



Employability Issues and Support for Low Income and Vulnerable Groups

July 2019

Written by Soristic Impact Collective

Commissioned by Singapore Business Federation Foundation

Any enquiry, please contact:
Ms Pauline Tan
Email: pauline@soristic.asia
Phone: 9626-3452

About the Organisation

Soristic Impact Collective (www.soristic.asia) is a social impact consultancy, focusing on impact assessment and social sector research in Southeast Asia since 2015. She is registered as a social enterprise with raiSE and enables businesses, non-profits as well as communities to achieve higher impact through her core focus work in

- Evaluation and Impact Assessment
- Social sector research in Singapore and ASEAN Region
- Capacity building
- Corporate Social Responsibility Project Design and Implementation Support

Clients of Soristic included CapitaLand Hope Foundation, United States Agency for International Development, National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, National University of Singapore, Community Foundation of Singapore, Lien Aid and Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood. Soristic is currently the evaluation partner for the Singapore Youth Impact Collective, a three-year programme by two social service agencies who are working with youth-at-risk.

Team Members in the Project:

Team Lead: Pauline Tan is a social sector researcher. She has published a number of papers commissioned by international funders such as USAID and AFD as well as conducted impact assessment for various social service agencies in Singapore and ASEAN. She is trained in impact evaluation by Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results, a unit of World Bank.

Assistant Team Lead: Lee Siew Ling holds great passion in purposeful people and community development work, specifically relating to social innovation, design “doing” and holistic learning. She has extensive experience facilitating problem-based learning, service-learning and design-thinking driven social innovation programmes at institutes of higher learning.

Coordinator: Thye Yoke Pean is a social entrepreneur. She received first class honours and masters from Imperial College. Subsequently she was on a Gates Foundation funded scholarship for her PhD in Indonesia that researched innovation in the humanitarian sector. She has worked on research projects commissioned by international funders and conducted several evaluations in Southeast Asia.

Facilitator: Michelle Ow has been in training and development since 1999, and continues to train and facilitate passionately. She is a certified Behavioural Consultant, Emergenetics Associate, TetraMap Facilitator, Team Psychological Safety Certified Facilitator as well as Trainer.

Employability Issues and Support for Low Income and Vulnerable Groups

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Unemployment in Singapore	4
3. Who are the unemployed?	4
<i>Table 1: Unemployed Residents by Gender, Age and Highest Qualification Attained</i>	4
<i>Figure 1: Unemployed Residents by Duration of Unemployment, June 2018</i>	5
4. Why are they unemployed?	5
<i>Table 2: Top main reasons for leaving last job among the unemployed residents</i>	5
<i>Figure 2: Residents outside the labour force by main reason for not working and not looking for a job, June 2018, percent</i>	6
<i>Table 3: Forms of employment support and examples of government agencies and social service agencies providing them</i>	8
5. Focus Group Discussions	9
5.1 Insights - Underserved Groups facing employability challenges	9
5.2 Insights - Barriers to employment	11
6. Summary and Recommendations	13
6.1 Recommendation 1: Support caregiving services/programmes	13
6.2 Recommendation 2: Support training programmes and place and train programmes	14
6.3 Recommendation 3: Facilitate Corporate Partnership for wider adoption of friendlier hiring policies/conditions	15
Appendix 1: Examples of Employment Support Provided by Government Agencies and Social Service Agencies	17
Appendix 2: Profile of FGD Participants	20
Figure 1: Age group of participants.....	20
Figure 2: Income Group of participants.....	20
Figure 3: Reasons for unemployment.....	20
Appendix 3: Other Funding Schemes Supporting Employability	21

1. Introduction

This study on Employability Issues and Support for Low Income and Vulnerable Groups is commissioned by Singapore Business Federation Foundation (SBFF). SBFF, established in 2013, works to enable and encourage contributions from the business community for the social, vocational and educational upliftment of all in Singapore. Over the years, she has partnered and supported a number of social service agencies. She is commissioning this study to get more insights on the underserved communities and the employability/employment challenges/barriers that these communities face to consider what she can do to support more effort at this juncture. Specifically, some communities are excluded from the scope of the study due to the relatively higher focus already offered by various government agencies and social service agencies. These included youths, ex-offenders, persons with disabilities as well as seniors.

2. Unemployment in Singapore

According to MOM Statistics, there are **66,900** (or 2.9% of) residents (Singapore Citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents who are aged 15 years and above) that are unemployed in Singapore in 2018 – this refers to people who are not working, actively looking for a job and available for work¹.

Among these unemployed people, **23.8% or 15,900** are considered in long term unemployment as they have been unemployed for 25 weeks or more (approximately 6 months or more)². In addition, there are 8,300 “discouraged workers” in 2018, people who are not looking for a job because they believe their job search would not yield results³.

3. Who are the unemployed?

There are 35,400 and 31,500 of unemployed males and females respectively. Most unemployed individuals are below 30 years old. The second largest of unemployed individuals are above 50 years old. Those with only post-secondary qualification (non-tertiary) make up the highest percentage of unemployment at 3.4%.

Table 1: Unemployed Residents by Gender, Age and Highest Qualification Attained

Year	2018	2018
	In Thousands	Percentage
TOTAL	66.9	2.9
Males	35.4	2.9
Females	31.5	3.0
AGE GROUP (YEARS)		
Below 30	21.6	5.2
30 - 39	11.5	2.2
40 - 49	12.6	2.3
50 & Over	21.1	2.6
HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED		
Below Secondary	9.7	2.5
Secondary	11.0	2.8

¹ <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/SL/Pages/Unemployment-Level-and-Rate-Concepts-and-Definitions.aspx?Flag=2&TRMID=102&PageNo=1>

² <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/SL/Pages/Long-Term-Unemployment-Level-and-Rate-Concepts-and-Definitions.aspx?Flag=2&TRMID=112&PageNo=1>

³ <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/SL/Pages/Discouraged-Workers-Introduction.aspx>

Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary)	8.0	3.4
Diploma & Professional Qualification	13.8	3.1
Degree	24.4	2.9

Source: Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Despite the fact that those below 30 years old make up the highest number and percentage of unemployment, they tend to also find a job faster, with 45.9% of them just unemployed for less than 5 weeks. Unemployment duration tends to get longer with age. For residents above 50 years old, 34.1% of them have been finding jobs for at least 25 weeks. In terms of qualification, those with only secondary qualification, as well as those with degree qualification tend to face longer time in job searching.

Figure 1: Unemployed Residents by Duration of Unemployment, June 2018



Source: Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

4. Why are they unemployed?

The top main reasons for unemployment include completion of contract, retrenchment, caregiving duties, long working hours and further study as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Top main reasons for leaving last job among the unemployed residents

Reasons for Leaving Last Job	% of unemployed residents (June 2018)
Completion of contract/Job	13.5
Retrenchment	11.8
Housework/care of children, elderly or sick relatives	8.9
Long working hours/work too demanding	7.7
On course/further study	5.6

Job was temporary in nature	5.3
Illness/injury/accident	5.1
Cessation of Business	5.0

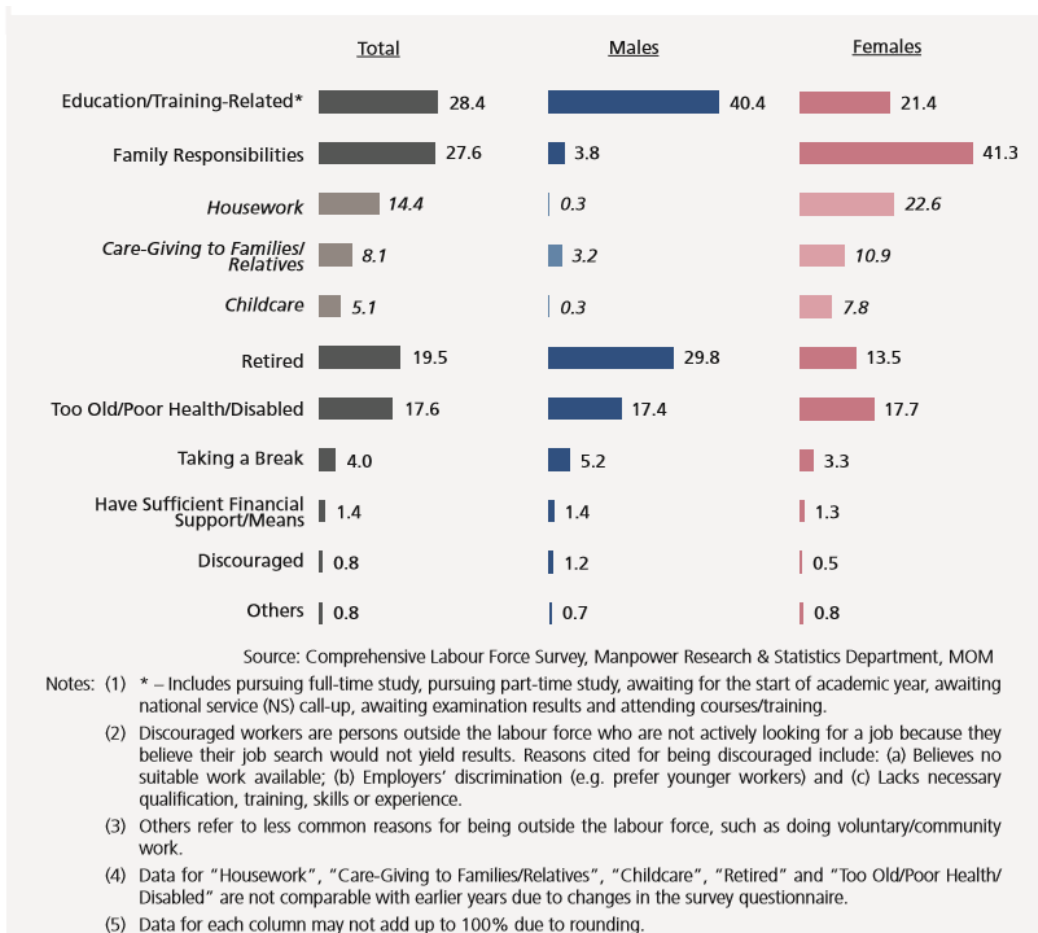
Source: Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Besides the unemployed in Singapore, roughly 32.3% or 1.09 million of Singapore resident population are outside the labour force. Most of them are in the age groups 60 years old & over (45%) and 15 to 24 years old (28%) - retirees and students respectively.

Women made up a larger proportion of residents (63%) outside the labour force with family responsibilities including housework, caregiving to families and childcare as the top reason that kept them outside the labour force. For males, the most common reason given was to pursue education/training, reflecting the high concentration of youths⁴ (see figure 2 for more details).

Clearly from the statistics on the two groups, unemployed and people outside the labour force, caregiving responsibilities is a very significant barrier for employment especially for female residents.

Figure 2: Residents outside the labour force by main reason for not working and not looking for a job, June 2018, percent



Source: Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

⁴ Ministry of Manpower (2018) Labour Force in Singapore 2018.

5. What are the current employment support out there?

The current employment support ranges from meeting the basic needs, training to upgrade the skills of the unemployed, job placement, soft skills training to social emotional support as elaborated below:

- a) **Basic needs:** There are financial support as well as food/groceries support by social service offices (SSOs) and family service centres (FSCs) for the unemployed. Some social service agencies such as Catholic Welfare Services, Crisis Centre (Singapore) and Casa Raudha also provide shelter to meet the basic lodging needs of the homeless and unemployed. These basic needs services tend to be temporary and emergency in nature.
- b) **Job placement:** Job placement, job matching and job fairs are services provided by the employment support agencies (eg Workforce Singapore (WSG), Employment and Employability Institute (e2i)), social service offices, SG Enable, Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), job placement centres run by Community Development Councils as well as social service agencies such as Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS), SENSE by Mendaki, Daughters of Tomorrow (DOT) and YWCA.
- c) **Skill training and reskilling:** There is extensive employment support in this area with many organisations providing assistance to enable the unemployed to obtain the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) for wide ranging skills and competencies. Many organisations also run their own in-house skill training and reskilling.
- d) **Soft skill training and career coaching/counselling:** These include training in interview skills, resume writing, presentation skills as well as confidence building. Many organisations provide some forms of soft skill training. Career coaching/counselling are further provided by some organisations such as WSG, e2i, SCORE, SENSE and SACS. Post-employment support such as job retention support are however only provided by a handful of organisations such as YWCA, SCORE, DOT and IMH.
- e) **Job redesign and work trial:** Work trial and vocational training allow job seekers to gain experience and be assessed for employment by their potential employers. These are supported by government agencies such as WSG and e2i as well as social service agencies such as SACS. Job redesign, on the other hand, involves redesigning of job elements like duties and responsibilities. This is targeted at employers and are supported by WSG and e2i.
- f) **Other support services:** These include indirect support services that enables the unemployed to find and stay employed. An example will be caregiving services provided by Community Childminding program run by Daughters of Tomorrow (DOT) and CareNights by Morning Star Community Services.

Please see table 3 and Appendix 1 for more examples of the employment support available by government agencies and social service agencies.

Table 3: Forms of employment support and examples of government agencies and social service agencies providing them

Forms of Employment Support	Government or government related agencies	Social Service Agencies
Basic needs eg financial support	Social Service Offices (mainly financial support)	Family Services Centres (eg Monfort Care), Crisis Centre, Catholic Welfare Services (mainly non-financial support)
Job Matching, Placement, Job Fairs	WSG, e2i, Social Service Offices, SCORE, SG Enable, Job Placement Centres, IMH	SAMH, DOT, SENSE, YWCA, HCSA, SACS,
Skill upgrading, Reskilling	WSG, e2i, SCORE, SG Enable	SAMH, SENSE, Casa Raudha Ltd, YWCA, HCSA
Soft skills training (eg interview skills, social emotional support)	WSG, e2i, SCORE, SG Enable, Job Placement Centres, IMH	Crisis Centre, DOT, SAMH, SENSE, YWCA
Career Guidance, Coaching, Counselling, job retention support	WSG, e2i, SCORE, SG Enable, Social Service Offices, IMH	Family Services Centres (eg Monfort Care), SAMH, SACS, SAMH
Job redesign, work trial, place and train	WSG, e2i	SACS ⁵
Other Support services		DOT, Morning Star Community Services

⁵ There are many social service agencies such as Autism Resource Centre, Touch Community Services, Bizlink that work with youths, people from disabilities as well as ex-offenders that provide place and train programmes but they are not included in the examples as these are beneficiary groups outside the scope of the study.

5. Focus Group Discussions

In order to gain more qualitative insights on the underserved groups; as well as the barriers to employment and service gaps that they face, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were convened on 12th and 16th July 2019 to gather insights from organisations (e.g. social service agencies, government agencies) working on employment support; as well as the beneficiaries they currently serve. The objectives of the FGDs are stated below:

- 1) To identify and scope underserved groups in the current employment landscape that SBF wants to support.
- 2) To find out from underserved groups their challenges in gaining employment and the services that they need.
- 3) To identify barriers for employment for the shortlisted underserved groups.
- 4) To identify service gaps (employability/employment support) for the shortlisted underserved groups to identify potential support needed.

For the FGD with organisations, a broad scan was first conducted on organisations offering employment support. Research effort was geared towards organisations working in community groups that Singapore Business Federation Foundation (SBFF) wants to prioritise for support. The eight organisations participating in the FGD were:-

- Beyond Social Services
- YWCA of Singapore
- Mendaki SENSE
- Wicare Support Group
- Daughters of Tomorrow
- Cheng San Family Service Centre
- Yong En
- Montfort Care

Ministry of Manpower was also invited to conduct a short sharing on the employment landscape and policies in Singapore.

For the FGD with beneficiaries, a total of 9 women participants nominated by the social service agencies and other community-based groups participated. Efforts were made to get participants from a diverse demographics (eg race, gender, age group). The participants were all female, mostly in the 30 to 40 years old age range, had low income and their top reasons for unemployment were caregiving followed by inability to find suitable jobs. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a more detailed profile of the participants.

5.1 Insights - Underserved Groups facing employability challenges

The underserved groups include beneficiaries that social service agencies may face challenge serving as well as groups where there are service gaps or insufficient capacity in meeting their employability needs - getting and staying employed.

- i) **Women with caregiving responsibilities**
 - a. Children caregiving

b. Other types of caregiving (eg elderly parents/grandparents, sick spouse)

A very significant group of people facing employability challenges is people with caregiving responsibilities as verified by the statistics we seen from the Labour Survey as well as our FGDs. Women especially is disproportionately affected, as they usually hold the primary responsibilities of taking care of children; elderly parents/grandparents or even sick spouse. For those that want to get back to work, the current inadequate support system, as well as high cost of caregiving serve as barriers to employment for them. Furthermore, they often require jobs that offer flexible working hours and preferred getting jobs nearer to their home locations, which are more challenging to find. Sometimes they are also hindered by spouses that prefer them to stay at home to do caregiving.

ii) Women with husbands that do not permit them to work

The issue of husbands not permitting the wives to work is not just limited to caregiving constraints. In some families, the husbands are less educated than the wives and instead of allowing the wives to work and earn for the families, they deny their wives work opportunities by sabotaging work opportunities offered to the wives (e.g. creating trouble for the employers). This group of women is hard to serve as mindset shift is needed from their husbands, before they can take advantage of any employment support available to them.

iii) Foreign mothers with Singaporean children

Another group of underserved community is the foreign mothers with Singaporean children that have either divorced their Singaporean husbands, or have deceased Singaporean husbands. Some face challenges to get Long-Term Visit Pass Plus (LTVP+) that would enable prospective employers to apply for a Letter of Consent instead of an Employment Pass, S Pass or Work Permit for them, such that they would not count towards the foreign worker quota of the company nor incur a foreign worker levy⁶. Others are hindered by prospective employers' lack of awareness on employment procedures related to their situation that discriminate them during the hiring process.

iv) Persons with mental health issues

Generally, persons with mental health issues face barriers to finding employment, due to discrimination and challenges in adjusting to work environment. These persons may require long term treatment/care since mental health issues can recur and it is challenging to define when they can be said to graduate from an employment support programme.

v) Men (who require help but do not reach out for help)

It seems that social service agencies find it challenging to reach out to male beneficiaries. There are men who require help in finding employment, but do not want to reach out to help. Often the beneficiaries willing to reach out for help are the females. It is suggested that perhaps current programmes need to be tweaked to emphasis more on mentoring/befriending and less on psycho-social emotional support in order to attract this group.

vi) People with lack of qualifications

Another noticeable group facing employability challenges are the people with lack of qualifications. These people could have drop out of school before obtaining "N" or "O" levels. They could have left the workforce due to various reasons and face challenges in re-entering the workforce with their qualifications. Many shared that getting WSQ certifications have not been

⁶ <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/aware-calls-changes-immigration-regulations-foreign-spouses>

able to help them get employment as employers still require minimum qualifications and do not look at their past work experience and the competencies they have gained from the certifications.

5.2 Insights - Barriers to employment

Barriers of employment are multifaceted and they can be tied to challenges faced in the regulatory system, work environment and/or personal lives of the unemployed. Some barriers of employment shared by the participants include:

- Rigid and/or Inconsistent Regulation
- Stigma/Prejudice/Unsupportive employers, co-workers and public
- Rigid conventional recruitment and human resource policies (eg rigid qualifications, inflexible work hours)
- Lack of support for caregiving responsibilities

i) Rigid and/or Inconsistent Regulation

Participants identify a number of barriers in the regulatory system that are rigid or inconsistent that affect the unemployed. These include

- **Too tight regulation**

Participants share that some groups such as ex-offenders may face unnecessary or too strict industry restrictions. For example, ex-offender are unable to work even as cleaners in a security firm as the regulation does not differentiate between the different roles within a security firm.

- **Lack of transparency in policies**

Foreign mothers face difficulty finding jobs due to unclear status over their legal status. In some circumstances they can work but there are certain restrictions on the industries that they can work in. According to the participants, there is a lack of transparency of certain policies such as those relating to Long Term Visit Pass Plus. Even though on paper there should be no industry restrictions but at the ground level, when they approach the MOM officers there are restrictions that they face. It is unclear to them whether the restrictions are on the policy level or due to varied interpretations by the officers.

Participants also expressed frustrations over a lack of transparency in eligibility criteria, and frontline officers' inconsistencies in applying criteria for financial support during their periods of unemployment. Several participants had encountered much inconsistencies and unnecessary bureaucracies (eg area zoning) when seeking financial support from SSOs that cause them unnecessary anxiety and stress.

- **Too tiered financial assistance schemes**

Participants also shared that sometimes the current financial assistance schemes deter beneficiaries from finding employment at the initial stage. The beneficiaries are often ineligible for financial assistance immediately after they find jobs. If the salaries for the initial employment that they could find are not much different from the amount they would receive from financial assistance, it does not provide incentive and in fact discouraged them from seeking employment. In addition, many beneficiaries have concerns about financial issues on the first month of their employment. With financial assistance cut off and salaries only

disbursed at the end of the month, they face difficulty sustaining financially through the first month of employment.

ii) Prejudiced and Unsupportive employers, co-workers and public

Some groups of beneficiaries include ex-offenders, persons with mental health issues and mothers face prejudice due to stereotyping and stigma. For example, some employers do not differentiate between the intensity and types of crimes and may reject all ex-offenders as potential employees. Employers, colleagues and public may not be discerning enough to understand the differences between people suffering from depression and bipolar disorders; and simply reject all applicants with mental health issues. Participants also shared the prejudice they face in getting employment from some employers if they are within the child bearing age or have children as employers are concerned about them taking maternity and childcare leave. One participant also shared that many employers perceived mature workers as always falling sick and being unable to keep up with technology and thus she faced difficulty even getting interviews. This may partially explain the disproportionately high percentage of people above 50 years old facing long term unemployment in the MOM Labour Survey.

iii) Rigid conventional recruitment and human resource policies

Many unemployed also face challenges getting and staying employed with the current recruitment and human resource policies that overlook the skills and personal needs of the employed. For example,

- **Overemphasis on qualification and overlook jobseeker' competencies and previous job experiences**

At least two participants wanting to re-join the workforce shared that they had regrettably attained many basic WSQ certificates which were not recognised by employers. Their lack of qualification of having at least a "N" level meant that they were overlooked even for interviews even though they had relevant job experiences in the past.

- **Inflexible working hours**

Inflexible working hours whereby employees need to work in shifts or weekend hinder many unemployed with caregiving responsibilities from getting unemployment. Currently, many of them have limited expertise and face employment options in limited industries such as food and beverage industry, hospital industry, retail industry as well as the childcare industry. These industries usually require shift work and also weekend duties which is challenging for the unemployed with caregiving responsibilities as they are only able to work during normal working hours when childcare centres are opened.

- **Long working hours**

Some of the unemployed are only able to work part time due to their various personal commitments. However, part time work options are limited to certain industries. It would be helpful if more employers can engage in job redesign to split up the existing full-time job scope/task so that there are more jobs that are bite sized with lesser responsibilities and shorter working hours.

iv) Lack of support for caregiving responsibilities

A major barrier to employment for beneficiaries with caregiving responsibilities is the inadequate support that they have for caregiving. For example, for mothers with children caregiving responsibilities, even when they are able to find employment with normal working hours where they could get childcare support from childcare centres, face difficulty reporting to work whenever their children fall sick or when the childcare centres are closed. They face challenge in getting the ad-hoc support and often have to take leave. If they have many children, they could use up all their leave very fast and be in situation where they need to get unpaid leave which is subject to whether their employers will be supportive. These ad-hoc and frequent leave taking even if acceptable to the managers could still generate unhappiness among their co-workers who have to cover their duties when they are away. It also undesirable for teamwork. However if there are more support for caregiving, they would be able to leave their children with trusted people during such emergency to allow them to focus on their work.

6. Summary and Recommendations

In general, the unemployed people with low income and vulnerable family backgrounds tend to face multiple issues such as family violence, single parenthood, mental health issues, health issues and low access to education. Rigid/inconsistent regulation; stigma and unsupportive employers, co-workers and public; rigid conventional recruitment and human resource policies as well as lack of support for caregiving responsibilities are just some barriers that they face in getting employment and staying employed.

Currently, these unemployed seek and receive a mixture of help from social service offices, family service centres, social service agencies as well as agencies such as Workforce Singapore and e2i. However, many remain unemployed or have problems staying employed despite the support received. More targeted support and solutions are needed to get them employed as well as be sustainably employed for a longer period of time. Some of the existing employment support programmes such as community caregiving support are relatively small scale and can be potentially scaled up to help the large number of unemployed with caregiving responsibilities. Other support such as job redesign, adoption of hiring policies/conditions friendly to the constraints faced by different groups of beneficiaries will require partnerships with more employers.

Based on our assessment of the scale and impact of the various employment solutions/recommendations mentioned earlier in the report, we have come out with a potential set of recommendations that SBFF can consider to support further or implement with your network:

6.1 Recommendation 1: Support caregiving services/programmes

8.9% of the unemployed left their last job due to caregiving responsibilities and 27.6% of the residents outside the labour force state family responsibilities as their main reason for not finding employment⁷. This meant that the group of people affected by caregiving responsibilities for employment is very significant at over 300,000 people. Among these, women are particularly and disproportionately affected and disadvantaged. These statistics alongside the qualitative insights we obtain from our FGDs call for more and bigger concerted efforts to support caregiving services/programmes to meaningfully make a difference to the scale of the issue.

Currently, there are caregiving services available commercially, such as childcare services and hourly paid caregiver services. Some families also employ foreign domestic workers to assist in caregiving.

⁷ Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

However, accessibility of these services is skewed towards those that can pay. Many low income and vulnerable women face issues in accessing such services. Even for those that can access subsidized childcare services, emergency childminding services are needed when their children fall sick or when the childcare centres are closed. Without these services and a good social support system, these caregivers face challenges in staying employment as employers may not be able to let them take so many days away from work due to operational needs.

There have been some caregiving services provided by social service agencies to assist in alleviating this challenge. For example, Morning Star Community Services has a CareNights@Morning Star Programme to help parents from low-income families get respite from caregiving at night. Criteria for children to get enrolled in the scheme include parents seeking to improve their employability by upgrading their skills, families seeking to improve their economic condition by working overtime or taking on a second employment at night, among others. CareNights@Morning Star operates from 6 pm to 10 pm every weeknight⁸. Daughters of Tomorrow has a community childminding program to cater for after-childcare hours and contingency support to help low-income women access and hold jobs in the retail, hospitality and service sectors. The program fosters a network of home-based childminders for mothers by mothers, rallying support among themselves to solve their day-to-day childminding needs⁹.

However, the scale of these existing efforts is small compared to the scale of the issue. More could be done to support caregivers, to enable them to find employment as well as to stay employed. There could be a scaling up of childminding initiatives, especially those that are community based for easier access.

6.2 Recommendation 2: Support training programmes and place and train programmes

a) Soft skill training

Over 21 % of the unemployed face long term unemployment as they spent more than 25 weeks looking for employment after completion of a previous work contract, retrenchment or having to leave job due to caregiving responsibilities¹⁰. They will benefit from soft skills training programmes (e.g. communication skills, job interview skills) that can help them build the professional confidence to re-enter the workforce. Currently many social service agencies such as YWCA, SENSE and DOT as well as some family service centres offer such programmes. SBFF could potentially support and scale up such soft skill training programmes run by the various social service agencies.

b) Training leading to higher qualification

It is apparent that having basic WSQ certificates are not enough to get employment as employers are also looking for academic qualifications besides the skill-based certificates. There are advanced level WSQ certifications that can lead to diploma that may help the job seekers suffering from lack of qualifications. Though taking the higher levels WSQ qualification require more time and cost. SBFF could consider supporting social service agencies to support and incentivise their beneficiaries working towards these higher qualifications.

c) Place and Train Programmes

⁸ <https://www.morningstar.org.sg/happening/carenights-morning-star/>

⁹ <https://daughtersoftomorrow.org/programmes/okccp/>

¹⁰ Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

Many beneficiaries also expressed a lack of opportunities and platforms for them to hone the skills and knowledge learnt after their courses, causing them to be stuck with low-paying jobs such as cleaners and security positions, and other ad-hoc short-term jobs which do not pay well.

Currently WSG has a Work Trial¹¹ programme that allows jobseekers to experience a short-term work trial, and be assessed for employment suitability. This programme extends to part-time employment offered by employers, and jobseekers can receive training allowances and retention incentives. Apart from jobseekers' allowances, employers can also make claims for Salary Support – thus there is lower barriers for companies to offer varied employment schemes for jobseekers. E2i also has place and train programmes where the unemployed undergo customised training with selected companies with course fees and training allowances support¹².

The unemployed can also benefit from more hands-on employers that provide more on the job training and guidance as they transit back to workforce. Examples of hands on employers include the company, SAP, that has an initiative “Back to Work”¹³ that offers women an opportunity to re-join the workforce. They offer project-based assignments complementing skills and experience, with options to work part-time and flexibility to work on-site or virtually. They also factor in training programmes, and a mentor to guide the employee through reintegration process. Standard Chartered Bank introduced a “Moms Matter” initiative in 2016 with the intent to get mothers to return to workforce and explore job opportunities with them.

SBFF can potentially facilitate/support/scale-up similar place and train initiatives to enable beneficiaries to hone their work-based skills and competencies to gain relevant experiences. Such programmes allow both parties to assess suitability of job fit. SBFF can facilitate partnerships between social service agencies working in this area such as SACS and her member companies.

6.3 Recommendation 3: Facilitate Corporate Partnership for wider adoption of friendlier hiring policies/conditions

A significant area that SBF can support to improve employability for the underserved would be in advocacy as well as partnership with social service agencies and her member companies in the following areas

- Hiring policies that look at competencies rather than qualifications
- Flexible working arrangement
- Job redesign for bite sized roles (e.g. shorter working hours)
- Training of managers to handle employees with mental health issues
- Hiring policies for foreign mothers with Singaporean children.

The wiliness of employers to go an extra mile to hire the underserved will play a significant role in improving the employment situation of the underserved. Sometimes it could be the lack of awareness of certain employment policies that prevent corporate from hiring certain groups of underserved. Other times, it could simply be the case of outdated hiring policies that look at qualifications rather than competencies that prevent the hiring of the underserved. In additional, some employers may just need a little nudge to get them to look beyond what they are currently offering to provide flexible working arrangement and re-design job roles that can enable them to hire the underserved. Currently

¹¹ <https://www.wsg.gov.sg/programmes-and-initiatives/career-trial-jobseekers.html>

¹² <https://e2i.com.sg/businesses/place-and-train-programmes/>

¹³ <https://www.sap.com/sea/about/careers/who-we-are/our-people/women/back-to-work.html>

WSG and e2i have WorkPro programmes that support businesses to come out with progressive employment practices, age management practices and flexible work arrangements.

Hiring the underserved should be portrayed as a win-win situation for employers where they are able to garner a pool of loyal employees in today's tight labour market if they can set up the right working environment for this group of job candidates. Their efforts can also potentially be seen as corporate social responsibility efforts that will benefit them in branding as socially responsible companies.

To get more buy-in from the member companies, a mixture of education, advocacy, awareness building as well as close partnership with social service agencies is necessary. SBFF can facilitate and support efforts/programmes by social service agencies in reaching out to corporate as well as provide financial support to incentivise corporate to take the initial steps. In addition, SBFF can profile and share case studies of successful companies in this area to encourage and provide leadership for other companies to follow.

Appendix 1: Examples of Employment Support Provided by Government Agencies and Social Service Agencies

Government Agencies/Government related agencies	Type of Programme	Signature Programme or Programme Supporting	People Supported
Workforce Singapore	Career Matching, Training and Reskilling, Career Guidance, Grants for Employers, Job coaching	Work Trial programme, Adapt and Grow Programmes, SkillsFuture, Professional Conversion Programmes, P-Max for Individuals, Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification	PMETs, non-PMETs, special needs, ex-offenders, youth
Employment and Employability Institute (e2i)	Skill upgrading, career matching, career guidance, Grants for Employers	Professional Conversion Programmes, Inclusive Growth Programme, Career Support Programme	PMETs, non-PMETs
Job Placement Centres (run by Community Development Council or Community Centre/Clubs)	Job Matching, Job information and skills training		Low income & vulnerable groups, PMETs
Social Service Offices/Family Service Centres	Job matching, referral to other agencies		Low Income & vulnerable groups
SG ENable	Job matching, Job preparation, Training and reskilling, Grants for employers	Job Redesign grant, special employment credit	People with Disabilities
Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE)	Job matching, job coaching, Training and reskilling, Job retention support		Ex-offenders

Social Service Agencies	Type of Programme	People Supported
Montfort Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducted study with SW101 on homelessness - Employee Assistance Programme (Life Skills Coaching, Psychological Assessment), under Marine Parade FSC. 	Homeless Community
Catholic Welfare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homeless Outreach Mission (use of office hub for homeless – shower, do laundry, socialise, perform outsourced jobs e.g. pack biscuits into tins) 	Homeless Community

Crisis Centre (Singapore)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide safe lodging, food, sanitation and employment assistance for our residents. - Provide activities to help residents develop life and work skills. 	Homeless Community
Sense by Yayasan Mendaki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Back-to-Work Women The programme aims to facilitate women in returning to the workforce, equip participants with career-ready skills and to connect participants to hiring industries. To supplement household income, to benefit from national childcare schemes. 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
YWCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowering Mums project This programme is dedicated to helping back-to-work mothers from low-income families improve their employment situation and holistically. Free 10-week schedule of group work and skills workshops culminating in a makeover and graduation. Plus six monthly post-project sessions and employment opportunities. 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
Daughters of Tomorrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidence Curriculum - Community Childminding program - Job placement 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
Care Corner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Service Centre: Casework supporting individuals, couples and families facing diverse issues relating to poverty, homelessness, unemployment - Care Corner Project StART (Family Violence Specialist Centre) 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
Casa Raudha Ltd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Casa Raudha Women Home, Social Resilience, Courses e.g. sewing, baking, (41.3% gained employment after admission) - Social Enterprise (Aquaponics/Hydroponics) 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
HCSA Community Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HSCA Academy Culinary Training Centre Enable HCSA's beneficiaries and other vulnerable individuals with skill training and job placement 	Single mothers/those who suffer from domestic violence
Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support clients with mental health issues through integrated employment services. - Employment Training Course (ETC): Structured vocational training provided. - Employment Internship Programme (EIP): On-site job coaching and job redesign. 	Those suffering from mental illness, or mental health issues

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment Support Services (ESS): Job matching and placement. - Employee Assistance Programme (EAP+): Face-to-face counselling services for clients, and training/awareness workshops for supervisors. <p>SACS Social Enterprises provides employability opportunities and vocational training for its clients through following set-ups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MOSES (clients with mental health issues) - Mother and Child Project (disadvantaged women) - Something Old Something New (clients with mental health issues) 	
Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MINDSET Learning Hub Aims to provide Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) training and employment placement, in industries such as cleaning, food and beverage, hospitality, healthcare support and retail, for Persons-In-Recovery. 	Those suffering from mental illness, or mental health issues
IMH Job Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individually tailored rehabilitation counselling - Equip in Job preparation skills such as career exploration, job seeking, resume writing and job interview techniques - Job placement and on-going support through phone call follow-ups, regular job site visits, crisis intervention - Support groups for employed individuals 	Those suffering from mental illness, or mental health issues

Appendix 2: Profile of FGD Participants

Figure 1: Age group of participants

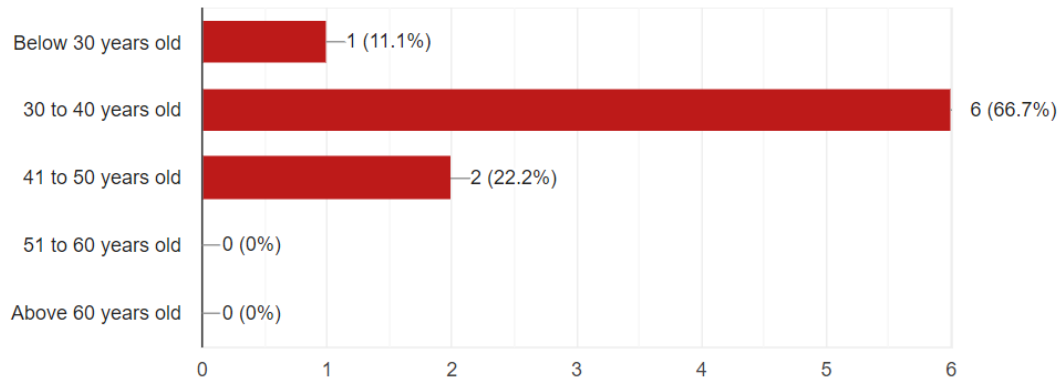


Figure 2: Income Group of participants

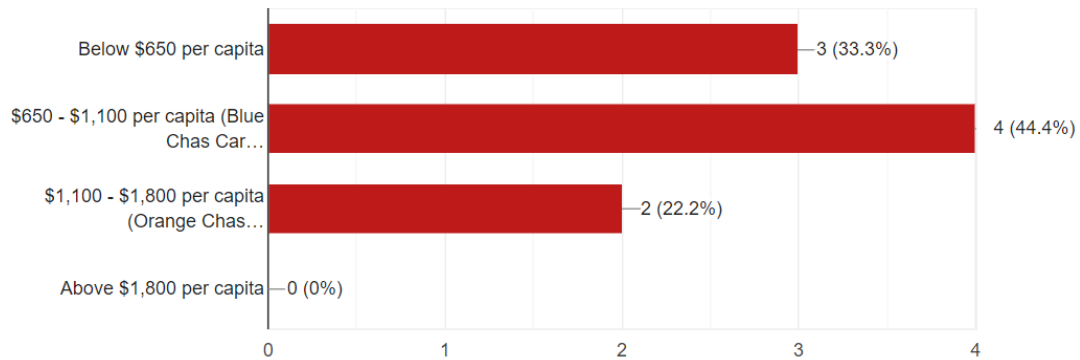
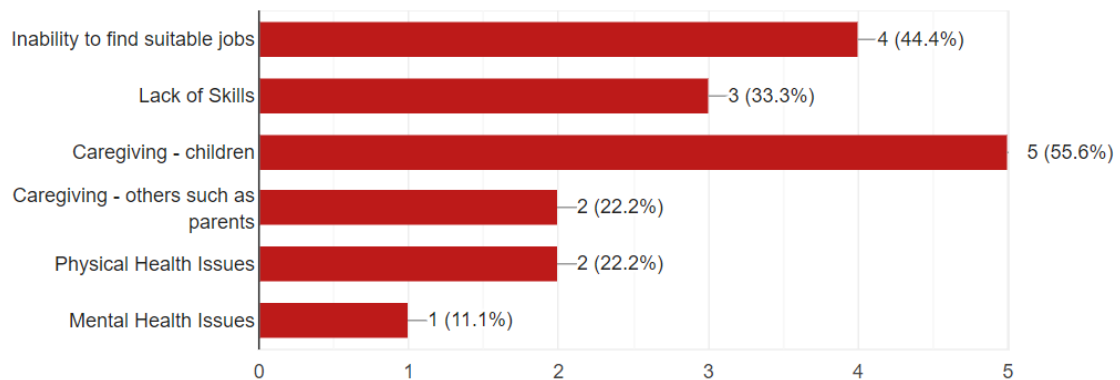


Figure 3: Reasons for unemployment



Appendix 3: Other Funding Schemes Supporting Employability

Funding Scheme	Community Impact Fund Programme	The Seeds of Change Fund	Tote Board Mental Health Strategic Initiative
Organisation	Community Foundation of Singapore	Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (funding comes from Govt)	Tote Board
Amount	\$528,000	\$300,000	Millions (not clear how much)
Usage of Fund	To support beneficiaries with an average of 140 hours of vocational training and another 60 hours of job matching, job placement and on-the-job coaching support.	Fund project costs for organisations that advocate or address women's employment and health issues for one year.	Support organisations that increase understanding of MH issues and encourage more supportive attitudes towards PMHIs; as well as increase employability for PMHIs to pursue their career or personal aspirations, supporting them to contribute to the community.
Groups Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with disabilities • People recovering from mental illnesses • Disadvantaged women • Youth-at-risk 	Disadvantaged women	People with mental health issues

More Details of the Funding Schemes

a) The Learning Initiatives for Employment — Community Impact Fund programme ¹⁴

Launched 23 May 2019 with funding amount of \$528,000 by Community Foundation of Singapore(CFS)

Aim: Equip participants with skills, and helping them find jobs and stay employed.

Target: Four marginalised groups, namely:

- People with disabilities

¹⁴ Ng (2019) New S\$528,000 fund to help disadvantaged people stay employed. Retrieved from <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/new-s528000-fund-help-disadvantaged-people-stay-employed>

- People recovering from mental illnesses
- Disadvantaged women
- Youth-at-risk

The fund will help participants undergo an average of 140 hours of vocational training and another 60 hours of job matching, job placement and on-the-job coaching support.

CFS targets around 65 per cent of participants to graduate from its training. Out of these graduates, 60 per cent are expected to be placed into jobs for at least three months. During the training phase, charitable organisations partnering CFS will help these participants minimise or resolve family issues which could derail their training.

Participants seeking kitchen and service jobs will be trained by social enterprise Project Dignity, while Bettr Barista — a coffee academy — will coach aspiring baristas. Both organisations will also provide job attachment opportunities.

In the future, more industries could get involved in the scheme.

The scheme targets an initial 90 participants who will first be identified and referred by Institute of a Public Character charities. Their attitude, aptitude and employment potential will determine whether they qualify for the scheme.

Where possible, the programme will continue to track the participants for up to two years.

b) The Seeds of Change Fund - Launched in 2019. ^{15, 16}

A \$300,000 seed fund from Ministry of Social and Family Development Office for Women's Development that is administered by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO)

The themes of funding for the first funding year are:

- Invest in Self – Projects that impact women's employment (e.g. women returning to work) and career advancement; or encourage training and career development
- Invest in Health – Projects that advocate or address health matters that impact women

Cost supported by this grant:

Project costs – activities, logistics, venue, marketing and publicity, production, material, and logistics costs, volunteer meal and transport costs

Non-qualifying costs:

Administrative and operating costs like manpower and other overheads that are incurred on an ongoing basis (internal costs)

Capital expenditures and purchase of assets. For e.g. property

Costs that have been incurred before the signing of fund agreement

¹⁵ Tay (2019) Seed fund for women to kick off with health, employment focus.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/seed-fund-for-women-to-kick-off-with-health-employment-focus>

¹⁶ <https://www.scwo.org.sg/what-we-do/seedsofchange/>

Besides funding, organisations that require guidance can get it from the NTUC Women and Family Unit and People's Association's Women's Integration Network.

Successful fund applicants will receive up to \$20,000, or 90 per cent of the allowable project deficit, whichever is lower, on a reimbursement basis. Projects of a larger scale and greater impact, however, may be considered for higher funding support.

For the first year, the fund is open only to the SCWO's more than 50 member organisations, which reach out to some 500,000 women

c) Tote Board Mental Health Strategic Initiative¹⁷

The fund aims to support mental wellness and create opportunities for Persons with Mental Health Issues (PMHIs) to lead a dignified life to their fullest potential. This outcome is in line with Tote Board's Strategic Outcome of providing Equitable Opportunities for Vulnerable Groups (in this case, PMHIs).

There are 3 programmes under this initiative:

- Community-based Services for Children
- De-stigmatisation, Mental Health Literacy and Employability
- Research to build Sector Capacity and Capability

Under De-stigmatisation, Mental Health Literacy and Employability, the Programme Outcomes are:

- 1) Increase understanding of MH issues and encourage more supportive attitudes towards PMHIs; an
- 2) Increase employability for PMHIs to pursue their career or personal aspirations, supporting them to contribute to the community.

¹⁷ Tote Board (2019) Tote Board Mental Health Strategic Initiative.
<https://www.toteboard.gov.sg/grants/apply-through-our-partners/strategic-initiatives/mental-health>