

# Our Invisible Neighbours

**And How To Care For Them**



# USING THIS HANDBOOK

## **Hello there!**

We're glad you're here to learn more about homelessness in Singapore. By educating yourself about rough sleepers, you're one step closer to becoming the advocate they need.

*Here are two ways to use this resource:*

## **Read**

This Handbook contains an introduction to homelessness in Singapore as well as helplines and tips you can use to help a rough sleeper. Take your time to read through the nuggets of information and real-life anecdotes. There is much to learn!

## **Respond**

We've incorporated interactive segments to help you organise your thoughts and explore content beyond the Handbook. Use these activities to delve deeper into the complex issue of homelessness – you might find yourself discovering new insights or inspiration to take action.

To help raise greater awareness of homelessness in Singapore, share your takeaways with your community. You could even consider inviting them to volunteer at an organisation that supports our homeless friends!

So make the most out of this Handbook and bring its words off the pages into real life! We're excited to see the impact you'll make in the lives of our invisible neighbours.

# Invisible

Homeless?

In Singapore?

More than a thousand people sleep rough on the streets every night in Singapore, hiding themselves away from curious eyes and probing questions.

But how did they end up there?

Could homelessness happen to someone I know?

Have you seen a rough sleeper before - but never realised it?

***Let's find out.***

## Chapter One

# WHY SHOULD I BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN?

The \_\_\_\_\_ Citizen

Most of us are citizens of Singapore, but do we know the roles and responsibilities that come with citizenship?

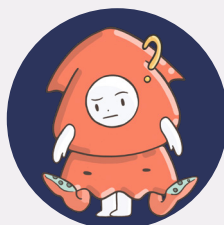
Let's identify some of Singapore's most familiar citizen types:



**The Keyboard Warrior**



**The Couch Potato**



**The Sotong**



**The Active Citizen**



You know things. But actually doing something with that knowledge? Nah.



Unimpressed by mere words, you find your sense of purpose in making a positive difference to society.



You've turned typing anonymous responses to news pieces into an art form.



What happens in society stays there - far away.

## Discussion:

*What kind of citizen are you? Describe yourself!*

## Find Me An Active Citizen

Active citizens can look just like you - unique!

**What are the traits of an active citizen?** *<Tick the correct responses>*

- ☐ Keep abreast of societal issues
- ☐ Unconcerned about news unrelated to them
- ☐ Believe they can make a difference
- ☐ Doesn't offer help to those in need
- ☐ Oblivious to people struggling in society
- ☐ Serve within their community

There's no age limit, cut-off point or pigeonhole you need to fit into before you start doing something that matters to people in need.



### **Active Citizens** simply...

Feel a **strong sense of belonging** to their nation. While they are aware of their nation's vulnerabilities and problems, they remain determined to improve the lives of their fellow citizens. They hope for, and **actively pursue** a better future for their nation.

### **Discussion:**

*How would you feel and respond in the following situations as an active citizen?*

- *Reading the news about rough sleepers in Singapore*
- *Spotting someone sleeping rough near your school*
- *Seeing some passers-by harassing a rough sleeper*

## Why Be Kind?

Why would you help someone you barely know?

Let's take a look at what your act of kindness could mean for rough sleepers in Singapore.

### Individual:

Ellis reads about rough sleepers in Singapore and empathises with their plight. Ellis talks to others about rough sleepers, spreading awareness of this "invisible" people group.

### Friends & Family:

Loved ones with different perspectives raise new questions and considerations towards rough sleepers. To find out more, Ellis' family and classmates consult an organisation that supports rough sleepers.

### Community:

Ellis and friends volunteer with the organisation and grow to care for the actual rough sleepers genuinely. After building trust with rough sleepers on the streets, Ellis refers them to the nearest Family Service Centre or Social Service Office.

### Society:

Ellis decides to work with an organisation working with the homeless. He continues volunteering long-term with the rough sleepers, and gets better at helping them. Ellis leaves a lasting impact in their lives.



## Discussion:

*Have you ever seen your acts of kindness having a similar ripple effect?*

*How far would you try to go to help someone in need?*

## Managing Expectations

It's exciting being able to offer real help to someone in need. But there are some traps and tips to look out for before we begin!

### Assuming

Assuming someone's needs and jumping in could result in negative responses.

### Pacing

Observe if someone really needs help, then ask for their consent before you act.

### Task

Don't stress and fixate on solving problems! People aren't projects.

### Relationship

Listen and care for the person you're trying to help.

### Solo

Working alone deprives you of a motivational buddy when things get tough.

### Team

Volunteer in a team! Your partners' different skills and personalities will come in useful!

### Simple

Don't expect to deliver someone from their problems straight away. There is no one size fits all solution!

### Complex

Accept that the problems each rough sleeper faces are multifaceted. Just do your best at what you can!

### Yes man

Agreeing to do everything your beneficiary wants could encourage them to hold unsustainable expectations of you - which does not solve their problems.

### No, thank you

Set boundaries to avoid sacrificing more than you're able to when you help anyone (e.g. time, effort, money). It's healthy to say No at the right time.



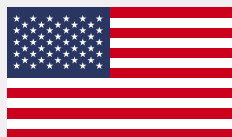
## Chapter Two

# WHAT ARE ROUGH SLEEPERS?

Now that you know the heart behind this resource, let's learn more about homelessness!

Homelessness is a worldwide phenomenon, not limited to developing countries. Even first world countries like the **USA**, **South Korea**, and **Singapore** have homeless people too.

### How would you define homelessness?



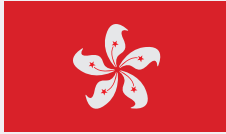
A Chronic Homeless Individual has **experienced homelessness for a year or longer**; or has experienced at least **4 episodes of homelessness** in the **last 3 years (totalling 1 month)**, and who has a disability (Byrne & Culhane, 2015).



A person is homeless if:

1. The person has no accommodation.
2. The person and others who are supposed to live together are nowhere able to live together and had to live separately.
3. The person or together with their family is residing at a residence due to enactment of law.
4. The person has accommodation but (a) cannot securely enter it; (b) occupation of it would lead to violence or threat of violence from other person residing in with a likelihood of carrying out the threat; (c) consists of a moveable structure adapted for human habitation.

Byrne, T., & Culhane, D. P. (2015). Testing alternative definitions of chronic homelessness. *Psychiatric Services*, 66(9), 996-999.



Hong Kong defines homelessness according to the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

As you may have noticed, there is no universally recognised definition for homelessness. What similarities in the definitions can you identify?

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In Singapore, a person is considered homeless if they do not have access to housing. This also includes **rough sleepers** who have homes but face difficulty returning for various reasons such as serious hoarding, or conflict with family members or co-tenants.

## Did you know?

In the United States, the state with the highest reported number of unsheltered homeless persons is California, with 151,278 persons reported in 2022 thus far.

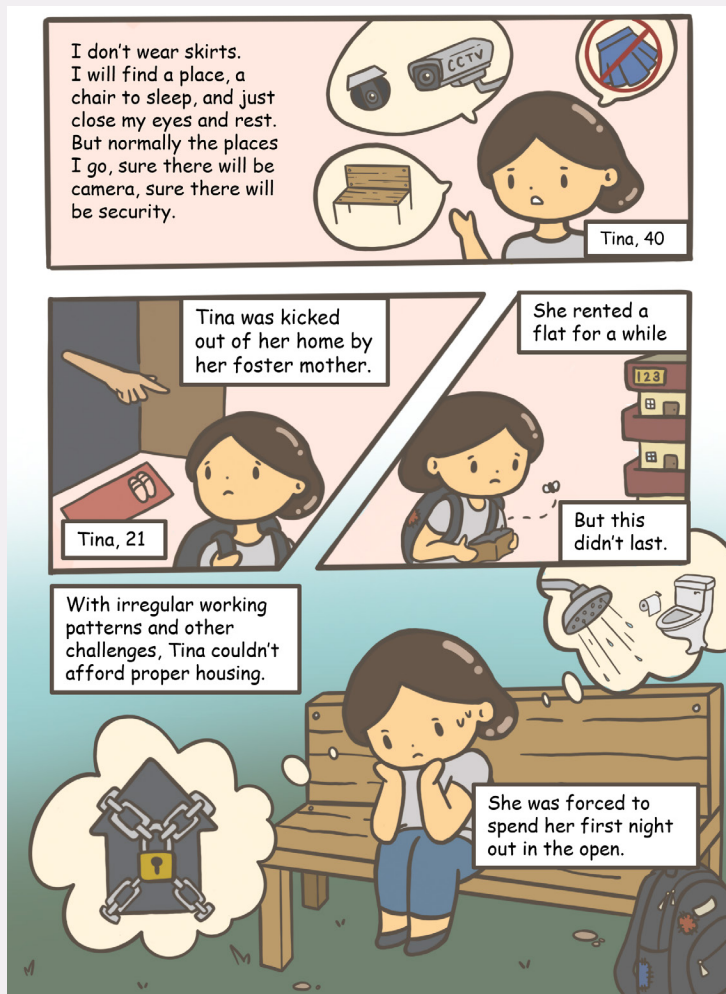
## What is a rough sleeper?

The term 'rough sleeping' or 'rough sleeper' is categorised as an individual who engages in the act of sleeping in a public space overnight. Rough sleeping is a key characteristic of one who is homeless.

With all these definitions in place, let's contextualise them by diving into a true story adapted from one of our homeless friends who experienced rough sleeping before.

## The experience of one:

Tina shares her experience with rough sleeping as a woman.



"I think for the part of rough sleeping, also to be fair, be it for females or for guys, it's not so simple or so easy. It's also quite difficult to manage," shares Tina, who also elaborated about difficulties in keeping up with hygiene, and inconveniences with finding a safe and secure place to rest at.

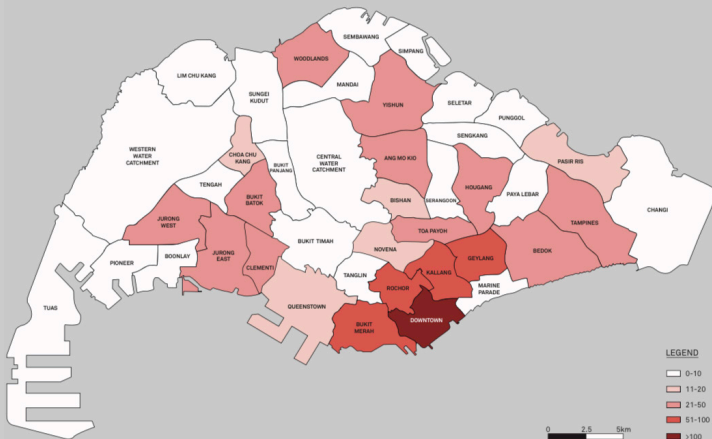
Yet, Tina, like many others who sleep rough in Singapore, are resourceful and innovative. Before she was admitted to the Transitional Shelter, Tina shares about the time she had to rough sleep. "Because I have a storage space, so I don't carry a lot of things around, you know. I don't think people I see outside know that I'm homeless."

## What does it look like in Singapore?

In 2019, a first of its kind Nationwide Street Count was conducted. Dr Ng Kok Hoe, the principal researcher, found that:

1. There are about 1000 street homeless people in Singapore.
2. They are mostly Older Chinese Men.
3. Common locations of rough sleepers were HDB void decks and commercial buildings.
4. Homeless persons' appearance, possession and environment do not fit stereotypes.

Scan the QR code to find out more about the street count!



## Where do you think most rough sleepers were found? Read on to find out more!

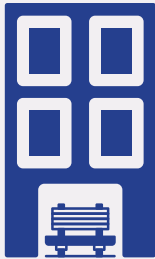
The study found that most rough sleepers were seen in the Downtown area of Singapore. However, in recent times, a new hotspot is emerging in the Northern region of Singapore.

Scan the QR code to read the full report!



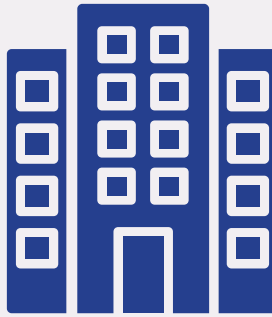
Ng, K. H. (2019). *Homeless in Singapore: Results from a nationwide street count*. Singapore: Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/faculty-publications/homeless-in-singapore.pdf>

These were the top 3 places that rough sleepers were sighted at.



Void decks

**31.9%**



Commercial  
buildings

**28.6%**



Pavilions,  
playgrounds

**10.1%**

*^E.g MRT stations, bus terminals, places of worship, car parks, and other unique sites*

If you were a rough sleeper, where else would you sleep?

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***Now that you have some knowledge of homelessness in Singapore, would you be able to recognise a homeless friend if you saw them on the streets?***

## Chapter Three

# WHAT DO ROUGH SLEEPERS LOOK LIKE?

*When we say homeless person or rough sleeper, what kind of image comes to your mind?*



The 2019 street count of rough sleepers in Singapore revealed results that were quite different from what you might have imagined. According to observations by field workers in the study, many of the rough sleepers spotted were described as presentable, and only a low percentage appeared untidy or without a shirt.






The clothing items worn by rough sleepers were also surprisingly common to the average Singaporean, such as t-shirts, jeans, and even football jerseys!

Ng, K. H. (2019). *Homeless in Singapore: Results from a nationwide street count*. Singapore: Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. <https://lkyssp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/faculty-publications/homeless-in-singapore.pdf>

And only 5% were noted as having a trolley or luggage with them, with the rest having few to no possessions. This tells us that rough sleepers can look just like us! We cannot rely on stereotypes of what we think a rough sleeper looks like to identify them.

**For rough sleepers, keeping clean is a challenge.**

**If you were a rough sleeper, where would you shower or wash up?**

-  Toilets in parks and coffeeshops
-  Shower facilities in stadiums and swimming pools
-  Handicapped toilets in malls

*The answer is... **all of the above!** These public facilities may also be used by rough sleepers to wash their clothes.*

## **Recognising rough sleepers**

As we learnt in Chapter 2, rough sleeping describes the act of sleeping in a public space overnight. So noticing such actions could potentially help us recognise rough sleepers. However, we must also be mindful that not everyone who sleeps in public is a rough sleeper. Some may have other reasons for choosing to spend their nights outside too!

The best way to find out if a person is rough sleeping is to hear it from them personally. Rough sleepers in Singapore already deal with many misconceptions about themselves and homelessness. If we have the opportunity, giving them a chance to speak and listening without prejudice lets their real voices be heard. Then the true stories of homelessness can come to light.

# I THINK I SEE A ROUGH SLEEPER!

## HOW DO I START A CONVERSATION WITH THEM?

### **Don't wake them up!**

If you come across a person sleeping in public, don't be the alarm clock that disturbs their rest. Try coming by another day at a different time to see if you can catch the person awake.

### **Introduce yourself.**

Share your name and let the person know you're here to offer help if they need it. Assure them that you aren't here to chase them away or report them to the authorities.

### **Be curious.**

Keep an open mind, instead of quickly making assumptions that you know it all. Let them be the one to tell you if they're rough sleeping. We don't know this person's story - only they do! To encourage someone to begin sharing, try asking open-ended questions such as do you live around here?

### **Be respectful.**

While we may be eager to point the person towards help, he or she may not be open to receiving it yet. Let them know about the resources you have, but don't impose and insist that they must seek help. It's their choice to make!



# BEING AN ACTIVE LISTENER

Ever jumped to conclusions and started thinking about solutions that you can suggest to your friend while they're still talking? Sometimes, they may want to share about difficult things they're going through, but our preconceived thoughts take us down a totally wrong path.

When it comes to speaking with rough sleepers, there's so much that we don't know at that moment, but have the opportunity to find out! By actively listening, we give rough sleepers the space to share honestly, which helps us better understand what they're going through.

## 3 Tips on Active Listening

- Look at the person who is speaking
- Don't plan your responses while listening
- Reflect what has been shared by paraphrasing it



## Discussion:

*On your way home, you spot an uncle laying down on some pieces of cardboard under your void deck. It's beginning to rain heavily and the uncle is only dressed in a t-shirt and bermudas. He doesn't seem to have an umbrella with him. What are some things you can do or say to help him?*

## Chapter Four

# HOW DO I HELP?

### How can I help rough sleepers?

Now that you know more about rough sleepers in Singapore and how to recognise them, it's time to think about how you can help them out! From directly reaching out to them to raising awareness of homelessness, there are many ways you can get started. Remember you don't have to do this alone – get a friend or two to create a greater impact together.

### Supporting the homeless

If you're keen on interacting directly with a rough sleeper, several organisations and ground-up initiatives offer volunteer opportunities that you might be interested in.

Homeless Hearts of Singapore and The Lighthouse run regular night walks where volunteers distribute basic necessities to rough sleepers and spend time chatting with them.



# ENGAGING THE HOMELESS

*Notes from a Volunteer at Homeless Hearts of Singapore*

Uncle L had been sleeping outside for a while.



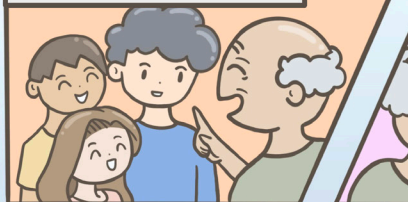
When we first met him, he wasn't open to talk to us.



Instead, we built rapport and friendship with Uncle L over time as we visited him each week.



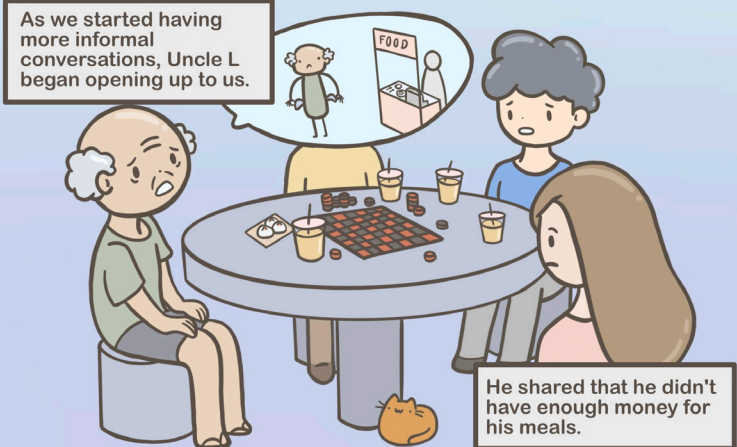
Uncle L started to joke with us and even checked in on our well-being.



We realised that he is someone who appreciates the people around him!



As we started having more informal conversations, Uncle L began opening up to us.



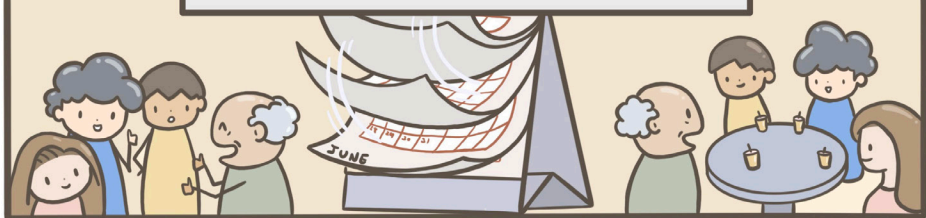
He shared that he didn't have enough money for his meals.

We referred him to the nearest social service office to apply for financial assistance.

The SSO also helped him to apply for a rental flat.



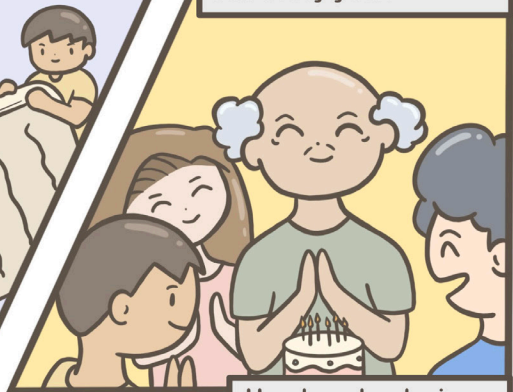
We continued to befriend Uncle L while he waited for his flat.



Once his flat was ready, we helped Uncle L to move in.



We still celebrate Uncle L's birthday with him every year.



He also checks in on us once in a while.

## Know the Helplines

When you encounter a rough sleeper open to seeking shelter or financial assistance, you can guide them to places such as Social Service Offices and Family Service Centres.

### Here's a useful list of helplines that you can keep with you:

#### Partners Engaging and Empowering Rough Sleepers (PEERS) Office

MSF\_PEERSOffice@msf.gov.sg

You may refer to these websites on more information about the PEERS Network and support for rough sleepers



#### Social Service Offices (SSO):

*For financial and employment issues*

ComCare Hotline: 1800-222-000

Monday to Sunday:  
7am to 12 midnight



#### Family Service Centres:

*For family, social and emotional issues*



## OneService App

Submit a request via the Help Neighbour Feature on the app

Download the OneService App:



*Apple Store*



*Google Play*

## Having conversations about homelessness

You can also help rough sleepers by raising awareness of homelessness amongst your friends. The issue of homelessness and the rough sleepers themselves are still quite misunderstood in Singapore!

## Stay updated

Connect with organisations that support rough sleepers by following their social media pages or subscribing to their newsletters.



*New Hope CS  
Facebook Page*



*Homeless Hearts of Singapore  
Facebook Page*



*The Lighthouse  
Instagram Page*

## Start a conversation.

Volunteered with rough sleepers over the weekend? Seen a story about homelessness in the news? Use these to kickstart conversations with your friends.

## What they think.

After you've shared your experience or brought up the news stories you found interesting, give your friends some time to think and space to share their thoughts. Practice actively listening to your friends!

## What you say.

What if your friends aren't interested in homelessness at all? Here's where you can start making an impact for our homeless friends - through a simple conversation. Use the stories in this handbook to pique their interest, and talk about how each of us can play a part in helping homeless friends find their way home.

Scan these QR codes for more stories on homelessness:



***Homeless, But I'm Not A Bum***

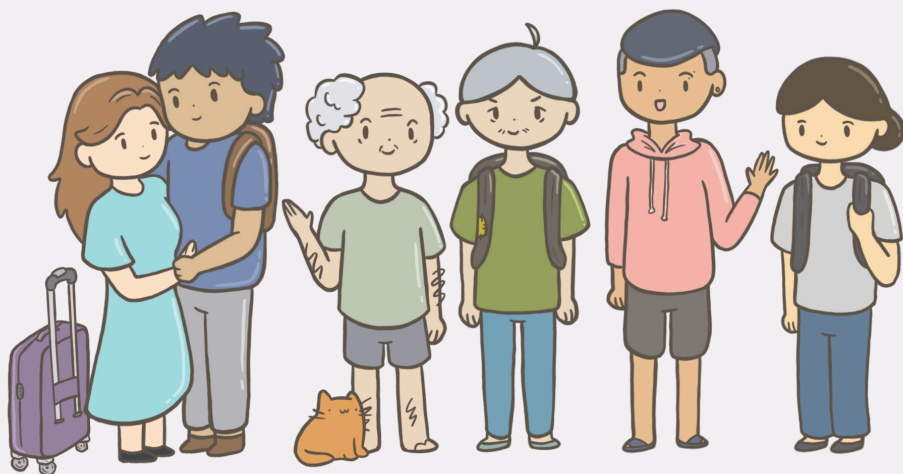
Source: CNA

([www.channelnewsasia.com](http://www.channelnewsasia.com))



***A Bridge | Singapore Together: a series of short films***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPgKwyEkuQU>



## Understanding the Homeless & Sharing about Homelessness - Notes from a Social Worker at New Hope Community Services

### Each Story is Unique

Oftentimes, as a social service professional, it is easy to prescribe solutions because we know the system well. We may zealously seek for our homeless friends to achieve long-term stability for their housing and employment. We may even feel responsible for the improvement of their situation. Yet, we are not the expert of their lives. Each homeless experience differs from person to person, each narrative is unique to the individual, even if circumstances may look similar.

### Be Curious About The People

The goal then is to always be respectful and open to listening. Try being empathetic, and create a safe space for clients to share their lives according to the pace they set. Understand that you are connecting with another human who has encountered a difficult situation. They are not defined by their homeless situation, although it



may seem like the biggest thing happening in their lives. Be curious about who they are as people, about their life-story, not just their homeless story. Be kind!

## **Share To Inspire**

When telling their story, ask yourself, why do you want to tell someone else's story? If it is for gossip, reframe your stance. Know that you have a part to play in supporting this vulnerable community. Use their stories to inspire, to motivate, to raise awareness. Use them to make a change! Try framing your perspectives through a strengths-based approach, by seeing the merits of the clients, their resilience through the ordeal. Be sincere and compassionate when telling their stories, seek consent too if possible. Always remember that respect and kindness goes a long way.

## Chapter Five

# IT'S A WRAP!

Hi there!

We hope this joint publication by New Hope Community Services and The Girls' Brigade Singapore has deepened your curiosity and heart for our "invisible" neighbours here in Singapore.

Each of you brim with potential to make a positive change in someone's lives - not just as an advocate, but as a friend who truly sees and cares for them.

Take courage and be kind!

### **About New Hope Community Services**

New Hope Community Services (New Hope CS) is a social service agency and a member of the National Council of Social Services. Our goal goes beyond providing temporary shelter to the homeless in Singapore; we want to infuse them with real hope to see their lives changed.

Our work began in 2003 when four homeless men approached Pastor Andrew Khoo (our Founder & CEO) seeking refuge. Deeply moved by a need that had not been met by social services then, Pastor Andrew set up the Shelter for Men-in-Crisis, Singapore's first shelter for homeless male ex-offenders. A year later, New Hope CS was born.

Since then, we have steadily expanded to meet the growing needs for temporary shelter in our community. We also recognise that building thriving and resilient families and individuals requires more than just a roof over their heads. As such, we run various services and programmes that help our beneficiaries break out of the poverty cycle and achieve long term financial resilience and independence.

### **About The Girls' Brigade Singapore**

The Girls' Brigade Singapore (GBS) is a Youth Uniformed organisation recognised by the Ministry of Education. Founded in 1927, GBS has always been committed in encouraging its member Girls to be Leaders in their own right – equipping them with the relevant skills to serve their community of friends, family and those around them.

### **About Teck Whye Secondary School**

Teck Whye Secondary School (TWSS) is a co-educational secondary school located in Choa Chu Kang, founded in 1966. As part of its Applied Learning Programme (ALP) in Sustainable Urban Design and efforts to promote Active Citizenry, the school is partnering and supporting New Hope Community Services in co-organising this forum.

### **Credits to:**

Elsa Heng - Illustrations

