

**BEYOND DIFFERENCES: A CONVERSATION ON RACE AND RELIGION**  
**18 JANUARY 2025, 1.00PM - 4.00PM**  
**ANCHORVALE COMMUNITY CLUB**

On 18 January 2025, 40 youths from different backgrounds came together to discuss topics on race and religion using the Beneath the Surface toolkit. Youths engaged in conversations on scenarios to build understanding, mutual respect and empathy for people of different races and religions. They also heard from panellists about the importance of racial and religious harmony and learned ways to cultivate a harmonious society in their daily lives. The session was co-organised by the North East CDC (NECDC), OnePeople.sg, and the National Youth Council (NYC), and involved the following panellists:

- Mr Christopher Gordon, 1st Vice President of the Eurasian Association Singapore and Secretary of OnePeople.sg
- Ms Sharany Hassan, Founder of The Whitehatters
- (Moderator) Mr Mohamed Irshad, Founder and President of Roses of Peace (ROP)

**Opening: Setting the objectives of the session and introducing the Singapore Youth Plan**

Mr Gordon began the session by emphasising the importance of having honest and respectful conversations about race and religion to foster mutual understanding in Singapore. This was followed by the introduction of the Singapore Youth Plan (SGYP), an action blueprint that captures the hopes and aspirations of all youths and transforms their ideas into reality and their passion into action, with support from the rest of society. Insights from the session would contribute to the SGYP.

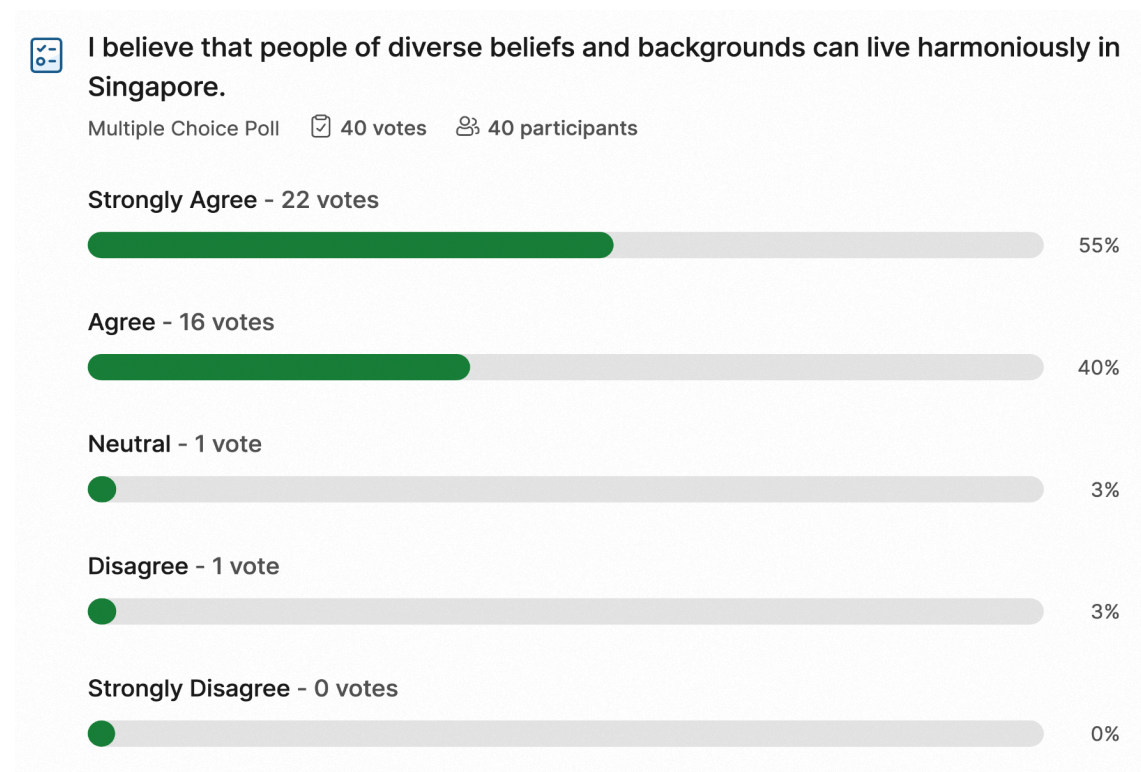
*The moderator invited participants to share their insights from their group discussions.*

- Participants shared that fostering common understanding requires going beyond highlighting similarities and that cultivating respect and openness within the community is essential to living harmoniously.
- Participants said that casual racism, often expressed through jokes, is still a pertinent problem in Singapore and agreed that it is important to be mindful and respectful of others' beliefs.
- Participants said that race and religion are nuanced issues that have significantly impacted their lives and that they shared diverse perspectives and the challenges they faced during their discussions.
- Ms Hassan said that the participants' discussions emphasised the continued importance of engaging in conversations about race and religion. She highlighted the value of asking questions sincerely and demonstrating genuine curiosity to overcome discomfort and foster meaningful dialogue and learning.
- Mr Gordon emphasised the importance of racial cohesion in light of the 1964 Racial Riots and highlighted the need to consistently build trust. He described trust as a societal

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reserve accumulated over generations that ensures resilience and unity during crises. Mr Irshad echoed this statement and said that trust was key to ensuring that different racial and religious groups could coexist peacefully.

The moderator invited participants to engage in a three-part Slido poll: (i) "I believe that people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds can live harmoniously in Singapore.", (ii) "What does a diverse community that lives together harmoniously look like to you?" and (iii) "What are some ways you can contribute and encourage others to live harmoniously?" The poll results were as follows:

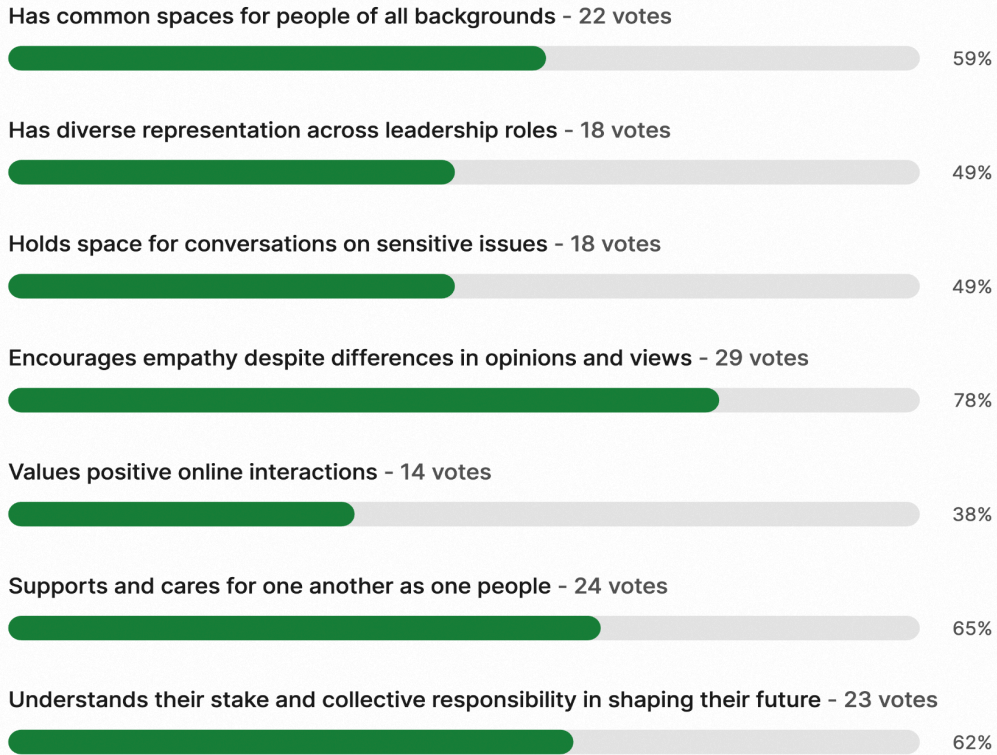


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**What does a diverse community that lives together harmoniously look like to you?**

Multiple Choice Poll   37 votes   37 participants



**What are some ways you can contribute and encourage others to live harmoniously?**

Wordcloud Poll   39 responses   28 participants



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*The moderator invited participants to share their responses to the polls.*

- Participants shared that they strongly agreed that people with diverse beliefs and backgrounds could live harmoniously in Singapore, as they had witnessed tolerance in their daily lives.
- Participants said they also recognised that citizens are still learning to progress from tolerance to acceptance.

**Insights from the panel dialogue:**

*Participants asked via Slido about how the panellists believed Singapore had fared in racial tolerance on the global stage compared to its Southeast Asian neighbours.*

- Mr Gordon stated that he believed the acceptance of different races and religions in Singapore was in a good state. However, he emphasised that more attention could be directed toward how Singaporeans interacted with foreign workers.
- Ms Hassan noted that the acceptance of race and religion was still a work in progress as some disagreements remained. She acknowledged that Singapore has made progress and credited it to collective efforts.
- In response to the issue of local-foreigner relations in Singapore, Ms Hassan noted that there were still challenges in welcoming foreigners while making sure they understood what was considered acceptable behaviour in Singapore.

*Participants asked via Slido if the panellists felt that race and religion would come up during the election hustings in 2025.*

- Mr Gordon said that removing race from politics was important because it prevents political figures and parties from using race to gain votes and helps avoid the polarisation of society.
- Ms Hassan expressed concerns about the rise of self-radicalisation and extremism, and emphasised the importance of having open conversations about race and religion to prevent these threats.

*Participants asked via Slido about ways to change the perspectives of family or friends who might hold racist views.*

- Mr Gordon said that participants should encourage their grandparents to put themselves in the shoes of those who are discriminated against and educate them. He emphasised that showing compassion, rather than anger, was important, as anger could make them more prejudiced.

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*Participants asked via Slido about the state of xenophobia and how to tackle it, given the recent influx of foreigners.*

- Ms Hassan said that the state of the economy influences the presence of xenophobia, as it becomes more prominent during economic downturns. She explained that to overcome it, people needed to have conversations about their willingness to interact with foreigners and be cautious of social media algorithms, which could create echo chambers of negativity.

**Closing Remarks by Panellists**

- Mr Gordon encouraged participants to take small actions, like speaking up when they witnessed racist remarks, and to work towards building understanding on common ground between the aggrieved parties.
- Ms Hassan encouraged participants to create safe spaces, initiate dialogue sessions, and emphasised the importance of engagement and interaction in promoting understanding.