

Adopt a Dorm

A very short guide

What's it about

Adoption is a powerful concept and act.

It connotes mutual care, equality, respect and responsibility for each other. By these, it enables us to live out our other-centredness fully.

We want to create a future where every factory-converted dorm housing migrant workers is adopted by other-centred people and organisations, for a better Singapore for all.

This can be done if we come together, leverage our assets, listen to each other, and build community.

The big 'why'

“To build bridges between migrant workers and Singaporeans through trustful relationships which grow over time”

Types of dorms

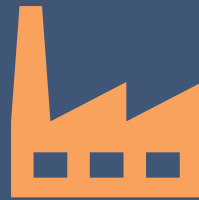
Purpose-built dorms

Specially designed with a wide range of amenities, services, and recreational facilities.



Other accommodations

Including construction temporary quarters (CTQs), HDB flats, private residential properties



Factory-converted dorms (FCDs)

Industrial or warehouse developments partially converted to accommodation; maximum of 300 occupants.

FCDs

Who

Migrant workers residing in FCDs typically work in the construction, marine shipyard and process sectors.

Currently-adopted FCDs usually house 60-80 workers under a single employer. However, one FCD has over 200 workers from multiple industries.

Most of the workers in adopted dorms come from Bangladesh and India (Telugu- and Tamil-speaking). There are also Chinese, Malaysian, Burmese and Thai workers in these FCDs.

Where

FCDs are found all across Singapore, but especially in the West (Jurong, Tuas) and North-east (Admiralty, Macpherson).

Dorm dynamics

The dorm residents

People with real life stories and aspirations from whom we can learn and grow together.

The employer
Overseeing the migrant workers' accommodation and work lives, the employer is a key partner in the adoption.



The dorm ambassador

Also known as the dorm IC, he is the first and main liaison between the residents and the adopter.

The adopter

Committed and empowered people who want to build meaningful relationships with migrant workers.

Adoption so far

Beginnings

During the Ramadan and Circuit Breaker period in 2020, close to 300 FCDs were adopted by over 100 organisations who:

- Raised funds from among their own communities;
- Sourced and delivered 1000s of pre-dawn meals;
- Provided breakfast, fruits and snacks to workers;
- Formed virtual interest groups on art sketching, photography, fitness, and English.

Evolution

Since then, and despite rapidly changing circumstances, adopters have:

- Organised safely-distanced carnivals and outings for workers, with fun activities like singing and push-up contests.
- Decorated FCDs during major festival periods.
- Established case management teams and offered counselling.

Top tips

Something for everyone

- Adoption can take many forms, in terms of location (at dorms, at the adopter's work place, at public parks and spaces) and time commitment (daily meal deliveries during Ramadan, specific public holidays or monthly/quarterly activities).
- The key is consistent and regular activity over time.

Ask and learn

- Asking workers what activities they want to do is a first step towards genuine relationship-building.
- Trust building activities like simply sitting down and sharing life stories can open up opportunities for friendship.

Time constraints are ok

- As with all relationships, adoption takes time.
- It may be difficult to find the right time for activities, due to workers' rest day schedules and adopters' commitments.
- Work closely with the dorm ambassador and employer to make best use of the time together.

Top tips

Rally the community

- Generous community members abound, from local stores willing to chip in fruit or fruit juice to supermarket discounts.

Lower barriers of entry

- Different tiers of volunteers can help make adoption accessible. Regulars can become key leaders or organisers, while those with family commitments can still meaningful participate regularly.
- However, you may need to consider the appropriate age groups and gender ratio (no. of workers to no. of men/women) when organising volunteers.

Better together

- To counter fatigue among volunteers due to language barriers, emotional stresses of workers, and the time needed for adoption, collectively adopt a smaller group of workers within a dorm. This enables a worker to reach out to a group of friends, rather than a single point of contact.

Getting started

#1 Find your purpose

Gather to align on your objectives, vision and motivations for adoption:

- What does adopting a dorm mean to you?
- What does it mean to put migrant workers “at the centre” of your journey?

#2 Build on your assets

We all have strengths and assets, from talents, skills and interests, to networks and physical or virtual spaces.

- What are your assets and strengths that can help you kick-start your relationship building?
- How can you identify and mobilise your assets to create simple and accessible adoption activities?

Getting started

You can begin with what you are most familiar and comfortable with:

- E.g., a law student or practising lawyer help grow legal awareness among dorm residents, or partner with NGOs on legal clinics.
- E.g., plant/garden enthusiasts can curate gardening activities or organise outings to parks.

#3 Reach out

Several current NGOs and ground-up movements provide touchpoints with migrant workers and FCDs.

Whether you are just curious to find out more, or are already planning to begin our journey on your own or with others, join our Monthly Migrant Mondays (next page)!



Monthly Migrant Mondays

An informal learning circle for the community of dorm adopters.

Join us online as we share our stories and learnings, needs and offers, so that we can journey and grow together.

Monthly Migrant Mondays takes place on every last Monday of each month.

For details, please contact connect@colabs.sg