

# Project Auxilium

7-16



**Single-year project**

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# 1 AREA OF CONCERN

As of 2015, there are 13,000 students with learning differences or special education needs studying in mainstream schools. This represents a huge proportion, nearly 2.7% of the entire student population (TODAY Online, 2015). This ever-growing number of students struggle to match the learning pace of their peers in school and find it harder to fully integrate into their society. Despite Singaporeans supporting disability inclusion in their society, only 1 in 10 Singaporeans is confident of interacting with children with special needs (Lien Foundation, 2016). Similarly, only 1 in 10 Early Intervention professionals, who provide developmental and educational support services for children with special needs, think that Singapore is an inclusive society. (Lien Foundation, 2018). Individuals with special needs are also more disadvantaged as compared to those with sensory or physical impairments as due to the nature of their disability. The public displays a larger degree of social distance towards individuals with special needs and behaves less positively towards them (NCSS, 2017). It is clear that more needs to be done to improve public knowledge and dismiss stigmas surrounding individuals with special needs so as to facilitate the integration of individuals with special needs into Singaporean society.

Our beneficiary, MIJ Education Hub, was established in 2011 and is a member of the Singapore Centre for Social Enterprises (raiSE). It provides special education, giving beneficiaries a safe and vibrant learning environment to develop intellectually and socially, such that they can be contributing members of society.

## 2 UNDERLYING PROBLEM

Given that people with special needs often face immense **social stigmatisation and exclusion** in Singaporean society due to a **lack of interpersonal skills and independence** that inhibits social interaction with the public, along with a **lack of understanding and awareness from the public**, how can we **inculcate basic communication and life skills** in youths with learning differences and **raise public awareness about their plight**, such that they are able to better interact with the public and be accepted by society, thus enriching their lives in the year 2020 and beyond?

### 3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### 3.1 OUTREACH

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to carry out interactions and focused more on raising awareness for our beneficiaries. We utilised Instagram (Fig. 1) to publish information regarding individuals with special education needs, so as to increase knowledge and dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding them, thus improving public perception of individuals with special education needs.

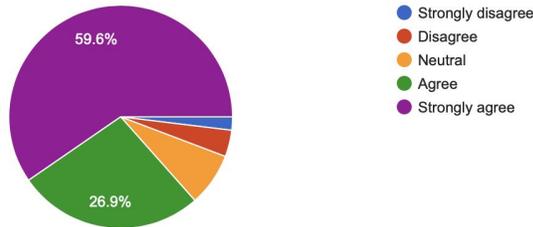


Fig. 1 Instagram Page

To assess the impact of our campaign to improve public perception, we conducted a survey on Instagram for the public to provide feedback on our work.

I have a greater understanding of the intellectual and learning disabled

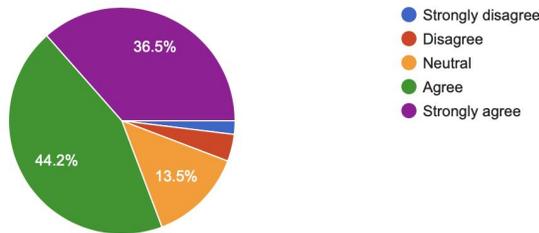
52 responses



**Fig. 2.1 Survey**

I am now better equipped to interact with the intellectual and learning disabled

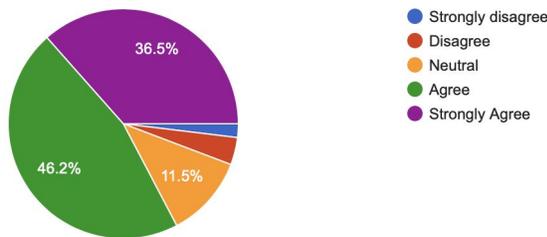
52 responses



**Fig. 2.2 Survey**

I feel more positive about interacting with the intellectual and learning disabled

52 responses



**Fig. 2.3 Survey**

Survey results (Fig. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3) revealed that our page has indeed succeeded in improving the public's knowledge and perception of individuals with special needs

## 3.2 INTERACTION

While we were unable to hold interaction sessions this year, we could still provide aid for future members of Project Auxilium, or even our beneficiaries, to do so, such that we can ensure that the project is sustainable. As such, we published our video resources meant for interactive sessions on our website, such that they can be used in the future. This includes videos on origami (Fig 3.1), which were meant to train our beneficiaries' focus and patience, and as a way for them to bond with volunteers, and videos on first aid (Fig 3.2) to increase their independence, so as to facilitate social integration. These videos have been made to be comprehensible for individuals with special learning needs.



**Fig 3.1 Origami Lesson**



**Fig 3.2 The First-aid Lesson**

## 4 REFLECTIONS

Due to the pandemic, we were unable to conduct the interaction sessions that we had planned initially and were unable to fully fulfil our goal of inculcating interpersonal and life skills to our beneficiaries. As such, we shifted our attention to increasing public knowledge and dispelling misconceptions. We hope that the next organising team would be able to conduct fruitful interaction with our resources, perhaps through a digital platform if the pandemic persists.

Through our awareness initiatives on social media, we have also learned more about individuals with special education needs. Initially, each of us had many misconceptions about our beneficiaries and were unaware of the biases and stereotypes we held against them. However, through our research, we have learned more about them, increasing our empathy towards this group. We are now more confident in our ability to interact and befriend individuals with special education needs due to more positive perceptions.

This project has made us realise that it is not enough to have solid proposals on paper - successful execution requires other parties to be cooperative as well. As such, it is also important to have an easily contactable beneficiary who is equally enthusiastic about our plans as we are. This project also taught us to keep my options open and continuously search for new solutions if certain proposals did not work.

## 5 CITATIONS

TODAY Online. (2015, February 7). *The Big Read: In mainstream schools, children with learning disabilities still face challenges* Retrieved August 18, 2020, from <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/big-read-mainstream-schools-children-learning-disabilities-still-face-challenges>

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Lien Foundation. (2018, April 24). *Early Intervention Survey* Retrieved August 18, 2020, from <http://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Early%20Intervention%20Survey%20-%20Final%20Presser%2C%20LF.pdf>

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