

Project Ignite 4-27

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Section 1: Overview

1. Area of Concern

Cerebral Palsy is poorly understood amongst Singaporeans. Parents do not consider that their child may have cerebral palsy despite early signs such as gross motor development delay.¹ This can delay diagnosis and early intervention, worsening the impact of cerebral palsy on the child's movement.² Cerebral palsy is a disorder that affects muscle tone, movement and motor skills and can impact the patient's cognitive ability and speech.³

The Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore (CPAS) serves adults and children with cerebral palsy, providing them with services for their developmental needs, dividing up their programmes into different levels accordingly.⁴ The CPAS centre is also a school for cerebral palsy students. Their largest problem is the severe misconceptions of the public towards the condition, which can lead to discrimination. One example they shared with us is people avoiding those with cerebral palsy as they feared it was contagious.

2. Challenges Identified

The lack of awareness and understanding of cerebral palsy is widespread, with few knowing the condition even exists. Furthermore, those with cerebral palsy are stigmatized by society, especially since the condition manifests physically. The discrimination that they face is also apparent when people still generally refer to them as spastic, which has extremely negative connotations.

More importantly, there is a lack of empathy for cerebral palsy patients. According to a study conducted by the Lien Foundation in 2016, which interviewed over 1000 people, more than half of the respondents think that Singaporeans are willing to share public spaces with children with special needs, but not interact with them.⁵ Thus while there is sympathy, Singaporeans are still a long way from being empathetic towards those with special needs.

3. Underlying Problem

¹ "Cerebral Palsy: Myths versus Facts," AsiaOne, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://www.asiaone.com/health/cerebral-palsy-myths-versus-facts>.

² "Early Intervention in Cerebral Palsy," Physiopedia, accessed August 4, 2018, https://www.physio-pedia.com/Early_Intervention_in_Cerebral_Palsy.

³ "Cerebral Palsy," accessed August 4, 2018, <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cerebral-palsy.html>.

⁴ "CPAS," accessed August 4, 2018, <http://cpas.org.sg/>.

⁵ *Lien Foundation*. PDF. Lien Foundation, May 30, 2016.

We believe that with a lack of knowledge, people stick to their pre-conceived misconceptions about the condition. This removes any opportunity for empathy and seeing these people as equals. Thus, awareness and understanding is a key problem. Furthermore, pushing people to move from sympathy to empathy is something that we aim for. This means that people no longer merely acknowledge the issue from an onlooker’s perspective but can step into the shoes of the cerebral palsy patients. This shift ensures that people become more aware of their actions and attitudes towards individuals with physical limitations and treat the clients with the same amount of respect that they would want.

4. Plan of Action

We adopted a three-pronged approach towards solving the identified barriers, categorizing our initiatives into three categories: raising awareness, fundraising and interaction. Our focus was on raising awareness for the condition and providing opportunities for interaction between the CPAS students and our members. Through direct visceral interaction with the cerebral palsy students, participants will be able to gain a better insight into the issue. Furthermore, they will move from their relatively removed and distant position as an onlooker to one that is more actively involved in helping those with cerebral palsy, allowing them to develop empathy for the students. Our initiatives are fully detailed below.

| Initiative | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| Street Sales and Flag Day | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling merchandise by CPAS together with flag-day event. • Held 10 sessions spread throughout the June Holidays at Bishan, Orchard, Yishun and Dhoby Ghaut • Total revenue:\$2 764.70 • On top of activating all of our external organizing team members (51) to come down for at least one session, many students outside of our organizing team volunteered to take part in this activity. • With the wide reach of our flag days, we had participants of all different backgrounds attending our flag days |
| Busking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five sessions of busking held • Core team members present throughout to explain the cause to the public • The money raised from busking is totaled together with Streets Sales and Flag Day |
| Short Episodes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborated with an external film-making team to create short videos which explains the issue of cerebral palsy • Filmed during July |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted interviews with those directly interacting with cerebral palsy clients (caretakers, CPAS employees, the cerebral palsy students) to gain an inside look into their daily struggles • This detailed description allowed viewers to see daily activities from the perspective of these people; they can see that despite the challenges they face, clients are unfazed by their physical limitations and look ahead to their goals in life • Video released on social media |
| Social Media Outreach Campaign | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operated a social media account throughout the project • Posted facts about cerebral palsy on a regular basis • Gathered 843 followers on Instagram • Also used to promote our initiatives |
| Toy Library | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteered to help CPAS operate its toy library, exclusively carried out by core members • Committed for an 8 week period, 3 hours every week • Opportunity to have direct interaction session with the cerebral palsy students • Carried out during July |
| Concert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 August • Organised and carried out concert in order to raise awareness and funds for cerebral palsy • Provided the audience with some understanding and awareness of the issue, as we explained the issue of cerebral palsy to our audience during our concert. • Had approximately 300 audience members, many of whom did not know much about Cerebral Palsy. |

Section 2: Implementation of the Plan

We have successfully completed most of our planned initiatives. We were not able to carry out our inter-CCA interactions as CPAS lacked staff to supervise; and our concert was held on 11 August. The outcomes of each initiative is also recorded in the table.

Section 3: Project Outcomes

1. Accomplishments

We have raised. \$2,764.70 for our beneficiary. Over 60 students participated in our flag day and street sales, not only allowing them to spread the cause to members of the public, but also had a deeper understanding of Cerebral Palsy, empowering them to better engage people with special conditions. We managed to also spread the awareness of Cerebral Palsy in other forms, such as the members of the audience in our concert, as well as the 843 followers that our Instagram page has, many of whom did not know about or knew little about Cerebral Palsy prior to our engagement.

2. Reflections

Initially, we wanted to increase interaction between cerebral palsy clients and the public. However, due to scheduling difficulties on both sides and concern that some of their clients' conditions were too serious, it was unfeasible to have large scale interaction sessions. We thus scaled down our project to ensure quality interaction sessions with cerebral palsy clients by committing a longer period with greater dedication. This allowed for a more sustained and visceral experience, having a deeper impact on us. We viewed this as being more valuable than having more participants. Similarly, we decided to forgo our plan to have a carnival as our beneficiary felt that it would be too taxing on the students.

Throughout the 8-week period where we went down to interact with the clients, we realised that no matter how people viewed them, they were equal to us. Even though it was awkward for us at the start, we soon saw how our thoughts were the only barriers to interaction. We thus felt that we achieved our objectives notwithstanding the deviation from our initial plans such as not being able to have a wider reach for our interaction sessions. More importantly, through our interactions with the cerebral palsy students, we felt that we became more empathetic towards the students as our proposed activities are more acceptable by the beneficiary due to an increased understanding of our beneficiary's needs.

3. Scope of Impact

Impact on Awareness: Through our initiatives, the members of public were able to gain an understanding of cerebral palsy. We made sure our flag day and street sales participants understood clearly what cerebral palsy was and could explain it to the members of the public.

Funds and Interaction: Funds were not our primary concern as we felt that raising awareness of the condition would be able to have a greater impact on our beneficiary. However, fundraising was still a part of our aims as fundraising is still able to bring about tangible benefits to the lives of those with Cerebral Palsy such as contributing to the subsidising of expensive transportations fees. Interactions were limited only to ourselves due to CPAS policy.