



Discovering the Hidden Youth in Singapore: Novel Outreach Approaches Used by Fei Yue Community Services

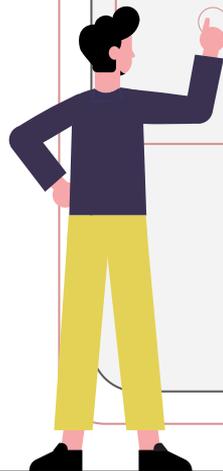
Authors:

Benjamin Yeo (Principal Social Worker/ Head of Youth Services)

Rauf Malachi (Social Work/ Programme IC)

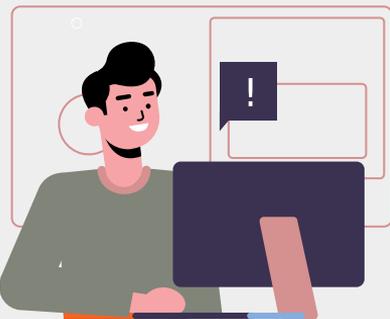
Denise Liu (Senior Research Executive)

Deborah Tay (Research Executive)





Overview



01 Who are Hidden Youths?

02 Fei Yue's Hidden Youth Outreach Service (HYOS)

03 Profile of Hidden Youth

**04 Effective practices :
Findings from Focus
Group Discussions**



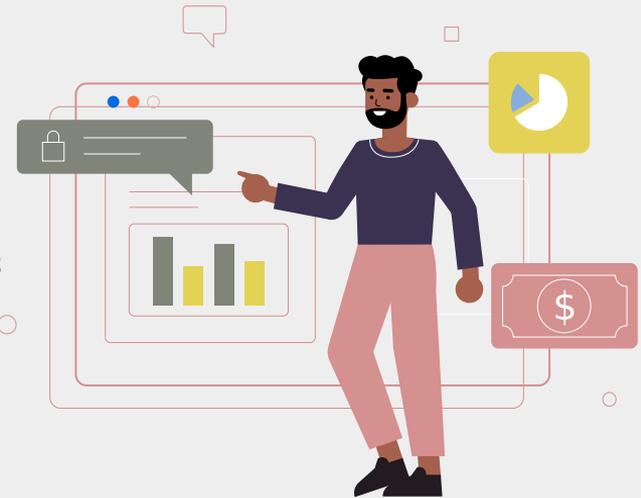
01

Who are the Hidden Youths?



Definition

“First coined by Dr Tamaki Saito (1998), Hikikomori refers to a condition where a youth **withdraws into the home** and **does not participate in the society** for a period of **over six months**, of which a **mental illness** is not likely to be the primary cause (Mind Science Centre, 2017, p. 25).”





Major Causes

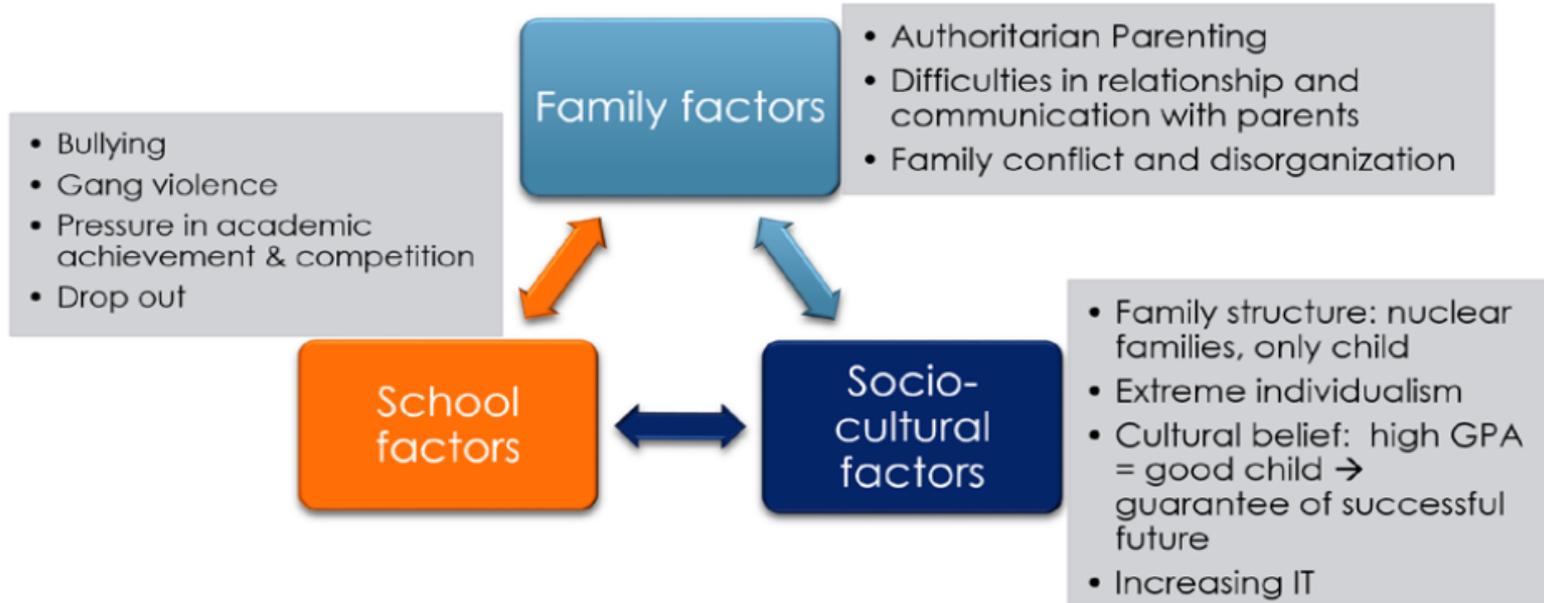
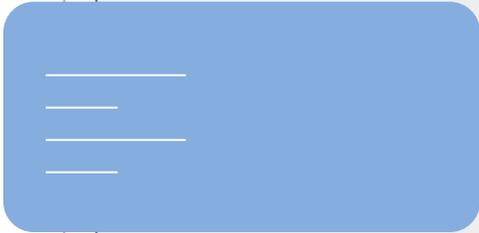
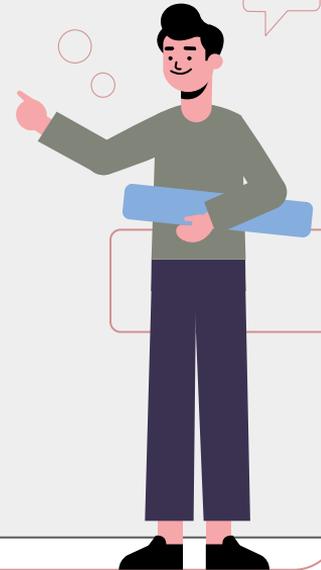


Figure 5. Lee, J. (2017). Major Causes of Socially Withdrawn Youths. [PowerPoint slides].

Case study (Daniel)





Case Study (Daniel): An example of how a youth became a hidden youth

Frequent arguments between oldest brother and mother.
Physical aggression between his two brothers.
Hung out with friends.

Had his first girlfriend, but the relationship ended in late 2017 that year because his best friend betrayed him.
A close friend died in a drowning accident and after which he stopped hanging out with his group of friends as he saw them as negative

Repeated Sec 2 as he did not pass Sec 1.
Absent for 139 days.

Started to miss school



Parents divorced in 2007.
Prior to this, father had been serving multiple prison sentences for drug abuse.

Moved to his cousin's rental flat where the cousin and two aunties were both diagnosed with mental disorders.

Skipped school most of the days (absent for about 127 days)

Attended school only for 1 day of orientation

- Diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder by NUH REACH.
- At risk of suicide and harm to others.
- Referred to Fei Yue in Sept 2020

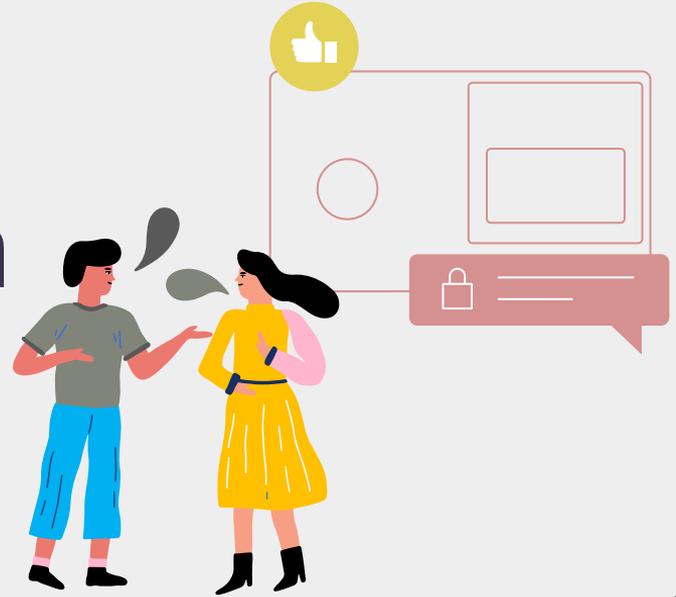
Family factors

School Factors

Social Factors

02

Fei Yue's Hidden Youth Outreach Service (HYOS)





HYOS Framework

Stage 1 Youth Outreach

- Home outreach
- Assessment of youth
- Develop outreach strategies with family

Stage 2 Youth Engagement

- Interest-based engagement to build rapport
- Develop hidden youth's identity, self-esteem and life goals through their interests

Stage 3 Youth Rehabilitation

- Develop hidden youth's socio-emotional & vocational skills through interest-based programmes
- Address issues & challenges impacting youth
- Connect youth to mental health interventions if required

Stage 4 Youth Reintegration

- Support youth's return to meaningful engagement through school or employment

Partnership with Family

Partnership with stakeholders (e.g., REACH, schools, other agencies)





03

Profile of Hidden Youth





Age of Onset & Intake

We are serving **22 Hidden Youths**:



Interventions are important in first 2 years of social withdrawal, when quality of life and psychological health are at the lowest (Chan, 2014)



Average age of onset of
social withdrawal:

13 years, 6
months

Average age at intake:

15 years, 1 month

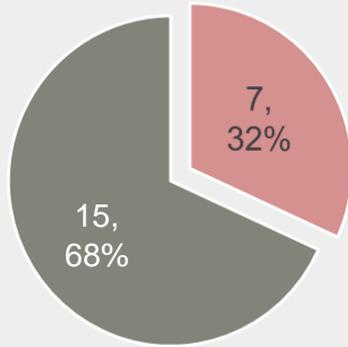
Gap between onset & intake:

1 year, 7 months



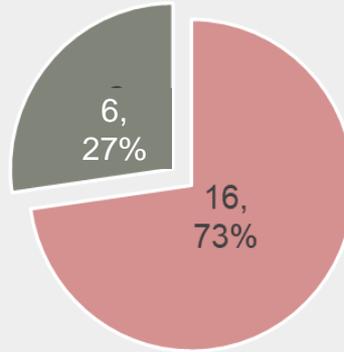
Demographics of Our Hidden Youths

Gender



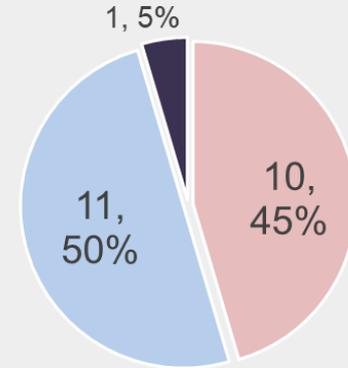
■ Male ■ Female

School Status



■ Withdrawn ■ Still enrolled in school

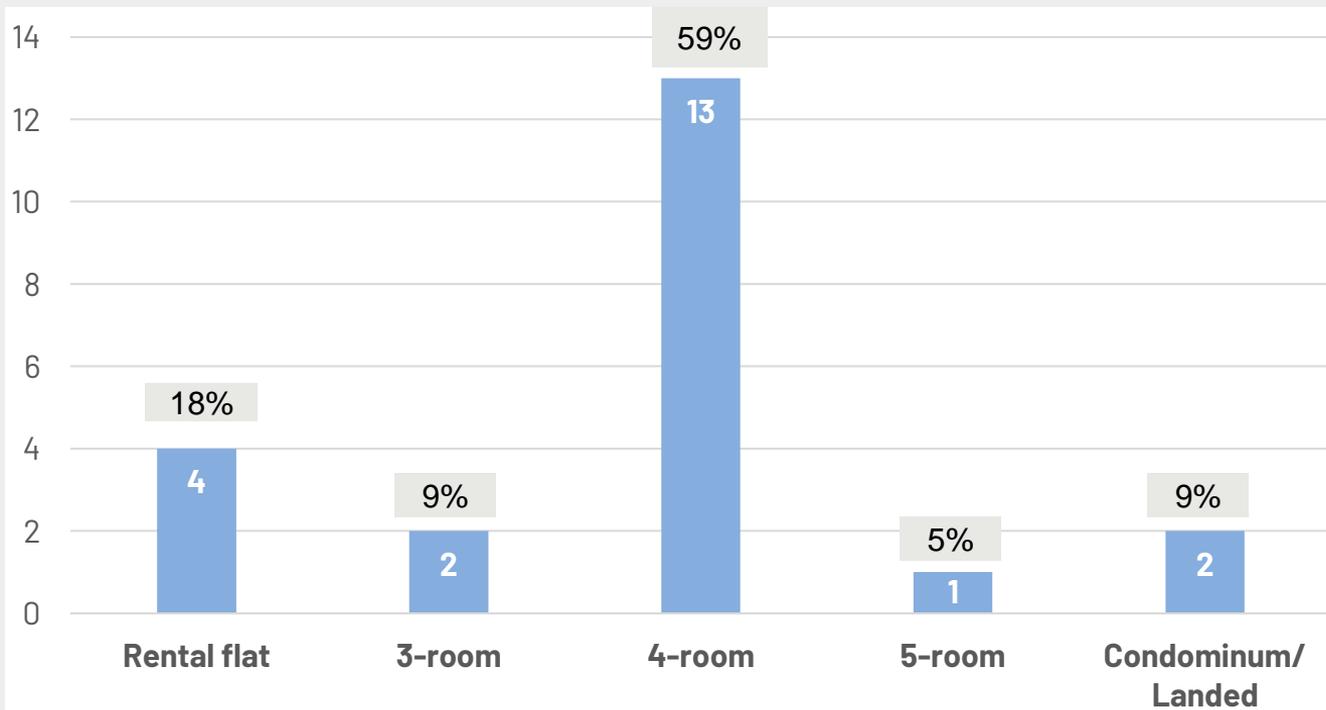
Parents' Marital Status



■ Divorced ■ Separated ■ Married

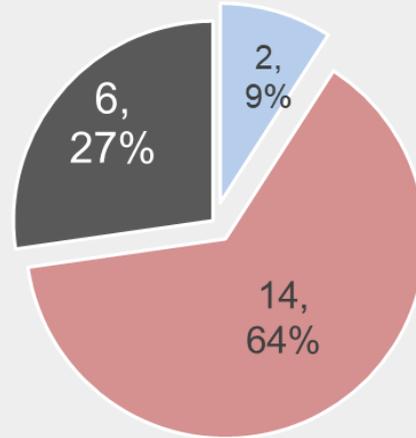


Housing Type





Severity Types of Hidden Youths



■ Mild

Still able to
leave the
house

■ Moderate

Does not leave
the house but has
some contact with
the family at home

■ Severe

Stays in room
with little/ no
contact with
family



04

Effective Practices: Findings from Focus Group Discussions



Focus Group Discussions

Purpose



- Elicit effective practices that workers have discovered while working with Hidden Youths and partners
- Explore challenges faced by workers

Method



- 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 14 practitioners working with Hidden Youth
- Average length of each FGD: 2 hours

Analysis



- FGDs were transcribed verbatim
- Thematic Analysis using a hybrid approach to identify themes (Boyatzis, 1998)

Key Themes: Effective Practices

Working with Parents

**Managing
Expectations**

**Empathising &
Attending to
Emotions**

Partnering Parents

Working with Youth

**Interest-Based Activities &
Creative Engagement
Approaches**

**Pacing; working within youths'
comfort level**

Working with Parents

Managing Expectations



[Sharing with parents] the pacing of the expectations of the youth to do something drastic- like suddenly leave the room. I share with them in general the timeline but I also give a disclaimer that it's very case-by-case, it really depends on [if the youth] feels safe to come out of the room. That one is not determined by anybody, only the youth.

- Participant 7

When I manage to talk to the caregiver, I.. Say.. Based on our experience usually it would take at least 3 months to engage the youth. Sometimes it can be up to 6 months... **the more anxious [the parents] are, the more I will overstate the duration.**

-Participant 10



Working with Parents

Managing Expectations



“I also think sharing the timeline of the work is helpful like in as part of managing the parents’ expectations. That it’s not within one month I’ll get to meet your youth especially for hidden youth it generally takes up to six months of rapport building.”

- Participant 1

“So I think the importance of skills of the worker is to bring about clear communication and to help them to share as clearly as possible what are some of the limitations that the worker are unable to do. And what are things the worker can do”

– Participant 3



Working with Parents

Empathising & Attending to Emotions



So sometimes due to multiple agencies, [parents] may be referred here and there. They are so tired. In the end Agency C say that want to do [this] then they'll just [say] okay. Then when we are Agency D, then they'll *aiyah* okay, sure. **But deep inside their hearts they are helpless, give up.** So are we sensitive enough? To be able to observe, to be able to listen to the different thoughts, feelings that they have during that point of intake?

– Participant 3

As a youth worker, especially working with **highly anxious [parents] who are very helpless**,... I got to meet them quite intentionally, and respond to them either by phone call or meet them. I appreciate that after a few months of high intensity of responding or attending to them, slowly they are less anxious. So far this is what I find helpful.

– Participant 5

Working with Parents

Empathising & Attending to Emotions



I totally agree that [parents] would feel very helpless. There can be a bit of shaming when people are coming into like, step in and help as though the parents were not effective. **So I think empathy helps.**

- Participant 1

Funakoshi et al. (2021) – listening and attending to family’s anxieties and frustration before providing them with support was an effective outreach strategy

So for the parents, how to help them feel less or don’t feel blame for the situation they are in?.. [so] they won’t feel like okay, there’s another authority coming to me telling me what to do about my child, or my child has all the issues in the world that I couldn’t solve.

– Participant 3

Working with Parents



Partnering Parents



[Tell parents] **How much I'm going to learn from you about your son. Because you are the expert.** You have been spending so many years with your son. And for me to develop the outreach strategies in the fastest time it depends on how much we are going to collaborate, how open you gonna share with me, and how frequent we will meet.

– Participant 10

This is not [workers] coming in to solve your issue or to solve your child's issue. Yeah, but it's a partnership.. so let's work things out. Let's plan on how to make things better. So I think - I find that whenever we put in **this kind of partnership thoughts in the parents they find ... it helpful. Like *heng ah [thank goodness]* I got support. That kind of feeling.**



– Participant 3

Working with Parents



Partnering Parents



Working hand-in-hand with [parents] at the start, getting more buy-in.. So we can better understand the youth and also eventually come up with a solution together with parents' inputs on what they think would be best to reach out to the youths.

–Participant 11

How we understand partnership is that we come in as an expert in working with youth, but the parents are experts of their own children and then we come together to discuss and negotiate what would be helpful in their own situation. However... when parents suggest something that they strongly believe works, but in our own professional judgment, we know that this will only turn the youth further away, then how do we still show the parent that we are willing to try but yet you don't want to set the youth back, set our rapport back, set us up for failure in the Outreach process? **So I think that negotiation is very very important and really having more time to, to discuss, ask more concrete questions to the parent.. [while], still maintaining that collaborative stand with the parent.** Not putting them down, like “I think this will not work, I don't want to try”



– Participant 1

Working with Youths

Interest-Based Activities & Creative Engagement Approaches



My youth was saying he wants to train himself in mobile legends to “carry” the team [so] he is the one who can.. get the team to build up their skills so they can overcome the enemy... I asked him how is that important to you... he said.. he hopes to be the one strong enough to help others. Then from there I asked him how is this a reflection of his own life and his own hopes... **I think that has been one of the more successful strategies.. To help them translate the digital life to real life.**

- Participant 10

Matsuguma et al. (2018):

- Play games to observe youth’s stories of success & accomplishments
- Facilitate conversations and reflection to help youth recognise strengths, gain confidence & self-efficacy to apply them in the real world

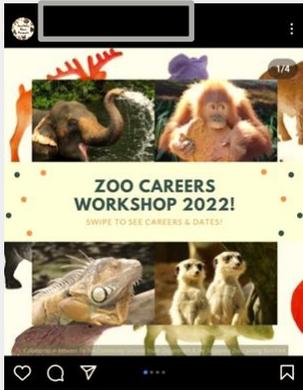
Working with Youths

Interest-Based Activities & Creative Engagement Approaches



Celebrating small milestones. Even stepping outside the house. **We played a game and the loser has to go smell someone's shoes. Surprisingly the youth said "okay". I think small steps.** Small victories and celebrating milestones.

– Participant 6



I think because of the different programmes we have, like the Animals.. it's something very different from what they would be able to experience. Which is something the youth enjoys, although the condition is that he has to meet other people. It's something he will still try because of the animals.

– Participant 1

Working with Youths

Interest-Based Activities & Creative Engagement Approaches

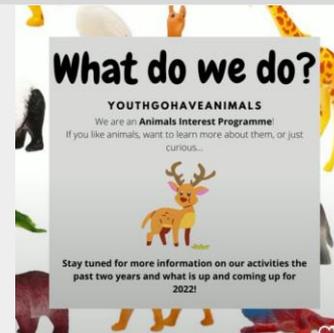
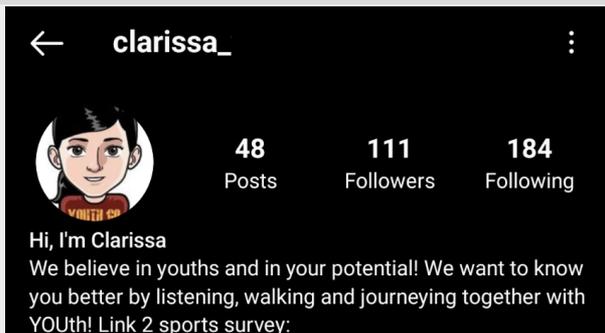


Once I delivered food. The youth already knows of my presence, but he wasn't willing to meet. So, I rang the doorbell then he opened up. So that was my first visual of him and his first visual of me. Then the mum came to the door, and she introduced. But after that he went back into the room. But at least he knows who I am, what I look like, and I think from there... I also wrote some cards and letters. I found out from the Social Worker that's what he prefers because he doesn't really like to articulate his thoughts in person. **So I just started writing letters. That's something that is really helpful cos at least there is a touchpoint rather than you just constantly text the youth which can seem a bit too much sometimes also.**

– Participant 11

Working with Youths

Effective social media outreach (Chan & Ngai, 2019):



Use profile pictures and descriptions to show that youth workers are fun and friendly adults to talk to

Design attractive newsfeed about outreach activities

Engaging Hidden Youth in conversations about their interests, hobbies, and casual topics that are more light-hearted (Funakoshi et al., 2021)

Working with Youths



Pacing; Working within Youth's Comfort Level

The youth can have a choice whether it's through Zoom or Discord; whether they want to show their face or don't want [so] it's something that the youth is comfortable with. - Participant 2

Effective outreach strategies include:

- Creating safety by avoiding conversations about school and work
- Providing support and solutions only when the youths are seeking them
(Funakoshi et al., 2021)

No youth wants to be disconnected. They disconnect to protect themselves... they want safety and people who can care for them.. So there was this period he didn't want to reply, so I went down to give food. I think what is helpful is that I wasn't fixated on getting him to talk to me, getting him to reply me.. Having the belief that when I communicate care one way, when he experiences enough care.. He will be ready to talk to me.

– Participant 10

Conclusion/ Future Directions

Future Research

- Documentary photography and photovoice to capture the lived experiences of Hidden Youth from their perspective
- Qualitative study to understand the experiences of caregivers and how to better support them

Programme

- Develop Parent Support group for caregivers of hidden youth



**"Staying in my room makes
me feel safe, in control and
free to be who I am."**

- Hidden Youth



Contact Details



Rauf Malachi
Social Worker,
Programme IC
raufmalachi@fycs.org



Benjamin Yeo
Principal Social
Worker,
Head of Youth Services
benjaminyeo@fycs.org



Deborah Tay
Research Executive
deborah Tay@fycs.org



Denise Liu
Senior Research
Executive
deniseliu@fycs.org

*We would like to thank **NUH REACH** for partnering with us to develop this hidden youth service in Singapore. We would also like to thank **Moses Yeo** for his contributions in conducting the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), **Sophia Koo** for her help with the transcription and analysis, **Zoe Tee** for her involvement in preparing the presentation and all the **Fei Yue Hidden Youth outreach workers** who participated in the Focus Group Discussions.*



THANK YOU

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**

