

Project Aether

07-16

Single-Year Project

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Section 1: Project Overview

1.1 Area of Concern

In an OECD 2018 study, **disadvantaged students** in Singapore were **largely segregated from the Singapore student population**, with 46% of “disadvantaged students” in Singapore attending “disadvantaged schools”. (Straits Times, 2018) This was a “**rising trend**” and these “**disadvantaged schools**” were inadequately resourced, in “**teacher quality and financial resources**”

Broadly speaking, students can develop adverse habits such as truancy (Schneiders, Drukker, van der Ende et al, 2003) and grow up **at the mercy of gangs**. Hence, communities are disproportionately affected by gang activity. (McDaniel, 2012)

Our beneficiary, Pertapis Children’s Home, is a welfare home for disadvantaged children, most of whom are aged 7-12. Their parents are mostly in poverty, have serious health issues or are incarcerated in jail, causing them to seek shelter at the centre.

1.2 Challenges Identified

In our surveys, the key learning need identified was a “**lack of motivation in learning**”. This was the result of their personal problems faced in life and school, which developed the mindset that learning was unimportant to them. The centre was unable to meet this learning need, with activities merely **mirroring the activities they had in school**, which dissuaded students from having a passion from learning. In our recce visits, the centre also faced **manpower shortages**, with too many students and too few teachers at the centre at any point.

1.3 Underlying Problem

Given that disadvantaged students are disconnected from and lagging behind Singapore’s student population due to a lack of enjoyment in learning, how might we rekindle the students’ interests in learning through various interactive activities, so that students aged 7 - 12 will be more actively engaged in learning, allowing them to excel in the education system in 2019 and beyond?

1.4 Plan of Action

In order to meet our UP objective of engaging the students in learning, we took a **two-pronged approach**. Firstly, **we will improve their academic foundation** either in terms of resources or schoolwork, allowing them to have that extra motivation to work hard in school. Secondly, **we will reshape their preconceptions of learning through interactive learning activities**, which allow them to understand that learning can be fun.

Section 2: Implementation of Action Plan

2.1 Actions and Outcomes to Date¹

Date	Actions	Objectives
February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnered up with Children’s Wishing Well• Conducted learning needs analysis survey with 30 students• Recce visits to understand other challenges faced by center	-
March to August 2019	Activity 1 – Homework Guidance and Interaction Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly sessions• Reinforce students’ academic coursework,• E.g. helping with homework, giving them fresh worksheets• Accommodated 15 to 20 students	Objective 1 –improving academic foundation

¹ We had a change of beneficiaries after our first beneficiary, Children’s Wishing Well, decided to abruptly discontinue with our services in June. Now, we are attached with Pertapis Children’s Home, with **similar area of concern and learning needs**. Fortunately, we could carry out the **entirety of our action plan** with PCH. The following “Accomplishments” section will focus on our current accomplishments in PCH

March to August 2019	<p>Activity 2 – Interactive Educational Games Sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly sessions held concurrently with homework guidance sessions • Played educational games e.g. Sudoku and Charades • Accommodated 15 to 20 students 	<p>Objective 2 - reshape their preconception that studying only involves memorisation and worksheet practice</p>
June 2019	<p>Activity 3 – Educational Materials Provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided students at the centre with better stationary and learning materials with our beneficiary’s help • Pencils, pens and highlighters • Provided equipment for about 50 children 	<p>Objective 1 – improving their academic resources foundation</p>
June 2019	<p>Activity 4 – Science Educational Workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in interactive <u>hands-on activities</u> related to subjects they have learnt in school • E.g. furthering their learning of yeast (cookie baking), and density (oil lava lamp) • Accommodated 15 to 20 students 	<p>Objective 2 - reshape their preconception that concepts can only be learnt through understanding textbook content</p>
July 2019	<p>Activity 5 – Education-Based Day Camp</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned to teach students more about how to recycle properly, supplementing school curriculum • Culminated in recycling competition where most creative recycled product won prizes • Accommodated 15 to 20 students 	<p>Objective 2 - reshape their preconceptions that that the only reward of learning is better results in school (after completing the camp and learning about topics discussed, students can feel a sense of pride and achievement)</p>

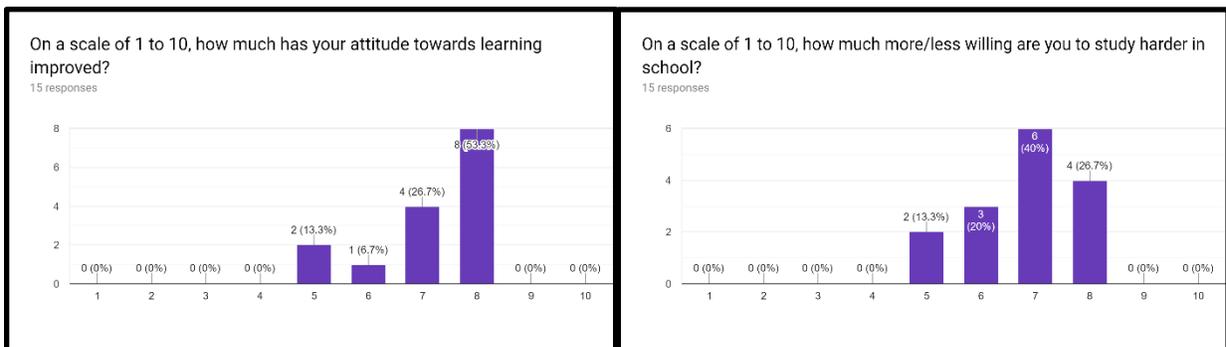
Section 3: Project Outcomes

3.1 Accomplishments

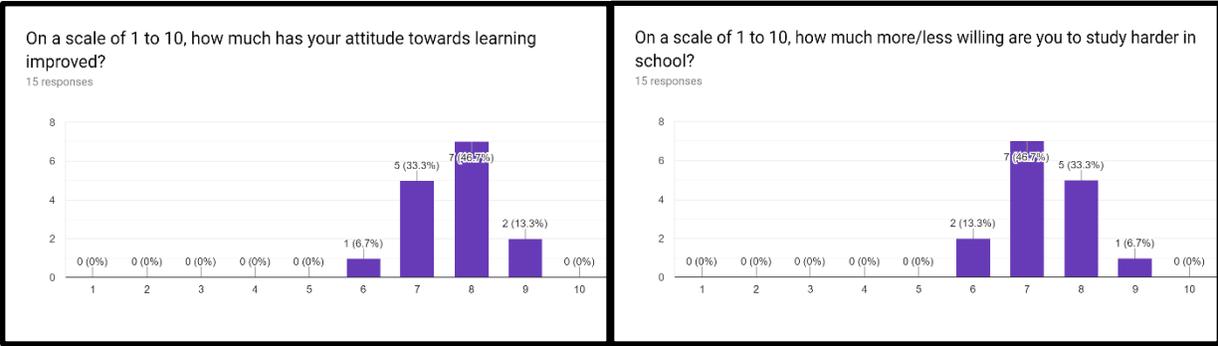
In total, we accommodated **80 disadvantaged students** through more than **20 sessions**. Students were from primary schools such as Henry Park Primary and Zhonghua Primary. Hence, we could impact the larger student community in Singapore through positive influence from these 80 students. We also leveraged on resources given by Pertapis, e.g. stationary and air-conditioned study rooms to facilitate our programmes. Our consideration of the beneficiaries' needs in proposing activities has allowed both parties to cooperate on all activities.

To fully assess the impact of the activities in solving our Underlying Problem, all the students who participated in the activities were surveyed. Our UP purpose, to allow students to be engaged in learning was split into **2 parts, tangible effects** meaning effects on grades in school and **intangible effects** meaning change in learning attitude.

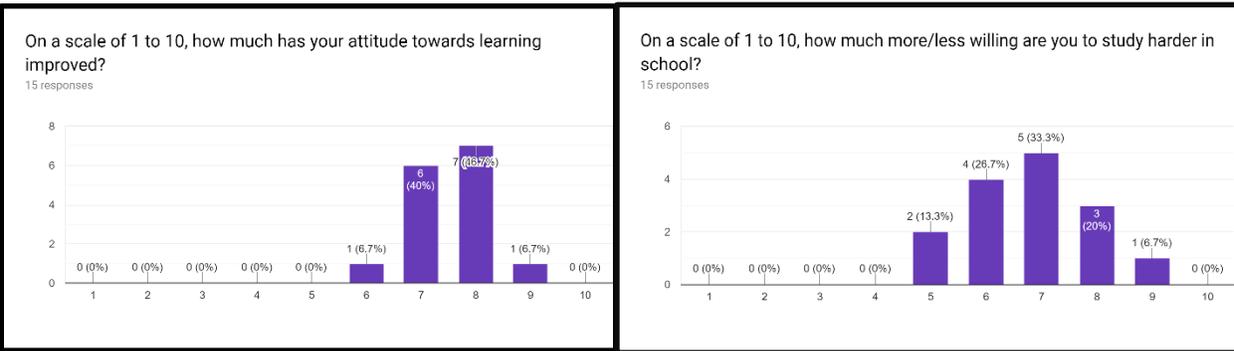
As can be seen from **Annex 1, Annex 2 and Annex 3**, majority of disadvantaged students saw an improvement in engagement in learning.



Annex 1: Impact of Homework Guidance and Games Sessions



Annex 2: Impact of Workshop



Annex 3: Impact of Day Camp

3.2 Reflections on Outcomes

As a group, we felt that in our implementation, we have successfully engaged them in their learning. The students' responses to learning opportunities have changed drastically. Previously, they got easily irritated when we were conducting our activities. Now, they easily find fun out of learning, telling us their desire for success in school. However, we faced many difficulties in planning, such as students losing focus. As such, we experimented with different ways to better engage the students and found out that using food and drinks was a great way to keep the students focused and motivated, making the implementation successful and pleasant.

Prior to our discontinuation, I always thought that communication with beneficiaries was extremely straightforward and simple. This was a result of the gracious and considerate email responses from the beneficiaries when we first met them. However, this resulted in several communication issues which resulted in the loss of confidence in our project, leading to the discontinuation. E.g. We had a learning journey which was already planned and approved by one of the main executives there, but was cancelled at the last minute, by a separate employee, which

happened multiple times. As it turned out, the main activity organizer was not notified. In the future interactions with beneficiaries, I will be extremely careful and discern the necessary personnel, before proposing the activity.

As individuals, prior to this project, we assumed that disadvantaged students were less academically-abled. However, many of them excelled in their work and showed high levels of inquisitiveness. Often, more substantial issues inhibit their growth. In future interactions, we will ensure that activities are fun and informative, to seize on this opportunity by cultivate positive learning mindsets in them.

However, there are well-rounded platforms for disadvantaged children, as shown by Family Service Centres set up by the MSF. Its “Big and Little Brave Hearts” programme teaches children practical skills and knowledge, while equipping parents with cognitive reframing skills to effectively support their children. In the future, communities should aim to focus on more holistic forms of service, in order to successfully eliminate the root cause of many social issues, such as at-risk youth.

3.3 Scope of Project

Community Impact: The wider school community in primary schools will be able to benefit, by seeing disadvantaged students becoming more engaged in learning and hence faring better in their studies, no longer creating a segregated learning environment in which more well-off students are way ahead of their peers.

Community Involvement: Although our beneficiary specifically told us not to have volunteers to allow the students to be more familiar with us, we engaged community involvement in another way, by getting organizations and businesses involved in the cause of helping these disadvantaged students. For the educational materials provision, with our beneficiary’s help, we engaged an external vendor that had never supplied stationary to a children’s home before, giving the business exposure in being involved in the cause of these disadvantaged students. In a continuation of our project beyond this year, we have also engaged the National Library Board for their KidsRead Programme, actively getting National Library Board involved in the cause of these disadvantaged students as well.

Resolution of UP: Given that disadvantaged students are disconnected from and lagging behind Singapore's student population due to a lack of motivation in learning, we have engaged 80 disadvantaged students in learning, through interactive activities such as day camps, workshop and educational games and also through foundation reinforcement such as homework guidance and educational materials provision. These students have shown an improvement in grades and learning attitudes, hence steering clear of delinquent activities in the future.

Word Count (excluding headings, footnotes and annexes): 1360

References

Teng, A. (2018, October 26). Nearly half of low-income students in Singapore attend the same schools. Retrieved March 22, 2019, from <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/nearly-half-of-low-income-students-in-singapore-attend-the-same-schools>

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McDaniel, D. D. (2012). Risk and protective factors associated with gang affiliation among high-risk youth: a public health approach. *Injury prevention*, 18(4), 253-258.