



Breastfeeding
Mothers'
Support Group

SINGAPORE

BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS' SUPPORT GROUP

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UEN No: S91SS0021J

Annual Report for the Year 2020-2021

17th Executive Committee

| Portfolio | Member | Elected / Appointed |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| President | Khatim Hamidon | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| Vice-President | Elaine Chow | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| Secretary | Far'ain Jaafar | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| Treasurer | Atiqah Halim | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Ellen Nepilly | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Mythili Pandi | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Emma Bell | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Nor Faizah Masod | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Alona Hodik | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Yen Lim | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Siti Nuraidah | Elected on 4 May 2019 |
| | Jasmine Tan Tai | Elected on 4 May 2019 |



UPDATES ON BMSG'S PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVITIES

1. Outreach

The channels that we are currently using to engage our members and target audience are: **Social Media, Newsletter, Community Initiatives**

a) Social Media

- i) Facebook page, where we post updates on our activities and share interesting or relevant information for our members.
- ii) "Breastfeeding Mothers' Support Group (Singapore)", a mothers-only closed group where members can post queries or share their experiences on breastfeeding. Our counsellors are rostered to respond to queries in this group.
- iii) "Breastfeeding Families Singapore", a new group started in June 2017. This group is open to both fathers and mothers, and is meant to be a platform where breastfeeding information can be more easily accessed, so that women can be better supported by their partners on their breastfeeding journey. Discussion in this group is also more broad-ranging, covering any family-related topic, instead of just restricting it to breastfeeding.
- iv) "BMSG Volunteers", a closed group comprising women who do ad hoc volunteering with BMSG. This is where we source for mothers to contribute articles to our newsletters, come for our workshops to do a "mother's sharing" for participants, and help run events.
- v) "BMSG Counsellors", a new closed group to streamline communication with our past and present volunteer counsellors, as well as act as a repository for useful information for counsellors.
- vi) "Separate BF101 and B2W workshop groups", closed private groups set up to facilitate online workshops for registered participants. Participants are given a 1-month access to a pre-recorded workshop and notes for the workshop which are both parked in the groups. In May, we also introduced live Zoom workshops. The groups remained for attendees who are unable to attend the live workshops.



b) **Newsletter**

The newsletter contains these five sections:

- i) President's Note (summary of BMSG's activities and articles for the month and to touch upon a newsworthy development in the breastfeeding world),
- ii) Milk Talk (an article on a relevant breastfeeding topic or current development in the breastfeeding scene here and abroad),
- iii) Mother's Sharing (real-life account from a mother on her breastfeeding experience which are curated to cover as wide range of common breastfeeding challenges and experiences as possible),
- iv) Milk Tip (information nugget on breastfeeding),
- v) Special Feature (ad hoc or seasonal articles), and
- vi) BMSG News (features current updates of BMSG's activities and its members)

c) **Website**

Our website continues to host a wide range of breastfeeding articles, information, contact points and infographics to support breastfeeding mothers.

In 2021 and onwards, we are looking to improve our website's functionality and user-friendliness, under a new grant

d) **Media**

In 2020-2021, these articles in the media had mentions of BMSG:

- i) **Straits Times, 16 March 2020**
'Don't be afraid to ask for help,' says mother who contemplated suicide
- ii) **Sassy Mama, 28 July 2020**
Celebrate World Breastfeeding Week 2020 in Singapore
- iii) **Berita Harian, 6 August 2020**
Galak susu ibu ditingkat masa Covid-19
- iv) **SCWO, 3 September 2020**
The Breastfeeding Mother's Support Group (Singapore) hosts its first virtual synchronised breastfeeding event to mark World Breastfeeding Week on Sunday 2nd August 2020



Publishing Hotline Number

Besides assisting media outlets as newsmakers, BMSG has also written in to The Straits Times to include the BMSG hotline should they publish any stories that is related to breastfeeding, as part of their community service. It could be likened as publishing the SOS hotline for stories on suicides.

Additionally, with many story links published on the media companies' social media pages, BMSG would also leave our counselling help details on the comments section.

Complaint on Misleading Article

Our exco member Siti Nuraidah reached out to the editor of Yahoo Life on 25 March 2021 to give feedback on a misleading article with regards to breastfeeding for newborns. Following this complaint, the said article was quickly retracted.

e) Other Outreach

i) MOH #1

With the panic and uncertainty on protocols for quarantine and hospital treatment of Covid-19 during the pandemic, mothers were understandably concerned should they be separated from their infants. BMSG reached out to the MOH hotline in June 2020 to find clarity on the possibility of mother-baby separation directives for quarantine orders.

ii) MOH #2

It came to BMSG's attention that breastfeeding mothers were being turned away or told to suspend breastfeeding by staff at Covid-19 vaccination stations. In response, BMSG wrote a letter to the Ministry of Health to highlight this issue, which contravened MOH's own directives that breastfeeding mothers can be vaccinated and that the suggestion of suspending breastfeeding was merely an option that these mothers could consider.

In response, MOH acknowledged the gap and promised not only to retrain staff in this area but also to contact all breastfeeding mothers who had been turned away and offer them a new vaccination slot.

Infographics have been produced to raise awareness of the rights of breastfeeding mothers to a) get vaccinated and b) choose not to suspend breastfeeding after the vaccination.

2. Counselling

a) Counsellors

We currently have 49 active counsellors with a few "retired" counsellors who pitch in for relief shifts when needed. We held counsellor training this year and welcome a new batch of counsellors to take on shifts.

b) Phone line

| | Telephone | Facebook posts | WhatsApp | Email threads |
|------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------|---------------|
| May 2020 to April 2021 | 640 | 6241 | 1132 | 0 |

c) Workshops

- i) We were able to resume some in-person workshops with safe distancing measures implemented. Participants maintained a safety distance of at least one metre from each other. Temperatures were taken and Safe Entry required from all participants. No food or drink was served to minimise mask-free time.

However, due to Phase 2 (Heightened Measures) beginning from 17 May, workshops will have to go back to virtual only.

- ii) As usual, all workshop participants (mothers only) will be added to a dedicated WhatsApp group administered by two counsellors. Participants will be part of the group for a period of one year. All participants from the April to June workshops were added to their respective groups as well and were able to clarify what they needed from the workshops with the counsellors.

| Workshops | Sessions | Attendees | Chas card holders |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| BF101 | 15 | 105 | 5 |
| B2W | 12 | 204 | |

d) Mother-to-mother support meetings

- i) We continue to hold 3 sessions a month of our free mother-to-mother support meetings, also known as Mum 2 Mum (M2M). These sessions are conducted monthly, with 2 weekday sessions (targeting mothers on maternity leave, stay-at-home-mothers and also mothers who work from home) as well as 1 weekend session for working mothers.
- ii) We had a total of 96 M2M meeting attendees from May 2020 to April 2021.

- iii) We have also seen a steady increase of participants with an average of at least 3 participants per session. Mothers reported that the convenience of attending from home has been a plus as they are able to attend with baby without the hassle of traveling to BMSG office

3. Activities & Events

a) Counsellor Training 2021

Twenty new volunteer counsellors are due to graduate in July 2021 and commence duty. Nineteen volunteer counsellors from the batch of 2019 will complete their bond.

We commenced Counsellor Training this year after a one-year hiatus due to the pandemic in 2020. This year, 90% of our training was conducted online via video conferencing including our final assessment for trainees. This was a stark difference to previous years where training and assessment were conducted on-site at SCWO training rooms. It has definitely been a challenging period of time as we spread the workload among our trainers and trainees who were also juggling family and work duties, sometimes having to split their time in between working from home and home-based learning.

We also introduced a new mentorship system where trainees were paired with senior counsellors to counsel real mothers.

Our final assessment was completed on 19 May 2021 and at the time of writing, we are still in the process of evaluating our trainees' verbal and written assessments. With experience in conducting online training, we hope to continue another round of training in 2022 with hopefully more physical sessions.

b) BMSG Ambassadors

BMSG trained a group of breastfeeding ambassadors who post comments in the group using the #bmsgambassador hashtag. Selected members of our Facebook group have undergone training and use this hashtag to supplement our counsellor responses. The Ambassadors can share links to relevant articles from trusted websites, promote BMSG newsletter articles, promote BMSG workshops and events, as well as share our infographics.

These can add on to counsellor responses, or provide a first level of assistance if a counsellor is not able to respond promptly.

This helps to deepen engagement with our community and also reduces the workload of our counsellors, especially as the Facebook shifts are quite heavy. The Ambassador scheme can help to test out potential counsellors, and minimally provides another way that mums can help other mums without becoming a counsellor.



c) New hires for BMSG

This year, thanks to a new government grant, funds were made available to hire a full time organisational development executive. Their role would be to work on business strategies, fundraising and donor management.

In order to optimise the grant fully, BMSG has also hired a part-time staff for finance and human resource.

d) Invitations and Meetings

BMSG has been invited to attend a number of events in the past year.

- i) Updated SIFECs Committee - Dec 2020 meeting by Health Promotion Board - SIFECs, on 11 November 2020. It was attended by Khatim Hamidon (President) and Siti Nuraidah (EXCO member) via Zoom.
- ii) World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) Group Meeting by WBTi, on 23 November 2020. It was attended by Khatim Hamidon (President), via Zoom.
- iii) Conversation on Singapore Women's Development by SCWO, on 16 January 2021. It was attended by Khatim Hamidon (President), via Zoom.
- iv) Conversation on Singapore Women's Development by PA, on 30 January 2021. It was attended by Khatim Hamidon (President), via Zoom.
- v) SCWO Presidents' Forum + Introduction to CEDAW by SCWO, on 27 February 2021. It was attended by Elaine Chow (Vice President), via Zoom.
- vi) IWD 2021: Trailblazing into 2052 by PPIS on 27 March 2021. It was attended by Khatim Hamidon (President) and 'Atiqah Halim (Treasurer), via Zoom.
- vii) Celebration of Mothers' Day by Mums for Life on 2 May 2021. It was held at Gardens by the Bay and attended by Khatim Hamidon (President).

Besides these invitations, president Khatim Hamidon attended the online presentations below on behalf of BMSG:

- i) Protecting Breastfeeding in the Time of COVID-19: Implementation of the Code in Asia organised by UNICEF, WHO and IBFAN on 24 June 2020.
- ii) Engaging Fathers in Breastfeeding Support - Perspectives from Southeast Asia organised by WABA on 3 December 2020.
- iii) Protecting women's and children's health and human rights in the 'first food' system: commercial influence and conflicts of interest on infant and young child feeding in Australia by ANU, WBTi, and Save the Children, on 15 February 2021.

- iv) 40th Anniversary - International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes organised by Global Breastfeeding Collective, WHO, Unicef on 21 May 2021.

e) BMSG Events

- i) BLO 2020 was held virtually, with the guest-of-honour MP Louis Ng, chosen for his advocacy for breastfeeding mothers, and hosted by Joanne-Marie Sim. We had a sharing on Breastfeeding@Work with a special segment during the event, as well as a presentation by Dr Chua Mei Chien, President of the Association for Breastfeeding Advocacy Singapore (ABAS) titled "Breastfeeding and the mother with suspected/confirmed Covid-19", a Breastfeeding Quiz and a curated virtual goodie bag.

The event was a success with 73 number of mothers who latched on during the Zoom BLO, a significant increase from 48 mothers in the previous year. While we were unable to meet in person, the virtual event actually resulted in a higher Latch On number than usual.

- ii) As Volunteer Day could not be held in person this year, BMSG sent out appreciation cards as well as badges to thank volunteers for their service.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Event</u> | <u>Attendance</u> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| August 2020 | Big Latch On | 100 |

4. Collaborations

a) Babes Pregnancy

We continue to work closely with Babes Pregnancy, a charity that gives assistance for pregnant teenagers. When their social workers have young mothers who request for breastfeeding assistance, we match their wards with our counsellors to provide support over WhatsApp. Babes has also asked for support from BMSG to counsel six pregnant teenagers via Zoom, with their social worker/Babes representative in virtual attendance as well.

b) Clarity Training

The first part of the training with Clarity, on crisis intervention management for our counsellors, has been completed in the first half of 2020. Due to the pandemic and safe distancing measures, the second part has been postponed till later notice when Clarity deems it safe to continue a physical face-to-face workshop.



5. Plans for 2021-2022

a) Phone upgrading

BMSG is facing issues with the current SingTel call forwarding system. Counsellors occasionally run into difficulty deactivating and activating the call forwarding, leading to unforeseen downtime from active counselling. BMSG is actively looking for new solutions and welcomes ideas and partners in this area.

b) Office renovation

Our office is (or was) used as an M2M meeting spot but participants have often commented that it is messy and squeezey. We have a lot of junk, old files and unused, outdated material in the room that can be cleared. The room is long overdue a cleanup and should be renovated to make it more organised as well as more welcoming. Since the room will not be used for physical meetings until clearance is given, it is a good time to consider renovating and sprucing up the office.

c) BMSG Picture Book

A BMSG picture book about breastfeeding is in the works. We are accepting donations to fund the production of the book, which is estimated to be completed soon. "My Sweet Baby" is produced by our very own BMSG counsellors and nursing mothers. It tells the story of a breastfeeding baby nursing with mummy all around Singapore and contains references to Singapore's iconic landmarks.

d) Seeds of Change Fund

We are continuing with the remainder of the Seeds of Change Fund, awarded to us in early 2020 by MSF, with the focus of working mothers who breastfeed and workplaces that are breastfeeding-friendly. In 2020, we have managed to produce two videos and have called on mothers to nominate breastfeeding-friendly employers, besides providing free back-to-work workshops for mothers. We will continue with three more videos and getting ready breastfeeding packs for employers.

e) New programmes

BMSG is looking into developing new programmes to widen our scope of care, in hopes to provide holistic assistance for mothers for concerns that are linked to breastfeeding. These programmes are hoped to also generate new income channels for BMSG.

f) Other events

BMSG also hopes to continue with our signature events such as the Big Latch On and Tea with Breastmilk series. Besides that, 2021 is also the 30th anniversary of BMSG as a registered society - we will be thinking of ways to celebrate this milestone!



g) Training

In 2022, we hope to be able to continue with our annual Counsellor Training. With the experience we have gained in this year's almost fully virtual training, we will improve and tighten processes considering that COVID-19 restrictions are likely to continue in place next year.

We are also considering holding Train the Trainer sessions in 2022.

h) Events

The Global Big Latch On (BLO) event this year is slated for 6-8 August 2021, in conjunction with World Breastfeeding Week (1-7 August) just like previous years. This year, the BLO will be conducted virtually around the world due to the success of this trend in 2020. BMSG hopes to conduct another virtual event this year to attract more families and breastfeeding mothers, regardless of how they provide breast milk, in another inclusive breastfeeding event.

i) 30th Anniversary Celebrations

BMSG was registered under ROS in 1991, and as such 2021 will mark its 30th year as an official organisation.