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**Singapore: Developing life skills and changing mindsets
about and through work in the home
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Abstract

In 2011 in Singapore, a photograph went viral. It was of a young man in army fatigues, striding ahead and focused on his smart phone while his much smaller domestic helper struggled after him, carrying his heavy army pack. The largely negative public response centred around the theme of young people being pampered, self-absorbed and entitled. While this anecdotal case was exceptional, it had turned the spotlight on the culture in many Singaporean homes where there is a heavy emphasis on academic grooming of children and a heavy reliance on foreign domestic help. The first aspect has resulted in a generation of children whose only task is to study and perform academically but who often lack basic life skills and (inter)personal skills and where advancement of self becomes the inevitable and ultimate marker of a successful and valuable life. The reliance on foreign domestic help has contributed to devaluing work in the home to a series of manual tasks that are considered beneath purview and which can be delegated away to minimally trained individuals.

We adopted a structured programme in Singapore that was begun in Kenvale College, Sydney, to attempt the rather monumental task of changing mindsets about the value of the work in the home and how through this work, the fundamental role that the home plays in developing character strengths and value systems in children during the crucial formative years is materialized in concrete and observable ways. The programme is a comprehensive and cohesive attempt at tackling the different facets and skills required to perform work in the home well, while at the same time, challenging its participants to analyse and evaluate their personal reasons for developing professionalism in the work they do in the home. It consists of 7 modules ranging from time management, beauty, art and entertainment, to home maintenance, dining and entertainment, and kitchen skills, with human anthropology embedded into each module to help participants reflect on what motivates excellence and professionalism in the home. We began the programme

in 2016, targeting primarily full-time or almost full-time homemakers with the anticipation that as these women developed and actualized their skills as home managers, the tenor and culture of home life would develop along with their skills and filter to and engage other family members. The goal is to expand the programme in time to include working parents, young professionals and to introduce some of the concepts and skills to youth through teen activities.

In bringing in a programme that had been geared for a westernised setting, we faced unique problems in customizing it to that of Singapore which straddles the East and the West. We found that there were some universal challenges, but also unique ones for example in terms of addressing cultural mindsets, the difference in sizes of homes, language barriers in a multilingual society, different culinary parameters, the role of domestic help in family dynamics.

This paper reports the first year of our experience of Kenvale College Home Management Program in Singapore.

Full Paper

See Book: "People, Care and Work in the Home"

<https://homerenaissancefoundation.org/resource/people-care-and-work-in-the-home/>