

NTUC TO STRENGTHEN TRAINING AND PLACEMENT SUPPORT FOR EX-OFFENDERS, TOGETHER WITH YRSG AND SPS

- *Almost 200 participants, comprising ex-offenders, inmates, employers, and community partners took part in NTUC's #EveryWorkerMatter Conversations*
- *NTUC, YRSG and SPS will continue collective efforts to strengthen employment and employability support for ex-offenders' successful reintegration back to society*

9 MARCH 2023 – The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), together with co-hosts Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG) and Singapore Prison Service (SPS), concluded three #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations held to understand the aspirations and challenges faced by ex-offenders and inmates as they transition back into society and the workplace.

Understanding Aspirations and Concerns of Ex-Offenders and Inmates Through #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations

2 Launched in August last year, NTUC's #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations endeavour to reach out to different segment of workers, including those that may have fallen through the cracks. This is the first time NTUC has organised engagement sessions specifically for and with this segment of workers. The first session (*#EveryWorkerMatters x YRConnects: Beyond Second Chances*), co-hosted with YRSG on 13 January 2023 was attended by almost 140 participants comprising ex-offenders, employers, aftercare partners, and union representatives. The following two sessions, held on 13 February and 9 March, engaged a total of 50 male and female inmates at Changi Prison.

3 “When we launched the #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations last year, we committed to engaging as many worker segments as possible, and breaking new ground where possible. Our engagement with ex-offenders and inmates exemplifies this commitment. I thank our partners Yellow Ribbon Singapore and Singapore Prison Service for working with us to help ex-offenders and inmates with their employment and employability when they re-integrate with our society. Our efforts will not stop here, and we will work towards better training and work outcomes for this group of vulnerable workers,” shared NTUC Secretary-General Ng Chee Meng, who attended the final round of discussions on Thursday, 9 March.

Observations from the #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations

Workplace Inclusion

4 Participant feedback from the 13 January session indicated that ex-offenders still faced discrimination in hiring practices and within the workplace, even if it is less than before. Acknowledging that more employers are open to hiring ex-offenders, participants opined more can be done to inform and educate fellow staff and colleagues they would work with, to foster a more understanding and inclusive work environment.

5 These sentiments were echoed by inmates in subsequent sessions on 13 February and 9 March at Changi Prison, with many sharing apprehensions about facing workplace discrimination, even if they have turned over a new leaf.

On the Job Training

6 Inmates also shared that while pre-release training and job placement support have become more accessible to them, more support for on-the-job training is key in helping them adapt to their new jobs, especially after prolonged periods away from work. Many expressed difficulties in applying new IT and digital skills in an actual job setting due to the lag time between certification and starting work.

7 For example, at the 13 February session with female inmates, one participant in her 40s, who hopes to join the hospitality industry after her release, suggested for opportunities to practice or “stay in touch” with the new skills that they have acquired, even after receiving certification.

Others

8 Beyond training and employment, participants also raised that holistic support in areas such as accommodation, mentoring, financial planning and family support, is key in reducing the risk of re-offending in the long term.

Helping Ex-Offenders and Inmates In Employment and Employability Through NTUC, YRSG and SPS

9 Opening each of the three sessions, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Patrick Tay assured ex-offenders and inmates that the NTUC’s Training and Placement Ecosystem, specifically, NTUC LearningHub (NTUC LHUB) and NTUC’s e2i (Employment and Employability Institute), will continue to support them in their transition back to work, together with partners YRSG and SPS.

10 “Building the pool of inclusive employers, job retention, and career progression are longer-term challenges that the Labour Movement hopes to address together with employers, unions, and partners so that ex-offenders can look to their jobs as a source of confidence and purpose. This begins with fair employment practices, which we will continue to push for all segments of workers, ex-offenders included,” shared ASG Patrick Tay.

11 CEO of YRSG, Matthew Wee Yik Keong shared, “Being engaged in meaningful employment is a crucial part of an ex-offender’s transition back into society. The #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations provided a fresh platform for different stakeholders in the support ecosystem, including ex-offenders, to better understand each other’s aspirations and challenges in this journey, and for us to be the change we want to see. Together with NTUC, we hope more employers adopt fair and inclusive hiring practices, play a part in an ex-offender’s reintegration journey, so that many more lives can be uplifted and contribute back to society.”

12 The employment support ecosystem for ex-offenders comprises both training and placement initiatives. Since 2007, NTUC LHUB has been working with YRSG to provide training to inmates. In July last year, they jointly introduced the Digital Citizenship with Coding Fundamentals programme, to uplift inmates and ex-offenders in the digital literacy domain and to prepare them for future employment. e2i has been working with partners such as YRSG to provide career resources such as employability workshops to ex-offenders who require more support before job interviews.

13 “In a fast-changing world, it is critical that inmates are adequately prepared to reintegrate into society and the workforce and training is an integral part of that readiness process. Opening the #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations to inmates and recognising them as part of the larger group of vulnerable workers, is a much-needed move in understanding the unique concerns and aspirations of inmates, and we are confident the discussion’s findings will be valuable in helping SPS and YRSG, together with our partners, to strengthen the ecosystem that sustains the ex-offenders’ participation in the workforce. Stable employment will help ex-offenders desist from crime as they rebuild and restart their lives,” shared Assistant Commissioner Caroline Lim, Director of Rehabilitation & Reintegration Division, SPS.

14 The #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations aims to reach out to at least 20,000 workers through dialogues, focus group discussions and surveys to hear their views around work, and refresh NTUC’s compact with workers. Since its launch, NTUC has engaged workers of all collars, ages and sectors - most recently being this recent series with ex-offenders and inmates.

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Additional Quotes from #EveryWorkerMatters x YRConnects: Beyond Second Chances, co-hosted with Yellow Ribbon Singapore on 13 January 2023

“After serving my time in the RTC, I was determined to rebuild my life, both personally and professionally. The trust and support from my employer and mentor helped me overcome the challenges of reintegration and create a better future for myself. I am glad to be part of the conversations to make our workforce more inclusive and forthcoming in giving second chances.”

Yeo Yun Luo, 32
Project Manager

Contact details available upon request.

Mr Yeo was also a panel member for the fireside chat on Supporting Inmates in Their Transitions to Better Work, Better Lives at the event.

“Participating in the Every Worker Matters X YR Connects event was a truly inspiring experience. Hearing the stories and struggles of like-minded stakeholders in relation to employment for ex-offenders reinforced my belief that every person deserves an opportunity to succeed and contribute to their communities. Empowering ex-offenders through employment is not just about giving them a second chance, it's about creating a more inclusive and equitable society. It was a powerful reminder that every individual has inherent worth and value, regardless of their past. I am proud to be a strong advocate and will continue to do so in the future.”

Rachel Lee, 33
HR Director

Contact details available upon request.

“It is a significant milestone for YRSG to work with NTUC on advocacy for equal opportunities and fair employment practices for ex-offenders. Through the conversations, we are heartened to see many employers ready to offer a second chance. Most importantly, despite their anxieties, ex-offenders are determined to change when given the right opportunities.”

Elric Toh, 35
Senior Assistant Director, Partnership@YR
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About National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)

The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) is a national confederation of trade unions as well as a network of professional associations and partners across all sectors in Singapore. NTUC's objectives are to help Singapore stay competitive and working people remain employable for life; to enhance the social status and well-being of our members and working people; and to build a strong, responsible and caring labour movement. NTUC's vision is to be an inclusive labour movement for all collars, ages and nationalities. NTUC is at the heart of the Labour Movement, which comprises 58 affiliated unions, seven affiliated associations, 12 social enterprises, six related organisations as well as a growing ecosystem of U Associates and enterprise partners. For more details on NTUC, please visit our website at www.ntuc.org.sg.

About Yellow Ribbon Singapore

YRSG is a statutory board under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It was established in 1976 as the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) and rebranded as YRSG on 1 May 2020.

YRSG adopts a multi-faceted approach to prepare ex-offenders for reintegration back to society and re-join the national workforce. These include initiatives to help them develop skills and long-term careers through partnerships with industry, as well as initiatives to garner community support and acceptance of ex-offenders.

YRSG works with more than 7,000 like-minded partners. Our collective efforts have contributed to the low and stable recidivism rate in Singapore.

YRSG will continue to advocate for ex-offenders, raise awareness of the challenges they face, and bring the private, public and people sectors together for their successful reintegration and contribution back to society.

For more information, refer to YRSG's website at <http://www.yellowribbon.gov.sg>