

Project B.T.S 3.0

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Multi-Year Project

Section I: Overview

1 Area of Concern

As the leading cause of cancer death^[1], brain tumours in children are becoming increasingly prevalent in Singapore, being the second most common form of cancer in Singapore^[2]. Brain tumours can damage a child's neurological development and can lead to death. Mood swings and memory loss are a few adversities the condition brings about, impede one's learning and confidence. In addition, a patient's siblings may feel neglected as their family focuses more attention on the patient, giving rise to the Invisible Sibling Syndrome. Despite the brave front families put up, many parents we have worked with often feel helpless and have expressed their need for emotional support. It is thus important to provide socio-emotional support for both patients and caregivers.

Despite the worrying statistics demonstrating the rising number of brain tumour patients, there is little effort on the part of the Health Promotion Board in terms of spreading awareness regarding the condition. According to Ms Melissa Lim, president of Brain Tumour Society (Singapore) (BTSS), there is currently no known information on the emotional, financial needs and challenges that brain tumour patients and their caregivers face. In fact, there is also a lack of formal statistics to track the number of people with brain tumours. As a result, it is necessary to educate the public about brain tumours in children and the after-effects of surgery.

Some common misconceptions include the assumption that communication with patients is impossible or that brain tumours are contagious. Patients feel ostracised by the public despite these assumptions being baseless. Thus, patients often avoid communication with others for fear of being discriminated against. As a result, it is

¹ Laurie mcginley. (2016). The Washington Post . Retrieved 6 August, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2016/09/16/brain-cancer-replaces-leukemia-as-the-leading-cause-of-cancer-deaths-in-kids/?utm_term=.1672fe1eccbe

² When headaches could mean a tumour in the brain. (2016, June 29). Retrieved March 31, 2019, from <http://www.todayonline.com/daily-focus/when-headaches-could-mean-tumour-brain>

necessary to educate the public about brain tumours to reduce potential discrimination against said patients, and to also invoke a sense of empathy and willingness to contribute to the brain tumour community. By showing that the public is accepting of them, we strive to enhance the emotional well-being of the afflicted through the formation of a supportive and cohesive community.

2 Challenges Identified

The Brain Tumour Society of Singapore (BTSS) was formed in 2014. As they are the only organisation that provides said patients with socio-emotional support, they have limited outreach and manpower, while still needing to run many events for the brain tumour patients.

3 Underlying Problem

Given that brain tumours are prevalent and have a multitude of adverse impacts on the lives of brain tumour patients and their families, as well as minimal outreach to bring light to the cause, how can we provide emotional support to paediatric patients, and raise awareness to educate our audience with the basic knowledge on brain tumours so that they can better empathise and support with the plight of the patients?

4 Plan of Action

We advocated welfare for both patients and caregivers through our various initiatives by organising monthly activities, allowing us to bond with the patients through constant interaction. We raised awareness about the cause in hopes of clearing misconceptions and weeding out discrimination through recruiting volunteers for our events and frequently posting information about brain tumours on our Instagram page.

Section II: Implementation of Action Plan

Date	Action	Objective(s)
January to March	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Liaising and communicating with BTSS 2. Recruitment of 30 man-strong Organising Team members and volunteers to help with our events 3. Continuation of Instagram posts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weekly posting of facts to raise awareness about common misconceptions about Brain Tumour 	Raising Awareness
April	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Art Jamming Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allowed patients to express their creativity through painting 	Advocating Welfare
May	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recycling Crafts Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants created beautiful crafts using recycled materials - Taught them the importance of saving our environment while having fun 	Advocating Welfare
June	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. June Embrace Camp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2-day long camp aimed at teaching patients new skills and to embrace their condition - Student volunteers provided constant interaction 	Advocating Welfare

	<p>2. Singing Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants sang songs that they are familiar with - Allowed patients to have self-confidence 	
July	<p>1. Youth Day Party</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patients bonded with volunteers over food and games - Allowed the patients to take a break from their hectic lifestyle and spend time with their family <p>2. Awareness Seminar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducted 3 sessions for students to learn about brain tumours 	<p>Advocating Welfare</p> <p>Raising Awareness</p>

Section III: Project Outcomes

1 Accomplishments

After our various initiatives, 80% of the beneficiaries felt that they could express themselves more confidently and 75% also felt that the camp had made an impact on their lives. 80% of our volunteers felt they could better empathise with the patients and 90% were more willing to help the brain tumour community in the future.

We have managed to forge bonds with the beneficiaries through the frequent interaction with them on a monthly basis. This has allowed us to advocate welfare for them as our activities have allowed them to be more open around others as concluded from their reflections.

Our Instagram account and seminar sessions had an outreach of more than 2100 people.

2 Reflections on Outcomes

2.1 Communication

As we only took up this project this year, interaction with our beneficiaries was an obstacle at first. However, as we got to know more about them, communication with them improved. At the beginning, we also lacked communication between the various organisers for our events, which delayed the planning and execution process. While this was a significant hindrance, we tried our best and did what we could, successfully planning a range of enjoyable events for the participants.

2.2 A change in mindset

This project was eye-opening as we were directly exposed to the difficulties such patients faced on a daily basis since we had to work closely with them, making us learn to adapt to new challenges. Not attaching social stigma was definitely a takeaway we had from every interaction with the patients. Even as students, there is still so much that we can do to improve the situation of the patients. One is never too young to give back to the community and that is the motto that we hope to share with our audiences and encourage more youths to step up.

2.3 Empathy

We learnt to better empathise with the brain tumour community and the less fortunate in general. This project allowed us to clear prior misconceptions that we had. We realised that the differences between brain tumour patients and other children are few and far between, however many are shy at first, fearing that they will face discrimination. Another takeaway is that the kids need understanding, not pity or sympathy. The care they need can hence be bolstered through giving them opportunities during our events to act more independently, nurturing their desire to learn just like any normal child.

3 Scope of the Project

3.1 Community Impact

Through our successful social media campaign, we have reached out to our 2100 followers, educating them not only on various facts of brain tumours, but also why they should not be stigmatised.

3.2 Community Involvement

We have 30 Organising Team members to help us out during our events. By volunteering, they are also interacting with the brain tumour patients themselves. Through our seminar, we allowed the participants to gain more knowledge about brain tumours, eliminating any possible misconceptions they may have had.

3.3 Resolution of Underlying Problem

Given that we identified that there was a lack of awareness about Brain Tumours and the many misconceptions of Brain Tumours by the public, we had awareness raising events, which we hoped would eliminate any prior misconceptions. As the Brain Tumour patients require emotional support, we had multiple events for their socio-emotional well being in order to raise their self esteem and confidence to do activities like everybody else and the opportunity to mingle with others.