

Dear Team

Over past few weeks we have been linking parents and caregivers residing in the neighbourhoods we serve to the citizen conversations that are happening in Singapore which have been attended by more than 20,000. On 9th May, 5 parents were present at “Our Singapore Conversation on Education” and since then, there have been 3 other conversations specifically for the Malay Muslim Community.

SuaraMusyawarah which is Malay for “Voices in Purposeful Discussion” is an Independent Committee set up to engage the Malay Muslim community. This Committee will be making recommendations to the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs on areas of concerns needing attention. Hence, we thought that by joining the conversation, our Malay Muslim members will get a chance to play a part in revealing the collective aspirations of Singaporeans.

When we asked a father of 2 children if he would be interested to attend the conversation on education, he said “Yes!” without any hesitation. He told us that he was glad that he will have the opportunity to voice the difficulties his children were having in school and he also wanted to hear if others shared his views. The other parents who returned from the same conversation shared that it was initially intimidating to be in a discussion with people who appeared much better educated than them but as the evening progressed, they realised that they shared similar concerns for their children. We were really glad that these parents did not shy away from the opportunity.

Remembering to include people and facilitating their involvement in the activities of the community is a small gesture that can have a significant impact on their well-being. A man on a wheelchair made sure he got to the conversation that was being conducted in his neighbourhood simply because he was invited. He shared that he was honoured and grateful to be invited and would contribute constructively. Like this man, participants took the conversations seriously and one suggestion I thought that I would mention is how rental for HDB Flats should be calculated. Currently, it is calculated on a sliding scale based on one’s pay slip but one participant voiced that many dwelling in rental flats had large families and it may be more appropriate to base the rental on per capita instead of gross income. There is really nothing like hearing from the people experiencing a problem as they are definitely part of the solution.

For a helping relationship to progress, the first thing we need to establish is that all parties must agree to be part of the solution. Our first duty is to convey with compassion and respect our position that we are here to help people help themselves and ensure that our members fully appreciate and accept this. Then we must be as helpful as we can be but courageously & humbly confront the situation if our efforts erode our position.

Wishing our Buddhist members a blessed Vesak Day and may all of us experience compassion and clarity of purpose in our lives. Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity. - The Buddha*