



# MOVING PEOPLE: TAKING CIVIC ACTION

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# SUMMARY

This case study features the work of ground-up volunteer group, the Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) who are engaged with residents who have been relocated from rental flat communities in Dakota Crescent and Sims Drive to Blk 52 Cassia Crescent. CRT started in February 2017, supporting residents who have been or will soon be relocated, and has since been supporting this community with meeting various needs, closing some gaps as well as adjusting to their new environment and community. They are also documenting and interested to share their lessons learnt from working with a community being relocated, advocating for how this experience can be improved for residents.

The story of CRT's civic action efforts which pre-date the formation of CRT are worthy of study - from different beginnings seeded by individuals<sup>1</sup> at Dakota Crescent; to their ability to galvanise a significant number of people, who became deeply invested and committed to volunteering with the community on a regular basis; to the creative approaches employed; the in-depth relationships formed in the community; meeting direct needs, including working with various service providers and agencies; to the networks and collaborations CRT has created with organisations within, and external to Cassia Crescent.

This case study of CRT distils several considerations for civic action. The first is the use of narratives, which invokes empathy and understanding while also surfacing questions and challenges – important precursors to civic action. The second is the creation of access, holding the space for civic participation whether for the individual, community stakeholders or broader society through education and advocacy efforts. Finally, the success of civic action hinges upon the embeddedness of CRT which is conditioned by their ability to build relationships and meet needs.

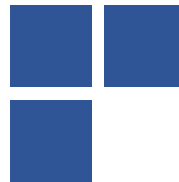
<sup>1</sup> First brought together by Cai Yinzhou who led Dakota Adventures, in February 2017, members of Dakota Adventures, *Between Two Homes*, and other friends came together to form CRT.

# INTRODUCTION

Notions of “civic society”, “civic participation” or “civic action” might not be intuitive for many Singaporeans. The idea that as individuals we have the power and agency to create change in our communities and society is not ingrained in us from a young age; instead, the utilisation of formal services, or to look towards government authorities to solve our problems is the *modus operandi*.

To be fair, ground-up groups have always been working to increase the awareness of the causes that they champion.<sup>2</sup> More recently, there is an increased interest in encouraging volunteerism and growing active citizenry from the government – SG Cares, a nation-wide effort to encourage volunteerism, for instance, can be seen as an attempt to cultivate an active and civic-minded citizenry.<sup>3</sup> Yet regardless of where the impetus stems from, the same challenge applies: How do you *make* people civic-minded, get them *plugged into* the needs of others and *make* them act? How do you galvanise civic action?

**“Civic action can be defined as a form of citizenship practice consisting in mainly collective initiatives aimed at implementing rights, taking care of common goods or empowering citizens.”<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> The recent publication *Art of Advocacy* provides an excellent overview of notable ground-up groups, both new and old. Refer to: Singam, Constance and Thomas, Margaret. *Art of Advocacy*. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> SG Cares, a nation-wide volunteerism movement was launched in 2017 by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre as well as the National Council of Social Service. It aims to nurture a community of caring people. See Goy, Priscilla. “Parliament: Nationwide volunteerism movement SG Cares to be launched later in 2017.” *The Straits Times*, Mar 9, 2017. Accessed 10 September, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parliament-nation-wide-volunteerism-movement-sg-cares-to-be-launched-later-in-2017>

<sup>4</sup> Moro, Giovanni. “Civic Action.” In *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, edited by Anheier H.K., Toepler S. New York: Springer, 2010.

No single system is all-encompassing. Within systems, people fall through the cracks, which makes ground-up feedback, movements and action critical in change work that affects the system. However, to affect the system, merely meeting needs and filling gaps would not be sustainable. In 2011, a study *Unmet Social Needs in Singapore* by Lien Centre for Social Innovation observed that what is missing from the snapshot of Singapore's social safety net "are the advocacy-based organisations which...provide a critical counter-point to government policies."<sup>5</sup> Connecting these gaps to the broader system and recognising the problem at its root require civic action to be coupled with advocacy. To find organisations that do both direct work and advocacy is rare. Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) is one of the few established organisations that does both direct and advocacy work.<sup>6</sup>

This case study however, is interested in how a ground up initiative - the Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) - does community and direct service work with the residents at Blk 52 Cassia Crescent (residents primarily relocated from Dakota Crescent and Sims Drive) while undertaking advocacy efforts to share

lessons learnt from the work and connecting the ground experience to broader systemic issues and gaps. Apart from that, CRT also works with various stakeholders to create opportunities for increased understanding and to work out possible solutions on systemic issues between CRT and other stakeholders. Please refer to Annex A for an introduction to the work of CRT.

This would be of interest to arts and creative practitioners who are engaging with communities and interested in contributing towards community development work. This could be through their own efforts, or collaborating with local stakeholders. They might find useful insights on how to go about supporting and working with communities over a longer period of time. As well, ground-up groups might also find the lessons from CRT useful for similar reasons above, but also the insights on galvanising more volunteers to join and sustain the efforts.

For non-governmental / voluntary / grassroots organisations and policymakers working with, or interested in ground-up groups, this case study provides some insights as to how to collaborate with these groups and support

<sup>5</sup> Mathi, Braema and Mohamed, Sharifah. *Unmet Social Needs in Singapore*. Lien Centre for Social Innovation, 2011, p26. Accessed July 30, 2018. [https://lcsi.smu.edu.sg/sites/lcsi.smu.edu.sg/files/Unmet\\_Social\\_Needs\\_in\\_Singapore.pdf](https://lcsi.smu.edu.sg/sites/lcsi.smu.edu.sg/files/Unmet_Social_Needs_in_Singapore.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> In *Art of Advocacy*, AWARE articulated the value of such work: "direct services add substantial value to an advocacy group. Aside from the benefits of the organisation having direct access to ground up information and data, the Government, the public and potential donors will welcome and appreciate the services that the NGO provides. Providing direct services goes a long way to increasing the general acceptance of the NGO's advocacy work, and is likely to enhance the sustainability of the NGO."

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these efforts. Groups like CRT can provide valuable feedback, identify and bridge gaps, extend the range of relationships with residents, provide alternative solutions, as well as offer recommendations to challenges on the ground. These informal, ground-up groups also bring in their own networks and resources as well.

The content of this case study is derived from a series of interviews conducted with various members of CRT. The *Reflection* sections are contributed by the writer of this case study. The case study also draws from material, and experiences that emerged when ArtsWok Collaborative (AWC) collaborated with CRT on two separate occasions.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> AWC presented the work of CRT during its community of practice, *The Greenhouse Sessions*, in 2016. More recently, ArtsWok collaborated with CRT on a cultural mapping project, *Mapping Cultures in Communities*, which involved designing and piloting participatory cultural mapping exercises held within and around Blk 52. Both groups are now working together to pilot a programme, *Cassia Kaki*, with the same community at Cassia Crescent, designed by a group of multi-disciplinary practitioners through AWC's action-learning programme, *The Greenhouse Lab*.

## 3 CONSIDERATIONS FOR CIVIC ACTION



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR CIVIC ACTION

The work of CRT points to the following considerations and strategies to mobilise civic action: the use of narratives, the creation of access, and embeddedness within the community.

## 1) NARRATIVES: SEEDING AND CULTIVATING CIVIC ACTION

Narratives are what connect and move us – to a heightened consciousness, to re-evaluate, to create change. Meaningful and compelling narratives that are shared authentically have the power to galvanise people through empathy, especially when they are based on real, lived experience and most importantly, by revealing how others can play a part in the ongoing unfolding of the story.

### CRT – A STORY IN 3 PARTS

#### Part I – Listening to First-Hand Narratives

A series of events and responses led to the formation of CRT. One such response was the

Dakota Adventures (DA) tour, and its history began with the co-founder of CRT, Cai Yinzhou whose grandmother used to reside in Dakota Crescent. He was reconnected to this community when he helped to do barbering together with a few friends at the *Remember Dakota* show in 2015.<sup>8</sup> That opened up opportunities for conversations. He said, “the thing about barbering is that when you talk to people, they tend to be a lot warmer because you are doing them a service as they speak...a lot of the narratives that they were telling me was seemingly very personalised and important but I wasn’t sure why it was significant.”

With more research and engagement with the residents, Yinzhou came to recognise the value of these stories. He began developing Dakota Adventures (DA) tours in 2016 when the opportunity came. His initial motivation and focus was cultural and heritage preservation, but that eventually encompassed narratives of relocation and eldercare. Ultimately, the tours



<sup>8</sup> More information about *Remember Dakota* can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/rememberdakota/>





were about raising awareness and about reinforcing stories. The content was furnished by Yinzhou's research from academic papers, the media or the newspapers but more importantly, layered by residents' stories and personal experiences. To resolve the issue of representation, residents were invited to co-guide the tours and tell their stories.<sup>9</sup> "We understood the complexity of how important it was to represent their voices and why it was significant that residents had to tell their own stories, or in a larger context how history is not one sided." All that made the tour "a 5D experience."

## Part II – Documenting and Sharing Narratives

Around mid-2016, a documentation project on

Dakota Crescent, its residents, and the impending relocation, *Between Two Homes* (BTH) project was underway ([www.betweentwohomes.sg](http://www.betweentwohomes.sg)). It had a three-pronged approach involving a documentation of residents' stories which culminated in a multimedia website, workshops and in the original design, an exhibition.<sup>10</sup> According to Delphia Lim, a volunteer who helped to conceptualise BTH, "the combined aim of the website and workshops was to highlight the voices less heard and the importance of empathy in decision-making, and through that to demonstrate the importance of citizen participation."

<sup>9</sup> For more information, refer to: Chia, Kyrstal. "Long-time residents of Dakota Crescent turn tour guides." *The New Paper*, Feb 15, 2016. Accessed 30 July, 2018, <https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/long-time-residents-dakota-crescent-turn-tour-guides>

<sup>10</sup> For more information, refer to the *Between Two Homes* website at <http://betweentwohomes.sg>

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The process of documentation and collecting stories involved engagement with the residents which afforded the BTH team the opportunity to be put into positions of knowledge that compelled more action.<sup>11</sup>

Jeremy Ho from Run & Gun Media, revealed that several of the founding members of CRT “started from working on BTH at the tail-end, helping with transcriptions, and getting to know the residents’ stories. They felt that investment despite never having met them.” Moved by the stories, several BTH members began assisting residents in the relocation process and eventually contributed to the founding of CRT.

The BTH website has since become a mainstay in informing the public about Dakota Crescent and some of the narratives behind the relocation process, humanising the whole experience, and moving some to find out more.

### Part III – Honing Civic Consciousness

A particular narrative shared by Yinzhou left a strong imprint on his audience during *The Greenhouse Sessions* community of practice by AWC. He talked at length about the story of a relocated resident, Ben.<sup>12</sup> With a steady pace and measured words, Yinzhou recounted,



<sup>11</sup> All members of the BTH Team were volunteers. For the list of team members, refer to <http://betweentwohomes.sg/about-project/>

<sup>12</sup> A pseudonym is used to protect the identity of the resident.

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almost reliving the period of medical crisis in Ben's life: Ben's health was in dire condition. Before he was hospitalised, he handed to Yinzhou the keys to his house, imploring Yinzhou not to let "'them' take his house away". He seemed aware of his time. Although Ben was eventually discharged, the hospitalisation phase led to a period of dependency because he was considered as someone facing a suicide risk. In fact, that was when the real caregiving began.

For an entire month, Yinzhou would faithfully show up at Ben's door at 7am and accompany him through the most basic tasks like brushing his teeth or taking him out to have breakfast. He explained that he was doing it to re-establish his pre-hospitalisation routine. Besides him, other volunteers took turns to take him to the doctor, clean his house and buy his meals. He talked about the backlash the volunteers had gotten. "Everyone, including the residents, told us to send him to an old folks' home. They would tell us that everyone will become old. If no one is taking care of him, send him to an old folks' home. [Ben] would also tell us the same thing - if you send me to an old folks' home, someone will take care of me and I don't have to come out." Yet despite the inefficiency of caring for Ben – a single dependent warranted the help of a disproportionate number of volunteers – Yinzhou believed that care should not be left

solely to the system. Since that episode, Ben has been, to a certain degree, rehabilitated. Although other medical conditions have surfaced since then, Ben preserves a relatively significant amount of independence.

This narrative, and others, had a deep impact on the audience listening during the community of practice session, some of whom subsequently proceeded to sign up as volunteers, or expressed interest in following the work of CRT. **The narratives shared by CRT were often situated within a larger systemic context, encouraging its listeners to question, and find their own answers, or propose solutions to particular challenges heard.**

**REFLECTION** "After hearing the story on Ben, I asked myself: even if it was inefficient, was that single person not worth it? By the end of the sharing, my heart was heavy, pained but deeply moved. At that point, I couldn't tell if I fully agreed with Yinzhou's view on care but that story helped me to feel and empathise with the needs of some residents in Cassia Crescent. I felt the weight of CRT's role in the community and a part of me also began thinking about the larger system of care in Singapore."

## 2) ACCESS: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHANNELS FOR ACTION

“When you join CRT there’s no job description. We try to play by your strengths and interests so you carve out what you want to do yourself. It takes more time and effort, but I think it makes volunteers feel more engaged and more aligned with what they’re doing. So a volunteer could be a regular volunteer doing house visits who is also helping out in our book project, or someone who is doing house visits and cultural mapping, [or] someone [who] is working on the back-end on our legal matters or our tech issues, different sorts of variations.”  
- Lim Jingzhou  
Co-Founder of CRT



ways. Volunteers find immediate channels to *do something* for a cause that they feel strongly for. **They are placed in positions where they get to harness their strengths, initiate and implement new programmes.** For example, there are medically trained professionals in CRT who would specifically support cases where medical knowledge is helpful.<sup>14</sup>

### Individual access: Harnessing strengths and providing autonomy

Civic action is about *doing*. Therefore, creating opportunities to take action is vital. In CRT, volunteers are given access and opportunities to tangibly take action and make a real difference. The emotional investment and attachment from learning stories find outlets to be translated into visible action. According to Yinzhou, a part of CRT’s work in the initial phase was attending to immediate and basic needs.<sup>13</sup> They attended to needs in tangible

Aside from that, there is also autonomy given to the volunteers. Their self-motivation and initiative profoundly shapes the direction and the character of the organization. One of the core volunteers, Lee Wei Ting, expressed: “every comment is valued and taken into serious consideration...CRT tries its best not to fall into a fixed mould and even attempts to be

<sup>13</sup> For CRT, the priority was to meet immediate needs. However, they worked on the principle that they were providing interim intervention which was to be connected with sustainable long-term intervention from the system.

<sup>14</sup> Medically trained CRT members provide support and knowledge through their recommendations on how to manage particular medical conditions. However, the resident’s choice in medical treatment is the first priority. In cases where residents decide to go to the hospital, CRT would assist in bringing the resident to the hospital. Where residents refuse to undertake traditional paths to seek medical care, CRT provides some alternatives through their medically trained CRT members.

as versatile as possible. It almost seems as though I am growing and learning together with CRT as it evolves". **Having available platforms is crucial in allowing convictions to be anchored in action.**

#### Community access: Engaging community stakeholders

CRT maintains an openness towards collaboration and engagement with other stakeholders. In doing so, they continuously carve out access points within the broader system of community stakeholders. Something that is often heard regarding collaborations is that the question is never about whether to collaborate, it is always about the degree of collaboration.

Lim Jingzhou, the other co-founder of CRT mentioned, "we start with the principle or the



value that we want to work with anyone and everyone who is in the community, who has a stake in the community, who is doing something in and with the community." **CRT maintains an open channel to all stakeholders. They recognise that collaboration and working with stakeholders is key to ensuring that residents are better served.** To date, they have worked with more than 50 partners from different sectors.<sup>15</sup> CRT brings interested stakeholders into the fold to create opportunities to improve the lives of residents. In AWC's experience of working with CRT, they bring the same sincerity and empathy with residents even when it comes to working with stakeholders. Despite the occasional frustration with stakeholders, Jingzhou revealed that "it's about recognising that everyone has their own limitations and constraints but we all have the



<sup>15</sup> Partners come from 7 different categories: grassroots and political institutions, government agencies, religious groups and institutions, social service and non-profit organizations, healthcare institutions, education institutions and the private sector. CRT is also partnering SMU-TCS iCity lab and Lvly in an effort to enhance community care to support sustainable ageing-in-place. This is achieved by providing sensor-enabled homes and personalized home care for senior Singaporeans.

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same goal which is to serve the community and the people and the residents. There will be gaps so we can help to complement each other's gaps."



### Societal access: Advocacy

What makes CRT unique as an entity is the manner in which their civic action extends beyond the micro dimensions of plugging gaps or working closely with stakeholders interested to contribute directly to the community. **The advocacy that CRT does, amplifies the work that they do beyond the confines of the neighbourhood they serve.** CRT's work straddles the different dimensions – ground work and change work. With a keen awareness of systemic issues, members of CRT recognize that change work must engage with policy. Wei Ting mentioned she was compelled

to join CRT because she was "intrigued by how closely they were working with stakeholders in the community and government agencies because it really showed how driven this ground-up group is in wanting to bring about real change."

**Through various modalities that target different people, CRT seeks to raise awareness about their experience.** Through participating in *The Greenhouse Sessions* community of practice, CRT's work reached arts and creative practitioners who are socially-engaged, as well as other multi-disciplinary practitioners such as

community and social workers, urban planners, policymakers, educators and researchers. With an ongoing book project, CRT's partnership with academics - including Ng Kok Hoe from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the publisher Ethos Books - enables them to tap on a larger network and share their learnings to a wider audience. In BTH, the message was subtle - it focused on the meaning of home and to tell the stories of the residents fully. The website was not only meant to document and raise awareness, but was also intended as "a tool to create empathy for the residents". The workshops and the originally intended exhibition would be targeted at "inspiring and training an active citizenry". In the workshops conducted at schools, "the call to action was to challenge [students] to incorporate the voices of those affected when developing their community projects."

**CRT consciously leverages ground work to lend weight to their advocacy work.**

Jingzhou mentioned, "if you want change you need something to base it on. Real life experiences, cases, statistics, complexities. And there's no better way to do that than to actually be doing it. Co-existence of both in one entity... It's very clear that these two parts of our work are very strongly interlinked and they feedback to one another." In terms of

ground work, CRT runs like a quasi-VWO. House visits are organised weekly, with cases recorded, managed and tracked. There is also a community team that organises and coordinates the community engagement programmes. Most importantly, **CRT's prudent yet open approach towards collaboration and sharing of information makes them highly organised and accountable.** Their presence on the ground, strength in organisation and their astuteness in connecting with community stakeholders lends them a legitimacy to buttress their advocacy work.

### 3) EMBEDDEDNESS: THE BASIS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION

#### Building relationships

#### **Relationships are the bedrock of CRT's work.**

CRT began its journey by building relationships with the community, and was supported by some initial relationships established by DA and BTH. The DA tours placed stories and individuals at the heart of the narrative. To elicit that naturally meant spending time and effort to interact with the individuals who

colour the narrative. The relationships of DA then opened entry points that made BTH a plausible project. The process of documentation in BTH was crucial in opening doors for CRT's work. "If we had not done the interviews, we would not have understood the perspective of the residents or the complexity of how the move would have affected them", said Yinzhou.



**REFLECTION** "I was once walking in the Cassia Crescent neighbourhood with Jingzhou. As we approached Blk 52, I began to feel like I was accompanying a local superstar. People knew Jingzhou, or the tall "Ah Boy", a strangely generic nickname that came with a specificity unique to Blk 52 residents.<sup>16</sup> Yinzhou was the other "Ah Boy", the "short one". I believe we were headed for the level 2 void deck of Blk 52 that day. The 5-minute journey took nearly 20 minutes. We were stopped intermittently by residents for short conversations and small talk. Whenever Jingzhou was stopped, I would register a change in his tone of voice. He trimmed off the deep cadences of propriety in his voice and slipped into a casual diction of mandarin and other Chinese dialects. He was comfortable and it felt like he had returned home. In an oddly comical way, I realised that Jingzhou was a local celebrity who was well-loved and somehow *belonged* to the community. I wondered about how long it took – the time, effort and commitment - for anyone to arrive at this level of trust and familiarity. It certainly was not built overnight."

<sup>16</sup> Some residents call Jingzhou "Ah Lim".





It is clear that the volunteers share a unique relationship and dynamic with the community. They plunge deep in their engagement and embed themselves in the community. Delphia mentioned that Dakota Crescent made a good case study on citizen participation because it involved both residents who were directly affected and citizens who were not but were willing to contribute. It is unique that Delphia framed it the way that she did because it implies that **even “outsiders” can become part of a community if they devoted time to weave themselves into the lives of the residents.** Unrestricted by the formality of organisations, many of the volunteers haul themselves into the work and embed themselves within the community. They too, develop high stakes in the community.

Yinzhou explained the concept further. In a formal relationship between a service provider and a resident, the stakes are higher for the resident. The resident is fully dependent on the service provider, while the service provider



has the power to render or withhold the service to anyone. In CRT, the stakes are levelled. The friendship balances the relationship. The volunteer has as much to lose as the resident. The dependency of a resident on CRT, however, is less than that on a service provider because a CRT volunteer is not a service provider but a friend that offers assistance. **This dynamic is highly equalising.** Yinzhou poignantly mentioned, “over time you gain as much from them as they gain from you. It’s no longer that you are a service providing help to them. But I’m learning more by just spending time with you. This is the larger shift in inequality. We are unequal in terms of socio-economic status and position in

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society based on the system we are within, but in terms of wisdom, learning and mentorship and even being old, there's a lot of cross exchange of value."



### Meeting Needs

The relationships formed with residents while at Dakota have further developed at Cassia Crescent. It is through these relationships that residents have surfaced their needs to members of CRT, and the latter's efforts at civic action are deeply appreciated by the residents because their needs are being met. This can be understood as the fruits of the volunteers' civic efforts. Jingzhou admitted, "CRT was a response to the needs that were immediate. A resident's bed that was filled with pee when we first met him again after relocation – that was the impetus of all the subsequent things that we did."



In the early stages of CRT, most of the time was spent "fire-fighting" in Yinzhou's words. The volunteers met immediate and pressing needs of residents, helping to clean houses, pack medicine, escort residents to hospitals, or simply being the hands and legs for residents who are not able to leave their house to buy a hot meal. They tangibly impact the lives of the residents. There are no shortcuts to this work. Engagement takes time and effort. Residents could only begin to entrust their personal lives to the volunteers because of the time and labour invested by the volunteers.

Now that the immediate transitional issues from relocation are slowly settling down, CRT is increasingly looking at psycho-social needs of the residents at Blk 52, and how to develop sustained levels of well-being. The volunteers' relationships and friendships formed from being embedded in this community compel and propel them to take action.

# MOVING AHEAD

On 1 Nov 2018, DA and CRT announced a restructuring to become two independent entities.<sup>17</sup> As an independent entity that is growing and expanding, CRT continues to reflect, question and chart their journey. CRT has been pivoting its focus towards community work, through various projects. For example, *Cassia Kaki*, an arts-based engagement project following from the cultural mapping project, both done in collaboration with AWC. Yet at the same time, questions on the sustainability of the organisation loom:

- **What are the eventual aims of civic action? Does civic action need to lead to the establishment of formal organisations? Should “scaling up” be a goal for CRT? What does scaling mean?**
- **CRT is run by volunteers organised via a relatively flat hierarchy. What does leadership look like amongst ground-up groups? What are the pros and cons of such a model?**
- **What might the long-term sustainability of CRT look like? On the flip-side, does CRT *need* to be sustainable in the long-run? Their work has indirectly attracted external stakeholders who are not service providers like ArtsWok Collaborative and Participate in Design (P!D) into the community. Is this a different model of sustainability?**
- **If the aim of CRT is to ultimately exit from the community, how might it be possible for CRT to exit in a way that would minimise the disruption of care for the residents?**

<sup>17</sup>The official announcement of the restructuring of DA and CRT can be found at <http://bit.ly/da-crt-2018>

# CONCLUSION

The work of a ground-up initiative like CRT is inspiring and admirable. It demonstrates the possibility of grounded, responsible, collaborative and committed civic action in Singapore.

Civic action can start from anywhere, and by anyone, as long as one is compelled to make a change in one's community. It is the hope of this case study that through the experiences of CRT, more individuals and groups will see a role for themselves in meeting social needs in Singapore, and have some strategies on how to mobilise others to civic action, while collaborating with the community and other stakeholders.

At the same time, there is also a hope for existing organisations, funders and policymakers involved in community development work to recognise the efforts and capabilities of these ground-up volunteer groups, to make and share space with them; as well as to welcome advocacy efforts and recommendations from these groups who often contribute different perspectives, thereby enlarging a particular community's narratives and capacities. In the case of CRT, they are also contributing towards advocating for a more meaningful relocation process for other communities facing a similar situation, by sharing their experiences and learnings via various presentations, and a publication.

Ultimately, the sweeter fruit of ground-up civic action would be the activation of other community members to step up and contribute to their own community, as well as elsewhere, both in terms of meeting needs and standing in the gaps but also advocating for changes and developments that need to take root, and gain ground in society.



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*All images are courtesy of Dakota Adventures, Between Two Homes and Cassia Resettlement Team.*

## **ANNEX A: ABOUT THE CASSIA RESETTLEMENT TEAM**



The Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) is an informal organization – officially unregistered – entirely made up of volunteers from all walks of life who commit to serving with and learning from the residents, particularly the elderly, of Blk 52 Cassia Crescent. Many issues came to the fore with the relocation of Dakota Crescent residents. The mechanical processes of relocation, the social relations disrupted by the move and the social repercussions of a flawed relocation process were some of the issues that the CRT volunteers came to address. Close to two years since its inception, CRT remains fully volunteer-run, with a current volunteer pool of 60 people, ranging from 14 to 59, and the work continues unabated. CRT has gradually evolved to pursuing three main areas of work:

1. Interim direct services and community programmes that emphasise on building strong relationships and trust with the people we serve and addressing immediate needs.
2. Facilitating linkages between community partners and institutional stakeholders to address gaps in services that have emerged for residents, rather than replacing professional care services.
3. Change work via sharing with stakeholders what we learn on the ground, piloting potential solutions that address resident needs with our partners, and our public engagement and advocacy efforts.

In the past, we often shared that we do befriending, medicine packing, medical escort etc, but we really came to the realization eventually that it has become impossible to define the scope of services which we cover. When we really think about serving communities, when we really want to respond to true community needs – which do not always fit into neat boxes, which are dynamic and ever-changing – the foundational values of CRT are then key: the emphasis on building strong relationships and trust with the people we serve.

CRT also organises community programmes like the regular *Cassia Potluck Party*, a regular block event with

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food and activities and *LIVE@52*, a floor-based engagement that utilizes the arts. Some of the programmes run by CRT are made possible with partial funding from the Marine Parade Leadership Foundation.

Presently, the house visits teams visit the homes of residents every Thursdays and Saturdays. Before the house visits, the team leads will look through the records made by volunteers during every visit, before deciding which households or residents to visit.

CRT has also partnered Lvely, a private-sector firm, to implement a pilot project in the community which involves the installation of a combination of sensors in homes of seniors who live alone so that caregivers can better care and respond to falls or situations which require external care and support. By growing the 'software' of this project, we hope to build a model of community care, where responses to alerts generated by the sensors are not responded to only by CRT volunteers – but a collective effort including family members of the residents, community partners on the ground, and most importantly, residents within the community. Other collaborations include the aforementioned cultural mapping project and the current programme pilot, *Cassia Kaki* with ArtsWok Collaborative.

For more information, please visit CRT's information sheet at: <http://bit.ly/crt-infosheet>

## ABOUT ARTSWOK COLLABORATIVE



The work of ArtsWok Collaborative focuses on arts connecting communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.

ArtsWok Collaborative works with multidisciplinary teams to design and implement innovative community-based arts programmes such as *BOTH SIDES, NOW*, an immersive arts experience that invites conversations about end-of-life issues, as well as *IPS Prism*, a civic-engagement piece which looked at governance in Singapore. In 2015, it launched the inaugural annual youth theatre festival *M1 Peer Pleasure*, a platform for creative and open exchanges with young people through drama and dialogue. It developed and continues to facilitate *The Greenhouse Series*, a field-building initiative that catalyses learning through a community of practice and action-learning lab. It also conducts and shares research that builds legitimacy for the field of arts-based community development. Our bi-annual e-newsletter as well as case studies can be found on our website.

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