

A photograph of a family of five (father, mother, and three children) smiling and posing outdoors in front of green foliage. The photo is overlaid with a dark blue gradient that covers the bottom half of the page.

TOUCH Young Arrows

Programme Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Context

This report presents the findings of the programme evaluation for TOUCH Young Arrows (TYA), a service of TOUCH Community Services started in 1992. TYA believes that children can be nurtured and sharpened like arrows to make a positive impact in society, and be future leaders. It aims to nurture children aged six to 12, from low-income or single-parent families through programmes conducted by committed teams of volunteer coaches across 24 TYA Clubs in various areas serving 580 children in Singapore.

Evaluation Scope and Objectives

With over 33 years' experience in Singapore, what are the achievements of the TYA? What are the impacts of the TYA on children and families? What kind of programmes are the most effective? With these questions in mind, the objectives of this evaluation were to understand the learning experiences of the TYA participants and the programme implementation process, which can help to set the future direction of TYA.

The Programme evaluation was conducted in three phases:

- Phase One: we reviewed the project documents and consolidated the information;
- Phase Two: we conducted site visits and pilot interviews;
- Phase Three: we interviewed the children participants and family members

Methodology

The methodology of the evaluation contains several components:

- 1) content analysis: a review of existing project documents;
- 2) observation of and meetings with key staff, including project leaders and volunteers
- 3) questionnaires and informal interviews: the children participants were interviewed face to face and the family members were interviewed via telephone.

The documentary part of the study relied initially on information given by the TYA staff about programme content and activities, participant backgrounds, etc. However, it was found that there was insufficient information after the review of the existing project documents, so the evaluation team consolidated all the information into a centralized database to facilitate the evaluation process.

In the meantime, they also conducted a few site visits to various TYA clubs and talked informally to both participants and volunteers regarding their views on TYA programmes. Five pilot interviews were arranged in order to test the questionnaire and understand the programme operation and the participants' experience. The questionnaire was refined based on the feedback from the participants, volunteers and staff.

Key Findings

The evaluation team concluded that the TYA had indeed created a supportive environment for the children and families. It is a potentially impactful organization with a long history of being operated by a group of loyal and committed volunteers.

However, it is difficult for the evaluation team to track the processes, outcomes and impacts of the TYA because different TYA clubs have different histories, different training programmes (both in terms of academic and moral education) and different formats for volunteers' engagement. Since TYA had not created a proper database management system, it took the evaluation team at least six months to build a centralized database which could store proper records and track the programme information. After building the system, it took another two months to analyse the existing club information and select for interview children with at least two years' experience of TYA.

The team interviewed 128 children at 22 TYA clubs. We found that 90% of the children reported that they enjoyed attending TYA programmes. They also gave positive mean ratings in terms of self-confidence (4.05 out of 5), self-discipline (3.88 out of 5), connecting with others (4.1 out of 5) and consideration for others (4.07 out of 5). Many of them reported that they prefer participating in activities that teach them skills (4.17 out of 5) over academic coaching. 60% of them enjoy going on outings, especially with family (30.2%). They indicated that the top three reasons for joining the TYA are 1) to be thankful for the volunteers ('gor gor & jie jie') in TYA (M=4.44); 2) to help them grow their potential and learn better (M=4.27); 3) to improve their school results (M=4.22).

One of the key features of the TYA has been to engage volunteers to build relationships with the children. Thus, the children reported that the most memorable aspect of the programme was when the volunteers spent time to interact and play with them. Without the commitment of the volunteers, the TYA could not have had its long history.

With the support from the volunteers and the participation of the children and their family, the TYA programme has become popular in the community.

Recommendations

In order to improve the long-term impact of the programme, we suggest the following improvements:

1. Programme Management

1.1 Data Collection and Database

- Regularly update and monitor the database system developed by the evaluation team (e.g. more intentional effort to keep the database up to date and to collect academic scores to track progress)
- Regularly review the programme in terms of club's activities, participants and volunteer engagement. An annual pre- and post- programme survey for programme monitoring purposes should be implemented

2. Programme/Operations

2.1 Programme – Curriculum and Lesson Plan

- Create a standardised programme and lesson plan for the various age groups of children at the clubs
- Create a centralized system for the volunteers to access various training/lesson plans
- Design a structured programme with clear intentional outcomes across the clubs
- Use experiential learning methods for teaching

2.2 Volunteer Engagement

- Strengthen volunteer involvement and sustainability by providing various training course (e.g. how to design lesson plans)
- Involve volunteers to discuss the programme design and possible impacts
- Create a better communication platform among volunteers, volunteer leaders, participants and family
- Train the volunteers in how to detect cases, who are in need

2.3 Family Involvement

- Design more family activities and educational programmes or integrate the activities with the TOUCH family programmes
- Emphasize both academic coaching and moral and value education
- Create a better communication platform among volunteers, volunteer leaders, participants and family

2.4 Referral Mechanism

- Have a clear system for the referral mechanisms, e.g. clearer SOPs and documentation for referrals and follow-up mechanisms for more effective intervention and communication among key stakeholders
- Conduct an exit survey of TYA-P6 participants and refer the participants to other youth programmes

3. Future evaluation Model

3.1 Develop A Systematic Model

- Refine the programme objectives and set a list of measurable programme objectives (possible measurement tools include the Hare self-esteem scale, academic efficacy scale, behavioural engagement scale, youth development scale and teacher-student relationship scale)
- Develop a systematic model for both process and outcomes evaluation
- Design the programme with intended outcomes across the clubs and representing the programme objectives

3.2 Create Stories of Impact

- Collect interesting stories of impacts on TYA children, volunteers and families

Conclusion

Since TYA has not engaged in systematic record keeping, the evaluation team was not able to assess the effectiveness of the TYA. If the TYA staff can follow up with the above recommendations, especially to have a systematic practice of data collection to monitor and review, the evaluation team would in future be able to evaluate the outcomes and impacts in another study.

The current evaluation was conducted based on a one-time cross-sectional survey with small samples from each club. There might be recollection bias. It has been suggested, above that the TYA staff could more systematically track and monitor the progress of each programme, including conducting an annual pre- and post- programme survey along with in-depth interviews with the stakeholders.

With a systematic database and review methodology, TYA could demonstrate that it is an influential service and could showcase how volunteer engagement nurtures children and help to build family bonds.

Appendix: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The total number of the children with more than 2 years in TYA Clubs was 180. 71% of the respondents (N=128) were interviewed and they were mainly from 22 TYA clubs out of the total 24 clubs.

55.5% of the children respondents were female, while 44.5% were male. Children aged 11-12 made up 50.7% of the respondents. 57.8% of the children respondents were Chinese and 37.5% were Malay. (Table 4). Among the parents, 73% were married, nearly 16% were divorced and 3% were separated. Nearly 40% of the parents had a job and 33% of the children relied on the father as the breadwinner for the family.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Children Respondents

Gender	Number (%)
Female	71 (55.5)
Male	57 (44.5)
Age	Number (%)
7-8	15 (11.7)
9-10	48 (37.5)
11-12	65 (50.7)
Race	Number (%)
Chinese	74 (57.8)
Malay	48 (37.5)
Indian	4 (3.1)
Others (Boyanese)	2 (1.6)
Total	128 (100)

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