver's physical/behavioural health.

Besides checking in with the family to explore linking them up with support systems in the community, the caption also suggests that there could be work that is needed in terms of the youth's mental well-being to help him deal with the grief and adjustment after his mother's diagnosis.

Often, a post might not provide enough information and requires further probing. The last image on the left captures an insta-message correspondence between our social service professional and a youth after seeing her insta-story post of self-harm marks on her arm.

Given that self-harm has high co-morbidity with suicide and mental health issues, our social service professional quickly reached out to this youth to assess any potential risks in these domains. In the correspondence, the youth revealed that she has depression, though we are unsure if it has been clinically diagnosed.

Given the rich assessment data available in the social media space, we have rostered workers to monitor youths' posts on a regular basis. As youths post an overwhelming amount of information on the social media space, it is highly time consuming to sift out relevant assessment data. It remains for the centre to explore different ways of improving productivity of SSPs conducting assessment in the cyber space.

Assessment in Drop-in Space

The other space that allows social service professionals to do assessment is the drop-in space. In a participatory action research paper on youth outreach by Youth-Infinity, Ibrahim (2018) suggested that a few factors were important in initial engagement. They are:

Good rapport building

Dressing in a casual manner

Ability to speak in youths' ethnic language

Demonstrating interest in the youths

Ending the conversation when youths start to reveal disinterest

While this was a study on outreach, these findings resonated with our experience when doing assessment with youths who were relatively new to us. However, one other factor that we found to be helpful was the ability to be opportunistic. The assessment must be done in the flow of the conversation for youths to feel comfortable enough to share.

We also felt that it was important to do the assessment bit by bit rather than pushing the pace at the expense of the youth's comfort, which could deter further sharing of information. Hence, it was essential to have the concepts of the chosen assessment tool at the back of our minds before interacting with our youths so that the assessment does not feel contrived. Having personal knowledge about the youth through social media was helpful in starting a conversation.

The transcript below outlines a conversation between one of our social service professionals (SW) and youth (Y) to illustrate how this process is like.

Y: Hi Cher*.
SW: Hi! How was your day?
Y: Boring.
SW: I see. (use social media as an entry point for assessment) Your insta story this morning didn't seem bored. In fact you seemed excited!
Y: Which post?
SW: The one that said "Yay! Two more weeks!"
Y: Oh! That one!
SW: What's happening in two weeks' time?
Y: Oh! I am going overseas with my parents!
SW: *(Assess domain - financial resources)* Which country are you all going? Going for how long?
Y: We are going to South Korea for a week!
SW: *(Assess domain – employment functioning)* Woah! A week means 5 days away from work! So your mum and dad both took leave from work?
Y: Yup.
SW: I see. So both your parents work huh. What do they work as?
Y: I am not too sure. But both of them come home at about 7+pm.
SW: *(Assess domain – Parent/Caregiver supervision and discipline)* Oh! So there is no one at home before 7+pm?
Y: No la. My grandmother is at home now. But I don't like her. She always doesn't let me do what I want.
SW: Oh! When she says no is it a firm no? Or you can negotiate?
Y: No means no. Sigh. Anyway, I need to go off to meet my friend at Bedok Mall.
SW: Ok. Have fun and be safe! Bye!
Y: Bye!

*short form for "teacher"

Documentation and Analysis of Case Notes

Given the huge number of youths we interact with, our workers have expressed difficulty in remembering everything our youths share with us during drop-in. Our workers were also more likely to remember information that suggested a need for immediate attention, relative to information that are useful but do not warrant immediate attention. Besides hindering relationship building with the youths, this was especially problematic when our workers had to generate social reports for referrals or develop a case plan.

To overcome this issue, an electronic case management system was developed so that workers could systematically record and track what they have found out about the youths thus far. The system was also designed such that the case notes could be more easily coded if they were to be exported for practice research. Entries were also organised and saved in accordance to the different domains in the selected assessment tool. Alternatively, an entire session can be recorded in a single entry followed by domain specific entries that document the assessment gathered from the session. While the former method facilitates potential coding in future via categorisation, the latter potentially reduces information loss by recording session information chronologically.

In terms of work flow, new youths are assigned to caseworkers on a monthly basis to ensure that workers know which youths are under their purview. A new youth will also go through a registration process where an individual electronic case file is created for him or her. With these in place, our workers will then systematically engage youths under their charge on afternoons during drop-in and proceed to log in their case notes the following morning. Workers could also log in case notes after looking through the youths' social media feed. Snapshots of our case management system that is based on concepts from CANS have been attached in Annex E to provide a glimpse into how an electronic case management system and case file could look like if your centre endeavours to create one.

Recommendations

1. Select a tool that provides clear domains and principles of assessment so that workers are mindful in terms of assessing different domains of functioning and the way that assessment is being done.

2. Roster workers to do assessment via youths' social media feed using a company/office social media account if manpower allows. The frequency of monitoring can vary depending on workers' bandwidth.

3. When interacting with youths, conduct assessment in a non-intrusive manner by probing in the flow of conversation when the opportunity arises.

4. Develop an electronic case management system so that workers can systematically update and track the progress of a youth whose needs and strengths could be constantly evolving. As these needs and strengths will shift over time, developmental work and casework could converge and complement each other in some cases.

Annex E

Date	Time Started	Time Ended	Recorded by	Case Notes & Assessment	Action Taken	Follow up plan	CANS Domain	CANS Item	Rating
19/6/2018	1700	1740	WL	C came to VOX and reported that NM had hit him on the head 14 times with her fist in the course of their conflict. According to C, similar incidents have happened throughout his life at a high frequency and intensity. However, no visible bruising observed on the back of C's head during session.	Informed FSC worker in charge of family immediately to assess need to escalate matter to CPSC or CPS. FSC worker said that he is aware and working with family on these issues and is still assessing whether there is a need to escalate matter to CPS.	Monitor for signs of abuse if case is not escalated to CPS and C continues to drop in.	Trauma	Physical Abuse	1
19/6/2018	1700	1740	WL	C reported that he had reacted to NM's verbal abuse by threatening suicide. C said he stood on kitchen window grille of his house on 8th floor as he wanted to end his life. C eventually got frightened and did not follow through with suicide attempt.	CW proceeded to de-escalate C's suicide ideation. During discussion, C spoke about the computer games that he has yet to play and countries he has yet to visit. At the end of discussion, C concluded that he no longer wants to commit suicide and would like to live till age of 70. CW proceeded with contracting for safety. CW ended session with C at this point as FSCCW had arrived and requested to speak to CW immediately.	Take direction from FSCCW for further action.	Child Risk Behaviors	suicide risk	3
19/6/2018	1740	1800	WL	CW had quick session with FSCCW. CW described what was covered in session with C. FSCCW shared that his assessment for C was that suicide risk is high. NM also has suicidal thoughts and told FSCCW that she did not attempt to stop C when he attempted suicide prior to session. NM is also assessed as a potential trigger for C to attempt suicide again.	No action required on VOX's end. FSCCW proceeded to bring family to IMH after sesson with CW	Get updates from CW from FSCCW at case discussion	Child Risk Behaviors	suicide risk	3
20/6/2018	1000	1130	WL	FSCCW shared that besides being physically aggressive towards NM, C will also smash objects at home whenever he is angry.	CW checked in with FSCCW to ascertain whether C's physical aggression could make him unsafe at VOX. FSCCW shared that he is in touch with FTSC and that C's physical aggression is context specific and happens only at home when NM and his brother is around. This assessment gelled well with what was observed at VOX so far in the past 2 days that C had dropped in.	Continue to allow C to drop in but get workers to monitor C closely for a week to ensure safety of youths and SWs at VOX. SWs will help to mediate and de-escalate potential conflicts and proceed to isolate C if he is assessed to threaten safety of others.	Child behavioral/emotional needs	Anger control	2
20/6/2018	1000	1130	WL	C rationalizes his physically violent reactions to anger by claiming that he has no control over himself whenever he is angry.	CW explored finding safe objects for C to displace his anger as an interim measure while working on emotion regulation as a potential strategy. FSCCW shared that he thinks that for C's age, it would be better to go top down straightaway and impress upon C to take charge of his anger and behavior. CW told FSCCW that VOX's stance is that FSCCW will be the primary caseworker and that VOX will support FSCCW's case plan. Hence, both sides agreed to ride with FSCCW's plan with FSCCW driving intervention while VOX reinforces whatever FSCCW has taught C.	Reinforce FSCCW's intervention plan.	Child behavioral/emotional needs	Anger control	2
20/6/2018	1000	1130	WL	FSCCW said that after visit to IMH, none of the family members were admitted. FSCCW said that suicide risk has de-escalated but risk is still high as the family is always in conflict and that suicide risk could re-escalate at any point. FSCCW said he will be working with both NM and NF on their communication and conflict management skills to lower frequency and intensity of conflict. FSCCW asked for CW's help to monitor C and inform him immediately should risk re-escalate.	CW agreed to help monitor C's intentions to commit suicide and reinforce safety contract with C.	Check in with C when he drops in at VOX to assess whether there are still intentions of suicide. Reinforce safety contract in a week's time. Alert FSCCW immediately should suicide risk re-escalate.	Child Risk Behaviors	suicide risk	3

Groupwork

Aligning Programmes with Youth Interests

With a framework in place, the principles and outcomes prescribed by the framework will naturally guide the programme design. Using the PYD framework for example, Lerner, et al. (2012) found that the 1030 participants who had attended 4-H programmes that were built using the PYD framework's principles and outcomes had better educational and health outcomes than the control group in an eight-year longitudinal study.

These participants were also more likely to stay away from drugs and delay sexual intercourse. Interestingly, although these programmes were designed using a similar set of outcomes and principles, they vary greatly in form, including robotics, agriculture, fitness, emotional wellness, community action and expressive arts, just to name a few (https://4-h.org/parents/programs-at-a-glance/).

With the huge diversity in form, a few questions came to mind. Is there a need for so many different programmes? How do we design and run these programmes such that they would still meet the social work outcomes we seek to achieve?

Our experience has suggested that programme diversity is needed. Working with voluntary clients, one of the initial challenges that we often face is the resistance to participate in programmes and later, the problem of attrition. We sense that this is often due to a mismatch in agenda between our social service professionals and the youths.

While we would like to focus on therapeutic activities that delve deep into issues or cultivate different life skills, our youths might prefer to just engage in recreational activities. In a study exploring the roles of local youth centres, REACH Community Services (2018) pointed out the need for youth centre programmes to be constantly updated with evolving youth interests so that they can attract and motivate youths to participate.

Unstructured Groupwork

In combination, these research findings showed the need to marry both agendas such that programmes have the capacity to meet their social work outcomes and retain their appeal to the youths by being fun and informal. Research on informal and incidental learning suggested that this could be a potential way to tackle this. In a review of research on studies on informal and incidental learning, Marsick and Volpe (1999) concluded that incidental learning can be characterised as such:

1. It is integrated with daily routines.
2. It is triggered by an internal or external jolt.
3. It is not highly conscious.
4. It is haphazard and influenced by chance.
5. It is an inductive process of reflection and action.
6. It is linked to learning of others.

Besides these six characteristics, Cseh, at al. (1999) also used this research to formulate a model of informal and incidental learning. This model is reflected in figure 2. The model suggests that learning begins with an internal or external trigger that challenges current ways of thinking. These triggers will then interact with the learner's worldview as he or she makes sense of the encounter. This interpretation is then further refined when the learner integrates it with the context that could involve people or factors like social or cultural norms.

Finally, the model postulates that this interpretation would result in choices and actions by the learner and creates a frame which the learner will bring into his new encounter, going back full circle to the beginning of the cycle.

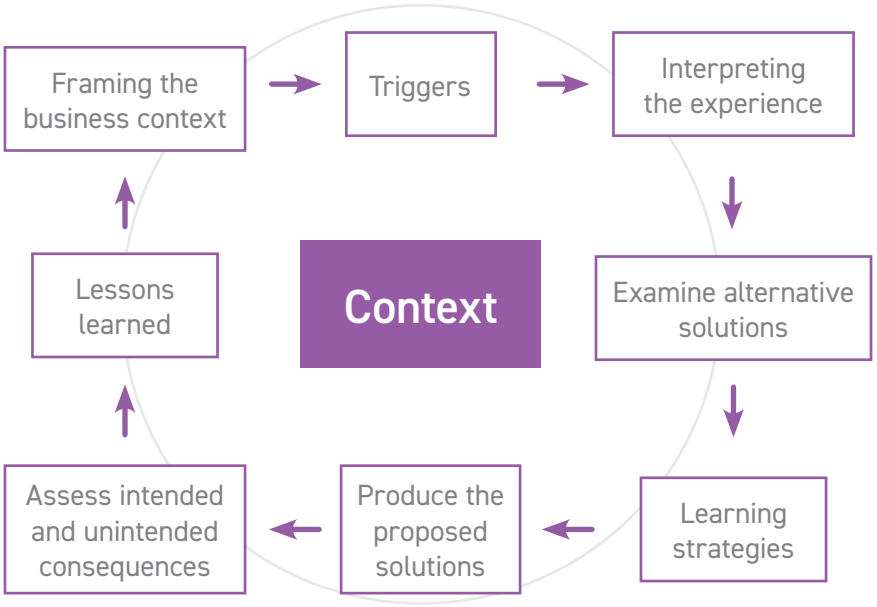


Fig 2

We have found that it is helpful to co-create programmes with youths and select activities that are appealing. Once the youths are on board, the attached social service professional can then co-plan and execute these activities with them. In the process of planning, recruitment of participants and execution, the attached social service professional can then find teachable moments to facilitate incidental learning.

Applying Cseh, at al.'s (1999) model above, our workers will seek to identify these triggers in the flow of the activity and interact with the youths to facilitate their process of interpreting the trigger events. When appropriate, debrief sessions could also be conducted post activity to reinforce the lessons learnt and linkages to the relevant outcomes in the centre's selected framework. Like the 4H programmes, these programmes could vary in forms, as they are just mediums to create the context and trigger events necessary to facilitate incidental learning.

Structured Groupwork

As noted by Marsick and Volpe (1999), informal learning happens in a haphazard manner, making the measurement of such learning and the development of such programmes difficult (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Without a clear theory of change, the amount of success in using these programmes to achieve the outcomes designated by the framework is also often left to chance.

We realised that it is helpful in practice to introduce structured groupwork when the timing is right. Using Tuckman's (1965) stages of development, we felt it is best done during the norming phase. In this phase, the team responds well to facilitation and is largely in a state of consensus and unity, making it an optimal juncture to negotiate with the youths. Once buy-in has been secured from the youths,

structured groupwork can be implemented with minimal attrition or discontent, provided that the groupwork is designed in a fun and appealing manner.

The gymnastics group at one of our centres provides a good case study to outline this process. A group of youths initially came forward to start a gymnastics interest group when they heard that there was a Corporate Social Responsibility request by a professional gymnastics coach. After negotiating among the group and with the external coach, the group scheduled their gymnastics sessions on Friday evenings from 8-10pm. The group will, however, arrive at around 7pm to chat or engage in simple bonding activities planned by the social service professional.

The social service professional would also shadow the youths for their gymnastics session to ensure safety and facilitate incidental learning in the process of their gymnastics training. Once the group went past the forming and storming stages, where it has sorted itself out and members gain one another's trust, the attached social service professional negotiated for structured groupwork to be conducted on a fortnightly basis. They eventually agreed that six sessions of structured groupwork will be conducted, using games to explore the topics of friendship and parent-child relationship.

As the social service professional became familiar with the gymnastics training, confidence and positive self-image were also identified as likely outcomes that can be achieved via incidental learning in the unstructured segment. Finally, the decision to run six sessions over a course of three months was also based on the general lifespan for the different groups that our workers have worked with.

With the youths' agreement, the social service professional went on to research and draft a brief logic model, which illustrates the links between the programme's resources, activities and expected outcomes, and design session plans for the groupwork. The logic model and a sample session plan have been attached in Annex F and G respectively for reference.

Recommendations

1. Empower youths to co-create groupwork programmes with workers so that the mediums used are appealing to the youths.

2. For unstructured groupwork, actively seek opportunities of incidental learning to work towards or reinforce outcomes outlined in the selected framework.

3. When worker-youth rapport is assessed to be strong, propose and secure buy-in from the youths to do structured groupwork so that the opportunities to work on selected outcomes can increase.

4. After securing buy-in from youths to include structured groupwork, research, develop and implement session plans to strengthen the efficacy of groupwork.

5. Programmes can include either or both unstructured and structured components. Use a logic model to outline clear desired outcomes and intervention pathways to increase the success rate of the intervention.

Inputs	Participation	Outputs: Activities	Outcomes: Positive Youth Development: Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
			Confidence		
Manpower: Social Service Professional Coaches **Materials:** Groupwork materials, food **Research** **Budget** **Time** **Venue:** VOX & Alpha Gym	Regular weekly attendance 80% participation in a month	Weekly gymnastics sessions conducted by Alpha Gym	Youths learn the importance of constant self-examination and setting mastery goals in helping them to achieve continued progress in gymnastics	Youths check in with peers and coaches to evaluate their own progress in gymnastics Youths actively set goals for themselves to become better in gymnastics	Youths have a sense of mastery and future: being aware of one's progress in life and having expectation of continued progress in the future. (PYD Resource Manual)
			Connection		
		Group meetings to collect inputs on gymnastics programme and check-in with youths on well-being. Casework and Counselling for youths with presenting issues identified.	Report is established between client and social service professional through listening and understanding youths' issues	Youths identify social service professional as a trusted adult in the community (VOX) and share problems with social service professional during non-gymnastics sessions	Form positive and trusting relationships with family, friends and colleagues
		Structured Groupwork Session 1: The four basic styles of communication	Understand the four different communication styles and how it affects conversations	Youth is able and not afraid to express his or her feelings/thoughts when talking to others	
		Session 2: Assertiveness in communication	Understand the importance of assertiveness in communication		
		Session 3: Perceptual bias	Understand how the percecption process (selection, organisation, interpretation) might lead to barriers in communication	Youths give full attention to who they are communicating with to prevent communication breakdown	
		Session 4: Identifying perceptual bias Session 5: Perceptual bias - Confusing facts with inference	Youths identify schemas they have about their parents and understand that these schemas could be inaccurate sometimes	Youths can communicate with parents with minimal disruptions from their schemas and biases	
		Session 6: Build a trusting friendship	Understand how the three domains of trust (Cognitive/Affective, Behaviour-dependent and Behaviour-enacting) will affect the formation of a trusting friendship	Youth engage in behaviours that nurture and promote trusting friendships	

Annex G

Session 3: Preceptual bias: Confusing fact with inference
Duration: 1 hour
Group size: 10 - 12 participants

Session Objectives:
- Demonstrate how schemas will affect communicaton patterns
- Demonstrate a perception check using the process of Observation, Clarifying and Feedback during communication to minmise assumptions and inaccurate information

Logistics preparation before session:
- Print two A4-size pictures (Refer to appendix)
- Disposable plastic cups and drinks
- Mahjong paper and coloured markers

No.	Activity	Logistics

1	Activity 1: Describe the Picture (15 mins)
	
	Activity Objectives:
	• Recall and discuss how individuals' schemas are formed based on past interactions with parents.
	• Demonstrate how these schemas will affect communication patterns.
	
	Activity (5 mins):
	• Participants to look at pictures and write down:
	  • What do you think happened in these pictures?
	• Ask participants:
	  • What are some personal experiences with your parents that made you interpret these pictures this way?
	
	Debrief (10 mins):
	• Share with participants that what they wrote are possibilities but may or may not be true as there is information lacking
	• Illustrate this with the following example:
	  • You came home at 9pm and your parents are asleep. You felt that they did not wait for you because they did not miss you. However, your parents could have slept early due to fatigue after a long day at work or because they have an important meeting the next morning at 8am.
	
	• As a prelude to the next activity, ask the group:
	  • What are some ways to find out from your parents if you think they are not caring enough?
	  • Use responses to illustrate the concepts:
	  • **Observation** (You did not wait for me to come home last night.)
	  • **Clarifying** (Why did you sleep early last night?)
	  • **Feedback** (Can you wait for me to come home tomorrow night?)
		• Print pictures *(refer to appendix)*
		
		• Put up two pictures on a board or flipchart
		
		• Prepare mahjong papers and markers

1	Activity 2: Drink up, Flip it (5 mins) Activity Objectives: • Energise participants Activity: • Recap the different ways of communication covered in previous sessions. • Split the participants into two groups. • After the grouping, participants will queue to drink the water and flip the cup. • The fastest group to finish all the water and flip the cups will win Round 1. **Filp cup game:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpi1aVZxucI	• Set up a table with 10 plastic cups in a line filled with soft drinks/water • Prepare Scenario and Response bubble cards *(refer to appendix)* • Markers/Pens

3 Activity 3: Scenario Cards (25 mins)

Activity Objectives:

- Demonstrate how using Observations, Clarifying and Feedback will help to strengthen the communication process with their parents.

Activity (15 mins):

- Tell participants that they will be given scenarios to role play *(refer to appendix for scenarios)* and that they have to demonstrate in their role play the stages of observation, perception, clarification and feedback.
- Illustrate activity with example below:
- Split the participants into 2 or 3 groups depending on group size.
- Assign the scenario to the groups and begin the activity.
- One facilitator is attached to each group.

Scenario Card	Bubbles
Your mother tends to check your handphone when you are showering.	Observations: Mom, I notice you often check my handphone. Clarifying: I'm just wondering if I had done something wrong lately? Feedback: Is there anything I can do to make you less worried?

Debrief (10 mins):

- Share with the participants that:
  - The activity teaches us how to communicate with our parents using the process of OCF
  - Our perception using schemas formed from past experiences with our parents may or may not be accurate
  - A good communication pattern will minimise perceptual bias and strengthen relationship in the long run

Appendix

Images for Activity 1

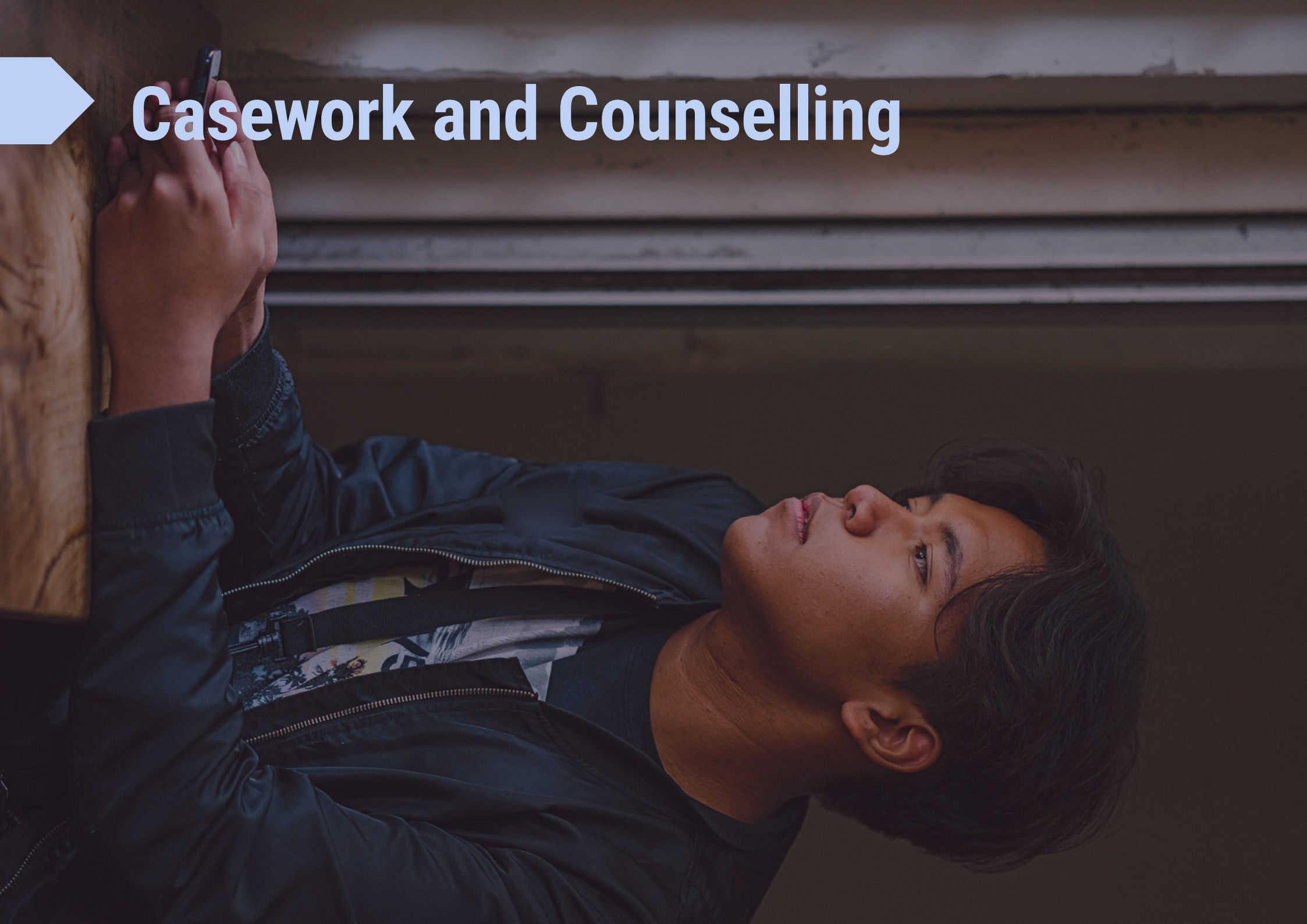
Created by Bearfotos - Freepik.com

Created by Prostooleh - Freepik.com

Scenario Cards for Activity 3

Scenario Card	Responses Card
You have finished your homework and are about to watch YouTube. Your mom just came home and started scolding you for not doing your homework.	**Observations:** I notice that you will always scold me when you first come home. **Clarifying:** Why are you always so angry when you reach home? Did something happen at work? **Feedback:** Perhaps it would be good if you can take a look at my homework first before you scold me?
You waited for your dad to fetch you after school to go and buy your birthday present. But he came an hour late without informing you and you waited in school for him. Your dad is not someone who will always be late for appointment.	**Observations:** Dad, you are late. **Clarifying:** You are usually punctual. What happened to you? **Feedback:** I was worried. It will be good if you can drop me a Whatsapp message or call if you know you are going to be late. But thanks for the present :)
You and your friend have decided to go to Sentosa this coming Saturday but you realised that you are short of money. You asked your mother for an extra $10 but she refused. This is not the first time your mom has refused to give you extra money.	**Observations:** Mom, I realised that recently when I ask for more money, you always reject me. **Clarifying:** Are you having difficulty with my pocket money? **Feedback:** Perhaps you can share with me your reasons to help me understand better?

Casework and Counselling



Youth-centric Casework and Counselling

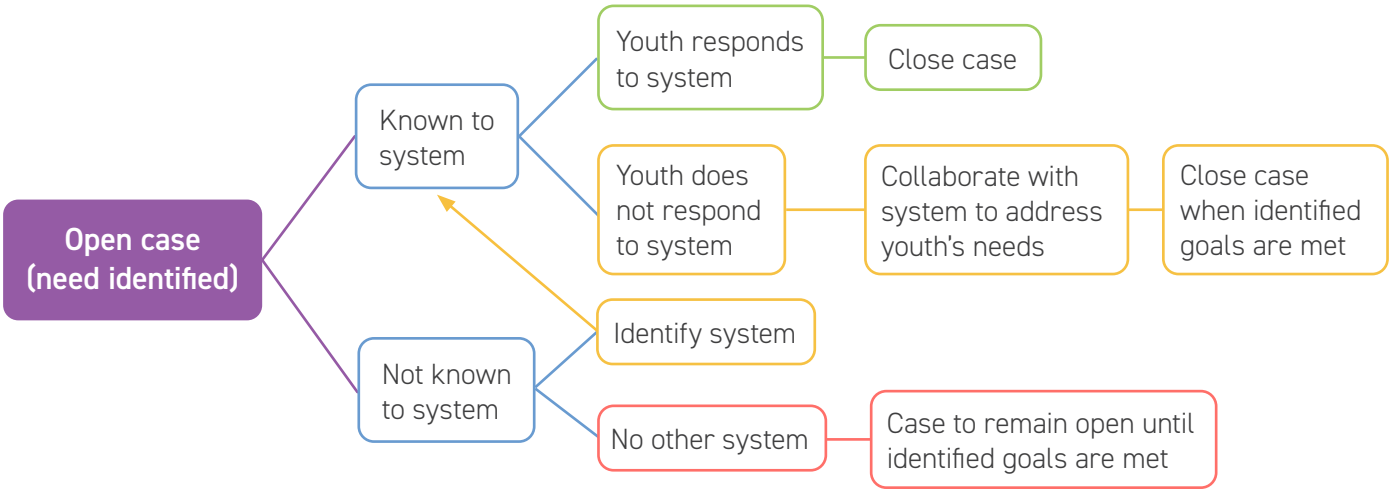


Fig 3

Research points out that youths vary in developmental trajectories due to a variety of factors (Lewin-Bizan, et al., 2010).

We find that for some of our youths, developmental work alone could be insufficient to help them flourish. Often after assessment, these youths are mired in issues that require systemic intervention via casework and counselling.

Research also suggests that a good worker-child helping relationship is a huge influence on the effectiveness of interventions (Marais, et al., 2016). Specifically, the quality of the initial engagement is the key driver for social service professionals and their clients to "move beyond surface or mundane conversations" (Ruch, 2010). Hence, given the existing rapport between our workers and youths, we are primed to leverage on this relationship to quickly intervene. Besides benefitting the youths, this work also broadens the skillset and experience of our workers, making it a worthwhile investment in resources and time.

Having said that, this piece of work is also highly demanding, and this creates a dilemma in terms of resource management. In addition, our setting also limits our interaction with the family system, making it highly time-consuming if our workers must move in to do relationship building from scratch with the family system.

We often find that these systems already have existing working relationship with our partners, so it is more efficient for us to tap on each other's rapport and expertise. It is extremely helpful to identify existing systems working with a family, calling for a case conference, and eventually carving out each other's roles in the case plan before proceeding with intervention. Our present workflow for casework and counselling is attached above for reference (Fig 3).

Recommendations

1. For youths who have been identified to require casework and counselling, probe for other helping systems that are currently active in the youth and family's ecosystem.

2. Coordinate and initiate case conference for different helping systems to meet and come up with a joint case plan.

3. Close case if enough helping systems are already in place and youth is responding well to intervention.

4. For youths who could benefit from casework and counselling from your workers, carve out roles for each other to to intervene efficiently based on the worker-client relationships that are already in place.

Evaluation

The Importance of Evaluation

Programme evaluation is critical to enhance the likelihood of a programme's success. Jacobs' (1988) five-tiered approach to evaluation provides a good summary of how evaluation can help improve a programme's efficacy.

1. Programme Definition - Justify the need for a programme in the community and define it
2. Accountability - Examine if the programme serves those it was intended to in the manner proposed
3. Understanding and Refining - Improve the programme by providing information to programme staff, participants and other stakeholders
4. Progress towards Objectives - Document the programme's effectiveness and short-term outcomes
5. Programme Long Term Outcomes - Demonstrate long term improvements, sustainability, suggest programme models worthy of replication and contribute to professional literature

In summary, evaluation is critical as it provides a mechanism for reflection and ultimately guides the practitioner to improve the programme design. Evaluation findings can also help us explain how our programmes are doing to stakeholders such as schools, other social work agencies, potential donors, etc.

Challenges of Evaluation

Evaluation design in a drop-in centre can be a challenge due to the dynamism of our setting. For example, one way to evaluate the effectiveness of a drop-in centre would be to compare the outcomes of youths who drop in regularly and youths who do not drop in. However, the challenge is that these two groups of youths often have different characteristics. Slesnick, et. al. (2008) rightly pointed out that youths who access drop-in centre services and agree to participate in treatment services could differ in levels of motivation, distress, and history of system involvement from youths who do not access or participate in drop-in centre activities.

We also find that youths could bring with them systemic issues of different forms, with varying levels of severity. In a paper written on evaluation strategies for Toronto drop-in settings for example, Meagher (2008) articulates that outcome measures might not work for drop-ins as programmes with participant-led strategies as their success could often be undermined by external factors that are beyond the control of the drop-in despite good programme delivery. These factors could include differences arising from the family, school or other systems in the youth's environment.

Besides differing client characteristics, the fact that youth organisations typically offer a huge range of activities that are loosely structured and under the guise of an open approach further complicates evaluation design (Mercier, 2000). As highlighted in the previous section on groupwork, mediums used must coincide with the interests of the youths to get their buy-in. Depending on the medium's unique characteristics, the likelihood that moments of incidental learning are precipitated, and the ease of weaving in social work structures would again, vary.

Next, we will attempt to highlight some of the approaches that have been taken to evaluate the work done at our drop-in centres. Besides describing how the approach works, the strengths and weaknesses of each approach will also be discussed.

Centre-as-a-whole Approach

One possible approach towards evaluation is to do outcome evaluation using a centre-as-a-whole approach. In outcome evaluation, we seek to measure programme effects in a target group through the assessment of the progress in outcomes that a programme seeks to achieve (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). In the centre-as-a-whole approach, we attempt to assess whether youths who have gone through interventions at our centre have made progress in the broad outcomes that our drop-in centre is trying to pursue. These interventions can include developmental group work, casework/counselling, or both, depending on the youth's needs.

Figure 4 below illustrates some of the data we have consolidated through one of our centre's evaluation using an adapted version of the Positive Youth Development Very Short Form (PYDVSF) tool by Geldhof, et al. (2014) which measures the five clusters of outcomes outlined by Lerner's PYD framework (refer to previous section on frameworks for more details). In this design, the PYDVSF was first administered on the youths when they register themselves as members (pre-test). The tool was then re-administered six months after their registration (post-test). Results show that the sample scored significantly higher in the caring cluster after six months. On the other hand, more can be done as there is no significant difference in the other clusters of 5Cs.

One of the strengths of this approach is that it allows us to see how the youths engaged in our centre programmes are doing in general across the different areas measured. By comparing pre- and post-test scores from the same participants, individual differences, e.g. diverse backgrounds, between participants will be accounted for. Secondly, individual scores can also be extracted to influence the design of one-on-one intervention should the need arises.

This approach also has its limitations. Firstly, a youth could participate in varying forms of groupwork, casework or both. Secondly, the level of participation in the various programmes could also vary due to their school schedules, caregiving duties, pursuit of employment, etc. These limitations make it difficult to attribute the differences to any programme specifically. Then again, these limitations are largely by design, given that the centre employs a system that places emphasis on providing youth-tailored interventions rather than an one size fits all approach.

Fig 4

Programme Specific Evaluation

Although the previous evaluation design provides some sensing of how the centre is doing as a whole, it is hard to attribute effects to any particular programme, even if we ignore the potential confounds. Hence, another approach that could inform programme development would be to do outcome evaluation on a specific programme. Although the sample size would be smaller using such an evaluation approach, the practitioner can make sense of which programme worked well and which did not. Again, individual scores can also be extracted for the design of one-on-one interventions for youths who need it.

This design has its limitations too. Programme attendance could vary among participants, making it a potential confound. It is often difficult to have a sample that attends only one programme at a centre in reality. Often, youths who drop in will join multiple programmes. While we could remove the scores of participants who attend more than one programme, this would further reduce the sample size and hinder the likelihood of us finding a significant change during analysis.

Besides evaluating outcomes, another helpful evaluation design is process evaluation, which seeks to evaluate whether a programme was implemented in a way that was intended (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Pawson and Tilley (2004) theorised that programme mechanisms and context factors are two other important concepts that can help us to make sense of what happened during programme implementation.

Using the example of a KPOP programme, even though we found a statistically significant difference in outcome scores, it would be difficult to tell which specific aspects of the programme facilitated or inhibited that change. However, a focus group discussion with participants yielded useful inputs in this regard. Specifically, the youths were asked to describe what was useful or not useful in the programme. Some of these inputs were:

1. "... Thankful that [facilitator] put in the effort to come up with the group work... [it is] kind of fun if we pay attention... we don't really talk about these things in school."
2. "We should have physical activities than just sitting down and talk. Some more it is before dance, [we] need to warm up"
3. "Sometimes... [the] topic is feelings... [it is] the same thing again and again... Not sure whether the same thing had a different meaning, or [facilitator] just saying the same thing again and again."
4. "Content are useful for the problems we face in school as there was sharing of information, and we will know how to handle the problem in the future."

Recommendations

1. It is challenging to have a perfectly designed evaluation. However, it is still important to establish evaluation mechanisms when designing programmes as they provide a sensing of how programmes are working. Evaluation also provides data that can help us to fine tune programmes and explain how a programme works to other stakeholders.

2. Use centre-as-a-whole evaluation approach to get sensing of whether interventions are working in general. Individual scores can also be extracted to facilitate one-on-one intervention design.

3. Design and implement programme specific evaluation to get a sensing of whether there are unique programme effects and to ascertain if a programme has worked well.

4. Use process evaluation to gain insights into specific context factors and mechanisms of implementation for programme refinement.

References

References

Bouvier, J. M. (2007). Mobile outreach: *A model for serving at-risk youths.* MA, Royal Roads University. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (MR35415).

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Types Of Evaluation. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/std/Program/pupestd/Types%20of%20Evaluation.pdf

Cseh, M., Watkins, K. E., and Marsick, V. J. "Re-conceptualizing Marsick and Watkins' Model of Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace." In K. P. Kuchinke (ed.), *Proceedings, Academy of Human Resource Development Conference, Volume I* (pp. 349–356), Baton Rouge, LA: Academy of Human Resource Development, 1999.

Dolgoff, R., Loewenberg, F., & Harrington, D. (2005). *Ethical decisions for social work practice (7th ed.).* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole – Thomson Learning.

Dotterweich, J. (2015). *Positive Youth Development 101: A Curriculum for Youth Work Professionals.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University. Retrieved from http://actforyouth.net/resources/pyd/pyd_pyd101curriculum.pdf

Dubois, D., Ji, P., Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. & Yohalem, N. (2011). *From Soft Skills to Hard Data: Measuring Youth Program Outcomes*. Retrieved from http://forumfyi.org/files/soft_skills_hard_data_0.pdf

Geldhof, G. J., Bowers, E. P., Boyd, M. J., Mueller, M., Napolitano, C. M., Schmid, K. L., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2014). The creation and validation of short and very short measures of the five Cs of Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 24* (1), 163-176. doi.org/10.1111/jora.12039

Goudas, M. & Giannoudis, G. (2008). A team-sports-based life-skills program in a physical education context. *Learning and Instruction, 18,* 528-536. doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2007.11.002

Hamilton, S.F., Hamilton, M.A., & Pittman, K. Principles for Youth Development. In S.F. Hamilton & M.A. Hamilton (Eds.) 2004, *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities,* 3-22. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ibrahim, Z. (2018, August 2). *Participatory Action Research (PAR) on the Effect of Youth Outreach on a Youth Drop-in Centre.* Retrieved from https://www.amkfsc.org.sg/publications/category/4-research-papers

Jacobs, F. (1988). The five-tiered approach to evaluation: Context and implementation. In H. Weiss & F. Jacobs (Eds.), *Evaluating family programs* (pp. 37-68). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine deGruyter.

Jelicic, H., Bobek, D.L., Phelps, E., Lerner, R.M. & Lerner, J.V. (2007) Using positive youth development to predict contribution and risk behaviours in early Adolescence: Findings from the first two waves of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *International Journal of Behavioural Development,* 31(3), 263-273. doi.org/10.1177/0165025407076439

Knifsend, C., and S. Graham. 2012. Too much of a good thing? How breadth of extracurricular participation related to school-related affect and academic outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(3): 379–389. doi: 10.1007/s10964-011-9737-4

Lerner, R. M. (2004) *Liberty: Thriving and civic engagement among America's youth.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lerner, R. M. & Lerner, J.V. (2012) *The positive development of youth: Report of the findings from the first eight years of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development.* Boston, MA: Tufts University. Retrieved from https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/4-H-Study-of-Positive-Youth-Development-Full-Report.pdf

Lewin-Bizan, S., Lynch, A. D., Fay, K., Schmid, K., McPherran, C., Lerner, J.V., & Lerner, R. M. (2010). Trajectories of positive and negative behaviours from early- to middle-adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 39*(7), 751-763. doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010--9532-7

Lyons, JS, Weiner, DA, Lyons, MB (2004). Measurement as communication. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool In M. Mariush (Ed.), *The use of psychological testing for treatment planning and outcome assessment* (pp. 461-476) Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Marais, C., & van der Merwe, M. (2016). Relationship building during the initial phase of social work intervention with child clients in a rural area. *Social Work, 52*(2), 145-166. doi.org/10.15270/52-2-498

Marsick, V. J., and Volpe, M. (1999). The nature and need for informal learning. In V. J. Marsick and M. Volpe (eds.), *Informal Learning on the Job, Advances in Developing Human Resources.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett Koehler

Marsick, V., & Watkins, K. (1990). *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Martinek, T. & Hellison, D. (2009). *Youth Leadership in Sport and Physical Education.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan

Meagher, S. (2008). *Measuring Success: Show What We Know.* Toronto, Canada: Toronto Drop-in Network. Retrieved from https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/220693

Mercier, C., Piat, M., Peladeau, N. & Dagenais, C. (2000). An application of theory-driven evaluation to a drop-in youth center. *Evaluation Review, 24*(1), 73-91. doi: 10.1177/0193841X0002400103.

Slesnick, N., Min, JK., Bonomi, A., and Prestopnik, J. (2008). Six- and twelve-month outcomes among homeless youth accessing therapy and case management services through an urban drop-in center. *Health Services Research, 43*(1), Part I. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6773.2007.00755.x

National Council of Social Services and Central Youth Guidance Office (2018). *ACT! SG Framework and Tools: A User Guide.* Retrieved from https://www.msf.gov.sg/

Ng, K.H. (2015). *Moving targets: The practice and evaluation of street outreach for at-risk youths in Singapore.* Retrieved from https://www.msf.gov.sg

Olenik, C., Zdrojewski, N. & Bhattacharya, S. (2015). *Scan and Review of Youth Development Measurement Tools.* Washington, D.C.: USAID.

Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (2004). Realist evaluation. Retrieved from http://www.communitymatters. com.au/RE_chapter.pdf

Pedersen, P., and Thibault, L.(2014). *Contemporary Sport Management.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Phelps, E., Zimmerman, S., Warren, A. A., Jelicic, H., Von Eye, A. & Lerner R. M. (2009) The structure and developmental course of positive youth development (PYD) in early adolescence: Implications for theory and practice. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*(5), 571–584. doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2009.06.003
REACH Community Services Society. (2018). *Project Compass.* Retrieved from https://www.reach.org.sg/youth-service/50

REACH Community Services Society. (2018). *Project Compass*. Retrieved from https://www.reach.org.sg/youth-service/50

Ruch, G. (2010). The contemporary context of relationship-based practice. In: Ruch, G., Turney. D. & Ward. A. (eds). *Relationship-based social work: getting to the heart of practice.* London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.

Scales, P. C., & Leffert, N. (1999) D*evelopmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development (2nd ed.).* Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

Lewin-Bizan, S., Lynch, A. D., Fay, K., Schmid, K., McPherran, C., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2010) Trajectories of positive and negative behaviours from early- to middle-adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 39*(7), 751-763. doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9532-7

Simon, J.S. (1999). *The Fieldstone Alliance Nonprofit Field Guide Series Conducting Successful Focus Groups.* United States: Fieldstone Alliance.

Singapore Children's Society. (2011). *A guide to youth drop-in centres.* Singapore: National Council of Social Service.

Stevens, H., & Wilkerson, K. (2010). The developmental assets and ASCA's national standards: A crosswalk review. *Professional School Counseling, 13*(4), 227-233. doi: 10.5330/PSC.n.2010-13.227.

Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin. 63*(6), 384–399. doi.org/10.1037/h0022100

Woods, R. (2011). *Social Issues in Sport.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Singapore Children's Society

Corporate Office

210 Middle Road #05-03
Singapore 188994
Tel: 6273 2010

www.childrensociety.org.sg

SingaporeChildrenSociety

SgChildrenSoc

SgChildrenSoc

https://t.me/sgchildrensoc

Our Service Centres

Children Outreach @ Children's Society
9 Bishan Place
#05-02 Junction 8 Office Tower
Singapore 579837
Tel: 6358 0911 Fax: 6358 0936

Community Services & Programmes @ Children's Society
Block 529 Bedok North Street 3
#01-570 Singapore 460529
Tel: 6448 6658 Fax: 6448 9896

JYC @ Children's Society
DEN @ JYC
Block 554 Jurong West Street 42
#01-349 Singapore 640554
Tel: 6563 0593

GIG @ JYC
Block 552 Jurong West Street 42
#01-321 Singapore 640552
Tel: 6566 6989 Fax: 6566 6386

RoundBox @ Children's Society
Block 122 Toa Payoh Lorong 2
#01-06 Singapore 310122
Tel: 6259 3735

SSFR @ Children's Society
Block 91 Henderson Road
#01-112 Singapore 150091
Tel: 6253 1124 Fax: 6256 9443

Student Care @ Children's Society
Block 129 Bukit Merah View
#01-174 Singapore 150129
Tel: 6278 7856 Fax: 6278 0191

Student Service @ Children's Society
51 Telok Blangah Crescent
#05-01 Radin Mas Community Club
Singapore 098917
Tel: 6276 5077 Fax: 6276 5075

Sunbeam Place @ Children's Society
28 Hong San Terrace Singapore 688247
Tel: 6462 3477 Fax: 6462 3371

The Fort @ Children's Society
51 Telok Blangah Crescent
#05-01 Radin Mas Community Club
Singapore 098917
Tel: 6276 5077 Fax: 6276 5075

VOX @ Children's Society
Block 44 Chai Chee Street
#01-108 Singapore 461044
Tel: 6443 4139

Yishun Family Service @ Children's Society
Block 107 Yishun Ring Road
#01-233 Singapore 760107
Tel: 6753 7331 Fax: 6753 2697

Youth Service @ Children's Society
Block 91 Henderson Road
#01-112 Singapore 150091
Tel: 6253 1124 Fax: 6256 9443

Our service centres are supported by the Advocacy & Research Department.

Advocacy unit
9 Bishan Place
#05-02 Junction 8 Office Tower
Singapore 579837
Tel: 6358 0911 Fax: 6358 0936

Research unit
51 Telok Blangah Crescent
#05-01 Radin Mas Community Club
Singapore 098917
Tel: 6276 5077 Fax: 6276 5075

Published in December 2020