

## Commentary - Case Study Sharing Session (5 Oct)

by Suffyan Othman

- 1) **The Relevance of the NUR Integrated Programme for Teenagers**
- 2) **An Integrated Approach towards Assisting Malay/ Muslim Families**
- 3) **The Evolution of Family Excellence Circles**

The second of a three part CLF case study sharing session was held on the 5th of October 2012 in the Yayasan MENDAKI hall. More than thirty people attended, and this includes heads of MMOs as well as the members of the CLF Review Committee. The three case study owners who presented were Mr Abdul Halim Aliman, Head of the Family Development Network, on The Evolution of the Family Excellence Circles, Mr Joachim Lee, from Tampines Family Service Centre, on An Integrated Approach towards Assisting Malay/Muslim families and Mr Sazali Wahid, Head of the Youth Development Network, on The Relevance of the NUR Integrated Programme for Teenagers. The session was to share the preliminary findings they had from the case studies and to provide a platform for these findings to be deliberated and discussed to further fine tune the studies themselves.

Chairman of the CLF Steering Committee, Associate Professor Dr Yaacob Ibrahim gave the opening remarks, focusing on the importance of this review process. This platform allows the partners of CLF to bring about the changes that they want in CLF. Furthermore, the inputs given during the discussions will help ensure that the programmes are refined or updated. The review process provides a safeguard so that CLF will not stand still and will remain open to suggestions for further improvements for the community platform.

Mr Mohd Ali Mahmood, Senior Director of PPIS was the chairperson and moderator of the panel discussion. He posited three main questions to the audience, in light of the question and answer session after the speakers' presentations, to help guide the audience towards a more focused discussion where greater constructive responses and inputs can be gleaned. The questions were, how can the findings be used to improve the relevance of the programmes, to look at the possible structural and procedural challenges that need to be addressed to sustain these efforts and ensure the improvements and the success of the programmes and finally the possible areas of additional development that can be gleaned from the findings to enhance the review process further. As these are preliminary findings, these inputs will help the case study owners to reflect and learn from them and further fine tune the studies.

The first speaker was Mr Abdul Halim Aliman, presenting on The Evolution of the Family Excellence Circles (FECs). His presentation was focused on the preliminary findings made from focus group discussions held with the two pioneer groups of the FECs. Conceptualized in 2004, the main focus of the FECs was to encourage the participants to be lifelong learners and therefore, the main research question was to find out what have the participants learnt and acquired for themselves and their families. The two groups that were interviewed were female centric, with only one member who is male. It was also highlighted that the husbands were very supportive of their involvement in this and from here, the need to hold focus group discussions can be seen. He stressed that this will be done to examine the multiplier effect of such efforts as well as to corroborate the findings from the earlier focus group discussions with their wives.

The main themes that were garnered from the focus group discussions were, the importance of good parenting and the importance of lifelong learning. In terms of good parenting, FECs were platforms for sharing and learning from one another, their involvement in Learning Journeys and workshops allow them to learn about best practices in parenting and thus they felt that their parenting skills were enhanced. In terms of lifelong learning, an important factor will be how this was then translated to their children, empowering the parents to take charge of and assist in their children's education. In essence, the importance of the FECs is that it empowers parents to help realize their children's potential.

The future progress of the review will be seen through analysis of the survey to look into the efficacy of the programme in terms of its structure and the processes as well as evaluating the groups that were helmed by the CLF partners, to examine how well the programme has been translated. This will assist in the review process as a whole and in light of further expansion and replication of the FECs in the near future as this will garner greater numbers of families who are active learners.

The next presenter was Mr Joachim Lee from Tampines Family Service Centre. His presentation was an examination of the efficacy of the Enhanced Wrap around Care (eWac) programme. From the

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perspective of the FSC, working alone is not enough as the families have multiple needs. The study was a comparative study of 20 families, 10 families under the eWac and 10 who receive regular services from the FSC, to highlight the progress and differences of the different approaches. Using blind raters, it was discovered that families under the eWac show greater improvements in a shorter amount of time. In terms of progress markers, these families had 11 progresses compared to 6 for those receiving regular services.

This reinforces the idea that traditional casework counselling is more tedious and time consuming as it has only one caseworker handling the case as opposed to the many helping hands approach under eWac. Another factor is that there are more resources that can be used for a particular family and the time taken for intervention is shorter. Cases can also be tracked over a longer period of time. For the families, because the other agencies that are helping are Malay/Muslim organizations, this helped the FSCs understand the cultural nuances as well. However, he felt that due to a high incidence of medical issues, there should be medical social workers to join in this approach as well as other relevant agencies. This will allow for a greater improvement in the approaching of helping these families.

For the final presentation, Mr Sazali discussed on the relevance of the NUR Integrated programme. The programme itself was to provide youths who face difficulties to have someone to talk to and to provide help. From 2006, the inception of the programme, to now, the number of calls and cases has decreased dramatically. The study is to understand why this is so. The study encompasses the youths themselves as well as the social service landscape provided for these youths. Therefore, there are focus group interviews with a range of youths as well as interviews with schools and agencies providing help.

This was also to look into alternative models of help. Issues arising from the focus group interviews with the youths show that they are aware of the helplines but are not aware of the NUR helpline. Further results show that young males do not perceive their problems to be issues that require attention. Currently, according to Mr Sazali, they are looking into the services that schools provide and these services are comprehensive. National agencies also have a wide range of programmes for the youths in need. These findings will then be shared with the NUR partners to improve the programme.

The question-and-answer session was focused on providing a more comprehensive framework for all three case studies. There were gaps that within each case study that were found during the presentations and the questions allow for a greater exploration of the case studies. For example, there were questions on the use of social factors to examine eWac, comprehensive use of indicators to ensure fidelity of the findings to expand the utility of the studies. All in all, the question-and-answer serves to improve the studies and its utility.