

OUR SINGAPORE CONVERSATION

Bread-and-butter issues dominate forum on values

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SINGAPORE – A forum for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents to share what societal values and qualities are important to them was dominated by bread-and-butter issues instead.

The discussion held at the Woodlands Galaxy Community Club yesterday was organised as part of the Our Singapore Conversation national project. It was hosted by Sembawang Group Representation Constituency (GRC) grassroots advisers, National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan, Mr Hawazi Daipi, Ms Ellen Lee and Mr Ong Teng Koon, who are also Members of Parliament.

The 250 participants — residents who come from all walks of life — were broken up into groups of up to 12, with facilitators to lead the discussion. The participants, about a quarter of whom were new citizens or Permanent Residents, had been expected to provide input on the type of society and home they would like to have in 2030 as well as how they can work towards achieving their desired future.

However, the one-and-a-half-hour discussion was mostly spent



on issues such as cost of living and housing, as well as municipal complaints like the low frequency of bus services and the litter situation in the estate.

For example, a participant in her 60s cited worries about rising healthcare costs. When a facilitator asked her what could be done to alleviate the situation by 2030, she replied that she did not want to think so far ahead.

Other older participants said they were worried that their children or grandchildren may not be able to afford their own homes, while some wondered if there will be enough homes for everyone in the future.

National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan at the Our Singapore Conversation discussion held at Woodlands Galaxy Community Club yesterday.

PHOTO: OOI BOON KEONG

Younger participants spoke about the challenge of balancing work and family while they try to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Among those who kept to the discussion's theme was Singapore Management University undergraduate Clarine Chai, who felt Singaporeans should have a sense of gratitude. Retiree Chong Weng Yoke suggested focusing on moral education from young to inculcate values such as respect, while Garry Luyun stressed the need for new citizens like himself to "integrate ourselves and work as a team, as a community".

At the end of the session, Mr Khaw noted that many of the participants used the opportunity to engage him on housing concerns, given his portfolio. He also assured the residents on the availability and affordability of flats.

Speaking to TODAY, Sembawang GRC MP Ellen Lee said that residents airing their grouses at the discussion was "not surprising at all".

On the challenge of getting residents to focus on the themes of the national project, Ms Lee said: "The value is not obvious but the process itself is important because the process itself shows that the Government wants to hear them ... even if they can't think so far ahead, it doesn't matter, at least we have approached them."