

CONTEXT OF STUDY

Beyond Social Services' Peer Learning
Circle Post-Evaluation



The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools and a turn to home-based learning for school-going children during the Circuit Breaker period.

It exposed a digital divide in Singapore where at least 1 in 10 households are not plugged into the digital world, resulting in adverse impacts on children's learning. In response to this,

Beyond Social Services (BSS) set out to develop an intervention in the community to mitigate the effects of the digital divide.





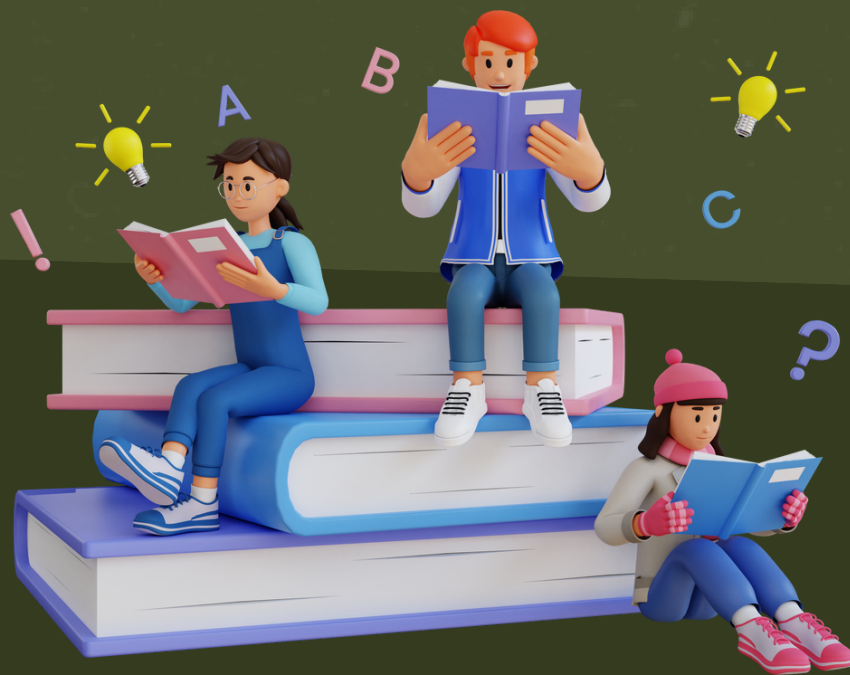
From a 'Theory of Change' exercise, BSS recognised that children in the rental flat community tended to lose out from home-based learning programs due to the lack of digital devices, poor quality of broadband connection, the lack of conducive space for learning and inadequate digital literacy.

After several conversations with the community and experts, BSS decided to implement 'Peer Learning Circles' (PLCs) to complement existing efforts by the government to mitigate the above-mentioned factors affecting children in the community.



Beyond addressing the digital aspects of learning, BSS aimed for PLCs to strengthen children's ownership of their own learning through volunteers facilitating a culture of children learning from one another in a conducive space. PLCs were eventually carried out in Lengkok Bahru, Ang Mo Kio and Whampoa. The exact form in which they were conducted varied according to the neighbourhood's characteristics.

Blackbox was commissioned to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of the intervention in three stages- from baseline to endline. Blackbox's study entailed comparing a treatment (students enrolled in BSS's learning programs) and control group of students (students not enrolled in BSS's learning programs).

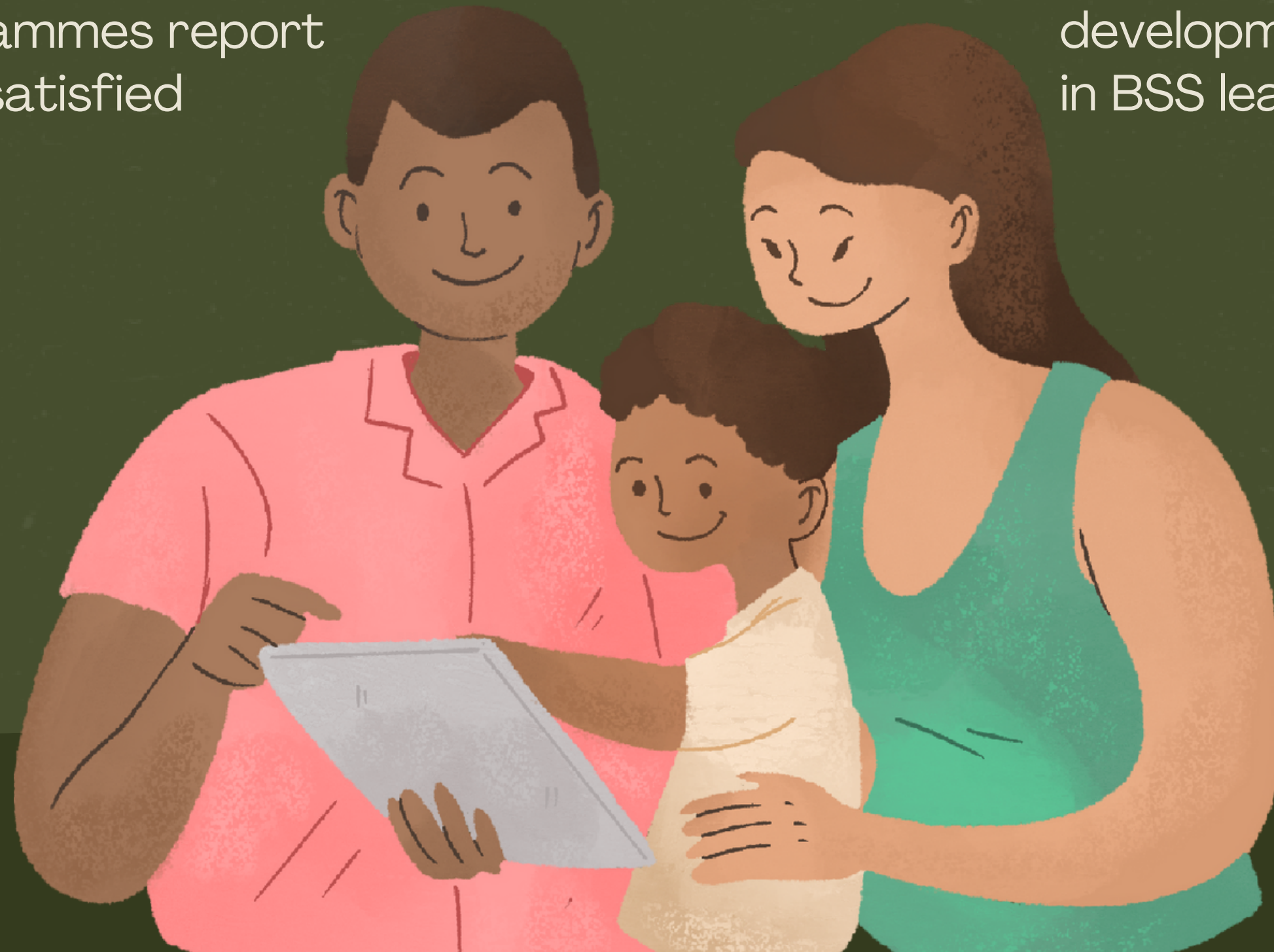




The study concluded with the following key findings about BSS's learning programmes in general and the PLC intervention more specifically:



90% of parents whose children participate in BSS learning programmes report that they are satisfied



56% reported seeing an improvement in their child's development since participating in BSS learning programmes.



74% OF STUDENTS ENJOY PARTICIPATING IN BSS LEARNING PROGRAMMES.

Particularly, most students in BSS learning programmes enjoy **studying together with friends** and **learning outside of school** compared to students in other learning programmes.



Parents notice that since enrolling their children in BSS' learning programmes, their children are having:



better relationships with them,
their peers and teachers,



and having better access to digital
devices as compared to those in
other learning programmes

However, compared to other learning programmes, BSS learning programmes fared poorer in parents' perceptions of their children's:

- learning capabilities,
- interest towards learning
- public speaking
- concentration levels
- access to a conducive learning space.



Nonetheless, outcomes for the most attended learning program BSS offers – ‘Learning Circles’ (a peer learning program), presented significantly positive results in all areas compared to all other learning programmes.

Among those who attend 'Learning Circles', parents' perceptions of their children's academic performance were significantly higher than those from other learning programmes.

Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions indicate that much of parents' perceptions of their children were also echoed by volunteers.





Students participating in Learning Circles were also more likely to express greater interest in a subject than students who participated in other programmes.



Students also shared that they appreciated the safe space the programme provided them.

They also remarked how they enjoyed the more creative and dialogical modes of learning (games and quizzes) that were presented to them in Learning Circles.



Although 65% of students liked and found **peer learning** via Learning Circles fun, 70% did not like coaching peers.



Prior to Learning Circles, BSS students would usually view volunteers as homework buddies to guide them on their academic work.

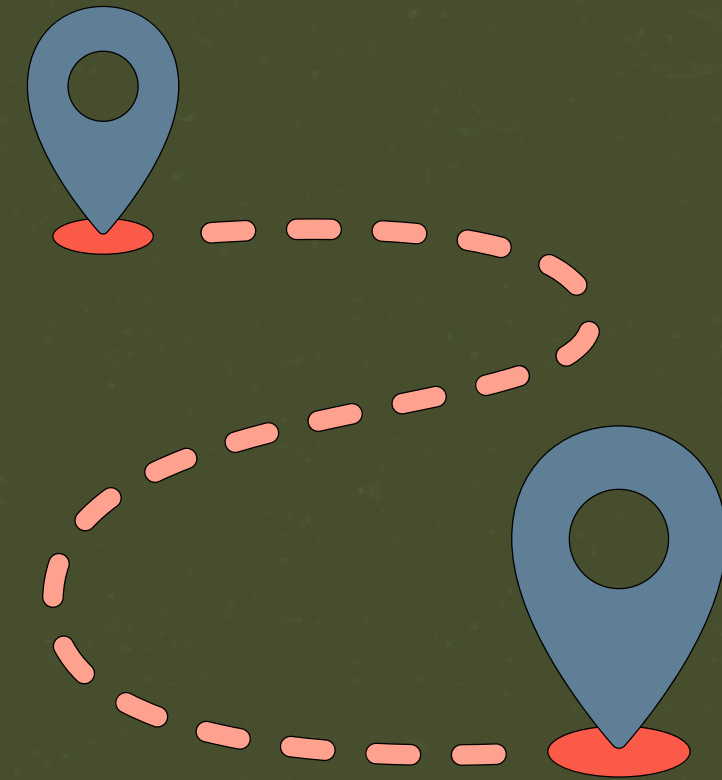


This was a challenging period for volunteers as it was post covid and some circuit breaker measures were still in place.

Volunteers mainly struggled with keeping students' attention when running zoom calls. As a peer learning programme, Learning Circles thus presented an opportunity to reframe the relationship between students and volunteers



The monitoring phase uncovered some challenges in implementing learning circles such as the difficulty for some students in changing location for every session. As for parents, some faced difficulty in hosting students at their home. These issues were resolved by the BSS team in subsequent sessions.



Both parents and students expressed that they wish for BSS learning programmes to be held more frequently.



As the participants have only been in the program for less than 6 months, more time would be needed to possibly see significant changes to specific character changes



If you would like a copy of the full report, email
mail@beyond.org.sg

