



# Community White Paper

## **THE BEZER INITIATIVE**

**RETHINKING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON SOCIAL ISSUES**

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+65 9299 4886  
[kenneth@solvenplus.one](mailto:kenneth@solvenplus.one)  
[www.solvenplus.one](http://www.solvenplus.one)  
N PLUS ONE PTE. LTD.

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## Executive Summary

Each year, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) tracks about 1,000 youths at risk. These youths need to be matched with foster carers or placed in youth homes due to (a) abuse, neglect or abandonment; (b) the inability of their parents to care for them due to imprisonment or physical or mental illness; or (c) the death of one or both parents.

On top of these cases, many other cases go unrecorded. Furthermore, youths above 18 years of age are no longer eligible for the foster care system and youth homes. In many cases, it still remains untenable for these youths to return home.

The Bezer Initiative seeks to help these youths and young adults get back on their feet and reintegrate into society. We aim to do this by building a national nervous system of care that engages the community at large to work alongside non-government organisations (NGOs) and government agencies.

Specifically, The Bezer Initiative aims to attract and empower able Singaporeans to open up their homes for short- to medium-term respite care for these youths. The objective of respite care is to provide for basic physiological needs, safety needs, and a sense of belonging. These will better position these youths to build their lives and reintegrate into community and, if possible, with their families.

The Bezer Initiative seeks to address this through building a national nervous system of care and engaging the community to work alongside NGOs and government agencies to journey with displaced youths with the goal of reintegration. Specifically, we envision that community groups will avail their resources and people through a mixture of guided and organic extension of help to displaced youths.

We seek to use this demographic group as a proof-of-concept for reintegration of other demographic groups including those who need protection from abuse, are estranged from family, young mothers, elderly with dementia, and the homeless. We believe that the community at large has more capacity to offer and greater agility to stand in the gap of the displaced and disadvantaged than they currently do.

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# Context

## Homelessness in Singapore

1. Over a short few decades, Singapore has gained global recognition as an economic miracle and a nation with world-class healthcare, housing, and social welfare systems. These systems are designed to strike a unique balance between state provision and individual responsibility, and generally function well. Yet, there are some who still fall through the gaps. A recent study found that about 1,000 people live on the streets in Singapore.<sup>1</sup> The main reasons given for their homelessness were work insecurity, financial poverty, relational problems in family, and inadequate or inaccessible housing.<sup>2</sup> While a larger proportion of this group was observed to be of an older demographic, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) also tracks about 1,000 youths at risk who face uncertain shelter due to (a) abuse, neglect or abandonment; (b) the inability of their parents to care for them due to imprisonment or physical or mental illness; or (c) the death of one or both parents. Moreover, it is likely that there are more unreported cases of homeless youths.
2. To support the abovementioned groups, the government provides financial assistance (through MSF's ComCare), subsidises public rental housing, and runs temporary shelters. Non-government organisations (NGOs) also run shelters, provide counselling and socio-emotional support, and work with those in need towards securing longer-term housing arrangements. For youths at risk, MSF tries to match them with foster parents or place them in institutional care.
3. However, there is scope to strengthen this support. Homelessness is often a result of complex underlying issues; short-term shelter and financial assistance are necessary but may only be treating symptoms rather than root causes. While NGOs do try to address the deeper-seated problems, this is often a long-term journey requiring layers of support, and is challenging for the case worker to address by him/herself. For youths at risk, in particular, there has also been a dearth of foster parents. Moreover, those above 18 years old are not eligible for the foster system and youth homes, even though, in many cases, it remains untenable for them to afford their own place or return home. Others may fall through the cracks or are deemed not critical enough to warrant help from the system.

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<sup>1</sup> Ng, 2019. Homeless in Singapore: Results from a Nationwide Street Count.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## The role of community

4. One's community is an essential component of addressing homelessness that has not been as visible in the existing continuum of care. Not only can they complement government and NGO efforts, there are also some roles that can only be played by the community, for example, fostering children or befriending individuals on a personal level. MSF also recognises the value of good home environments in its push to place children in foster families instead of institutional homes.
5. Thankfully, there seems to be a growing interest in contributing to the tackling of social issues in Singapore. Volunteerism rate doubled from 17% in 2008 to 29% in 2018.<sup>3</sup> There also continues to be a push for society to do more from across the government, social service sector, academia, and activists alike. The SGCares movement helmed by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), for example, seeks to shape a more caring society through encouraging acts of kindness, volunteerism, and collaborative ground-up initiatives.
6. However, this also means that the community must be engaged beyond just volunteering as an "extra-curricular activity" but to see making strong and caring connections as a *way of life*. Singaporeans must then, as a community, understand that addressing social issues requires the collaborative participation of many stakeholders within the vicinity. An often-raised concern that prevents volunteers from availing their own resources or physical space is the perceived lack of support and personal privacy as they volunteer. Yet there is a need to close the gap between neighbours within the community and to create space where people can step in and support during times of crisis.
7. The concern regarding protecting one's privacy is not unique to Singapore. With urbanisation and industrialisation, households have become smaller and more private, which in turn increases the risk involved in offering hospitality to strangers.<sup>4</sup> This is an important point that must be navigated in order to facilitate more openness and ownership in building one's community.
8. In Singapore, the common markers of success are defined individually when it comes to fiscal and academic achievements. Every citizen is assessed individually first, followed by one's immediate family members. Nuclear families are often conceived to exist only within the four walls of an HDB flat. Social policies are shaped in a similar fashion: one's income, in relation to the number of immediate family members, is first considered before help is extended. Such

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<sup>3</sup> Individual Giving Study 2018, National Volunteering and Philanthropy Centre, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Pohl, xx.

<sup>5</sup> Individual Giving Survey 2018

policies perpetuate a self-sufficient ideology within family units, preventing families in crisis from asking for help and others from being incentivised to extend help.

9. However, stakeholders within the same community are important and agile resources to be tapped on to address these social issues from a multi-faceted approach. These can be found in the voluntary offers across households within a single neighbourhood: from sharing of meals between neighbours, lending of kitchen equipment, to offering temporary living space. Such acts of neighbourliness can adequately fill the short-term gaps that the current infrastructure within the social service sector are limited in addressing.

### **Misconception of care**

10. The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) Individual Giving Survey in 2018 found that “contributing to society” ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of a series of life priorities. Priorities such as “living a relaxing life”, “meeting new people”, and “social mobility” are some of the few that outrank “contributing to society”. Since volunteering is not a priority, taking time out to volunteer can seem like an optional extra-curricular activity. Only when one has more free time to spare will one consider volunteering their time. This scarcity for volunteer hours affects how NGOs engage with the public in general.
11. While the survey found that 70% of Singaporeans are keen to volunteer, volunteerism rate is only 29%. Among those who volunteer, only a third do so regularly. Nearly two-thirds of Singaporeans are interested in volunteering in areas that are more convenient or beneficial to them, namely activities that are located near their homes (34%) and those that match their hobbies and interests (29%). While there is nothing inherently wrong with these preferences, giving out of convenience draws a pragmatic line: we as volunteers are all right entering the lives of those we are serving, but not so much to let them into ours.
12. 25% of former volunteers stopped volunteering because they found that the activity they engaged in created little impact or meaning. At the same time, people in Singapore believe that giving needs to be selfless and from the heart. This ironically creates a perception of volunteering as difficult and requiring great sacrifice and effort. There needs to be more equitable distribution of responsibility when it comes with giving. When everyone contributes a little in making their communities more lively, kind and generous, it facilitates resilience in management of crisis.

# Objectives

13. In order to help displaced youths and young adults get back on their feet and reintegrate into their communities The Bezer Initiative seeks to build a national nervous system of care that engages the community at large to work alongside NGOs and government agencies.
14. “Bezer” means fortress. It is derived from the root word “Basar”, which describes the act of separating something from its maternal environment, in order to let it mature in peace until the final result can be extracted. We believe that when many families in the community band together, in partnership with help agencies, they are able to provide more holistic care to those in need. From shelters, to relationships, these are factors which are important in facilitating social mobility.
15. The Bezer Initiative has three objectives:
  - a. to encourage greater empathy in Singaporeans for displaced people and confidence in supporting them;
  - b. to codify the principles of a reliable network for host families and support communities to work with displaced people towards resilience, integrated with the existing ecosystem of government and NGO efforts; and
  - c. to develop a national platform for cross-neighbourhood support.
16. This strategy can be used by help agencies to engage organic communities, creating access to support for social workers.
17. The initial target group we want to work with to test a proof-of-concept is displaced youth. *This is due to the immediacy of the gap that many social workers are struggling with.* The Bezer Initiative is designed with the consideration and potential to scale to other profiles as well.

## Considerations

18. In designing any solution, we need to consider both the strengths and needs of all the stakeholders involved.

### Displaced Youth

19. Many youths at risk require an emotionally available community and the time and space to integrate into the host family. They may have a large range of needs – physical, socio-emotional, and/or

financial. However, this needs to be done in a way that does not breed over-dependency but empowers them to “bounce back”. The main goal is reintegration – *to provide for basic physiological needs, safety needs, sense of belonging, which will position these youths to build their lives and reintegrate into community and, if possible, with their families.*

#### Host Families

20. Host families need to be ready to provide care and support. We have heard anecdotal accounts of foster families experiencing crisis and marital challenges themselves after they open their homes to other people.

#### Other Stakeholders

21. There are a few partnering organisations and families that are actively engaging the community in a similar manner. In one example, Homeless Hearts of Singapore aims to inspire fellow volunteers to start their own ground-up initiatives to serve and befriend any homeless in their own local neighbourhoods. They have built a real-time digital dashboard that looks out for those who are displaced and those who can respond. Engaging ground up volunteers continues to be a challenge for them. These are gaps and opportunities that The Bezer Initiative can complement and enhance.

## Case Studies

22. To get a better sense of our target group and stakeholders, as well as how to design our solutions, we examined two success stories people who have hosted displaced youth and tested out a simulation with regular Singaporeans in the community. The three case studies are summarised below.

### **Case Study A: The Last Resort**

23. The Last Resort (TLR) is a home-based shelter for young people who have been displaced due to abuse, sudden crisis, or unfortunate circumstances to allow them to “experience a safe, nurturing and normal family that restores dignity and confidence”.<sup>5</sup> It is a ground-up initiative run by Kenneth and Adeline Thong out of their own home. They have housed more than 50 young people since 2007, with stays ranging from one day to three years. TLR avails their space and community to anyone who needs a safe place to stay, for free and for as long as is required. While there is no fixed criteria, the Thongs will first consider the suitability of the displaced person and the range of options for them. Referrals are by word of mouth and have also come from SSOs and FSCs.

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<sup>6</sup> The Last Resort, <https://www.thelastresort.life/>.

24. Their availability provides social workers with an option of support while they develop a longer-term plan with the displaced youth, from family re-integration to developing independence. Social workers are also more comfortable reaching out to them due to reliability and reputation.
25. There is a limit to how many youths TLR can host before the environment becomes unhealthy. Every person that enters comes with individual set of challenges and risks. Their progress are intrinsically connected to other members within the same community. Not every case turns out well. When one struggles, it sometimes affect the progress of another.
26. Through shadowing TLR and four other families who have hosted displaced youth as well as interviewing people from their respective communities, we made a list of common qualities that these host families possess, which also enables them to better navigate these issues:
  - a. Level-headed and able to remain calm in crisis
  - b. Respected by most within their community
  - c. Makes decisions through sound reasoning
  - d. Has clarity in personal identity and convictions
  - e. Honouring to all, including those they disagree with
  - f. No record of addiction (e.g., gambling, drugs) or violence
  - g. Teaches ethics
  - h. Lives and encourages a lifestyle of kindness and compassion
  - i. Exercises self-control and prudence (are disciplined)
27. Such “suitable” family units can provide an anchor of stability to the displaced youth. This is important as it provides a peaceful and emotionally stable environment for the youth. This must also be complemented with the community’s intentional involvement of supporting the family unit.
28. An unintended consequence of TLR getting publicity is that many people have started referring cases to them. However, their work is limited by the capacity of them as one couple. The community at large may also feel absolved of responsibility to help or feel inadequate due to the large extent of help TLR gives to each person.

### **Case Study B: Boy**

29. To further determine what some success factors for hosting displaced youths could be, we looked at a successful experience of two families hosting a displaced youth (“Boy”). Boy had spent 3-4 years in Boys’ Home and had a social worker who had been working with him on family reunification. Boy was transferred to another home when one incident occurred which caused the home to be

unable to keep him. This crisis further estranged him and his parents, reducing hopes of reconciling with his family.

30. Boy was referred to two families which were deemed “suitable”: B and A, and W and C. For six weeks, B and A took Boy into their home, and connected with Boy’s social worker and the drop-in centre that Boy attended. Every day, Boy would go to work or the drop-in centre and return home by 7pm to have dinner with B and A. B and A were firm with Boy, ensuring he abided by house rules and making sure he honoured his curfew. They also facilitated reflections with Boy. Following that, W and C took Boy in for 12 weeks. They gave Boy support by being present in certain conversations with Boy’s parents and teaching Boy basic disciplines to follow. By the end of the 18 weeks, Boy said to his social worker that should he find himself in difficult situations, he would turn to his host families. See [Annex B](#) for more on Boy’s story.

31. We identified some factors that appear to have contributed to Boy’s progress :

- a. Mutual support and shared goals across host families. During the time, both host families kept in touch with each other on matters relating to Boy. While they had different styles to managing Boy, both maintained the same message, values, and interest in Boy’s personal development. While establishing a relationship with one another for stronger support and accountability and coordination when working with Boy.
- b. Active communication and engagement of stakeholders by host families. Both host families built a strong relationship with Boy’s social worker and were in constant communication, e.g., through a WhatsApp chat group. Through this, they were able to identify common issues to work on with Boy. For example, they knew that he had some trouble with punctuality. The host families thus spent time teaching Boy about the importance and value of honouring one another’s time.
- c. Connection to personal communities of host families. Both host families were actively involved Boy in their personal communities. This allowed Boy to interact with more families and see how they operate, as well as better understand his parents and alternatives for how he could communicate with them. This also expanded Boy’s social circle, learning from more diverse and stable personalities.

32. The benefit of having these families coming into the picture was that the social worker could be more effective in her work. As a result of the host families caring for Boy, the social worker had more space and time to work with his parents.

## Case Study C: Simulation of Community

33. The team designed and tested a simulation to encourage individuals to take personal responsibility for and consider how they can practically contribute to building community in their neighbourhood. Rather than frame it explicitly as an activity on poverty or displacement, the simulation was facilitated as a hands-on workshop on active citizenry. Participants had to take on realistic roles and go through day-to-day scenarios. A variety of crises were then introduced at random, and participants had to attempt to respond to them. (See [Annex A](#) for more details.)
34. We observed that the simulation allowed participants to get a broader sense of interactions within a community and set the tone for them to talk about community living. By the end of the activity, they appeared to have a better understanding of the incentives behind deliberately investing in community and building social capital, as a means to better manage crisis when it happens. They also discovered prejudices they had towards vulnerable groups that they may not have been aware of.

## The Bezer Response

35. Drawing from the case studies and with the considerations in mind, we envision the following initiatives:
  - a. The Bezer Simulation
  - b. Resource Centre (Symphony of Care)
  - c. Navigating Cross-neighbourhood support

### The Bezer Simulation

36. In Case Study C, a workshop was designed and facilitated with the aim of providing the basis to have conversations regarding personal citizenry.
37. This simulation allowed participants to get a broader sense of the sociological interactions of a community in an accessible way. Insights derived from the simulation would reveal prejudices one may develop towards vulnerable groups. It also creates the space for participants to talk about community living, understanding that crises are indiscriminate. A crisis can strike anyone and the support of a holistic community then becomes instantly vital. More details can be found in [Annex A](#).

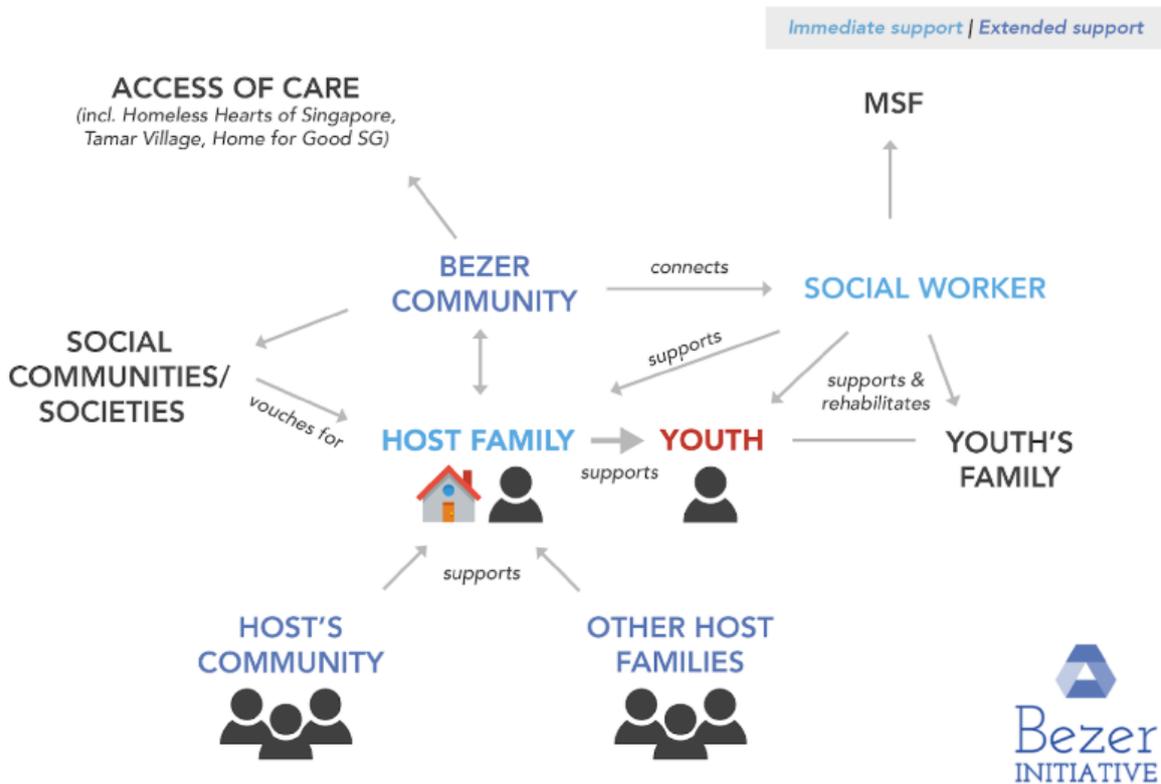
38. The Bezer Simulation can be run by any partner NGO to help the wider community develop greater empathy for those in need of shelter and to see how a community can rally together to support those in need. The facilitators could also identify participants who might want to eventually be a part of the Bezer Community.
39. This simulation can also be part of preparation for those who will be hosts. Before a family is able to host a person in crisis, they might need to better understand how crises occur and build confidence in crisis management.

### **Resource Centre (Symphony of Care)**

40. The Bezer Initiative also wants to codify a cohesive model of community: from the first responders, to the relevant stakeholders connected with the community (both NGOs and government agencies/policies). This model will act as an open-source platform for accessing and sharing experiences and insights in responding to a person-in-crisis.
41. Every person-in-crisis has unique conflicts, contexts, and issues they face. While there are sometimes similarities, adopting a one-size-fits-all model to providing support may not yield the best results for all issues. However, insights from experiences should be shared amongst the community, facilitating a more reflective community-based decision making process.
42. Using volunteers to build bridges across FSCs and government agencies can prevent persons-in-crisis from “falling through the cracks”. Fostering stronger collaboration and information sharing enhances the care and support provided to the person-in-crisis. This increases accuracy of information and enables the appropriate extension of support.
43. We also believe that the responsibility of care should not fall entirely on a single host family. It is not possible for them to meet every need while ensuring that they themselves are cared for. The responsibility can be shared across more stakeholders, where the host family serves as main coordinator of ground-up support that will work with the relevant social workers/agencies.
44. This can be a platform to share experiences and insights in supporting a youth in crisis. Concerns regarding healthcare, education, legal, personal finance are real challenges that deter families from hosting, e.g., if a person who is being hosted borrows money from unlicensed moneylenders and implicates the host.
45. We understand that some people may not be ready to be host themselves or have other commitments (e.g. young children). However, everyone can offer something even if it is not hosting

persons-in-need; we call this the “matrix of care” (see figure below). The needs of the host family can be matched with what individuals in a community can offer, e.g., grocery shopping, tuition, and/or household chores etc.

46. Our vision is to have 1% of Singapore’s population (i.e., 60,000 representatives or about 20,000 households) be part of the Bezer Community – of the “suitable” family unit and are ready to host, as well as galvanise their own community to support those in crisis.



### National Nervous System: Encouraging Cross-neighbourhood Support

47. In Singapore, the different regions and neighbourhoods are likely to have different demographics, e.g., mature estates tend to have more elderly, BTO areas tend to have younger families. Cross-neighbourhood collaborations should be forged to share support that certain neighbourhoods may be better equipped in. This can be expanded from the regional level to the national level.
48. Through the harnessing of technology, we can build support to facilitate stronger collaborations between communities. This is a platform to facilitate easy communications across NGOs and communities.

# Next Steps

49. We want to build a prototype network of families with FSCs by:

- a. developing clearer rules of engagement;
- b. building up case studies; and
- c. refining the criteria for host families (i.e., “suitable” family unit) and how they can be assessed.

50. To build the cross-neighbourhood support, we can start with resource sharing across FSCs in different regions. Eventually, help can be extended beyond youth to any displaced persons.

51. We also want to run the Bezer Simulation with more groups. There was initial success with small groups. But, with further developments and input from FSCs, we can refine this simulation and test it with a larger group. We aim to publish a resource for any NGO working with families (e.g., Focus on the Family) to use and for FSCs to offer as part of community work. We want to encourage families to discuss elements of a healthy community and galvanise volunteers to join the Bezer Community.

## Annexes

Annex A: The Bezer Simulation

Annex B: Boy’s Story

Annex C: Example of a Matrix of Care

# Annexes

## Annex A: The Bezer Simulation

The Bezer Initiative had designed and tested a simulation, facilitated as a workshop aimed at providing the basis of conversation regarding personal citizenry. Almost like a game of life, this simulation creates stories and scenarios that participants can characterise and live in. From the beginning, parallels of the simulation to real life are facilitated to be as realistic as possible; from familial ties, to varying kinds of jobs observed in Singapore. Through the exercise of “living life” on a day to day basis, a variety of crisis are introduced. Participants learn about the volatility of life, where crisis cannot be controlled and are introduced at random. It is in the varying ups and downs, that participant observe day to day living cannot be understood purely from an individualistic perspective, but one in the context of a larger community. That understanding enables participants to see the incentive behind investing deliberately into the workings of community, building social capital in a way that enables community to better support one another and better manage crisis not if, but when it happens.

This simulation allowed participants to get a broader sense of the sociological interactions of a community in an accessible way. Insights derived from the simulation would reveal prejudices one may develop towards vulnerable groups. It also creates the space for participants to talk about community living, understanding that crises are non-discriminated. When a crisis happens to anyone, the support of a holistic community becomes instant poignant.

Anecdotes of active citizenry are shared at the end of the simulation, challenging participants to recall moments of kindness in their own journey (example here: <https://www.solvenplus.one/post/the-can-opener-i-never-asked-for>). These stories shows the value of being kind and sharing resources with one another.

The goals of the simulation:

- a. Raise awareness of personal responsibility to active citizenry
- b. Challenge individuals to consider how they can practically participate in their neighbourhood.
- c. Search for suitable/potential Bezer Representatives whom would be connected to relevant SSOs

The next step would be to codify and publish this simulation as a resource for any SSOs who have a strong network and relationship with families (i.e. Focus on the Families). These SSOs can offer these simulations as immersive and fun programmes for families to participate in. To create new platforms for families to discuss the elements of a healthy community and galvanise volunteers to participant in the Bezer Community.

### **Testimony – Participant**

My character in that game was on hardwork, family and encouraging others and that's what I value in for real life. Eg; in that game I was grouped with Zhi hao & Nathan and we all simulate playing the role of 3 brothers and there was this stage whereby Nathan felt we pangsehed him as we were talking to another simulated game character (TC). Cut the Long story short, we apologised to him and we all reconciled before moving to the next Mission card activity; this emphasising on the value of family. Was learning that we can be so caught up with our own taskings or things we have to do, that we actually lose sight of the small things that matter. Thinking about this morning whereby I was rushing for this combined cell today and just nice my next door neighbour was going for work but he looked Super shag. Maybe what I could have done was to offer prayer for him because he looked like he needed one.

### **Testimony – Community Leader + Participant**

Getting members of my small group to put themselves in the shoes of everyday people with everyday struggles resulted in some powerful personal reflections and insights on how to empathetically love the people we meet everyday.

Through the immersive creative process of generating personas and role-playing them as part of the activity, participants were able to understand why different people develop different personal values as a result of different life experiences, which in turn lead to different responses to life events. For example, the retrenched father desperate to find a way to feed his children, or why the homeless teenager that spends his night at the void deck.

Participants were able to develop a greater appreciation for how external constraints on our mental, emotional and physical bandwidth can lead to bad decisions, which are not necessarily due to 'bad character'. Several participants shared reflections on the activity challenged them to be more aware of their own busyness, and to be intentional in identifying social needs around them.

It was encouraging to see participants responding creatively to various scenario injects, upon realising that new possibilities can be created by building connections and working collaboratively to share resources with one another. One group of participants 'discovered' a single mother who had caregiving struggles for her children, and invited them for a home-cooked meal. In another participant-generated scenario, another group of participants role-playing a trio of brothers experienced a conflict due to a misunderstanding, but later initiated reconciliation with one another, despite daily time pressures.

### Bezer Simulation Programme Outline

Duration	Programme Segment	Remarks
10 min	Icebreaker / Context Setting	Explanation of the simulation and how it will be conducted through the 3 hours.
15 mins	Character Creation and Relationship Building	Participants identify personal characters and find familial ties within the simulation
90 mins	[Activity] Simulated Interaction	6 Stations: HDB, Office, School, Mall, Market, Religious Institution (Social Media Wall included)  Missions are assigned and participants go through the simulated day.  Debrief is done after every simulated day
30 mins	Overall Debrief	Understanding guiding principles of a community in context to SG.  Parallel to current issues that SG face (invisible communities)
35 mins	Challenge Development	Break-out Session (Discuss resolution and personal challenges for the future)

## **Annex B: Boy's Story**

The following story was a record released with permission of an FSC, with anonymity to protect the Boy's identity and his family. As part of having our family hosts care for Boy, The Bezer Initiative met up with the manager of the FSC to debrief on Boy's journey and his development with the families.

### **Boy's Story - Case study recorded from Social Worker's Perspective**

When we first started working with Boy and his family in January 2018, he had twice been admitted to a children's home following harsh physical punishment from his father. Boy stayed in out-of-home care for 5 years.

The focus of our intervention was to reintegrate Boy home. Boy then presented with challenging behaviours such as not going to school, lying and stealing, which caused a lot of stress and frustration to his parents. Boy's father would find it a challenge to manage his anger and resort to physical violence, harsh words or kick him out of the house. Boy's mother would feel helpless and stuck between her husband and son, while his sister would stay away, jaded from so many years of tension within the family.

During the course of our intervention, it was necessary to place Boy twice in another residential home when it was assessed to not be safe for him to be home. In the meantime, intensive support continued for the family – working on anger management and healthy coping methods, improving family relationships and having Boy be meaningfully engaged either by going to work or a youth centre. Boy also attended animal therapy to build his confidence and problem-solving skills, and saw a psychiatrist to assess if he required ADHD medication.

From September to December 2018, the family was doing well. There had been several times when father and son were angry with each other but managed to step away from each other and cool down.

In March 2019, however, there had been another recurrence of physical harm at home. Boy was 17 and could not be protected under the Children and Young Persons' Act, which had a maximum age of 16 then. MSF Child Protection could not come in to work with Boy and his family, and Boy would not be able to stay in a residential home. The few homes that had voluntary admission were not keen to take him in due to his challenging behaviours. Hostels turned him down too as they did not have the manpower to supervise him. Boy could not stay with his relatives too as they feared not being able to

manage him or having to face his father's anger. Boy ended up having to sleep in a backpacker's hostel. Everyone worried about him getting into fights with strangers or falling into bad company outside.

We contacted Ken and Addy, who were willing to have Boy stay with them, if not for other boys who were already staying with them and acquainted with Boy. Through the Bezer Community, Ken and Addy thankfully linked us up with BA, who were fast in opening their house for Boy to stay in. Boy stayed with them for 3 months in which he worked on his goals of 1) going to work or the youth centre, 2) stopping smoking and 3) rebuilding his relationship with his father. Boy also attended church with BA, and joined them for activities together with their friends. BA also mentored Boy in the areas of money management, communication skills and challenged Boy to do pull-ups in preparation for NS. Time away from Boy also allowed parents to take a breather and re-commit towards having him return home. The family continued to have family therapy sessions together and met up for meals. Boy progressively spent more time with his family and returned home in Jun 2019.

Boy began to stay with WC when his parents had to go overseas at the same time, and worried about him being home alone. WC continue to make their house available for him as a place to rest and re-charge when Boy feels that he needs more space between him and his father. Boy has matured in his thinking, in managing his emotions and decision-making. His interactions with his family has been more positive and he has grown closer to his sister. He is grateful to BA, and WC who continued to guide him. Boy's parents are grateful too BA, and WC have been able to guide Boy in a way they have not been able to. They have also been open to receive feedback from BA, and WC on what works in caring for John. We are grateful for the community stepping up where families might have fallen through the gaps of the formal welfare system. Boy and his family have received a lot of support and thankfully, these meaningful relationships continue even as professionals step out.

## **Interview with The BA Family**

The following interview was done with 1 of 2 family hosts who had taken in Boy at different seasons. The family was highly encouraged to be as honest as possible about their experience and intention; especially their decisions and choices were deeply influenced by their faith. Their responses are recorded with their permission (with anonymity).

### **1. What were some initial impression you had before doing such a thing**

The first time we discussed such a thing (hosting strangers in our own home) was after reading an article about Ken & Addy of The Last Resort. I remember we had been reflecting on whether it was more uncomfortable to move out of your comfort zone to go to a foreign missions field, or to make your comfort zone the missions field, and thought it was definitely the latter. We wondered what type of people God called to this type of work.

### **2. What made you decide to do it at the end**

A few months later, we were contacted by a friend from the Bezer Community who was helping Ken & Addy look for a place for a displaced young lady, who asked if we were open to taking her in. It was at a time when we were studying the book of Joshua, and were challenged to think about what new and unknown place God was calling us to next. God was showing us through the example of what he did in Joshua's time that all he wanted was our faithful obedience to take the first step, and that He'd provide everything else we'd need, and in miraculous ways only He can.

As we discussed our decision, it became clear that there were so many reasons why we should say yes, and practically no reasons to say no. God had blessed us with the space and resources to take someone else in under our roof; the Bible records that Jesus commands us to share what we have with those who need it; it was the way the early church lived. Most of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples happened within the home, and we had set up our home from the start to be a place of ministry. The only reason to say no was that we didn't know what to expect and had a fear of the unknown.

Ultimately, we said yes because this was God's call for us in this season and we wanted to obey. Although the first placement fell through, the same reasons came up again when we made the decision to take Boy in, a month later.

### **3. How had the experience been (good and bad)**

The scariest part of the experience was before Boy arrived - we simply had no clue what to expect and we anticipated major changes to our seemingly comfortable lifestyle and routine. Since then, it's been amazing to see how God works through what little we have to offer. We have no experience in parenting, much less in caring for a displaced and troubled teen. Yet God would speak to us through His word, provide us with support in community, and work in all our hearts to enable us to know how to guide and mentor Boy, and for Boy to receive it willingly. Gospel living hardly gets more real than this.

Of course, there are inconveniences that we have to put up with - the lack of privacy, sacrificing time that would otherwise have been spent with friends or alone, and having to deal with human conflicts and disappointments with Boy. It's not a bed of roses, but it's the Christian life.

Boy was a troubled teen with a troubled past, but we aren't perfect either. The journey is ultimately about building a relationship, building trust, and watching God do the transformative work. We have taken away so much from this experience ourselves too - learning more about ourselves, learning empathy, learning patience, learning to be firm.

## Annex C: Matrix of Care

The Matrix of Care was an exercise conducted to analyze the human capital that is available in families of varying contexts. The following report annexed is structured by age groups, the possible constraints that they may encounter as well as what they can offer.

### What are the needs of the family?

- Constraints: time, resources, emotional capacity?
- Financial support (especially if youth needs financial support too)
- Physical / Mental Relief and Rest: e.g. cooking some meals at home (especially for those who are busy working and need rest time)



### What can you offer?

- Residence, somewhere to stay (Physical)
- Conducive environment to study (Physical)
- Therapy / mental-emotional outlet (Emotional)
- Meals for family (Physical)
- Financial support for schooling fees (Career / Academic / Financial)
- Academic support and tutoring (Career / Academic)
- Interest-based: educational opportunities, internships (Career / Academic)
- Jobs (Career / Academic)
- Outings and Hangouts (Relational)

## The Matrix of Care

Individuals	Possible Constraints	What can be offered
Schooling or graduated Individuals (under 25 y/o)	Financial Capital Cannot provide a physical home	Friendship! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pursuing common interests: e.g. playing sports regularly, going on outings to places</li> <li>- Just a buddy to talk to about life, especially if they feel they cannot talk to their parents about it</li> </ul> Academic support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer tutoring (tuition, share notes, etc.)</li> <li>- Skills development/upgrading: e.g. design skills, coding etc.</li> </ul>
Working adults (25-60)	Time, have their own families to provide for	Financial Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For schooling / tuition fees</li> <li>- Towards buying resources for academic development (e.g. books, sign up for courses)</li> </ul> Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jobs, internships</li> </ul> Acts of Service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cook meals for the family once a week</li> <li>- Days out / bring youth with them on their family outings</li> </ul> Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perhaps can provide a conducive place to study if it's not in the foster home</li> </ul>
Young working adults (25-35)	Financial resources are limited	A home and family A conducive place to study and to rest? Closer, emotional mentoring
Old Nesters	Physical energy maybe	Time A home and family Acts of Service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cook meals for the family once a week</li> <li>- Days out / bring youth with them on their family outings</li> <li>- Perhaps can provide a conducive place to study if it's not in the foster home</li> </ul>