



# The life situations and experiences of youths who were with Beyond in the '80s and '90s

A Retrospective Study conducted between Aug 2011 and Jan 2012

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## **Introduction**

### **Aims**

This research aims to take stock of Beyond's vision crafted in the year 2000, at our strategic review, that "By 2025, every child and youth in Singapore, despite a disadvantaged background has the opportunity to refuse a lifestyle of delinquency and welfare dependency."

A decade on, while undergoing a programme review with the support of the Management Board's Programme committee, the need to evaluate if Beyond was meeting the requirements to achieve this vision, arose. The research was undertaken with the following objectives so we could learn about ourselves and changes in the operating terrain, in order to plan for the years ahead.

### *Objectives of the Study*

- To understand the current life situations of Beyond's past beneficiaries with specific reference to Beyond's vision
- To understand and describe the experiences of being with Beyond that have affected or impacted the lives of past beneficiaries.
- To explore the possibility, relevance of concepts, perspectives and methodologies to be used for the tracking of all service-users in Beyond.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The primary objective of the study is to understand the current life situations of the past beneficiaries, with the hope that it would inform the practice to achieve the desired impact.

We combined a structured survey questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow for richer narratives and to give a voice to the beneficiaries. A select group of respondent to the quantitative study agreed to the in depth interviews.

Four broad parameters have been used to understand socio economic situations of past beneficiaries at the point of the study:

1. Educational achievement
2. Employment
3. Position with the law
4. Household income

Questions were added on social capital (both who the respondents could turn to for help, and their involvement in their local community), well-being measured by the perceptions they had of current issues in their lives, as well as a ranking of how helpful Beyond's

interventions were in the areas of financial assistance, education, keeping them out of trouble, and improvements in family relationships.

The qualitative method was to understand and describe the beneficiaries experiences with Beyond and how the participant views Beyond’s impact in their lives, if any.

Quantitative Study (30 respondents)	Qualitative in-depth interviews (9 interviews)
<p>The structured survey questionnaire is loosely ordered in the following way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demographic data: Age, status, etc.</li> <li>2. Parametric data based off the four indicators: Educational achievement, employment, position with the law, household income (indicators of general well-being and social capital were also included)</li> <li>3. Beyond related data: who they remembered best? What did they remember most? Likert scales indicating satisfaction with the services rendered</li> </ol>	<p>The semi-structured interview mirrored the questionnaire in terms of the domains of interest to be measured.</p> <p>The interview allowed us to capture, in their own terms, how they view their own lives, what their journey was like, and how Beyond has impacted them.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do beneficiaries view their own lives? What is success for them?</li> <li>2. What was their journey like to get to where they are now? What role did Beyond play?</li> <li>3. Who were the other stakeholders in their journey? What role did the community play, and what is Beyond’s role in strengthening that community?</li> <li>4. What are the experiences of the beneficiaries with Beyond – and what aspects helped them, and what did not?</li> <li>5. What aspects about Beyond and its programmes can they specifically draw linkages to their current life situations?</li> </ol>

### Sampling

The sample was drawn from beneficiaries listed in Beyond’s database since we computerised our records. A sorting of all entries were done, based on the following :

- Participants should have been at least below 21 when they were known to Beyond.
- Be at least 25 years old in 2011, at the launch of the study

It was decided we will include only those 25 years and above, as that was the average age a Singaporean got married and established a family, and as such in a relatively more stable and independent phase in their lives. There were 2 respondents who were 22 years and one respondent who was 23 years. They have been left in the sample as they are leading independent lives and were able to share their experiences with clarity.

However, it was not possible to do a purely random sample, as many contact details had changed, and past beneficiaries could not be traced. As such, participants referred their friends who they had kept in touch with or were beneficiaries who had maintained contact with staff in Beyond.

In this instance, as the respondent sampling was self-select the sample population differs somewhat from the generally higher number of Malay males that Beyond serves who are from families that are higher in numbers of single parents, step and blended families than the local population.

### *Analysis*

The design of the study was limited to self-report and the data collected should only be used as a snapshot of where the participants are today, how they got there and what they recall of their time in Beyond Social Services. Being aware of the many different factors that impact their lives, Beyond's contribution was assessed when participants explicitly talked about how Beyond has helped them.

Due to the sampling methods, size of sample and the exploratory nature of this study, any of the findings elucidated here cannot be generalised to the larger population. Rather, the analysis of the data is descriptive in nature and should be used to form a picture of what our service users are like, their experiences and suggest the grouping of meaningful elements that they found helpful or supportive.

In this light, information is processed by using the measures of central tendency to represent aggregations which represent normative groupings of individuals based on one perspective utilising measurements of the parameters of the study.

At the same time, because we are experimenting with the types of methodologies in measuring socio-economic and subjective well-being, it is important that we do not ignore the variability of individual differences presented to us by the data. In fact, it is the individual accounts of participants (especially in the qualitative study) that will inform us on how multi-faceted the nature of our service users lives can be. This, in turn, will inform and suggest the theories and hypothesis that will be used in the tracking of service users in Beyond.

### *Ethical Issues*

Participants were thoroughly briefed on the confidentiality of the study. Details and specific names would not be used in the final report, and any personal information would be securely kept and disposed of.

Participants were also given the choice to stop the survey/ interview at any time, or abstain from answering any questions they were uncomfortable with.

## **The structure of the report**

The report is presented in two distinct parts organised by the findings from the quantitative study in Part (A) and the qualitative study in Part (B). Where possible, the qualitative findings are interspersed with quantitative findings. We have refrained from doing this in areas where the results could be misinterpreted or where the qualitative findings have been more perceptions than facts.

We have attempted to highlight

- Facts ie the key indicators that the study covered
- Interpretations based on the responses of the participants
- Critical analysis based on how the practice can be informed by these responses.

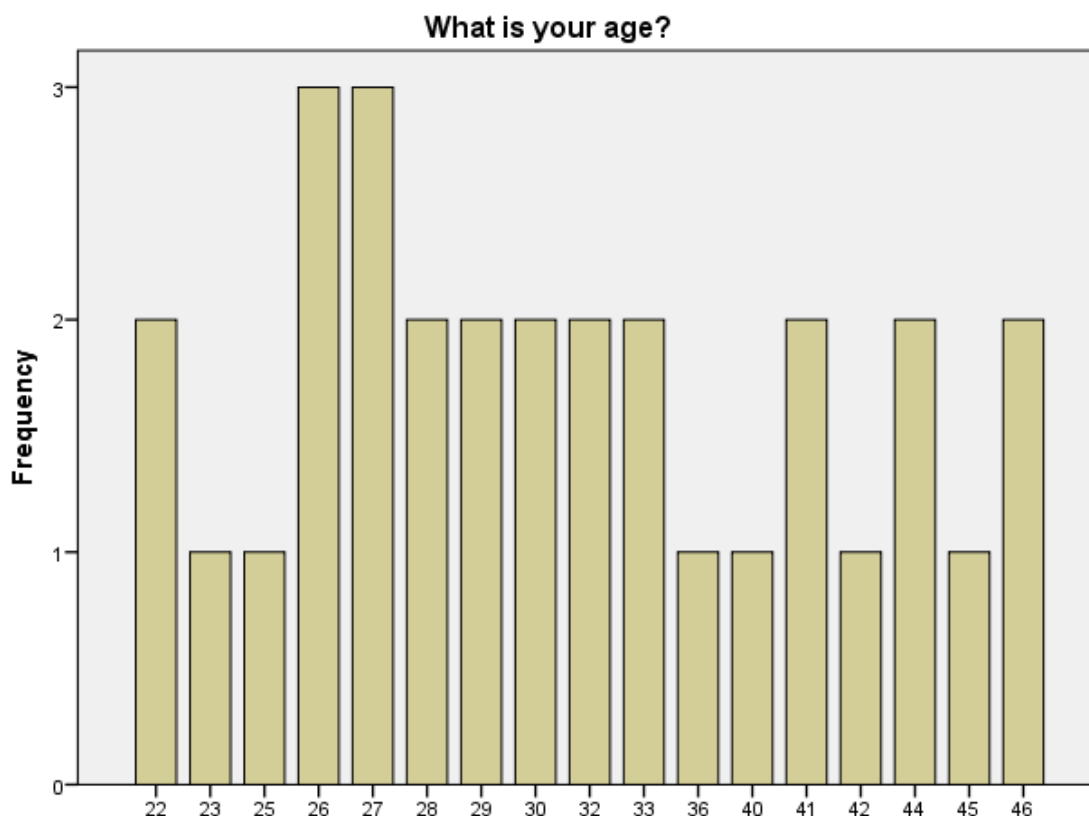
## **Findings**

### **(A) QUANTITATIVE**

#### **Demographics**

The descriptive statistics must be taken in light of our sampling characteristics which tended to be adults within a certain age range that were usually friends that hung out together in Beyond. However, as a rough measure, it is also indicative of the ethnicity, religion, and family background of the clients we serve.

The age range at time of interview was from 22 years to 46 years, and a majority of the respondents were male (63.3%). Unlike the population Beyond serves which is largely Malay, the majority of respondents were Chinese (66.7% or 20 persons).



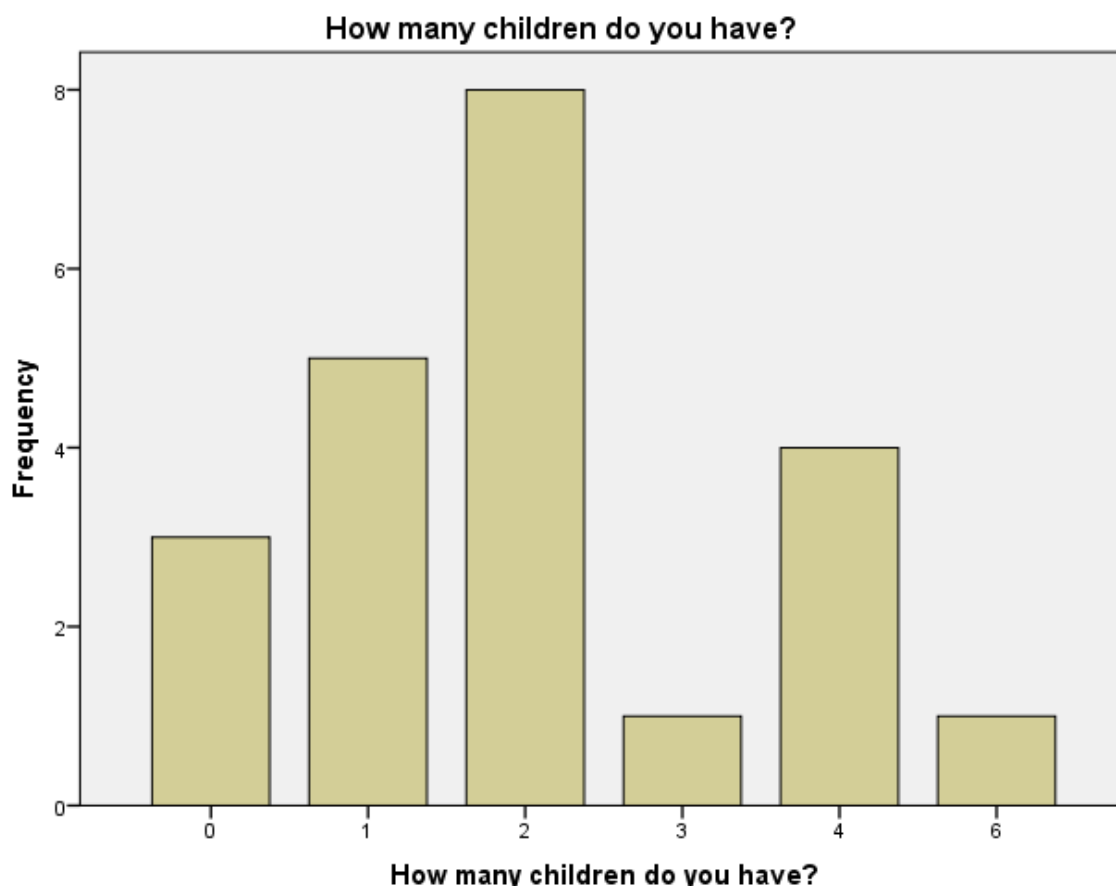
**Marital Status and family**

63.3% stated they currently lived with their original families, while the remaining were part of single parent, step or blended families.

With a uniform sampling of participants aged 22 to 46, we can compare our statistics of the participant population with distributions in the local population in order to see how beneficiaries in Beyond are skewed.

Of the respondents, 53.3% (16) were married, 23.3% (7) were single and the others were separated or divorced at the time of survey.

Disregarding single participants, the distribution of the number of children centred around 2.09 per family.



The large proportion of those without children was due to the participants that were single.

**Housing**

Most of the beneficiaries in our sample lived in owned or rented HDB flats with 3 or 4 rooms. This seemed reasonable for the number of people living in their house which centred around 4 per household.

Type of Property	Number of rooms (Range)	Mean number of people per household (Range)	Mean number per household / Number of rooms
Landed / Condo	4 (3-5)	4 (4)	1
Owned HDB	4.12 (3-6)	4.12(1-8)	1
Rented HDB	1.4 (1-2)	4.9 (1-12)	<b>3.5</b>

However, the researchers noted that the variation of the number of people per household living was quite large with a standard deviation of 2.4. While most households residing in condominiums or landed property had 4 heads per household with very little variation, households living in rented and owned HDB flats had a very large range from 1 to 12

residents in the household. This is particularly troubling for those in rented HDB flats with only 1 to 2 rooms as it indicates 3.5 heads to 1 room in these flats.

### **Financial Situation & employment**

There is a strong correlation between income per capita and the subjective responses of individuals on their financial situation. Generally, households with less than \$600 per capita report that they are spending more than they can earn.

Based on that threshold, about 40% of past beneficiaries have an income per capita of <\$600, even though only 13.3% complain of spending more than they can earn.

Almost all (with the exception of 1) who report having just enough or spending more than they can earn are living in rented HDB flats. Furthermore, 6 of the 10 households in rental HDB report having arrears to pay off, ranging from hundreds to ten thousands. These individuals with arrears have an income per capita of \$262.50 each month (ranging from \$41.70 to \$583.33).

The majority of respondents were involved in full time employment (60%) although the income from the full-time jobs varied largely from \$500 to above \$5000, measured at \$500 intervals. Those looking for work (13.3%) had the lowest household incomes (below \$500 to \$3500) and the lowest income per capita ranges. Those employed part-time (13.3%) were holding jobs which paid from \$2500 to above \$5000.

Of the individuals that were not looking for work (13.3%), half reported spending more than they could earn (below \$500 to \$1000) and the other half reported saving regularly with household incomes of above \$5000. All of these participants were female and most cited the need to take care of their children, a consistent priority despite the disparate circumstances of both halves.

### **Education Status**

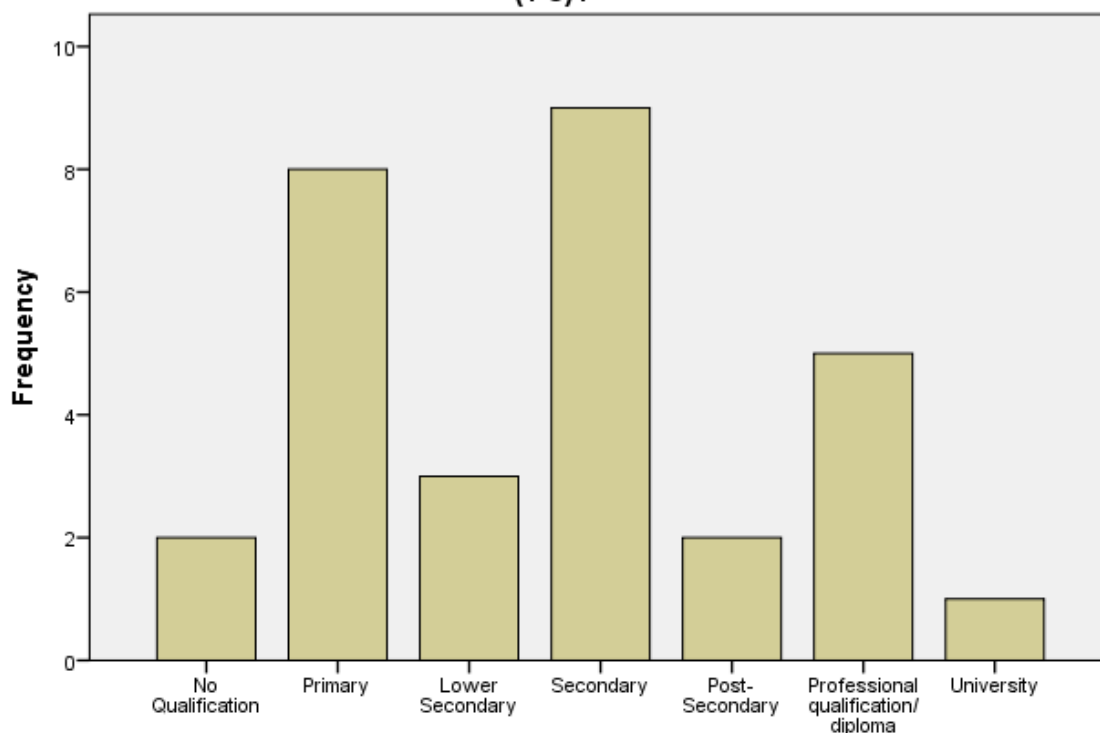
Highest level of education obtained was distributed such that a majority had obtained up to secondary education. 33.3% had primary level or no education (10), 10% (3) had gone up to lower secondary, 30% (9) had completed secondary and 26.7% (8) had post-secondary education ranging from professional qualification, diploma and degree.

Given the responses to the aspiration question on the qualification they would like to achieve, we charted the difference between a participants aspired highest qualification level and their obtained qualifications.

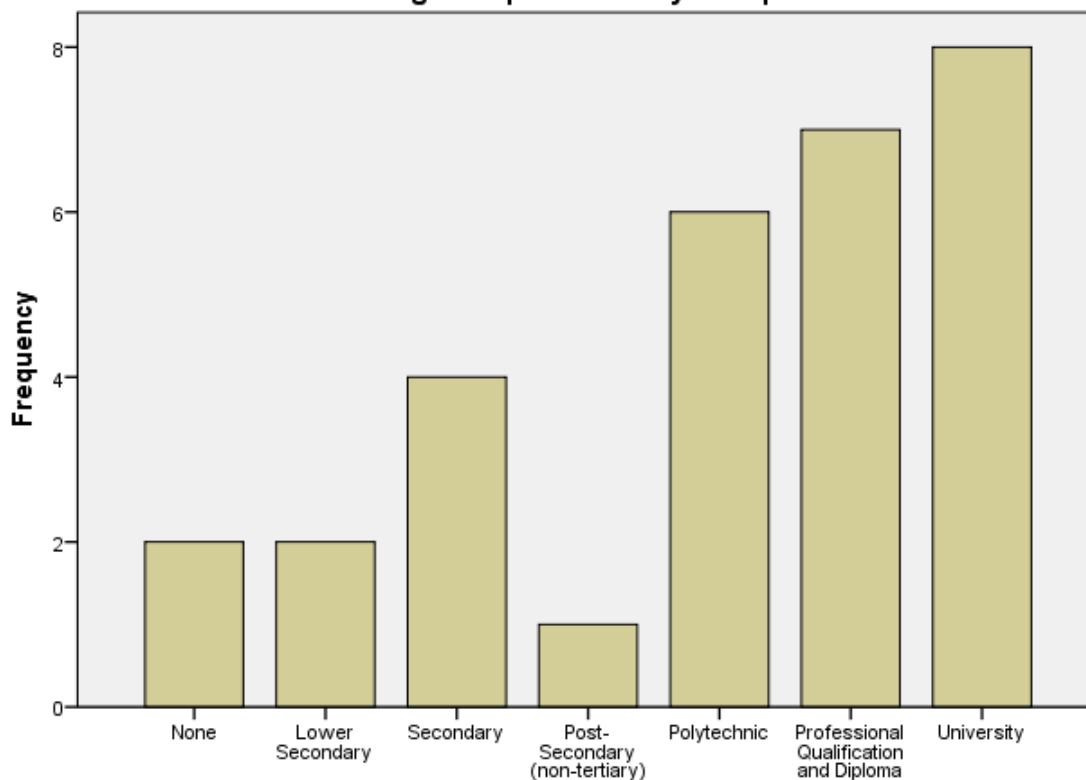
In general, 73.3% of the participants indicated some sort of aspiration to improve their education, and these participants aspired to usually 2-3 levels higher than their currently obtained level (e.g. Secondary to Polytechnic). However, only 18% of these participants were currently pursuing courses to reach their goal.



**If you have finished studying, what is the highest qualification you have obtained (1-8)?**



**What is the highest qualification you aspire to?**





Our data revealed a moderate but insignificant correlation with the highest educational level obtained and the household income (-.316). This suggests that those with higher education earned more. However, no correlation was found with regards to educational level obtained and income per capita, possibly due to the large variation in household sizes.

**Conflicts with the Law**

26% of past beneficiaries reported that they had gotten in trouble with the law. Half of these participants had gotten into trouble with the law once, while the other half had gotten into trouble with the law 2-5 times in their lives. All of these participants had stayed out of conflict with the law in the past year.

The range of crimes they had committed mainly centred on gang-related or drug-related activities.

**Challenges in the past year**

We asked respondents what were the kind of problems they faced in the last 12 months. These problems ranged from illness, law, financial, housing and relationship domains. A third of the participants reported no problems, while the remaining two-third had more than one problem in the last 12 months. On average, participants were struggling with 1.7 problems in their lives.

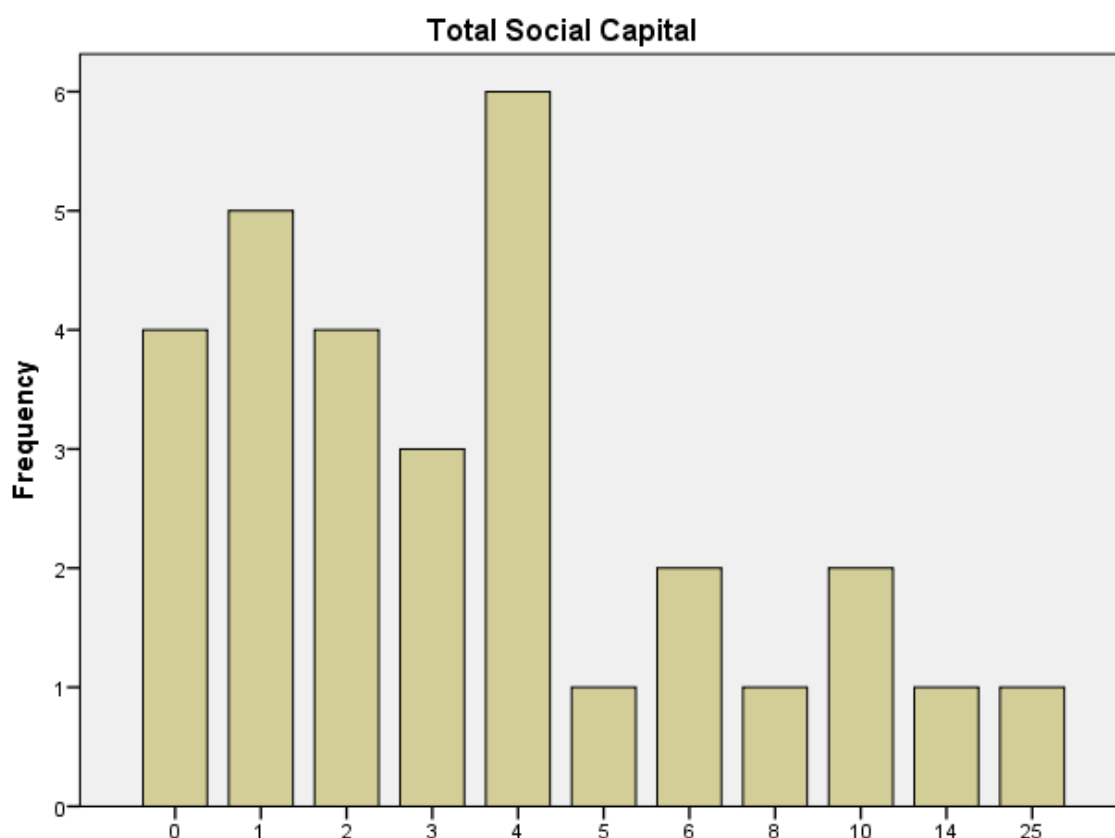
<b>Health</b>	<b>Financial</b>	<b>Law/Addiction</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
17 had health problems for themselves or family members. - 4 lost a member of the family - 6 had a member of the family with a condition that requires constant care. - 8 had a member of the family hospitalised for a serious medical problem - 5 had a member of the family which was hurt/sick but not hospitalised.	8 highlighted a financial issue - 2 reported that a caregiver had lost his or her job - 2 reported that the family has difficulty in obtaining basic necessities - 5 reported that the family is in debt.	4 reported a problem with the law - 1 reported an addiction problem in the family - 4 reported a member of the family arrested or in jail.	4 reported housing issues - 2 reported being unable to find stable housing - 2 reported being very crowded where they lived	6 had family relationship issues - 2 reported that parents were separated or divorced - 1 reported a child/ youth in the family put into institutions - 3 reported arguing a lot in the family.

From our study, it seems almost all participants (except 1) who reported multiple problems reported at least 1 health related problem. Those who reported problems with finances seemed more likely to also report problems with the law and more likely to have housing issues. However, there is not enough of a large sample size to confirm such a finding.

On average the 20 recipients that reported problems in the past 12 months reported that they were moderately satisfied that the crisis was well resolved (2.78/ 5)

**Social Capital**

In measuring social capital we posed 4 questions to participants. The first 3 comprised of who they can turn to for help in terms of family, friends and neighbours. The last question pertained to how the participant has helped his community and neighbours in the past 12 months. In general, most respondents reported about 4.33 individuals whom they could turn to in their family and friends (2.1 from family, and 2.23 from friends).



In addition to friends and family, we found that participants were generally not that close to their neighbours. The mode was 0, with a mean of 1.63 which indicated none or limited contact with their neighbours. The most frequent type of favours done amongst neighbours was borrowing something other than money.

However, the amount of contributions to the community was substantial. Most participants (86.7%) reported helping their neighbourhood or community in one or more ways with an

average of 2. 16 respondents donated to a charity. 10 respondents volunteered in an organisation. 8 respondents were involved with community activities. 12 respondents helped their neighbours. 10 respondents helped a stranger. 1 respondent voiced their opinion to a public official to improve their community.

<b>Contribution</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>
Donating to charity	16
Volunteered in a helping organisation	10
Involved in community activities	8
Helped their neighbours	12
Helped a stranger	10
Voiced their opinion to an official	1

See Qualitative Study findings under the heading “Social Capital” for more information on how respondents described the support they have within their family and community.

### **Well Being**

An important finding of the study is the wide variation that comes out from the results when participants are asked how they feel about their lives in the past year. In highlighting the successes and challenges in their lives over the past year, the perspectives which participants take can be both be surprising and refreshing.

What we take away from these accounts, which form a significant proportion of the feedback, is that success and well-being is defined very differently according to the individual.

While there are many who struggle with issues of employment or housing, it does not necessarily mean that for them, a secondary school education or taking on more employment is a means to achieve that end given their circumstances. For some, such a route to “independence” does not seem viable given their circumstance, and for others, while survival is important, financial independence is not the primary goal which makes their lives worth living.

Instead many individuals view their lives as successful despite being financially poor or uneducated or getting in trouble with the law.

### **Support from Beyond**

Each participant was asked how Beyond was helpful in four different aspects in their lives: financial situation, pursuing their education, staying out of trouble, improving family relationships. Responses ranged from 1 (very unhelpful) to 5 (very helpful). Many respondents answered with not applicable (blank) as they felt that they had no problems in that particular area, or that they did not seek out that kind of help from Beyond.

Here is the average score for each aspect, as indicated by the respondents :

<b>Improving financial</b>	<b>Pursuing education</b>	<b>Staying out of trouble with the law</b>	<b>Improving family relationships</b>
3.78 (quite helpful)	4.11 (helpful)	3.88 (quite helpful)	3.42

See Qualitative Study findings under the heading “Beyond’s service model” for more information on the service user experience, as shared by the participants.

## **(B) QUALITATIVE**

This qualitative research of the retrospective study aims to understand the various experiences of the past beneficiaries and ascertain the impact of Beyond’s work on their lives, in their own words.

The paper intends to claim a working model of services where youths and adults in communities are partners with providers. The measures of ‘success’ are not limited to individual change, but are tied to improving the conditions that spawn problems. The in-depth interviews explored:

- How do those involved view the effort?
- What constitutes success for them?
- What has the impact of the effort been?
- How has the effort itself demonstrated the changes it sought to create in the community?

### *Methodology*

There were a total of 9 in-depth interviews based on a discussion guide that spanned the above points. The focus of our analysis is the people who told us about their lives. It is a way of uncovering and exploring the meaning that underpin people’s lives. People’s stories are an important means to understand our subjects better.

The qualitative information was coded into a self-programmed database that consisted of 12 codes. Each category had several sub categories to allow more fine-tuned analysis.

<b>1. Beyond’s service model</b>	<b>2. Self</b>	<b>3. Others</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with Beyond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education - Self, Aspiration, Family</li> <li>• Employment - Self, Family/household.</li> <li>• Housing - Type, Ownership, Others</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Economic situation</li> <li>• Well- Being - Negative, Positive, Coping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Structure - Past &amp; Present</li> <li>• Relationships - Family</li> <li>• Social Capital</li> <li>• Hopes for Children - Future</li> </ul>

There is interplay of various factors in everybody's life that contributes to what they are today. Social competence, self-direction, self-esteem, the acquisition of values, standard of conduct and preparation in life skills, are complex by-products of interactions in families, in school, in the workplace, with peers, friends and neighbours and in exposure to community organization and institutions.

For the purposes of the report, it has been structured into Beyond's service model, Self and Others, as per the table above:

### (1) Beyond's service model

- People make a difference, experiences make a difference

Perhaps the most striking feature of the study was that it brought out the salience of the human element in our service model. Beyond has always placed a large emphasis on maintaining a personal relationship with our beneficiaries, and this was affirmed in the accounts of our beneficiaries.

By and large, when asked about what they remember most about Beyond, it is the influence of staff, volunteers and significant events that underpins the impact Beyond has had in their lives. In contrast, few of the youths in Beyond can recall exactly what programme they were in, or what that programme was trying to achieve for them. Instead, it is a kind or admonishing word from a person in their lives that seemed to make an indelible difference - a person that they respected, or viewed as a friend, or simply showed a genuine interest in their lives.

For these individuals, despite whatever happened in the intervening years, the memories of those who served as role-models helped them to cope with the challenges or setbacks that came their way. For some, it was simply a reminder that someone had believed the best of them, for others it even became a guide that shaped their own career development in working with other youths.

*"Everybody deserves a chance. Yes this is what I learnt. Everybody deserves a chance and I learnt from Sister that there is something good about someone, no matter they are convicts, criminals. There must be something good in them. We need to see the strengths in them not their weakness"*

In no small part was this role played by volunteers. Despite being unable to remember any sort of structured programme, most beneficiaries fondly remember activities that were associated with volunteers who they remember by name and express the desire to get in touch with again.

- Sense of belonging / Staff and volunteers

Kit and Jen, now 46, still have the memories of the Youth United Group. They had close friends because of the Youth United Group and they were all called '*the crazy girls*' by volunteer Eng Ang because of their mischievous activities.

Tim, 33, Charlie, 36 and Han, 32, are still in touch with their friends whom they met in Beyond when they were kids. They regularly meet up even now. Richard still considers them as his true friends.

*From the NC days, are you still in touch with all the friends?*

*Richard : " Yes yes yes. We are pretty close. So this is the group wherever I am in any trouble, emotionally or anything...I will call them. So even financially, if I were to....I would call them".*

Tim still remembers staff and volunteers Swee Kee, Chun Wai and Yik. His ability to see bad things in the neighbourhood and understand their effects was a great learning from the volunteers. Charlie, a former youth and now a social worker, mentions that his memories of Sisters' passion inspired him to do Youth work.

The influence of volunteers and their support have had a great impact. The respondents clearly remember the volunteers by their names although it has been a long time getting in touch with Beyond again. Apart from the activities which engaged them productively and kept them out of trouble with law, the influence of volunteers in guiding, counselling and instilling good moral values was persistent.

They associate most of the activities with the volunteers and their influence has been immense. It highlights the role of volunteers in a community welfare organization. This concept can be directed towards capacity building of volunteers.

Peter feels that Beyond's support is still there for him and this assures him to look forward.

Yati's association with 'Bukit Ho Swee' started since the age of 12 when both her parents were incarcerated. Beyond ensured that her brothers went to school and were out of trouble. She still treasures the photograph when everyone from Beyond came for her wedding. She considers volunteers Beng Leng, Anna, Mathew, Ming Huat, Rebecca and Rebecca's husband very supportive.

- Safe, warm space

The interactions of the beneficiaries with Beyond has never been purely a client-welfare relationship. It has been like a place which has been described as '*Shelter*', '*open space*', '*warm place*', '*playground*' and '*hangout place*'.

One can derive the concept of 'space' when the beneficiaries recalled their days with Beyond. Most of them belonged to difficult families and disturbed neighbourhoods. Nazareth Centre was a 'shared social space' and it was a 'perceived space for freedom'. It enabled them to build social networks.

Han is grateful the way Nazareth Centre was run. He felt it gave him and other youth a free space for grooming and development - 'an open environment'.

Richard considered Nazareth Centre as his shelter when he was a child but found Beyond's environment very unfriendly and formal when he visited recently. With respect to identifying any service gaps the concept of 'social space' can be rebuilt. The Family Learning Centre perhaps provides this type of space

Han is 32 now. He was introduced to Nazareth Centre when he was 5 years old. *"NC became a place for us, to hold us for our games ...everything. It was also our meeting area".* He enjoyed the camps and outings. *"My first camping was when I was 6 years old, At Punggol, Punggol track 13, I still remember"*

The beneficiaries still remember it as Nazareth Centre which has drawn in people for reasons like difficult family backgrounds, poverty and lack of amenities to engage children. It was regarded as an 'open space' and 'free environment' to interact with close friends which gave them a sense of ownership. The proximity of Nazareth Centre and childcare provisions were support provided by Beyond in the early stages, and have played an important role in shaping their future.

- Programmes

The support provided in the form of food rations, school pocket money, sponsorship for activities have helped the beneficiaries in pursuing further education.

The activities to engage the beneficiaries were varied and were very useful to keep the kids with family difficulties out of trouble. Soccer, carpentry, learning to cook in the cafe, magic, computer classes, and outdoor games would not have been easily possible to avail for the beneficiaries with the kind of background they had. Parents preferred their kids to hang around in Beyond rather than anywhere else as it was *"the problematic neighbourhood"*.

Tim feels that the programs designed in Nazareth Centre by the volunteers have helped him to understand the kids well when he started volunteering with Beyond because he could relate to them and their situation.



## (2) Self

- Education, Employment and Housing

Those who did not get an opportunity to complete their education due to family responsibility or they were on the wrong side of the law, have come a long way with various changes. They have shown emphasis on skill based education like 'child care course' and 'F&B certificate' and also a series of job changes for better exposure.

Yati aspired to at least finish PSLE but could not due to heavy responsibilities. Two of her brothers went to ITE but the other two decided to quit their studies as they wanted to work. She had done different types of jobs to sustain her livelihood. She worked part time at a shopping centre and also sold curry puffs at public places. She has aspirations to be a child care assistant. Her son has grown up and is doing N level. *"I am very happy, I am proud of it. My daughter's PSLE results are also better, good results"*

Peter has a certificate in F&B. He is proud of his high score in English in the government approved CAP test. He has worked in many well-known cafes and restaurants in Singapore. Currently, he is working at a *chic* deli cum bakery near Tiong Bahru and earns around \$1400 per month and with overtime he earns about \$1800. Peter even conducts cooking classes at a home for boys. He has built a very good relationship with his boss and he is very happy about it. *"One day if he sees me open a Bakery shop he would be very happy that's my success"*.

Han is working in the Singapore Armed forces for the past 15 years; he finds his job 'meaningful' as he enjoys guiding and engaging the young National service men.

There is a prevalence of satisfaction in terms of finding the job 'meaningful', 'build trust with my boss' 'interaction with colleagues makes me feel happy". Another feature of those who have had an opportunity to pursue their regular education in schools is their aspirations for higher education like 'MBA' and PhD. They find their job scope challenging and competitive. They have desires to strengthen their career. Charlie, a social worker at a Family Service Centre aspires to do Phd in future.

Richard had a very difficult childhood. He never got any guidance from his father as his father was never around. He used to stay out of his home late nights and used to come home at 3am to sleep during his primary school days.

Now, he is 27, working as a technician and also pursuing a degree in engineering. He regularly donates to Community Chest. He owes it to his teacher for her guidance. *'Every day after school on certain days I will go to this teacher's house. We have a lesson over there for 4 hours every week, just to do Chinese. She will also bring us out to eat. When we go to her house we are treated like we are her children. You will feel very bad if you don't appreciate. So, we are very grateful. That's why I am very fortunate to have a lot of very nice people around me.'*

- Law

Peter was in prison for serious cases involving theft and murder. He is still in touch with his fellow ex-offenders and they help each other in finding jobs. He volunteers with Beyond and goes for kayaking with the children and participates in organising activities with the families. He strongly feels that his story will help the young minds. He does not want that circumstances should mould them because it is very difficult to bear it.

His association with religious organizations has helped him in coping with the past and overcome negative emotions. *"I actually applied for the Christian Intensive Religious Counselling Program which is an 18 month full time programme conducted in Prison. The person who interviewed me was actually worried if I could do it because it is very intensive. However he still decided to take me."*

*"The program taught us life-skills through religious teachings. It taught us how to overcome negative emotions and anger. It helped me to learn English and know more about the religion and respect all the believers."*

*"So I learnt to read, to apply spiritual teachings in my life. There is still some anger in me but it is better now. I still need to support family and balance work pressure."*

*"That's why when I was in Prison I thought back about a lot of things, recall back on how Beyond really helped me and encouraged me & I feel very sad. I realised people actually never give up on me but I gave up on myself, never gave myself a chance. I decided when I come out I will actually call Gerard to apologize to him."*

Peter has incurred problems in terms of arrears with HDB but there is a motivation to help himself *'Actually my church member wanted to help me to settle but I said no...people try to pay back but the thing is in the end I do not really feel so good because I try to help myself, try to take the challenge'*

### **(3) Others**

- Social Capital

Social capital determines many socioeconomic outcomes. The respondents had supporting factors in their environment that built their aspirations and further fortified their aims. The contributions by the respondents' siblings, parents and spouses have played an important role in sharing the responsibility, or easing the individual's burden.

Social capital is highly interrelated with their well-being and coping with their difficulties with various issues in life like law, health and psychosocial support. Social capital is derived from various sources like relationship with family members, friends and people in the

community. The sense of achievement is very subjective and is attributed to community work, associations with religious organizations.

Tim has a close knit family. He is newly married and his parents stay with him. They have a healthy relationship and his parents let him have his own decisions. His sisters are married and stay nearby and they all care for their parents.

Peter never liked staying with his family because he always liked to hang out with the other kids. Moreover he never had a strong bond with his mother because of her addiction problem. After his release from prison he is staying with his parents in a one room rental flat at Jalan Besar. He has started taking responsibilities for his mother and his relationship with his mother is improving. He gave a surprise by buying a cake for her on her birthday.

Fitri lived with his two siblings and parents till he turned 18. He moved out with his girlfriend and now they are married. Whenever he has a problem he talks to his father. He is very comfortable with him and they are like 'friends'.

- Caring for the community

Tim still comes back to see the old neighbourhood. It is cleaner because of the renovation but has also lost a lot of things of the past. There are no more green patches where children used to play. He finds children very pampered now unlike those during his days of hardship and survival where one built resilience by being exposed to various hardships. However he does not want to impose anything on them but would definitely guide them along.

Richard, Kit and Jen are concerned about the present generation. *"When we are young we fought for ourselves. We defend ourselves. Nowadays children do not go out and mix."* They feel that children do not socialise and they are active only on social networking sites. Richard considers the present generation very 'cold'. There is lack of interaction face to face. He fears that *"they will see loss of things that I used to cherish"*.

Peter wants to build relationship with the children in the neighbourhood, he wants to provide support for them, especially the ones with difficult relationships with their parents.

Jen wants her children to do their 'duty' for the country

- Hope for their children

Aspirations for better life is reflected by the fact that that they have taken charge of their lives and are currently helping themselves for better job opportunities and their children in pursuing education. They are looking forward to a better future.

Kit and Yati want their children to be well settled unlike their days of struggle and hardships.

There is a constant comparison between their own days and the present generation in terms of economy and as well as relationships. There is a hope for better future for their children and also in the community.

Tim wants to see his own children grow the same way he grew up. *"It's like going through maybe a rough sea. Like you are on a boat and the sea is rough and it's just how you make the survival skills to get through this rough patch. And once you clear the storm itself you will find the sun is always there."* He feels that exposure to different things helps to build resilience and identity.

There is an urge to improve on their past economic standing and plan for better lives for their children. Kit has seen tough days in her childhood. She gave up her studies and started working when she turned 16. She has worked hard, changed jobs for better exposure and saved to give her children better lives and good education. *"After my first child I saved for renovation. Two years later I got my flat. I planned for my second child. So save, save, save. Rich parents different thing. Our parents have no money. This is how we survive"*.

Right now her daughter is studying in UniSIM and her son is in Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Jen repeatedly mentions *'We fought for our own survival'*. She belonged to a poor family. *"Our time we cannot even afford. What we had every day on our table was plain porridge'*. Now her children are in United Kingdom to pursue their further education.

Yati's ex-husbands have served long terms in jail due to drug abuse. She had Beyond's support when she was young. Right now her children attend programmes in Beyond as well. She has arrears with PUB but she has got CDC and HDB's support. She has close family support. She is worried that her kids are facing the same problems when she was a kid. However she is doing much better now. She feels stronger and able to cope better *"then settle step by step because I think I can manage the time when I was young why not now"*. Her parents have changed too, they are out of prison. Her siblings are doing alright. Her children are fine and she has a sense of achievement *"My son plays football with Pei Kang's team (staff at Beyond), now he is going to join another team. My son, one day he wants to become a footballer he tells me he wants to represent Singapore."*

At the same time, Yati is disturbed by the fact that there is a repeated pattern in her life. Beyond supported her when she was young and now her kids are with Beyond.

*"The problem is my own family - my ex-husband and my children. I have got back to the same problem after 12 years, last time when my brothers were small, my parents went to Prison. Now when my children are small my husbands are imprisoned. You understand or not?"*

However, she feels she is coping with the situation, with support from others.

## **Observations from Qualitative Study**

The beneficiaries have strong coping skills which have contributed immensely to their current life situation. It has contributed to their resilience and vice versa. Their views of their own crisis or life situations have made them stronger and they feel they are able to deal with new challenges. They have helped themselves by working hard, building networks in the community and finding different resources to make their lives better.

In the process, a few of the beneficiaries are giving back to the community because they understand the struggle of surviving with crisis. Some are donating and a few of them are regular volunteers in their own community and organizations.

## **(C) CONCLUSION**

As a snapshot of how then youths who were in Beyond are faring now, how they look back on their lives and the way Beyond has contributed to them, our respondents have grown to be resilient individuals with a unique life story. While we are encouraged to see that most of Beyond's past youths are in many ways stable, it is perhaps this variation of life trajectories which is the most important finding of all.

The findings and interviews compel us to acknowledge that many other factors -- such as religion, marriage, hardship and intrapersonal factors -- play a large role in the development of these individuals and account for both who they are, as well as where they are now. Importantly, social capital and interpersonal relationships are integral and powerful agents in transforming at-risk youth into well-balanced adults who now contribute in different ways in the communities they are a part of now.

We observe that many of these factors are present within the natural community these youths belong to, and that conversely, the youths themselves form communities of their own and play integral roles with their friends and family. This suggests that working within communities and building communities will have powerful indirect effects on the well-being of our service users.

This study also serves as a reminder that we are not in control of their lives, and our efforts to 'shape' development must be seen within the vast context of their experiences. The stories also suggest how we should sometimes step back and appreciate the choices and paths that our youth's take. While their choices may not appear optimal in the economically-driven, goal-oriented sense, their hardships and successes contribute to their resilience in ways that are non-linear, but experiential and valuable for well-balanced adulthood.

At the same time, it is gratifying to know that our efforts in their lives have seldom gone unnoticed. Beyond's impact is not limited to the indicators of financial stability, as shared by

the respondents. It is greatly appreciated and felt in different ways, mostly through the relationships with staff and volunteers. Its effect is subtle, but noticeably present especially in the memories; an enduring awareness that there are people out there who genuinely accept them.

#### **(D) GOING FORWARD**

- For the research

The current study provides greater clarity for our ambition to track all youths in our purview until they are 25. In moving forward with the tracking, it is important that we objectively and continuously benchmark standards of living in Singapore.

With the varied factors and trajectories of individual's lives, tracking is principally an exercise in accountability and to deepen our understanding of the lives of our youth. Beyond's programmes will not be the main reason for the growth or change nor should we entirely reduce our youth's lives into a simple set of scales. Correspondingly, the studies should ensure that our measurements of individuals take in a wider perspective of the aspects that impact their lives.

- For the work

The retrospective study provokes us to reflect on what has worked for our youths and why. The feedback gathered and our understanding of the current population indicates that the same needs exist for youths today. Further, it is the dynamic interplay of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, either with the staff, volunteers or the natural environments they interact with are the largest factors that drive change.

The factors that nurture and support change, though varied, are best found in a conducive natural community. While we continue to support their material needs, Beyond's role is to encourage active citizenry with our youths, empowering residents to share ownership of the community and the members within it. The natural communities have to form a welcoming space where children and youth can feel accepted, and where they can serve as contributors, instead of being seen as the unfortunate dependents of social welfare. Thus, by recognising the strengths, contributions and successes of our youths in their communities (which may or may not be related to economic success), Beyond can facilitate a community environment that is important to bring up socially responsible and well-balanced children.

Secondly, the potential for authentic change comes from validating youth's own self-worth, empowering them to transform their own lives in the direction they see fit, by identifying and amplifying their strengths. We must also ensure that the personal touch between staff, volunteers and the community is maintained in order to journey with our youths in a humane way.