Autistic children and youth in Singapore

**DEFINITIONS AND KEY STATISTICS**

In February 2017, Just Cause worked with a private foundation to pull together the data on children and youth with autism in Singapore. Here’s what we found:

**THE BIG PICTURE**

There are an estimated 50,000 people in Singapore with ASD

Approximately 11,500 (23%) are under 19 years of age

70% of people with ASD have a low IQ, requiring supervision

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**ISSUE 1: EARLY INTERVENTION**

Early intervention is known to be really important for children with ASD:

“The early years offer a special opportunity to foster developmental gains in children, as 80% of the brain’s capacity develops before the age of three. The gains are shown to be highest for those with maximum disadvantage” (UNESCO, 2009, “Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: The Early Childhood Imperative”)

...but access to early intervention is a challenge, especially for children with more severe needs from low-mid income families.

PRESCCHOOL

70% estimated % of all children with moderate/severe special needs who do not attend pre-school

Fewer than half of parents of special needs children who do attend preschool felt their kids were adequately supported by the teachers, curriculum and school facilities

1 inclusive preschool in Singapore: AWWA’s Kindle Garden

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**ISSUE 2: QUALITY EDUCATION OPTIONS**

HIGH DEMAND FOR AUTISM SPECIFIC SCHOOLS

3 autism specific schools run by VWOs offering subsidized places (Pathlight School, Eden School, St Andrew’s Autism School)

6-24 months: reported length of waitlists for autism-specific schools

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**CHALLENGES FOR INTEGRATION AT MAINSTREAM SCHOOL**

100% of primary schools have at least one Allied Educator, but only 10% of primary school teachers are trained in special needs

Only 60% of secondary schools in Singapore have at least one Allied Educator

Only 20% of secondary school teachers are trained in special needs

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**ISSUE 3: LIMITED SOCIETAL INCLUSION AND STIGMA**

Over a third of Singaporeans do not interact with children with special needs (of any kind) at all of those who do, 1 in 4 interact once a year or less

Only 1 in 10 Singaporeans feel sure about how to interact with children with special needs

Only 50% of parents of regularly developing children report that they will be comfortable with their child seated next to a child with a special needs in the same class

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**MAIN MESSAGE:**

For thousands of poorer families in particular, it can be difficult, stressful and expensive to secure the right education and support for their autistic child.

**JUST CAUSE THINKS:**

Government is actively working to increase subsidies and provision for autistic children. But there is still huge potential for private donors to help, either in boosting the existing government-funded programmes or in tackling some of the more niche or hidden issues, such as social stigma.

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**SOURCES**

1. Autism Resource Centre, quoted by Straits Times 24/12/16. “7 in 100 children in Singapore have autism”. “There have been no accurate studies on the rates here, but it is likely to be about 1 per cent of the population - or 50,000 - given global estimates. Of this group, 11,500 are under the age of 19.”

2. Singlehealth website: www.singhealth.com.sg/PatientCare/ConditionsAndTreatments/Pages/Autistic-Spectrum-Disorder-Child-SID.aspx accessed 14/02/2017

3. Lien Foundation, 04/07/16. “Less than half of parents of children with special needs surveyed felt their kids in preschool were adequately supported by teachers, curriculum & facilities.”


5. Today, 07/02/15. “For special needs children, pre-school is not a given”

6. Based on scanning the websites of a range of private providers of therapy for ASD young children

7. Straits Times, 26/01/17. "Easing Long Wait at SPED Schools"
