

## Country Report by Down Syndrome Association Singapore



Greetings from Down Syndrome Association (Singapore)

Website: [www.downsyndrome-singapore.org](http://www.downsyndrome-singapore.org)

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## **Background**

DSA is a self-funding, non-profit Social Service Agency (SSA), which works closely and regularly with healthcare and educational professionals, and voluntary welfare organizations. We are officially recognized by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), and a registered charity organisation with the Commissioner of Charities, Singapore.

The Association is affiliated with international bodies such as Down Syndrome International (DSI), the Asia-Pacific Down Syndrome Federation (APDSF), Asian Federation on Intellectual Disabilities (AFID), and International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSID).

## **Our goals and aspirations**

We acknowledge and respect the right of all persons with Down syndrome to receive an adequate response to their needs. We are thus committed in our aims to provide support, enable a person with Down syndrome to attain his or her full potential, help a person with Down syndrome to lead a 'normal' life and thus be able to contribute to society and educate the public on Down syndrome.

## **Education and Services**

DSA provides the following services and programs:

### Infant Toddler Program (ITP)

ITP adopts a play-based, child-initiated approach and takes on a parent coaching and empowerment model, aimed to build the capacities of parents and caregivers, by embedding intervention strategies in the family's daily routines. The program emphasises and builds on the existing strengths of children and families, to enhance their knowledge, skills, and participation in community life; and reduces or eliminates the impact of children's existing disabilities that could lead to a delay in developmental milestones.

During the pandemic, the team worked closely with parents and caregivers to conduct centre-based sessions and individualised virtual intervention sessions.

### Early Start Family Program (ESFP)

ESFP provides online speech therapy and physiotherapy services including direct treatment, indirect treatment, and parent consultation for children and families enrolled in the Infant Toddler Program. The program integrates virtual intervention support to families in addition to on-site therapy provided by ITP. The ESFP aims to minimize the educational costs to families and the need for additional special therapy and related services for infants and toddlers with Down syndrome. The ESFP program enhances and value-adds to the services currently provided by ITP.

### Integration Facilitation Support Program (IFSP)

IFSP provides a continuum of services in areas of communication, independence, academic, functional, and social skills for students aged 3 to 14 years with Down syndrome and other special needs from ECDCs to primary schools. Support provided through IFSP enables families to be active

participants in their child's education and make informed decisions regarding the nature of resources and services that promote family self-efficacy.

During the pandemic, IFSP teachers refined the support and guidance offered to each student. The learning curriculum was personalised to each student's unique academic needs and personal interests within the confines of a computer screen by combining interactive recorded lessons, video clips, and live-streamed classes.

Parent workshops are also conducted by IFSP teachers to equip parents with new skills and gain new information and knowledge. It is a valuable approach to facilitate knowledge sharing between teacher-to-parent, parent-to-teacher, and parent-to-parent.

### Adult Enhancement Program (AEP)

AEP equips adults with Down syndrome aged 18 years and above with basic life skills such as mobility independence, functional skills, social skills, and job readiness skills by adopting an active support approach that engages the mind and promotes relationship building, positive language, and motivation. We believe that personal development occurs on a continuum and individuals learn and pick up skills differently.

During the pandemic home-based learning (HBL) packages comprising videos, worksheets and resources were sent to caregivers to ensure a seamless transition from the centre-based sessions to home-based learning. Due to the pandemic measures that restricted movement, our training officers creatively brought the community such as the supermarket to the learners through video conferencing tools.

The skills learned during HBL, empowered our learners to plan and host an interactive online session for children in a childcare centre. This experience was unique because instead of the usual practice where our partners organise the activities for our beneficiaries, our learners organised for our partners.

### Independent Living and Training (ILT) Centre

ILT centre trains up to 12 adult learners in life skills through the application of independent living skills. It is a purpose-built outfit located in Telok Blangah which houses facilities such as accommodation, kitchen, laundry, office, and practice rooms. Learners are encouraged and empowered to make their own decisions in everything they do. At the same time, they have the real-life opportunity to practice their money skills, travel skills, and self-advocacy, among many other independent living skills.

The ILT Centre learners experienced their first overnight stayover in September 2022. This was put on the back burner due to the pandemic. The overnight stayover provides another opportunity for learners to practise the independent living skills they are learning each day.

### Enrichment Programs

DSA values every individual talent and provides a platform for members to acquire new skills, nurture their interests, and hone their talents. Catered to persons with Down syndrome and other special needs aged 5 years and above. DSA conducts Enrichment Programs in the areas of Arts, Education, Sports, and Fitness.

The programs seek to engage, educate, and inspire members; encourage them to explore interest, grow their passion and develop talent; build and strengthen their cognitive, emotional, physical, and social developments; showcase their abilities and change perspectives of others of the abilities of persons with Down syndrome.

In addition to the regular programs, after a 2-year hiatus, DSA resumed our School Holiday Programs in 2022. DSA worked with corporate partners, organisations, and volunteers to run a series of activities like art and craft, baking, swimming, and learning life skills.

### Family Support Services (FSS)

FSS provides legal, medical, and advocacy support, parent mentoring and other resources. It also offers referrals to other services that clients may need and organises talks and training on a regular basis to educate caregivers in their journey of caring for their children with special needs. In the Peer Support Parent Mentorship program, trained parent mentors share their personal experiences and provide guidance and information regarding education, medical and community resources for children with special needs.

To strengthen support for caregivers, FSS works closely with parents to identify and discuss suitable pathways for their child in areas of education, health, and social needs and collaborates with various community partners to organise specialised workshops throughout the year to guide caregivers in their caregiving journey across various developmental phases of their child. Some of the topics shared included 'Financial Resilience during Covid-19'; 'Aging for Persons with Intellectual Disability'; 'TCM Wellness'; and 'Speech & Language – An Occupational Therapist Perspective'.

## **Health**

### Mental Wellness

AEP and ILT centre curriculum focus on self-care and mental wellness to help alleviate any psychological distress and anxiety. Our training officers incorporated self-care aspects into the Social and Emotional lessons and morning exercises, such as mindfulness and physical workout, and relaxation time. These activities are also great practical handles for managing one's thoughts and emotions.

### Physical Wellness

After the relaxation of Covid measures, our learners have been traveling to the stadium and the neighbouring parks for their Gross Motor Skills classes, engaging in physical activities such as walking, running, and playing basketball every week.

DSA has also been engaging physiotherapist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist for our clients who attend our core programs to improve their health and well-being. Individualised treatment plans are tailored according to their needs and abilities.

## **Training and Employment**

In our efforts to prepare our adult learners for future job placement opportunities, DSA launched the Job Readiness Program. Our adult learners with moderate to high support needs embarked on a year

of upskilling. They honed their skills in sorting, packing, and labelling items; cleaning; food safety; administrative skills and learned how to manage job interviews and write simple resumes. They also learned how to make soaps and candles. The candles were presented to our guests at our Mystique Charity Gala Dinner in September 2022. Many of our learners with low support needs are in open employment such as Food and Beverage and teaching dance to children with disabilities.

In the spirit of inclusivity, our learners from the moderate support needs group were offered a supported employment opportunity. They were involved in the packing of Marina Bay Sands (MBS) mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn festival. This was the very first time that these learners had such an opportunity outside DSA premises.

Selected learners from our adult programs attended a customer service skills workshop at an Institute of Higher Learning. We were commended by SG Enable, the focal agency for disability in Singapore, for this collaboration. (SG Enable seeks to enable persons with disabilities to live, learn, work, and play in an inclusive society. It raises awareness on disability issues and facilitates access to disability schemes and services. It brings partners together to share knowledge, collaborate and innovate, striving towards a common goal of building an inclusive Singapore and enabling lives.)

DSA endeavours to partner with SG Enable in attracting more employers to create more opportunities for persons with Down syndrome and other Intellectual disabilities to be hired in open employment.

## **Public Education and Advocacy**

### Research

DSA's staff, and a beneficiary with her mother had the privilege of sharing DSA's programs and services with over 1,500 delegates at the 14th World Down Syndrome Congress (WDSC), hosted by the Emirates Down Syndrome Association, which was held virtually from 18 to 20 November 2021. Our staff presented two research-based presentations. This year, at the International Society on Early Intervention conference held in Chicago from 27 to 30 September, our Early Intervention teachers shared another research project with over 1,700 early childhood intervention experts, specialists, and researchers.

### Outreach

In addition to the website makeover, DSA commissioned a series of videos featuring beneficiaries attending our core programs, namely Infant Toddler Program, Integration Facilitation Support Program, Adult Enhancement Program, Independent Living and Training Centre and Enrichment Programs. Through this set of videos, we hope that the public will have a better understanding and appreciation of persons with the genetic condition, the challenges they face and the opportunities and support that DSA and the community can provide them to enable them to be more independent and lead fulfilling lives. You may view the videos at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLM74DJV6pXVy2YV8t1m-9FzJ8tF7bsYPM>

### Advocacy

'Our Lives, Our Voices' a self-advocacy program jointly organised by Movement of the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) and Down Syndrome Association (Singapore) brings individuals with special needs through an introspective journey to explore their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, and find ways to communicate them to others. It enables them to find solutions or

support to address challenges along the way. This program nurtures them to be confident and independent individuals as they learn to take ownership of the choices they make.

### **Initiatives and Significant Events**

To provide holistic support for persons with Down syndrome and their families who are not our existing members or are not supported by other charities, DSA launched the 'Leave No One Behind' initiative in August 2021. The initiative aims to help persons with Down syndrome attain their full potential and enable them to live a fulfilled life.

Artwork Commission for Heart Zone Art is an activity that develops one's fine motor skills as well as concentration and problem-solving skills. Commissioned by SG Enable and Tower Transit Singapore, our adult learners created an artwork by experimenting with various colours and utilising non-traditional tools for the Heart Zone at Bukit Batok Bus Interchange. On 2 December 2021, our ILT Centre learners and lifestyle educators were invited to the launch of Bukit Batok Bus Interchange Heart Zone. The event was graced by Mr Baey Yam Keng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Transport.

DSA commemorated World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) in a hybrid format for the second consecutive year on 19 March 2022. The 'live' event was co-hosted by our very own persons with Down syndrome. We were privileged to have Mr. Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health grace the event at our DSA Centre at Bishan Junction 8. The theme for the year's WDSD centred around the question of "What Does Inclusion Mean?", emphasizing the importance of the collective effort from the community to advocate for full inclusion in society for people with Down syndrome and for everyone. Together with our caregivers and online viewers, all were treated to a drum performance, a scented soap-making session, and a mini-forum featuring self-advocates from the 'Our Lives, Our Voices'. During the forum, self-advocates shared what inclusion means to them and their hopes for the community.

As part of the World Down Syndrome Day celebrations, our beneficiaries, Allan Cai and June Lin were invited to share what inclusion means to them at the World Down Syndrome Conference held at the United Nations Office in Geneva on 21 March 2022.

Running parallel with our WDSD 'Live' Show was our online awareness campaign, 'Rock Your Socks'. Back for the third year running, 'Rock Your Socks' is a fun and easy way to raise awareness of Down syndrome. DSA also organised the Platter of Joy, a delivery fundraising initiative launched during COVID-19. 2022 was the third consecutive year for this initiative.

DSA's 25th Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 18 June 2022. The meeting was conducted in a hybrid format to allow and enhance our members' participation.

DSA's Thrift Shop had its soft re-opening on 25 June 2022, in the form of a mini-Jumble Sale and Carnival. This event was a reunion of sorts for learners from AEP and ILT Centre to contribute to the preparation and running of the event.

After a two-year hiatus, Mystique Charity Gala Dinner returned in full swing on 24 September 2022 with more than 300 guests in attendance. We were honoured to have Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Education, as our Guest-of-Honour.

On 29 October 2022, our beneficiaries and staff participated in the Purple Parade, Singapore's largest movement that supports inclusion and celebrates the abilities of persons with disabilities. The Purple

Parade is a unifying national platform to promote awareness and celebrate the abilities of Persons with Disabilities in Singapore. Our beneficiaries made props, had their faces painted, and donned purple t-shirts along with the staff. Our contingent received the 'Most Eco-Friendly' award.

Our beneficiaries were among the recipients of the 2022 Goh Chok Tong Enable Awards (GCTEA) ceremony to be held at the Istana on 1 December 2022. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year DSA beneficiaries are receiving this award. The GCTEA, an initiative by MediaCorp Enable Fund was launched in 2019 by Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong to recognise the achievements of persons with disabilities and to motivate those with promise and potential to go the distance with their endeavours.

### Singapore's Disability Sector Landscape Highlights

The Enabling Masterplan 2030 (EMP2030), which sets out the vision for Singapore as an inclusive society in 2030, was released on 17 August 2022. The EMP2030, which is Singapore's fourth Enabling Masterplan, sets out the vision for Singapore as an inclusive society in 2030. It was developed by, for, and with persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Their words and thoughts are reflected throughout the report.

EMP2030 contains 29 recommendations along three strategic themes, to guide efforts in shaping the future disability landscape until 2030.

- Strategic Theme I: Strengthen Support for Lifelong Learning in a fast-changing economy
- Strategic Theme II: Enable Persons with Disabilities to Live Independently
- Strategic Theme III: Create Physical and Social Environments that are Inclusive to all

EMP2030 includes quantitative indicators and targets, which will be used to measure progress towards achieving tangible change in 2030 and beyond.

The EMP2030 graphic summary:



One key initiative of the EMP2030 is the Enabling Services Hubs (ESHs) which will link adult persons with disabilities and their caregivers to appropriate support and services such as respite care. The ESHs will enhance respite options for caregivers of persons with disabilities and enable better access to appropriate support and services.

To know more about the services available for PWDs; and their caregivers in Singapore, you may visit

<https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Enabling-Masterplans/Pages/Navigation-of-Services-and-Caregiver-Support.aspx>

Thank you