# 7th ASEAN and Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies

## Towards an Inclusive Society – strengthening the collaboration between social welfare, health and medical systems for Children with Disabilities

**Singapore Country Report**

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In September 2006, The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) appointed an Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee to review and chart services and programmes in the disability sector from 2007 to 2011. This Committee comprised members from the people, private and public sector. The Committee's report was released in February 2007.

1.2 Government is aligned with the Enabling Masterplan's vision for Singapore to be able to maximise the potential of persons with disabilities so that more of them can be self reliant and employable. Families will be the first line of care and support and institutionalisation will remain as the last resort. The disability sector will bring out the best of the "Many Helping Hands" approach where each party will contribute in the area it is best at.

1.3 To achieve this vision, the Enabling Masterplan adopted a life stage approach (from birth to adulthood) when reviewing services and programmes in the disability sector. The report encompassed 31 concrete and comprehensive recommendations aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Singapore.

## 2. Statistics on Children with Disabilities

2.1 There are currently about 6400 children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools, while about 4700 study in special education (SPED) schools. The breakdown of these children by the disability type is presented in the tables below:

**Table 2: No. of children in mainstream primary, secondary schools and Junior Colleges by disability types**

| Disability type | Actual Enrolment |
|---|---|
| Learning and/or Developmental Disabilities | 5750 |
| Sensory and/or Physical Impairment | 707 |
| **Total** | **6457 (1.3%)** |

**Table 3: No. of children in SPED schools by disability types**

| Disability type | Actual Enrolment |
|---|---|
| Learning and/or Developmental Disabilities | 4342 |
| Sensory and/or Physical Impairment | 457 |
| **Total** | **4799 (0.9%)** |

## 3. Government-support programmes for children with disabilities

3.1. The Singapore Government continues to work closely with NCSS and other relevant bodies in the delivery of services and programmes for people with disabilities. The Singapore Government has also progressively increased its funding for children's disability programmes over the years.

### (i) Diagnosis and early intervention for children from birth to six years

3.2 Some of the key elements of enhanced social service delivery to children with disabilities include:

*(a) Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) - (11 centres)*

3.3 EIPIC is a centre-based programme that provides social, educational and rehabilitative services for children aged up to 6 years who are diagnosed to be at risk of having a handicapping condition or special need that will affect his or her development. The objective is to increase the developmental growth potential of the child and minimise the development of secondary disabilities.

3.4 The programme covers the following areas:

- fine and gross motor skills;
- cognition;
- communication;
- social adaptation;
- self-help skills; and
- adaptation to and use of assistive equipment.

3.5 The child's progress will be monitored through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that is developed jointly by the EPIC centre and parents. A joint disciplinary team of therapists, psychologists and social workers is involved in the assessment and treatment of the child.

3.6 In 2008, MCYS and NCSS set up the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) Support Grant to help families access early intervention service.

*(b) Integrated Child Care Programme (ICCP) - (18 centres)*

3.7 The ICCP aims to maximise the potential of children aged 2-6 with special needs who can benefit from a mainstream education. It provides an inclusion programme for children with special needs in a mainstream childcare centre environment. This will ease their adaptation in a mainstream school setting eventually. Through ICCP, selected childcare centres will set aside 10 places to take in children with special needs. The children engage in the same group activities as typically developing children in the centre.

*(c) Special Student Care Centre (SSCC) - (10 centres)*

3.8 SSCCs provide before and after school care services for such children who are attending either mainstream or special education schools. This enables their parents and caregivers to continue to work, knowing their children are under proper supervision.

**(ii) Education for children with disabilities**

3.8 Singapore's education system aims to help develop individuals to realise their potential to the fullest, equip them with the necessary skills for employment. This

applies also to children with disabilities and special educational needs. As a country, we uphold the belief that our children with disabilities deserve an education that will enable them to develop their potential.

3.9 Support for children with disabilities is provided in both mainstream and special schools, depending on the severity of needs of the children. Children with mild disabilities attend mainstream schools and have access to additional support. Children whose needs are more severe and require a more intensive support can access the specialised provisions in alternative specialised settings, such as special education schools.

a) Support in mainstream schools

3.10 All beginning teachers undergo a compulsory 12 hour module in special needs support to ensure all teachers have at least basic awareness of the educational needs of children with disabilities. Each mainstream school has 10% of its teachers who have received some additional training in special needs and one Allied Educator who can provide support.

3.11 To ensure that the children receive the needed specialised treatment, the Ministry of Education (MOE) collaborates with volunteer welfare organisations (VWOs) to provide additional intervention, such as school-based itinerant support for children with sensory and physical impairments, specialised remediation for children with learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia); and outreach support for children with autism. These VWOs receive direct funding from the MOE for every disabled child that receives additional support services, pegged at 50% of the cost of primary education per capita.

3.12 If needed the children can be referred to MOE Educational Psychologists (EPs) and Reading Specialists for assessment, diagnosis and advice on ways in which the support in schools can be customised to meet pupils' individual needs. The EPs could also refer children that need therapy or medical intervention to government hospitals, funded by the Ministry of Health.

b) Special Education (SPED Schools)

3.13 The Ministry of Education (MOE), together with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), fund and support Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) in the

setting up of special education (SPED) schools to cater to children who are not able to benefit from mainstream schools. This tripartite partnership in providing special education is in line with the “many helping hands” approach in looking after the needs of the less fortunate in society.

3.14 The general mission of these SPED schools is to provide education and training for children with disabilities so as to enable them to function optimally and integrate into society. The programmes are provided according to the type and level of disabilities and are customised to meet the needs of the children. Currently, there are 20 SPED schools run by 13 VWOs in Singapore.

3.15 SPED schools are registered as private schools under the Education Act and the management of the SPED schools is vested in the School Management Committees (SMCs). MOE is represented on the school SMCs.

3.16 SPED schools are provided an annual capitation grant for recurrent expenditure. Funding is capped at four times the cost of education in mainstream schools. Registration of SPED schools and teachers come under the purview of MOE. MOE also provides guidance and advice to principals on their school programmes and management.

3.17 MOE provides 95% of capital funding for the construction of purpose-built SPED school buildings, renovation works and the five-yearly repair and repainting projects. MOE has planning standards, guidelines and building programme for purpose-built SPED schools to replace existing SPED schools. To date, sixteen customised special school buildings have been completed and another four redevelopment projects are at various stages of planning and development.

3.18 The government’s Edusave Scheme has been extended to pupils in SPED schools and eligible pupils receive a yearly contribution similar to that for mainstream primary school pupils. In addition, like the mainstream primary schools, SPED schools also receive an annual Edusave grant for enrichment programmes and purchase of additional equipment and resource materials. SPED schools also receive the Opportunity Fund to level up co-curricular development opportunities for pupils from lower income household.

3.19 In recent years, key strategies and new initiatives have been put in place to raise the quality of education in the SPED and mainstream schools. The key changes

meant more involvement from MOE in the overseeing and supporting the management of SPED schools, greater training and professional support for the schools to achieve excellence and more diverse range of educational opportunities. Efforts have been made to developed and implement transition support processes to facilitate the progression of children with disabilities across different educational settings, such as preschool to primary; primary to secondary; and from special to mainstream schools.