



Project Review

Open Home Network

Between April – August 2020

Find out more at
www.solveplus.one
N PLUS ONE PTE. LTD.

COMPANY REG. NO.: 201839038Z

The Open Home Network: June-August Report

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Background



About us

[Solve n+1](#) is a social enterprise birthed to represent and strengthen communities. Facilitating social innovation through micro-initiatives for vulnerable communities.

We strive to be enabler of systemic change by taking on challenging problems and leveraging the multi-disciplinary expertise and resources of our partners and network.

How the Open Home Network (OHN) began

The foundations of OHN were laid by our initial work done in the Bezer Initiative, which was started by Solve n+1 in Jan 2019.

Bezer means “fortress”. Our hypothesis was simple: stakeholders in the community are important and agile resources to be tapped on to address social issues from a multi-faceted approach. Communities can offer support in many ways: from sharing of meals between neighbours, lending of kitchen equipment, to offering temporary living space. Such acts of neighbourliness can help to fill the short-term gaps in the social service sector, and as a whole, lead to a more resilient and caring community.

The Bezer Initiative was driven by the vision of a national nervous system of care where the community could work together with NGOs and government agencies to journey with displaced youths with the goal of reintegration. We sought to deal with the question: how can community groups avail their resources and people to help displaced youths? The Bezer Initiative focussed in particular on one tangible expression of community care: through households opening their homes and hearts to help youths find safe spaces in the community from which they could reintegrate back into society.

The Bezer Initiative sought to use the youth demographic group as a proof-of-concept for the reintegration of other demographic groups including those who need protection from abuse, are estranged from their family, young mothers, elderly, and rough sleepers. We believed that the community at large can do more to stand in the gap to meet the unmet needs of displaced and disadvantaged persons, and with more flexibility and agility than traditional institutional options.

In Apr 2020, due to COVID-19 crisis and Circuit Breaker measures, more social crises surfaced. Many were rendered homeless due to an array of issues that surfaced during this trying period: loss of jobs, family violence and abuse, and even mental health illnesses. Together with Homeless Hearts of Singapore, an [online appeal](#) was made for families to step forward to avail their homes to those who were in need of a safe place. As a result, 160 families stepped forward and the OHN was officially launched on 8th Jun 2020.

Aims of Report

This report is a review of the OHN, which was designed and deployed between Apr to Aug 2020. We outline our objectives in starting OHN, our process of conceptualisation, preparation and deployment of host homes during these 5 months.

It is hoped that this report will provide the basis for learning on a few issues:

- the value of community involvement in the system of social care;
- how community groups can work alongside institutional actors in social care; and
- how host families, in particular, can be a valuable resource to meet the needs of displaced persons.

For further details, our materials and strategies can be made available on request.

Objectives of OHN

When OHN was launched, we had the following objectives:

1. To understand the role that families/households in the community can play, to complement and integrate with the existing ecosystem of government and NGOs supporting displaced persons;
2. To codify the principles of how to build and maintain a network of host families and support communities to work with displaced people towards resilience;
3. To help the community understand better the complexities of caring for the vulnerable;
4. To recruit and equip families to be host families to provide temporary shelter for persons-in-crisis; and
5. To train and grow a network of volunteers to support community involvement in social care.

OHN Journey

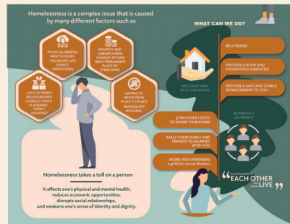
OHN TIMELINE

START

160 families signed up

April

- Designed the Open Home Guide
- Created 8 Infographics
- Called for volunteers



May

- Partnered with S3Ps and MSFs.
- Narrowed down the 160 families, to 60.



June

- Official Launch of OHN
- 21 Referrals, 2 PIC/Host Families matched, 3 Matches underway, 10 families ready.
- Wrote 2 Engagement Packs to support PICs and Host Families

July

- Focused on the matches and move-ins
- Documented stories of the OHN community
- Connected with 14 Social Service Partners



August

- Connected with 22 SSOs
- Closed the OHN chapter for a new one
- Made plans for further steps forward

MOVING FORWARD:

Extension of the OHN support until December 2020

The above figure illustrates the timeline of events for OHN. The main milestones in the OHN journey can be grouped according to the phases of:

- Conceptualisation: developing content and processes that prepare families to host, facilitating healthy matching between family and persons-in-crisis.
- Preparation: host family engagement and equipping.
- Partnerships: connecting with important stakeholders (e.g. Ministry of Social and Family Development; various NGOs and social service agency partners) to identify possible guests to be matched
- Deployment: launch of OHN referral service, matching, and follow-up support for host families

Conceptualising the OHN Framework

With 160 household sign-ups and faced with the mounting need for safe spaces, we had to quickly come up with a framework to tackle the key phases of preparing open homes: educating, getting to know, preparing and matching households to host persons in crisis (PICs).

In 2 months from April to June, we rapidly prototyped content and processes to:

- (a) Educate households about hosting
- (b) Verify families and prepare them to host
- (c) Verify and understand the needs of potential guests (i.e. PICs)

(a) Education

Although encouraged by the number of sign ups, we wanted to ensure that our host families were adequately informed and prepared for the realities of hosting. Education was crucial before we took any further step to match host families with potential guests.

There was a need to educate families as:

- The online appeal was primarily a call to meet the needs for immediate physical shelter. However, opening one's home goes beyond just providing physical shelter - there are other important considerations such as the impact of the arrangement (on both host and guest), the relationship between members of the host household and the guest, duration of stay, transition plan for the guest to long-term housing options.
- Households who signed up may have been reacting to the urgency of the needs surfaced by Singapore's Circuit Breaker measures¹. Many families might not have fully understood or considered what hosting entails.

¹ "With no place to stay, some Malaysian workers sleeping rough near Kranji MRT Station" by Nabilah Hwang, 19 March 2020, Today Online: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/no-place-stay-some->

- Singaporean households tend to be quite private², with interactions between neighbours remaining largely casual (e.g. exchanging greetings). Welcoming a stranger to stay in one's house is not a norm in Singapore.
- Households who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have different lived experiences from, and might not be exposed to, the cultural and background differences of persons who are displaced and navigating complex issues in their lives.

As we did not know of any similar content available, we spent the first few weeks creating content for our [Open Home Guide](#).

Our challenge was to create content that:

- adequately covered the realities of hosting so families could make an informed choice;
- prompted self-reflection about households' own readiness to host;
- was simple enough for households to digest; and
- could be disseminated easily via Whatsapp or text, given the limitations on interactions during Circuit Breaker.

The Open Home Guide consists of a series of infographics and processing questions that covers a broad range of topics relating to hosting:

- Understanding the Vulnerable
- Sharing Your Home
- Managing Personal Expectations
- Preparing to Host
- Preparing Logistics
- Building Relationships
- Rallying Your *Kampong*
- Your Hosting Journey
- Working Through Issues
- Managing Conflicts

Prior to the OHN being launched, we had spent about a year (as part of The Bezer Initiative) relating with, observing and learning from [The Last Resort](#) and other host families. Their experience and sharing provided a lot of insight which we gave us a foundation to work from. 2 of the 6 members of our core team also had prior or ongoing experiences in hosting PICs in their

[malaysian-workers-sleeping-rough-near-kranji-mrt-station?fbclid=IwAR05gahwAiNF4pEkII_DSfH9q3rAC0M13C7lgjXVN2V3N58YnwXULh7jjHE](https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sporeans-prefer-privacy-to-mingling-with-neighbours-poll)

² "Singaporeans prefer privacy to mingling with neighbours" by Priscilla Goy, 28 June 2017, The Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sporeans-prefer-privacy-to-mingling-with-neighbours-poll>

own homes. The personal insights and experiences shared by experienced host families were the main resource we drew from in creating the content for the Open Home Guide.

Our first step to engaging the households was to disseminate the Open Home Guide to them. We recruited volunteers (whom we called Community Representatives) to connect with and share the Open Home Guide with them.

After giving them some time to process the information, we asked them to re-confirm their commitment to hosting. Out of the 160 households who signed up, around 60 (or about 35%) expressed interest to proceed.

(b) Verifying and preparing families to host

Before we could introduce any guests to stay with the families, we had to take measures to ensure that: (i) the households were safe for guests to stay in; and (ii) the households were ready to host PICs.

However, the key challenges we faced were that:

- We did not know the 60 households personally. Through the online appeal, these families provided us basic information especially on their physical spaces available. However, less was asked (and thus known) about them personally.
- We did not know of any readily available content or process to guide us in verifying families and preparing them to host. Fostering was a close parallel, but had key differences - i.e. it dealt with children, whereas we were focussing on PICs aged 18 and above. This meant that the application for fostering was a lot more extensive; and was under the charge of social service organisations overseen by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF).

Hosting a PIC is not a common practice in Singapore. The movement to host PICs has been pioneered by families - such as Kenneth and Adeline Thong from The Last Resort - and 'spread' informally through relational networks and sharing. Thus far, there was no formal precedent to codify the principles of selecting and preparing host families.

We drew inspiration from research into similar initiatives overseas³ in particular for their overall framework for recruiting, assessing, preparing and matching host families. However, we recognised that we had to work within our capacities. In particular, unlike the examples we saw

³ Host Homes Handbook (2018) by Point Source Youth in the USA; Washing State Department of Commerce, Research and Recommendations on Host Home Programs (July 2017)

from overseas, we were a ground-up initiative or network (as opposed to a formal agency), and relied heavily on volunteers (as opposed to professional social workers) to help us prepare and journey with host families.

We thus took a few weeks to prototype a framework to equip our volunteers to engage with host families. The framework, codified in our Host Family Engagement Pack⁴, set out the basic principles (e.g. relationship first, transparency, equipping and encouraging families to take the next step they are willing and able to take), overall process (i.e. from recruitment, assessing households, matching, to move-in), and role of our volunteers in engaging potential host families.

The purpose of the Host Family Engagement Pack was to serve as a guide when we started to take on actual cases - to set out beforehand the issues and processes to consider at every step. However, as every person and family is different, in application we were guided by the philosophy of *“people and problems before process”* - to put the people and their issues first, and to ensure that the process was flexible enough to cater to the unique needs in each case.

We worked with our Community Representatives to engage the 60 host families who remained interested in hosting (after receiving the information in the Open Home Guide). Broadly speaking, our Community Representatives were to:

- Request potential host families to fill in an application form. The purpose of the application form was to obtain more information on the families themselves, to ascertain their readiness to host, and the profile of the guest that would be suitable for them. We also requested that families provide 2 references from people who knew them and their household well;
- Speak with host families over a face-to-face (zoom) call to understand their motivations and concerns better;
- Prepare a brief (anonymised) host family profile with essential information about the host family, that could be shared with potential guests for their consideration;
- Send anonymised PIC profiles to host families for consideration on whether to host them;
- Support host families as they get to know their potential guests and decide whether to proceed with the move in;
- Support host families during and after the move-in.

As we progressed through these steps, we saw a further attrition in terms of the number of host families willing to proceed. The attrition could be due to host families’ reconsideration of their decision to host as they became clearer as to the commitment required, or due to personal circumstances that had changed over time.

At the end, we had about 10 families remaining who completed the process with us and were ready to be matched with potential guests.

⁴ Available at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1L2ixX3qpVIn22PlxrWX_F_iHCxL3Fown/edit

(c) Verifying and understanding the needs of PICs

We chose to work with existing social service agencies and NGOs working on the ground - who were well placed to verify and understand the needs of PICs in terms of shelter. We wanted to see host families (and the larger community in Singapore) provide a resource that was integrated in the system of social care.

However, we also recognised that host families could play a unique role in helping to serve those who fall within the cracks in the system. Further, as a ground up initiative, we could be more flexible in catering to those who were not plugged into formal support from social service agencies. As such, we remained open to the needs of requests from the public (whether from PICs personally or from first responders who knew them). For such cases:

- We came up with a simplified framework (consisting of a few questionnaires) to help first responders to understand and assess the needs of PICs better, so as to help us determine if a host family was a suitable option.
- We encouraged PICs not referred from social service agencies or NGOs to get connected to formal supports available to them - especially if the issues they were dealing with were more long-term and complex.

Stakeholder Engagement & Partnerships

Stakeholder engagement and building partnerships was core throughout our work. The OHN essentially provides a framework and builds a bridge (through open homes) for the community (households and volunteers) to work alongside the social service agencies and NGOs in supporting PICs.

The essence of our work was bridge-building: building bridges to help the wider community (through households) move towards understanding and relating to PICs, and in playing a more integrated role in the system of social care. It was also to mediate the formation of these relationships between households and existing actors in the system (e.g. social service agencies, NGOs).

In the context of a stable relationship, we could know, understand, and serve potential host families better; we could facilitate greater understanding and empathy for the issues faced by PICs; and we could build greater cooperation towards contributing to the existing work of social service agencies.

The work required a significant level of personal involvement from our team and volunteers. For example, we recruited and trained volunteers (whom we called Community Representatives) to connect with, engage and journey with host families as they prepared to be matched with PICs. Their continued perseverance enabled us to meaningfully facilitate connections between the new host families and experienced host families for greater community support.

A crucial part of our work was also engaging stakeholders in the social service sector to understand and partner with us. As mentioned above, we preferred, where possible, to work through social service agencies and NGOs to identify potential guests for the host families. This required us to be open and transparent about our framework and limitations, listen to and understand their concerns as well as hopes, and invite them to work together with us as part of the process of finding suitable homes for their clients. We also reached out to engage MSF to keep them in the loop on our plans and progress.

Broadly, the respective roles of the key actors in the Open Home Network can be summarised as follows:

- **OHN team:** bridge-builders, co-ordinators, facilitators
- **Households:** host families, provide temporary shelter, a safe space and stability for PICs
- **Community Representatives:** connect with and journey with host families through the process of being matched with potential guests
- **Experienced host families:** informal mentors to new host families
- **Social service agencies, NGOs & first responders:** refer PICs whom they consider suitable to stay with host families; formal support for PIC in navigating through their crises
- **Case Management Team:** connect with and liaise with social service agencies, NGOs and first responders on the needs of PICs; facilitate matches with host families.

Deployment

(a) Matches

The initial part of our work involved rapidly prototyping a framework for open homes and engaging stakeholders and partners needed for the work. The initial phase took place over a period of around 2 months.

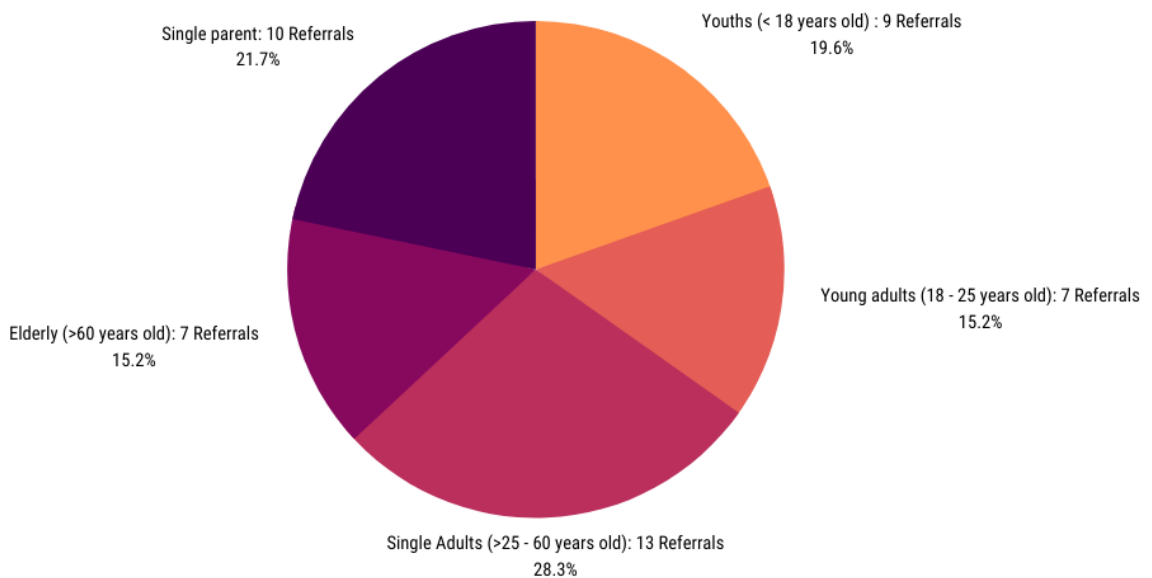
On 5 June, we officially launched the OHN and went public on facebook. With publicity, we saw an uptake in requests for open homes and started deploying our host families to host PICs.

During the period June to August 2020, 46 referrals were made. The profiles of the PICs referred to the OHN network is summarised below:

- Youths (< 18 years old) : 9 Referrals

- Young adults (18 - 25 years old): 7 Referrals
- Single Adults (>25 - 60 years old): 13 Referrals
- Elderly (>60 years old): 7 Referrals
- Single parent: 10 Referrals

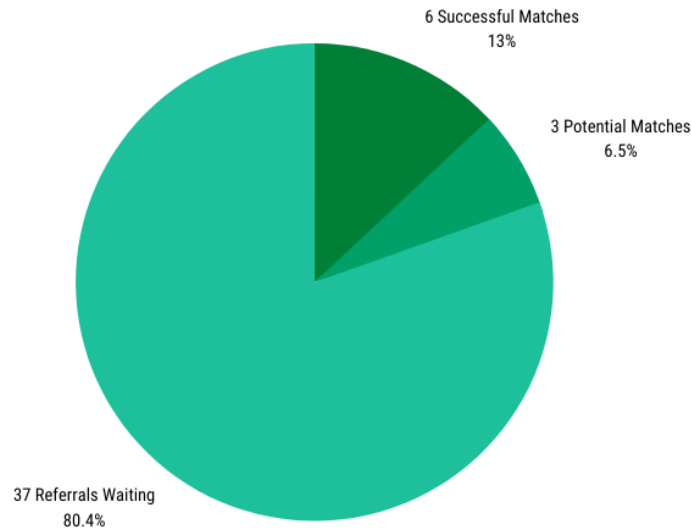
DEMOGRAPHICS OF REFERRALS: 46 IN TOTAL



During this period, OHN worked to prepare and ready 10 families to be matched with potential guests. OHN managed to process:

- 6 matches (3 PICs have moved in with host families, 3 are in the process of moving in)
- 3 potential matches
- 37 referrals whom we have either found alternative support or not matched.

REFERRAL MATCHES



The profiles of persons-in-crisis whom were matched with host families by OHN were:

- 3 Young Adults
- 2 Single Adults
- 1 Single parent

As at the time of this report, all our host families whom we have prepared and equipped have been matched with guests, or are ready to be matched for shorter-term respite stays only.

(b) Communications

Communication was an important part of our strategy. We started simply with facebook as most of our families are between the ages of 30 - 50, FB was the most shared platform. The role of social media was two-fold. To educate and build communities. We posted about 3-4 times a week, featuring topics from perspectives on hospitality to the sharing of social work practitioners. More data on our engagement can be found with the images below.

As many of our family hosts generally use FB, we mainly wrote and shared on our FB page. This platform allowed us to share important updates with our family hosts and connect with them on topics that will better prepare and equip them. Our posts grew in engagement and the public response seems to find the material inspiring. This has hopefully encouraged many to think about community and consider opening their homes.

We were deeply grateful that our work has caught the attention of mainstream media. ST has reported on the willingness and the importance of hospitality in a time of pandemic. Many other agencies like Vulcan Post, Stacked Homes, and Social Medias like ThisisSG have also featured OHN's work in the months of Aug and Sept 2020.

06/19/2020 8:44 PM	As we think about the subject of Home and the process of building		11.6K	1.3K 335	08/01/2020 6:45 PM	Hosting Conversations #2 - Understanding the Vulnerable		822	23 19
06/17/2020 5:49 PM	For today's #wonkywednesday segment, we asked a host family to		850	62 32	07/31/2020 4:12 PM	She said, "I have not felt that sense of belonging to a family in so many		314	15 12
06/15/2020 4:35 PM	As we ponder on the culture of community in Singapore, we may		1.7K	110 31	07/31/2020 12:13 PM	#FeatureFriday Nicole (23 years old) is a social worker, working at		7.2K	976 265
06/14/2020 4:52 PM	It's the end of the week! We are very grateful to everyone who has		1.6K	160 92	07/29/2020 9:49 PM	#WonkyWednesday was voted "the crowds favourite hashtag" during		855	96 39
06/12/2020 6:06 PM	Many are sceptical when it comes to opening their homes and letting a		9.7K	2.2K 237	07/27/2020 10:40 PM	#MicroerspectiveMonday The role of the Social Worker in the OHN "if		3.3K	198 52
06/10/2020 12:26 PM	Introducing THE TEAM! Like an ant colony building its nest, there are		1.5K	278 59	07/24/2020 11:12 AM	#FunFactFriday Did you know? The Open Home Network (OHN) was		327	11 6
06/08/2020 5:31 PM	You may have a house to live in, but how often do you feel at home?		2.7K	257 62	07/20/2020 8:46 PM	Reconciliation In the Open Home Network, we believe in building		1.5K	48 37
06/05/2020 6:22 PM	WELCOME to the official page of the Open Home Network, where we		795	55 24	07/17/2020 11:27 AM	For today's #FeatureFriday, we asked members of the OHN core		1.1K	142 41
06/05/2020 6:02 PM	Our Backstory: The Open Home Network (OHN) was birthed as part		4.2K	236 60	07/13/2020 2:30 PM	#MatchmakingMonday! Before we find a suitable home for a person-		4.5K	423 74
06/03/2020 4:37 PM	Open Home Network		0	0 4	07/12/2020 10:08 PM	Our bi-weekly update: 1. We are in the process of matching 5 persons		3.2K	296 56

Opening up their homes to strangers in dire straits

20 families in volunteer network offer those facing crisis rent-free refuge for up to a year

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs
Correspondent

Two Singaporeans have started a movement to encourage and support families here in opening up their homes to provide refuge for those facing a crisis, such as the homeless or abuse victims.

Twenty families have signed up with the Open Home Network, a volunteer movement officially launched in June.

These host families are willing to house those in dire straits rent free, for up to one year.

Mr Kenneth Heng, founder of Sobor's social enterprise that facilitates social innovation for vulnerable communities, is one of the two people behind the movement.

The other person is Mr Abraham Tan, the 38-year-old co-founder of Homeless Hearts of Singapore, a charity that helps the homeless.

Mr Heng, 41, said the network's aim is to recreate the kampung spirit and tap host families to offer temporary shelter to those in need.

He said, "In a kampung, people know each other, are open to one another, and are more ready to share their resources to meet the needs of others in their community."

"In modern Singapore, the sense is that our community has become more private, with people more in-

clined to mind their own business."

During the two-month-long circuit breaker which ended on June 1, more people needed refuge as they ran into financial and social difficulties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

They include those who lost their jobs and can no longer afford to pay rent, victims of family violence and those left stranded by Malaysia's travel restrictions.

Most of the host families live in housing block flats, with some in three-room flats. A few had vacant apartments to offer.

Mr Heng said of those living in smaller flats, "It shows us that it's not really about space, but the size of their hearts, to be there for those in a crisis."

The network takes referrals from social service agencies and non-governmental organisations, and both the host family and the person in crisis will meet to gauge if they are comfortable with each other before the person moves in.

Each host family houses one person or family in crisis at a time for up to one year, but the length of stay really depends on the individual's circumstances and the help needed to navigate through his crisis.

Mr Heng noted that while there are shelters for the homeless, these families can complement institu-

tions to offer care and shelter to those in need.

"Host families can't replace professional services, which are needed, but they can complement the restorative process by extending friendship, acceptance, love and care."

"These relationships provide stability between transitions so that the person in crisis can feel enough warmth and security that will embolden them to continuously take steps forward for themselves," said Mr Heng.

Those who have sought help include homeless men from their 40s to 70s, and unwell mothers in their 20s and 30s who needed a place to stay as their families were not supportive of their pregnancies.

There were also a few teenagers who needed refuge because of violence at home or strained ties with their families.

When asked about precautions to keep the coronavirus at bay, Mr Heng said the social workers refer to necessary contact tracing and ensure that both host family and guest are healthy, among the safe distancing measures they have in place.

Mr Lim Wei Ming and his wife Chardine Lie, who are both 31, recently started hosting an 18-year-old teen who needed refuge as his home environment was unsafe for him due to family violence.

Mr Lim, who also works at Sobor's, said he was initially apprehensive about their safety and security when Mr Heng asked the couple if they could be a host family. The cou-

ple, who live in a five-room HDB flat, do not have children.

Madam Lie, a church worker, said of her initial apprehension: "Home is our most comfortable space and having someone I don't know live with us pushes us out of our comfort zone."

The couple decided to become a host family after talking to Mr Lim's mum, who shared that his grandmother used to shelter those in need in their home in a kampung.

Madam Lie said of their experience so far: "It has been rewarding, although there are also challenges adjusting to another person. Our eyes and hearts have been opened to meet a young person in crisis."

Another host family is that of Mr Terrence Tan, a 46-year-old associate lecturer, and his wife, Madam Lim Mei Kim, a 43-year-old financial adviser.

They have two daughters, aged 10 and 12, and the family lives with Mr Tan's parents in a four-storey semi-detached house.

Madam Lim, who had a "challenging childhood", said she was grateful for friends and relatives who allowed her to stay in their homes for short periods when things were too tense at her place.

She is looking forward.

For a few months last year, the couple hosted a 13-year-old girl who had very strained ties with her father, a single parent.

Her social worker felt that a short stay with host family could give both the father and the girl - who grew up in a children's home - breathing space, in the hope of mending the relationship.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) says it welcomes ground-up initiatives to help the homeless.

It had a virtual meet-up in May with the Open Home Network for them to understand each other's efforts, and they had a "fraternal conversation".

The MSF spokesman said: "Both MSF and the Open Home Network share a common understanding and purpose to help the homeless."

theresat@sp.com.sg

STABILITY BETWEEN TRANSITIONS

Host families can't replace professional services, which are needed, but they can complement the restorative process by extending friendship, acceptance, love and care. These relationships provide stability between transitions so that the person in crisis can feel enough warmth and security that will embolden them to continuously take steps forward for themselves.

MR KENNETH HENG, founder of Sobor is a social entrepreneur that facilitates social innovation for vulnerable communities, and one of the two people who started the Open Home Network.

MR TERRENCE TAN and his wife, Madam Lim Mei Kim, are among the host families with Open Home Network. For a few months last year, they opened up their home to a 13-year-old girl who had very strained ties with her father, a single parent. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY



This is SG posted a video to playlist.
August 1 · Singapore

#ThisisSG: Staying at home during the circuit breaker is hard enough, but what if you don't even have a home? With Open Home Network, Kenneth and his team are helping Singaporeans in need stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic - matching them with kind-hearted hosts who willingly open up their homes for others to stay in. 🏡❤️🏠

Share photos or videos of your passion with us using #ThisisSG.

This is opening up our hearts and our homes.

17 5 Shares

NEWS READER

'Airbnb For The Needy': This S'pore Initiative Opens Up Homes At Zero Rent For Up To A Year

 **Jae Chia**
6 days ago

0 



Review

Over the course of the 5 months of running OHN, we have identified a few key lessons.

Importance of host preparation and education

We anticipated that hosting a stranger in crisis would be a novel idea that many Singaporeans might feel empathetic towards, but might not actually know what it entails and what they need to be prepared for.

Some of the families who initially signed up with us as hosts decided not to continue after we sent them more information on hosting via the Open Home Guide, which set out expectations of hosts clearly.

However, some of the families who went through the Open Home Guide felt that it was not enough. The Open Home Guide was mainly useful for one-way dissemination of information; and whilst it prepared families on what to expect, it did not provide answers or assurances for families who wished to work out remaining concerns on hosting.

Importance of community models

Many of those who were willing to explore the possibility of hosting requested to speak to families to have hosted before. At the same time, many existing or prior hosts also mentioned that their decision to host was inspired by, or crystalised after speaking to someone who had done it before (e.g. The Last Resort) and inspired them to do likewise.

The assurance from someone who had been through a similar experience appears to be invaluable, even though every host's experience is unique. This might be due to a few reasons: the experience of hosting is an intensely personal one, and there is some information about the experience of hosting that cannot be adequately expressed on paper. The sharing by another host family of how they have 'gained' personally through the experience (both bad and good times) could also motivate families to host; by providing something that they could also aspire to. Having a 'peer' or friend to share their experience, and answer their questions, and remain a touch point, establishes a form of community support that encourages families to take the step to host.

Community support for hosts

In the Open Home Guide, we emphasised the importance of host families '*rallying their kampong*', or tapping into their community for support for their hosting journey. This is important to ensure sustainability of hosts - hosting does introduce more concerns and burdens for the family on a daily basis, and ensuring that the host family is cared for is important. Further, in many ways, the host family, in hosting a PIC, provides a gateway for their community to come alongside and offer the PIC a holistic environment in which they can recover from crisis.

We required host families who signed up as hosts to provide us 2 referees from their community for this reason. While it provided us additional points of reference to ascertain the suitability of each host, our purpose was also to require host families to reach out to their community and share with them about their journey. Some questions posed to referees included: what areas do you anticipate the host family needing support in their journey? What concerns do they have? Who would be a suitable (or unsuitable) guest for them?

This would help ensure, at least in part, that host families had friends that knew them well, and who were informed and involved in the decision-making to host.

However, beyond ensuring that hosts were connected with community support at the start of their journey, it was difficult in practice to do more than encourage hosts to reach out to their community during their hosting journey. Each host has a unique relationship with their community, e.g. different dynamics in terms of when and what they would reach out for support for. As the interactions were personal between them and their own community, this was beyond the reach of the OHN team.

What we focussed on was trying to facilitate community support within OHN, by connecting with them and by connecting new hosts with existing host families in our network. We were able to facilitate connections with existing hosts for some host families who requested or were more open to it. On our end, the core team and Community Representatives had opportunities to engage and support the host families as we journeyed with them to explore and take steps towards hosting.

Importance of engagement with host family

Our initial contact with the 160 families who signed up to be hosts was primarily through volunteers who contacted them via Whatsapp/phone communications (as it was during Circuit Breaker, personal contact was not allowed as well). We were lean on manpower available, and needed to move fast to reach out to, educate, and prepare families to host.

The level of personal engagement with the families differed depending on the volunteer and family's comfort level as well. Some volunteers managed to spend time speaking with the families on the phone, while others preferred communications via whatsapp. In general, the level of engagement increased with the level of contact. We were also better able to sense the needs and concerns of the families that we had higher levels of engagement with.

Engagement with host families was crucial to help us not only identify their concerns, but also to sense their suitability to be hosts. We were aware that the hosts were not known to us personally, and hence the need to verify their suitability to be hosts before proceeding to match them with any person-in-crisis for a stay. Yet, it was challenging to get to know host families from scratch due to limited manpower and time, as well as constraints in personal contact during Circuit Breaker. Having a host family network housed within an existing community network where they are known and supported would be ideal.

Partnerships with social workers/social service agencies

After initial preparations for our families were underway, we engaged with 20 social service agencies and NGOs to share about OHN and the possibility of connecting their suitable clients/beneficiaries to host families for temporary shelter. We emphasised in particular that not all of their clients/beneficiaries were suitable for host families, for e.g., those facing more severe crisis that required more structured support, or would be difficult for host families to navigate.

The response we received from the social service agencies and NGOs was largely positive. After they understood OHN's process in preparing families and matching them with potential guests, many started making referrals to us for their clients/beneficiaries. A testimony of a social worker, Nicole, from The Safe Place, who had worked with OHN to match one of her clients to a host family is [here](#).

We encouraged, as far as possible, all PICs to be supported by a social worker, before they were matched to a host family. We recognised the value of social workers in supporting persons-in-crisis to navigate the complexities of their crisis, and yet social workers cannot be the sole source of support. We saw host families as playing an integral in expanding the support for PICs, and in providing a positive and stable environment for them. In other words, we were affirmed by our

partnerships with social service agencies that host families could play a powerful complementary role to deepen their efforts in supporting PICs.

We have seen that the role played by the social worker is integral, in helping us to work out suitable matches, as well as in continuing to facilitate a positive environment for their clients/beneficiaries even after they begin staying with host families. Continued partnership with social service agencies is crucial to help ensure that the environment provided by the host family continues to be holistic and healthy for the person-in-crisis, even as their relationship evolves. If there is any crisis or need to transition out of the host family, the social worker can also be kept in the loop to work with their clients/beneficiaries on the next steps.

Role of Volunteers

OHN was run by 6 members of the core team, and was supported by the following volunteers (in total): 16 Community Representatives, 5 Case Managers and 7 from the Social Media team.

As OHN got more visibility through social media, we received more interest in volunteering, mostly from students or young adults. These volunteers were eager to learn and excited about the vision. However, some found it challenging to balance their commitments as volunteers with their full-time studies or jobs.

A testimony of one of our key volunteers who was part of our core team can be found [here](#).

(a) Community Representatives

We engaged volunteers to come on board as Community Representatives. The role of Community Representatives evolved over time as we prototyped the framework for engaging host families; this presented some challenges for the OHN team in terms of volunteer equipping and engagement.

We initially recruited Community Representatives to reach out to the 160 families who signed up as hosts. Their role was to get in touch with the 160 families as soon as possible, and to disseminate the Open Home Guide for them to process their commitment to host.

Subsequently, as the number of potential hosts consolidated, the role of the Community Representatives evolved to journeying with the remaining host families to support them through their journey of being prepared, matched, and moved-in with the guest.

This shift in role was not entirely comfortable for some of the Community Representatives, who were often younger and did not feel mature enough to support host families. For many, it was not the initial role that they envisaged, so the OHN core team needed to provide more guidance and support for them to navigate their role. Practically, this meant that members of our core team would 'buddy' each Community Representative to journey with their host families together.

Another adjustment in the role of the Community Representative was the regrouping of the Community Representatives into regional teams. This was to facilitate better coordination and support for the host families based on their geographical region. However, it would mean a re-assignment of previous host family contacts to new Community Representatives. To mitigate this, and after hearing concerns from the Community Representatives, we encouraged Community Representatives to identify the families whom they want to continue the relationship with, and made allowances for that even with the reorganisation.

Another learning point was the need to build more of a network/community among the Community Representatives. Many Community Representatives worked alone as they were each individual 'account managers' to a number of assigned host families. They were also matched with OHN core team members to guide and train them on a case-by-case basis. That meant however that any 'losses' or 'wins' experienced in each case were not shared with the wider community of volunteers; and a sense of belonging to a larger community (beyond the OHN core team) was not forged.

The core team actively encouraged Community Representatives to learn and grow into their roles, providing guidance as well as opportunities to manage cases independently at appropriate junctures. Some felt more confident in doing so, but many expressed the need for further guidance in supporting host families. Community Representatives had the opportunity to get to know host families, understand our process, engage with social workers and PICs, as well as support host families after the match was made.

(b) Case Management Team

The role of a case manager evolved over time as we gained more clarity on our processes and on what each supporting role should look like. Initially, case managers played a dual role - as liaisons with social workers and, together with the Community Representatives, as an overall coordinator for the matching process (between the host family and PIC) as well.

After some time, we decided to streamline the case manager's role to focus on being a liaison with the social workers and supporting them in the matching process. This shift was helpful for our volunteers as it gave them clarity on their role and made their role more manageable. Clarity and manageability was important because most of our volunteers were either full-time students or working adults.

In terms of volunteer engagement, the volunteers appreciated the personal guidance given to them. This involved one-on-one check-ins to walk them through our processes, explain their role to them, answer their questions, and also to get to know them personally. As every case we encountered was different, so were the demands of each case. Thus, being there to walk with the volunteers through that was helpful for them and allowed us to provide clarity through changing circumstances. It also made them feel valued as our relationship with them was not just about what they could contribute, but it was also about what we could do to add to their learning experience. This approach made volunteers more invested in the process. The volunteers also had opportunities to meet the social workers, Community Representatives and host families, and they found this exposure really helpful.

Potential impact of a whole-of-community response

As can be seen above, the entire effort of running OHN was spread out across the community: in our host families and their communities; our volunteers; our core team. The key to unlocking the potential of the community was to first provide enough education, assurance, and guidance; and then to provide a supportive environment for members of the community to step forward into their various roles.

We also realised the power of community to engage and step into a meaningful, complementary role in the system of social care; in providing households as host families and a community network of support around them, we were able to take a small but significant step to augment the potential options for PICs (and the social service agencies supporting them) beyond institutional shelter options. Anecdotally, many of the social service agencies in referring their clients to us expressed that institutional shelters were not ideal for their clients for various reasons (e.g. youths, potential for rehabilitation in a positive supportive home environment), and expressed confidence in the potential of a home environment to make a positive impact in the lives of their clients.

Future of OHN

Our original commitment was to operate OHN until the end of Aug. Since then, responses towards OHN have been positive. Our volunteers have also expressed their sincere commitment to extend OHN's referral service until Dec 2020. This means that we will continue to advocate for more family hosts, educate and prepare them to receive referrals from our partners.

OHN core team has developed a deeper understanding of social care in Singapore and some of the pressing needs present. Because OHN is fully volunteer-driven now, the core team will use Sep to Dec 2020 to strategise new possibilities for 2021. More information will be shared closer to Dec 2020. Some of these possibilities would include:

- Ensuring stronger privacy in operations through platform digitalisation

- Corporate Collaboration: Working with different organisations to provide holistic support
- Design and Publication of Community Care Recipe Book
- Decentralising OHN operations: Chapter planting

OHN can only exist for as long as we have the support from the community. We are deeply grateful to all our volunteers who have worked tirelessly alongside us to make this happen. This commitment has inspired and energised the OHN team to continue to strive in reimagining and building the kind of community that we dream about.