



Burztech's app, which is used to make bookings up to two weeks in advance and open the doors of its work-study pods, currently has more than 2,000 users, according to the firm's co-founder Joel Leong.

# Pods at void decks in Boon Lay where residents can work, study

Cubicles offering a more private, conducive environment are part of a pilot till next July

Tay Hong Yi

Housing estates and community spaces throughout Singapore will see more work-study pods for residents to use, as ongoing pilots in several neighbourhoods show a strong uptake.

These pods, which are portable, enclosed cubicles that can seat one or two, can provide a conducive and more private environment for residents to work near their homes, said Minister for National Development

Desmond Lee on Sunday.

The pods come as hybrid and work-from-home arrangements initially brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic become established practices.

Although existing study areas in void decks continue to be well-used, Mr Lee said: "(Needs) evolve and change for students as well as working adults for more privacy, especially when they make more confidential calls or business calls."

He was speaking to reporters at the official launch of nine such

pods in the Boon Lay ward of West Coast GRC, where he is MP.

Three pods each were installed at the void decks of Block 183C Boon Lay Avenue, Block 260 Boon Lay Drive and Block 674B Jurong West Street 65, as part of a year-long pilot till end-July next year.

The pilot – a collaboration between the Housing Board, People's Association and pod provider Burztech – is the first involving pods installed at void decks.

Pods in ongoing pilots in Clementi, Bukit Timah and Keat Hong that were launched last November and December are in common areas of community centres, or within residents' committee centres.

Mr Lee also said that housing has to reflect the broader set of needs and aspirations that Singaporeans young and old now have, indicated by trends such as the rise of co-living spaces by private operators that appeal to youth here.

He added that the Government will continue to seek feedback on housing aspirations through initiatives like the Long-Term Plan review exhibition, which ended last month, as well as the ongoing Forward Singapore exercise.

Mr Lee, who will lead discussions on the home and living environment under the "Build" pillar of the engagement exercise, also said that he will share more about the built environment, housing, home and living aspects of BuildSG, a national movement to transform the built environment sector, later this month.

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Number of pods installed at each of the void decks of Block 183C Boon Lay Avenue, Block 260 Boon Lay Drive and Block 674B Jurong West Street 65.

The nine pods in Boon Lay, which began operation last month, are air-conditioned and sound-proof, with two power sockets and Wi-Fi connectivity provided. Some 5,000 residents, including 100 students, are expected to benefit.

Burztech's app, which is used to make bookings up to two weeks in advance and open pod doors, currently has more than 2,000 users, said co-founder Joel Leong.

The firm charges six cents a minute in Boon Lay in a launch promotion till Oct 10, before prices rise to 7.5 cents a minute.

The People's Association said the initiative arose following residents' requests for a quiet working space amid the pandemic, and that the pods may be set up in more estates if the pilots are successful.

Among those set to benefit in Boon Lay are 25 lower-income students who on Sunday were each given 35 hours of credit worth over \$150 – sponsored by the Boon Lay

Community Development and Welfare Fund – to cover their usage of the pods till December.

Mr Kevin Goh, a Singapore Polytechnic student, is one of them. The 21-year-old said the chirping from more than 20 birds that his father keeps as pets has been a distraction.

"There is definitely a lot of noise from my house: the TV, the birds – everything adds up. Even if I close my bedroom door, I can still hear them," said Mr Goh.

Burztech is also involved in a pilot at Keat Hong Community Club, which provides the pods for free public use, with take-up rates of up to 18 hours a day. The club's management committee pays a fixed rate to the firm each month.

Mr Leong said Burztech is keenly awaiting the results from the Boon Lay pilot, as this is the first time users have to pay to use its pods.

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National Development Minister Desmond Lee speaking to resident Florence Yu, 10, in a work-study pod in Boon Lay on Sunday. Mr Lee was at the official launch of nine such pods in the Boon Lay ward of West Coast GRC, where he is MP. He said the pods can provide a conducive and more private environment for residents to work near their homes. ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG



The planned four-storey extension (left) of the Enabling Village in Lengkok Bahru will also include an amphitheatre (below), a garden terrace and cabanas. It will help develop the artistic talents of people with disabilities, strengthen their independent living skills and address the well-being of caregivers. It is slated for completion in 2024. PHOTOS: WOHA ARCHITECTS

# Enabling Village to get four-storey extension; \$10m in funds being raised

Goh Yan Han

A new four-storey extension will be built in Lengkok Bahru to add to the Enabling Village – a one-stop hub for people with disabilities.

SG Enable, which manages the space, is driving a \$10 million fundraising campaign for the project, slated to begin work by this year and be completed in 2024.

SG Enable chief executive Ku Geok Boon said the extension will allow the agency to extend its reach and develop more inclusive business models that embrace people with disabilities as integral members of the workforce.

She told The Straits Times that

the new space will focus on developing the artistic talents of people with disabilities, while strengthening their independent living skills and addressing the well-being of caregivers and their loved ones.

The space will house an art gallery to showcase the works of people with disabilities as well as studios offering artists-in-residence programmes. SG Enable will also partner more organisations for creative and arts programmes.

SG Enable also hopes to hone the skills of artists and craftsmen with disabilities, and offer more jobs in art creation, design and artisanal craftsmanship, said Ms Ku.

The extension will have studios outfitted with smart home technology, where training workshops

can be held on independent living skills such as travelling, grocery shopping and cooking.

It will also cater to the caregivers who neglect their own well-being in caring for their children with special needs or find it challenging to have time for themselves.

The extension will address this need through activities such as plays for children, music making or mindfulness programmes, to allow caregivers to take some time off for themselves.

Asked about the need to raise funds, Ms Ku said construction costs have risen due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine conflict. Fund raising began in August, and the funds will be raised through a people-pri-



ate-public partnership model.

SG Enable declined to state the full cost of the project and the costs to be borne by each side.

"We hope that the community can also contribute towards building dreams and enabling the lives of persons with disabilities," said Ms Ku.

Companies and philanthropists can also adopt a space in the new

extension, which includes a piazza, an amphitheatre, an art gallery, a garden terrace and cabanas.

The original 30,000 sq m Enabling Village cost \$25 million and was launched in 2015, to bring a range of facilities and services for people with disabilities under one roof.

The building costs were covered by the Ministry of Social and Fam-

ily Development, Tote Board, the Care and Share movement – a national fund-raising and volunteerism movement – and donations from companies and foundations, said Ms Ku.

The space currently houses a playground, a supermarket and an outdoor amphitheatre, all of which have universal design features, as well as Singapore's first inclusive pre-school, Kindle Garden, run by social service agency Awwa.

Jalan Besar GRC MP Denise Phua, who is president of the Autism Resource Centre, said the expansion of Enabling Village signifies the increasing attention of society on the disability community.

She added that the move is timely to support the ambitious measures laid out in Singapore's Enabling Masterplan 2030 – the latest road map for disability inclusion released in August.

These include a 40 per cent disability employment rate goal as well as recommendations to improve education and caregiver support, among other things.

Ms Phua said the Enabling Village's contribution has largely been in the space of employment support, but with the extension, it is set to play a bigger coordinating role for different services.

Ms Jacqueline Ang, 45, who has 19-year-old twin daughters with autism, said they visit the Enabling Village every two weeks to attend classes at Tech Able, an integrated assistive technology space.

There, her daughters learn how to use augmentative and alternative communication methods, including devices and tools that replace or support regular speech.

They also go to the FairPrice supermarket at the village afterwards to practise the skills they have learnt in a real-world setting.

"The Enabling Village... looks very tranquil when we visit and the environment is calmer," said Ms Ang. "It feels more welcoming to people with disabilities than other public places."

She hopes to see more courses from charities ART:DIS and YMCA being offered at the extension, as well as a space for performances that they can attend on weekends.

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• Those keen to donate can do so at <https://donate.enablingvillage.sg/>