



AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE OF ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES IN SINGAPORE. A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Children with disabilities grow up and become adults. In Singapore and the rest of the world, there is a lack of research on adults. In 2017, the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) in Singapore, conducted and piloted a study about the Quality of Life for adults with disabilities. It was conducted employing the WHOQOL (World Health Organisation Quality of Health) assessment to better understand the needs of vulnerable adults, including persons with disabilities. In this study, 1,000 persons (adults) with disabilities aged 18 and above were surveyed. It was found in this study that persons with disabilities want to feel enabled and to live their lives as independently as possible. These adults that were surveyed also conveyed that they wanted easier and seamless access to information and pertinent services, including receiving appropriate social support and developing the confidence of participants as active members of society.

INTRODUCTION

“It must be unimaginable that someone with cerebral palsy could be married with two beautiful children, run his own consultancy firm and complete a kayaking expedition around Singapore to raise funds. Indeed, I would have never achieved these milestones if my mother had sent me to an institution when I was born, on the advice of the paediatrician, as there was “nothing much she could do” – that my life wasn’t worth the effort.”

Mr Leo Chen Ian
 Founder and Partner,
 Insight Access Pte Ltd

The above message was a quote from Mr Leo Chen Ian, who believes that if he had lived his life in an institution, he would not have experienced the same fulfilment and quality of life as he is now (included in the community). Thus if this is the scenario in Singapore, where the majority of adults with disabilities are living in institutions or segregated type settings, how can we improve and enhance their quality of life for them? How can we better the standards in these institutions so that the adults living in these institutions may have a better chance of being ‘discharged’ from the institutions so that they will be better prepared to live in the community independently? How can we better and enhance the care aspect for adults with disabilities in Singapore?

GROWING TRENDS IN THE ADULT DISABILITY SECTOR IN SINGAPORE

According to the National Council of Social Services NCSS (2017), the following are growing trends in the disability landscape in Singapore.

- Firstly, persons with disabilities are living longer and have a longer life span. It is imperative that society

prepares and enables them to live independently as they grow older.

- Secondly, the rate and number of persons diagnosed with autism (ASD) are increasing and therefore services to support this group will need to be enhanced and improved.
- Thirdly, as the population starts to age and family size shrinks, elderly caregivers will find it challenging to take care of their adult children and themselves. Thus society’s support for older persons who are in caregiving roles also needs to expand and improve. Therefore services to assist the caregivers and their charges will need to be met across the entity of disabilities.

The points mentioned above, especially the third point about elderly and ageing parents experiencing challenges taking care of their adult children are crucial points to consider. Singapore (society) must hence also plan and strategise policies and services to assist these adults with disabilities to achieve a better quality of life. It is imperative that the goal of such planning and strategies to enhance the lives of adults with disabilities to their fullest potential are met.

3rd ENABLING MASTERPLAN

In line with the government’s initiation and belief in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the 3rd Enabling Masterplan (2017– 2021) was set up. This Masterplan signifies and embodies one more noteworthy step concerning empowering persons with disabilities to achieve their fullest potential. These adults will be accepted as important, integral and contributing members of Singapore’s society. This will blend and synergise with Singapore’s government and



society’s belief that Singapore will strive towards being an inclusive community. The 3rd Enabling Masterplan sets forth a multi-faceted plan to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, support their caregivers and build a community that is more caring and inclusive. It is evident that in this 3rd Enabling Masterplan, the person with disabilities’ well-being is at the centre of all that is being planned and considered.

FACTS CONCERNING THE ADULT DISABILITY SECTOR IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, the National Council of Social Services – NCSS (2017) supports and believes in a person-centred and ecosystem approach towards helping individuals achieve a quality of life. A person-centred approach functions on the

Key Descriptors	
1)	34% of Singaporeans aged 18 to 49 have a disability
2)	49% of individuals with disabilities in Singapore have a moderate to severe disability.
3)	13.3% of Singaporeans aged 50 and above have a disability
4)	30.4% have more than 1 disability type (co-morbidity). For example, Down Syndrome and Autism

It was also noted in this study that persons with disabilities experience a lower quality of life than the general population. It was also interesting to note that the score was even lower for persons with complex needs.

It was noted as well that although persons with disabilities with mild special educational needs (SEN) have a better chance of finding some form of employment or furthering their education, most graduates (18 years and above) from special education schools (SPED) are faced with limited options and opportunities. These would include: staying at home, joining a day activity centre, entering a sheltered workshop or being admitted into an institution (Raghunathan, Balakrishnan, Smith, & Kadir, 2015; Poon & Sidhu, 2017; Wong 2016). Without meaningful engagement, adults with disabilities will typically suffer a deterioration in their physical, mental and emotional health. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals in centres or residing in institutions will also need the right professional care and expertise to assist these adults with disabilities to reach their fullest potential and to prevent or slow down their decline.

CONCLUSION

Institutions or centres need qualified staff and trained staff who are able to work with adults with disabilities. They will be able to better assess and evaluate their clients’ abilities, challenges and needs (Janicki, 2011; Rose & Gallivan, 2019; Zijlmans, Embregts, Gerits, Bosman, & Derksen, 2015.) This will also include the best possible methodologies to help, provide and support these adults across the different life stages in their adulthood via appropriate and suitable training programmes, services and assistive devices to help them achieve the best possible outcomes. It was also noted that when staff are not properly trained or qualified, it can lead to the adults with disabilities’ detriment. One of the key findings is that it can actually aggravate and can cause self-injurious behaviour including meltdowns for these adults (Oliver, Hall,

premise that an individual has the capability to comprehend, communicate, decipher and work through problems and difficulties in life and be able to make wise decisions with regard to overcoming these challenges. This is also the message which lies behind the Social Service Sector Strategic Thrusts (2017-2021). It is part of the study that NCSS took up and it is titled, ‘Understanding the quality of Life of Adults with Disabilities’. This study was published in 2017. This plan also shows a 5-year roadmap for the social service sector.

Below are some facts concerning the adult disability sector in Singapore as depicted in the study by NCSS (2017).

Hales, & Head, 1996; Snow, Langdon, & Reynolds, 2007). It is difficult for non-profit organisations or voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) to stay effective without adequate resources and continuous quality training and development.

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