

Conversations about the Homeless

1) Hi, before we begin can you share with me your name, age & a short description of what you're currently doing?

RESPONSE: My name is Yu Ning, 40 this year. I would prefer to be 39 because my birthday is at the end of the year HAHAHA. I am a dietician by day and housewife at night.

2) So, as a (what they're currently doing), have you ever come across someone who was homeless?

- if yes, can you share the encounter?

- if no, do you think there are homeless people in Singapore?

RESPONSE: Yes, I have come across them. Camping out at Pasir-Ris Park and ECP or sleeping at conspicuous corners in a 24-hour fast food chain restaurant, sleeping under the shelter of the Esplanade MRT link or park benches along Kallang River with a thin ply of cardboard as their bed, or sleeping in their vans or makeshift cars. Didn't really get a chance to converse with due to the sensitivity of the issue.

3) What do you think being homeless means?

RESPONSE: Based on the direct definition of Homelessness, these are people that have no permanent place of residence for more than a year, but I'm not sure how long have the people I've encountered been out sleeping in the streets. I think for the context of Singapore, a number of these people are homeless because of an abusive household, mental issues, health issues, any disabling conditions or simply because it is dysfunctional staying at their homes. Heard of people being homeless because they typically share a rental HDB with another household and it is very uncomfortable.

4) Can you share what you think these people do daily?

RESPONSE: Assuming that a whole family is homeless. Menial work for the males and may be holding 3-4 jobs. The ladies might also be working or taking care of their children at a full-time basis. Individually, they definitely have a source of income, really depends on the reason for their homelessness. Some might actually be holding full time work or contract work. Some might also not be working and stalking the streets.

Conversations about the Homeless

5) And what about their night routine?

RESPONSE: Depends, but I think for those that hold 3-4 jobs, one of their jobs usually consist of a night-shift job as a security guard potentially 'staying' at their workplace as a 'home'. Or they could be just finding a place to lay to sleep at night without getting caught by the authorities or comfortable enough from the elements. Really depends.

6) When was the last time you:

- had a shower?
- had a meal?
- washed your clothes?

RESPONSE: Today, more specifically a few minutes ago hahaha. But yes, I know I can bathe, and they cannot.

7) Imagine yourself without a home, where in Singapore would you go to fulfil these basic needs?

- food & water
- sanitation
- shelter, safety & security

RESPONSE: Laying out my assumptions, just because they are homeless doesn't mean they have no money or income. So, I can assume that food and water would not be a huge issue, but whether or not their stomachs are filled, I would not be certain to make a judgment on that.

However, if I were to assume the worst off amongst them, these would be my assumptions:

- For water – natural parks/taps at kopitiam/coffee shops. Singapore's tap water supply is one of the world's cleanest, so should be fine.
- Food – shelters/ temples/churches in SG, assuming they cannot afford their own food. I have actually heard of foundations that actually provide meals to elderly at Chinatown. I know that there are quite a number of temples that provide free meals too, along Telok Ayer road.
- Sanitation – bathing or cleaning, usually the public pools or public gyms or toilets at beaches or natural parks. I would assume that females can gain access to their own sanitary pads when their period arrives.
- Shelter - Camping out at Pasir Ris Park and ECP, 24-hour fast food chain restaurant, Esplanade MRT link or park benches, their own vehicles.

Conversations about the Homeless

8) Why do you think these individuals/groups end up as they are now?

RESPONSE: Think I mentioned this earlier oops, for the context of Singapore, a number of these people are homeless because of an abusive household, mental issues, health issues, any disabling conditions or simply because it is dysfunctional staying at their homes. Heard of people being homeless because they typically share a rental HDB with another household and it is very uncomfortable.

Some might be homeless due to 'choice' rather than physically lacking a 'house'. So, the environment they were in when they stayed in a house is so poor that they would rather stay out on the streets.

9) Do you think there's a way out of their predicament?

RESPONSE: Yes. But it's difficult.

10) So being homeless is of course without shelter, but that doesn't exclude them from having their belongings – personal items and at times even family members. How would you advice someone in such a situation?

RESPONSE: Seek help from organisation or go to the police if they are in a difficult situation at home. Work with social workers. It honestly, depends.

11) Here are some examples of campaigns and activations done overseas. Do you think they will be effective in a place like Singapore?

RESPONSE: It depends, US homeless issue has got lots of veterans so I don't really think it can directly apply. Different countries have got unique reasons as to their homeland's homeless situation. The context of Singapore can be very different. However, I think that we can form campaigns based on some a general directive and context of problem. So no, I don't think these campaigns will be effective in Singapore.

12) Is homelessness a policy problem or community problem?

RESPONSE: Both. It can be a Policy problem because there are not enough catchments systems to prevent these people from falling through the crack of the social system. Such as safeguarding individual rights and harshness of the law also might be a push factor for people seeking help. It can also be a community problem because of the shame and stigma associated with being homeless, such as 'smelly', 'lazy' and 'unmotivated'. Making it harder for those currently homeless to reach out to the relevant help and authorities. Community problem because of their homes being unliveable.

Conversations about the Homeless

13) Let's put aside political intervention. Who in society do you think can drive the greatest impact upon this community?

RESPONSE: Politically correct answer, me and social workers, so collectively it is all of us haha. But there are reasons for this, it's really about a shift in mindset, having more sympathy and also a change in education. It's important for someone to actually bridge the conversation between the homeless and the authorities, example non-profit organisations and NGOs. I personally believe that homelessness should not be a life sentence, it usually arises due to more unseen reasons than just financial reasons. We therefore have to provide the resources and help for them to know how they can better protect themselves and where to seek the relevant intervention or help. But it would be good if there are organisations out there that actually go for "homeless hunting" where they keep their anonymity intact, yet also provide them with the relevant resources and help in teaching how they can help themselves. Unlike the police where they would be interrogated and searched, the homeless are given an opportunity to look for help and make the changes themselves, its more empowering.

14) Which would you be more interested/open to participating:
- an outreach activation
- an immersive experience (role-playing/experiential)
- none of the above?

RESPONSE: Outreach activation or donating money.

- INTERVIEW END -