

Project Grace 7-08

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Overview

1. Area of Concern

There are 150,000 individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) in Singapore, according to the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (Ong J., 2018). In an exploratory study by Assistant Director of diversity and inclusion Mr Ho Jack Yong at SMU to investigate public attitudes towards persons with ID, he noted that his participants, when asked about persons with disabilities, immediately recalled physical disabilities only (Tai J., 2016). It reveals the widespread lack of awareness on ID and capabilities of individuals with ID.

Our beneficiary, Special Olympics Singapore (SOSG), is part of the global inclusion movement seeking to empower persons with ID and promote inclusion via sports, health, education and leadership programmes. However, inadequate outreach has hampered its efforts to combat stigmatisation, evident in public confusion of its mission with that of Paralympics – to create sporting opportunities for the physically disabled.

2. Challenges Identified

The general public are unfamiliar with and tend to have certain misconceptions and generalisations of persons with IDs, resulting in marginalisation and stigmatisation towards them. Their lack of awareness fuels the discrimination against special athletes, limiting interaction opportunities between them and special athletes. Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic has rendered our initial blueprint impossible, due to the restrictions on social gatherings and safe distancing measures during the pandemic. Our planned events, aimed at creating opportunities for understanding between the ID community and the public, had to be postponed or downscaled (eg monthly outings, sports outreach), thus our chances of reducing discrimination towards persons with ID are greatly reduced.

3. Underlying Problem

Given that there is a lack of understanding of the abilities of people with ID which has resulted in marginalisation and stigmatisation by the public, how might we raise awareness about it and provide these individuals with the necessary emotional and social support, so that they can be integrated into society in the year 2020 and beyond?

4. Plan of Action

Date	Action	Objective
January - March	<p>Understanding ID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research and interview with PWIDs for better understanding <p>Working with Special Olympics Singapore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help provide more support for the athletes especially during the circuit breaker period where physical interactions were limited ● Design suitable programmes to cater to their social-emotional needs <p>Needs Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct a survey to investigate public awareness on their understanding of people with ID and their abilities 	Planning
April - August	<p>Capacity Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Athlete Leadership Programme webinars to enhance communicative skills of Athlete Leaders from SOSG on Zoom (Self-introduction and sustaining conversation) ● Focus on the workplace, to reduce discrimination <p>Networking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Light-hearted interaction sessions between the public and SOSG athletes to raise awareness about persons with ID, and to promote inclusion of the ID community. <p>Moving Forward (Work in Progress)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Liaise with SkillsFuture.sg to arrange courses for Athlete Leaders(eg. mental wellness) ● Secure funding for courses (professional courses) ● Liaise with professional training organisations for pro-bono courses for Athlete Leaders. 	Interaction
April - September	<p>Public Outreach</p> <p>Social Media Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular public engagement on social media channels (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) to: ● Raise awareness about ID; ● Celebrate SO athletes' achievements 	Raise awareness and funds

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fundraise <p>Paid Advertising Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A series of self-created inspirational videos promoted to users via paid advertising services on social media platforms for extensive public outreach (125,000 people). ● Raise awareness on persons with ID, to reduce stigmatisation and encourage public participation in activities ● The campaign themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All Dreams Are Equal; ● Misconceptions about ID; ● The Power of Families; ● How Can We Join the Inclusion Movement? <p>Public Relations (Work in Progress)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare news articles on the various facets of the lives of persons with ID and our work. ● Liaise with journalists from The Straits Times and Lianhe Zaobao to feature our articles. 	
<p>September - December</p>	<p>Monthly Outings* (Pending)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular sports excursions for bonding between SOSG athletes and the public. <p>Sports Outreach* Programme (Pending)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Special Olympics-organised sport training for athletes to include students from mainstream schools. ● A carnival with Athlete Leaders to celebrate new friendships forged <p>Unified Sports®* (Pending)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sporting competition with Unified Sports® between SOSG athletes and mainstream school students <p>Public Roadshow* (Pending)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participating in SOSG Roadshow <p>*tentative due to COVID-19 measures</p>	

Project Outcomes

Accomplishments

To date, we held 2 Athlete Leadership Programme sessions, Fitness Friday sessions and an interactive session with 5 other students from our school. These sessions allowed us to interact with the athletes, as well as equip them with effective communication skills when speaking to members of the public. Through our social media with 608 followers on Instagram and 74 followers on Facebook, we managed to raise awareness for our project and SOSG, with \$3860 in donations raised through our giving.sg campaign.

Reflection

Prior to this project, most of us had little awareness about persons with ID (PWID) and their abilities. However, this project has changed our perceptions. We have learnt much about their strengths and motivations to succeed.

We are pleased to see the impact of our project on PWIDs and our outreach efforts. We have managed to empower the athletes to some extent, giving them the confidence to interact with people in society.

Covid-19 has disrupted some of our initial plans. We learnt the importance of preparing for uncertainties such as the pandemic and were quick to adapt and redesign our programmes within the given constraints. This enabled us to continue working with the athletes successfully.

We will work with the next batch of members of Project Grace next year to ensure the success of the programmes. This would ensure a sustainable, long term support for Special Olympics Singapore and the ID community.

Scope of impact

Capacity Building

With our ALP sessions, Special Athletes were ready to effectively communicate with people in various social contexts. They could confidently introduce themselves and engage in further conversations. We hope the public will better appreciate PWIDs through our activities.

Community Impact

Given that we identified a lack of awareness in society about PWID, we reached out to the public to help debunk misconceptions through social media. We were also able to celebrate the abilities of these athletes, and raised funds for them.

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