

The background features a stylized landscape with a teal sky and a light orange ground. Several teal, stylized clouds are scattered across the sky. In the lower-left foreground, a silhouette of a person in a wheelchair is shown on a path that curves towards the right. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

A Call for Collaborative Giving

**Bridging the Divide for
Persons with Disabilities**



FOREWORD

In Search of Solid Ground

The open sea is daunting and unpredictable. The further we are from stable ground, the less we feel in control.

Like the ocean, our society is a vast, intricate ecosystem, where beneath a sometimes smooth surface swirl endless, complex currents that are difficult to navigate and overcome.

The enormity of social problems is such that effective and sustainable solutions necessitate a coordinated effort by multiple stakeholders across many sectors. Cross-sector partnerships have the potential to maximise resources, create shared value and common purpose, and generate more holistic solutions.

To this end, the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and Community Foundation of Singapore (CFS) launched Colabs in 2017. This initiative brought together philanthropists, non-profits, companies and the public sector to better understand social issues, share knowledge and insights, and then journey collaboratively towards social change.

Social integration is a key challenge we recognise for the communities on which Colabs focuses: Children and Youth, Persons with Disabilities and Seniors.

In our second Colabs series, 82 participants from 50 organisations came together over five sessions to explore the challenges facing post-18-year-old persons with disabilities in Singapore. Through two broad approaches of meaningful engagement and gainful employment, we examined the existing landscape in Singapore for persons with disabilities as well as innovative solutions from overseas. The findings are summarised in this giving guide.

Government agency or academia, non-profit organisation or corporation, foundation or an individual—whichever you are, consider giving through a collaborative partnership so your efforts may truly make waves.

Darrel Lim

Director, Strategic Partnership
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Swim or Sink

With medical advances, persons with disabilities are living longer lives. Their parents are also ageing, and smaller families mean that there may not be a loved one able or willing to look after them. Then, there is the growing number of children diagnosed with developmental problems.

About 4,000 pre-schoolers were diagnosed in 2015 with developmental problems such as autism and speech and language delays at KK Women's and Children's Hospital and the National University Hospital, a 60% jump from 2010.

Persons with disabilities form a significant portion of Singapore's population. They account for 2.1% of the student segment, form 3.4% of people aged 18–49 and the number rises to 13.3% for those aged 50 and over. As one ages, the chances of becoming disabled increase through stroke and other illnesses (NCSS, 2017).

They are supported until they turn 18...

Through a national roadmap called the Enabling Masterplan, the government works to support persons with disabilities as they grow up. This includes services and schemes such as early childhood intervention programmes, assistive technology and rehabilitative services.

As of 2017, there were about 1,770 children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) per age cohort. 75% of them, or about 1,330 children, had mild SEN and were able to learn in mainstream schools. The remaining 25%, or about 440 children, had moderate to severe SEN and would attend government-funded Special Education (SPED) schools till the age of 18 (Puthuchery, Phua, Aljunied, Ang, Chia et al, 2017).

From 2019, all children born after 1 January 2012 with moderate to severe SEN are required to regularly attend a SPED school under a Compulsory Education framework, unless they are exempted (Goy and Teng, 2016).

...but then they have to swim or sink

Ideally, persons with disabilities are gainfully employed after graduating from school. However, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) reported that from 2014 to 2016, only about 650 persons with disabilities have been employed under the government's Open Door Programme (MSF, 2016).

While persons with disabilities with mild SEN can usually find some form of employment or further education, most SPED school graduates at 18 face limited options: stay at home, join a day activity centre or enter a sheltered workshop. (Raghunathan, Balakrishnan, Smith and Md Kadir, 2015). Without meaningful engagement, they usually suffer a decline in their physical, mental and emotional health.

This guide looks at what is being done and what more we can do for persons with disabilities after they graduate.

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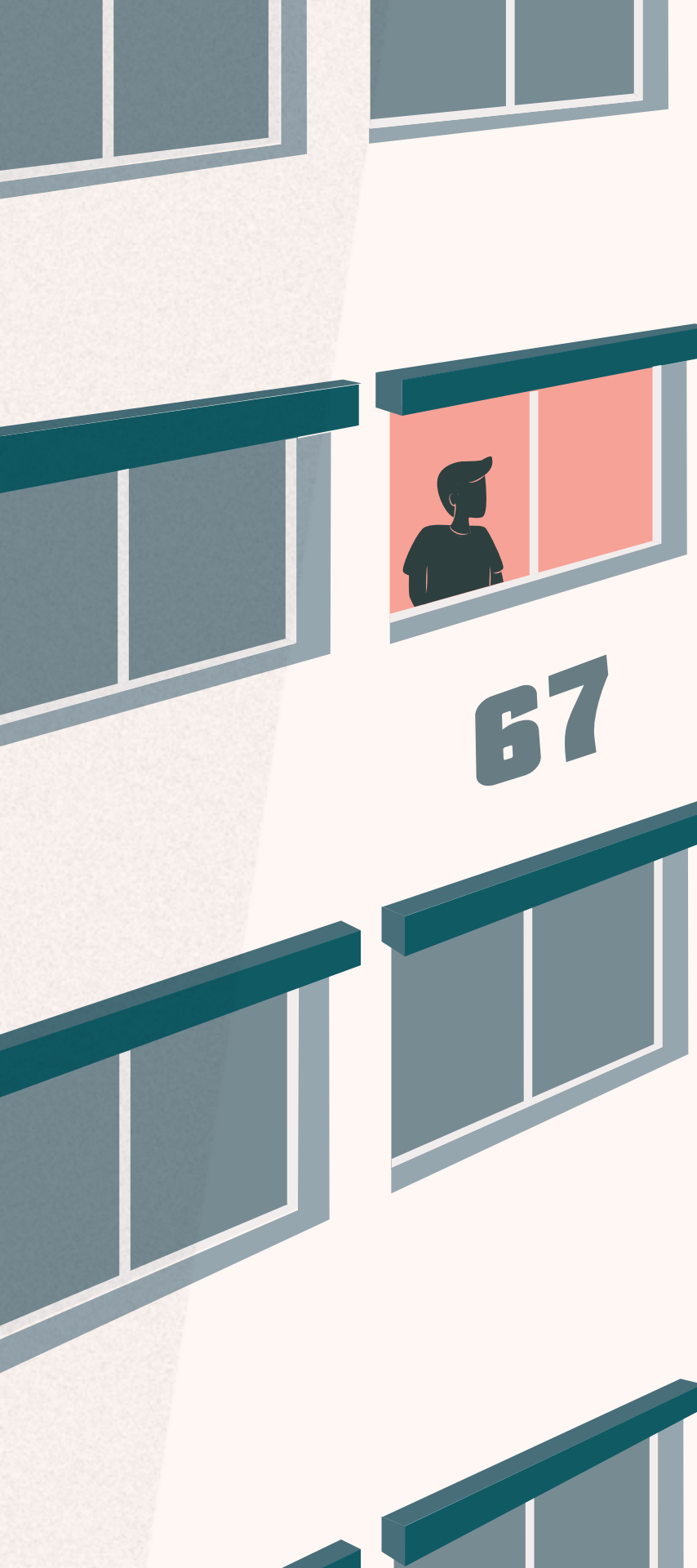
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Peter, Stranded

Facing daunting odds and an uncertain future

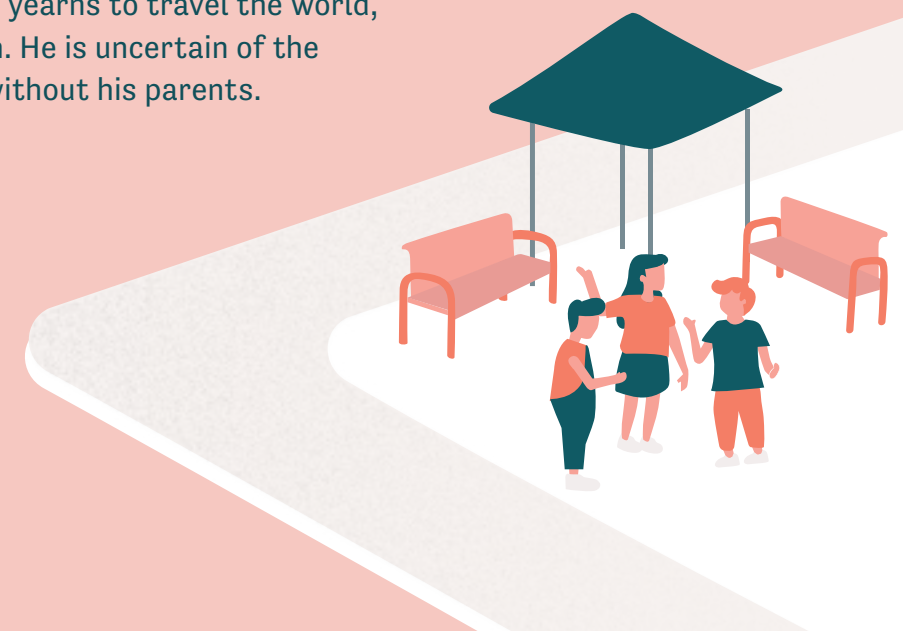
Peter, 23, has cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that primarily affects his muscular coordination, balance and voluntary movement. He has difficulty walking and relies on a wheelchair to move around. The condition also affects his speech and causes involuntary jerks and spasms in his movements. As a result, Peter is very shy and is uncomfortable being in crowded places or amongst strangers.

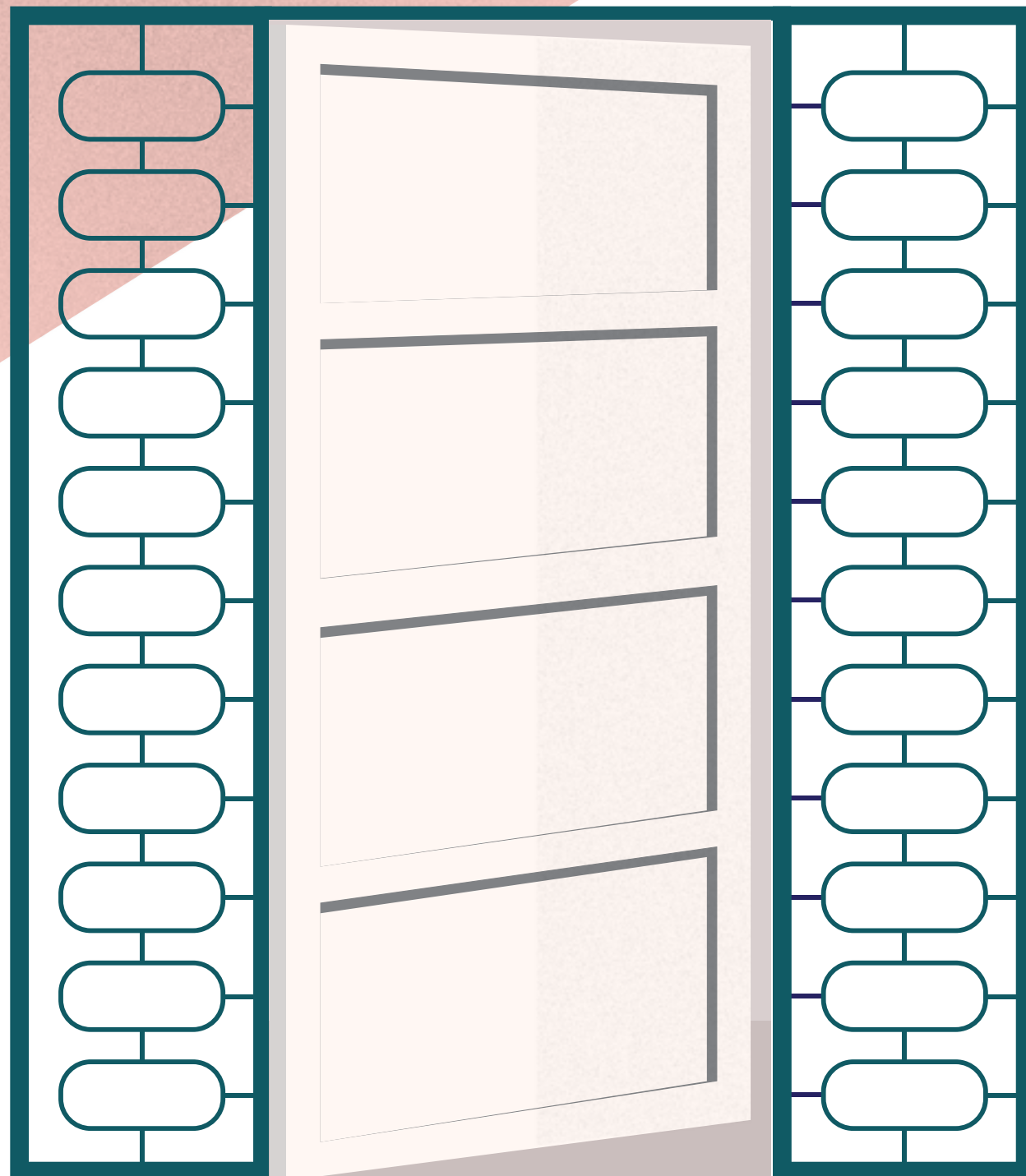
Peter lives with his ageing parents who help him to his sheltered workshop every day before going to their own jobs. He earns a small allowance from sorting and packing items. While Peter is glad that he can contribute a little to the household, he finds the work monotonous and the sheltered workshop environment boring.

On weekends, Peter stays at home watching TV or playing games online. He has few friends outside of the workshop and finds it hard to go out on his own without his parents. He misses his time in school—the activities and interactions with teachers, friends and volunteers.

Peter's parents are very protective of their only son and worried about his future. They are afraid that as Peter ages, his condition may worsen with no one to look after him when they are gone. With limited finances, their options are restricted and there are few suitable adult disability homes.

Peter longs for greater independence and yearns to travel the world, but he feels that it is an impossible dream. He is uncertain of the future and afraid of how he will manage without his parents.





What is Being Done Today?

A plan for social inclusion

As a commitment to support persons with disabilities, the government launched the Enabling Masterplan in 2007. It charts the development of programmes and services in the disability sector and serves as a roadmap for Singapore to build a more inclusive society where persons with disabilities are empowered and enabled to realise their true potential.

Reviewed every five years, it is now in its third iteration (2017–2021) and currently focuses on:

- improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities like Peter;
- supporting caregivers like Peter's parents;
- developing a community of support; and
- building an inclusive society.

One of its key initiatives is SG Enable. The agency empowers persons with disabilities through supporting schemes and grants, enhanced employment and educational opportunities. SG Enable also guides persons with disabilities and their caregivers across life stages and rallies support from the community.

The government-run Workfare Income Supplement Scheme also provides cash and CPF payouts to supplement the wages and retirement savings of low-income persons with disabilities (Ministry of Manpower, 2016).

Different Journeys for the Differently Abled

Depending on the type and severity of their condition, persons with disabilities have some options for gainful employment or at least to stay engaged with the society at large.

Those with mild SEN may obtain work opportunities through additional training, job role re-design and job placement programmes. Those with moderate SEN may work in sheltered workshops like Peter's or participate in day activity centres. In more severe cases, caregivers may prefer to hire domestic helpers to care for them at home.

— Open Employment

While persons with disabilities form a significant segment of our population, only a small subset of them found open employment, forming a mere 0.1% of the private sector workforce (NCSS 2017).

— Sheltered Workshops and Social Enterprises

With developmental disabilities, individuals like Peter have limited job opportunities. Sheltered workshops, run by social enterprises or charities, provide basic employment opportunities in a more conducive environment. But there are currently fewer than 10 of such workshops, with their job offerings narrow in scope and progression, limited to roles like data entry and telemarketing (SG Enable, 2018).

Social enterprises offer a wider range of job functions plus the chance to interact with the general public in a relatively safe space.

— Residential Homes

Persons with disabilities with no alternative accommodation may opt to stay in long-term adult disability homes. These could also provide short-term respite care for caregivers.

— Day Activity Centres (DACs)

DACs here cater largely to persons aged 18 to 60 who have more severe disabilities. They provide activities that promote skills development as well as caregiver support (Metta Welfare Association, 2017).



Battling the Currents

Social isolation

A Lien Foundation survey of 1,000 people on their attitudes towards children with disabilities found that close to two-thirds of respondents shared the belief that Singaporeans are willing to share public spaces with children with special needs, but are not willing to interact with them. Over one-third said children with special needs are not part of their social circle. Other surveys showed as much:

“I do not feel included or accepted by society.”

“I have little to no opportunity to contribute or reach my potential.”

Sentiments felt by 62% of persons with disabilities (NCSS and Tote Board, 2016)

Only 36% of the public said they would be comfortable being close friends with persons with disabilities.

(NCSS and Tote Board, 2016)

Being out and about in Singapore is uncommon for persons with moderate to severe disabilities. They often attend specialised day activity centres located at void decks or secluded locations, segregated from the larger community.

All this suggests the dearth of interaction and perceived discomfort around persons with disabilities stem from ignorance and uncertainty, rather than prejudice. Yet to change mindsets, correct misconceptions and overcome ignorance, we face a catch-22 challenge where we must find ways to facilitate meaningful interaction between persons with and without disabilities.

Caregivers need care too

The role of a caregiver is physically and emotionally demanding, especially when looking after persons with disabilities who need high-level care. As families grow smaller and the population gets increasingly older, a gap in caregiving will be more keenly felt.

Many caregivers struggle with burn-out. A 2013 study by Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School revealed that nearly half of 1,190 caregivers surveyed held jobs. Yet they spent 38 hours every week on caregiving and were likely to experience high levels of stress and depression.

In many service models, the priority of care is on persons with disabilities; support that focuses on caregivers are few and far between. More must be done to develop structured support services for caregivers such as needs assessment, respite care, self-care and support groups so they can continue well in their caregiving journey.



Seeking employment: a harsh environment awaits

For Peter, the journey to gainful employment is a long and arduous one. Persons with disabilities fight against the current from early on in the job-hunting process.

Challenges faced by persons with disabilities as they seek open employment (NCSS, 2017):

- Employers lack awareness of their capabilities as employees.
- Misconceptions about the cost of employing them in terms of job duties, physical infrastructure and co-worker support.
- General negative attitude towards them as colleagues.

This leaves persons with disabilities segregated and cut off from job development and progression opportunities. Even while employed, they can face discrimination, poor treatment and may receive lower wages than their able-bodied colleagues (Toh, 2017; Goy, 2015).

Less than desirable alternatives

Sheltered workshops may be an option for those with moderate disabilities. However, it is known to be a sunset industry with increasing automation (Tai, 2015) and the relocation of factories to countries like China and India. The scope of jobs is often narrow based on the perceived productivity level of persons with disabilities. Like Peter, persons with disabilities also worry about their livelihoods as jobs at sheltered workshops pay generally low wages and are highly contract-dependent (Goy, 2015).

Their caregivers worry

Another challenge is the mindset of caregivers themselves. For instance, caregivers like Peter's parents are well aware of obstacles such as the lack of accessibility within company premises and social stigma amongst co-workers. They fear for their loved one's safety and are reluctant to let them join the general workforce. This can be a complicated hurdle for persons with disabilities seeking gainful employment.

A Way Back to Shore

What needs to be done

For individuals like Peter, they face numerous challenges in life and more so after they turn 18. Persons with disabilities, like everyone else, long for companionship and yearn to be engaged in meaningful activities. But they also have to cope with their disabilities and manage the physical, mental and emotional challenges that come with it. To support them in their adult life, intervention is needed to empower the individual, boost non-profits' capabilities and transform the sector.

Early intervention

The overall cultural consciousness on how we treat and interact with disabilities can change, and it should start in early education. Having children with and without disabilities learning side-by-side helps everybody celebrate differences and appreciate the talents and gifts all kids bring with them (NCSS, 2017). This can help build confidence in caregivers and their charges later in society.

Making the individual visible

Where possible, activities for persons with disabilities can be carried out more regularly in and around public spaces, such as malls and HDB blocks. Individuals like Peter can interact more seamlessly with the community through programmes and experiences tailored to their abilities— from wine and dining to sports and the arts, improving the quality of their social life. Through social interaction, members of the public can also learn to put the person first, before their disabilities.

Unpacking “social inclusion”

A key tenet of the Enabling Masterplan is about social inclusion and integration. But first, we must unpack its meaning and understanding across different social roles. It may be a caregiver or persons with or without disabilities—each individual has unique needs and goals in order to feel that they are a part of the community. Only then can we have meaningful discussions that may allow us to effectively design programmes and form policies that can further the cause for inclusion.

Aiding non-profits

Many non-profits face funding, organisational and manpower issues. They need qualified staff and trained specialists who can work with persons with disabilities and their caregivers to properly assess their abilities, needs and how best to support them across life stages via appropriate programmes, services and assistive aids. It is hard for non-profits to stay effective without sufficient resources, continuous training and development.

Greater Good Through Collaboration

Many societal challenges today are complex and cannot be solved in isolation. There is a growing desire among Singaporeans to empower those with disabilities with opportunities to become integral and contributing members of society. We need to create and facilitate pathways to support individuals like Peter after they reach 18 years of age, so they can achieve a quality of life that is meaningful to them.

Givers, non-profits and government agencies should collaborate and work together to:

- increase coordination in financial and human resource allocations;
- capitalise on the strengths and expertise of different organisations for shared outcomes;
- continue funding support for systemic and sustained change, with improved outcomes and impact;
- innovate infrastructure, operations and business models that promote social inclusion; and
- provide a continuum of services for persons with disabilities to achieve their potential.

Working together for better outcomes

As you start your collaborative giving journey, look out for these factors to improve your group's chances of success¹:

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

¹ Channeling Change:
Making Collective Impact Work

Be the Change

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

As a giver, you can help in three ways:

Provide funding at

Programming level

Direct resources at

Organisational level

Support efforts at

Sectoral level

Giving at Programming Level

TARGET AUDIENCE	Persons with disabilities, their families and their caregivers
GOAL	Develop and deliver quality programmes that benefit persons with disabilities and/or caregivers
TIMELINE	1 - 3 years

HOW YOU CAN GIVE	HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained and long-term funding • Scale existing programmes • Pilot experiments • Pay for evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a befriender • Drive them to appointments • Perform home visits • Run errands with them • Play sports with them

If you enjoy directly helping persons with disabilities and their families, consider supporting non-profits or social enterprises in the delivery of their programmes and services. You can fund programmes that aim to:

- provide additional training and skills development towards increasing employability.
- increase job placement opportunities through apprenticeships and internships.
- promote social inclusion in schools or student care centres.
- enhance infrastructural facilities that enable easy access for persons with disabilities.
- pilot and innovate new technology in assistive devices.
- support affordability of assistive devices for the financially challenged.

Visit colabs.sg to see overseas examples of giving at programming level.

Giving at Organisational Level

TARGET AUDIENCE	Non-profits
GOAL	Boost the operational capabilities of non-profits through innovation, infrastructural enhancements and talent growth
TIMELINE	1 - 5 years

HOW YOU CAN GIVE	HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund organisational systems on process improvements • Fund manpower and staff training • Purchase equipment for staff to ease caregiving strain • Invest in leadership development and change management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer your professional expertise and skills, e.g. in marketing and human resource management • Be a board member • Plan for fundraising activities • Be an advocate for the organisation

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

- funding that evolves the service model for day care centres and/or sheltered workshops.
- collaborating to design persons with disabilities-centric care models in long-term residential homes.
- supporting manpower acquisition beyond the quota provided by government funding.
- flexible funding of overheads, programmes or initiatives that complement existing funding sources, freeing up resources for non-profits to expand good programmes.
- long-term investment in social enterprises that train and employ persons with disabilities.

Visit colabs.sg to see overseas examples of giving at organisational level.

Giving at Sectoral Level

TARGET AUDIENCE	Non-profits, government agencies and businesses
GOAL	Champion social inclusion through public awareness and policy changes at sectoral level by sharing knowledge and expertise
TIMELINE	Three years onwards

HOW YOU CAN GIVE	HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund public awareness campaigns on social inclusion • Support programmes where social inclusion for all is beyond disabilities-specific access • Fund research with a results and action-oriented approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in discussions under the Enabling Masterplan • Join organising committees for movements like The Purple Parade • Network with government leaders • Advocate social inclusion for all, not just for persons with disabilities

In recent years, there has been progress in improving accessibility and opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the economic, social and civil dimensions of society. But for social inclusion to grow beyond tolerance and accommodation, and to become instinctive and ingrained into part of everyday life, more has to be done at the sectoral level.

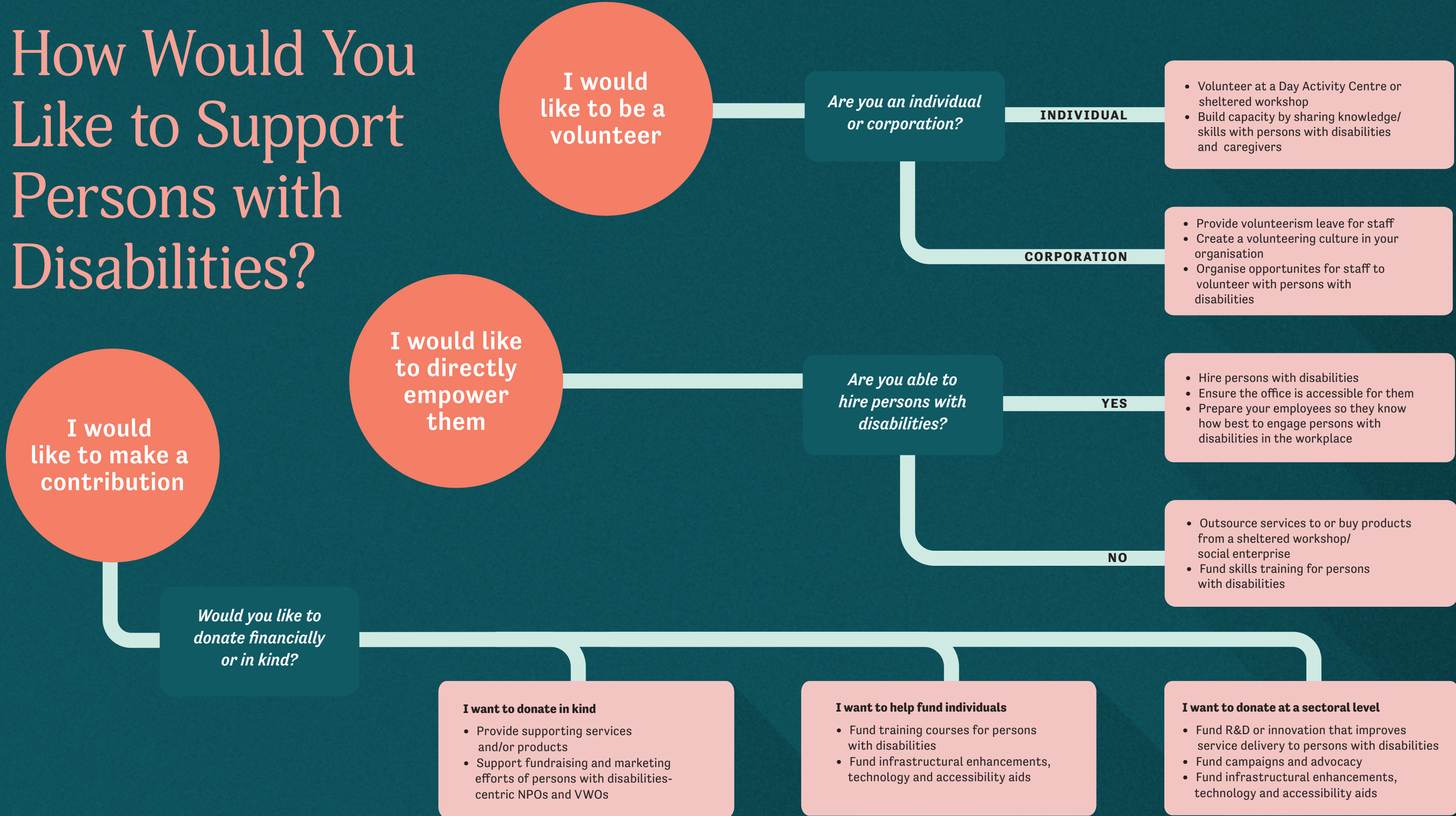
If you desire to see big-picture changes that positively impact persons with disabilities, consider contributing towards sector-level initiatives that synergise government policies and champion social change.

You could:

- fund and actively participate in social movements such as The Purple Parade (a nationwide inclusion-awareness movement).
- support research that increases understanding of social inclusion across different stakeholders.
- join the Singapore Business Network on DisAbility or the Enabling Employers Network Committee, if you are a company interested in hiring persons with disabilities.
- collaborate on public campaigns such as 'See the True Me' and 'Breaking Barriers' by NCSS and SPD respectively.

Visit colabs.sg to see overseas examples of giving at sectoral level.

How Would You Like to Support Persons with Disabilities?



I would like to be a volunteer

Are you an individual or corporation?

INDIVIDUAL

- Volunteer at a Day Activity Centre or sheltered workshop
- Build capacity by sharing knowledge/skills with persons with disabilities and caregivers

CORPORATION

- Provide volunteerism leave for staff
- Create a volunteering culture in your organisation
- Organise opportunities for staff to volunteer with persons with disabilities

I would like to directly empower them

Are you able to hire persons with disabilities?

YES

- Hire persons with disabilities
- Ensure the office is accessible for them
- Prepare your employees so they know how best to engage persons with disabilities in the workplace

NO

- Outsource services to or buy products from a sheltered workshop/social enterprise
- Fund skills training for persons with disabilities


I would like to make a contribution

Would you like to donate financially or in kind?

- I want to donate in kind**
- Provide supporting services and/or products
 - Support fundraising and marketing efforts of persons with disabilities-centric NPOs and VWOs

- I want to help fund individuals**
- Fund training courses for persons with disabilities
 - Fund infrastructural enhancements, technology and accessibility aids

- I want to donate at a sectoral level**
- Fund R&D or innovation that improves service delivery to persons with disabilities
 - Fund campaigns and advocacy
 - Fund infrastructural enhancements, technology and accessibility aids

An illustration of a city street scene. In the background, there are several tall, white buildings with windows. One building has the number '67' written vertically on its side. The sky is a light pinkish-orange color with a few stylized clouds. In the foreground, four people are walking on a sidewalk. A woman in an orange shirt and dark skirt is walking towards the right. A man in a dark shirt and dark pants is walking towards the left. A man in a dark shirt and dark pants is sitting in a wheelchair, facing right. A man in a dark shirt and orange pants is walking towards the right. The overall style is flat and modern.

Peter, With Purpose

Supported and hopeful

Now 28, Peter still packs items for a living at his sheltered workshop. But it is different. Three years ago, the workshop was relocated to be part of a new adult disability home and was integrated into the day care centre. Now, there is a mix of work and recreational activities that Peter engages in throughout the day, and he can access shared facilities such as the gym and swimming pool.

Peter looks forward to visiting the centre every day. He works for three hours in the morning, then interacts with others through arts activities or sports. He especially enjoys the afternoon sojourns to the nearby park where he can play with the therapy dogs that volunteers bring with them.

Once a month, he and his friends go to the supermarket, accompanied by staff, where he can buy what he likes or simply browse the grocery aisles. Sometimes, he gets to attend concerts at the Esplanade or even visit the Singapore Flyer—special occasions for which he enjoys dressing up.

Thanks to the everyday interactions, Peter is now happier and more sociable. He feels more purposeful and hopeful for the future. His parents feel likewise. Comforted by the quality of care, they have peace of mind knowing that Peter is looked after by the staff just like family.

And should the need arise, there can be a seamless transition from day care to long-term residential care. Peter could move in when he grows older and live out a fulfilling, productive life surrounded by friends and a supportive community.

APPENDIX

Defining Disability and Special Needs

It is important to note that the definition of disabilities varies between organisations and countries. Each type of disability also has varying levels of severity. Some disabilities are easily identifiable, while others are not (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

The definition of disabilities in Singapore's Enabling Masterplan describes persons with disabilities' limited prospects for education, training, employment and recreation, compared to other members of the community, due to physical, sensory, intellectual and developmental impairments (SG Enable, 2016).

Physical

Physical disabilities range widely, and can limit a person's mobility, dexterity or physical functioning. These could be caused by muscular dystrophy or spinal cord injuries, for example.

Sensory

Sensorial disabilities are usually impaired hearing or sight. Together with physical disabilities, they could be developed before or at birth, or later in life from disease or accident.

Developmental

Developmental disabilities, which occur in childhood and usually last a lifetime, include autism, Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities.

Multiple

A person has multiple disabilities when he or she has two or more areas of significant impairment. Cerebral palsy, for instance, can affect intellectual development as well as physical mobility.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

A child is considered to have SEN when he or she:

- has a disability;
- needs different and/or additional resources beyond what is generally available for the majority of same-aged children; and
- shows either:
 - more difficulty in learning compared to the majority of same-aged children; or
 - difficulty using educational facilities catered to the majority of same-aged children; or
 - some areas of impairment, in terms of social, academic, physical, or sensory functioning (MOE, 2018).

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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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