



7-43: HCI Habitat For Humanity

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Abstract

Singapore: A modern 21st century island-nation, seeking to achieve prosperity and progress for our nation. In achieving her dreams, she has left the underprivileged marginalised. Though inequality is left out of the narrative, it still exists. Her GINI Coefficient was 0.43 in 2014. Poverty manifests herself in Singapore in the form of poor living conditions. HCI-Habitat for Humanity aims to tackle this problem of poor living conditions in Singapore through Service, Fundraising and Advocacy, empowering and rehabilitating the lives of the underprivileged.

1. Introduction

Quote: *“Who are we as human beings if we ignore the sufferings of others?”* - Anonymous

HCI-Habitat For Humanity is a service-learning project which aims to:

1. empower residents by improving their living conditions,
2. Improving their social, psychological and emotional well-being
3. Promote an inclusive and informed society with a strong culture of volunteerism.

We are currently working with our beneficiary, Habitat For Humanity Singapore, a non-profit international organisation, whose vision is a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

2. Definition of Problem

The narrative held by the general follows Singapore as a developed, modern, and urbanised First-World nation where citizens lives in relative affluence. While the majority of Singaporeans have a roof over their head and a place to call “home”, there are many who live in less favourable living conditions such as rental 1-room HDB flats on government grants, as they currently lack the capability to upgrade to better living conditions. More often than not, these houses are cluttered and infested with pests, posing a danger to the occupant’s health. These conditions are fire hazards as well. In Singapore, the primary concern is hence people living in the aforementioned conditions and not “homelessness” per se. Often, the occupants experience cluttering and infestation of pests in their flats, and require extensive cleaning up in order to be considered a satisfactory and safe environment for the residents to live in. Hence, we have decided to work towards ensuring that no one will fall through the cracks of poverty and that everyone will be able to have a clean and comfortable environment to live in.

3. Strategies

Our project aims to provide support for these in the form of the following:

- **Service**, where we will directly be involved in the cleaning-up process;
- **Fundraising**, where we will raise funds to support the cleaning-up works which may amount to almost \$1000 dollars per house; a
- **Advocacy**, which aims to raise awareness and garner the support of the public to further our cause.

These approaches form the core of our approach. We also incorporate a layered approach starting with a collaboration with the non-profit organisation Habitat for Humanity Singapore, and extends to our volunteers. Through this model, we are able to engage and benefit every aspect of society. As a result, we have a wide range of programmes designed to mobilise people from all walks of life.

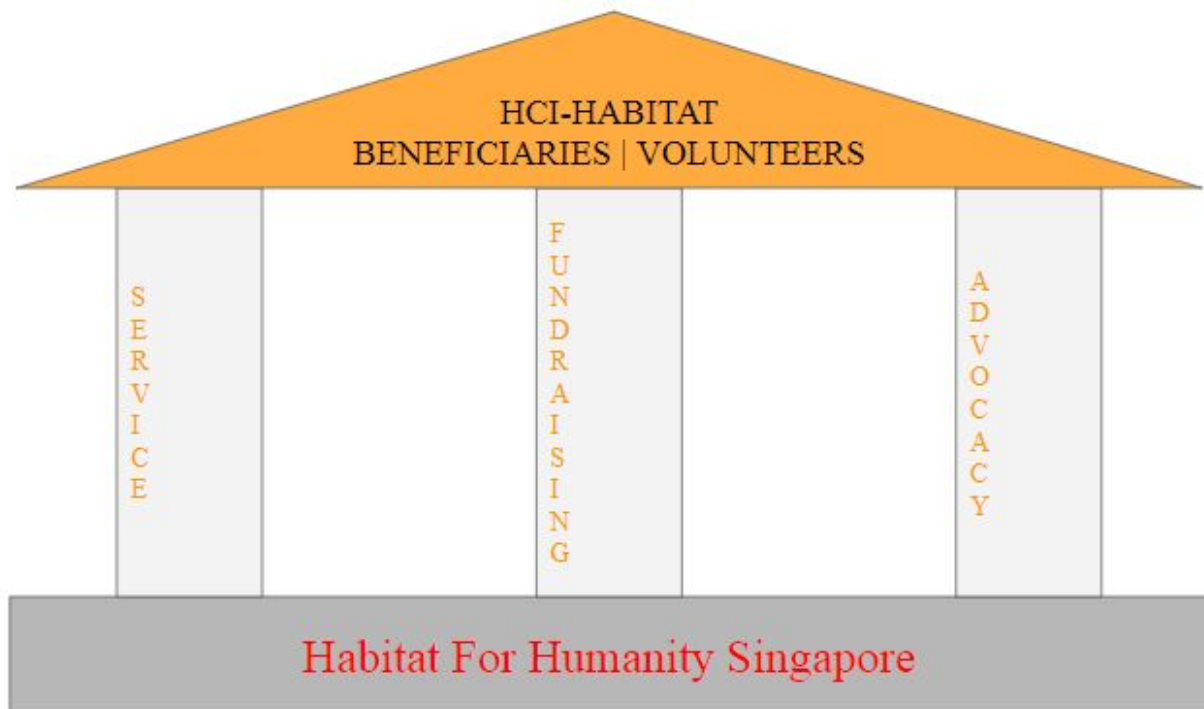


Fig. A: Strategies

4. Proposed Solutions

Under the **service** aspect, we have the Project HomeWorks initiative, where we went to the homes of our beneficiaries to carry out decluttering and minor renovation activities. We will be providing them with new furniture such as bed frames and mattresses. We also have **Unlitter: Neighbourhood**, where we collaborated with Town Councils to organise litter-picking sessions. These sessions aim to improve the living conditions outside the confines of the four walls by keeping the public areas where residents frequent clean. This is in line with our objectives as Singapore can be considered our home from a macro perspective too and we must maintain the living conditions of Singapore by keeping it clean. We invited youth and adult volunteers alike to participate with us in this programme, so as to provide a meaningful hands-on educational opportunity for the youth and to challenge their views of Singapore as inherently clean. This will hopefully spur them to do their part for the community and picking up litter on their own accord.

Under the fundraising aspect, we aim to have Street Sales where we sell merchandise that is specially customised and designed by us. While selling the merchandise, we will also be able to raise awareness for the issue/concern of poor living conditions in Singapore.

For advocacy, we organised a concert where we invited aesthetic groups and talents to perform for the audience and experts in the field to elaborate on this topic to help our audience understand our cause better as well. In addition to inviting representatives from Habitat for Humanity to elaborate on this topic, look beyond the common narrative of Singapore as a nation where everyone lives in affluence. We have also organised Home Sweep Home in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity Singapore, an exhibition booth at Singapore's largest advocacy exhibition for this cause.

5. Implementation of Solutions

1. **Project HomeWorks** is Habitat Singapore's local initiative that aims to rehabilitate the homes and lives of our vulnerable elderly or those with disabilities living alone in cluttered, unhygienic and bug-infested one- and two-room rental flats. It was held on 25th March and 12th May. We enforce this through the repainting of walls, decluttering, fumigation and replacement of bug-infested beds with new furniture which ensures their standard of living and safety. HomeWorks is a service-oriented, hands-on approach. Many of the vulnerable individuals we support through Project HomeWorks typically have little social support and mobility issues that make it difficult to care for themselves, let alone their homes. We believe that it is ethically and morally reprehensible to see any human being (our own kind) to live in such an unsafe or unhygienic environment, without taking any affirmative action.

During a Project HomeWorks session, we mobilise volunteers to make homes safer by reducing clutter that are potential fire hazards or could cause accidents like falls. Homes are also made cleaner by discarding expired food items and clearing pest-infested furniture to improve health and well-being of our elderly.

2. **Unlitter** is an initiative where we inculcate the value of taking care of our living space beyond the confines of our homes through this initiative. It was held on 26th May. The Organising Team went down to a Kreta Ayer to pick up litter from the streets and car-parks. It will be one session that is organised by the Hwa Chong Chapter. Habitat for Humanity collaborated with us for the event to provide equipment necessary for the clean-up such as gloves and trash bags. By extending Habitat's UnLitter Red Dot initiative to youth participation, we are actively getting more members of the community to be involved, making Habitat's influence more widespread. This initiative would benefit both the youth and Habitat, resulting in a Win-Win situation that is in line with our school values.

3. **Home Sweep Home.** Home Sweep Home is a large-scale advocacy and impact session held on 14th July 2017 where Habitat invites all campus Chapters as well as their own volunteers to come down to a carnival that has been set-up. During the event, fumigation and decluttering activities took place around the site at Banda Street. HCI Campus Chapter's role was in the latter, where we helped 20 households.

4. **Street sales.** Our street sales took place over the June holidays as it was where we could get most of the students enabling it to be the most effective and raising the most funds.

The street sales helps to raise funds for HCI-Habitat's initiatives such as Project Homeworks. It helps us to advocate -- while selling merchandise on the streets, we can take this opportunity to raise awareness for our beneficiaries. The merchandise sold are uniquely designed by our own Street-sales Committee. Simultaneously, donations will be collected from members of the public who do not wish to purchase any merchandise.

5. **Concert Hearth.** Concert Hearth was a concert on 11th August featuring both students and professionals, to ensure that our concert boasts both relatability and quality. Most of the acts would be dances or musical acts. During the concert, we introduced our project so audience can be more involved by gaining a deeper insight into our project. This will give us the chance to raise awareness for our cause, fulfilling the mission of HCI-Habitat. We will also sell merchandise and collect donations during the concert. Exhibition panels from Exhibition Calor has been displayed to better compliment our efforts to raise awareness.

6. Outcomes

HCI-Habitat has been a huge success. For fundraising, we have managed to raise around \$4500 through street sales alone. For advocacy, we have estimated that we have reached out to 1500-2000 people. In terms of service, after every session, we will be interviewing our beneficiaries to ask for their feedback on whether we have made a difference in their lives. With their feedback, we can identify our shortcomings as well and make immediate changes before the next HomeWorks session commences, hence ensuring a more delicate and specialised approach. Revisits are also conducted to ensure that residents are equipped with the knowledge to maintain their clean living environment and allow this project to be beneficial in the long run, and to prevent the project from losing steam after a brief while. We are not without room for improvement and hence plan to introduce a more direct and cohesive programme aimed at educating homeowners taking part in project HomeWorks about the dangers of an over-cluttered household. Such programmes could include the handing-out of pamphlets, putting up of posters, and an increased regularity in the revisits we carry out. These direct, long-term solutions would be cardinal to providing sustainability to the solution of the problem. Notwithstanding this, our project has been a large success due to the efficacy of our direct-action initiatives to target and alleviate certain problems regarding living spaces, be it litter, or over-cluttering. We have made it a point in our project to not only stop our efforts at advocacy and fund-raising, but also to continue forward with initiatives to make a direct contribution towards mitigating the existing problems.