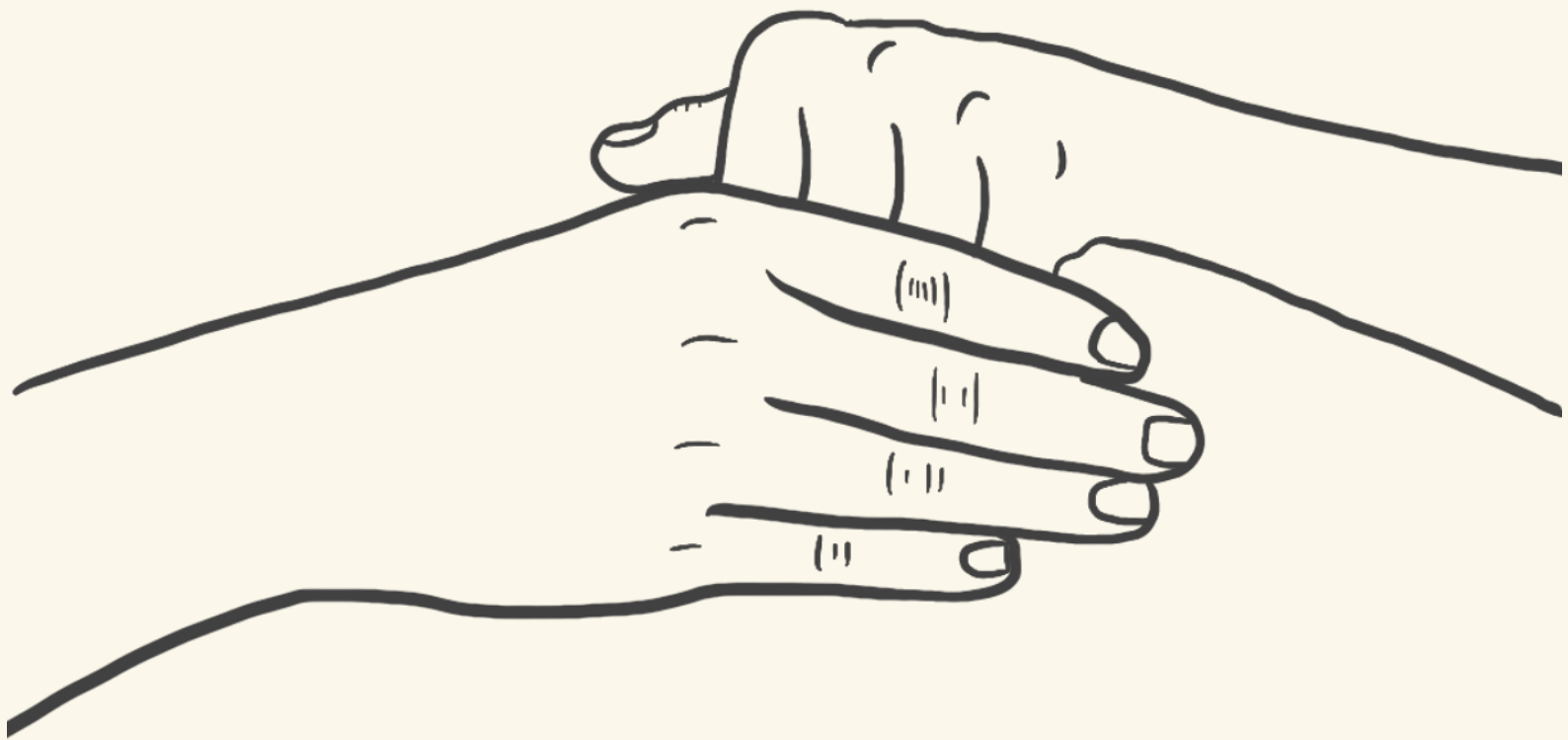


INCLUSIVE
CAMPUS PROJECT

FEB 2021



**VOICES OF N(US):
OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS AN
ACCESSIBLE CAMPUS**

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
GRANT 2020

SUPPORTED BY THE
OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not represent the views and opinions of the National University of Singapore or any of its subsidiaries or affiliates.

About us

The Inclusive Campus Project brings together collective voices in the NUS community to produce a series of publications. Through the process of narrating our experiences, we seek to encourage both the contributors and readers to reflect on our current state of inclusivity and inspire changes.

Each “Voices of N(US)” publication features:

- The personal experiences of students on campus
- The reflections of a student group after reading the personal stories
- A staff member’s response to the students’ perspectives

The title “Voices of N(US)” represents the project team’s vision of inclusivity. We want to bring across the idea of inclusivity as a state where every individual is valued within the community. Additionally, the pronoun “us” was used intentionally to highlight that inclusivity is a collective effort from us, for us.

We hope that these entries will give you new insights and inspire you to contribute to the diversity and inclusion efforts.

Xin Hui, Khye Bin, Wee Ling

Inclusive Campus Project

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Preface

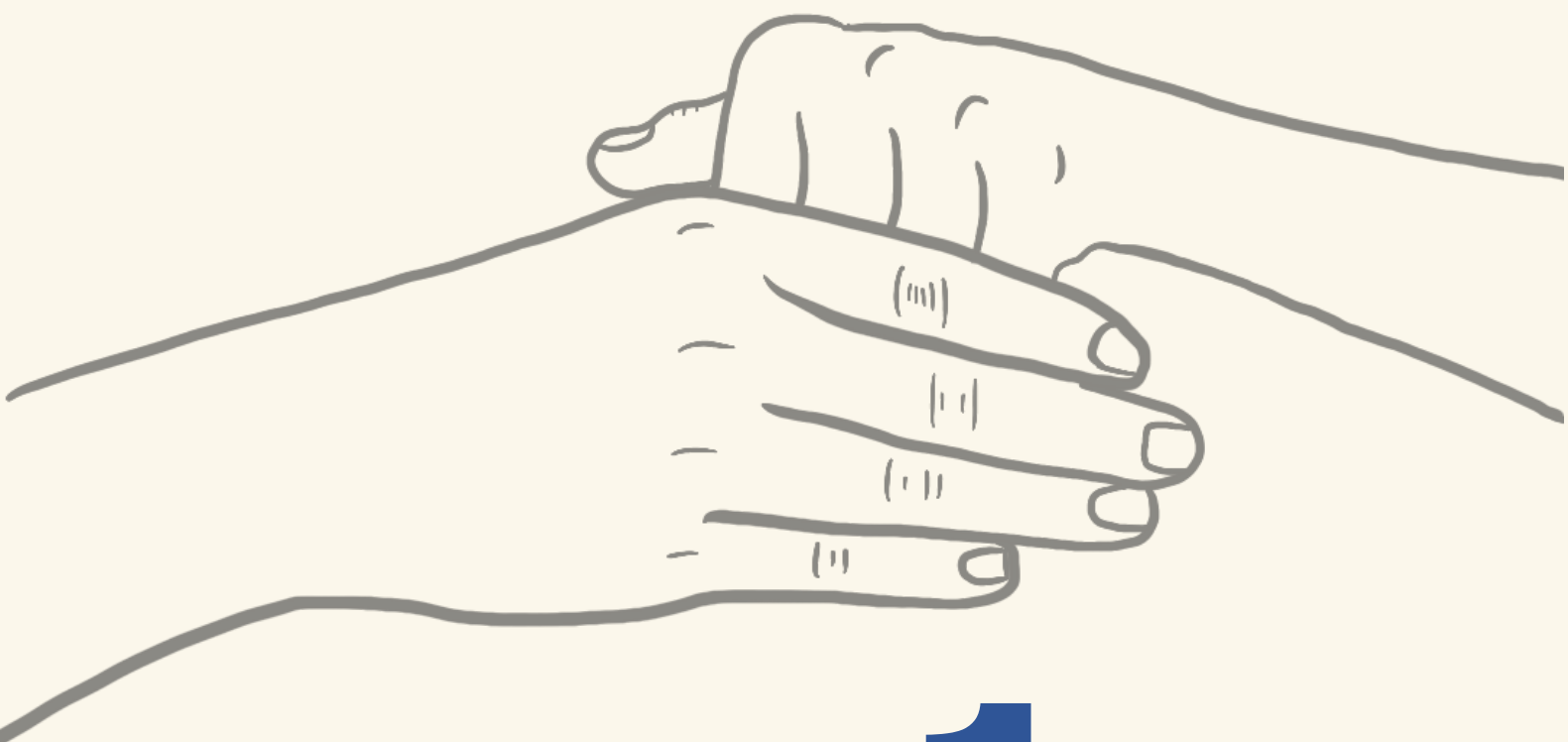
By the Inclusive Campus Project Team

Our daily experiences encompass routines and interactions that enable us to be a part of communities both within and outside of campus. This can include commuting, having meals, attending classes, working, and engaging in social activities with our friends and family. However, these daily activities may pose challenges for persons with disabilities (PWDs). As a university community, it is worthwhile to reflect on how inclusive our built environment and social environment are.

Whether you are a student or staff of NUS, we all play a role in determining the state of inclusion. Our attitudes, perceptions, and values would influence whether we treat PWDs as equals. This would in turn affect their extent of social participation, which is one measure of inclusion¹. Ms. Chia Yong Yong, the former President of SPD, recently emphasized the importance of having strong support for students with disabilities to complete their tertiary education². Likewise, it has been found in other university contexts that campus experiences can affect PWDs' participation on campus³ as well as their sense of belonging⁴.

In this instalment of Voices of N(US), we feature entries centring around the theme of disability inclusion in NUS. It contains perspectives from students with disabilities, a student group, and a staff member from the Student Accessibility Unit. These contributors have advocated for students with disabilities and improved accessibility on campus. Such steps involve improving the physical infrastructure, administrative procedures, and social support.

Read, reflect, respond. Admittedly, meaningful change requires much more than our publication alone. As you read their entries, we encourage you to reflect on how you may play a role in this journey towards greater inclusivity. Most importantly, we hope that these perspectives can inspire you to respond in your various capacities.



Section **1**:

**Our Idea of
Accessibility**

More to Access: Involving the Person

By Chee Yong

Change is never easy. As a person living with cerebral palsy, transition can be even more challenging than it already is for any other individual. This is because very rarely, if ever, is any environment 100% accessible. For me, it is all about familiarising myself to a new environment, so that I know how to create accessible workarounds for inaccessibility.

The work of Ms. Agnes from the NUS Student Accessibility Unit (SAU) has certainly made transition into NUS much easier than if I were to do so myself. Before I began my classes in University, Ms. Agnes arranged for me to recce around the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as well as Tembusu College – the two main places where I will spend most of my University life. This allowed me to familiarise myself with the new physical environment beforehand, allowing me to focus on familiarising myself with the new social and academic environment when school started.

Of course, the labyrinth that is FASS cannot be navigated by heart after one day of recce-ing. She had made a rough sketch of the accessible pathways within FASS – which I found to be useful when I needed to be at a new location that I have not previously been. During the semester, I can always approach her when ad-hoc challenges arise – such as when an accessible pathway becomes inaccessible due to temporary works.

While Ms. Agnes has been a great source of support, there were occasions where I wish I had not needed Ms. Agnes' support. As I have mentioned earlier, I do not expect any environment to be 100% accessible, I will assess the situation and explore a workaround. There was a situation where a workaround was required, and it needed the approval of a relevant NUS personnel to be possible. They had rejected my proposed workaround not because of operational constraints, but because the particular personnel had thought that their counterproposal was more convenient for me.

Convenience, while usually one of my considerations when I do things, is rarely ever my only consideration. After rationalising with the staff – about how my proposal better addresses my considerations holistically – to no end, I had contacted Ms. Agnes to explain the situation. Finally, the NUS personnel approved my proposed workaround after Ms. Agnes had basically repeated to them what I had been telling them repeatedly for the past hour.

I am not always right, and I appreciate when people suggest alternatives that I may not have considered. However, I hope for people to understand that I am capable of determining what is best for myself in spite of my disabilities. I was left with the impression that the particular personnel had only been convinced that my workaround was better because I had the endorsement of Ms. Agnes. It felt as if I had not been believed by virtue of my disability.

Inclusivity to me is more than just having accessible infrastructure or frameworks to accommodate people with disabilities. It is about the understanding that I am the sum of my traits, that while disability is certainly a trait of mine, it is not my only trait. Therefore, I should be treated as a person first and foremost, rather than the condition that I have.

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**What NUS is lacking in terms of
inclusivity, however, is the
consideration for the person behind
the obvious trait of a disability.**

While there is much more to be done to make NUS more inherently accessible, I feel that the stop-gap measures have made NUS sufficiently inclusive infrastructurally. What NUS is lacking in terms of inclusivity, however, is the consideration for the person behind the obvious trait of a disability. The table specially placed at the front or back of the lecture hall ensures that people on a wheelchair have a table to take notes on. However, it fails to consider how the person on a wheelchair may want to sit alongside their peers.

Internal Shuttle Bus drivers appear to have been trained to make sure that people using wheelchairs alight the bus in reverse. While that is theoretically the safer method, the drivers have failed to consider that the weight-bearing on my wheelchair makes it such that I am likely to tip

backwards should I reverse down on a ramp. Of course, I do not expect the drivers to magically know. The point that I am trying to make is that the training for how to accommodate people with disabilities should be focused on supporting the person, rather than ensuring that something is done in a textbook-defined “safe” manner – which may not actually ensure safety in all instances.

While this entry has been largely focused on evaluating the state of inclusivity in NUS in terms of institutional efforts, I would like to highlight that the individual is also an important stakeholder in fostering an inclusive community. It is with the help of my Orientation Group mates that I could enter Zouk – which was definitely not built for wheelchair access – for Arts O’Week Finale Night. It was with Tembusians not making assumptions because of my disability that I had the opportunity to participate in sports Interest Groups. I would like to express my gratitude to all in the University who I have come across and will come across for seeing me before you see my wheelchair. Thank you.

“

**... the individual is also an
important stakeholder in fostering
an inclusive community.**

Inclusivity at NUS: A Personal Story

By Laura

I am a student from NUS, and I am suffering from vision impairment. I have recently completed my undergraduate studies in the NUS School of Business, and I am now embarking on my graduate candidature in the NUS Faculty of Science. Over the past few years of striving to achieve academic and non-academic goals in school, my disability has not once stood in my way, and I would like to ascribe a big part of this to the supportive stance of the University towards members of the NUS community having special needs.

Prior to the official start of my first academic year at NUS, Ms. Agnes from the NUS Student Accessibility Unit (SAU) reached out to me and introduced to me her role and the functions of her Office, assuring me of the support I would be able to seek in times of need at NUS. She also shared with me a whole range of infrastructure and SOP which NUS has put in place to facilitate the accessibility of special needs students to various forms of assistance with respect to mobility, exam arrangements, reading aids etc. With some help from Ms. Agnes, I had also been able to secure accommodation on campus within closest proximity to my home faculty as needed. Many of my pre-conceived worries about adapting to a new living and learning environment were instantly put to rest, and my transition to life at NUS was made effortless.

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... inclusivity is everywhere at NUS.

Throughout my four years at NUS, most if not all of my lecturers and professors have gone the extra mile to see to my special needs accommodation. They provided me with advanced access to course materials to the best of their ability, and they worked with the respective department secretaries to arrange for separate invigilation for my assessments. This is not just the case in my home faculty. The teaching staff I encountered in other Schools are also very generous in their help towards students. Once when I read a programming methodology module in NUS School of Computing, in order to allow me to learn alongside my peers, the module coordinator and the teaching assistants had incorporated the use of a software which projected the tutor's teaching screen onto my desktop for my learning. I recall a similarly enjoyable and smooth learning experience at the Department of Statistics in the Faculty of Science as well. In short, academic inclusivity is everywhere at NUS.

Outside of classroom settings, I also had many warm encounters on campus at times when I needed to turn to strangers for help. The librarians, meal providers, vendors, technicians, and many other members of the campus community are more than willing to extend their assistance when I ask for it. I remember myself accidentally boarding the wrong shuttle bus once which took me out of campus, and upon hearing about my

special needs condition, the driver kindly gave me a lift back to my hostel on campus without hesitation, while offering me words of comfort the whole time. Such unexpected yet warm gestures had instilled in me a strong sense of reassurance and trust in the NUS community -- notions which I draw close association with inclusivity.

“

**A little kindness or thoughtfulness
... goes a long way in helping a
special needs individual become a
little cheerier or braver.**

To me, inclusivity is about the actions taken by others who come to know about a person's special needs, which strongly correlates with the level of comfort and willingness which a special needs individual feels when needing to share with others about his or her disability. In that regard, I think that inclusivity ought to extend beyond equal opportunities and involvement in social activities. Positivity is indispensable to inclusivity, be it in the preconception of special needs individuals, the personal touch, or any other form of interaction. Simply putting oneself in the shoes of a special needs individual can teach one to be empathetic, and no longer will "special needs" be in any way derogatory to a fortunate, normal individual. A little kindness or thoughtfulness, be it a short catchup or an encouraging smile, goes a long way in helping a special needs individual become a little cheerier or braver.

"We focus on your abilities, not your disabilities," I was told, when Singapore's MOE assured me of equal chances in vying for a scholarship award many years ago. Since then, I have felt a healthy respect for the local community's belief in meritocracy. However, the wisdom and fairness that shone from the policies and systems in the Singaporean society are not all reflected at the grass-roots level. Around me, I could still hear snide remarks from peers about a particular special needs student who was in our class, and it is rather upsetting to me that it took another special needs individual to stand up for his or her peer, by explaining that none of us chose to be born the way we were. While such an exchange did not take place often, it still bore the mark of marginalization and exclusion to me.

Some might find heartfelt inclusivity a utopian vision, because preconceptions and prejudices are harder to change than one may think. Hence, every conscious effort made towards being gracious and feeling empathy towards special needs individuals is precious and laudable. I am very fortunate to have met peers and lecturers at NUS who befriended me sincerely, being genuinely concerned about my wellbeing, and even wished for my recovery. Besides, I greatly appreciate the confidence that my thesis and project supervisors placed in me on achieving objectives. The level of faith and expectation which they accorded to me were no different from those received by any other normal student, which to me, means a great deal in terms of inclusivity.

At NUS, I have met other special needs individuals who are equally if not more motivated yet more humble than myself, and I have learned about many more ways to embrace differences and grow alongside them. It takes a while to realise that everyone is not that different from each other in the sense that we each have our own challenges in life, just that individuals with special needs wear theirs on their sleeves. Perhaps when more voices are heard and more hearts touched, will we then move one step closer towards inclusivity.



Every individual has his or her own life challenges, yet we never forget to reach for love and light each day.

Journey through the eyes of a blind in NUS

By Raymond

I am Raymond, a visually impaired final year student majoring in Data Science and Analytics. Personally, I have not experienced exclusion while studying in NUS and I have been able to participate in school activities with everyone's support. While the school has done much to make the campus more inclusive, I think there is always room for improvement and I hope that my story will be able to inspire more students to be more accepting and understanding to the visually impaired community.

Coming to NUS was an apprehensive moment for me. I had to adapt to a completely new environment which was an especially challenging task for me given my condition. Furthermore, university life is vastly different from high school life and I was worried that I would not be able to cope well with the increased workload. However, as the months progressed in NUS, I realised that students don't actively discriminate against me despite knowing about my condition. As such, I have been able to participate in group projects without feeling discriminated against or having my abilities doubted. Moreover, thanks to the effort of many people and communities, I am able to enjoy my schooling years like a normal person. NUS Enablers is one such community. Being a two-time participant of the NUS Enablers Orientation Camp, I was able to befriend people and learn more about school life in the process. While it is much shorter than other orientation camps, NUS Enablers did a good job in implementing the camp and I found the

camps really enjoyable. Through the camps, my circle of friends has also greatly expanded. This includes a group of friends which I remain in contact with even till today.

The school has also done a lot to ensure that I did not feel excluded, specifically administrative staff from the Student Accessibility Unit (SAU) (Shout out to Agnes!) The SAU sends an email every semester regarding a sharing session for People With Disabilities (PWDs). Through these semesterly sharing sessions, I was kept abreast on the different schemes that were available for me. One such scheme would be the Special Education Needs (SEN) Fund, which would allow me to procure equipment that could help me in my day-to-day life for free. As I did not come from a privileged background, I was glad that these schemes were available to alleviate even a little of my financial burdens on my parents. In addition, Agnes connected me to other parties such as SG Enable, whose activities are part of a wider effort to help the PWDs.

As part of SAU's push for an accessible college, Agnes and the other administrative staff have also been helpful in addressing concerns related to my everyday experiences on campus. One example would be dimly lit areas on campus. I suffer from Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), a condition which gives me a very narrow field of vision. To give some perspective on what my field of vision is like, it is as though I am permanently looking through a straw. This is why this condition is sometimes termed as "tunnel vision". As a result of this condition, I am unable to see well in both dark and bright places which is made worse by the fact that I have both total colour deficiency and night blindness. As such, when places like the sheltered

pathway at Yusof Ishak House are too dark, it becomes especially difficult for me to navigate my way around. I informed Agnes about this and she promptly contacted the relevant authorities, who readily made the place brighter. Honestly, I was quite surprised at the speed with which the issue got addressed. I am most appreciative of NUS and SAU for their efforts in making sure that special needs like this are promptly addressed, which really helps to make the community more inclusive to people like me.

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**Inclusivity is an important mindset
because it encompasses the values
to accept people who are
differently abled.**

Inclusivity is an important mindset because it encompasses the values to accept people who are differently abled. While I am fortunate and thankful that there are so many people who support me so that I do not feel left out or excluded, there are still times when I feel that disability is tolerated but not really accepted in NUS. In my experience, this usually stems from a lack of understanding and exposure to the disabled community. As much as NUS tries, this is something that cannot be changed quickly with policies but is something that has to be inculcated from a young age. To me, much of a student's university life

experience is determined by the student population rather than by the staff. Therefore, if there was a paradigm shift within students, different people, not just people with disabilities, will feel more included.

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**In all candour, due to the nature
and current state of inclusivity --
or lack thereof -- PWDs would
sometimes even resort to excluding
themselves to avoid conflicting or
awkward situations from arising.**

In all candour, due to the nature and current state of inclusivity -- or lack thereof -- PWDs would sometimes even resort to excluding themselves to avoid conflicting or awkward situations from arising. I was no stranger to this. I was often a maverick even in groups. I hated socialising. This often resulted in me exuding an anti-social aura. Given my headstrong attitude, I would often dismiss struggles as something trivial, for I have become quite accustomed to them and hence, not classifying them as obstacles when they actually were. I was only able to survive relatively well because of my strong family support and care from my precious friends. However, not all PWDs are as lucky as me and I call on us to be more inclusive in our mindsets so other PWDs can benefit from a more inclusive society.

With this aspiration for a more inclusive society in mind, I have personally strived to do my part to create an impact for the disability sector both on-and-off campus. On campus, during my time with NUS Enablers, we overhauled Inclusive Fest and helped revamp the orientation programs to make it more relevant to students. In particular, I brought in experiential games on inclusiveness that I felt should be played on a wider scale, such as during Inclusive Fest. The purpose of these activities was to move beyond awareness and enable people to better understand and empathise with PWDs and their disabilities.

Off campus, I worked to launch a start-up to come up with a card game to help primary school students to learn about disabilities and how these disabilities affect them. Additionally, my team is also piloting a digital platform application which utilises handwriting recognition to allow students to do their assignments on mobile. This application then automatically grades said assignments for educators. Through these projects, I hope to bring my experience as a visually-impacted person to the education sector and improve the way we educate our young. Through this, I hope that there will be more inclusive features to help differently abled students learn better.

My team and I are currently in talks with MOE to help bring more visibility into inclusive teaching methods and more exposure to different types of disabilities. I participate in both of these activities because I believe that inclusivity entails changing mindsets and mindsets cannot be changed without understanding and exposure to the differently abled. Of course, more work needs to be

done to make sure special needs are accepted rather than tolerated and I hope that by reading this story, I have changed your mind, even just a little.

Inclusivity at NUS: A collective effort

By Yong Jie

When I was still a polytechnic student, I had a brain haemorrhage and suffered from a stroke. Since then, I have not fully recovered but have made efforts to become independent enough to carry out activities of daily living. I went for intensive rehabilitation and a transition to employment program under the SPD. While I was able to successfully obtain a job as a systems developer, I thought of joining the allied health practitioners who supported me. But I decided that social work was a more viable option because of my disability. As such, I applied to NUS Social Work in 2016 and matriculated a year later.

Since joining NUS, I have had multiple occasions where I felt supported and included. It started with my contact with the Student Accessibility Unit (SAU). I was apprehensive about being in NUS because I felt that I needed to go to camps and ensure I could familiarise myself with the environment. When I later asked for a tour of the accessible routes in NUS because I heard that FASS was inaccessible, Agnes from SAU suggested that I join the upcoming NUS Enablers orientation camp.

The camp was a memorable event for me. It involved an amazing race that taught me the different accessible routes and shortcuts around campus and ended off with

a picnic under the stars at UTown Green. It was through this camp that I got to know seniors who helped us to navigate the various school platforms. I also got to know other Students with Special Needs (SSNs) and we have helped each other out as well. Because of them, I later joined NUS Enablers to contribute back.

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The camp was a memorable event for me. It involved an amazing race that taught me the different accessible routes and shortcuts around campus and ended off with a picnic under the stars at UTown Green.



Picnic under the stars at University Town Green, Enablers orientation camp 2019.

Similarly, my experience in Social Work also entailed a great deal of inclusion and support from the people around me. I was worried that my medical condition would affect my energy level, but I was assured that the Social Work camps are unlike others that demand high energy and enthusiasm. Instead, they focused on human relationships and reflection, and allowed me to make more friends. As such, I was fortunate to get to know people who are now my close friends in university. They have helped me a lot during my time in NUS. Not only did they help with my academics, but in socio-emotional aspects and accessing services I had difficulty with.



Social Work orientation group, 2017.



My closest group of friends in uni
with lecturer, Dr. Peace in the middle.

In terms of exclusion, the only ones I can think of are unintentional ones. As a person with physical impairments, activities like running and certain sports are exclusionary by nature. I do play badminton with my friends, but I cannot perform well and will feel dejected. That said, I cannot expect others to play modified sports to cater to me. Regardless, it is not a serious form of exclusion and I can always join them for lunch after their games.

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**When I think about inclusivity,
I think about two points -
interaction and engagement.**

When I think about inclusivity, I think about two points - interaction and engagement. Interaction refers to the interaction between the SSNs and the rest of the student population. In terms of interaction, I would look at the frequency, meaningfulness, and quality of these interactions. Right now, learning about people with disabilities (PWDs) and disabilities on campus is limited to classrooms and workshops. If you do not have friends or course mates who are PWDs, it is likely that you will not interact with them.

Personally, I have been involved in efforts, namely Enablers Bonding Day and Enablers biweekly gaming sessions, to increase interactions between the SSNs with the rest of the student population. Of course, these interactions depend on whether the students are available or have other priorities.

On the issue of interaction, a related concern would be how we talk and think about disabilities. Talking about disabilities is something people are afraid to do, because they are worried that it might not be something that the PWDs want to talk about and they might find it awkward. However, PWDs are in fact open and happy to share about their disabilities. Then again, there is the issue of how we think about disabilities and whether knowing or not knowing about someone's disability is a sign of inclusion. People treat me normally and support me like other students. But, for people with invisible disabilities like autism, being able to function allows them to be included. The question is, if people do not know and the SSNs do not disclose having a disability, is it still considered inclusive?

In terms of engagement, I would look at whether the SSNs have the opportunity to participate in activities, contribute to student life and schoolwork, and make a difference in the school. This can include teaching and advocating about disabilities. Through the recent Inclusive Fest 2019, the SSNs volunteers involved were empowered to contribute. They did so by sharing their experiences and planning the events that would enable other students to hear their voices and understand them further.

However, there are also structural barriers to inclusivity. Aside from the inaccessibility of some spaces within NUS, traffic light timers can impede inclusivity. I previously wrote to the school to highlight that the traffic light timer along the road between FASS and the Industrial Design Faculty needs to be lengthened. This is because the PWDs need more time to cross the road as they are at greater risk of being exposed to oncoming traffic. That said, there are efforts to address these barriers. For example, there are alternative transport arrangements that are safer for users with disabilities and other students. This enables students to go around school without relying on the ISB whose cramped conditions can be difficult to endure or can result in misunderstandings.

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More can be done to change the infrastructure, but it needs time.

More can be done to change the infrastructure, but it needs time. I can see that the school is becoming increasingly accessible and inclusive. However, what can help would be to also increase students' awareness of the available special arrangements through various platforms aside from the school websites as not many of these resources are known to the students. Regardless, I am aware of the ongoing changes being made, so there is nothing more to suggest or propose.

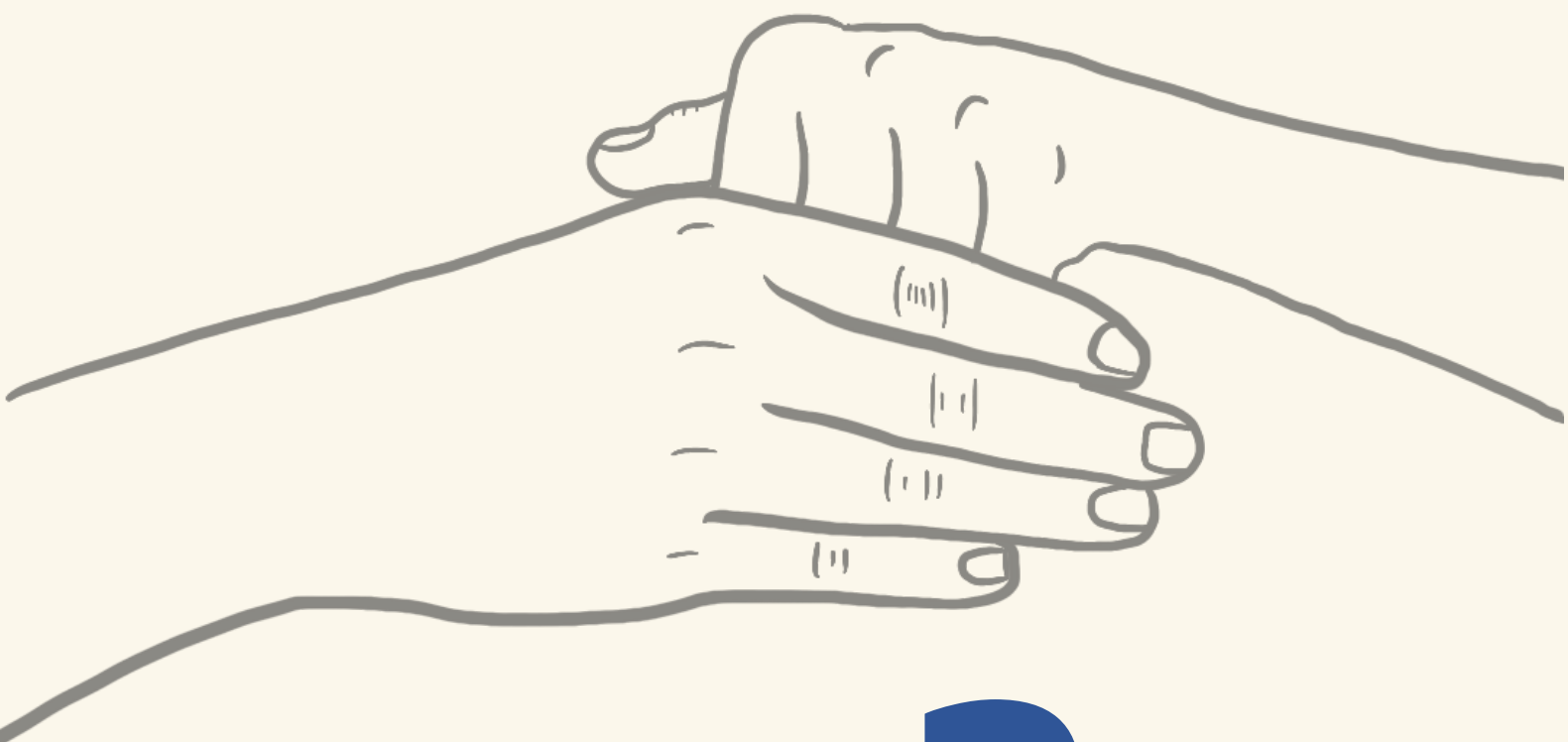
Reflections

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It's a matter of having the **right environment** to develop the confidence we need. Otherwise, who'd ever dare imagine that we could reach beyond ourselves?

CHIA YONG YONG

What stood out for you as you read about the students' experiences?



Section 2:

**Student Group's
Response**

Inclusivity on campus: A Work in Progress

By NUS Enablers

NUS Enablers is heartened to read about the positive experiences of Students with Special Needs (SSNs). From the stories, it is evident that NUS students and staff are mostly non-discriminatory and inclusive, and we feel encouraged to continue promoting ground-up inclusivity on campus. For instance, after reading about the impact that our annual freshman orientation camps have on SSNs, we hope to continue contributing our efforts to facilitate their integration into University life. Indeed, the transition to University life can be daunting for anyone as uncertainty naturally breeds fear; thus, we are glad that we can reach out to the freshmen and help them navigate the challenging times at the start of their journey in NUS.



Enablers Freshmen Orientation Camp 2019:
Picnic @ UTown Green.

As our club discussed the entries, we also pondered over whether there is another page in our disability chapter that has yet to be written. Some SSNs are not included in social circles. Some daily struggles were not talked about in the entries. Some SSNs with 'invisible' disabilities or conditions may not be recognised for their disabilities and pain. As you read this, you might be thinking that this is not something that is unique to SSNs. Absolutely. When we entered University, some of us might have found it harder than others to socialise and make friends in an unfamiliar place full of strangers. Everyone we meet could be fighting a battle that they do not talk about. We will never know what another person is going through if we do not ask. Therefore, we need, and desire something more in NUS.

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**We will work towards the day where
'disability' becomes just another
word and not a defining trait.**

We hope to work towards creating a culture of inclusivity and kindness on campus. Hopefully one day, SSNs can feel comfortable and safe openly sharing their needs with their peers without fear of judgment. One day, the school will be more accessible and have fewer physical barriers. One day, we will all get to know each other better as persons and ultimately, become friends. After all, everyone has their individualities. We will work towards the day where 'disability' becomes just another word and not a defining trait. Inclusion does not have to be a huge

production – small actions make a big difference. While there is no standard way to define inclusivity, the creation of a culture where everyone feels comfortable enough to interact with one another is of utmost importance.

We had a candid conversation about what inclusivity meant to each of us. Similar themes emerged from our conversation. Inclusivity to us means to provide equal opportunities and resources for persons with disabilities (PWDs) to participate in every aspect of life. It is to create a society where everyone is treated equally no matter how different we are. On top of that, inclusivity means building a community that welcomes PWDs. We can do that by getting to know PWDs as persons, rather than identifying them through their disabilities or the stereotypical notions of who a PWD is. This would come naturally with empathy, which is coupled with communication to promote mutual understanding. Two-way communication is necessary for both parties to be cognisant of each other's needs. Active listening is a necessary ingredient to hear what PWDs are feeling and experiencing. We need to start speaking up; to seek help and offer help. On the topic of accommodation, we need to be clear about the intentions of accommodating the needs of PWDs. We hope that as a society, we can go beyond accommodation to having acceptance and optimism of a person's abilities.

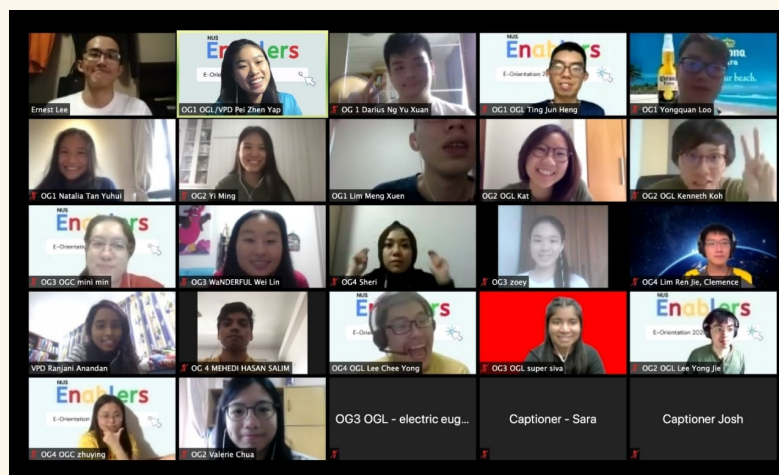
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**The current state of inclusivity
on campus is a work in progress.**

The current state of inclusivity on campus is a work in progress. We can all see that the NUS Student Accessibility Unit (SAU), previously known as NUS Disability Support Office (DSO) has been actively pushing for inclusivity by ensuring that opportunities are given to SSNs to fully participate in school. Within the student population, there is no outright rejection or exclusion. However, we should not stop here. There is much to improve on. As George Bernard Shaw said, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything”, change has to come from within. The mindset of the student population now seems to be that of indifference, without discrimination. Every single one of us in NUS is part of the equation for inclusivity. To build a community where everyone belongs, more proactivity and conversations need to happen on campus.

Over the years, NUS Enablers has been working within our capacity to fulfil our mission: “To create an inclusive NUS by raising awareness and reducing social stigma about special needs”. We held NUS-wide events such as our annual “Inclusive Festival” at University Town with the aim to educate and promote disability causes through experiential activities. This year, we hope to bring in more

training opportunities to NUS students on disability causes. We also organised activities for SSNs to help them integrate with the NUS community. For example, we have a buddy program where SSNs who have indicated a desire to have a buddy will be matched with volunteers of our club. Buddies provide support in various ways such as being a visual guide to facilitate movement between classes for students with visual impairment or by simply making a new friend from having lunch together. During COVID-19, we started online bi-weekly gaming sessions to promote engagement within our community. Other efforts include our freshman orientation camp and the distribution of welfare packs, among others. Increasingly, we see more SSNs coming on board to be part of our committee. We are invigorated to understand more perspectives and work together to build inclusivity on campus.



Enablers Freshmen e-Orientation
Camp 2020: Group photo over Zoom.

We urge more people to join hands with us on this cause. Inclusivity can be as simple as initiating a casual conversation or reaching out to help SSNs when needed. The need to create an environment where each individual can comfortably speak up and seek help when in need is ineffably important. More interactions, curriculum, advocacy, events, and workshops need to happen within NUS. Our club also hopes that NUS can pump in more resources to hire more staff in SAU and work on infrastructural changes. A universal design is a good investment – not only to increase campus accessibility but to show our efforts to be a leading global university in terms of inclusivity. One day, NUS will truly embrace diversity.

Reflections

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When we recognize that PWDs too are **equal members** in Singapore, then removing barriers so that they can **fully participate** in society level, becomes **second nature** – and not an act of charity or magnanimity.

DENISE PHUA

**What can you do to make your
community more inclusive?**



Section 3:

NUS Staff's Response

Inclusion: A collective Journey

By Ms Yuen Yim Yee Agnes

It is always heartwarming to hear from students who have benefitted from the support that the university provides to them. Reading the candid stories of these students whom I've been in touch with was certainly uplifting and serves to affirm the purpose of our work behind the scenes at SAU, Office of Student Affairs. Beyond the meaning it brings to the work, it is the knowledge that the work touches the students' life in ways tangible and intangible, and having the privilege to walk the journey with them, when they need it most, that brings home the prize.

Yet, beyond the seemingly encouraging narratives of overcoming challenges and receiving the support they need to ride through student life at NUS, and amongst the notes of appreciation to those who played a part in supporting them, lies a more subdued voice, to be known for the person inside, and for those who cross paths with them to get to know them beyond their disability. A quote made by one of the student writers, Chee Yong, which stayed with me, was when he appreciated those whom he has encountered for "seeing me before you see my wheelchair". This resonated deeply with me.

I recall another student I know who candidly shared that he has no problems talking about his disability but sometimes prefer not to, as it bores him to talk about something that he has been living with his whole life!

While it does not represent the stand of everyone, there is value in being mindful of respecting the boundaries of the individual in the way we approach our interaction with others. If prior consent is sought and if the other party openly invites others to get to know them through asking questions about their disability, then the air is cleared. Having said that, there is certainly a place for all of us to learn and understand more about the different disabilities through the many platforms available, so that we are more aware of how we can support those around us, when the opportunity comes up.

Globally and closer to home, disability inclusion is almost always associated with the notion of inclusivity. And rightfully so. Yet, the word inclusivity is so loaded with meaning in different contexts that it is not a word that can be defined in one broad statement.

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**...inclusivity to me would be
adopting a level of openness
that propels us to always
seek to understand.**

If I choose to view it from an attitudinal lens, inclusivity to me would be adopting a level of openness that propels us to always seek to understand, and if called upon, to co-ideate solutions that are unique to the individual's experience and preferred mode and form. If I take on a more formative and educational lens, inclusivity would be for students to have the opportunity to exercise some

levels of agency, in what students would like support with (and having those support made available) and what they may prefer to do independently. The key would then be availing the options to students, to decide for themselves what works best.

At a more individual and interpersonal level, Laura's appreciation of what inclusivity looks like to her perfectly echoes what I feel is inclusivity at its most fundamental level and one that everyone can relate with. Laura said that "inclusivity is about the actions taken by others who come to know about a person's special needs, which strongly correlates with the level of comfort and willingness which a special needs individual feels when needing to share with others about his or her disability". She also shared that inclusivity is also in the little acts of thoughtfulness that people choose to do during their interaction.

Little acts of personal interaction and checking in on someone out of concern are so important and fundamental that they should not be diminished. This is because they can sometimes hold so much meaning for a person whom we interact with, whether we are able to discern or not, that has a disability. This understanding and appreciation speaks of inclusivity at the core of humanity, and certainly not just disability inclusion alone.

In my opinion, inclusivity is a constant work in progress towards the right direction. Within the IHL setting, this direction encompasses empowering students with disabilities with the support they need and the options they can exercise, to thrive in the path that they choose

for themselves, much like any other student.

In my capacity working with students with disabilities, something that I hold close to, is to ensure that we enable students to take charge of the support they would like to receive. To present options but allow the final decision or choice to be taken by the student, making known to them the repercussions that they'll need to bear in mind, allowing them to make a sound and informed decision. This can sometimes prolong the interaction process as we serve more as advisors and take on a less directive approach towards the supportive relationship, but one I feel pays due respect to students who are developing in their own right, to be their own advocate. If students state in more certain terms that they would like to be more guided in a certain situation, then the levels of support could then be adjusted to the level that is necessary.

“

**To me, a supportive relationship
is one that respects the students
we work with, and one that
scaffolds the level of support for
different individuals.**

To me, a supportive relationship is one that respects the students we work with, and one that scaffolds the level of support for different individuals, depending on which part of the spectrum they are comfortable with. Meeting them

where they are, allows them to know that support is on hand if needed, but the freedom to make decisions is also supported if they so wish to.

“

I do believe that gone should be the days, where things and processes are built out of convenience and what is thought to be, making way for a more inclusive approach where persons with disabilities are rightfully part of the movement.

A common thread that came out strongly in the student narratives is one of agency and a sense of autonomy. Allowing students to experiment with platforms and opportunities to do so, is certainly a step in the right direction for person with disabilities who wish to exercise this agency to play a part in the changing discourse of inclusion. Take Yong Jie for example, who benefitted from NUS Enablers' peer-led inclusive programmes and thereby motivated to pay it forward by stepping up to a leadership position within the same interest group. This sense of autonomy also shone through in Raymond's story. Having experienced inclusion through his interpersonal and educational experiences, he now taps on his strong entrepreneurship to spearhead initiatives that will blaze the trail for inclusion for our future generations. On this note, I'm immensely grateful for the work of NUS Enablers, for championing the cause and anchoring this

breeding ground that students can take comfort in, allowing for these inclusive interaction and opportunities to take place.

I do believe that gone should be the days, where things and processes are built out of convenience and what is thought to be, making way for a more inclusive approach where persons with disabilities are rightfully part of the movement. As the saying goes for self-advocates, nothing for us, without us.

Reflections

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To help PWDs help
themselves, stand **alongside**
them, **not above** them.

CASSANDRA CHIU

What would you advocate for?



Section 4:

Now What?

Now What?

By the Inclusive Campus Project Team

Putting together this publication was a journey of learning for us as much as it hopefully was for you, our readers. Indeed, this learning journey was what we set out to do – to use the process of bringing together the voices of the community to understand the state of inclusivity, what we are doing well, and what we can do better.

Now that you have read the perspectives of our contributors, what stood out to you? What stirred an emotion in your heart? What made you pause for another second to think? Sit with those thoughts and emotions.

Admittedly, meaningful change requires much more than our publication alone. We titled our project the “Inclusive Campus Project”, but it should not be the end all be all. Making the campus inclusive does not end with the release of our publications. Your actions matter as well, if not even more.

So... now what?

We leave you to answer.

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NUS Enablers

Ms Yuen Yim Yee, Agnes, Asst Senior Manager

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* Names marked with asterisks are aliases to protect the identity of the contributors who wish to be anonymous.

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Scan the QR code or click on the link to complete our survey. For any queries, comments, and feedback, please email to voicesofnus.icp@gmail.com

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