

Hiring of disadvantaged individuals

Empower Circles

Singapore Business Federation Foundation

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Abbreviations

DOT	Daughters of Tomorrow
e2i	Employment and Employability Institute
F&B	Food and beverages
IMH	Institute of Mental Health
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MSF	Ministry of Social and Family Development
NCSS	National Council for Social Service
NHCS	New Hope Community Services
SACS	Singapore Anglican Community Services
SAMH	Singapore Association for Mental Health
SBF	Singapore Business Federation
UK	United Kingdom
WSQ	Workforce Skills Qualifications
WSS	Workfare Skills Support
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

1. Introduction

A resilient and inclusive workforce forms the backbone of business and economy. Yet, disadvantaged individuals among us such as unemployed parents/caregivers whose young children are at greater risk of dropping out of school¹, women² facing challenges including single mothers, the homeless³, people who have mental health conditions⁴, ex-offenders⁵, and persons with disabilities (PWDs)⁶ face significantly greater challenges in obtaining and sustaining employment. Employment is key to their independence and integration into the community. When they obtain employment, they are able to access housing, childcare, or other subsidy schemes to further financially support themselves and their family.⁷ And once they gain stable and sustainable employment, they will be able to reap the fruits of their labour and reduce reliance on government welfare.

The government, social service agencies, businesses and other stakeholders in the employment sector have been working to support disadvantaged individuals in getting a headstart in the workforce. Initiatives include: training programmes by the Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) MINDSET Learning Hub; employment and job matching services by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) Job Club, the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i), and Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS); women-oriented programmes by Daughters of Tomorrow (DOT), Dress for Success, Fempreneur Secrets, and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), as well as; evening childcare services for disadvantaged families by Morning Star Community Services. The Singapore Business Federation (SBF) Foundation also partnered with New Hope Community Services (NHCS) for a Job Support And Retention Programme which is a 7-stage job support framework for the homeless.

The SBF Foundation aims to complement these efforts by rallying more businesses to help four groups of disadvantaged individuals. They are unemployed parents/caregivers of young children, women facing challenges including single mothers, the homeless, and people who have mental health conditions get a headstart in the workforce. The hope is that disadvantaged individuals will have more opportunities to obtain jobs, and sustain their employment. This report offers insight into the challenges faced by these disadvantaged individuals getting that head start. In particular, it describes common hiring practices that prevent such individuals from obtaining and sustaining employment, and provides examples where companies in Singapore have enabled them to thrive. Finally, we suggest how employers can better support the recruitment and retention of disadvantaged individuals.

¹ A study by [Sandstrom and Huerta \(2013\)](#) found that parental employment instability was linked to negative academic outcomes, including lower educational attainment

² A [BBC article](#) from 2015 about the challenges women face in the workplace, and going back into the workforce.

³ T. Gray. (2020). [Employment and homelessness in the context of the new economy following Covid-19](#). Centre for Homelessness Impact.

⁴ TAFEP. (2019). [Workplace Inclusion: Supporting Mental Health in the Workplaces](#).

⁵ For example, this [article from mycareersfuture](#) mentioned about the stigma employers have, 'find ex-offenders difficult to trust because of their past mistakes and discount them as potential hires without even an interview.'

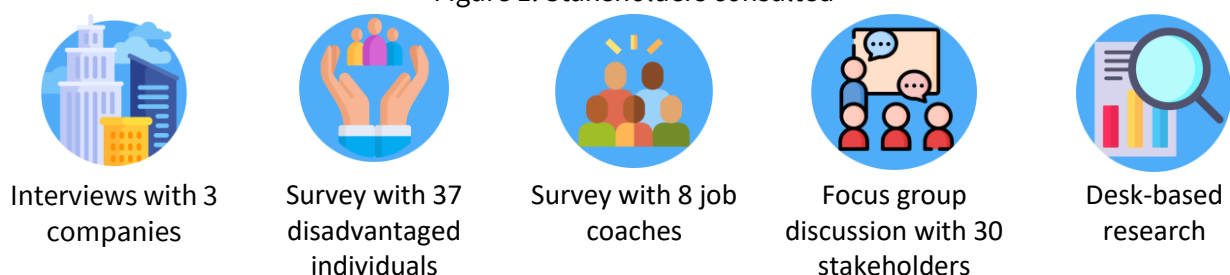
⁶ A [CNA article](#) from 2020 about the challenges PWDs face when they looking for good and sustainable employment.

⁷ As stated in [2018's Ministry of Social and Family Development Occasional Paper](#): "Employment provides the best opportunity for individuals to uplift themselves and their families in the long run."

2. Stakeholders consulted

The findings shared in this report are based on surveys with disadvantaged individuals, interviews with companies, as well as a focus group discussion with stakeholders involved in the employment of disadvantaged individuals. In January 2021, we interviewed 3 companies who had been actively hiring disadvantaged individuals. In March 2021, we surveyed 37 individuals who are homeless, women facing challenges including single mothers, caregivers of at-risk children, or have mental health conditions, as well as 8 job coaches to better understand the challenges faced by these individuals and explore how hiring practices affect the employment of disadvantaged individuals. These surveys were conducted with support from the SAMH, DOT, e2i and NHCS. Following the survey, a focus group discussion was conducted with 30 representatives of companies, SSAs, and government agencies to explore what more can be done to support job seekers. Desk-based research was also carried out.

Figure 1. Stakeholders consulted



Icons from Flaticon.com

Companies interviewed

For this report, 3 companies that have an established practice of hiring disadvantaged individuals were interviewed:

- [Reachfield Security & Safety Management](#) is a licensed Security Guards Agency. They have been named as an employer that listens to their employees.
- [SBM Management Services](#) offers building maintenance services including janitorial and housekeeping services, vendor management and soft service bundling. They were named by multiple job coaches as an inclusive employer because of their onboarding programme, buddy system, empathetic supervisors and development opportunities.
- [World Clean Facility Services](#) specialises in cleaning and housekeeping services. They were named by multiple job coaches as an inclusive employer because of their flexible working hours and locations.

Respondent profile: Survey with disadvantaged individuals

We surveyed 37 individuals who are homeless, women facing challenges including single mothers, caregivers of at-risk children, or have mental health conditions who were clients of SAMH, DOT, e2i and NHCS. Survey respondents were in different employment situations and came from a range of backgrounds (see Figure 2 on next page).

Respondent profile: Survey with job coaches

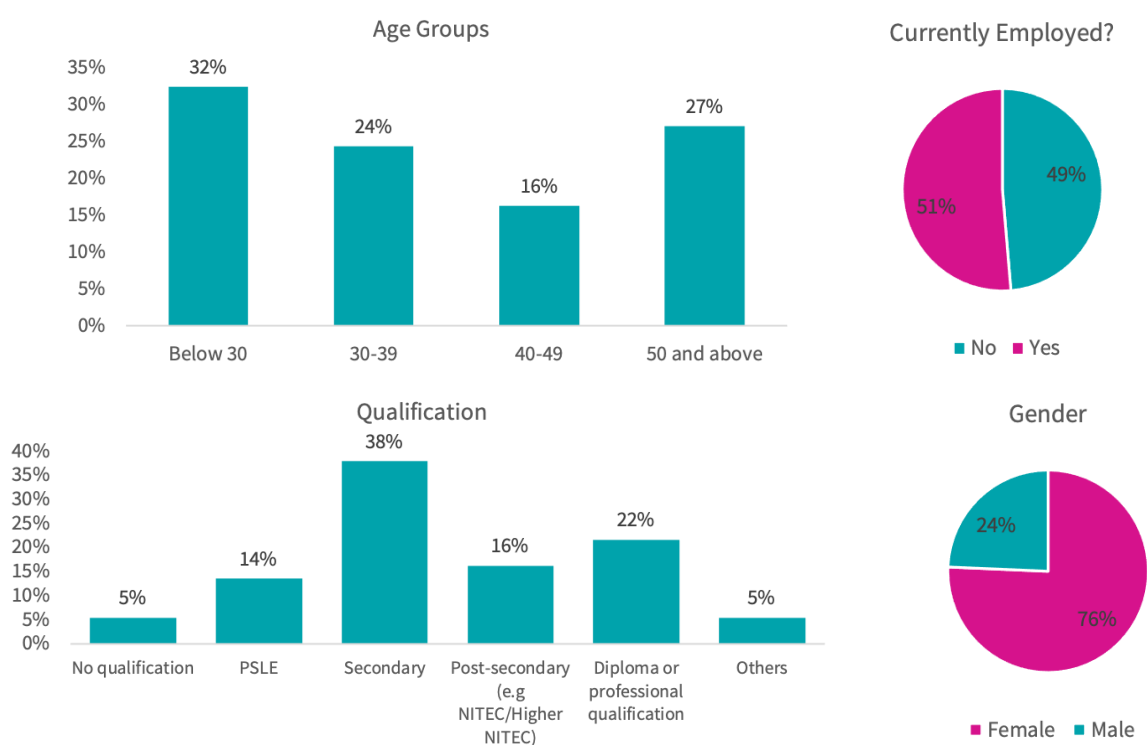
We surveyed a total of 8 job coaches from 4 organisations - e2i, SAMH, DOT and NHCS. As job coaches, their key function is in supporting these disadvantaged individuals to gain employment. In the survey, respondents were asked about the challenges and barriers faced by their clients in getting stable and sustainable employment. They also shared the enablers and/or inclusive hiring practices for stable and sustainable employment for their clients as well as case studies of exemplary inclusive employers.

Empower Circle focus group participants

Following the survey, a focus group discussion was conducted with 30 representatives from Empower Circles, a platform of multiple stakeholders from SSAs, government, community agencies, hiring organisations, and disadvantaged individuals, who have come together to work on a common goal of supporting job seekers.

These representatives were from Advancer Global Limited, CapitaLand Singapore Limited, DOT, e2i, Epitome Global, EtonHouse International Holdings Pte Ltd, Far East Organization, Institute of Technical Education, Kiosks Collective, Greenpac (Singapore) Pte Ltd, NHCS, Markono Print Media Pte Ltd, Procter & Gamble, SAMH, Sodexo Singapore Pte Ltd, The Salvation Army and Wargaming.

Figure 2. Profile of survey respondents



Subject matter experts included Mr Alvin Aloysius Goh, Executive Director of Singapore Human Resource Institute; Ms Fazlin Abdullah, Director of Knowledge and Insights at National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre; Ms Lim Kar Yee, Senior Director of CDC Planning and Development at People Association; Ms Ranganayaki Thangavelu, Deputy Executive Director of Beyond Social Services; Ms Wong Sing Chee, President of People and Career Development Association, Ms Vicky Wong, Deputy CEO of e2i, and Ms Ong Mei Ling, Assistant Director of e2i. Other stakeholders included the Manpower Planning and Policy Division

of the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and the Social Policy and Services Group of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF).

The discussion covered the following topics: the current realities of job opportunities for disadvantaged individuals; visions of an ideal ecosystem for providing job opportunities to disadvantaged individuals; recommendations for what government agencies, employers, job seekers, and job coaches could do to work towards an ideal ecosystem.

3. Understanding the state of employment of disadvantaged individuals

This section discusses the types of circumstances people can experience, and how it makes it more difficult for them to gain and sustain employment. We also highlight government and community initiatives that exist to help disadvantaged individuals overcome or manage the challenges they face when seeking jobs.

The disadvantaged individuals in Singapore

The disadvantaged in Singapore include but are not limited to: unemployed parents/caregivers of young children, women facing challenges including single mothers, the homeless, people who have mental health conditions, ex-offenders and persons with disabilities (PWDs). For the purpose of this report, we do not focus on ex-offenders and persons with disabilities as agencies such as Yellow Ribbon and SG Enable already specifically support these groups respectively.

Data on the number of people who are disadvantaged is limited. However, available studies and statistics on the employment and income situation of different groups of disadvantaged individuals suggest that they are far more likely to be unemployed. Among the clients we surveyed, 49% were unemployed. These results are in line with findings gathered from the desk review (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Overview of employment situation of the disadvantaged



Icons from Flaticon.com

The following paragraphs present available studies and statistics on the employment and income situation of different groups of disadvantaged individuals. It is also important to note that many of these circumstances described below can occur concurrently and exacerbate vulnerabilities. For example, single parents face a higher risk of mood disorders, partly aggravated by caregiving duties and financial difficulties⁸, which may lead to them becoming homeless due to the inability to pay rent.

⁸ Subramaniam M, Prasad RO, Abdin E, Vaingankar JA, and Chong SA. (2014). Single Mothers Have a Higher Risk of Mood Disorders.

Single parents: There are approximately 90,578 single-parent resident households, comprising 6.6% of all resident households.⁹ Information from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)¹⁰ indicates that, in 2017, the median average monthly income of citizen mothers with non-marital births was \$600 per month for mothers below 35 years old, and \$3,500 per month for mothers aged 36 years old and above. This is significantly below the median gross per person income from work of \$4,534 per month in 2020.

In addition, a study by Glendinning, Smith, & Md Kadir (2015)¹¹ found that 32% of the 88 single, mostly female, parents interviewed were unemployed. This is many times higher than the 2020 national overall unemployment rate of 3.0%¹².

People with mental health conditions: Approximately 796,600 (or 1 in 7) residents have experienced a mood, anxiety or alcohol use disorder in their lifetime, according to the second Singapore Mental Health Study initiated in 2016¹³. The study found that the rate of unemployment among those with at least one of the identified disorders was 8.3%, which is significantly higher than the 2020 national overall unemployment rate of 3.0%.

Homeless: A nationwide count¹⁴ carried out in 2019 estimated that there were between 921 and 1,050 homeless people living in the streets across Singapore. While people living in the streets were mostly men, stories from SSAs suggest that there are likely to be many more, including women, who are staying with friends. According to the study, irregular work and low pay among homeless persons were common. Among the 10 people interviewed under the study, 4 were unemployed. Of the 6 who were employed, they were mainly in part-time or casual jobs. Therefore, most of their wages varied week-to-week, from \$20 to \$75, with a median of \$53. For interviewees who were paid monthly, their wages ranged from \$560 to \$3,000, with a median of \$1,400.

Disadvantaged individuals face challenges that make them more likely to be unemployed

Disadvantaged individuals face many challenges obtaining a job and staying employed for a sustained period of time. Of the survey respondents who were employed, the majority (54%) had contracts that were only 6 months or less. Only 30% had kept jobs for more than 1 year.

⁹ Department of Statistics Singapore. (2020). [Singapore Population. Singstat.](#)

¹⁰ Ministry of Social and Family Development (2018). [Average Income Of Single Unwed Parents.](#)

¹¹ Glendinning, Smith, & Md Kadir (2015), Single-Parent Families in Singapore: Understanding the Challenges of Finances, Housing and Time Poverty.

¹² Ministry of Manpower. (2020). [Labour Market Statistics and Publications.](#)

¹³ Institute of Mental Health. (2018). [Latest nationwide study shows 1 in 7 people in Singapore has experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime.](#)

¹⁴ Ng KH. (2019). [Homeless in Singapore: Results from a nationwide street count.](#) Singapore: LKYSPP.

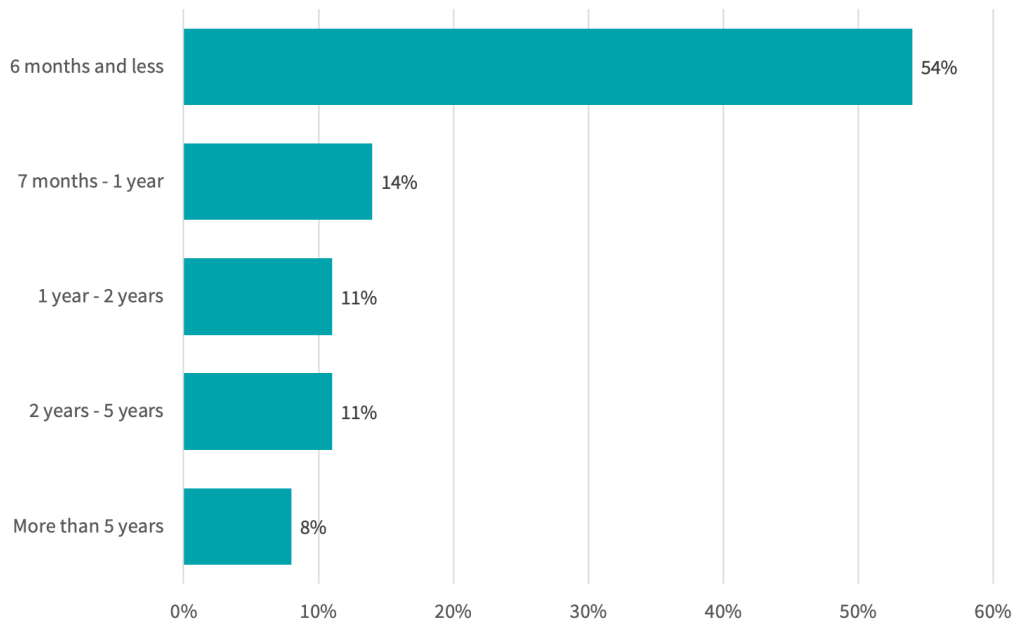


Figure 4. Length of employment of current/last job

Many of these challenges are common across the disadvantaged, such as the need for flexible or shorter hours, stigma and confidence, financial constraints, and lack of qualifications.

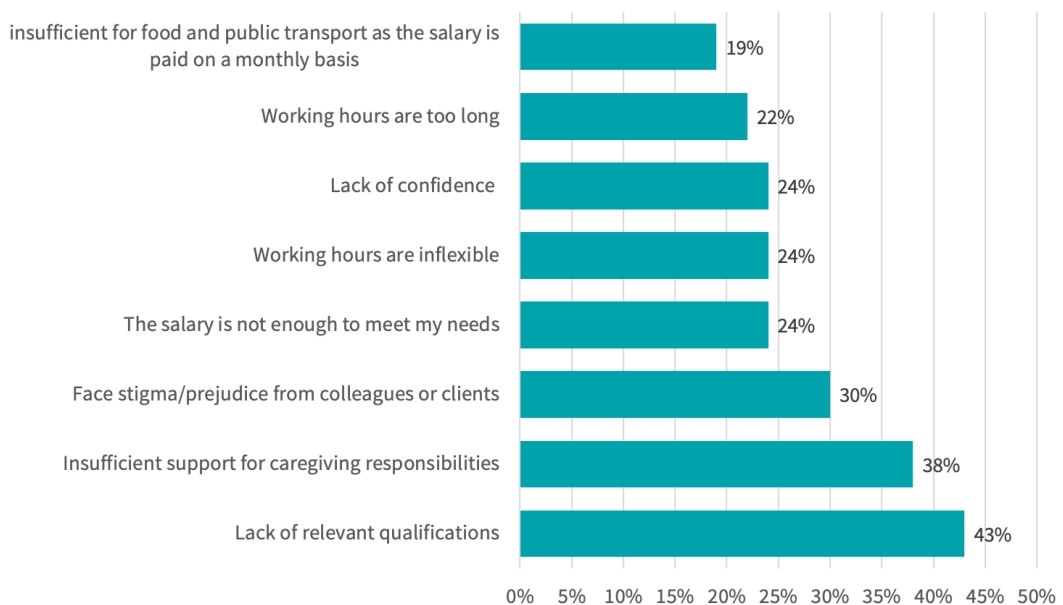


Figure 5. Challenges faced/barriers by disadvantaged individuals surveyed

Inflexible and long work schedules: Caregivers, especially women, people with mental health conditions, and people who are homeless have varying needs that require them to obtain a job that lets them work on a flexible schedule or take time off on short notice. Among the survey respondents, 24% felt that working hours were inflexible, while 22% felt that working hours were too long.

Figure 6. Challenges faced by the disadvantaged in working 9-to-5 jobs



Unemployed caregivers and single parents, especially women
Cannot afford childcare and therefore have to care for children on their own



People with mental health issues
May have to attend scheduled medical appointments or are on medication that requires time off work



Homeless
May have to take urgent time off to meet government agencies for housing or other support

Icons from Flaticon.com

For example, single caregivers do not have a spouse and family members to contribute income to afford childcare. Therefore, they have to care for children on their own. However, many jobs require employees to work from 9 to 5 or in long shifts, which prevent caregivers from parental responsibilities such as sending and picking their children up from school and preparing meals. 38% of survey respondents stated that they did not receive sufficient support for caregiving responsibilities.

Stigma, stress, and confidence: Disadvantaged individuals often feel a sense of stigma associated with their circumstances, because topics related to ‘broken’ families, mental health conditions, and homelessness continue to be taboo topics in the office and wider society. They may also face additional stresses from challenges such as having to care for children alone, managing their mental health condition and finding a place to stay. These pressures may affect their confidence in their ability to obtain a job, which may in turn impact their performance at interviews.

Their lack of confidence may also be carried over to their ability to perform at work if they manage to secure a job. Colleagues may behave in a way - whether intentionally or unintentionally - that contributes to the sense of stigma. 30% of survey respondents shared that they faced stigma or prejudice from either their colleagues and clients.

“Colleagues don't seem to understand my condition so I don't know if they can give me the support that I need when I am unwell at work.”

Lack of qualifications: In addition, disadvantaged individuals who face difficulties obtaining jobs are those with fewer qualifications than their peers. Among the respondents surveyed, 43% stated that they lacked the relevant qualifications to obtain a job. During the focus group discussion, SSAs also shared that there were insufficient job opportunities for people with fewer qualifications. This again reduces the confidence of disadvantaged individuals in obtaining a job.

Inadequate savings for ad-hoc expenditure: Because of their circumstances, disadvantaged individuals often have limited savings. As focus group participants shared, many are struggling just to provide food and shelter for their family. Some might not be able to afford clothes suitable for interviews, but are unaware of or are unable to obtain support from SSAs who can offer clothes. This affects their chances to succeed at interviews.

Insufficient cash flow for daily expenses: In the event that disadvantaged individuals successfully obtain a job, additional challenges arise when salaries are disbursed on a monthly basis. This is because they are unable to afford a month's worth of household, transport and medical expenses before they receive their next salary. 19% of survey respondents shared that the monthly disbursement of salaries was an issue. Employees may have to skip meals and even walk to/from their workplace if their current job does not allow them to afford meals or transportation towards the end of each month.

Stress due to financial challenges: The stress caused by their financial situation may also affect their ability to perform to expectations at work. Because of their need for flexible hours and lack of qualifications, many disadvantaged individuals are only able to find low-paying work. Survey respondents shared that they typically found work in food and beverages (F&B), cleaning, administration, retail, customer services, logistics, and similar industries. The bottom decile (10%) of households earned an average household income from work of \$1,978 per month, far below the median household income of \$9,189 per month¹⁵. This keeps such individuals in a constant state of worry on how to obtain the money required to provide for their family and meet all their bills on a timely basis. 25% of survey respondents shared that their current salary was insufficient to meet their needs.

Government and community initiatives exist to support disadvantaged individuals

Stakeholders in the employment sector have been running a range of initiatives to support disadvantaged individuals in obtaining employment. This section describes some of the initiatives run by the government as well as community organisations.

Government initiatives

The government runs a range of initiatives to support the employment of the local workforce.

Workforce Singapore (WSG): WSG is a statutory board under MOM which promotes the development, competitiveness, inclusiveness, and employability of all levels of the workforce. Their services include Careers Connect, a one-stop centre for Singaporeans to get career related advice and assistance, and MyCareersFuture, an online job search service to match Singapore citizens and permanent residents with relevant jobs based on their skills and competencies.

SkillsFuture (SSG): SSG is a statutory board under the Ministry of Education which nurtures a culture of lifelong learning in order to drive the country's next phase of development towards an advanced economy and inclusive society. For example, SSG offers a variety of training grants to support self-sponsored and employer-sponsored training. In 2015, all Singaporeans aged 25 and above started receiving credit to use on eligible courses.

Community initiatives

Community organisations also support disadvantaged individuals in different ways, such as training, job coaching and matching. Some provide support to specific groups of people like parents/caregivers and women.

¹⁵ Department of Statistics Singapore. (2020). [Singapore Population](#). Singstat

Training, job coaching and matching

- [Employment and Employability Institute \(e2i\)](#) is a network for workers and employers seeking employment and employability solutions. It serves as a bridge between workers and employers. It is also a one-stop centre to assist potential employees with their employment needs. Run by vocational specialists and job placement officers, the team provides vocational counselling and assessment, as well as job-matching. During the job-seeking and placement process, the team works closely with both employers and potential employees to ensure job fit and placement success.
- The Institute of Mental Health's [Job Club](#) is a one-stop centre for employers to connect with workers to offer job security through job-matching, career guidance and skills upgrading services, and partnering employers to address their manpower needs through recruitment, training and job redesign solutions.
- The [SAMH MINDSET Learning Hub](#) provides WSQ training and employment placement to persons-in-recovery for selected industries such as cleaning, F&B, hospitality, healthcare support and retail.
- SACS offers a [range of employment services](#) to young to middle-aged clients with mental health issues, including a workforce skills training programme to prepare clients for employment and community integration, internship placements, as well as job matching and placement.
- SBF Foundation partnered NHCS on the [Job Support And Retention Programme](#) to enhance the employability and improve job retention of people who are homeless. The programme is based on a 7-stage job support framework which includes career coaching, counselling and case management to prepare them to enter the workforce and enable them to stay on the job.

Parent/caregiver support

- [Morning Star Community Services](#) runs CareNights, an evening support programme for children aged 6 to 14 years to enhance their social and psychological development. Their centre CareNights@Agape Village, gives families, including those with parents seeking work, the opportunity to improve their financial situation while providing night-time childcare for their children.

Programmes for women

- [Dress for Success](#) empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire and development tools to help them thrive at work and in life. Clients are referred from SSAs, such as women's shelters, and educational institutions.
- [DOT](#) aims to help their beneficiaries regain confidence and attune them to a positive mindset before channelling them to work opportunities. Their DOT Confidence Curriculum, for example, is designed to help women rediscover their talents and strengths while opening their minds to new and greater possibilities in life.
- YWCA's [Empowering Mums](#) programme runs free support group work, skills workshops, and post-project sessions to improve the employability of mothers from low-income families. Childminding is also offered through their [Empowering Kids](#) programme.

Assessment of the state of employment of disadvantaged individuals

Despite the numerous government and community initiatives to support disadvantaged individuals in employment, these individuals still face significant challenges in accessing sustainable employment. This

is a similar assessment of the situation by our focus group participants. When asked to rate on a scale from one (lowest) to ten (highest) on the progress Singapore had made as a society toward providing employment opportunities for the targeted groups, most participants gave a rating of 3, 4 or 5, with a median rating of 4 out of 10. They shared that there are some employers advocating for inclusive hiring but many remained on the sideline. Disadvantaged individuals still struggle to find suitable job opportunities. Overall, Singapore has made some progress in this area but much more work can still be done.

4. Why hire disadvantaged individuals?

Hiring disadvantaged individuals can bring many benefits to companies, while also supporting disadvantaged individuals as they transit towards being able to independently support themselves and their family. For example, a survey conducted by the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) found that every \$1 invested in workplace adjustments for mental health provided an average of \$5.60 in returns, in terms of a 13.3% reduction in average annual medical expenses and 6.5% increase in average yearly income per person¹⁶.

Figure 7. Benefits of inclusive hiring of disadvantaged individuals

Benefits of inclusive hiring practices to:	
Companies	Disadvantaged individuals
Wider pool of talent	Stable and sustainable employment
Reduced recruitment costs	Transition out of challenging circumstances
Increased staff retention	Social integration
Increased staff morale and loyalty	Improved financial and mental wellbeing
Improved company branding	

Wider pool of talent: Contrary to stereotype, many disadvantaged individuals may possess unique skill sets that are not reflected in the jobseeker’s formal qualifications. For example, Ernst & Young’s internal research of 400 graduates found ‘no evidence to conclude that previous success in higher education correlated with future success in subsequent professional qualifications undertaken¹⁷. In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK state that people who have overcome their own personal challenges can bring fresh perspectives, ideas and solutions to problems¹⁸.

Considering disadvantaged individuals can enable companies to tap into a larger pool of talent, especially if companies embrace flexible job arrangements such as flexible hours or having multiple persons share the responsibilities of a full-time job, especially for roles with skill shortages and hard-to-fill vacancies. In addition, as Singapore tightens the foreign worker quota in some industries, business owners and

¹⁶ National Council of Social Services (2019). <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/press-room/publications/MentalHealthToolkitforEmployers>

¹⁷ Sheriff, L (2015, Aug 4). *Ernst & Young Removes University Degree Classification From Entry Criteria As There's 'No Evidence' It Equals Success.*

¹⁸ Department for Work and Pensions. (2020, Nov 26). [Inclusive recruitment support.](#)

organisations can take the opportunity to re-evaluate their hiring practices and make use of the underemployed groups in the local workforce.

Reduced recruitment costs: Research has demonstrated benefits of adopting an open hiring policy where individuals are hired regardless of background, without asking for a resume, interview, and/or background check. Reducing emphasis on qualifications, processing resumes and conducting interviews saves time and effort on recruitment. Open hiring policy can shift resources towards investing in workers, building a more resilient business, and achieving a diverse pool of employees who would otherwise have been passed over or ignored¹⁹. The average cost of retaining and hiring an employee in Singapore is \$3,650¹⁴. With an open hiring policy, this cost can be greatly reduced.

Increased staff retention: Businesses in the UK report that employees who are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds will stay with their employer for longer, have a strong commitment to their organisation and lower rates of absenteeism¹⁵. In a tight labour market, embracing a flexible workforce and hiring individuals outside a company's normal pool of candidates is an advantage. Research shows that job sharing, which may be particularly suitable to disadvantaged individuals who require more flexible working arrangements - results in a 20% decrease in a voluntary turnover rate²⁰.

Increased staff morale and loyalty: Hiring disadvantaged individuals demonstrates that companies care about marginalized communities. This increases their sense of belonging and pride towards the company, which increases motivation, and ultimately productivity.

“When our existing staff see us recruiting this group of individuals, they gain confidence that they are working for a good company that cares about people. They feel happier and proud to work for such a company. They are also motivated to work better. Over time, we notice a stronger culture of teamwork is built among the employees as they are more willing to help one another. There is also a higher sense of loyalty and employees start referring their friends to join the company.” - World Clean Facility Services Pte. Ltd.

NCSS's survey of companies also observed improved morale and productivity among mental health-friendly companies.

Improved company branding: Similarly, customers or clients who see a brand care about the community are more likely to patronize or do business with the company. In the UK, 92% of employers have said that diverse recruitment has enhanced their reputation, helping them win new contracts²¹.

¹⁹ DeLong, D and Marcus, S (2021, Jan 5). *Imagine a Hiring Process Without Resumes*. Harvard Business Review.

²⁰ Singapore National Employers Federation (Snef), Ministry of Manpower (MOM). (2019, May). Job Sharing Implementation Guide

²¹ HM Prison & Probation Service. (2018). [Employing prisoners and ex-offenders: See what's on the inside.](#)

5. Hiring disadvantaged individuals

To progress in the provision of employment opportunities to disadvantaged individuals, various stakeholders such as companies, SSAs and government agencies can contribute and work together. This section summarises successful initiatives implemented by some companies as well as potential initiatives for consideration.

Successful initiatives

A number of companies have successfully recruited and employed disadvantaged individuals, by making arrangements that respond to the challenges that disadvantaged individuals face. Marcus's story below, who was connected with World Clean Facilities Services through NHCS, demonstrates how the steps taken by the company have made a difference in his life.

Case Study: Marcus

Marcus (not his real name), 53, is a homeless individual who had been living in a homeless shelter operated by New Hope Community Services for more than a year. He used to work ad-hoc jobs when he was living in the streets and faced difficulties holding a job.

Currently, Marcus works as a cleaner with World Clean Facilities Services. He joined the company in February 2020 and has been there for more than a year. This has been his longest working stint in recent years. He shares that he enjoys going to work every day as the company trusts him to do his job properly. He also feels that he is being respected and treated well. In turn, he wants to do his job properly to ensure that his company gets good feedback from the client.

He especially appreciates the fact that the company processes his pay promptly every month. When he first started on the job, the company was also able to provide him with an advance before his first salary disbursement to help him with his daily expenses since he did not have enough savings. Since working for the company, he has been able to save and no longer face problems with his daily expenses.

Here, we describe what some companies have done which your company can also consider implementing.

Look beyond resumes and backgrounds when hiring

Disadvantaged individuals who struggle to find employment have fewer formal qualifications and lack confidence compared to their peers. Therefore, they can be overlooked during the hiring process or underperform during interviews. Companies who have hired disadvantaged individuals do so 'as long as they are willing to work' and are physically capable of handling the job. Some companies have formally adopted an opening hiring policy, which is a process that employs anyone on a first-come-first-serve basis without asking for their resumes or their backgrounds.

Case Study: The Body Shop

The Body Shop, a cosmetics brand from the United Kingdom, implemented an "open hiring" policy in

2019. The company piloted the initiative in its North Carolina (United States) distribution centre where applicants only needed to answer three simple questions:

- a) Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?
- b) Can you stand for up to eight hours?
- c) Can you lift more than 50 pounds?

There were no interviews and background checks. Applicants who answered the three questions in affirmative were given a chance to work with roles allocated on a first-come, first served basis.

The company saw a 60% decrease in turnover rates for seasonal workers and 13% increase in warehouse productivity in the pilot initiative. Management reported the best hiring season in the distribution center in years and they are looking at expanding this open hiring practice to other entry level positions in their retail stores²².

Adapt jobs to the circumstances of different jobseekers

As elaborated in Section 3, two of the key challenges faced by disadvantaged individuals are the need for flexible or shorter hours and financial constraints. Companies can take steps to adapt existing jobs to the needs and constraints of disadvantaged individuals.

Offer a convenient work location: Offering a place of work that is close to the employee's home enables them to save time commuting, which they can spend on caring for their children, and enables them to save money on transport costs, which they can save and invest in their family.

“As much as possible, we take into consideration the location that our employees are based (e.g. homeless shelter, rental flats) and deploy them to the nearest available job location. It will reduce their travelling time and ensure that they are less likely to be late for work. It will also help them to have enough rest and save on transport costs.” - Reachfield Security & Safety Management Pte Ltd.

Job sharing and flexible working arrangements: Implementing mechanisms that enable employees to work shorter hours and/or be able to take time off on short notice will allow them to provide necessary care for their children and respond to last-minute appointments with hospitals/clinics, governments or SSAs that cannot be rescheduled.

“We have part time and full-time positions to accommodate employees that require flexible working arrangements. For new employees, they can start off with part time employment until they are ready to work full time. Our ready pool of part-timers also allows us to accommodate the leave arrangement of our full timers.” - World Clean Facility Services Pte. Ltd.

Companies can offer part-time opportunities or make it easier for colleagues to cover each other's duties. Such arrangements can be organised under a job sharing scheme. This is where the responsibilities of a full-time job position are divided among multiple employees according to their strengths and interests. The

²² Delong, D and Marcus, S (2021, Jan 5). *Imagine a Hiring Process Without Resumes*. Harvard Business Review.

Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF)'s Job Sharing Implementation Guide has guidelines on how companies can prepare and sustain job sharing arrangements²³.

Provide opportunities to explore roles: Disadvantaged individuals, especially people who are managing mental health issues, may find it more challenging and stressful to perform in certain environments. Companies who provide space for employees to figure out where they can maximise their potential will also help them gain confidence and improve productivity.

“Mr A was initially assigned to a job site that would require him to work in a team. However, he faced issues fitting in and requested for a change. We noticed that he was stressed out working in a team and seemed more comfortable working by himself. Thus, we assigned him to another job site where he was the only worker. At the new work site, he thrived and performed very well.” - Reachfield Security & Safety Management Pte Ltd.

More frequent salary disbursements: Particularly at the start of their employment, disadvantaged individuals face difficulties meeting daily expenses, especially towards the end of a month pay period, as they have yet to amass sufficient savings to last the month. Some industries (such as cleaning services and security) already mitigate cash flow concerns through biweekly instead of monthly salary disbursements. Others provide cash advances.

“We provide advancements to our new employees should they face cash flow issues. They can borrow amounts such as \$50 from our petty cash.” - World Clean Facility Services Pte. Ltd.

Offer support during onboarding, supervision and training

Disadvantaged individuals may have fewer skills due to their lack of qualifications, or lack confidence in their ability due to a sense of stigma, their mental health condition, or because they are apprehensive about returning to the workforce after a prolonged period of unemployment. Being supportive can help allay these fears and insecurities, and build their confidence.

Orientation: Companies can provide new employees with as much information as possible so as to minimise their anxiety before their first day of work. These can include detailed travel directions, contact details of their supervisors, as well as photographs of their work environment.

“The HR department conducts an orientation session at the headquarters office before the new employees start their on-the-job training at their job sites. As much as possible, we provide detailed travel directions to the job sites, supervisors’ contact and even photographs of their job environments to familiarise them so that they will know what to expect in their job site. There is a question-and-answer session to resolve any doubts that they might have.” - SBM Management Services Pte Ltd

Companies can also meet new employees on their first day at a convenient location in order to accompany them to their workplace, then show them how they can commute to work.

²³ Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), Ministry of Manpower (MOM). (2019, May). Job Sharing Implementation Guide.

“We bring them from the shelter to the workplace on the first day. We orientate them on the public transport that they can take. This reduces the anxiety that they would face in the job.” - SBM Management Services Pte Ltd

“We get our work supervisors to meet the new employees at the nearest MRT station on the first day to orientate them to the workplace.” - SBM Management Services Pte Ltd

Supervision and feedback: Companies can identify supervisors who understand that disadvantaged individuals may take longer to gain confidence and proficiency in their job. They take the time to offer more guidance and accept that the employee may make more mistakes than their peers at the beginning.

“The new employees also get to shadow their supervisors for the first few days to allow them to familiarise themselves with the work.” - SBM Management Services Pte Ltd

“We do not write them off immediately if they commit a mistake. We have employees not turning up for work without any notice and we only find out through our client. For such cases, we provide multiple chances to give them opportunities for adjustments. They are given verbal notices initially. Written notice will follow after they use up their verbal notice chances. Employees are dismissed only after receiving three written notices.” - World Clean Facility Services Pte. Ltd.

Some companies also make the effort to train employees.

“If they lack the qualifications for the work, we will sign them up for WSQ courses to allow them to get the right training and qualifications for the work.” - Reachfield Security & Safety Management Pte Ltd.

Companies may be able to tap into the Workfare Skills Support (WSS) Scheme, which is a training grant that covers 95% Absentee Payroll when employees who are 35 years and above and earn an average gross monthly income of not more than \$2,300 for the months worked are enrolled in a Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) course²⁴.

To be effective, supervisors should be empathetic to the needs and circumstances of employees, so that supervisors can guide and manage their employees appropriately.

Develop a more progressive work environment

Disadvantaged individuals go through challenges that others may find difficult to understand and empathise with. Even if the company’s leaders created the relevant policies and procedures, it is still incumbent on the relevant employees to carry them out. Creating a supportive environment for employees to adapt and thrive in a new environment will only be realised if hiring managers and supervisors are committed to helping employees gain confidence and proficiency. The job coaches shared that barriers are more likely to occur at the employee level rather than the leadership level.

²⁴ Ministry of Manpower. <https://www.workfare.gov.sg/pages/wss.aspx>

To facilitate buy-in at the employee level, find hiring managers who are willing to look beyond formal qualifications, identify job scopes and locations that are suitable to the job seekers, and guide new employees closely through their orientation. Recruit supervisors (or buddies) who are willing to provide additional support and guidance to learn about their job, send the employee for additional training, provide more opportunities if they make mistakes and offer flexible work arrangements.

Companies can also organise training to help hiring managers and supervisors better understand the challenges faced by disadvantaged individuals. For example, Daughters of Tomorrow organises a 90-min interactive workshop that raises awareness about poverty, so that participants gain insights into the realities of the economically challenged women and understand them better²⁵. Companies can also consult NCSS' Mental Health Toolkit for Employers for guidelines on creating a mental health-friendly workplace²⁶.

Potential initiatives to advance inclusive hiring further

In addition to the initiatives that have been implemented successfully by some companies to support the employment of disadvantaged individuals, below are other ideas and potential solutions as brainstormed by the multiple stakeholders in the focus group to advance inclusive hiring further. These potential initiatives are focused on targeted support for the disadvantaged individuals, information access, recognition for inclusive employers and financial incentives for inclusive hiring.

More targeted job matching

As shared earlier, many disadvantaged individuals face difficulties holding on to the new jobs that they are placed in. Job coaches placing the disadvantaged individuals should spend more time identifying their clients' strengths and needs. They can focus on finding suitable and good job matches for the disadvantaged individuals to ensure that the placements would be sustainable.

Continual support for disadvantaged individuals at initial phase of new employment

Job coaches as well as the SSAs supporting the disadvantaged individuals can continue to support the disadvantaged individuals during the initial phase of their new employment. At this initial phase, the disadvantaged individuals can face challenges adjusting to the new job and still require various kinds of assistance. It is thus important to continue support for them instead of withdrawing support prematurely to ensure that the disadvantaged individuals can successfully transit to sustainable employment.

One stop portal

Many participants in the focus group shared that it will be very helpful if there is a one stop portal for them to access the various kinds of support measures/schemes that are provided by government agencies and SSAs to companies as well as disadvantaged individuals for the employment of disadvantaged individuals. Currently much information resides with the individual government agency and there is no clear overview of the various support measures/schemes that they can tap on for the hiring of disadvantaged individuals.

²⁵ Daughters of Tomorrow (2021, Mar 4). <https://www.facebook.com/daughtersoftomorrow/posts/3532684326841475>

²⁶ National Council of Social Services (2019). <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/press-room/publications/MentalHealthToolkitforEmployers>

Sharing success stories

Case studies of employers that have hired disadvantaged individuals and benefited from the arrangement can be shared with the business community to illustrate the business case for hiring disadvantaged individuals. This has an advocacy effort and can encourage companies to take inspiration and follow successful examples.

Certification or recognition for companies that hire disadvantaged individuals

To encourage companies to hire disadvantaged individuals, there can be certification or recognition given to inclusive and progressive companies. One example is the Enabling Mark, launched in 2020 by SG Enable. The Enabling Mark is a national-level accreditation framework that aims to be a benchmark as well as provide recognition to organisations for their practices in disability-inclusive employment. Organisations are assessed in six categories - leadership, culture and climate; recruitment practices; workplace accessibility and accommodation; employment practices; community engagement and promotion; and extent of inclusive hiring. The overall maturity level of an organisation across the 6 assessment categories would determine the Enabling Mark tier that the organisation will receive – Silver, Gold or Platinum, with Platinum being the highest tier²⁷.

²⁷ SG Enable. <https://enablingmark.sg/index.php/home/faq>