

Imagine Bishan-Toa Payoh Appreciative Inquiry Interview Summary



A community initiative by the Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC

Facilitated by Outreach Partner:

I M A G I N E

Singapore

A Nation in Conversation

Imagine Singapore

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What is Imagine Singapore

Imagine Singapore is a civic movement to bring people from all walks of life together to discover the true essence of our strengths, qualities and spirit that have stood the test of time.

It is the discovery of our communities' hopes & aspirations, verbalized through active dialogue & engagement.

Simply put, we imagine a nation in conversation.

Purpose & Goals of Imagine Singapore

Hope Optimism Resilience Rootedness

Strengthen & contribute towards the
Social Capital of the nation by promoting
citizenry engagement and positive activism

Collective ownership

Build shared vision for people living in
Singapore for the next 50 years

Imagine Bishan-Toa Payoh

:engagements to date:

Total no. of Student-Interviewers trained: 115

Total no. of Schools in the GRC Involved: 15

February 17, 2010

Venue: Catholic High School

No. of students trained: 50

Participating schools: Beatty Secondary, Bishan Park Secondary, Catholic High School, Guangyang Secondary, Whitley Secondary School.

February 18, 2010

Venue: Pei Chun Public School

No. of students trained: 26

Participating schools: First Toa Payoh Primary, Guangyang Primary, Pei Chun Public School

March 10, 2010

Venue: CHIJ Toa Payoh Primary

No. of students trained: 39

Schools participating: CHIJ Secondary - Toa Payoh, Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Secondary, Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Primary, CHIJ Toa Payoh Primary, Ai Tong Primary

[question 1]

Opening Questions

“How long have you lived in Bishan–Toa Payoh?

a) What brought your family here?

b) What about this neighbourhood makes you especially glad you live here?”

On average, most respondents have lived in BTP for more than 10 years and for some, they have lived there all their life. Reasons to settle and be especially glad of living in Bishan– Toa Payoh include:

Convenience – Residents appreciated the location of their neighbourhood being central of Singapore. With a lot of facilities nearby and close to good schools.

Friendly neighbours – Residents appreciated the relationship amongst their neighbours; who are helpful (interacting well with one another).

Being close to family & friends – Residents made the choice to live in the area to be close to their family and friends.

: convenience :

“12 years, since 1998. (a) My in-laws were staying in Toa Payoh so we decided to get a resale flat nearby. (b) Amenities. This place has everything – shops, eating outlets, MRT, bus interchange – getting to anywhere is so easy.”

: friendly neighbours :

“...I am glad to live in this area as our neighbours are helpful and caring...”

“... there are friendly neighbours in Bishan–Toa Payoh where people interact with each other easily. The MPs are also nice to the residents...”

“Toa Payoh is a very vibrant and everyone in the neighbourhood is nice”

: being close to family and friends :

“... I moved here with my son who wanted to stay closer to his in-laws who were helping to look after the children.”

“... It is near my daughter school and easier to reach to my relatives and friends. b) Transport is very convenient. Neighbours are especially friendly, they help to take care of my son when me and my daughter are out. They practice the fortnight recycling of things which is environmentally friendly.”

[question 2]

Favourite Places

“When you think of Bishan–Toa Payoh, what particular places, landmark and images stand out for you? Do you have a favourite place in this community you think we should conserve?”

The community felt that the amenities present have allowed for residents to **interact & bond together** – for social interaction among friends & families.

Residents felt that the amenities present have allowed for **sports activities** to be carried out with greater ease.

The **accessibility of the facilities** in the area made the place convenient to carry out social activities with friends, families & neighbours – that allowed for greater understanding with each other.

List of favourite places

- Toa Payoh HDB Hub
- Libraries
- Bishan Junction 8
- Bishan Park
- The Sensory Park
- Toa Payoh Central
- Toa Payoh Garden
- Lower Pierce Reservoir
- Bishan Active
- Toa Payoh Stadium
- Sports Complex
- Upper Thomson Rd

Toa Payoh HDB Hub

- Where family gatherings are possible
- I think that we should conserve the shophouses/older houses and not tear them down as this will preserve our heritage.
- The Toa Payoh Hub is a very important place that serves many purposes.
- There are many shops such as Popular, where we can find things that we need
- There is also the interchange that allows us to transport to other places easily.

Bishan Junction 8

- “When I think of Bishan–Toa Payoh, I would always see Junction 8 in my mind. Maybe its because I would always hang around with my friends there”
- “There are lots that we shop there, there is no need for her to venture far to look certain things such as stationery etc. She learns music there, she hopes the one day she might actually work there. Hence, she hopes that J8 will remain the same. so, she can fulfill her dream in being a music teacher there.”

The Sensory Park,

- because it is full of activity and green plants, which make the air very fresh.

Toa Payoh Central.. The Neighbouring Park.

- Play badminton, cycle and skate
- Toa payoh park as it is very peaceful and it is a very green and clean place. I am not sure what favourite place that I think you should conserve.

Toa Payoh Stadium and the Sports complex is a place I cannot forget in Toa Payoh.

Bishan Active

- Also, Bishan Active is a rather innovative area for residents to exercise and play recreational sports. With a fitness area that is conveniently built at, people will have more excuse to exercise daily and keep fit. I'm not sure of any place to conserve here, since i just moved to Bishan from Yio Chu Kang.

Bishan Park

- Lovely place to go for walks
- I guess the nearby Bishan Park which is working on linking the Kallang River. It is a great place to exercise and get comfortable with the nature
- It is really big and occasionally, our whole family will go there to exercise or even go fishing. In the park, we will also meet a lot of friends there, hence, it is not only a place to exercise, but also a place where social bonding can take place. Maybe to me, that is why the park stands out as Bishan's own landmark. Conserve the empty fields, stop overcrowding Bishan with infrastructures and houses, we're not Tampines or Jurong.
- Not only iconic but also an important part of his life

Lots of Nature to Conserve

“Well, the first thing that pops into my mind is the reservoirs, cause, well, I'm a very nature loving person. I think that my main concern will be all the nature related areas. I feel that those areas should be conserved and cared for.”

“When I think about Bishan–Toa Payoh, the first place that come across my mind is **Toa Payoh Garden**. There is this landmark at Toa Payoh Garden where I used to go when I was young, I like to play hide–and–seek with my friends there. I think we should conserve this landmark because I believe it really brings back a lot of memories for a lot of people who used to live in Bishan–Toa Payoh.”

“The MacRitchie reservoir. I feel that we should conserve the MacRitchie reservoir as it has a beautiful boardwalk area where I usually bring my child to walk. That area shows me the flora and fauna of Bishan–Toa Payoh and it is a good place to gather with old friends. The reservoir is also important.”

“The Lower Peirce Reservoir. I like Lower Peirce most as it is picturesque and scenic for many families to enjoy. In order to keep it beautiful, I think that it is best to conserve the environment by keeping it clean.”

“She would like to conserve nature and the rows of trees along Upper Thomson road. It is one of the most beautiful stretch of road in Singapore with canopy of branches hanging over the road, making it a very scenic and pleasant drive on a hot sunny day.”

[question 3]

Sense of Community

“Thinking back over the times as a Bishan–Toa Payoh resident, what have been some of the most memorable times for you living in this community?”

- a) What are some stories of times where you felt a strong sense of belonging, harmony and connection with your neighbours, friends and relatives who live in this community?
- b) What made these memories special for you?”

Residents feel a strong sense of belonging, harmony and connection with neighbours, friends and relatives who live in this community when they are:

Helping neighbours in need: Residents felt comfortable in entrusting neighbours to care for children, house, etc, and they help even if they do not know the neighbours personally.

Celebrating different traditions/cultures: The community celebrates and shares in joy and festivities e.g. during National Day, Chinese New Year, Lantern Festival, etc.

Connecting and building friendships: The bonds between residents which transcend faiths and ethnicities, are strengthened when the community gets together gatherings and connect to know each other better

Excerpts from Interviews : Helping neighbours in need :

“There was once where I just moved in to a new house in this area,so the furnitures are delivered to my house. My mum is not able to speak English so it is very difficult to communicate with the worker. Surprisingly, my neighbour helped her with the communication. I felt very touched when I learnt about the incident as we just met each other and she is willing to help us. I do not experience this kind of incident very often.”

“My neighbours in the previous house(also in Toa Payoh) that I used to live in made me feel that i was one of them, especially because i was new here and she hardly knew me. Once i forgot my keys in the house and I was unable to enter. I hardly knew that my Chinese neighbour – she came out and asked me what was the problem. After hearing my story she took me to her house and she allowed me to use the phone to call my husband while she used her mobile phone to call up the locksmith. The locksmith used some spare keys and the door opened.... We became good friends and talked with each other whenever we got the chance. We were able to be friends regardless of our race and we were able to share our difficulties and fun times together.”

: celebrating different traditions/cultures :

“Hanging out with my friends going to nearby library and shopping centre. During National Day celebration, Chinese New Year celebrations, almost everybody would be wearing the respective costumes and the celebrations in school make my life in this community very vibrant and exciting and i feel a sense of belonging to the school, community and country.”

“During festive holidays such as the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya, the different ethnic groups would usually visit one another and wish each other well, mostly through food one made themselves. This is special and unique as it creates a strong bond between us.”

“Festivals gatherings is the most memorable times for her living in this community. a) The happy festivals gatherings when she was invited let her felt a strong sense of belonging, harmony and connection with her neighbours, friends and relatives who live in this community. b) She gets to know each other well and better.”

: connecting & building friendships :

“Most memorable times – upgrading periods (there were lift-upgrading, major upgrading of interior) (a) Those were times when I get to know my neighbours better as we went 'house visiting' during upgrading. Though messy and noisy, everyone chatted over the progress of work and invited one another to visit or check things out. Also it was heart warming to know of neighbours who have 'sheltered' others while the latters' flats were being upgraded. (b) These memories were special as they bonded the neighbours together more so than anything else.”

“The most memorable time would probably be the time when I was young. I used to visit the two cinemas at Toa Payoh, there were also two hawker centres next to the cinemas respectively and I was having lots of fun hanging out with my friends in different parts of Toa Payoh after school. I also remember playing soccer with my neighbours and chatting with them at the void deck. However, we seldom see this kind of thing happening nowadays. Most neighbours usually keep to themselves and Bishan-Toa Payoh has really changed a lot, some of the buildings or flats have already been demolished and new ones are built. So I guess the most precious memories I have with me are my childhood days in Bishan-Toa Payoh.”

[question 4]

Youth Contributions

“A leader is anyone who wants to help at this time.

- a) What are some things you think youths like me can do, to make a positive contribution for our very own Bishan-Toa Payoh community?
- b) Who else can we reach out to help & support?”

Building relationships

Communities would like to see more interaction among the residents (especially between the youth & the elders) – for greater cultural understanding & creating for heightened mutual respect in the community.

Volunteering

Communities envision the youth to be more actively involved in their own residential community – in activities that will enhance the overall living & cultural atmosphere of the community.

Support & collaboration

Residents expressed the need to want to reach out to MPs & Grass-root leaders to create better interaction among residents & policy makers in the community – for greater understanding of community concerns. Additionally, to reach out to other organizations in the area.

Youth Effort for a Greener environment

Numerous suggestions for youths to clean up the estate & involve the families as well for intergenerational bonding

Building relationships

“Help old folks ,greet them, beware of pedestrians when cycling, do not spoil any property, paint different paintings nicely on the walls in HDB flats. Everybody can help and give their support.”

“For Mr Kul, he feels that youths like us should spent more time with the elderly by visiting them daily and by having activities for them b)For help and support, Mr Kul thinks that we should meet with the ministers during the meet-the-people sessions.”

“I think the most important thing is the youths must first love the community, only then, they will try to do their best to help to improve the community. I guess the other people who we can approach for help and support will be the MP, RC members and grass-root leaders.”

Volunteering

“Participate in more community involvement projects, or organise events for youths to get together, raise funds for the elderly and for different charitable organisations.”

“Youths could volunteer in the under-privileged homes, join the community centre as youth members to better understand the Bishan-Toa Payoh community at large. Community Leaders, Religious Leaders, Parents, Self-Help Groups, Government Agencies, Social enterprise.”

“I think youths can start by doing voluntary work like caring for the elderly or the needy. Where students can try to reach out to the less privileged family and coach the students to help them excel in their students or set up youth groups to help the troubled youngsters by encouraging them to contribute to community in positive ways. I think you can reach out to the working population, the MPs and the GRC members of the community.”

[question 4>excerpts from the
interview]

Collaboration

“Organise more social classes activities for residents to know each other culture. We can reach out help by the residents.”

“They can have racial harmony, help each other in the community and not littering. She thinks that we can reach out to for help and support with communities.”

“Since youths these days are already so busy with schoolwork, they can collaborate with their school on projects which merge project work with community service. You can reach out to companies in this district for help and support. “

Youth Effort for a Greener environment

“I think youth can play a part by keeping the place neat and clean. Not only to stop littering but also to pick up the litter and put them into the rubbish bin. We can reach out to our friends, teachers and neighbours.”

“Gather youths together to do cleaning up for the estate. To ask parents & other family members to be involved so that it becomes a family project.”

“CIP projects whereby they go around the neighbourhood collecting items such as newspapers and magazines and selling them to garang guni (I don't know the English word!). Community clubs can organise such events, and this can make various people in the community closer to each other.”

“I think you could collect more items to recycle in order to save our environment.”

Health & Well-Being of Youths

Fitness.

Residents encourage the youth to take part in activities such as exercising to reduce stress levels.

Activities to bond with the youth.

Residents supports activities that allow for better interaction among the elderly residents & the youth – that allow has health benefits. For example, mass exercising.

Reaching out to each other for support.

Residents realizes the challenges that the youth face & want to support the youth in dealing with these challenges – the youth has to reach out to the elders.

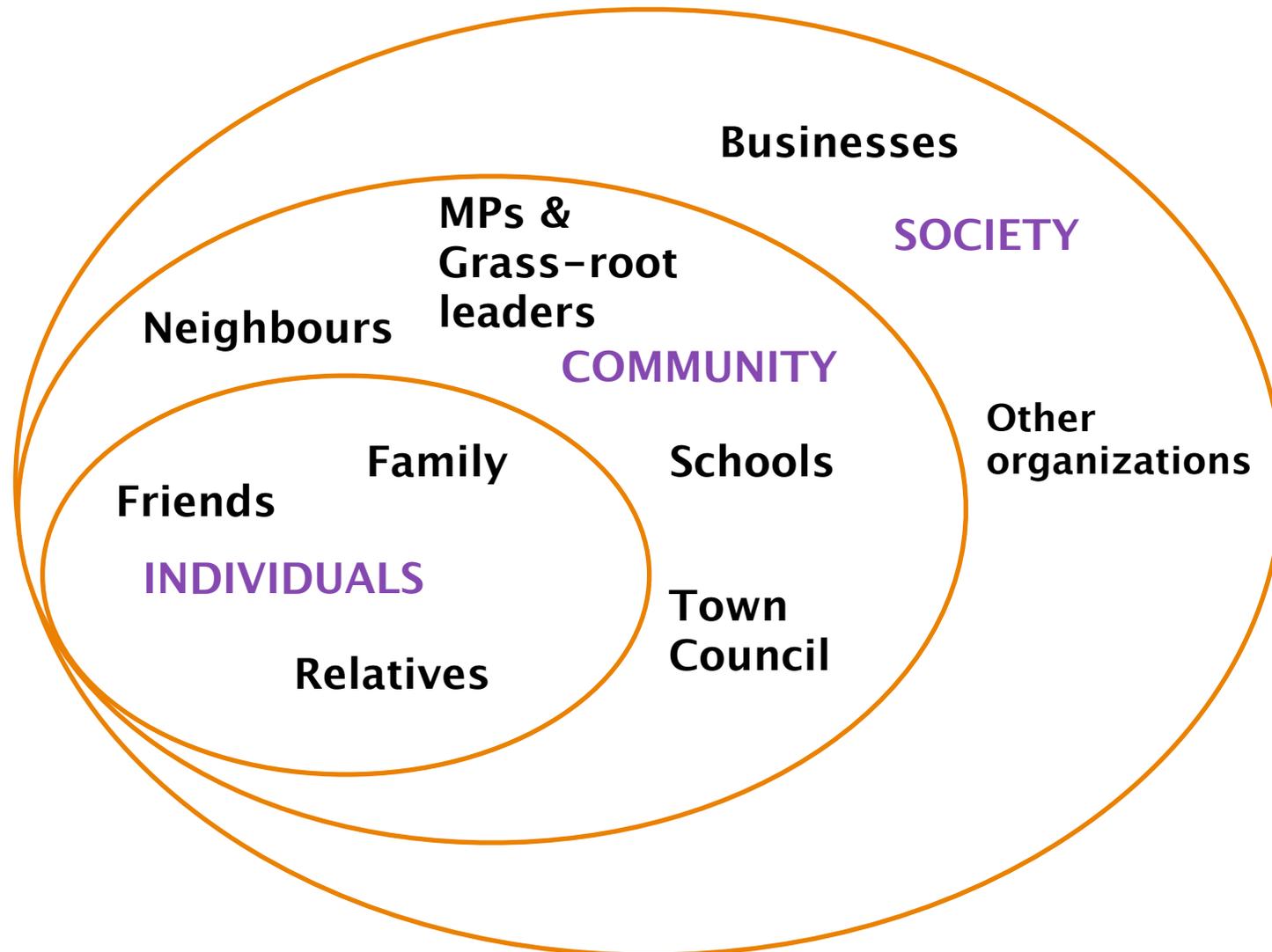
[question 4>excerpts from the interview]

excerpts from interviews

“I think the youths can exercise more, wether with friends or family, maybe at the Bishan Active? They can stay healthy and not think about stress. That reduces the problems of youth thinking too much and suiciding case to the community. For help and support, we can reach to the hotline for youth and family members.”

“Maybe youths can do things to avoid thinking about harmful or suicide matters, for e.g. like using the fitness corner around the neighbourhood. It will reduce problems of stressful youths to the community. The hotline for troubled youths and family members.”

Who the youths can reach out to if they want to make a contribution:



[question 5]

Vision for Bishan-Toa Payoh

“ Close your eyes and imagine Bishan-Toa Payoh as you always wanted it to be a generation from now. The best that you can ever imagine! Beyond the physical spaces, we imagine a great home where neighbours feel a strong sense of belonging, and even know one another by name!

- a) What are some things you see and hear in your imagination
- b) What would make you even more proud of being a resident here
- c) What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen
- d) Who else might you work with?”

(A) Social Environment

“Kampung Spirit”

Residents feel closer, warmer relationships amongst the neighbours. Appreciate the vibrant community that is peaceful & with racial harmony.

Getting together

Communities do get together to know one another through the events organized in the neighbourhood: inter-district competitions with neighbours.

Interaction & Common Interests

Residents get together on common interests such as music or sports.

[question 5>excerpts from the interview]

The 'Kampung Spirit'

“Umm... I can see many groups of residents gathering together, chatting happily, as if they were close friends! They waved to me and greeted me a good morning and even to an extent of allowing me to join in their conversations

“I can see the young and elderly interacting happily without the barrier of generation gap as it would no longer be a problem. Residents would also respect each other for their differences, regardless of race or religion. There will be more friendly people who are willing to make the first move and make an effort to interact with each other. 5(b) I would feel even more proud if residents share a common bond where people cooperated with each other and are ready to help one another and always looked out for each other. Finally, I hope for a united Bishan-Toa Payoh! 5(c) I would try to approach other residents by being friendly to them like offering a smile and kind words. 5(d) My neighbours, friends, GRC members.”

The 'Kampung Spirit'

“I see a joyful neighbourhood with racial harmony and everyone is happy staying here. I am proud because Bishan–Toa Payoh is really well–developed. In order to have a strong sense of belonging and know one another by name, I guess I must take the initiative to start first. I will start by greeting my neighbours when I see them and also get my family members to do the same thing.”

“The residents are very close and have the so–called 'Kampong Spirit' which is rarely felt and seen these days. Everyone gathering for parties. Children playing hide–and–seek, teenagers complaining about homework together, men talking about golf and property market while ladies talk about clothes and going shopping. If everyone is helpful to one another, Bishan will be a better place to live in with a more conducive and pleasant environment. I'll be so proud to say, "What a pity you and your neighbours do not have the Kampong Spirit. My neighbours and I get along very well." to my friends when they mention about their unpleasant environment. I would be the bold one to visit all my neighbours and hold a party which will allow neighbours to bond with one another. I will work with the Resident Committee.”

Getting together to get to know each other

“Everyone is friendly to each other, and greeting each other; People having little gatherings and everyone is familiar with each other) b) Having inter-district competitions, and I would be very proud if Bishan – Toa Payoh wins. c) Organise events, competition. d) Family, friends, community.

“I can imagine families with three generations having fun at Bishan Active playing sports and hear the gleeful screams of children enjoying their session outside in the open. I would be very proud to be able to play basketball for Toa Payoh. I could volunteer myself to play basketball with other people to foster ties between residents. I could work with my friends staying at Toa Payoh to make the event an attractive one.

“Coffee every morning with neighbours, sharing their home-cooked meals with one another, knowing each other by their first name, having more space and facilities for senior citizens as we are an ageing population, monthly sporting events. When all the residents from other precincts talk about us– Bishan–Toa Payoh as the place to live in. c) To actively serve the community. – Joining as a Grassroots member would be a good start. d) My family, friends and neighbours.

(B) Physical Environmental

Rising Environmental Consciousness

Residents are more environmental conscious; more for preventing global warming.

Convenience is key.

Residents feel that there are more convenient amenities – with an increase in the number of upgraded HDBs too.

Conservation of traditional dwellings

Residents are proud of the iconic buildings in the area & would like to preserve the heritage of Bishan–Toa Payoh.

Greener & more beautiful surroundings

Residents wishes for more diversity of beautiful landscapes.
More parks & trees planted in the area.

Cleaner neighbourhoods

Cleaner environment – litter-free neighbourhoods.

A Beautiful Green Home

“...Less traffic congestion – Build less buildings –Plant more trees –More recreational parks. b)Make Toa Payoh less commercialized, and retain the heritage. c)Make it more conducive for residents to connect with each other. d)My daughters. They can encourage their peers.”

“a.Bishan–Toa Payoh as a litter–free environment. b.We can try to make the surrounding more attractive by not harming the plants. c.Be a more considerate person and do our part as a resident here. d.I might work with my neighbours and friends.”

[question 5>excerpts from the interview]

A Beautiful Green Home

"Oh! What a beautiful scene it was! b) I will be even more proud if I could spread the message "Do not harm the environment!" towards the residents in Bishan-Toa Payoh! As such, global warming could be slowed down and we can do simple things by not wasting paper, try to reduce the number of plastic bags, bottles, containers, etc. c) I imagined that I might be encouraging more people to reduce the number of plastic bags and maybe I will decide to reward these people for doing their part. d) I might work with my husband and my children, my friends and my relatives."

"... Residents playing chess together in the park, children running around in the playground, laughing, everyone is smiling and enjoying, people appreciating the beauty of the nature. b) The residents in Bishan-Toa Payoh are united, looking out for each other. c) By helping more people to participate in events and get together. First, I myself must be involved in community events, before I can persuade other people to join in this meaningful activity. d) Schools, community centres, ask people to hold talks in schools, to help Bishan-Toa Payoh become a happier place."

[question 6]

Summary

“As you think back about our conversation so far, what images and ideas stand out for you as your hope for this constituency’s future?”

Harmony

Residents feels comfortable & lives in harmony with their neighbours.

Youth involvement

Residents feels the youth can be more involved in their communities' activities.

A Great Home

The Bishan-Toa Payoh community has truly become a place residents can call their 'Home'.

Harmony

“Everybody helping each other, living in harmony.”

“Encouraging people to create a positive atmosphere for people living here and give them something that will be able to make them happy and proud of.”

“I hope that Bishan–Toa Payoh would be the best estate in Singapore and it can be a place which everyone calls home.”

“... I do hope that we can maintain this good environment for our children's children to continue their lives peacefully just like our times!”

[question 6>excerpts from the interview]

Youth involvement

“I think it is the youth contribution. As our future are in the youth's hand , so they should be educated from young that living in harmony with each other in this **multi-racial society is very important.**”

“I believe with the motivation of the project youths like you are undertaking right now, Singapore would be a better place, whereby citizens would be able to voice out their suggestions and opinions.”

“I aspire for Bishan–Toa Payoh to raise and be a nurture ground for future leaders.”

“Bishan–Toa Payoh to be a place where his children call the place home.”

[question 6>excerpts from the interview]

A Great Home & Caring Community

“We should stand as ONE PEOPLE – helping ,having fun and sharing.”

“Everyone can celebrate each other's birthday with one another, everyone knowing each other through gatherings and bonding together; greetings everywhere.”

“The ideas that stand out for me will be a crime-free neighbouring environment, like in a kampong surrounding whereby everybody knows one another by first names.”

“I also hope that there will be a party specially for neighbours, so as to get to know one another. I hope to have a neighbourhood where neighbours are filled with love and concern for each other.”

“We should have a friendly and close community, where we help each other in times of need. Residents are kind and helpful towards one another.”

“Upholding justice. It would be nice if Toa Payoh came up in the newspapers for good reasons rather than because of a crime of some sort. Especially if the neighbourhood could stand together as one and fulfil the obligation of a true Singaporean citizen. “

“Gracious and harmonious society, multi-racial without any conflict whatsoever.”

[question 7]

Further suggestions

“What else do you think we can do to bring people together for conversations about creating Bishan-Toa Payoh of our dreams? Who else do you think we should interview?”

Community Engagement

Neighbourhood party: food & games

Festive celebrations with the other races

To increase bonding opportunities: excursions, festive parties, meetings

To increase racial harmony parties

Festive celebrations with the other races

Discussion – dialogue sessions

Massive group discussions

Forum

Talks at the Community Center or void decks

Letting residents speak publicly about their views

More Community Engagement Ideas

- More Town Hall sessions
- These kinds of interviews
- Weekly gatherings in an open space with different types of topics for discussion
- Put up posters of our dreams & wishes
- Early workout & breakfast meeting
- Work with other constituency for joint events: charity & welfare
- Monthly neighbourhood gatherings – to catch up with old neighbours & make new friends
- To build lounges in the void decks

excerpts from the interview

“We can put up posters about our dreams and state ways how we can make it happen. We should also interview senior citizens.”

“You can create more bonding opportunities in the community like excursions, festive seasons or even meetings where people share about how the constituency can improve and how they can play a part in it or how to encourage others to come together and share their ideas. You can also try to raise awareness about how a friendly and united neighbourhood can prevent crimes and change everyone's life. I think you can interview the GRC members, elderly and youths or even foreigners living in Bishan–Toa Payoh to get an idea of what they are thinking.”

“More community involvement programmes. You should try and interview the needy and see what they want in their Bishan–Toa Payoh.”

“We can organise dialogue sessions, so that everyone can give feedbacks and their concerns for the constituency's future. We can interview more residents from Bishan – Toa payoh.”

[question 7>excerpts from the interview]

excerpts from the interview

“We can create more frequent talks to motivate the people. We can interview other people for suggestions, such as teachers, classmates and principals even.”

“We can organise block parties and social gatherings among the residents so that they can get to know one another. In this way, there will be a sense of belonging which the residents have towards their estates. I feel that you all should interview residents who have just received their Singapore citizenships.”

“I think you can do that by advertising widely about this programme. I think you should interview people who are not very satisfied about this community.”

“Getting more students to be involved in the community. Secondary, Junior college, Polytechnics and others.”

“Have early workout followed by breakfast to get together. MPs for Bishan could get to know us better instead of the weekly Tuesdays meeting.”