

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 age¹

70% of people with ASD have a low IQ, requiring supervision²

What is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the umbrella term used to describe Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and other related disorders. ASD is a lifelong developmental disability that affects a person's ability to make sense of the world and relate with others.

For more information, see the helpful summary by the Autism Resource Centre

(<http://www.autism.org.sg/living-with-autism/what-is-autism>)

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.



PRESCHOOL

70%: estimated % of all children with moderate/severe special needs who **do not attend pre-school**³

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 facilities³

1 inclusive preschool in Singapore: AWWA's Kindle Garden



THERAPY AND SUPPORT

17 Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) centres run by VVOs for children with special needs⁴ of which 5 have specific programmes for children with ASD⁴

\$2-1,000: monthly fees for VVO EIPIC programmes (including govt subsidy)⁴

>12 months: waiting time reported by some parents for these programmes⁵

\$1,600-3,300: cost of therapy and support programmes from private providers⁶



ISSUE 2: QUALITY EDUCATION OPTIONS

HIGH DEMAND FOR AUTISM SPECIFIC SCHOOLS

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

6-24 months: reported length of waitlists for autism-specific schools⁷

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 needs⁸

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

only **20%** of secondary school teachers are trained in special needs⁸



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 less⁹

Only **1 in 10** Singaporeans feel sure about how to interact with children with special needs⁹

Only **50%** of parents of regularly developing children report that they will be comfortable with their child seated next to a child with special needs in the same class⁹



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.



Check out the following:

Autism Resource Centre
www.autism.org.sg

Autism Association Singapore
www.autismlinks.org.sg

Metta School www.metta.org.sg/hq/index.php/our-services/special-education

Rainbow Centre www.rainbowcentre.org.sg

World Autism Awareness Singapore (voluntary group) www.waas.org.sg/howcanyouhelp.html

SOURCES

1. Autism Resource Centre, quoted by Straits Times 24/12/16, "1 in 150 children in Singapore has 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. Singhealth website: www.singhealth.com.sg/PatientCare/ConditionsAndTreatments/Pages/Autistic-Spectrum-Disorder-Child-SGH.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 preschools were adequately supported by teachers, curriculum & facilities"

4. SG Enable website: <https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-children/early-intervention-programme-for-infants-children-eipic/> accessed 13th April 2017
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, 25/01/17, "Easing Long Wait at SPED Schools"
8. Ministry of Education, <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/programmes/support-for-children-special-needs> Retrieved 7 Feb 2017
9. Lien Foundation, 2016, "Inclusive Attitudes Survey"