

## **Beyond Social Services to Evolve HSCDC into a Community Model Supporting Families with Young Children**

**Singapore, 14 October 2025** – Beyond Social Services (BSS) has announced that it will cease operations at its Healthy Start Child Development Centre (HSCDC) by the end of 2025, marking the end of nearly two decades of dedicated service to children from low-income households. As this chapter comes to a close, it reflects BSS’s continued commitment to what has always guided its work: listening closely to families and building stronger communities together.

HSCDC’s story began in 2002, when a community survey in the Henderson and Bukit Merah estates revealed that most of the children from 104 families were at risk due to inadequate childcare, parental incarceration, or early school leaving. In response, BSS launched the Level-Up Playhouse, an early intervention programme that served around 30 children from these neighbourhoods and embodied the belief that every child deserves a healthy start in life.

As the programme grew, it evolved into the HSCDC, a safe, nurturing environment offering affordable, full-day preschool education, nutrition, and care for families facing challenging circumstances. Over the years, HSCDC has walked alongside hundreds of families, preparing children to enter primary school with stronger developmental foundations and the confidence to thrive.

### **Why we’re winding down HSCDC**

The early childhood landscape in Bukit Merah and across Singapore has changed significantly, with more affordable and accessible preschool options available to families. As these developments met the needs HSCDC once uniquely served, enrolment gradually declined, from over 50 children in 2018 to 14 in 2024, while referrals also tapered off as families relocated due to housing redevelopment.

Equally important are family-level barriers that a centre-based model alone cannot solve. Despite more accessible childcare places and targeted support for low-income households, irregular preschool attendance persists. According to the Supporting Lower-Income Households Trends Report 2024 released by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, in 2023, while 85% of ComLink+ families had enrolled all their children aged three to six in preschools, only 26% of the families that had enrolled their children in preschools run by Anchor Operators had achieved an average monthly attendance rate of 75% or higher. Irregular attendance at the preschool stage has been linked to weaker developmental progress and later academic and social challenges, often necessitating more extensive and costly interventions in primary school.

Frontline observations from BSS reveal that families navigating preschool support face multiple, interconnected barriers that extend beyond affordability or motivation. Logistical hurdles, such as transport difficulties, irregular work hours, and lack of alternative care arrangements, often result in inconsistent attendance. Systemic gaps, including wait times for special needs support and preschool schedules, further compound these pressures.

Many parents experience “attention” and “time” poverty, balancing financial stress and caregiving without reliable help, while emotional fatigue and children’s behavioural challenges strain family routines. Families also shared concerns about cultural and language disconnects in preschools, while widespread social isolation and low community trust continue to limit peer support and parent participation. Together, these realities highlight the need for flexible, community-rooted supports that strengthen caregiving capacity and leverage the community’s strengths at the neighbourhood level.

### **Reinvesting in Community**

Rather than seeing inconsistent attendance as a reflection of parental neglect, it points to broader structural and social challenges that require a collective response. Reinvesting in community-rooted support can help families build predictable routines, strengthen caregiving capacity, and create environments that nurture children’s readiness for primary school, complementing, rather than duplicating, existing preschool services.

“When HSCDC closes, we are not saying goodbye to the children or their families,” said Dr Mary George, Chairman of HSCDC’s Management Committee. “Even before the children entered HSCDC, their families were part of the Beyond community. Many of the parents know each other through Beyond.”

That spirit of connection continues today. In one neighbourhood, three mothers who met through Beyond’s *Community Tabung* programme have begun supporting one another with childcare. When one needs to work or attend to family matters, another steps in to help. Their simple arrangement reflects the trust and care that Beyond hopes to strengthen across all its communities — showing that even as HSCDC closes, the Beyond community lives on.

### **Next Steps: Co-Creating the Next Chapter**

Beyond’s work has always been grounded in the belief that communities already hold the wisdom and strength to care for one another, and Beyond’s role is to walk alongside them, strengthening these informal efforts and helping them dream bigger, so that together we can co-create solutions that are sustainable and can benefit more families.

In that same spirit, we have begun conversations with HSCDC parents and caregivers to co-create the next phase of work, while also engaging parents in the wider community to understand their caregiving challenges and aspirations. These discussions build on what’s already happening organically — mums supporting one another with caregiving, neighbours sharing advice, and families forming informal care circles through initiatives like the Community Tabung.

This process will unfold through four key phases:

- **Engage and Understand:** Build trust and rapport through small-group conversations with parents and caregivers to understand their caregiving realities, challenges, and hopes for their children. These sessions will surface shared values and motivators, strengthening belonging and collective purpose.

- **Identify Priorities and Leverage Community Assets:** Facilitate parents in defining common priorities, such as regular school attendance, shared caregiving, or after-school enrichment, mapping out community strengths that can be mobilised and working closely with Social Service Offices and partner agencies to ensure coordination and support. Parents will co-create simple, achievable goals and agreements on how they wish to support one another.
- **Empower and Strengthen Interdependence:** Support parents to act on their shared plans through regular gatherings, peer-led activities, and collective problem-solving. Examples include shared caregiving arrangements, learning circles, or social play sessions. Relationships formed in Tabung and parent groups will be deepened through reflection, celebration of progress, and practical skill-building.
- **Bridge with Wider Resources:** Connect families and parent groups to additional networks and partners, including preschools, community volunteers, and corporate or educational collaborators, to broaden access to learning, health, and psychosocial resources. This stage will also help parents gain confidence in engaging with systems and advocating for their children's needs.

Monitoring and learning will take place throughout these stages, using both attendance and participation data as well as parent feedback to inform programme refinement. A focused pilot involving around ten families will begin in early 2026, supported by ongoing community and partner engagement.

The closure of HSCDC is not a retreat, but a continuation of Beyond's mission — to empower families, nurture mutual care, and strengthen the communities they call home. We invite all who share this commitment to journey with us as we shape what comes next, together.

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