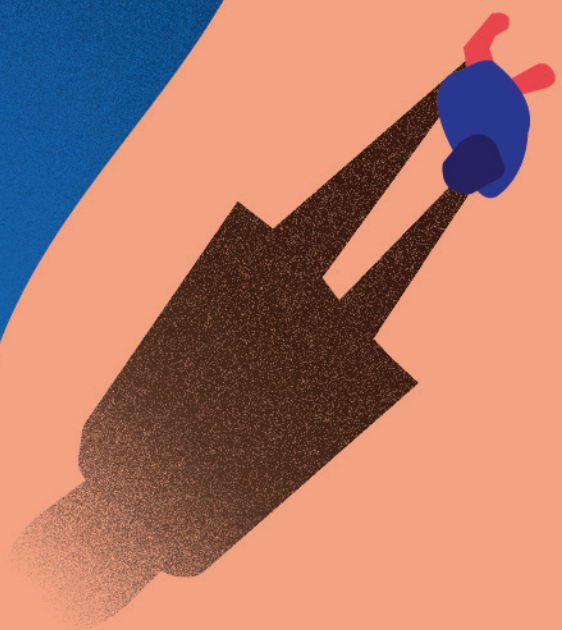


# A Call for Collaborative Giving

Closing the gap for  
disadvantaged young persons



# A Changing Climate

When a butterfly flaps its wings, myriad factors push that gentle breeze along the way till it becomes a typhoon elsewhere.

The social issues we face today are not that different. Just like wind patterns, how multiple factors interact with each other produce very different outcomes. They are always in motion, deeply complex and difficult to dissect. In this context, responding effectively requires a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach. In 2017, the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and Community Foundation of Singapore (CFS) started Colabs. This initiative brings together philanthropists, non-profits, companies and the public sector to collectively build insights and work towards social change.

Ensuring social mobility and enabling social integration are today's key challenges. These issues provide the backdrop for the communities we focus on: children and youth, persons with disabilities, and seniors. We do not know how these challenges will unfold but one thing is for sure, the scale, scope and complexity of these issues cannot be solved by a single player – business, government agencies, non-profits and academia – we all need to come together if we want to see transformation and change in our society.

As the landscape of philanthropy continues to evolve and expand, it has become clear that how we give affects the outcome. This first Colabs report presents the collective insights of 115 participants on disadvantaged children and youths, plus suggestions for collaborative action.

Collaboration in cross-sector partnerships can unleash innovative ways of working, mobilise expertise and unlock hard-to-reach resources, generating shared value and accountability to tackle the root causes of social problems. Whether you work in a company, non-profit organisation, foundation, or give in your private capacity, if you are looking for more impactful social change, we hope you consider collaborative partnerships as a way of giving. Each of us plays a valuable role but it is in collaboration where real transformation can take place.

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Director, Strategic Partnership  
National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre

**Joyce Teo**  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer  
Community Foundation of Singapore

# An Academic Divide

## Education is a social leveller...

Most parents see education as their children's foundation for better lives, and rightfully so. It is widely-held as a social leveller, a way to reduce growing divides in opportunities and outcomes for children across different strata of society. The higher the education attained, the better one's chances of earning higher wages.

Based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – an evaluation that tests skills and knowledge of 15-year old students worldwide – Singapore has a world-class education system, faring better in maths, science and reading than countries like Finland, Japan and Korea.

## ...but the playing field isn't level

Research shows that children from lower-income families tend to have poorer educational outcomes. Within Singapore, socio-economic differences accounted for a variation of 17% for student performances in Science, higher than the average of 13% across 35 countries.

As of 2016, the median gross starting salary of university graduates in full-time permanent employment is \$3,360, about 1.7 times that of an ITE graduate (\$2,000). So, while education is indeed a powerful leveller to bridge the social mobility gap, it can widen that very gap into a chasm should we not lend a helping hand to disadvantaged youths today.

Not every child has the access, aptitude or know-how to fully tap into the potential education can provide. Challenges begin in a child's home environment – a complex web of economic, social, cultural and personal factors that shape how much they can absorb in school, how well they do and ultimately how far they can go.

This guide looks into some of these factors and provides suggestions on how givers can contribute towards diverse forms of long-term support for these young persons.

#Go deeper into how academic performance affects social mobility

## A Homeground Disadvantage

4

A lifetime of catching up starts with the home and family.

## Catalysing Change

8

A way to plug the gaps in giving.

## Be the Change

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Are you a giver whose goodwill needs a direction?

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A stylized illustration of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a dark blue dress and red shoes, standing on the edge of a light brown cliff. The background is a deep blue sky with several stylized, light-colored clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

# Jane, Excluded

## Chained to circumstance.

Jane Lee, 14, is currently in secondary school, in the Normal (Tech) stream. She is extremely shy, soft-spoken and struggles with her command of English. She is unable to get help from her mother as Mrs. Lee herself barely speaks the language.

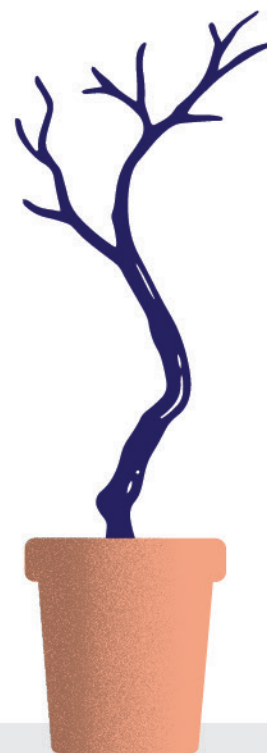
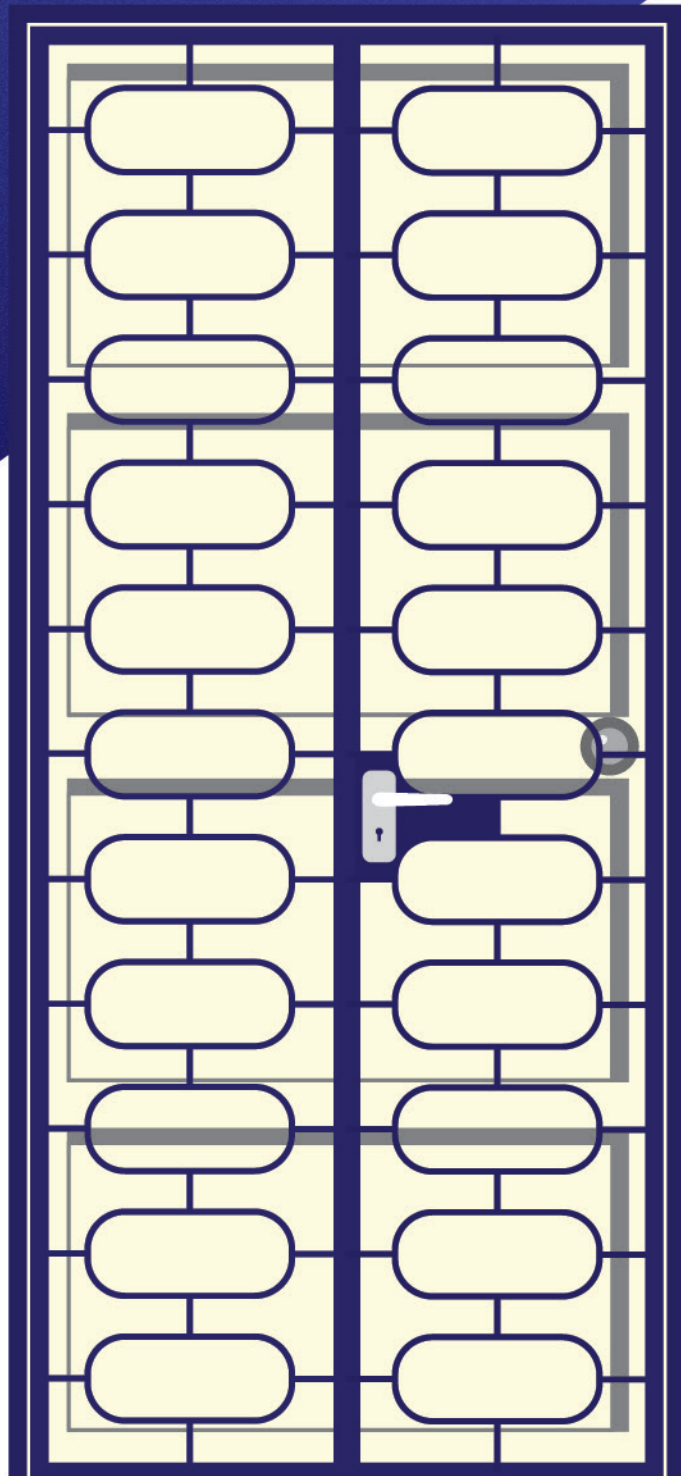
Jane's father passed from a heart attack at 49, when she was only 10, leaving Mrs. Lee to be the sole breadwinner for Jane and her two sisters.

Jane is behind in most subjects in school and has few friends. She spends most

of her time at home caring for her two younger siblings and helping with household chores while Mrs. Lee holds two jobs to make ends meet. During the holidays, Jane works part-time to cover her school expenses.

When she occasionally catches her mother breaking down in private, Jane gets stressed and confused. She does not have anyone to confide in and is frustrated with her life. She is considering dropping out of school to work and help lighten her mother's financial burden.

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# A Homeground Disadvantage

## It starts at home.

Disadvantaged young persons like Jane face many challenges that cripple their ability to do well in school and beyond. And it all starts at home.

These challenges may stem from her family's limited resources, a stressful and uncondusive home environment or her lack of access to adult supervision and guidance on studies and personal issues.

The family environment hugely impacts a young person's development and goes on to influence their socio-emotional behaviours. It can easily lead to low confidence and self-esteem, impatience, impulse or inappropriate emotional responses. This then affects performance in school and their ability to fulfil their potential.

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# Inheriting Inequality

## Income

Like Jane's mother, parents from disadvantaged families tend to work long hours or hold shift jobs. This impacts their relationships with their children, leaving them scarce time and resources to invest in their children's development.

These families struggle to get by and are often focused on meeting immediate needs, such as putting food on the table, or paying bills. The economic stress of providing for today often leaves them with fewer options. Even though they understand the importance of a good education, tuition and enrichment are often considered luxuries they can ill-afford (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2013).

**“In Singapore, affluent parents (earning >\$6000/month) spend 30% to 50% more on tuition than less well-off parents.”**

(Teng, 2015)

## Education

Studies have found a relationship between parents' education and the education attainment and income levels of their children. An ethnographic study of low-income households in Singapore found that parents often felt ill-equipped to help their children in their homework due to their lack of familiarity with the curriculum and the rigor of the educational system (Brassard, 2015).

**“Children with more highly educated parents were more likely to develop higher aspirations for their own education, and attained more education by age 19, which in turn related to higher levels of adult educational attainment.”**

(Dubow, Boxer, Huesmann, 2010)

## Environment

Children of low-income families face multiple stressors in day-to-day life. This can range from household conflicts, incarcerated parents, divorced or single parents, to family members with special needs. Constant chronic stress impacts their physical, social and emotional growth. It can result in consequences like poor health (e.g. higher blood pressure, weaker immunity) or negatively affect their attention span, behaviour or ability to delay gratification (Mathews & Chan, 2015).

#Go deeper into challenges they face due to family circumstances

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# A Downhill Struggle

Shaped by their family background, young persons like Jane will likely face some form of disadvantage at every crucial stage of life. These disadvantages significantly affect their personal development, educational attainment and eventually their ability to be socially mobile.

## Socio-Economic Background of Family

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One's family background consists of:

- physical resources like family income, material wealth
- educational attainment of parents and key family members
- the strength of relationships within and beyond the family

2

A young person from a disadvantaged background often has to:

- help with chores or adult duties/ responsibilities with expectations not on par with their development (role reversals)
- sacrifice their own needs for attention, comfort, and guidance
- forgo pursuits of friendship and/or education to fulfil duties (Mathews & Chan, 2015)

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This can bring anxiety, depression, psychological distress, shame, eating disorders, substance misuse, poor literacy development and academic performance (Mathews & Chan, 2015).



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## Personal Development

### Less Access

Children in poverty are likely to have less access to print media, age-appropriate toys, informal learning venues and educational digital materials, which can result in a less cognitively stimulated childhood (Mathews & Chan, 2015).

### Less Growth

Chronic family stress also affects their self-regulation and coping mechanisms and abilities like attention control, working memory and planning (Mathews & Chan, 2015). Disadvantaged preschool children are more likely to develop behaviour problems than their higher socio-economic status counterparts. They also tend to have lower language abilities and relatively more deficits in social skills (Mathews & Chan, 2015).

## Educational Attainment

Family background has an impact on academic performance and levels of education attainment. Socio-economically disadvantaged students are more likely than advantaged students to repeat a grade (OECD, 2018). A survey of 2,000 respondents from lower-income families in Singapore revealed that four in 10 (44.2%) had only primary school education or below. About a fifth of respondents (19.9%) had some form of secondary education, but they did not eventually obtain GCE qualifications. (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2013).

## Social Mobility

Evidence shows a clear connection between socio-emotional capabilities and positive life outcomes, such as educational attainment, employment status, health and behaviour (McNeil, Reeder & Rich, 2012).

In other words, if disadvantaged young persons face a challenge developing the skills and behaviours they need to success in life, their academic attainment and social mobility will be impacted.

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# Catalysing Change

For young persons like Jane, these disadvantages left unaddressed, cast a shadow over the course of their lives. To help disadvantaged young persons get ahead in life, we need intervention at various levels: enabling the individual, strengthening the work of non-profits and building systemic change at the sector level.

## What does Jane need?

Jane can benefit from support that enables her to build both her academic and socio-emotional capabilities such as resilience, managing of feelings and communication skills to improve her options and outlook on life as she moves on to post-secondary education.

In the absence of a positive relationship with an adult, a social worker or mentor from the school or non-profit can help Jane process negative and complex emotions, manage the demands and relationships at both home and school or seek financial support for transport, food or additional schooling items that influence her performance. Jane's mother must also be engaged to build a closer relationship with her daughter and reinforce her learnings at home.

## What do non-profits need?

Non-profit organisations need resources such as funding and skilled expertise to effectively develop, deliver and evaluate quality programmes for Jane and her family.


Working directly with the clients like Jane and her mother, they need qualified staff with understanding of youth-work frameworks and therapies to know how to support Jane and her family, assess their needs and direct them to suitable programmes or services. Without that knowledge and manpower, they cannot be effective bridges.

## What does the sector need?

We need more cross-sector partnerships or alliances between non-profits, businesses, academia and government agencies to create change. This may be achieved by sharing data, funding different components of a programme or aligning programmes to shared outcome frameworks.

Sharing of information allows stakeholders to see each others' perspectives and provide richer insights into the successes and challenges, while addressing the needs and better enabling the strengths and aspirations of young persons like Jane.

# Greater Good Through Collaboration



Many societal challenges today are complex and cannot be solved in isolation. Fortunately, we see a growing recognition of others' valuable contributions and an increasing desire for greater impact. Now is the time for collaboration, for givers, non-profits and government agencies to work together to:

- increase coordination in financial and human resource allocations
- capitalise on varied strengths and expertise of different organisations
- enable a more informed and iterative way to influence policy
- grow the potential for systemic and sustained change, with improved outcomes and impact
- provide a continuum for disadvantaged young persons to better their odds

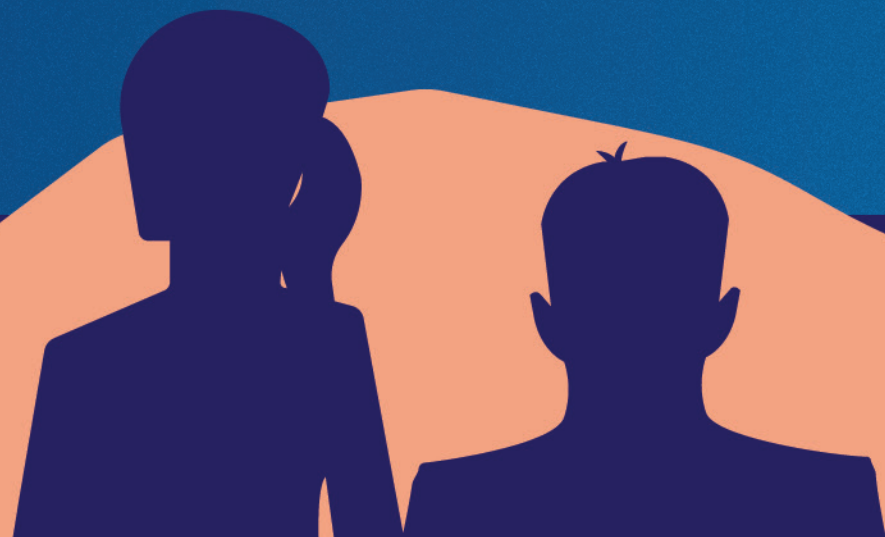
## Give your goodwill a direction.

As you start your collaborative giving journey, look out for these factors to improve your group's chances of success<sup>1</sup>:

- a common cause
- an influential champion
- adequate financial resources
- a sense of urgency for change

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<sup>1</sup> Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work  
[Click here for more.](#)



# Be the Change

We invite corporations, SMEs, grant-makers, foundations, trusts, and individual donors who can provide funding, skill-based volunteering or pro-bono expertise to drive greater social impact through collective action.

As a giver, you can help in 3 ways:

Directly fund programmes at  
**Programme level**

Support efforts at  
**Organisational level**

Support efforts at  
**Sector level**

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# Giving at Programme Level

<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	Young persons and their families
<b>GOAL</b>	Deliver and scale quality programmes that benefit disadvantaged youth
<b>TIMELINE</b>	1 - 3 years

HOW YOU CAN GIVE	HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER
<b>Fund a programme:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sustained and long-term funding</li><li>• Scale existing programmes</li><li>• Pilot experiments</li><li>• Pay for evaluation</li></ul>	<b>Offer your time and abilities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be a mentor</li><li>• Coach a sports team</li><li>• Perform home visits</li><li>• Be a facilitator in camps</li></ul>

If your passion is to help disadvantaged young persons and their families directly, you can consider supporting non-profits in the delivery of their programmes and services. You can fund programmes that aim to:

- develop socio-emotional capabilities in young persons, such as empathy, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, emotional competence, social maturity and self-management (via strengths-based approach<sup>2</sup> and assessment<sup>3</sup>)
- help them build positive and supportive relationships with family and peers
- provide young persons like Jane, with access to positive adult role models
- provide opportunities to develop social and cultural capital
- develop their hard and soft skills in areas such as literacy and numeracy, communication and employability
- improve their academic performance and education attainment (i.e. certification or vocational qualification)

<sup>2</sup> Strengths-Based Approaches for Working with Individuals  
[Click here for more.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Assessing Positive Youth Characteristics  
[Click here for more.](#)

# Giving at Organisational Level

<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	Non-profits
<b>GOAL</b>	Optimise non-profit capabilities to deliver quality programmes and services
<b>TIMELINE</b>	2-4 years

<b>HOW YOU CAN FUND</b>	<b>HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER</b>
<p><b>Fund investments in systems and process improvements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Donor and volunteer management system</li><li>• Hiring of manpower</li><li>• Staff training</li><li>• Renovation of dated facilities</li></ul>	<p><b>Offer your expertise and time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help develop marketing campaigns</li><li>• Set up IT systems and databases</li><li>• Be a board member</li><li>• Plan for fundraising activities</li></ul>

If you believe that investing in people, systems and infrastructure builds a solid foundation for performance and impact, you can contribute towards opportunities that strengthen a non-profit's capacity and capabilities to run quality programmes and services. These include:

- funding non-profits and manpower initiatives that attract, develop and retain people with the skills and passion to work with young persons
- flexible funding of overheads, outreach efforts, or other programme elements that complement existing government funding, freeing up resources for non-profits to sustain or expand good programmes
- funding programme development and evaluations
- lending your industry skills in strategy, planning, marketing, design, communications, etc.
- supporting research or training that help non-profits improve programme design or to better understand young persons' needs

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# Giving at Sector Level

<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	Non-profits, government agencies and businesses
<b>GOAL</b>	Create systemic change at sector level by sharing and building knowledge and expertise, and advocating for policy changes
<b>TIMELINE</b>	3 years onwards

HOW YOU CAN GIVE	HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER
<p><b>Fund cross-sectoral partnership initiatives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pay for research and evaluation</li><li>• Invest in data-sharing platforms</li><li>• Contribute to collective funds</li></ul>	<p><b>Take on advocacy roles to influence improvements in the sector:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sit on cross-sector committees</li><li>• Be a facilitator</li><li>• Network with government leaders</li></ul>

If you desire to see big-picture changes that positively impact disadvantaged young persons, through effective and efficient use of resources, you can consider contributing towards sector-level initiatives that better synergise government policies and social programmes. You should:

- fund services that enable non-profits and government agencies to share data, knowledge and outcome frameworks, or aim to develop a common language for programme design
- support activities that create cross-learning opportunities for organisations and aggregation of insights that can inform sector-wide changes to better align and review outcomes

# Jane, Empowered

## Cause for hope.

Jane Lee, 14, is currently in secondary school, in the Normal (Tech) stream. She comes from a single-parent, low-income family, but her school and a family service centre are aware and providing support towards her family's financial situation and learning challenges in her studies.

Jane struggles with her English but is improving, thanks to weekly tuition sessions run by qualified teachers from the family service centre. She also takes part in a youth mentorship programme that develops key life-skills such as emotional regulation, confidence and communication. She now has a group of friends whom she hangs out with regularly and has a great relationship with her mentor whom she can confide in.

Jane's mother is receiving counselling support for her emotional outbursts and learning to better manage the family's finances. Jane's two younger siblings are cared for at a nearby childcare centre, giving her time to spend on her studies and personal development.

Despite the challenges at home and in school, Jane is hopeful about her future. She knows that she needs to work hard if she wants a better life for herself and her family. And she will find ways to achieve her dreams, with the support of people around her.



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# We are Colabs.

**Collaborative action, collective impact.**

Colabs is an initiative by the Community Foundation of Singapore and the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre. It drives collaboration by bringing together the public, private and social sectors to learn and co-create solutions for lasting change. This first series focuses on the issues surrounding disadvantaged young persons.

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