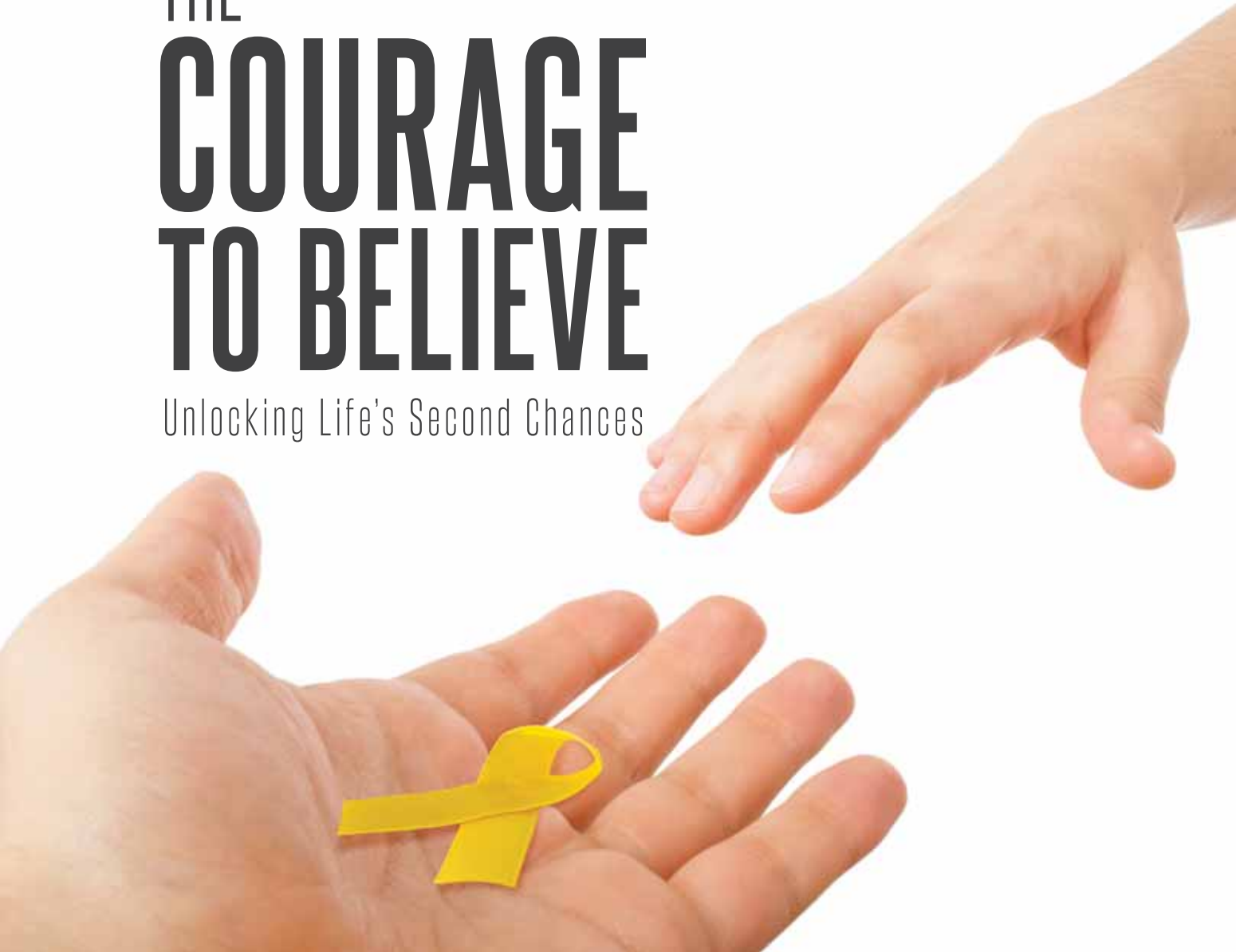


COMMEMORATING YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY



THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE

Unlocking Life's Second Chances



THE
**COURAGE
TO BELIEVE**

Unlocking Life's Second Chances



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I'M A GOOD MAN
PAINTING BY AN INMATE

THE REASON TO LIVE

All I had was, just broken dreams
But you saw hope, from deep within
You kept the faith, in just believing
That your love, can change everything

Though I caused, the tears in your eyes
You still believed, true love cannot die
And it's your love, that set me free
When you stood there, waiting for me

Chorus

I'm so grateful, for all that you've done
You gave me hope, and a second chance
And I rejoice, in the love you give
'Cos you've given to me, the reason to live

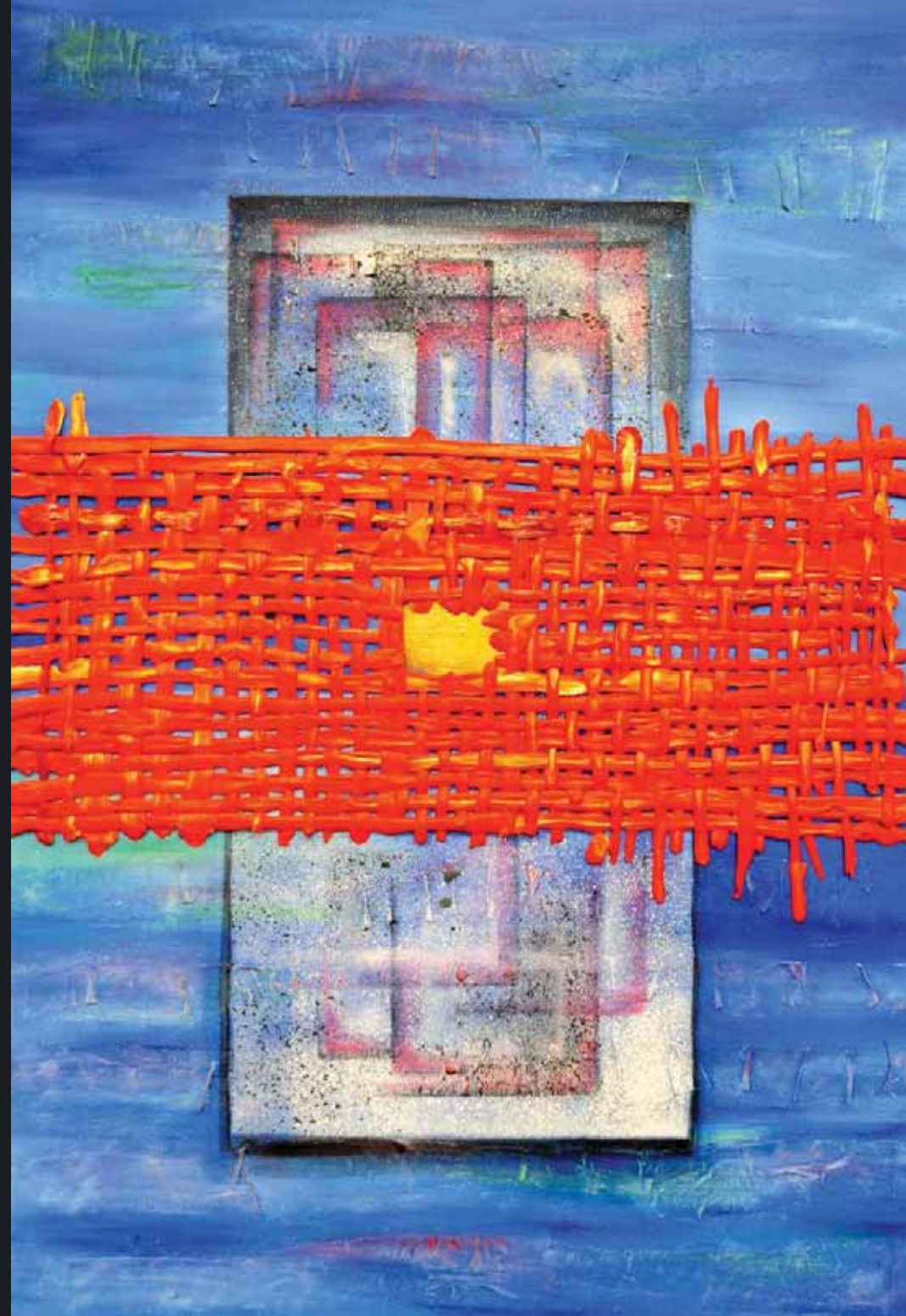
Bridge

And I know, it's all because of you
You changed my heart, and made me new
And now I have, the joy in my heart
'Cos you helped me see, through the dark

Now I live, in a different light
With more of faith, than just by sight
For all, that I've received
I've learned, it's more blessed to give

SONG WRITTEN BY AN INMATE

MOOD & MEMORY
OIL PAINTING BY AN INMATE



BUOY WITHOUT A LINE

A sweat, a tear, or salt water; all felt the same
As I reeled back and forth.
I strove to rise above the water, but wave after wave
Shoved me off.

Thunder screaming, flashes striking
The things I heard, I could not make out.
All I saw was nothing but a blackout.
If not for a gulp of air or two, life was over,
I was nothing but a drifting corpse.

Out of the blue, breaking through the fog
Sounding the horn, out came a launch.
Standing at the helm, I saw a man throw
Down a tyre without a lifeline.
He steered a course and left without a sign.

I held onto the buoy, wondered how it would help
Without the rope, it offered me little hope.
Stroke by stroke, I paddled against the waves
When I hit the pebbles, I knew I was saved.
Now I know why – a buoy without a line –
The effort I put in should be none but mine.

POETRY WRITTEN BY AN INMATE

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PART ONE

THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE

Do we have the courage to believe that a seemingly hopeless, incorrigible criminal can one day become a responsible citizen in society? We need faith – a faith that makes us confident of what we hope for – and assurance about what we do not yet see. Yes, it calls for a huge dose of courage to believe and do the improbable.


FOREWORD

FEARLESS GRACE

The Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) marks its pivotal 10th Anniversary this year. It is a significant milestone. Indeed, not many good things can claim to be around for a decade simply because they are good. In fact, many good ideas and efforts have died quietly for the lack of sustainable vision, support and perseverance.

YRP could not have come so far without the very essential pillars I have just mentioned – vision, support and perseverance. As I write this, I stand on the shoulders of giants. Giants of Reform who believed that there was a wrong to correct, and would correct it, even if it required moving heaven and earth. Here, I am thinking of the early Directors of Prisons like Poh Geok Ek and Chua Chin Kiat, who knew that the combination of a burgeoning prison population and slow recruitment of custodians was a ball spinning towards disaster. They put their brains to solving the problem and even put their reputations on the line.

Then there are the Giants of Creativity who, given a problem, came up with the most amazing solutions. Here we remember Jason Wong and the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises team in 2004, who took the lyrics of a 1973 pop song and transformed it into a campaign that gripped the hearts and imaginations of a nation and even crossed geographical boundaries to continue its



"As a society, let's continue to fearlessly believe in the potential for goodness in ex-offenders, and persevere to bring out the best in them."

CHNG HWEE HONG
Chairman of SCORE

transformative work abroad.

All throughout the rehabilitation work, there have been Giants of Courage – these are the employers and families of ex-offenders who were willing to take the risk of accepting these individuals into their hearts, their homes and their organisations.

Then there are the Quiet Giants – the partners, volunteers and donors who gave of their money, time and effort, day after day for year upon year. Accolades to this group have been given by the ex-offenders for whom they toil. At annual volunteer appreciation event, ex-offenders have stood on stage and tearfully poured out their gratitude to these Quiet Giants: “Thank you for believing in me,” and “Thank you for not giving up on me even when I disappoint you.” Accolades pour in from the Prisons and SCORE staff as well.

“Why do they do it? They are not paid for their efforts, yet they bare their hearts to a bunch of prisoners week after week who disappoint them time and again. Why?” The selfless nature of these Quiet Giants have gone on to inspire countless others.

Then there are the Transformers themselves – the ones for whom we labour, and who have done us proud. These are the ex-offenders who came from backgrounds dominated by drugs, violence, poverty, absent parents and just ‘bad luck’. Yet, despite their circumstances, they turned their backs on their broken past and resolutely built a brighter, better future for themselves. Rehabilitation efforts can only give opportunities to ex-offenders, it is up to the ex-offenders themselves to fully utilise these opportunities to transform their circumstances. The road to transformation is never easy, so we applaud them for their commitment and resolve.

As a society, let’s continue to fearlessly believe in the potential for goodness in ex-offenders, and persevere to bring out the best in them, with the spirit of grace through the Yellow Ribbon Project in the years to come.

Chng Hwee Hong

Chairman

Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE)

INTRODUCTION

1 GIVING HOPE

Ten years is a significant milestone. It is a time to celebrate, a time to recall and reflect, and a time to share good things with others. This commemorative book, *The Courage to Believe*, attempts to do all three as it chronicles the 10-year journey of the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP).

We celebrate by bringing together all the key players involved in the massive rehabilitation and reintegration effort of ex-offenders. There are simply too many of them. We wish we could feature every person who contributes to the YRP, however, we can only acknowledge their organisations and express our heartfelt gratitude through this book.

We also take this opportunity to reflect on the past decade. This reflection causes a tide of gratitude to rise up as we begin to appreciate how the YRP has succeeded beyond our hopes and imagination. In our desire to help ex-offenders, we did not realise that our lives were also being enriched and changed. Thank you, Yellow Ribbon. Not only have you empowered society to give second chances to ex-offenders, society has in turn learned to give second chances to one another – to be more patient, more tolerant and more forgiving. Surely, this can only build stronger bonds amongst the citizens of our country.

The YRP 10th Anniversary is also a good time for us to share our dream, challenges and experiences

with all stakeholders – the families of ex-offenders, employers, community partners and leaders, government as well as non-profit agencies and the general public. In doing so, we aspire to capture, together as a society, the spirit, intent and vision of the YRP – that is, a gleaming hope and an inspiring channel to transform the lives of ex-offenders and their families.

The Courage to Believe is a daring expression of the YRP vision. As you read, may you be stirred by the humble boldness, ingenuity and hard work of all who have contributed towards the YRP, and be invigorated to do your part, however big or small, in unlocking second chances for ex-offenders.

Read and be truly inspired by how an idea can touch and change the lives of so many people.

Teo Tze Fang

Chief Executive Officer

Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE)

Chairman of the Yellow Ribbon Project Committee

“The Courage to Believe is a daring expression of the YRP vision.”

TEO TZE FANG

CEO of SCORE

Chairman of YRP Committee



2 JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

The transformative journey of rehabilitation and reintegration an ex-offender goes through is made possible by the dedication of countless stakeholders – staff from the Singapore Prison Service, Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), community partners and volunteers – who all live out the spirit and language of the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP).

A convicted offender is sent to prison for manifold reasons. The first and most obvious is to punish him for the crime he has committed, another is to protect society from the threat he poses, and the third is to deter him, and others in general, from further offences. There is a fourth reason – his time in prison should also be for his rehabilitation. To facilitate his rehabilitation is good not merely for the offender, but also for society at large.

In Singapore, while prison conditions are humane and fair, they are also tough. Such conditions instil discipline and serve the purposes of punishment and deterrence. A high standard of discipline is maintained and inmates adhere to a strict and highly regimented regime. This is so that as rehabilitation programmes are provided to them, and prison officers seek to inspire hope in them, they are motivated to take personal responsibility for their rehabilitation.

Imperatively, these key principles undergird the transformation journey – a tough prison regime that serves the purposes of punishment and deterrence, a vigorous rehabilitation programme to help ex-offenders reintegrate into society, the primacy of personal responsibility of the ex-offenders, and the critical supporting role society plays in their reintegration. They form the springboard with which the Singapore Prison Service and SCORE launches efforts to mobilise society for the



Female inmates preparing food for a function in the prison

rehabilitation of ex-offenders.

To date, countless people from all walks of life have been working tirelessly as one to help these ex-offenders rehabilitate – prison officers, people in SCORE, government agencies, non-government agencies, religious organisations, employers and families. They have the courage to believe that ex-offenders can be transformed.

Indeed, each and every one of them holds in their hearts and hands one single ribbon of purpose – to give second chances to ex-offenders. That epitomises the spirit of Yellow Ribbon.

PART TWO

THE YELLOW RIBBON STORY

Can we turn a villain into a good guy, and should we? This was the fierce philosophical battle fought in the hearts and minds of prison service pioneers before the Yellow Ribbon Project was birthed in 2004. A group of courageous daredevils emphatically answered “Yes!”. This section covers the starting point of YRP, tracing its roots, the perspectives of its trailblazers, and its milestones over its 10-year journey of unlocking life’s second chances.

3 RADICAL TRANSFORMATION

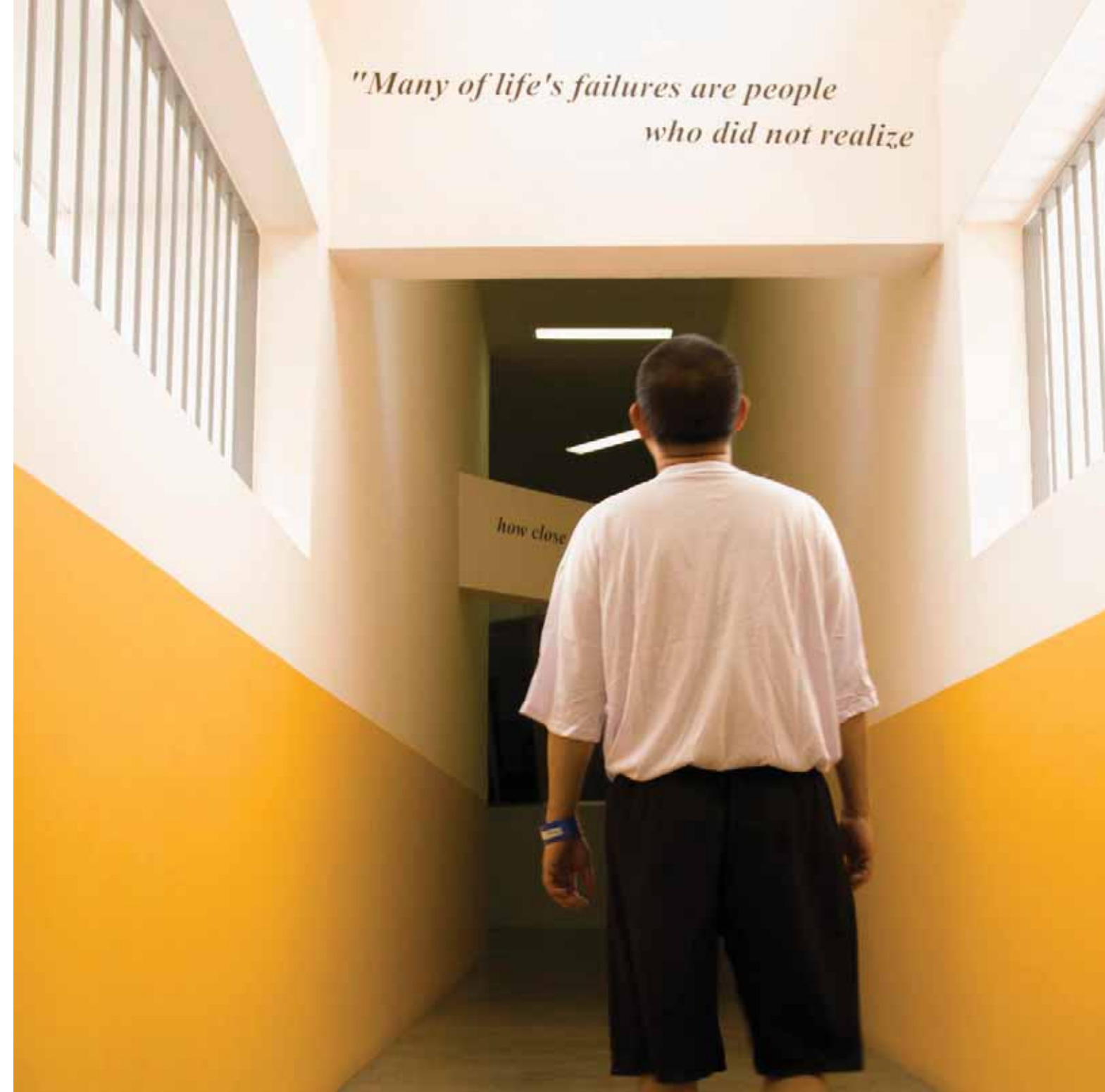
The Yellow Ribbon Project story began with a radical approach to redefine the central role of the Singapore Prison Service: Beyond being a mere custodian, it acts as an enduring catalyst to effectively rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders. This chapter chronicles the “Who? What? How?” stories that brought the YRP from its inception to what we see today.

According to a proverb, “The stars need to be aligned before miracles can happen.” Internationally, the Yellow Ribbon Project is known as a lodestar. It happened because of a group of extraordinary people. Their courage, hope and vision brought about a confluence of factors, creativity, community support and resources, engendering the transformation of ex-offenders in a radical way.

Prison Service in Singapore began when Changi Prison was built in 1936. Tucked away in nondescript enclaves of Changi, Tanah Merah and Queenstown, the prisons were totally divorced from society. Most Singaporeans then were not aware that the residents within those walls needed their attention and help. They had also not yet come to the realisation that prisoners’ lives were worth paying attention to. The inmates were incarcerated because of the wrongs they had committed, period.

In 1946, the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) was institutionalised as a department. Mr Quek Shi Lei was appointed Director of Prisons in 1973, and was succeeded by Mr Tee Tua Ba in 1988. That was followed by the appointment of Mr Poh Geok Ek as Director of Prisons from 1992 to 1998, and then Mr Chua Chin Kiat, who went on to serve from 1998 to 2007.

In the late 1990s, the prisons were overpopulated and new offenders were being admitted



every day. The public profile of prison officers was unattractive, so recruitment and retention of staff was difficult. The amount of resources available was not enough to match the burgeoning prison population. A solution needed to be found, and fast.

When Chin Kiat took over the position of Director of Prisons in 1998, he could not be said to have succeeded an enviable post. First, he had to learn about the prison he had taken over. As an example of the climate of the prison, the first book he was given as 'must-read material' was *Games Prisoners Play*. This American book contained stories of how prisoners trick prison officers into compromise, and how the officers must be ever-watchful. Chin Kiat picked up on the adversarial relationship between the two groups immediately.

He also observed this adversarial attitude in his officers. For example, there was once a group of officers gathering at a breakfast meeting. One officer commented: "Sir, do you really wish to eat this breakfast? It was prepared by inmates." Chin Kiat gave that officer what could mildly be termed a dressing-down.

In another instance, on a visit to the Changi Women's Prison, Chin Kiat witnessed the inmates being commanded to face the wall. No eye contact was allowed with visitors. Puzzled, Chin Kiat asked the then-Superintendent of Changi Women's Prison, Ms Lee Kwai Sem: "Why was there so much shouting? Is it so harmful to have eye contact with prisoners?"

The reason for the regulation was to protect the officers against familiarity with the prisoners, which may lead to compromise. That day, Chin Kiat made a discovery: "We were not dealing with separate issues; we were facing an entire culture built on distrust."

THE BEGINNING OF PRISON TRANSFORMATION

A visioning exercise was necessary to help the employees clarify their purpose and aspiration as prison officers. This would also address one of the two pressing problems facing SPS – the poor recruitment and retention of staff. A date was set for the SPS Workplan Seminar. The officers were grouped and asked to think about some questions – "Where are we now? What is wrong with us?"



Where do we want to go from here?"

The results were dazzling. It would be best described using the picture of a *ripple effect* (see illustration). At the centre of the ripple is the change-maker – the prison staff. The change would ripple outwards to touch the inmates, their families, the community and even beyond Singapore's shores. The ripple effect symbolises the prison officers' desire to not just be an instrument of punitive incarceration, but to rehabilitate offenders so that they can contribute to building a peaceful and just society.

From there, the team went on to craft a vision statement for themselves. It read: "We aspire to be Captains in the lives of offenders committed to our custody. We will be instrumental in steering them towards being responsible citizens, with the help of their families and the community. We will thus build a secure and exemplary prison system."

As Captains of Lives, SPS developed a set of core values based on the acronym HEART:

- *Honour* our Vision by placing it above self-interest
- *Excelling* in all that we do
- *Agile* by being vigilant, innovative and responsible for our own learning
- *Respect* and care for our colleagues, inmates and the community
- Foster *Teamwork* and inspire one another at work

The new vision was communicated to all the staff through dialogues, retreats and working group discussions. Slowly, the staff mindset changed – they began to believe and put their hearts into inmate transformation. At the same time, SPS embarked on a bold corporate image campaign to communicate its new vision to the public and to change the negative perception of ex-offenders. The new vision required action, different recruitment and retention strategies, and even infrastructural change. One thing was obvious – the emphasis on rehabilitation of ex-offenders had increased in importance.

REHABILITATION VERSUS PUNISHMENT

Rehabilitation would also be a solution to the second problem in the prisons – overpopulation. A large number of inmates were repeat offenders. This was particularly so with drug offenders – the relapse rate was more than 50 percent of releasees, i.e., half of the people released came back within a few years!

“At that time, besides a tough imprisonment regime, rehabilitation was limited to work regime, counselling conducted by external volunteers, some vocational skills training and job placement assistance upon release,” Chin Kiat wrote in his book *The Making of Captains of Lives*, “Faced with the large number of prisoners, these measures failed completely to produce positive change in the inmates.”

A taskforce was put together to tackle rehabilitation needs. Speedily, it became obvious that the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) needed to be brought on board.

SCORE Aligns with SPS

SCORE needed to be aligned with SPS before Yellow Ribbon Project could be birthed. Established as a statutory board as early as 1975, SCORE takes care of prison industry, provision of vocational and employability training, and assists in finding employment for releasees.

Employment is vital for sustaining livelihood and increasing ex-offenders’ chances of a



“We were not dealing with separate issues; we were facing an entire culture built on distrust.”

CHUA CHIN KIAT
Director of Prisons (1998 to 2007)

smooth reintegration into society. Most offenders have little education and work experience. SCORE helps by:

- Getting offenders 'Ready for Work' – giving training in work skills
- Ensuring 'Work is Ready' for offenders – connecting ex-offenders with employers
- Enabling offenders to 'Secure and Sustain' in employment – providing ex-offending clients with job coaches to help them maintain their jobs

The turn of the century was an exciting time for SCORE. The spotlight was focused on rehabilitation and SCORE rose to the challenge. Translated into strategies, it meant that SCORE had to source for vocational and employability training opportunities, increase the volume of work in the prison industries and engage more employers to offer jobs to released offenders. At that time, the partnership between SPS and SCORE could be depicted as two men walking side by side, each focused on the files in their hands. In other words, they were heading in the same direction, but their attention was on their individual responsibilities and goals.

Mr Kong Mun Kwong observed all these as the Chairman of SCORE. He had been learning the ropes since 1992 and took up the Chairman role in 1996. "At that time, there wasn't that cooperation and smooth coordination between SPS and SCORE that we can observe today," Mun Kwong explains. "Although our objectives were similar – the rehabilitation of ex-offenders – our emphasis was different. For SCORE, our key performance indicator was training and job placement, whereas for SPS, incarceration and security was the number one priority."

A realisation had been slowly growing in SPS and SCORE – that incarceration alone could never be the solution if rehabilitation is not brought in as an early part of the entire social system of law and order. In 2004, about 11,000¹ ex-offenders were released back into society. Imagine in two years, the number of ex-offenders in society would be 22,000, and, in three years, 33,000, and so on. These ex-offenders have to reintegrate into society. If not properly rehabilitated, every ex-offender would affect or influence the people around him with his antisocial behaviour. In the family alone, ill-adjusted ex-offenders may cause distress to parents, spouses and children. They may attempt to

¹ 11,000 was the figure in 2004 – the first year of Yellow Ribbon Project. This figure has since dropped to 9,000 in 2012.

cheat their employers or harm members of the public if they return to a life of crime.

"Do you see that, for a happier society with less social issues, good rehabilitation programmes for ex-offenders must be put in place?" Mun Kwong emphasises.

RESTRUCTURING OF SCORE

For more effective rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders, the synergy between SPS and SCORE had to be improved. To this end, an independent review of SCORE's role and performance was conducted and it spurred a massive restructuring of SCORE in 2001. Part of the restructuring was infrastructural. SCORE had to be brought physically nearer to SPS. The relocation of SCORE's operation and management offices within the Prison Headquarters brought about immediate cost savings and better inter-agency coordination.

Next, the issue of prison industries' productivity. Inmate workers had to operate under strict security measures and be supervised at all times. Yet, in terms of output and speed, they had to compete with commercial companies. If clients needed production to be sped up, or if there was a sudden change in the instructions, prison industries found it difficult to be flexible. Communication was also slow because clients could not give their instructions directly to the workers but had to go through a prison supervisor.

Even on the issue of talent retention, SCORE lost out to commercial companies. Regular companies could attract and retain talent by offering competitive salaries and benefits. However, SCORE trained workers until they were very good at their job but, once their release dates arrived, SCORE would lose these workers. This was, of course, good news for the releasees, but from a business perspective, it put SCORE at a distinct disadvantage.

In other countries, similar organisations like SCORE solve this problem by retreating from commercial competition. But Mun Kwong points out triumphantly: "This is why I am so proud of SCORE, because we compete with commercial companies for tenders, and we deliver despite all our restrictions."

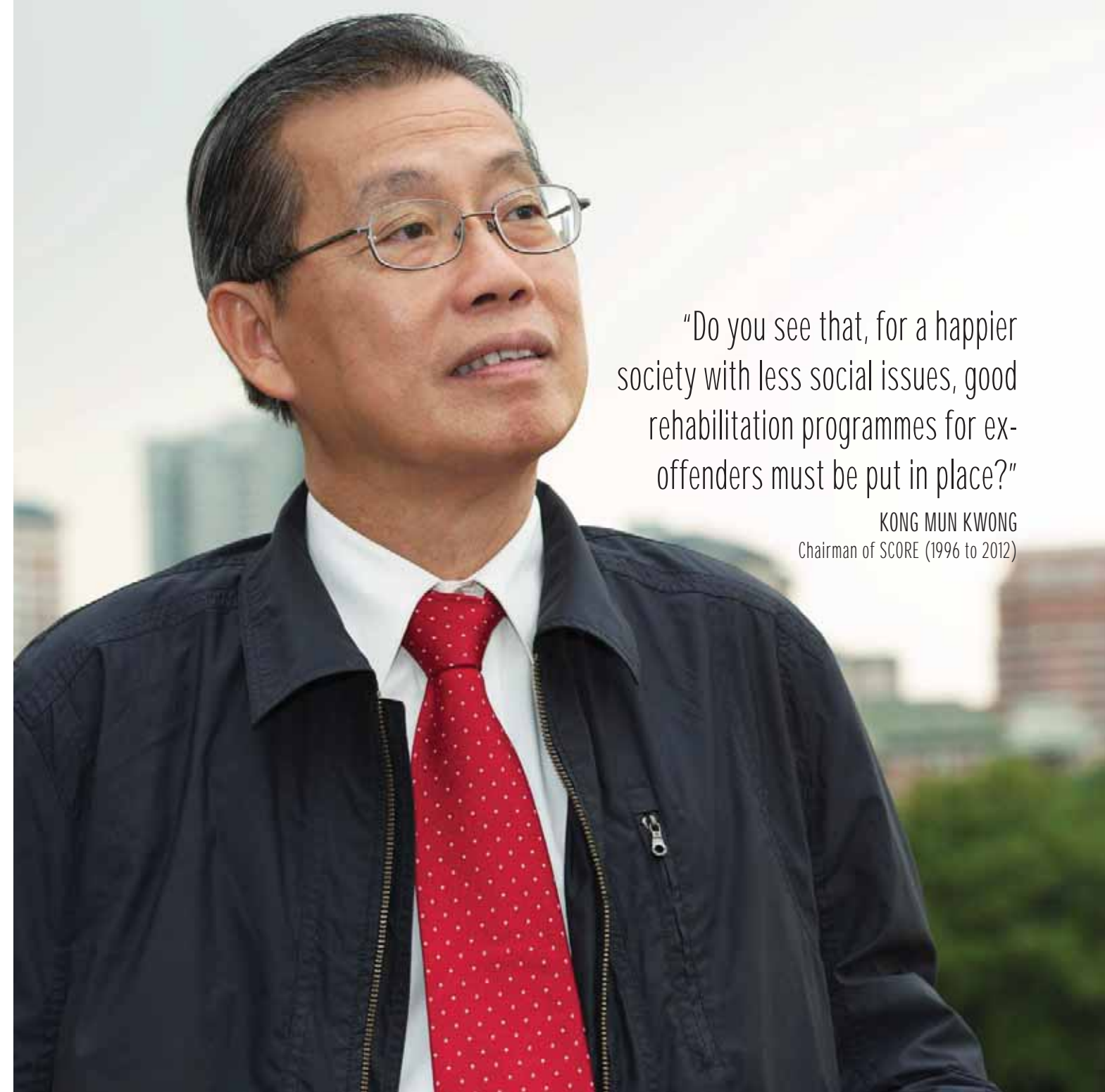
FORMATION OF CARE NETWORK

Meanwhile, other agencies were doing their part by conducting programmes that met the other needs of ex-offenders. SACA, SANA and ISCOS run aftercare programmes to assist ex-offenders in their reintegration and provide support for their spouses and children. By 2000, it was recognised that all these agencies needed to be aware of what each of the others was doing so as to achieve better synergy and deployment of resources.

SPS and SCORE then took the lead to set up a new coordinating structure to connect these different agencies in May 2000. This became known as the Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network. With the vision of giving hope, confidence and opportunities to ex-offenders, CARE Network strives to improve the effectiveness of rehabilitation of ex-offenders in Singapore by engaging the community in rehabilitation, coordinating member agencies' activities and developing innovative rehabilitation initiatives for ex-offenders. All of this contributes towards the creation of seamless transfer between in-care and aftercare. As the agencies began to assemble at CARE Network planning sessions, trainings and celebrations, a clearer picture soon emerged about the entire rehabilitation scene available in Singapore.

The CARE Network was more than just a gathering of agencies; its formation was meant to have a multiplier effect, or 'the seed principle'. Mun Kwong explains: "When you plant a seed, you do not get back another seed. You get a plant that continually produces many more seeds."

CARE Network fulfilled this great expectation. In 2001, CARE Network launched a milestone programme called Case Management Framework (CMF). This programme offers assistance to ex-offenders in dealing with their reintegration issues such as family, financial, employment, accommodation and other concerns. In 2006, the first professional training framework for the aftercare was established. Aftercare services became more professional – a system for identifying core competencies of aftercare managers, training roadmap, best practices guidelines and work process system.



"Do you see that, for a happier society with less social issues, good rehabilitation programmes for ex-offenders must be put in place?"

KONG MUN KWONG
Chairman of SCORE (1996 to 2012)

THE STAGE IS SET

Unknown to the key partners at the time, the stage was being set for the formation of a revolutionary idea – the Yellow Ribbon Project. While mulling over the challenge of transforming the negative public perception of ex-offenders, a think tank was formed and came up with ideas like concerts, mass events that all members of the public could participate in, and even a Prison Open House. However, they were all disparate ideas with no common theme. Chin Kiat engaged the then-CEO of SCORE, Mr Jason Wong, to come up with a unifying theme.

The Million Dollar Idea

The rest, as it can be said, is history. **The Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) was born in 2004.** YRP became the unifying theme to launch a month-long campaign to create awareness about the need to give second chances to ex-offenders. It became the umbrella project under which many successful initiatives were launched – the Yellow Ribbon Concert (2004, 2006 and 2008), Yellow Ribbon Walk (2005 and 2007), Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition (2007 and 2008), Yellow Ribbon Job Fair, Yellow Ribbon Prison Run (2009-2012) and the Yellow Ribbon Culinary Competition (2007, 2009-2011).

Ten years have passed and many people have been wondering: “Exactly how was the YRP brainwave conceived?” Here is the definitive version as recalled by Jason, who was there at its very inception.

“It began in the Prison clubhouse,” Jason recalls, getting a faraway look in his eyes. “A few Prison colleagues and families had gathered in a karaoke room. The children were singing *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree* in their high, sweet voices. To me, it was just an oldie song. But Thomas, one of the Prison staff, explained that this was a song about prisoners.”

The lyrics spoke about a prisoner writing a letter to his sweetheart just before his release. The man could not be sure that his wife would accept him, so he told her: “Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree . . . If I don’t see a ribbon round the old oak tree, I’ll stay on the bus, forget about

us, put the blame on me.”

The song mirrored exactly what SPS and SCORE were trying to achieve! The man in the song was not only voicing his longing to be accepted back by his sweetheart, he was articulating the desire of all ex-offenders everywhere in the world!

Prison counsellors could give inmates the best training in managing emotions, but this would amount to nothing if an ex-offender’s wife does not want to forgive him. Inmates could be equipped with work skills, but it would be wasted effort if employers are not willing to employ them when they are released. It is not about how much incare the offenders receive in prison, but the attitude of society outside the prison that determines the success of reintegration.

Truly, ex-offenders face a second prison even after they have been punished for their crime. The second prison is the prejudice of society that makes reintegration difficult. Another line from *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree* says: “I’m really still in prison, and my love, she holds the key. A simple yellow ribbon’s what I need to set me free.”

The people who hold the keys to an ex-offender’s second prison are his family members, employers, friends and the public in general.

From Concept to Reality

It was obvious that this message could only be brought across with a movement. And to effectively communicate the message, SPS and SCORE had to go beyond simply organising concerts, commissioning a film or conducting a Prison Open House in isolated ways. They needed a single theme to tie all these disparate efforts together. A single theme . . . or a single ribbon!

Jason began to see the potential of using the Yellow Ribbon to symbolise the acceptance ex-offenders need from society. The SPS and SCORE team followed enthusiastically. It began to rally others to participate in the Yellow Ribbon campaign scheduled for 2004. The start was not without snags. They ran into difficulties; people simply could not catch the vision that was still just a concept in Jason’s mind. Thankfully, fresh motivation came in the form of then-Prison Chaplain, Reverend Henry Khoo. He exhorted them: “If you help one ex-offender, you are not simply helping one person, you are also helping his family members, which means you are helping three or four

people!" They did the calculations – as 11,000 inmates are released every year, this meant that many people stood in need of help every year!

Then, a breakthrough came. Then-President of Singapore Mr S R Nathan agreed to launch the YRP Campaign at the inaugural YRP Charity Concert in September 2004. Jason marvelled: "Even our own staff occasionally had doubts about what we were trying to achieve. But here was the President – he had never seen YRP, yet he believed in it!"

It spurred the team to complete the final preparations for the inauguration of YRP. On the day itself, Jason witnessed with gratification as 7,000 people filed into the concert hall. As the ex-offenders stood up to perform their songs, resounding applause broke out.

THE FRUIT OF BELIEF AND HARD WORK

After the Concert, a woman with a young child approached Jason. "Thank you very much," she told him, "This time, when my husband comes out of prison, he may find a job."

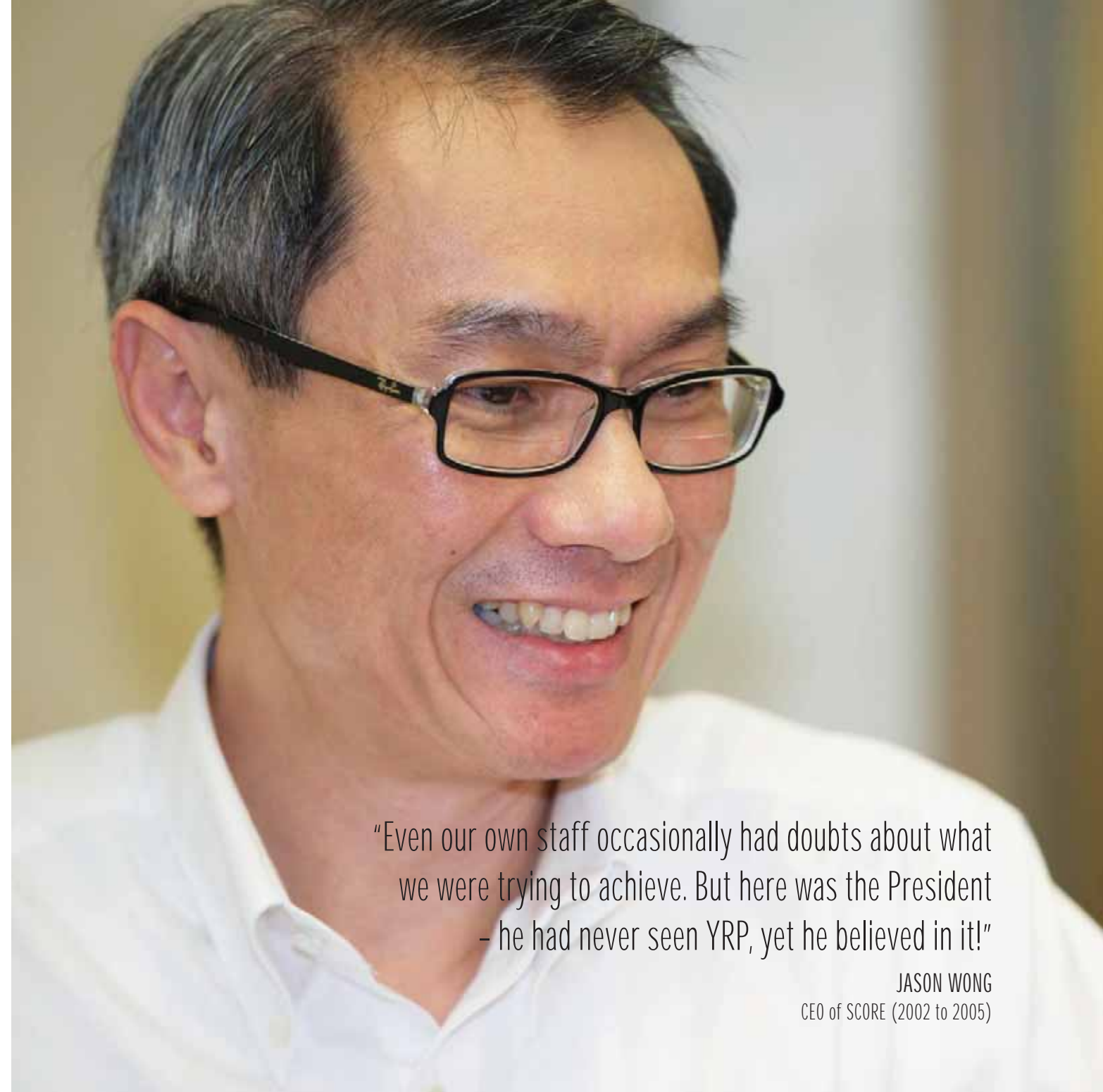
Jason recalls: "Just this encounter alone made all the months of effort worthwhile."

The success of YRP took even the team by surprise. After wrapping up the 2004 YRP activities, one SCORE employee who had been working on the project all along admitted: "I never understood YRP, until I saw it with my own eyes."

Following the successful launch, letters were written to the local newspaper, The Straits Times, highlighting the need for more awareness and acceptance of ex-offenders. Employers signalled their willingness to employ ex-offenders, and donors came forward. The national climate was changing.

The team, which thought they were organising an ad hoc campaign, found themselves doing it again the next year, and the year after. The vision of the YRP was established as:

- Create Awareness of giving second chances to ex-offenders
- Generate Acceptance of ex-offenders and their families into the community
- Inspire community Action to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders



"Even our own staff occasionally had doubts about what we were trying to achieve. But here was the President – he had never seen YRP, yet he believed in it!"

JASON WONG
CEO of SCORE (2002 to 2005)

To achieve this Vision, YRP chose a different theme every year that focused on the 3As. With each year, there were new breakthroughs. The year 2005 saw the inauguration of the YRP Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon Walk. Inmates handmade a total of 388,000 ribbons which were distributed to the public to be worn visibly on their clothing during the campaign period. The Job Fair was a great success that year, with 17 companies offering 660 job vacancies. 154 pre-release inmates were offered jobs.

The focus in 2006 roped inmates and ex-offenders into their own rehabilitation. On one occasion, it was proposed that the distinctive Yellow Ribbon – distributed nationwide every September – should be given an upgrade by having it manufactured using hardier materials and outsourced to a factory. But the idea was vetoed. Jason explains: “The whole point was to allow the inmates to handmake the Ribbons, so that they are personally involved in their own rehabilitation.”

The theme in 2007 was ‘Give Back’ to society. Of epic encouragement was the presence of Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong at the Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon Walk. Many heart-warming milestones have followed since. In 2013, YRP marks its 10th Anniversary, and its list of achievements continues to grow.



Milestones (2004-2013)

4 THE YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT STORY

From a tumultuous start to the triumphant 10th year of the Yellow Ribbon Project, milestone after milestone testify of the true grit of the people who have believed in and walked the journey of hope since 2004. They are the pioneers and countless individuals and organisations who strive to unlock 'second chances' for ex-offenders. This is the Yellow Ribbon Story.

Every year, a distinctive theme is developed for the YRP campaign, with each ensuing one levelling up the width and depth of its impact, from awareness creation to community engagement and mobilisation of rehabilitated ex-offenders to give back to society.



2004

CREATING AWARENESS: HELP UNLOCK THE SECOND PRISON

The Yellow Ribbon Project Singapore was established in 2004 as a nationwide public education campaign aimed at changing society's mindset to give ex-offenders a second chance in life and to bring about societal acceptance of ex-offenders and their families.



Launch of Yellow Ribbon Project – Yellow Ribbon Charity Concert | 2 October 2004

The Yellow Ribbon Project was launched by former President of Singapore Mr S R Nathan during the Yellow Ribbon Charity Concert. The event saw a mix of local celebrities and foreign artistes such as Gurmit Singh, Sharon Au, B.A.D. and Tension performing to an audience of over 5,000 people at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

2004

'Wear-A-Yellow-Ribbon' | Month of October 2004

The month-long 'Wear-A-Yellow-Ribbon' encourages members of the public to wear Yellow Ribbons to show their support for ex-offenders and their families. Handmade by inmates, the Yellow Ribbons represent the ex-offenders' desire for acceptance and forgiveness.



Community Movie 'Coming Home' | 9 October 2004

This community movie features celebrities Moses Lim, Irene Ang, Melody Chen and Aaron Aziz. It focuses on three ex-offenders preparing to reintegrate into the community after serving prison sentences, and encourages Singaporeans to accept ex-offenders back into their midst. The movie premiered to a strong crowd of 6,500.

2005

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: GIVE THEM A SECOND LEASE OF LIFE

The reach of Yellow Ribbon Project 2005 was enlarged to bring the acceptance message to a wider audience, as well as to get supporters to take action.



'Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon' Walk | 3 September 2005

2005 marked the first 'Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon' Walk, which gathered more than 14,000 participants. In a show of solidarity, they walked from Changi Prison Complex to the finish line at Pasir Ris Town Park, symbolising ex-offenders' journey from incarceration to freedom.



Yellow Ribbon Job Fair | 15 & 25 September 2005

The inaugural Yellow Ribbon Job Fair co-organised by the North East Community Development Council (CDC) was supported by 17 companies offering 660 vacancies to pre-release inmates. The Job Fair saw 154 of the 238 pre-release inmates offered jobs. Guest-of-Honour Ms Penny Low, Member of Parliament and Vice-Chairperson of North East CDC was accompanied by former Director of Prisons Mr Chua Chin Kiat (left) and former Chairman of SCORE Mr Kong Mun Kong (second from left).

Yellow Ribbon Conference | 28 September 2005

The first Yellow Ribbon Conference was conducted to provide a platform for correctional staff and community partners to share best practices and research studies on reintegration issues. For the first time, all the partners in the rehabilitation work began to see the full picture.





'One More Chance' Movie | 2 September 2005

Yellow Ribbon Project teamed up with Jteam Productions to produce 'One More Chance', a Chinese-language movie directed and produced by Jack Neo. The film was shot within Changi Prison Complex and highlights the importance of community acceptance and the difficulties faced by three ex-offenders after their release from prison. The movie attracted 150,000 viewers.

Registration of Criminals (Amendment) Act 2005

The Registration of Criminals (Amendment) Act was amended in May 2005 to provide for the records kept in the Register of Criminals of convictions for minor crimes to become spent after five years, provided certain conditions are satisfied. The records of convictions for offences not kept in the Register will not be construed as 'criminal' records.



'Unlock' Music Album

Universal Music and Tiny Box Productions co-produced the album 'Unlock' featuring local celebrity Julian Hee. The album features a collection of heartfelt original compositions by inmates and ex-offenders from 2004 and 2005.

2006

ENGAGING THE EX-OFFENDERS: WIDENING THE REACH, DEEPENING THE MESSAGE

The Yellow Ribbon Project aimed to deepen the understanding of rehabilitation and highlight the contributions of reformed ex-offenders. At the same time, inmates and ex-offenders were mobilised to contribute to Singapore through community service.

Yellow Ribbon Creative Festival

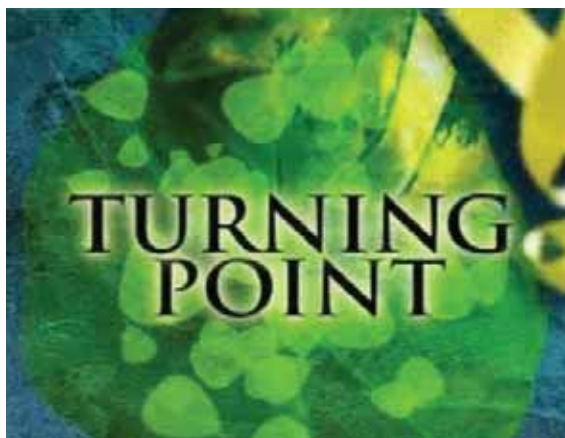
The first-ever Creative Festival: Poetry Competition and Songwriting Competition was held in Changi Prison during the month of June to give inmates a platform to express their hopes and appreciation to those who have helped them.





Yellow Ribbon Concert 'New Hope, New Dreams' | 22 September 2006

The Yellow Ribbon Concert 'New Hope, New Dreams' saw a strong turnout of 6,000 viewers. It featured performances by reformatting inmates with the themes of hope, forgiveness and second chances. They were supported by local celebrities Mark Lee, Koh Chieng Mun, Jai and Project SuperStar winners Mi Lu Bing. The event was subsequently televised to over 50,000 viewers on Channel NewsAsia.



Turning Point – Yellow Ribbon Docudrama | 31 October 2006

The first reality docudrama co-produced with MediaCorp and broadcasted on national television, 'Turning Point' features the life stories of four ex-offenders and their struggles. It also gave the ex-offenders an opportunity to express their thanks to those who gave them hope during the key 'turning points' in their lives.

Celebrating Second Chances Award Ceremony | 10 September 2006

Celebrating Second Chances Award Ceremony saw more than 300 ex-offenders being commended for their efforts to remain crime-free and drug-free after their incarceration. The award presentation affirmed them that there were people supporting and cheering them on in their difficult journey of reformation.

2007

GIVING BACK: EXTENDING OUR REACH, INSPIRING ACTION IN INMATES AND EX-OFFENDERS

The call to 'Give Back' to society was the theme of the Yellow Ribbon Project 2007. Inmates and ex-offenders were encouraged to look beyond their pasts and their limitations to help the less fortunate of society. Through this, they demonstrated that they can play their part to be contributing members of the community.



Yellow Ribbon Cooking Competition (in collaboration with Raffles Hotel) | 9 May 2007

The inaugural Yellow Ribbon Cooking Competition gave inmates an opportunity to showcase their culinary skills in French cuisine. It was held in collaboration with the Raffles Hotel and saw the participation of nine teams from the various prison institutions. In the picture are female inmates interacting with a French chef.



Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition | 22-23 September 2007

The first Community Art Exhibition was held in September to showcase the artistic talents of inmates and their journey of rehabilitation and reintegration through various art forms at The Arts House. The exhibition attracted a crowd of 1,000. (Above) Then-Minister of State for National Development Grace Fu (first from left) admiring paintings on display.



Poetry Book – ‘Giving Back’ | 2 September 2007

‘Giving Back’, a collaboration between the National Library Board and YRP, was launched at the YR Fair. It served as a mouthpiece for the unheard voices of inmates and expressed their desire to change and to contribute to society. The quality of the poems demonstrated the sensitive and aesthetic nature of the inmates.

Tribute of Love – Mother’s Day Celebration

Twelve inmates who participated in the Cooking Competition had the special opportunity to cook a gourmet meal and dine with their family members on Mother’s Day. Forty-eight family members attended the event. The inmates were deeply impacted as the event gave them an opportunity to appreciate their long-suffering family members.



Public Perception Survey 2007

A public perception survey found that 94% of Singaporeans were aware of the YRP’s core message to give second chances to ex-offenders. It also found that an average of 58.5% of the respondents had generally positive attitudes towards ex-offenders.

2008

BEYOND JUST WORDS: GOING BEYOND AWARENESS TO ACTION BY ACTIVELY ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Building on the increased awareness and support for the Project, Yellow Ribbon Project 2008 aimed to encourage family members, employers and volunteers to go 'Beyond Just Words' and take 'Action' to help ex-offenders remove the label of prejudice and pave their way back into society.



Yellow Ribbon Journey Exhibition 'Our Crossroads' | 12-14 September 2008

'Our Crossroads' Exhibition was an experiential exhibition showcasing three real-life stories of inmates/ex-offenders. The exhibition allowed the community to gain an insight into the intricate issues affecting the inmates/ex-offenders and their family members, and garnered community support for their reintegration journey. (Second from left) Minister for Finance Tharman Shanmugaratnam and former Director of Prisons Ng Joo Hee visiting a booth.



Yellow Ribbon Journey Exhibition 'Our Crossroads'
Mr Tharman writing a note of encouragement to inmates and ex-offenders: "Ex-inmates are like all of us – we make mistakes, and we try to recover. Let's help everyone..."



Yellow Ribbon Journey Exhibition 'Our Crossroads'
Ex-offender Nicodemus performing on stage for guests and the public.



Movie Screening – 'The Days'

'The Days', a movie produced by local film director Boi Kwong (centre in jacket), was screened at Golden Village Marina and saw an attendance of 400 viewers. On his right is Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee, former Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs. The movie depicts the relationship between two brothers – the older brother being responsible for leading his younger brother into gangs.



Singapore Biennale 2008

At the Singapore Biennale 2008, Yellow Ribbon Project contributed 4,000 inmates' slippers which were used by artists Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan for their artwork, *Flight*.

2009

GIVING BACK: INMATES AND EX-OFFENDERS PLAYING A ROLE TO GIVE BACK TO SOCIETY

As beneficiaries of community support for the last five years, the organising committee sought to foster more partnerships through collaborations with community partners. This year, as many Singaporeans were hit by the economic downturn, the inmates and ex-offenders gave back to the community to show solidarity with society in times of difficulties.



Yellow Ribbon Prison Run | 6 September 2009

The inaugural Yellow Ribbon Prison Run attracted thousands of enthusiastic professional and amateur runners.



Yellow Ribbon Prison Run | 6 September 2009

The inaugural Yellow Ribbon Prison Run was flagged off by the Guest-of-Honour, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean. 6,000 runners went 'Beyond The Run' to show their support for ex-offenders by running from Changi Village into Changi Prison Complex. Through the runners' participation, a total of \$95,000 was raised for the Yellow Ribbon Fund.



National Day Goodie Bag Packing

Eighty-eight inmates participated in the Nation's birthday by packing 35,000 funpacks and 100,000 Yellow Ribbon Packs for the National Day Parade. This showed that inmates can be contributing citizens even when they are serving sentences in prison. On the left, Brigadier General Tan Chuan-Jin having a light moment with an inmate.

Yellow Ribbon Tattoo Removal Programme

GiGATT International Marketing Pte Ltd sponsored a \$2 million pilot tattoo removal programme to help 154 inmates renounce their gang affiliations by removing their gang tattoos as an act of affirmation to restart their lives.



2010

THIS IS OUR JOURNEY, THIS IS YOUR YELLOW RIBBON

Through the years of campaigning, the Yellow Ribbon Project has seen more community partners step forward to show their support in forging their own Yellow Ribbon Journey by helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society.



Yellow Ribbon @ Chingay | 19-20 February 2010

The Yellow Ribbon Project participated in the Chingay 2010 'Yellow River' segment. Eleven ex-offenders and 250 community members formed the contingent. Many of these community participants were the ex-offenders' families and secondary school students.



Shatec Training Course with Temasek Touch

A batch of 11 trainees graduated from the inaugural 'Certificate in Basic Culinary Skills Course' conducted by Shatec Institutes and sponsored by the Temasek Touch Trailblazer Fund.



Rekindle Programme with NECDC | 23 January 2010

The Rekindle Programme jointly organised with the North East Community Development Council (NECDC) helped inmates from the Reformative Training Centre to reconcile and mend ties with their family members. Mayor of the North East District Teo Ser Luck (second from left) graced the event.



Club 21 (Calvin Klein) Fashion Show | 22 January 2010

In collaboration with Club 21 Singapore – the licensed retail distributor for Calvin Klein – a fashion show was organised at the defunct Queenstown Remand Prison. Through the event, \$56,000 was raised for the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

2011

LITTLE GESTURES, BIG DIFFERENCE

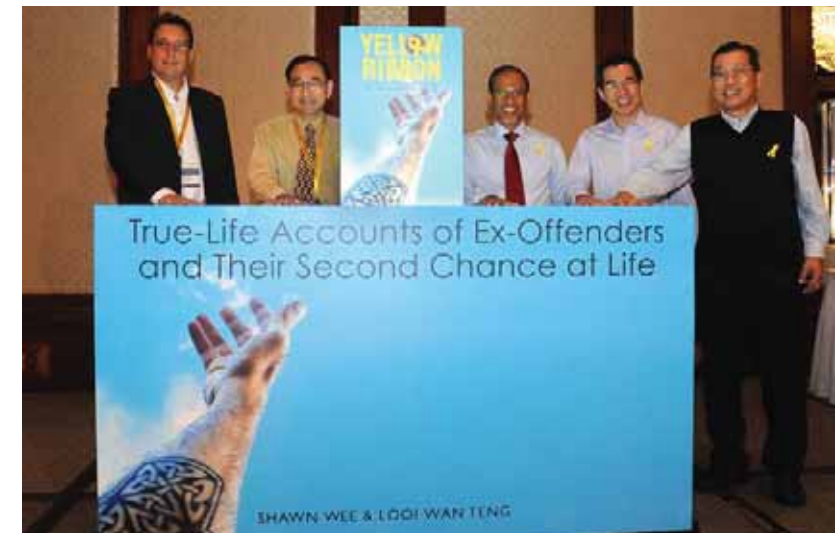
Little gestures of acceptance, kindness and support, and even a simple greeting, make a big difference to ex-offenders.



Yellow Ribbon Conference @ ICPA | 11-16 September 2011

At the 13th International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) Conference, 14 September was designated the 'Yellow Ribbon Day' where about 130 community partners and representatives from CARE Network gathered to discuss community reintegration and issues related to aftercare. (Fifth from right) Minister of State for Home Affairs Masagos Zulkifli was the Guest-of-Honour.

2011



'Yellow Ribbon' – A Book of Success Stories
Marshall Cavendish Editions lent their expertise and produced a book titled 'Yellow Ribbon' based on success stories of ex-offenders and described their struggles in assimilating back into the community. (Above) The official launch of the book by the Guest-of-Honour, Masagos Zulkifli (third from right).

Yellow Ribbon Tribute of Love | 1 October 2011
Guest-of-Honour Mr Seah Kian Peng, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore joining in the spirit of 'giving back' with a group of more than 50 ex-offenders and volunteers led by ISCOS. They served up a special lunch cooked by inmates from Changi Prison Complex for residents of the Lions Home for the Elders. ISCOS raised a total of \$2,500 for Lions Club Singapore and this was matched by the South East Community Development Council, bringing the total raised to \$5,000.



2012

WILL

As a noun and a verb, the theme 'Will' mustered the determination and strength of the mind to rise above the past to change the future – helping inmates, ex-offenders and their families to look beyond their past towards a better future with the help of the community.



2012



Community Art Exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum | 13 September 2012
Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Law Sim Ann presented with an inmate's artwork by Director of Prisons Soh Wai Wah (second from right) and Chairman of SCORE Chng Hwee Hong.



Community Art Exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum | 13 September 2012
An array of 2D and 3D artworks were on display at the museum.



Mdm Jenap 'Dusk till Dawn Challenge' | 12 September 2012

At 53 years of age, Mdm Jenap ran twelve hours in her own Dusk till Dawn Challenge to raise funds for the Yellow Ribbon Fund. Known as the 'Catwoman' in the marathon circuit, her act helped raise more than \$130,000. (Right) Acting Minister for Manpower Tan Chuan-Jin putting the Yellow Ribbon on a prison gate replica.



Yellow Ribbon Golf Tournament | 4 July 2012

More than 280 donors participated in the third Yellow Ribbon Fund Golf Tournament and Dinner held at the Singapore Island Country Club's New Course. The hallmark fundraising event was graced by Guest-of-Honour Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong (centre). Organised by the Yellow Ribbon Fund, over \$400,000, a record, was raised. The funds will go to the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for ex-offenders, and development and implementation of family support programmes to help strengthen family ties of inmates and ex-offenders.



Yellow Ribbon Mobile Application

Leveraging on the popularity of mobile phone applications, the YRP launched its first mobile application for smartphone users to get the latest updates and information on the Yellow Ribbon Project.

2013

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SECOND CHANCES: THE ROAD TO ACCEPTANCE

The Yellow Ribbon Project's focus in 2013 is appreciation of the strong support it has received, and thanking every Singaporean who believed in the cause. It is also focused on fostering strong community engagement to empower more Singaporeans with the opportunity to be part of the movement.

Yellow Ribbon Giant Ribbon | 15 September 2013
The formation of the largest giant human Yellow Ribbon in Singapore symbolises the concerted effort in supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders.





Yellow Ribbon Prison Run 2013 | 15 September 2013

More than 1,200 participants formed Singapore's first-ever giant Yellow Ribbon on 15 September 2013 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Yellow Ribbon Project. The formation was part of the fifth Yellow Ribbon Prison Run, which attracted over 10,000 runners and was flagged off by Mr Teo Chee Hean, Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs. Since 2004, the Yellow Ribbon Project has organised several initiatives to encourage the acceptance of ex-offenders who have changed for the better. The Yellow Ribbon Prison Run is one of the events that have resulted in more Singaporeans demonstrating their support for the cause. Among the runners this year were 10 visually challenged and 10 intellectually challenged representatives of Runninghour, a social interest group that fosters better integration between the less privileged and other fitness enthusiasts. The 20 runners, along with their trainers, took part in the 10 km Competitive Run. The event, themed The Road to Acceptance, took participants through either a scenic 10 km Competitive Run or a 6 km Fun Run before celebrating their support for the cause with a carnival held within the Changi Prison Complex. Exhibits and performances to showcase the journey of inmates and ex-offenders in earning the acceptance of fellow Singaporeans were presented at the carnival.



Mr Teo Chee Hean (centre), Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, at the start of the 6 km Fun Run. On his right (in yellow) is Mr Soh Wai Wah, Director of Prisons, and on his left is Mr Teo Tze Fang, CEO of SCORE.



Popular Singaporean singer Kelvin Tan Wei Lian (in green top), blind since birth, and his guide at the 6 km Fun Run.



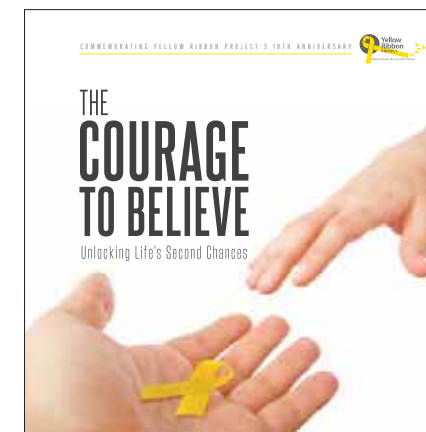
Yellow Ribbon Fund's 10th Year Anniversary | 20 July 2013

The Yellow Ribbon Fund celebrated its 10th Anniversary at a gala dinner held at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore. Onstage during a cheque presentation are (from left) Mr Phillip Tan, Chairman of Yellow Ribbon Fund; Guest-of-Honour Mr S Iswaran, Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Home Affairs and Trade and Industry; Mr Soh Wai Wah, Director of Prisons; and Mr Chng Hwee Hong, Chairman of SCORE.



Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition | 12-28 July 2013

This year's Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition 'Road to Acceptance' delved into the struggles, determination and aspirations of inmates and ex-offenders. It displayed their artistic interpretations of the path back to society and their heartfelt yearning for acceptance – of forgiveness, hope and second chances. It aimed to inspire visitors to break away from the barriers of stigma and bias towards them, thus inspiring the right strokes to complete the big picture of acceptance.



Launch of the Yellow Ribbon Project Commemorative Book 'The Courage to Believe' | 19 October 2013

This book chronicles Yellow Ribbon Project's brave journey from its inception in 2004 to its 10th Anniversary celebrations in 2013. It was held on 19 October at the Celebrating Second Chances Award Ceremony. Three hundred ex-offenders who have led crime-free lives were also honoured at the occasion.

Yellow Ribbon Appreciation Dinner | 23 October 2013

A special event organised to recognise the contributions of community partners and volunteers who have given selflessly and without fanfare for the past 10 years. It is also a fitting grand conclusion to the Yellow Ribbon events for the year of 2013.



"Everyone deserves a second chance.
Grab it, and do not waste it!"

ERROL LIM

Nine-year-old Errol Lim was one of the 900 volunteers to distribute 250,000 ribbons to spread the message of YRP

TRANSFORMATION OF LIVES THROUGH THE YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT

STATISTICS AND TRENDS

Awareness

A post-media campaign analysis survey conducted in 2012 showed that 96% of the respondents were aware of the Yellow Ribbon Project's (YRP) objectives. This compares favourably with the 94% reported in the previous public perception survey conducted in 2007.

Acceptance

- The YRP has distributed more than 1.6 million Yellow Ribbons since 2004.
- More than 300,000 members of the public have participated in YRP events and activities since our launch.

Action

- Since 2004, an average of S\$1.2 million is raised each year for the Yellow Ribbon Fund to contribute to the development and implementation of reintegration programmes for ex-offenders as well as support programmes for the families of ex-offenders.
- SCORE job bank has increased from 1,300 to 3,400.
- More than 2,400 volunteers have pledged their support since 2004.
- More than 400 ex-offenders and more than 833 community partners have also stepped forward in supporting the various Yellow Ribbon Project activities and events.

BEYOND THE RUN

On the surface, the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run 2009 looked like any other event designed simply for mass participation – a day for people to gather for some fresh air and exercise. But not so for the organisers. For them, the Run was symbolic of so much more.

Two Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon Walks in 2005 and 2007 had been successfully organised by the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) team, gathering about 10,000 participants each time and winning wide media coverage. There was apparently no need to vary its success formula in 2009.

But there was a compelling drive to conceive something new, something more daring. The organisers deliberated and decided it would be a Run in 2009. The previous mass event of a Walk was like a pleasant stroll in the park, free of hardships and conquests. However, a Run is different. The undulating terrain of Loyang Way, Upper Changi Road North and Tanah Merah Besar Road became a test of endurance and perseverance. It would make



Start of the inaugural Yellow Ribbon Prison Run 2009. Marathon runner and reformed ex-offender Hannel Choong (second from left) is in the foreground

participants wonder: “Can I make it to the finish line?” and “Should I just quit now?” And when they reach the gentle declines, they would rejoice in one another’s companionship, gain confidence and be encouraged to press on for the next lap.

The route epitomised the peaks and troughs of ex-offenders’ Yellow Ribbon journey. The organisers were convinced there was no reversion to a Walk. Now, they had to spread the message to as many people as possible about the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run!

It became more than mere symbolism; the event was finally named ‘Beyond the Run’. It was to communicate that there remained needs to be met and actions to be taken beyond the finishing line of the 10 km route; the organisers wanted to encourage participants to think and do something for ex-offenders.

At daybreak on 6 September, 6,000 people gathered at Farnborough Road for the start of the event. Kicking it off was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Mr Teo Chee Hean. Runners who conquered the route spoke later about the feelings of intimidation they experienced around the halfway mark as they laboured up 30 degree inclines, the sober sense of responsibility for society as they skirted the historic wall of Old Changi Prison, and, finally, the swell of joy and gratitude as they rounded the final bend to glimpse a glorious stretch of downslope leading to the finishing line.

A cheerful carnival and refreshments awaited them at the end point, Changi Prison Complex. Highlights of the carnival included a Rehabilitation Fair, showcases of the inmates’ talents, plus an exhibition on aftercare work and even a mock cell to help visitors understand inmates’ living conditions. A total of \$90,000 was raised from the Run for the Yellow Ribbon Fund to support programmes and services for inmates, ex-offenders and their families.

True to its message of ‘Giving Back’ to the community, ex-offenders and inmates continued to volunteer in numerous community service projects beyond the Run. Their contribution was made more significant in the light of the global economic crisis in late 2008 and 2009.

The Run was symbolic of ex-offenders’ journey of rehabilitation and reintegration into society. But its impact on the reality of YRP work is beyond measure.

DID YOU KNOW?

A contingent of 80 reformed ex-offenders participated in ‘Beyond the Run’ 2009. Their message was “for all ex-offenders to pick themselves up after having fallen down”. The Run also got into the Singapore Book of Records with the most runners who wore Yellow Shoelaces in a sporting event. There were 2,392 Yellow Shoelaces in total!

Reformed ex-offender turned marathoner, 48-year-old Mr Hanniel Choong, challenged himself to finish the 10 km race in 48 minutes. His effort raised S\$35,000 in donations for the Yellow Ribbon Fund. Hanniel had been in and out of prison for almost 20 years on drug-related charges. It was difficult for him to get a job with his ‘ex-con background’ each time he was released, as job placement services were not efficient in the early ‘80s. His family almost gave up on him during his repeated downfalls. After his final release in 1996, he joined The Helping Hand as a full-time staff. Then, he volunteered for missions work in a halfway house called House of Hope in Cebu, Philippines. He helped rehabilitate drug addicts there for three years before returning to Singapore. Hanniel has a passion for running and competes in marathons.



Reformed ex-offender Mr Samuel Chow had been convicted for armed robbery and served a sentence of 11 years. Incarceration changed his view of life and he determined to be a better person upon release. However, like many ex-offenders, he faced problems such as rejection by employers, mistrust, suspicion and discrimination in society. He persevered and eventually started two hardware shops which employed ex-offenders. For the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run 2009, Samuel sponsored the participation of 31 boys from Boys’ Town when he heard that they were keen to do so. Boys’ Town was so encouraged by Samuel’s generosity that he was invited to their appreciation dinner to present the plaques to the runners.

FUND OF HOPE

Instituted in 2004, the Yellow Ribbon Fund (YRF) plays a vital role in raising funds and awareness for the rehabilitation efforts to help ex-offenders and their families. The road has been challenging as well as rewarding.

It was a grand affair – a gala dinner celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the YRF. It was held at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel and more than 500 donors from various public and private organisations attended the glittering event. Even while wining and dining, YRF never digressed from the original purpose of its founding, which was to raise funds for rehabilitation work. More than \$550,000 was raised at the gala dinner alone.

It was an important occasion for YRF Chairman Mr Phillip Tan. After all, he has been with YRF since its inception in 2004 and, therefore, looked forward to this special anniversary more than any other stakeholder. However, while admiring the opulent surroundings and five-star service of the hotel, he could not help



but hark back to another kind of dinner party.

At that dinner party, the tables were also laden with fine dinnerware, and music wafted in the background, sculpting a soothing, impressive ambience. Waiters in crisp uniforms floated among the guests giving impeccable service. The diners would not be faulted if they mistook themselves to be in a ballroom similar to the one in The Ritz-Carlton, except that they had just exchanged their identity cards for passes at the security gate, and been escorted by uniformed men through long corridors monitored by CCTV cameras, in order to reach this 'restaurant'. It was no commercial dining place; it was in the heart of Changi Prison Complex. The chefs and waiters were all inmates and the programme was named 'Dining Behind Bars'.

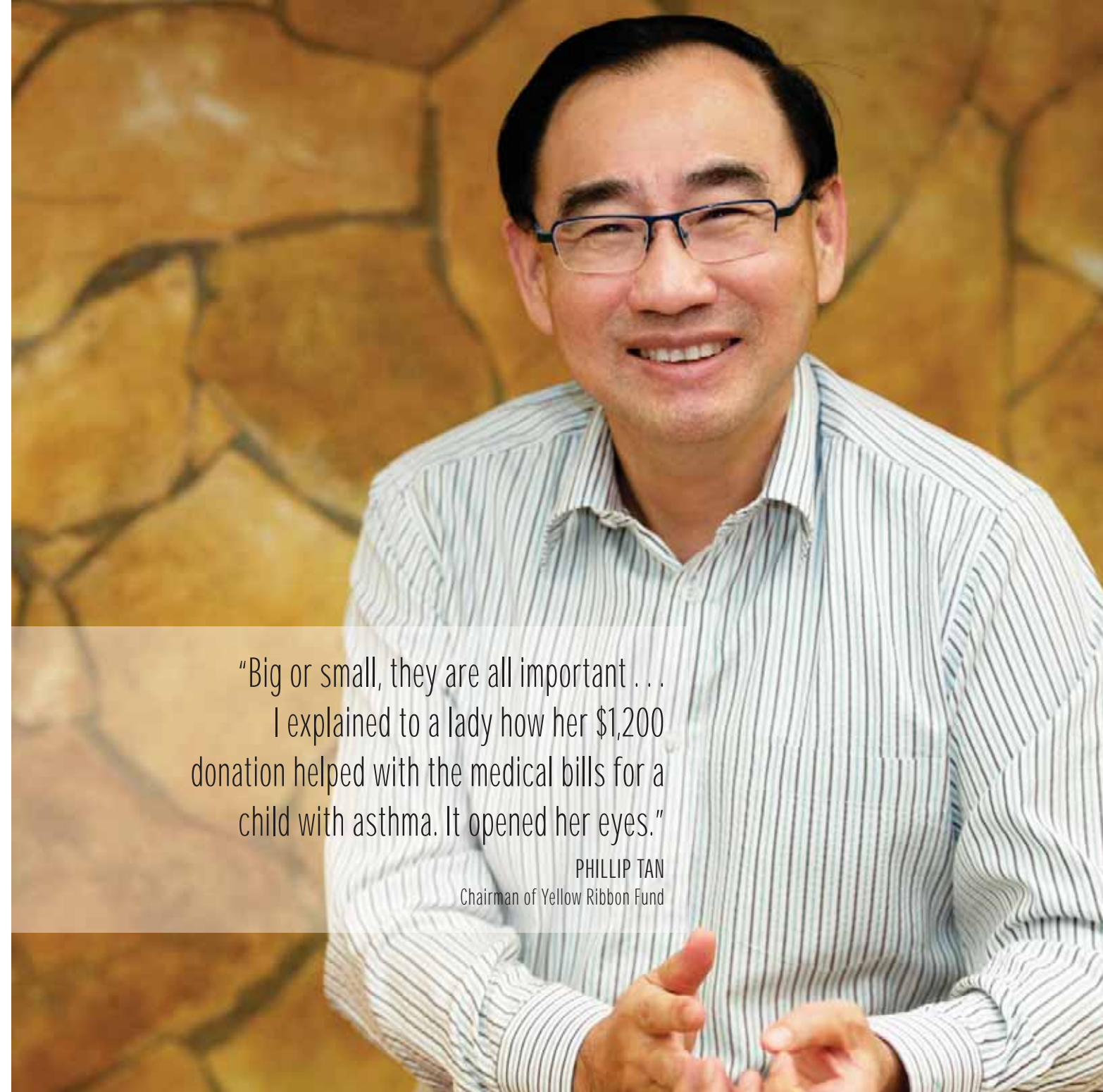
In 2005, the YRF did the unprecedented – it brought public members into the Changi Prison Complex and served them food prepared by inmates. The purpose? To prove that, given a chance, ex-offenders can give excellent products and services to equal anything one finds in commercial establishments.

A FUND THAT RESTORES HOPE

Phillip likes to tell stories. This is how he brings the YRF to life for his audience. He has many stories to tell about the Yellow Ribbon Emergency Fund (YREF), a key initiative of the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

The Yellow Ribbon Emergency Fund was established in 2006 to aid recently released ex-offenders who are in dire need of cash as a start-up upon release from prison, or affected dependents from recent incarceration of a sole breadwinner. In 2012, YREF provided short-term assistance to 777 ex-offenders and 103 families.

Phillip's latest story is that of Mdm Roza. Her husband left her and their three children. Her 27-year-old eldest son is disabled, her daughter has heart problems and her youngest son is seeking financial assistance to complete his diploma education in a private institution. Mdm Roza is an ex-offender. When she was released, she faced many debts and challenges. While lifting her disabled son, she hurt her back. She was worried that her long medical leave would jeopardise her job as a



"Big or small, they are all important . . .
I explained to a lady how her \$1,200
donation helped with the medical bills for a
child with asthma. It opened her eyes."

PHILLIP TAN
Chairman of Yellow Ribbon Fund

baggage handler and she really needed the income.

After receiving help from the YREF, she said: "I am thankful. During my most challenging time when I almost lost my job, the YREF provided me with financial support to care for my family's needs during that critical period and it continued to ensure that my family received assistance from relevant agencies."

Education is an important means of helping reforming ex-offenders get a fresh start on life. This is why YRF also started the YRF Skills Training Assistance to Re-start (STAR) Bursary under its own auspices. This bursary provides financial assistance to ex-offenders for skills training so that they can be gainfully employed and become self-sufficient. The YRF team hopes to help more ex-offenders get their Institute of Technical Education (ITE) certificates. Some talented inmates have also qualified for arts courses in LASALLE College of the Arts.

Since the establishment of YRF STAR Bursary in 2010, a total of 59 students have been enrolled into the programme. Twenty-three of them have successfully graduated with recognised diplomas.

The YRF has extended its reach to more than 29,215 inmates, ex-offenders and their families through the disbursement of more than \$4,554,266 from 2004 to 2012.

DIEHARD DONORS

All these donations would not have been possible without the fundraising efforts of YRF. In 2011 alone, the YRF team comprising Phillip, two staff and their pool of volunteers raised more than one million dollars.

"It is not easy to ask for money again and again," Phillip points out. "Whatever we raise, we do not keep to finance our own programmes. A huge part of the donations are given to other agencies to carry out their in-care and aftercare programmes."

The best way to raise funds would be to showcase the happy results. However, YRF finds itself in a delicate position. Ex-offenders are still trying to find their feet, so they need to be given space and time to establish themselves without the glare of public attention, and donors understandably wish

to keep their privacy. Phillip says: "So, I can only ask the donors and the public to simply trust our word that the donations are being channelled to the people who really need them." The donations and disbursements are reflected in the public domain and the accounts are audited by an external firm. And as an Institution of a Public Character, its annual report and financial statements are also submitted to the Commissioner of Charities.

Fortunately, YRF has 'diehard' donors. These are people who believe enough in the YRF cause to put their wallets behind it, again and again. The YRF team responds with gratitude by keeping them abreast of developments through newsletters and personal calls. During Christmas, the inmate employees of SCORE Bakery present cookies to them. Such little acts of appreciation are important.

Phillip emphasises that appreciation must not be tied to donation amounts. "Big or small, they are all important. One lady raised \$1,200 selling little knick-knacks. She was shy about the sum. I explained to her what \$1,200 could do for a family in trouble, and how her donation helped with medical bills for a child with asthma. It opened her eyes."

YELLOW RIBBON FUND

Yellow Ribbon Fund (YRF) was started in 2004. It is the first national charitable fund devoted entirely towards the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and services for ex-offenders and their families. Registered under the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), YRF has been granted Institute of a Public Character (IPC) status since 2004.

The objective of the Fund is to provide funds to support:

- Rehabilitative and aftercare services to inmates and ex-offenders during and after their discharge from

custody, including the provision of such services by partner organisations.

- Rehabilitation and reintegration support programmes for family members of ex-offenders after their discharge from custody.
- Public awareness programmes aimed at creating awareness of the need to give second chances to ex-offenders, generating acceptance of ex-offenders back into society and inspiring community action to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders.

5 YELLOW RIBBON TAKES WINGS

Doggedly setting the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) campaign in motion, the YRP team did not realise the true potential of YRP until it began to cross oceans and link countries into one long Ribbon of hope and second chances.

Mr Desmond Chin, the Chief Executive Officer of Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) from 2005 to 2010, disembarked from the aeroplane after a nine-hour flight from Singapore to Fiji in 2008. In his hand was a letter from Mr Ioane Naivalurua, the Director of Fiji Prisons and Corrections Service. It was an invitation to Singapore Prison Service (SPS) to be a guest at the Fiji Launch of the Yellow Ribbon Project. This was the first time that Desmond and SPS had heard of the event.

For the next two days, Desmond frequently made the mistake of thinking himself back in Singapore. This was because the Fijians had replicated the Singapore Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon Walk 2007 right down to the tiniest details. They had made thousands of the exact same ribbon as the Singapore Yellow Ribbon. The Fijian Walk was similar to the Singapore version. The T-shirts and caps worn by the participants had the look and feel of Singapore's event. The Fiji Prison Director had also galvanised his country's Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, to attend the Walk.

Desmond exclaims in wonder: "What did I expect? Perhaps the usual meeting and courtesy call? But, when I looked around, I was truly stunned. It was as if I was in Singapore!"

In his closing speech, the Fiji Prison Director said: "I want to thank one country," and proceeded to

"It never crossed my mind that the Ribbon would cross the Pacific Ocean to an entirely different culture and people in the Fiji Islands."

DESMOND CHIN
CEO of SCORE (2005 to 2010)
Deputy Director of Prisons



give full credit to Singapore. It turned out that loane Naivalurua had attended the Singapore Tie-A-Yellow-Ribbon Walk in 2007. The Walk was symbolic. It represented walking away from imprisonment in solidarity with families and the community. Ten thousand ex-offenders, their families, religious and community organisations, corporations, government agencies and members of the public took part in the Walk. A small percentage was made up of foreign correctional officials, including loane. He came, he observed, he walked, then he left for his home country.

Apparently, he had been so inspired that he had replicated the YRP wholesale. As the saying goes: "Imitation is the sincerest form of praise."

Desmond muses: "When we began the YRP in 2004, we were just targeting our own people. It never crossed my mind that the Ribbon would cross the Pacific Ocean to an entirely different culture and people in the Fiji Islands."

After the event, an old Fijian woman approached Desmond with tears on her face and a big smile, and proceeded to give him a huge bear hug. Perhaps her son or grandson was one of the prison inmates. Desmond would never know because he did not understand her language.

"But it proves one thing – it proves that the message of second chances is universal," Desmond sums up.

BEYOND OUR SHORES

It started with the Fiji Yellow Ribbon Project in 2008. Singapore later learned that Prison Fellowship Nigeria had started something similar in 2008. Nigeria is located in West Africa and is the most populous country on the continent.

Prison Fellowship Nigeria called its campaign the Green Ribbon Campaign. The goal of this campaign is to reduce crime through the 'provision of a constructive moral environment for returning ex-prisoners back to society and meaningful socio-economic reintegration'.

Prison Fellowship Nigeria does this by 'showing empathy, compassion and care to ex-prisoners in the name of Christ and common humanity' through fellowship, counselling and the provision



A Yellow Ribbon welcome ceremony in the Fiji Islands

of shelter, food, and clothing. They also impart trade skills and mentoring.

Much like Singapore's YRP, the Nigeria Green Ribbon Campaign reaches out actively to the public and volunteers to 'create a humane, secure and safe environment for our peace and happiness by caring for ex-prisoners, victims of crime and their families'.

Then, there is Mozambique. Mozambique is located in Southeast Africa. A former National Commissioner of Prisons of Mozambique, Mr Zandamela, visited Singapore Prison Service in January 2009. He took a tour of Kaki Bukit Prison School and was so inspired that he went home and established the Boane Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre (Boane Prison School). This rehabilitation centre is the first establishment in Mozambique aimed exclusively at juvenile offenders. In 2012, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) paid a visit to the Centre and reported that it was in good condition, with 103 out of its 105 young inmates enrolled in school.

Eric Schelzke from the United States of America was similarly inspired by Singapore's YRP. He immediately caught the YRP vision of uniting custodians, ex-offenders, employers and society to change the public perception of ex-offenders, softening the impact of their re-entry into the community. It contributed to his inspiration for the Apollo 13 Project, which takes its name from the USA space launch that overcame tremendous odds to return to Earth.

The Apollo 13 Project mission is to develop the ground support necessary to help prisoners accomplish a challenging re-entry into society, with odds stacked against them in areas such as employment, housing, addictions and mental health.¹

On the other side of the ocean, Australia celebrates The Second Chance Day: Yellow Ribbon Project Australia.² This initiative was launched in 2011 and is celebrated every 1 May. It aims to engage the community in accepting female ex-prisoners and their families, giving them a second chance at life, thus building stronger families and safer communities. The initiative was inspired by the works of Singapore in creating awareness and engaging the community using the Yellow Ribbon theme and imagery. Besides Second Chance Day, workshops on the dangers of drug and alcohol addiction are also conducted in schools.

In February 2012, SCORE received another letter quite like the one sent by Fiji Prisons and Corrections Service in 2008. This time, it was from the Executive Director of BuCor Love Foundation from the Philippines. The Foundation is a non-government organisation that partners the Bureau of Corrections in Manila. A team from BLFI had attended the Singapore Yellow Ribbon activities in 2008 and had been inspired to conduct similar events. Hence, the First Philippine Prison Run was conceived. SCORE was invited to send a photo and message for the First Philippine Prison Run commemorative journal as well as Yellow Ribbon packs to be worn by the participants.

BLFI is a non-profit organisation that advocates awareness, compassion and acceptance towards released prisoners. It provides incare and aftercare programmes and aims for a genuine transformation of inmates in order to produce socially responsible and law-abiding citizens prior to their reintegration into mainstream society.

Presently, Mozambique's Boane Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre is being used as a model for other initiatives such as a youth centre in another district. Thus, it can be seen that the universal and timeless message of the Yellow Ribbon Project continues to spread across geographical borders to touch the heart of every society. The activities are limited only by creativity and budget, but the call remains the same – extend mercy and grace in the form of second chances to ex-offenders.

¹ <http://a13.org>

² secondchanceday.org.au

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

Singapore Prison Service was given an Honourable Mention by the United Nations in 2007. The 2007 UNDPI Award was presented in conjunction with the International Public Relations Association for outstanding achievement in public relations campaigns which best exemplify the ideals and goals of the United Nations. This 'public relations campaign' refers to the revolutionary Yellow Ribbon Project.

Moreover, Singapore has been invited to many countries to speak about the YRP journey.

YRP was featured at the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI), held in Japan, for four consecutive years. In 2010, YRP travelled to Brazil for the 12th United Nations (UN) Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and to Canada for the New Synthesis Canada Roundtable. In 2011, YRP was a highlight of the 13th International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) when Singapore was the host country.

6 FRAMING REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

Policy-making and programmes need to be guided by concrete evidence of results, and not just by a gut feeling of what works. Singapore has established and fine-tuned a rehabilitation and reintegration framework that is drawing attention all over the world.

Nine thousand¹ ex-offenders are released into the community every year in Singapore. Any intervention efforts targeted at them need to be based on evidence-based practices that are rigorously tested and constantly yield results. The principles of intervention must be consistent in programmes across the board, from the assessment tools being used to daily interactions between prison staff and inmates, and even community aftercare programmes.

Singapore Prison Service (SPS) has adopted the RNR model posited by criminal justice scholars Don Andrews, James Bonta and Stephen Wormith. RNR is the acronym for Risk-Need-Responsivity. SPS Chief Psychologist Mr Timothy Leo explains: “RNR is a theoretical model that is backed up by research and is recognised internationally. What we have done here is bring together the body of scientific knowledge and craft structured programmes suitable for Singapore’s context based on the principles of RNR. The programmes and, indeed, the whole rehabilitation and reintegration framework are constantly under review by our staff. We regularly sit down to decide whether new programmes should be introduced and old ones should be continued.”

¹ 11,000 is the figure in 2004 – the first year of Yellow Ribbon Project. This figure has since dropped to 9,000 in 2012.



RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY MODEL

The first 'R' in RNR stands for 'Risk'. The principle states that the type and intensity of rehabilitation service should be offered according to the risk level of the inmate. In order to know the risk level of individual inmates, the SPS team of correctional rehabilitation specialists and psychologists uses risk assessment instruments. These instruments incorporate historical information such as the history of criminal offending and other relevant factors.

Timothy describes a typical example of a high-risk offender. This person would have a longer history of breaking the law and has probably been in and out of prison several times. He typically has only basic education. His lifestyle is characterised by job-hopping, with frequent or long periods of unemployment. His actions could be motivated by impulse (impulse is a frequently cited reason for committing crimes). He finds it hard to delay gratification, and lacks motivation to work and save up for something long-term. He would often put the blame on others or circumstances for his offending.

With regard to his attitude towards people, the high-risk offender shows little respect for other people's property, thus resulting in theft and breaking into people's homes. He may be violent or suspicious towards people. He probably has strained relationships with family members, and his friends may incline towards criminality. For leisure, the high-risk offender likes to mix with antisocial elements and/or indulge in substance abuse.

Risk assessment does not merely identify the make-up of the offender, it also pinpoints the areas of need. "Identifying their needs is just as important as identifying their risks. This way, we can determine the most effective interventions for them," observes Timothy.

Which leads us to the 'N' in 'RNR'. This stands for 'Criminogenic Needs'. These are areas that require intervention and are known to lead to a reduction in reoffending if properly addressed. They are: antisocial thinking, antisocial peers, antisocial personality patterns, substance abuse, family relationships, education, employment and how they use leisure. These needs are primarily addressed with 'criminogenic' programmes. This category of programmes addresses their attitudes

and thinking regarding the above-mentioned 'Needs'. They help the offenders confront and examine their attitudes and beliefs towards life, family, work, and taking responsibility. These programmes provide the offenders with problem-solving skills and help them to adapt to challenges and difficult life situations without the need to turn to crime and substance abuse. "If the offender does not change unproductive or antisocial attitudes, it is not going to translate into positive life changes, not even if he is given a promising job prospect or community support," Timothy points out.

Apart from equipping them with psychological skills, programmes and interventions also include vocational and academic skills training to increase their employment potential, and engaging families, religious bodies and other social agencies that can help them reintegrate into society. This is where partners, caseworkers, religious organisations, employers, community groups and volunteers need to co-labour with SPS and Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) to meet these needs.

The last 'R' talks about 'Responsivity'. The best rehabilitation programme would be useless if inmates cannot understand (due to learning difficulties or poor educational attainment, etc.) or are not motivated to learn. So, Prison Correctional Rehabilitation Specialists have to come to the level of the inmates, using real-life examples and colloquialisms, if necessary, to help the counselees understand the programme.

The next step is to examine the inmates' habits that might 'sabotage' their reform efforts. An example could be late night beer sessions with unsavoury friends. They are posed questions like: "If you stay up late drinking, do you think it will affect your performance at work the next morning?" No model answers are given, but effort is given to elicit from the inmates what measures they are willing to take to ensure they do not reoffend. With the 'solutions' coming from them, they are more likely to take ownership of their own change process.

As can be seen, results cannot be achieved overnight. Therefore, rehabilitation programmes in prison often intensify in the last 6 to 10 months before the inmate's release date. Rehabilitation does not cease when the inmate walks out the prison gate. SPS and SCORE recognise that partners play an indispensable role; they collaborate to monitor the aggregate effect of programmes offered by different community agencies in order to deliver holistic and seamless throughcare.

Timothy adds: "In many jurisdictions, the word 'parole' is used. This gives releasees the negative idea that they are still being 'policed' after they have done their time. I hope our releasees see that what we are giving is support, hence the word 'aftercare'. Because, the truth is, they still need to be scaffolded. We support their desire to have freedom, and this structured support system is designed to, hopefully, translate into many more years of prosocial living and freedom for them."

RECIDIVISM AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

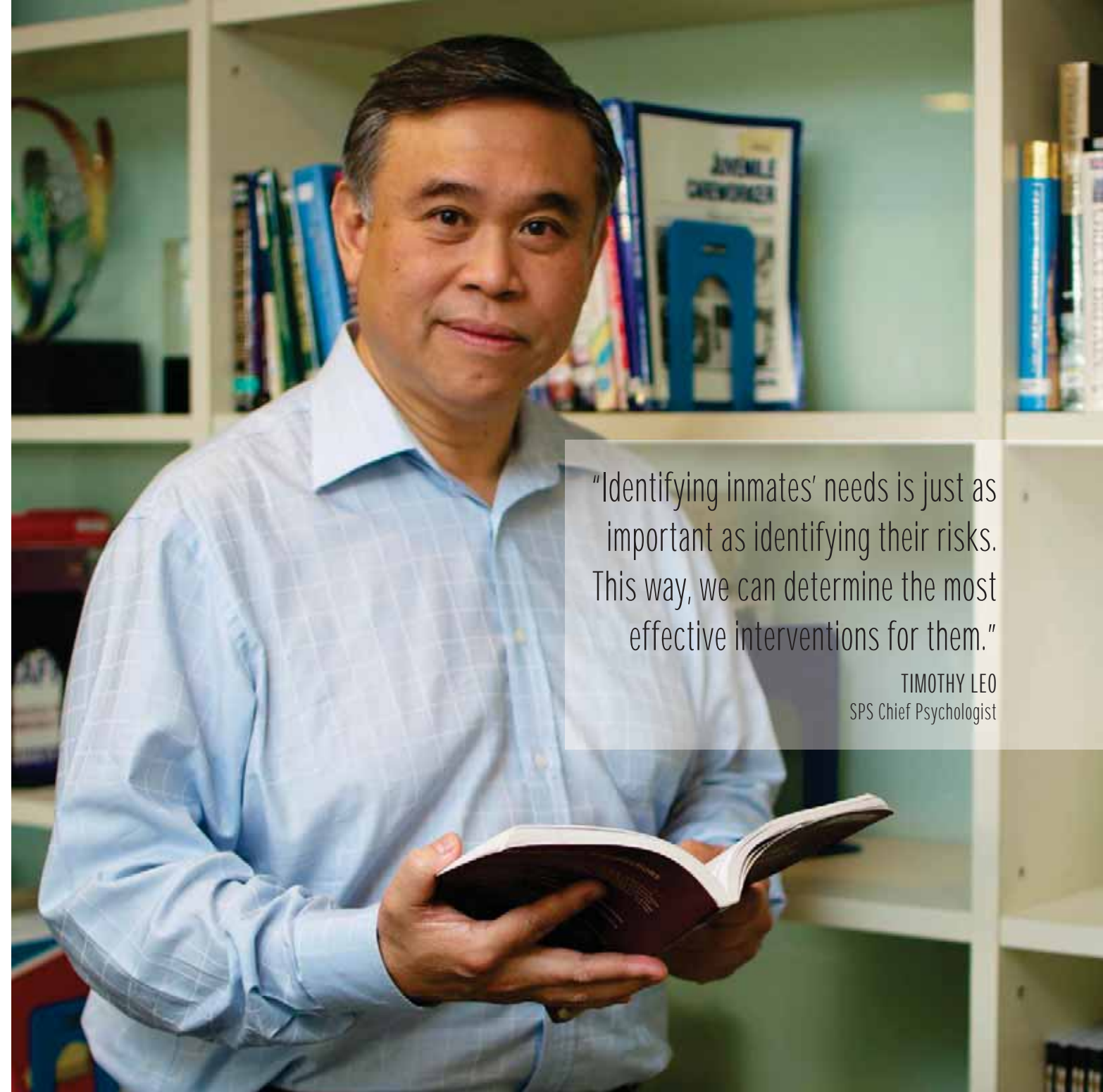
If SPS's Rehabilitation and Reintegration framework based on the RNR model does work, should the national recidivism rate not drop as more releasees are given a framework of help so they do not reoffend? "It is too soon to tell what kinds of successes we will achieve, but we are seeing positive indicators," Timothy affirms. "Assessment of attitudes has shown an overall shift. We believe that a significant portion of releasees will not reoffend. We are monitoring how the releasees are faring in the community."

Enough results have been achieved to warrant growing attention from correctional institutions in other parts of the world. SPS has been invited to conventions like the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI) to share about its rehabilitation and reintegration work.

"Developing countries are encouraged. We were once a developing country, but in 10 years, we have managed to reach this stage of development in lowering crime rate and recidivism. They want to know how we did it."

Timothy believes that the rehabilitation principles drawn up by SPS are applicable in different cultures. "The theoretical principles are the same. Also, the distorted thinking that works behind criminal acts is quite universal. What would vary would be the implementation – this would be contextualised according to the cultural norms and languages of the nation."

The Yellow Ribbon Project is inextricably complementary with SPS in the incare work. YRP has removed stigmatisation of ex-offenders to a large extent, thus facilitating the goal of rehabilitation



"Identifying inmates' needs is just as important as identifying their risks. This way, we can determine the most effective interventions for them."

TIMOTHY LEO
SPS Chief Psychologist

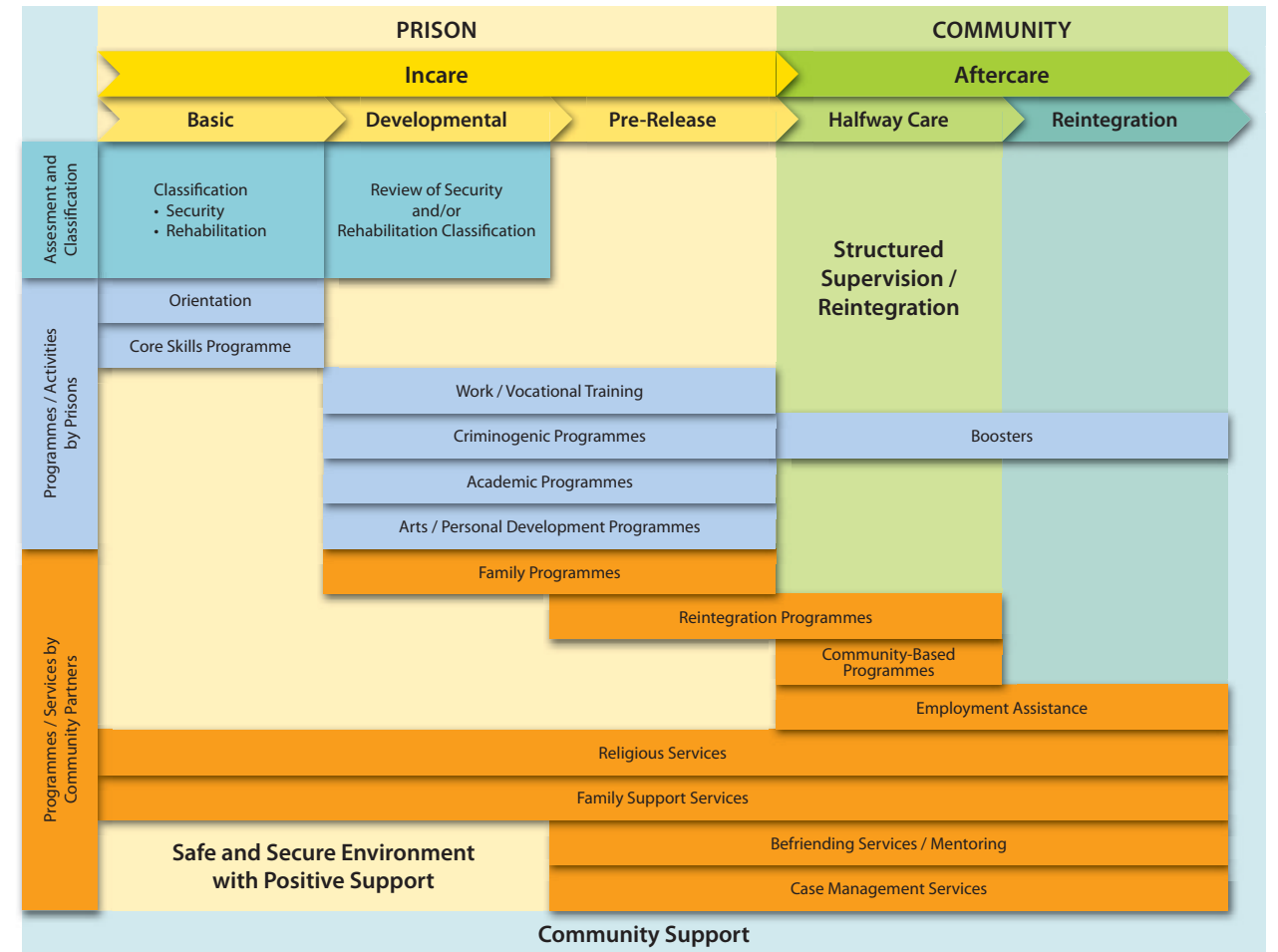
and reintegration. In addition, warm response from the community has helped prison staff to feel that they are not alone in the mission and spurs them on towards fulfilling the vision of SPS.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the Rehabilitation and Reintegration framework for offenders and ex-offenders is about galvanising commitments and efforts from all stakeholders within and beyond prison, and providing a robust, evidence-based approach to rolling out effective, seamless throughcare programmes, that is, incare and pre-release phase for offenders who are being incarcerated, and aftercare for released ex-offenders.

Readers will be able to appreciate, in the following chapter, the wide-ranging, collective incare, pre-release and aftercare work by the various groups of people fused passionately together by one common purpose to improve men's destinies.

Chart 6.1 Rehabilitation and Reintegration Framework



7 CAPTAINS OF LIVES

Many helping hands are needed to roll out the seamless throughcare – incare, pre-release phase and aftercare – so as to help unlock second chances for ex-offenders. This chapter traces the drive and responsibilities of the ‘Captains of Lives’ as they live out the Yellow Ribbon spirit.

Ideally, rehabilitation should start once an offender steps into prison. However, rehabilitation is usually the furthest thing from a new inmate’s mind. Typically, a new inmate is awash with regret and bitterness. He loathes his new environment, which he finds extremely restrictive and repulsive. Before he can fully register the loss of freedom, privacy and space, he receives his kit box – nothing luxurious, only catering for one’s basic needs. The stigma of prison, which he has thus far beheld only from afar, will now be his reality for the duration of his sentence. And there is no escape.

Faced with this, some inmates can become depressed and even suicidal. Very few inmates, during this period, would be thinking about their release and making constructive plans. The burden then falls to the lot of prison officers to ensure that inmates do not wallow in misery, some to the extent of inflicting harm on themselves, and, instead, engage them to use their time in prison constructively.



Inmate being guided by employer on using a tracking device

REHABILITATION WITHIN PRISON WALLS

Prison Officers

“Time in prison need not be wasted time,” is a tag line which resonates with many inmates. With the launch of the new Vision, Director of Prisons Mr Soh Wai Wah tells his staff: “Each of us can make a difference, even in simple things like what we say to the inmates and how we say it. In every encounter, we can inspire in them hope, motivate them to change and encourage them towards good behaviour. Every single moment of inspiration for an inmate can make a difference to his rehabilitation experience, starting inside the prison, and extending beyond into his release. So, let each of us, as Captains of Lives, inspire every one of them towards the aspiration of a prison, and a country, without reoffending.” Indeed, prison officers have become Captains of Lives, driving rehabilitation beyond the base of safe and secure custody of inmates.

The foundational posting of prison officers is Personal Supervisors. In general, Personal Supervisors are to ensure the safe and secure custody of small groups of inmates, maintain order and discipline, engage and offer inmates guidance, and assist them in their rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Each inmate, upon entering prison, would be assessed on their security risks and rehabilitation needs that will be charted on Personal Route Maps (PRM). The inmates would then undergo their respective regimes and rehabilitation programmes throughout their imprisonment. Towards the pre-release phase, their Personal Supervisors hand over responsibilities to the caseworkers in charge of their aftercare so that there is seamless throughcare.

Personal Supervisor Ms Yeo Yan Ting summarises her duties as “a disciplinarian cum teacher cum parent cum counsellor all moulded into one!”

After a Singapore Prison Service (SPS) re-visioning exercise in the late 1990s, where prison officers were called to become Captains of Lives, many new recruits joined because of this inspirational vision. Voicing the sentiments of many of her fellow officers, Yan Ting says: “I always wanted to do something meaningful with my life. When I saw the Prison Service recruitment advertisement, I told myself that I could be a captain of the lives of prisoners. I am inspired to guide the inmates to



think about becoming better people.”

Yan Ting subscribes to the Yellow Ribbon philosophy that ex-offenders who have served their sentence as a punishment for the mistake they have made should be given a second chance. She keeps her eyes steadfastly fixed on the goal of rehabilitation. “During our daily engagement with the inmates, we instil hope in them to change for the better. We conduct restorative practice by guiding them to realise for themselves the mistakes they have committed, and build their awareness of how their actions impact others.”

Not all inmates respond positively to the officers. But there are some who do spur Yan Ting on in her mission. She recalls one such case. Abdul (not his real name) belonged to the high-risk (reoffending) category. He was not keen on attending the 10-month pre-release programme. He exhibited aggressive behaviour, liked to argue with the officers and often dished out negative comments. Nevertheless, Yan Ting, as his case coordinator, persisted in engaging and motivating him. “He became more positive and started participating in his Integrated Criminogenic Programme (ICP) class and other courses,” Yan Ting recalls. “He also puts in effort to control his temper and his tone of his voice, which helps him to interact better with the counsellors, officers and his family members.”

Unknown to Yan Ting, when Abdul was interviewed by the Superintendent later, he said: “I want to thank my case coordinator for encouraging and motivating me to change. She made me think of planning for my future.” Yan Ting smiles proudly: “I was so happy when I heard about it, as he is not the type who gives affirmation to others.”

PRISON CORRECTIONAL REHABILITATION SPECIALISTS

An important partner of prison officers is the Prison Correctional Rehabilitation Specialists. Their role is to conduct risk assessments and treatment programmes and work together with prison officers to create a suitable environment to enhance the rehabilitative effects on inmates before their release. SPS has been operating at the forefront of the correctional industry and is known for

pioneering new initiatives in correctional work. Correctional Rehabilitation Specialists often find themselves fortunate to be part of the pioneering efforts.

Ms Sophia Tan is one such employee. She is an SPS Correctional Rehabilitation Specialist working in the Pre-Release Centre (PRC) with high-risk inmates. These inmates have been in prison multiple times and served long prison sentences, and have thus lost touch with society. Some have a history of substance abuse. Many have multiple issues that include finances and lack of accommodation, estranged families and lack of employment skills. Most of all, they struggle with the motivation to change when they see all the seemingly insurmountable issues facing them.



Yeo Yan Ting (left) and Sophia Tan

Sophia speaks passionately about her work with her inmates. “I saw how the inmates in my programme struggled to manage the uncertainties they faced, tried to make sense of their situations and to manage their emotions. However, despite all their challenges, it was heartening to see the way they embraced the persevering spirit in order to successfully complete the treatment programme, and to look forward to starting a new chapter of their lives in the community. What really touches me is when I witness their tears as they share about their loved ones.”

All these experiences stiffen Sophia’s resolve to be part of the change factor in these people’s lives. She goes on: “I believe my work extends beyond the prison. Aside from working with the inmates in their rehabilitative process, we also help to educate the public and correct misconceptions. This is to facilitate greater societal acceptance and reduce stigma towards ex-offenders. As much as I try to help ex-offenders reintegrate into the community, society has an important role to play in accepting and providing opportunities.”

More than 2,000 prison officers and 100 Rehabilitation Specialists in Singapore Prison Service form part of the first phase of incare for incarcerated offenders. As the frontline in rehabilitation, they help the inmates to weather the critical period of adjusting to incarceration and give them hope for the future.

RELIGIOUS COUNSELLING

Holistic care means that the spiritual and psychological needs of ex-offenders cannot be denied. In fact, it has often been observed that religion brings peace to inmates and brings about positive and long-term behavioural changes.

Representatives from four different religions came together in harmony to share why they serve as religious volunteers in prison. Ms Yashodhara Dhoraisingam, who is with the Hindu Centre, has been serving as a religious volunteer for 5 years; Ustaz Tuan Isa bin Mohamed, from the Muslim Counselling Services, has been serving for 11 years; Venerable Shi Xiang Yang, in his distinctive saffron monk’s robe, hails from Singapore Buddhist Federation; and finally, Reverend George Ian

Beed, of the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) Religious Group of Volunteers (Christian), has been serving inmates and ex-offenders for 30 years.

They are all familiar with one another, having met one another and volunteers of different faiths numerous times during CARE Network gatherings, training sessions and appreciation events. At such sessions, all religious differences are put aside as they share a common agenda – to help ex-offenders. In fact, one can say that a common heart of love is surely the greatest denominator of religious harmony. Ms Yashodhara explains what it means to be a religious volunteer. “In all religions, we are introducing a moral and belief system, which may be totally



(From left) Ms Yashodhara Dhoraisingam, Venerable Shi Xiang Yang and Ustaz Tuan Isa bin Mohamed

radical from how inmates have led their lives so far.”

Venerable Shi adds: “Many inmates come from dysfunctional families. They have developed certain antisocial ways of reacting to people and situations. These reactions are instinctive; they seldom stop to think. Some suspect others of looking down on them and so they react or shift blame onto others. Many find it hard to control their temper.”

He continues: “In my counselling sessions, I teach them to calm down, to think about the situation that upsets them and reflect on the root cause. Invariably, once they have calmed down, they will discover that the root cause has something to do with themselves. They will, then, be better able to respond in a calm and collected manner. This exercise is important to disrupt the cycle of reacting with violence and ignorance, which leads to further chaos.”

Ms Yashodhara is convinced that when people use dharma principles as a moral compass to guide their decision-making, they will make the correct choices. So, she does a lot of teaching from the text recommended by Hindu Centre.

As a pastor, Reverend Ian focuses his counselees’ attention on God: “I share with Christian inmates about the love and power of God, which can help them to change for the better and avoid future offences.”

Ustaz Isa is especially passionate about helping teenage boys and young men. “Boys this age – they like to beat the system. I tell them that they cannot outsmart the law. Being young, they do irrational things without forethought. I try to get them to reflect whether their behaviour is in line with Muslim teachings, and to think about the consequences of their actions.” He shakes his head, smiling at memories of all the unruly boys he has taught over the years.

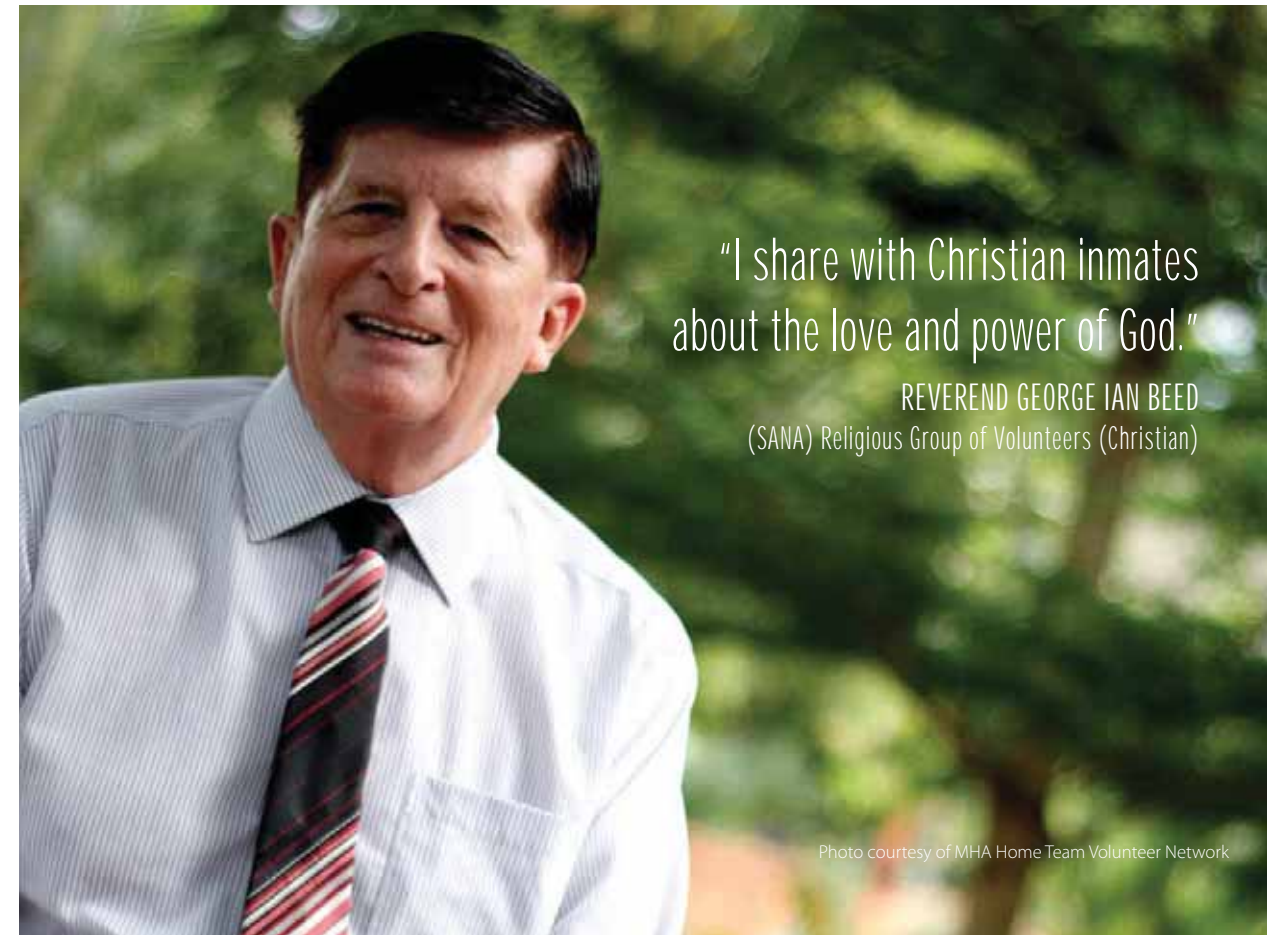
These religious counselling sessions are strictly voluntary. The volunteers only meet with inmates who request for such counselling. A class can range anywhere from 5 to 50 inmates. Different religious organisations will plan their lessons differently. Generally, part of the two-hour sessions will be devoted to teaching from their holy texts and a component can be on prayer.

After release, the counselees are encouraged to visit the respective religious institutions so that they can form new friendships and move away from the influence of previous unwholesome peers.

The sessions are usually very amicable, as the inmates are keen to turn over a new leaf. “However, the true test is when they are released,” Ustaz Isa notes. “Will they adhere to the teachings they have learned in prison? Will they follow through on the promises they have made to themselves while they were locked up?”

The other religious volunteers nod their heads in agreement. From experience, they have seen as many backsliding cases as they have successes. This can result in some heartaches. At some point in their voluntary service, they have had to answer the same question: “Why do I persevere?”

“When I see an inmate fall and go back to prison, I cannot help but ask myself whether I have



“I share with Christian inmates about the love and power of God.”

REVEREND GEORGE IAN BEED
(SANA) Religious Group of Volunteers (Christian)

Photo courtesy of MHA Home Team Volunteer Network

done enough," Ms Yashodhara admits, "I have to remind myself not to focus on results, because this is the surest way to get discouraged. I persevere with the attitude that, as long as I trigger a change in even just one inmate, that is enough for me."

They all talk about drawing boundaries. Reverend Ian explains: "The help we give is a two-way street – it cannot emanate only from the counsellors. The inmate must also do his part and put in the effort to take responsibility for his own life."

Prison volunteering goes beyond simply helping inmates and ex-offenders. Volunteers attest that they, too, take away something valuable from the exchange. First, it is the training provided by SPS. While religious volunteers receive their religious training from their faiths, they also come together for lessons specific to dealing with inmates. These include courses on gangsterism, criminology, drug and alcohol addiction, and counselling skills, among others. The volunteers appreciate such training, all provided by SPS.

Second, it is the transformation within the volunteers themselves. Ms Yashodhara recounts: "I don't know about changing inmates, but volunteering has certainly changed me! Because I tell the inmates to practise good values like truthfulness and gentleness, I feel I mustn't be hypocritical. As a result, my character also develops. My family and friends say I am different now."

Volunteering has also brought them priceless satisfaction. "There are so many memorable experiences," Reverend Ian recalls, "Invitations to weddings, the birth of a child, inmates who start their own businesses after release, or becoming pastors!"

There is also the domino effect when some inmates return to prison, not as offenders, but as counsellors to share their experiences. The volunteers' most memorable experiences are those of ex-offenders who have turned their lives around and live as law-abiding and productive citizens.

Some of the organisations that conduct faith-based programmes in prison are:

- Buddhist Fellowship
- Christian Counselling Services
- Muneeswaran Temple Society
- Muslim Counselling Services
- Persatuan Ulama dan Guru-Guru Agama Islam (Singapura)

- Prison Fellowship Singapore – Christian
- Roman Catholic Prison Ministry
- SANA Religious Group of Volunteers (Christian)
- SANA Religious Group of Volunteers (Hindu)
- SANA Religious Group of Volunteers (Muslim)
- Sikh Welfare Council
- Singapore Buddhist Federation
- Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League (SKML)
- The Hindu Centre

Prison School

Prison School plays an important role in the rehabilitation of inmates. It is founded on the belief that equipping inmates with educational qualifications facilitates their reintegration into employment upon release. In the course of pursuing their studies, it also promotes self-discipline, self-motivation and the spirit of learning.

Mr Ng Joo Hee, Director of Prisons (2007-2009), says: "From the systems point of view, simply locking up young offenders without putting extra effort into reforming them is just storing up trouble for the future. As such, every young person who comes into our custody should go back to school. The hope is that enforced discipline, prison regimentation and the lack of distraction will allow them to focus, perhaps for the first time in their lives, on study and receive an education in the process."

The increased emphasis on education has proven to be sound. Since 2004, as many as 20 graduates from Prison School have scored five As or more in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-Level examinations. Most years, more than half of Prison School students scored five passes in the GCE O-Level examinations.

In 2008, the Prison School made national news headlines when it produced Singapore's top O-Level private candidate, who scored distinctions in English, Mathematics, Science (Physics/Biology), Principles of Accounts and Combined Humanities. He was 28 years old and did not have a secondary

school education previously.

Besides O-Level subjects, Prison School also offers subjects leading to GCE N-Level examinations, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) courses and National Institute of Technical Education Certificate (NITEC) courses. There are also useful work-related courses like Microsoft Office skills and webpage design. The teaching staff in Prison School have Ministry of Education qualifications. Prison School even offers Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs). These are enrichment activities like guitar, dance, visual arts, harmonica, drama and drumming.

The Prison School was originally located in Kaki Bukit Centre. However, student intake was limited by the small space and the facilities were old. In 2011, the school was relocated to Tanah Merah Prison. It was a welcome move. The upgrades that had previously been a dream could finally become a reality.

The improvements included new science laboratories with upgraded equipment, an IT laboratory with new software and classrooms fitted with audiovisual equipment. One room was converted into an examinations room to simulate a more realistic environment for examinations to take place. The new library received much admiration. It had a bigger selection of books, and overlooking a garden, it was a tranquil environment for reading and studying.

Colourful wall facades and motivational quotes decorating the walls make it a homely place which fosters an eager learning spirit in the inmates.

FROM INCARE TO PRE-RELEASE PHASE

SCORE and Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA)

To ensure a smooth transition from incare to pre-release care, SPS invests extensively in cultivating the right training environment for inmates, providing them with a wide array of training programmes that help them hone specific job skills. All of these are based on the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Framework and is aimed at preparing and facilitating inmates' eventual reintegration into the community upon their release. Two key partners are actively involved in this critical transition –



“Every young person who comes into our custody should go back to school.”

NG JOO HEE
Director of Prisons (2007 to 2009)

Inmates attending a class at the Prison School

SCORE and the WDA.

SCORE is set up to provide employment for inmates, and train them in vocational and employability skills, enabling them to gain employment opportunities upon release. It maintains a rigorous, professional daily regime, for example, a dedicated timetable of daily work activities. This not only inculcates good work ethics in inmates, but also contributes to the overall security of the prison.

The core businesses in SCORE are linen services, food manufacturing and production, SCORE Bakery, multimedia services, subcontracting services and industrial space leasing, among others. The revenue generated by SCORE is ploughed back into rehabilitative activities for the ex-offenders.

Training is equal in importance with pre-release job placement. Many offenders have low education, limited work experience, or their work experience has become outdated during their incarceration period. Therefore, SCORE instituted a structured training curriculum in prison.

The curriculum focuses on equipping the participants with generic work skills, trade skills and supervisory skills relevant to work. It also includes progressive levels of certification to give inmates a sense of achievement and promote continuous learning.

Some of the courses include:

- Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) in Landscaping
- On-Job Training (OJT) in Laundry (Flat Iron)
- Basic Culinary Skills
- ITE Skills Certificate (ISC)
- ISC in Food Preparation
- ISC in Logistics Operations

SCORE partners WDA in providing training in prison through Project Phoenix to assist offenders with their training and employment needs prior to their release. It began with training subsidies for inmates to take Computerised Adaptive Tests (CAT) to assess their English literacy and numeracy skills, and Employability Skills (ES) under the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) framework. This expanded to include vocational skills training.

Today, WDA also funds SCORE to set up training facilities, for example, a training kitchen and a

training food and beverage facility within the prison compound. Funding support is also provided for job matching services, placement services and post-placement services.

Project Phoenix aims to achieve two key objectives. First, it plays an active part in the national rehabilitation and reintegration framework as it helps offenders to get back into society via gainful employment. Second, it helps to alleviate some of the manpower woes faced by employers.

Mr Wong Hong Kuan, WDA's former Chief Executive Officer, says: "WDA recognises the importance of helping offenders to be equipped with the necessary skills so that they can seek gainful employment and reintegrate into society upon their release. We are heartened that, to date,



"WDA recognises the importance of helping offenders. We are heartened that, to date, Project Phoenix has assisted more than 20,000 offenders."

WONG HONG KUAN
Former WDA Chief Executive Officer

Project Phoenix has assisted more than 20,000 offenders. WDA will continue to build on our efforts to reach out to more offenders so as to assist them in acquiring the necessary skills to find good jobs and reintegrate into society.”

Pre-Release Centre

A specialised physical environment is one of the most powerful ways of getting a message across. To help pre-releasees grasp that they need to prepare for imminent release, a dedicated Pre-Release Centre (PRC) was set up in Changi Prison Complex in 2012.

Release is not simply a matter of leaving the confines of prison for the free world. Overnight, the releasee will have to find a place to stay, make peace with family members, earn his livelihood and put his plans for his future into action. All of this can be overwhelming, hence the need for preparation like the PRC.

When an inmate reaches the tail end of his imprisonment, he will be moved to the PRC to undergo 10 months of pre-release programmes. While confinement and strict discipline continue to be enforced, the PRC features colourful walls with pastoral scenes and motivational quotes. The relaxed environment helps the inmates to ‘normalise’. Added facilities like sinks, open cabinets and shelves differentiate the PRC cells from the typical prison environment.

In the first phase, the pre-releasees are exposed to therapeutic intervention, confidence-building sessions, and experiential learning such as team-building. In the second phase, SCORE employability skills training are stepped up. This is done in tandem with criminogenic counselling. In the third and final phase, pre-releasees are empowered to plan their graduation ceremony and participate in recreational competitions such as basketball and badminton. These activities are meant to cultivate them to become more autonomous, responsible and socialised.

One of the most powerful moments of the pre-release programme is the open visit with family members. Unlike seeing their family members through clear glass windows or television screens, the pre-releasees get to mingle and interact with their family members in a room. Up to four open visits may be granted throughout the entire programme.

This would be the first time that the inmates get to physically hold and touch their spouses and



children since their incarceration. It is a deeply emotional moment and some of them break down in tears. This is where inmates are given the opportunity to pledge a commitment to change *for their families*, which is more powerful than if they were to pledge to change for themselves.

The purpose of the 10-month pre-release programme is to empower high-risk inmates to break the chain of reoffending. Since the implementation of the programme, many inmates have successfully graduated. They become more confident, and are better equipped to reintegrate into society. Three hundred inmates are undergoing the programme at the moment.

ADMINISTERING AFTERCARE

Halfway Houses

Many repeat offenders are drug offenders who find it difficult to escape the tangled web of addiction. It was recognised that this group of prisoners require extra, specialised care. In the 1990s, Singapore adopted a three-pronged approach to counter rising drug abuse. The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) took charge of enforcement and preventive education; SPS took charge of treatment and rehabilitation; SCORE managed the aftercare and continued rehabilitation of drug abusers.

As research showed that there was a need for drug abusers to enter 'halfway care', the Ministry of Home Affairs invited major religious denominations to create halfway houses with programmes specially geared for drug addicts. Now, amenable offenders housed in drug rehabilitation centres and prisons, who do not have the benefit of strong family support, spend the last stage of their detention at these halfway houses. The halfway house programmes have been constantly monitored and refined; as a result, the Halfway House Service Model was implemented in 2010.

This new service model provides a framework to enable halfway houses to operate a consistent and dedicated programme based on stipulated service requirements. Currently, there are eight halfway houses participating in the Prisons Halfway House Scheme and administering the Service Model.

Ms Noormah binte Ismail is a social worker cum counsellor at Jamiyah Halfway House, a facility for male drug addicts. She describes the routine at her centre as one filled with addiction counselling and religious activity to strengthen the residents' moral development. It includes courses on anger management and family life, among others. A big focus of the programme includes community service.

"We enrol our clients to do community service in mosques and community events. They help with spring cleaning, ushering and traffic control," describes Noormah. "They have to be appropriately and smartly dressed for these occasions. The reason for getting them involved is to expose them to dealing with the public. They have become accustomed to being treated as addicts and criminals. But, in public, people treat them with respect as fellow citizens. These interactions help reinforce their self-worth."

There are currently eight halfway houses operated by different religious groups:

- **Muslim Halfway Houses**
Jamiyah Halfway House (Darul Islah)
Pertapis Halfway House
- **Hindu Halfway House**
HEB-Ashram Halfway House
- **Buddhist Halfway House**
Green Haven
- **Christian Halfway Houses**
Breakthrough Missions
Teen Challenge
The Helping Hand
The Turning Point

Case Management Framework Programme

For inmates, serving their sentence can feel like being caught in limbo. However, time starts moving again six months before their release date. Suddenly, there are many matters to settle – *Where will I stay when I get out? Will my spouse forgive me and take me back? Can I get a job? I have no income, so how will I meet my living expenses?* And so on.

It is vital at the pre-release phase for caseworkers to step in to 'handhold' the pre-releasees for a few months. Different agencies come together to meet the different needs of pre-releasees at this phase. They help new releasees to reintegrate into society by helping them to find jobs, apply for financial aid if necessary, and connect with the right agencies to get other kinds of help. Counselling is involved. As families play a vital role in successful reintegration, these associations also work

closely with the ex-offenders' families, providing marriage and parenting courses, counselling and referral services as needed.

Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) and Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) administer the Case Management Framework (CMF) Programme. This programme is an important initiative of CARE Network. It looks at pre-releasees as individuals with unique needs. For example, one pre-releasee may already have secured a job at one of the SCORE Job Fairs, but lack a place to stay after release. Another may have poor job prospects and require further vocational training. These needs will be recorded in their individual CMF casefile. Having a case manager to guide them further helps to ensure their chances of success.

Together with the case managers, the clients identify their aftercare needs and reintegration challenges. An Individualised Service Plan (ISP) is then drawn up to chart out the resources required.

Ms Quek Bee Geok is Assistant Head of Programmes with SACA and works on the CMF Programme. "CMF is offered to inmates during pre-release on a voluntary basis. We follow up with them for six months after release. If they need further care, the period can be extended."

SACA addresses pre-releasees as 'clients' instead of 'inmates'. Everything, from the way they are addressed, to the more conducive environment of the PRC, reminds them that they will soon become autonomous members of the public. As such, they are sought for their opinions rather than dictated to. At the same time, greater initiative and civic behaviour is expected of them.

Bee Geok used to be a prison officer in SPS. With her enforcement background, she notes: "I tended to approach my clients with a disciplinary viewpoint. I would tell them bluntly what they should do and not do. But aftercare requires a softer touch."

"It was a struggle at first," she quips. "I learned to listen to their point of view, and talk with them patiently to help them shift in their thinking. They have to understand for themselves why something is right or wrong and then take action."

Some clients drop out in the middle of the programme after release. Bee Geok would leave messages or try to contact their families, but no disciplinary action is taken as these are free men and women. However, there are also clients who humbly take her advice and run with it. One client



(From left) Noormah binte Ismail, Quek Bee Geok and Steve Boey

who comes readily to mind is Lee Meng (not his real name) who discussed his plans for improvement with Bee Geok. Even after a terrible work accident set him back, he persevered to put those plans into action instead of giving up.

“This is one job that sure makes you grow as a person,” says Bee Geok, “But I must be doing something right, because I have clients who keep in touch with me long after their cases were closed.”

Community-Based Help

The releasee is back in the arms of the community. Ideally, he would be matched with a job and start work soon to support himself. However, there is the pressing need for accommodation. Hopefully, his family is willing to accept him back into the home. Even if his family accepts him, a period of adjustment is necessary for all the family members involved.

Family Service Centres are a vital partner during the aftercare phase. They can provide much needed support for the families of ex-offenders. The impact of incarceration on families and children of inmates, the unintended victims of crime, is negative and often significant. The impact is felt financially if the offender is an income earner. The impact is also psychological as these offenders' elderly parents, spouses and children bear the social stigma of being related to a 'criminal'.

Family Service Centres can also provide referral services for family members who need to find jobs to supplement the family income, counselling for anger or grief management, and case work management. They also cater to children of ex-offenders, who need special attention as they cope with the absence of their incarcerated parents and perhaps face ostracism in school. Tuition, counselling and ad hoc activities can be arranged for these children.

Some Family Service Centres, like Lakeside Family Centre, have set up tele-visit facilities. Tele-visiting uses tele-conferencing technology to provide a convenient means for families to visit an inmate, without the need to travel to the prison institutions. There are 10 tele-visit centres distributed throughout Singapore.

Lakeside Family Centre has a one-stop walk-in facility where ex-offenders and their families can seek aid, called TJ Haven. Help comes in the form of sourcing for financial aid, referrals to social agencies.

Mr Steve Boey was one of the pioneers of TJ Haven. He had been a professional social worker for 13 years, went abroad for 3 years on missionary work, but decided to return to Singapore and help set up TJ Haven. He explains, “I realised there are people who need help right here in Singapore.”

Steve will always remember one little girl. “When I first met her, she was only 5 years old. She had picked up her ex-offender father's bad habit of threatening her mum, ‘I will hit you if you don't give me the thing I want.’ But, just the other day, I saw her again. She is already 12 years old and she had come with her mother to our Mother's Day event to celebrate the occasion with her. It was so touching.”

Steve adds: “Even if we give up on some incorrigible offenders, we must never give up on the families and especially the children. They did not ask to be born into their families. As caseworkers, we can never replace the love of the incarcerated parent, but we can provide other things. We can teach them life skills, give financial aid or tuition, and help them with anger management as they cope with the temporary loss of their parent. Or, we can simply be with them.”

Befriending Programmes

Volunteer Ms May Hui was first introduced to prison volunteering when she promoted the game of chess to schools, including Kaki Bukit Prison School. It was the first time she met inmates. “They are an interesting group of



people. I played Scrabble with them and lost to them. From this, I saw that they have potential, that they are as good as everybody else."

May decided to volunteer in prison. She joined Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) in 2002. Busy with her own business as a trainer and parenting her two children, she admits: "Yes, my schedule is quite full. But I still want to volunteer."

Her duty includes befriending individual pre-releasees. May is paired up with an inmate two months before his release. If they need information to prepare them for release, like employment details or training courses, she would help them get it. After release, she monitors them for a few months until they are 'steady' before submitting her report to SACA and being paired with the next pre-releasee.

Volunteering has enriched May's life viscerally. She admits: "When I was a new volunteer, I was impatient for them to change. As a result, I would be disappointed when I saw some of my counselees relapse and go back into prison. Slowly, I learned that habits don't change overnight." How May perseveres in her volunteering work is her conviction in the 'final wake-up call.' "For repeat offenders, I realised there is always a final wake-up call. It could be the death of a parent or spouse, or embracing a religion. I have to be patient and wait for this wake-up call."

May recalls several counselees who have become friends. Like Tai Heng (not his real name). "He had been going in and out of prison for 20 years since 1991. We never gave up on him. After his last stint in prison, he went into a halfway house, then got a job selling *chee cheong fun* (rice noodle roll). I used to visit his stall to monitor him. It's been five years and eight months, and I still visit his stall and eat his *chee cheong fun*. We are friends."

Yellow Ribbon Community Project (YRCP)

There is a saying: When an inmate serves his sentence, his family serves alongside him. To a great extent, an offender's incarceration affects his family – the loss of a breadwinner, a caregiver and a source of emotional support. As a result, the family, especially the children, often become the unintended victims of crime.

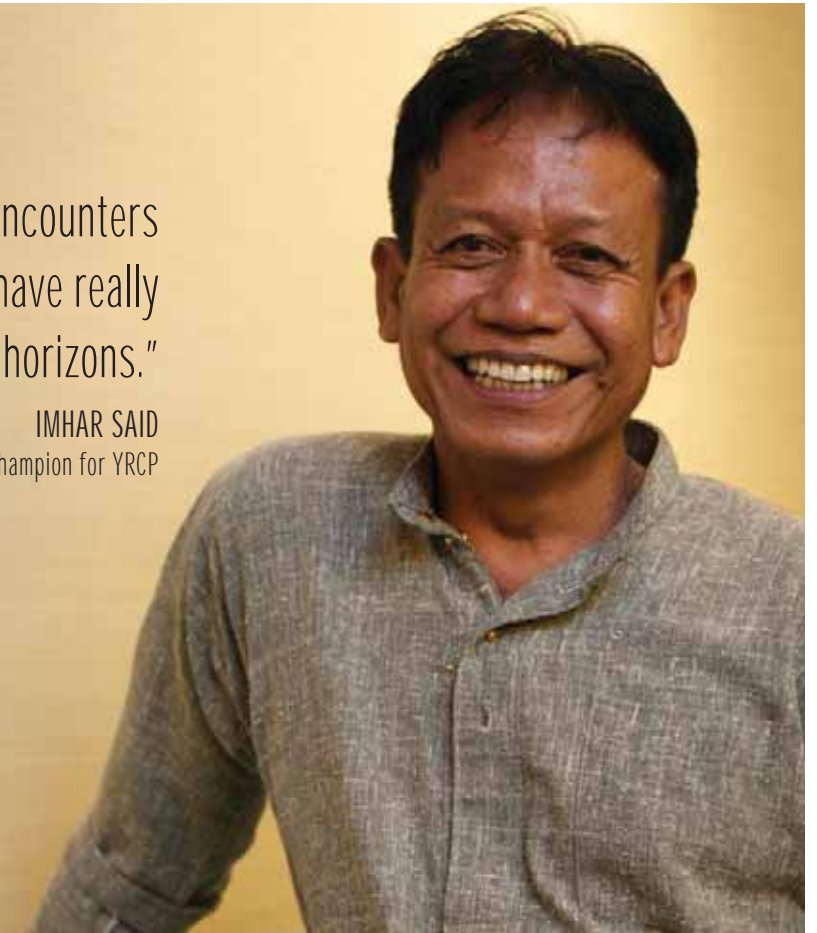
Initiated in 2010, Yellow Ribbon Community Project (YRCP) aims to provide support and assistance

for families of offenders. Upon admission to prison, offenders are introduced to YRCP. Once an inmate gives consent for his or her grassroots to receive the family's contact details, YRCP volunteers from these divisions will contact the family and conduct home visits to connect them with relevant community resources.

The needs of each family vary; some may require tangible assistance such as financial aid or food vouchers, while some may seek counselling on how to cope with a loved one who might be newly released from prison. YRCP volunteers are trained to assess their needs, and work together with agencies like Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Family Service Centres (FSCs) to

"My experiences and encounters
from YRCP have really
broadened my horizons."

IMHAR SAID
Yellow Ribbon Champion for YRCP



help these families.

YRCP started out with 2 pilot grassroots divisions. As of August 2013, the number has risen to 58 participating divisions, with all 15 Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) in Singapore represented. With growing support from the local community, families are taken care of during the offender's term. They are also better prepared to welcome their loved ones back after their release from prison. For offenders, a stable family environment enhances their potential of successful reintegration into society.

One volunteer who has made a difference through YRCP is Mr Imhar Said, Residents' Committee Chairman for Siglap East and Secretary for Malay Activities Executive Committee (under Community Club Management Committee). His interest to find out more about the Yellow Ribbon Project guided him to accept the offer of appointment as Yellow Ribbon Champion for East Coast GRC in May 2012.

As a Yellow Ribbon Champion, Imhar oversees and coordinates the Project for the divisions in East Coast GRC. This includes following up on case referrals from Prisons. "I would contact the family, let them know that we are ready to help if needed and request to pay them a visit to find out their needs. Thereafter, I mobilise the volunteers to visit them," he says.

Each month, Imhar collates forms and visitation reports from his YRCP team before replying to Prisons. In addition, he is responsible for YRCP volunteer management within the GRC. Nevertheless, he experiences his share of exciting moments when conducting home visits with his team. "There was once I had to visit the father of an inmate around Hari Raya season. Before I had the chance to explain the purpose of my visit, he yelled at me: 'Release my son! If not, you can go away!'" Imhar chuckles as he recalls the incident. A seasoned volunteer who has contributed more than 25 years to community work, Imhar remained composed in this situation. "I replied nicely and tried to calm him down. His daughter, the inmate's sister, apologised to me for her father's behaviour. But I wasn't upset at his outburst. I placed myself in his shoes, and understood how he must have felt then."

A year later, he visited the same household. This time, the inmate's father welcomed Imhar and his team into the house. Imhar explained the father's change of heart: "He saw that we were genuine about wanting to help. We conveyed the family's message to the prison officers and now

the inmate is studying hard and making good use of his time there. The family did not require any tangible assistance, but I believe we met their need by helping their son."

Despite the extra responsibilities of being a Yellow Ribbon Champion over and above his grassroots duties, Imhar has no regrets about volunteering in YRCP. "My experiences and encounters from YRCP have really broadened my horizons. I am now more aware about the needs of offenders and their families, and how best to help them."

Employers with Heart

Work is a very vital part of life – it gives us our livelihood, a structured and productive lifestyle, and, often, our self-esteem as well. It is even more so for new releasees. Employment is an important component in the rehabilitative process. With stable jobs, releasees gain financial stability and a restored sense of self-worth and respect. Employers who commit to offer jobs and training are important partners in rehabilitation work. This is why SCORE has a dedicated Employment Assistance Unit (EAU) which provides employment assistance to new releasees and ex-offenders.

SCORE is always looking out for employers to partner them in offering employment to ex-offenders. Currently, there are about 3,500 employers registered with EAU. Companies that are interested in employing ex-offenders log into SCORE's Online Job Portal. The portal allows companies to post job vacancies and search for candidates directly.

Even while incarcerated, inmates are already enrolled in a work programme. SCORE on-the-job training imparts vocational and employability skills and inculcates positive work ethics and self-discipline. This helps them to rejoin the workforce when they are released.

SCORE has also learned from experience that securing a job for an inmate before he is released is the key to successful reintegration. Therefore, SCORE arranges for employers to interview suitable candidates during the pre-release phase. Thereafter, case managers (CMs) follow up with the new releasee for six months to ensure that he is adjusting well to his new workplace. CMs work closely with employers and releasees to resolve their work, financial and other issues.

One of SCORE's valued employers is Resorts World Sentosa. RWS started offering employment to ex-offenders in 2010 when it opened. This forms part of its recruitment philosophy, "where

all job candidates are reviewed based on their suitability for the job, regardless of their personal circumstances in the past.”

Director of Human Resources & Talent Development, Ms Jessica Shen, says: “As Resorts World Sentosa has a sizeable staff strength, we believe this workplace gives ex-offenders a good opportunity to leave their past behind and blend in smoothly with the RWS Team. Many of them have done themselves and their families proud since we welcomed our first ex-offenders in 2010. We continue to employ new releases annually as our experience working with them has been positive.”

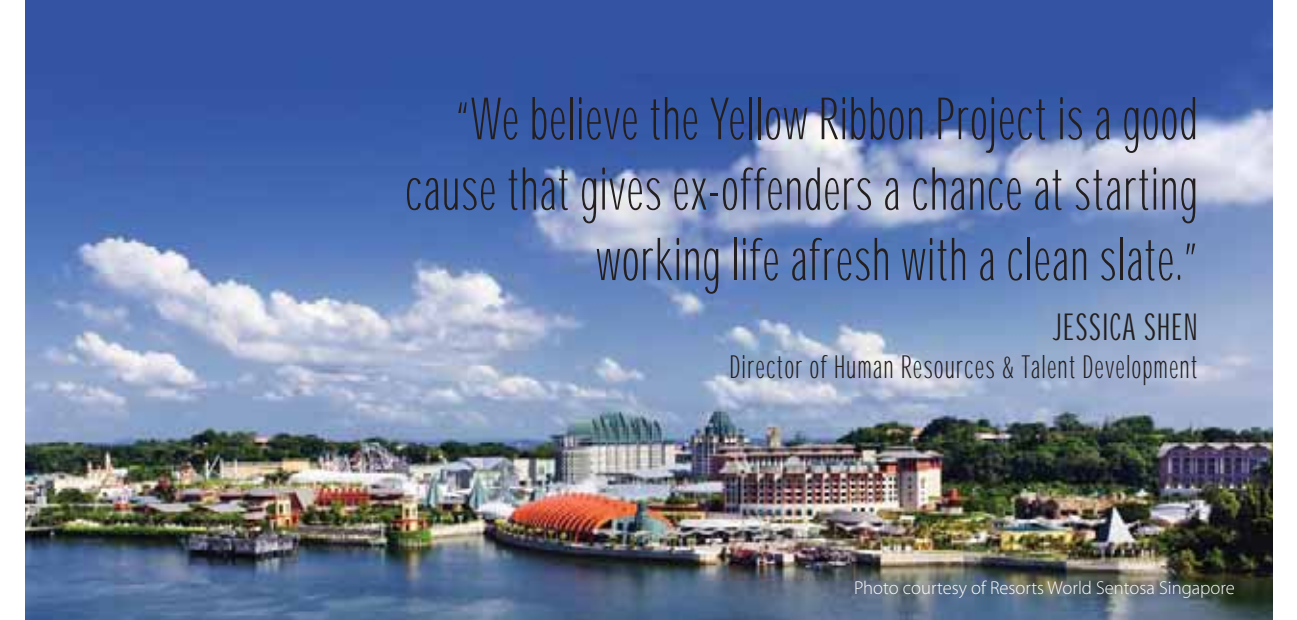
RWS has employed more than 30 ex-offenders, mostly for its food and beverage outlets and for its carpark team. Some have earned promotions through their good performance and attitude. Not all have remained at RWS, but Jessica is all right with this. “We are heartened that we have made a positive difference to the lives of our former team members.”

She adds: “We believe the Yellow Ribbon Project is a good cause that gives ex-offenders a chance at starting working life afresh with a clean slate. Because of our belief, we focus on paying for the job performed and contributions made by the team member holding that role. There is no reason to differentiate salaries or design a different career track for employees because of their ex-offending background.”

RWS has also shown wisdom and sensitivity in assimilating this group of employees. First, the new hires are paired with a supervisor who acts as both a mentor and buddy. Pains are taken to protect their identity and background so as to give them confidence that their past will truly remain in the past.

One reformed ex-offender who has benefited from SCORE’s job matching service is Mr Abdul Rahim Daud. He works at Logwin Air + Ocean Singapore, an international logistics company, as a warehouse assistant. “As the oldest and the only son in my family, I have a lot on my shoulders.”

His boss, Managing Director Mr Jimmy Ler, has hired three former offenders since 2008. Rahim is the only one who has stayed with the company. The others have found new opportunities and moved on, something Jimmy does not mind a bit. Jimmy grew up in an area rife with gangsters and saw how his friends were sent to prison. He used to wonder: “Why can’t people give them a chance? If nobody gives them a second chance, they will likely revert to their bad ways.”



“We believe the Yellow Ribbon Project is a good cause that gives ex-offenders a chance at starting working life afresh with a clean slate.”

JESSICA SHEN
Director of Human Resources & Talent Development

Photo courtesy of Resorts World Sentosa Singapore

Now that he is Managing Director of a company, he has decided to be the one to give ex-offenders a chance. Jimmy believes that, given the right opportunities and hard work, anyone can excel in life. Rahim is grateful for his job and the working environment. “Everybody here is so friendly. They don’t bring up the past, and that’s important to me because I want to forget it.”

THE YELLOW RIBBON FUND

In the same year that Yellow Ribbon Project was formed, Yellow Ribbon Fund (YRF) was also set up. It was tasked to be the fundraising vehicle to deliver rehabilitative and aftercare services to ex-offenders. About \$750,000 is disbursed to 13 agencies annually.

Statistics show that 53 percent of inmates’ families have financial difficulties. Thus, above and beyond the financial disbursement to aftercare agencies, YRF also set up the much appreciated Yellow Ribbon Emergency Fund and Skills Training Assistance to Re-start (STAR) Bursary for ex-offenders’ families.

Although social assistance is readily available in the community, the assistance is not timely due

to the administrative processes. For example, some ex-offenders are homeless upon release, and families of inmates may need some emergency cash to tide them over a rough spot. The Yellow Ribbon Emergency Fund, set up in 2006, can be disbursed in 48 hours.

Chairman of YRF Mr Phillip Tan, says: "This emergency fund is about giving dignity to people. For example, I once met up with the wife of an offender who had lost her arm in an accident and could not work. Their home was very neat, and the woman and her daughters were neatly dressed up to greet me. I could see that they wanted to lead as normal a life as possible. The woman just needed a sum of cash to study for a security guard course so that she could get a job and support the family. YRF disbursed a modest sum to the family, but the results far exceeded the amount. The family was encouraged; the woman managed to complete her course and they got back on track."

To date, YREF has disbursed \$267,089, providing financial help to 2,057 ex-offenders and 886 families.

Education is important to help reforming ex-offenders get a fresh start on life. The YRF STAR (Skills Training Assistance to Re-start) Bursary was set up to provide financial assistance to ex-offenders for skills training so that they can be gainfully employed and become self-sufficient. With the bursary, more ex-offenders can be motivated and helped to get certificates from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) and Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR), among others. Some talented inmates have also qualified for arts courses in LASALLE College of the Arts.

The bursary has proven successful in motivating ex-offenders to be positive about their futures through upgrading their employability and self-sufficiency. It helps them from reoffending and encourages them to be law-abiding citizens. It helps them become positive role models for future ex-offenders to draw inspiration from.

The YRF celebrated its 10th Anniversary on 20 July 2013.



YRF-ISCOS FAIRY GODPARENT PROGRAMME

The name Industrial & Services Co-operative Society Ltd (ISCOS) may be well-known in professional rehabilitation circles, but mention 'Fairy Godparent' and the children's faces break out in wide smiles. ISCOS Fairy Godparent Programme is definitely one of the organisation's more popular programmes.

Children are the secondary victims of crime; they struggle with the stigma and financial scarcity of having one or both parents serving time in prison. The ISCOS Fairy Godparent Programme (FGP) emphasises the importance of education for these children to get a head start on a better life in the future.

ISCOS does this by awarding bursaries, and providing tuition and mentoring support from committed volunteers to ex-offenders' children. Enrichment workshops, outings and activities are also organised during the school holidays. The Point Optical has donated up to \$12,000 worth of spectacles for FGP children.

ISCOS was established in 1989 to help ex-offenders and their families reintegrate successfully into

society. It has over 13,000 members. Besides the FGP, the co-operative also provides employability training and job placement services for ex-offenders. One psychologically powerful initiative is the Gift of Hope. This is an initial relief package worth \$50 given to new members who have just been released from prison. The Gift of Hope package contains basic necessities like a NETS FlashPay Card and food and grocery vouchers to help new releasees tide over the first few days upon release.

The co-operative also conducts support groups for new releasees. Issues like adjusting to work, family and time management are addressed. Having a support group where they can discuss their problems with others in similar situations helps the members feel that they are receiving emotional and practical support from one another and from trained ISCOS staff.



What we have just read are the unsung heroes and heroines, and organisations with heart, who give of themselves to serve tirelessly and relentlessly inmates within the prison walls, and ex-offenders striving to reintegrate into the society, all in the firm hope that they will become good one day. They believe that every life – no matter how treacherous the background – is precious and deserves chance after chance. No disappointments have been too daunting, no tasks too arduous, and no stigma too vile to repel them from helping the inmates and ex-offenders.

They are the Captains of Lives; they are living the Yellow Ribbon spirit.
And they deserve our utmost salute.

PART THREE

TRANSFORMING LIVES

One man did not think he could escape with his life. Another almost lost his wife and son. A woman lived in bondage to drugs. All these individuals, and many like them, had broken pasts and no hope of a decent future. But they have learned that a prison sentence is not a full stop. They can choose to start anew. The following stories show the powerful and dauntless spirit of ex-offenders who make such a choice, made possible by the fierce dedication of people who believe in them.


8 CHANGED FOR GOOD

Adam bin Ahmad had been in and out of prison for a period of 20 years. He had seen the different phases of incarceration within prison and participated in some of them. Finally, the sight of his growing children gave him the determination to stop his drug habit once and for all.

Mr Adam bin Ahmad had been in and out of prison four times over a 20-year period. The first stint was for drug possession. He stayed for a brief 6 months as a first-time offender and cleaned up. Thereafter, he stayed on the right side of the law for 10 long years.

Inexplicably, he picked up the drug habit again 10 years later. This time, he was incarcerated for a year. Despite going through cold turkey behind bars, he did not truly kick the habit and was back into drugs upon release. He stayed out of reach of the police for more than 5 years but went back behind bars for a third time. In 2001, he was caught again a fourth time.

Having experienced prison life over a span of two decades,



"When you have taken drugs for a long period of time, it rewires the mind. It becomes a part of the self."

ADAM BIN AHMAD

Adam has seen, first-hand, the evolution of rehabilitation efforts for inmates. "When I went in the first time in 1977, prison life was just work during the day and lock-up at night," Adam shrugged. "In 1988, I was matched with a job upon release. It helped, but because I returned to drugs, I couldn't maintain the job."

After his fourth incarceration, he volunteered for a drug addiction intervention programme. The programme is offered strictly on a voluntary basis in Changi Prison and ex-offenders have to go through a stringent interview process to demonstrate their sincerity to follow through with the programme.

"I started on the programme in 2001 and I've been drug-free ever since," Adam confides quietly. He leans forward as he emphasises, "But it is not just because of the programme."

There are no miracle cures, Adam explains. "When I first started taking drugs as a teenager, I could take it or leave it as I chose. However, when you have taken it for a long period of time, it rewires the mind. It becomes a part of the self, and the memories and associations cannot be erased."

Instead, he attributes his past 12 drug-free years to mental determination and family support. He has two children, now aged 16 and 14 years old. "When I went back to prison the last time in 2001, my children were growing up. They were beginning to understand the world. I did not want them to suffer the label of being an ex-con's children. My children made me determined to quit drugs."

The seductive memories of drug highs still linger in Adam's mind, but they no longer have the same allure as before. "Now, I will just ignore the thoughts and concentrate on what I am doing."

A NEW LIFE

Once Adam made up his mind, he went from strength to strength as if to make up for lost time. He was hired by SCORE Industries Division, Linen Services; his job was to collect soiled linen and arrange for the cleaning and distribution of clean linen to the hospital he was attached to.

In 2003, he won a SCORE Star Service Award. In 2006, he won a Star Service Award from the Ministry of Home Affairs. In 2008, he won a Certificate of Achievement (Celebrating Second Chances).



"My children made me determined to quit drugs."

ADAM BIN AHMAD

He was also awarded a scholarship to study for a Diploma in Logistics Management by Singapore Institute of Materials Management, which he successfully completed. By 2009, he had risen to the position of Site Supervisor in Linen Services at NUH where he was tasked to supervise and lead a team of inmates placed under work programme at the hospital.

Director of Environmental Services at National University Hospital Ms Cynthia Foo has this to say about Adam: "He goes about his responsibility with pride and dedication. He works together with his team to ensure delivery of the linen to our end users promptly."

In a nomination for yet another award, SCORE described Adam: "He is looked upon as a role model and mentor by his team. His team of linen attendants would seek advice and guidance from him during their work programme." So far, he has supervised more than 20 inmate workers.

He listens calmly as his achievements are read out but becomes lively when his team is mentioned. "I know these men. I know how they think. I often tell them 'Even if you hide in a black plastic bag, I know what you are going to do. When the wind blows, I know which way your hair will turn.'"

He shares life lessons with them, like "Think about what you are going to do next," and "Your employer doesn't owe you a living." If they relapse and break the rules, Adam tells them baldly: "You are a fool."

Although he is not a prison volunteer, in his workplace, Adam has the vision and the fire of a prison counsellor. He is indelibly changed for good.

ANTI-DRUG STRATEGY IN SINGAPORE

70 percent of the inmate population have committed drug-related offences. This demonstrates that drug offenders require specialised aftercare in order to desist from reoffending. The drug problem is not restricted to the minority who have addiction problems; it also impacts their families and employers, and poses a potential negative influence on society.

The fight against drug activities in Singapore is threefold. The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) and Singapore Police Force are in charge of enforcement. Once a drug offender is charged and detained, Singapore Prison Service and Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) step in with

rehabilitation programmes. Prevention is the third strategy. CNB and SANA conduct education and awareness programmes for schools and the community about the changing forms of drug danger. The media has also been instrumental in keeping the anti-drug message continually in the public consciousness with informative news and testimonials of recovered addicts.

Although Singapore's stringent actions against drug abuse has garnered good results, public education remains a priority to guard against a softening of attitudes towards drugs. We need to maintain a zero tolerance attitude towards drug usage. The ultimate goal is a drug-free Singapore.

9 STRETCHING OUT

Ranjit Singh tried to quit drugs by himself but failed repeatedly. Heroin robbed him of his job and almost destroyed his marriage. Finally, Ranjit learned about relapse prevention at The Helping Hand. As he learned, Ranjit grew in desire to help others quit drugs too.

Mr Ranjit Singh, 53, had a taste of prison once. He was incarcerated for 10 months in Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) after being caught using drugs. After release, he was smart enough to never get caught with drugs again. But he was living in a different kind of hell. In many ways, it was worse.

Ranjit had started using soft drugs at 18 years old. From soft drugs, it was a short step to heroin. He was arrested in 1986, eight years after he started on drugs. "I remember what a culture shock DRC was. I was surrounded by addicts and they were constantly swapping stories."

"We were put in prison and told never to do drugs again because this (lock-up) is what will happen to us. But, on the other



"I did not know that there are so many things to do before a former addict can safely say he is in recovery."

RANJIT SINGH

hand, the prisoners told us a very different story. They said 'Once you are an addict, you will always be an addict and you will be back in DRC very soon.'

HOOKED ON ADDICTION

Armed with youthful naiveté, Ranjit told himself that he was different from them; he was smarter, he would break free of addiction by himself and gain a new and successful life. What he did not know was that every addict before him had told himself exactly the same myth and many of them had never managed to break free from drug addiction.

"In fact, I did not know a thing about addiction. I did not know that there are so many things to do, so many steps, before a former addict can safely say he is in recovery," Ranjit exclaims.

After release, he put his plan into action. His strategy was to get married. He had a girlfriend before he was remanded and he married her speedily. They had a child. He thought a stable family would help him to stay away from drugs.


"It was smooth for a while. I drank alcohol to take the place of drugs. But I did not know that alcohol is a trigger for drug use. Then I met up with an old friend who offered me heroin. From that one smoke, I went on to take heroin once a week, twice a week, and then every day."

His despatch job salary could not pay for his expensive addiction. He could not work without heroin, but when he took heroin, he was too stoned to work. It was no surprise that he soon lost his job and hopped from job to job.

"There was constant conflict at home. I blamed my wife for everything that went wrong. I used her money to feed my habit. I even took things from our home to sell in order to buy drugs. I peddled drugs too." Ranjit shakes his head at the recollection of those four horrific years.

"I really tried to seek help. I went to many places to find assistance. One day, I was taking heroin in a toilet and I saw a newspaper ad with the words: 'If you are a counsellor for addiction or you have addiction, attend this talk.' I kept the ad and attended the talk."

At the talk, a man befriended him and subsequently followed up with him. This friend, Mr Chia



"I realised I was naive concerning drug addiction. Indeed, this could be one reason I was in bondage for such a long time."

RANJIT SINGH

Shih Sheung, arranged for Ranjit to stay at The Helping Hand and continued visiting him even after he had been handed over to the care of the halfway house.

It was only at The Helping Hand that Ranjit learned the truth about addiction. Addiction is rooted in four flawed core beliefs. First core belief of addicts: "I am a bad person." They might have adopted this self-image because of labelling by family members. The second flawed belief is: "Because I am bad, if I show people who I really am, they will not love me." This sabotages the addict's recovery efforts because he cannot reveal his struggle to loved ones. The third flawed belief is: "Nobody can help me, only I can help myself." This is linked to Belief Two. And the final belief that keeps the addict in the bondage of drugs: "Only one thing can help me – heroin is my only refuge."

"I realised I was naive concerning drug addiction. Indeed, this could be one reason I was in bondage for such a long time. But I had to determine if I wanted to change for good, and I would need help if I decided so," recalls Ranjit. At The Helping Hand, Ranjit felt he experienced unconditional acceptance and professional help. "The more I learned, the more I wanted to be able to spread the message to other drug addicts – 'you can be free!'"

Besides undergoing counselling and receiving emotional support in the initial phase, Ranjit went through life skills training and immersed himself in Bible study. He noted, "There are actually many things that a recovering addict needs to do to prevent relapses. I'm just grateful that, when I had almost given up on myself, I was given the precious opportunity to restart life at The Helping Hand."

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

From the desire to learn all about addiction to help himself, a new passion started to grow in Ranjit – he wanted to help others wean off addiction. He wanted to use the same tools to empower others. Thus, he joined The Helping Hand as a staff helper in 1994.

Ranjit reconnected with his wife. As she saw his improvement, her hope in the marriage revived. Subsequently, they had two more children together. She caught his passion for the halfway house

mission and now works as the business manager of The Helping Hand.

Mr Chia Shih Sheung also joined The Helping Hand as its Chief Executive Officer. He says of his friend: "Ranjit enrolled in The Helping Hand's rehabilitation program at the darkest period of his addiction. Step by step, The Helping Hand guided him out of his addiction and into being a hardworking man and good husband and father to his children. Now, Ranjit is responsible for the smooth running and discipline of the halfway house, no easy task as 70 ex-offenders live in close proximity to each other. Because of his personal experience of escaping from the clutches of drug abuse, prison incarceration and community stigma, he is in a unique and powerful position to help others in the same predicament."

Ranjit has at least two good reasons to be thankful to the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP). He often sees tangible examples of YRP opening the second prison door. "Do you know halfway houses have been established long before YRP? But there was so little news coverage and understanding about halfway houses. However, after YRP's efforts to showcase the work of halfway houses, nowadays people smile and affirm me when I identify myself as a halfway house staff!"

The second reason is more personal. Ranjit had been taking short courses, workshops and conferences in order to be more effective in helping recovering addicts. Two years ago, he learned about the Yellow Ribbon Fund STAR (Skills Training Assistance to Re-start) Bursary and applied for it. The bursary enabled him to study for a Diploma in Social Service with the Social Service Training Institute (SSTI). He recently completed his Diploma and his success has emboldened him to think about trying for a Higher Diploma in Social Service.

YELLOW RIBBON FUND STAR (SKILLS TRAINING ASSISTANCE TO RE-START) BURSARY

Ranjit benefited from the Yellow Ribbon Fund STAR (Skills Training Assistance to Re-start) Bursary. This bursary aims to provide bursaries to financially needy ex-offenders for vocational and skills training to help them achieve employment and

self-sufficiency. People who are eligible are inmates who are due for release soon and ex-offenders who have been released not more than two years before the time of application.

10 TURNING POINT

Lim Kuan Yok had been to jail three times because she could not break free of her addiction to drugs. A spell in the halfway house The Turning Point helped her to face her problems squarely.

Ms Lim Kuan Yok, 56, is busy clearing up her tofu stall which she owns with her husband, Mr Lim Ai Huat. It is Monday, the only day that she closes shop two hours earlier than usual. The stall is open seven days a week, and has been so ever since Kuan Yok set up the business in 1997. The tofu business is very important to Kuan Yok. It symbolises Kuan Yok's and Ai Huat's new life – a new beginning of redemption, dignity and freedom from drugs.

But at the mention of Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP), she willingly sets aside her work to talk. "Anything, if it helps drug addicts to break free," she says in Mandarin.

Besides her business, the other thing that Kuan Yok is



"After I started using drugs, life became all about where I could get money to buy my next fix."

LIM KUAN YOK

passionate about is helping drug addicts. This is because she knows, first-hand, what they are going through. Kuan Yok had been a drug user for more than a decade.

At 17, Kuan Yok started on heroin under the influence of friends. "It takes just one child in a group to start. All the rest will follow," Kuan Yok explains the danger of drugs and peer influence.

"After I started using drugs, life became all about where I could get money to buy my next fix. I would do all sorts of bad things – cheat, steal – in order to get money. I couldn't live the life of a normal teenager, I couldn't watch movies, go for barbecues, plan a future . . ."

Desperate, Kuan Yok got married, hoping to start a new life with her husband. But her husband, being from the same circle of friends, struggled with his own problems of gambling and debts. Receiving no love, Kuan Yok was driven even further into her drug habit. The marriage ended when her husband took his life because of his problems.

In 1987, Kuan Yok was sentenced to four months in Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC). When asked about drug rehabilitation programmes in the '80s, Kuan Yok smiles ruefully. "Cold turkey and marching," she sums up the programme.

TURNING POINT

The jail term was not sufficient as a deterrent for Kuan Yok. A year after release, she was back. In total, she served three sentences. After her third sentence, which lasted two years, she did something different upon her release. She went straight to The Turning Point, a stay-in halfway house for ex-addicts.

"It seemed that, for the first time, I 'woke up' to my situation and properly reflected on my life. I was already 33 years old, but I had no achievements and no future. What was I going to do with the rest of my life? Go back to drugs and go in and out of DRC? In the past, whenever I met with such problems, I would escape into drugs. But, at The Turning Point, I faced my problems."

After leaving The Turning Point, Kuan Yok showed her determination to turn over a new leaf by persisting in an electronics factory job for three years. She also remarried. Ai Huat is also an ex-



"We have wasted a lot of time already.
We should not waste any more of our lives."

AI HUAT
Kuan Yok's husband

addict, but he is even more serious than Kuan Yok about staying drug-free. “We have wasted a lot of time already. We should not waste any more of our lives,” he told her.

The couple did not just desire to survive, they wanted to build a future. Thus, they opened their tofu stall in a wet market in Bedok and have worked hard at the stall ever since.

Despite her busy schedule, Kuan Yok goes to The Turning Point on Thursday evenings to share her testimony with the residents and encourage them to leave drugs. She also volunteers at the Changi Women’s Prison. “I share about my experiences and how I stood up to be a human being again. I exhort them to plan for their future. They can have a future, if they start now.”

Volunteering has been equal parts heartbreak and satisfaction. Sometimes, more heartbreak than satisfaction. “Recently, I saw a familiar face at The Turning Point. I had counselled this woman before, 10 years ago. Even at that time, her story was already a sad one. She did not take drugs until her husband introduced her to it. She had two lovely children with him, but drugs broke up their family. She was 28 years old when she was remanded in DRC. Now, 10 years later, she is at The Turning Point. She told me what happened in the intervening years. She fell back into the drug habit after leaving DRC. She was so desperate for money to buy drugs that she did some regrettable things.”

Notwithstanding the encounter of such ‘failures’ in her counselling efforts, Kuan Yok did not give up. “There are already so few volunteers. If I give up, there will be one less. I cannot boast, but I am a living testimony of a drug addict who turned around. Struggling addicts need to see examples like me in order to have the faith that they can make good too. I need to be a role model for them,” she humbly explains her motivation to volunteer.

Rehabilitation experts can take a leaf from Kuan Yok’s experience. She gives one example, “Detoxification treatments to wean addicts off drugs are easier options than cold turkey, but it is still not effective in the long run. These treatments do not address the addicts’ mental attitude and circle of friends. If he doesn’t have a desperate resolve to stay away from drugs, he will continue to mix with his drug-using friends and they will be his downfall.”

To Kuan Yok, the most effective long-term cure is religious faith. “The addicts need to believe in a higher power – that this higher power can help them. Otherwise, if they trust in themselves, they will fall again and again.”

Kuan Yok’s business is too busy to allow her to take part in YRP activities like the Walk and the concerts. But she heartily approves of the campaign. “It is a good movement to help the public to know more about and be more accepting of ex-offenders. If the public can see more of the results – how releasees are helped to stay clean – they will be even more motivated to be part of YRP.”


11 CHANGE-MAKER

Michael Teoh, 48, has a family, a job, and volunteers in grassroots agencies and prison. However, once upon a time, he could not even be guaranteed of keeping his life. Michael reiterates that since he has been saved by God and pardoned by the law, he must now give back to society.

Mr Michael Teoh had been sure he would get the death sentence. At 17 years old, with four other boys, he had robbed a fishmonger. Things had gone horribly wrong and the man was killed. Michael was soon confined in an isolation cell in Queenstown Remand Prison (QRP), waiting for the court to decide his sentence. He was sure that it would be the death sentence.

Michael had not even lived yet. He was only a teenager and he had never even experienced the warmth of a family. His parents had separated when he was young and he had been passed from relative to relative as a boy.

In QRP, he regretted, he despaired, but he did not plan. There



"I never dreamed that I could, one day, get married, have children."

MICHAEL TEOH

was no future to plan for. "I never dreamed that I could, one day, get married, have children, become a swimming coach for a national team, and counsel hundreds of prisoners," Michael recalls his frightful period in QRP.

It was unbelievable, but it happened. Michael felt that the turning point came when he became a Christian in the QRP isolation cell. Even though he was still certain he would get the death sentence, receiving Christ as his Saviour gave him peace. He spent four years in QRP, and when the case was finally brought to court, miraculously, the charge was changed to 'robbery with hurt'. Michael served another sixteen months in Changi Prison, received 12 strokes of the cane, and was finally released after a total of five years and four months in prison. He had a future.

Now 48 years old, Michael still marvels that his wife accepted his proposal, that he could father two children who are grown-up now, and that he could study for coaching courses and a business diploma. One thing he did not wonder at – he did not wonder about becoming a prison volunteer.

"I always knew I wanted to come back as a volunteer. In prison, when I learned that I would have a future, I made up my mind that I would do my best when I got back to society. I would upgrade myself and learn. I wanted to get married. And I wanted to come back to prison and counsel the prisoners."

One by one, he worked hard to fulfil his dreams. He also sought restitution by making reconciliation with, first, his mother and then his father. He also tried to get in touch with the family of the victim, but his attempts were unsuccessful. However, the dream to re-enter Changi Prison as a volunteer remained unfulfilled for 15 years. "In those days, the policy was to exclude ex-offenders as volunteers, perhaps because they could be bad influences on the inmates," Michael says.

Change came about with the Yellow Ribbon Project. Michael was invited to share his testimony and, in 2005, he was invited to share his life story with inmates. He accepted immediately. Since then, he has been volunteering with Prison Fellowship Singapore. He gives motivational talks in Changi Prison and Tanah Merah Prison, and does one-to-one counselling. He takes active part in YRP activities, like the Walk. He also volunteers as a grassroots leader in Marsiling Residents' Committee (RC). At the same time, Michael makes sure he spends quality time with his family.

All of this translates into a lot of hard work. Michael pushes himself because "My life has been saved by God, I have been pardoned by the law. This is my chance to help others."

This mindset has also helped him in his career. As a student who never even completed his secondary school education, after his release, Michael took night classes for his N-Level certificate. Then he completed a swimming coach certificate from Singapore Sports Council and took an advanced diploma in business. He did all these while holding down full-time jobs as, first, a cook, then a salesman, lifeguard and swimming coach.

"I wanted to be a lifeguard and swimming coach because I took a life in the past. Now, I want to save lives," Michael explains softly.

Mr Michael Lim, Deputy Director of Teen Challenge Singapore, has known Michael for several years through Teen Challenge's outreach in prison. "Michael willingly avails himself for prison work, whether it is with the youth or adult prisoners. He is effective and influential as he shares from his past experiences. He is able to encourage and motivate others to see that change is possible. I find him reliable, confident and encouraging."

Michael Teoh talks about his counselling method, "I don't set specific goals for the ex-offenders. I just talk to them about the right way to conduct relationships in the family, teach time and task management, and address their concerns."

"I am most encouraged when I see a releasee who doesn't just think about building his own kingdom, but is willing to contribute to society. To me, this is a true sign that he understands and appreciates the second chance he has been given."

PRISON FELLOWSHIP SINGAPORE

Prison Fellowship Singapore (PFS) is one of many religious organisations that run programmes in prison. These organisations provide spiritual guidance, and emotional and mental support for inmates to assist in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Prison Fellowship Singapore started in August 1953 when the then-Commissioner of Police challenged: "These prisoners fear neither men nor law, make them fear God."

The late Reverend Khoo Siaw Hua responded to the call and became the first Honorary Prison Chaplain. PFS is interdenominational and a registered Christian Voluntary Welfare Organisation with the Singapore Prison Service. It runs in-care religious programmes as well as community

outreach to inmates' families with Wives' and Mothers' Support Groups and food hampers for families during Christmas, among others. After 32 years of service, from 1953 to 1985, the late Reverend Khoo was succeeded by his son, the late Reverend Henry Khoo, who continued his father's legacy of guiding inmates until 2006, before he passed the baton of leadership to his son, Reverend Timothy Khoo.

Today, PFS works with a network of churches, Christian organisations, halfway houses, employment agencies like SCORE, prison authorities and a pool of more than 400 volunteers. Internationally, it is one of the over 127 affiliated members of Prison Fellowship International (PFI), whose new CEO and President is Reverend Timothy Khoo.

PART FOUR

UNLOCKING LIFE'S SECOND CHANCES

A decade of experience - wrenching heartaches, delightful insights, surprising breakthroughs and world-renowned successes. It would be tempting at this stage to grow complacent, to take a know-it-all attitude and stop learning and growing, to become mechanical in churning out programmes year after year. But times have changed. The profile of prisoners and society are constantly evolving. The Yellow Ribbon Project needs re-visioning. What does the future hold?

12 THE PASSION TO TRANSFORM LIVES

In the previous pages, we have seen the staggering number of people involved in the work of rehabilitation and reintegration and the success stories of ex-offenders made good. This chapter reveals the heart of a team of special people – the key dreamers and believers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) lives on, year after year.

Bringing the Yellow Ribbon Project to what it is today was certainly not a walk in the park, especially in its infancy stages. The initial years of trying to introduce a radical message and educate the public was met with scepticism, misunderstandings and downright hostility. The stigmatisation of ex-offenders smothered all their efforts like a heavy wet blanket. It took extraordinary courage and faith to press on with the campaign.

Thankfully, there were four persistent souls who believed in the compelling cause of YRP. Braving the public's lukewarm responses, they came together as colleagues to work shoulder to shoulder, and soon became close friends. Ms Leonie Tan, Deputy Director of the CARE Network office, who also heads the YRP Secretariat Team, was there from the beginning. She recounts: "I can still remember trudging from company to company in 2004, trying to sell the concept of giving second chances to ex-offenders and meeting with blank stares and even outright rejection. It was demoralising."

Mr Koh Tong Hai, who took up the challenging role of YRP Vice-Chairman from 2005 to 2008, notes: "The public climate towards ex-offenders in those years was vastly different from now." He often heard this statement from the people he approached: "These criminals have harmed society. They don't deserve anything. Why should I give them a second chance?"



(From left) Lam Cher Soon, Kenneth Foo, Leonie Tan and Koh Tong Hai

Sometimes, they shot Tong Hai this question: “Why are you asking us to give criminals a break? Do you condone crime?” Tong Hai found himself fumbling for answers to these hard questions.

Mr Kenneth Foo joined the YRP Secretariat in 2006 and quips about skipping the difficult pioneering years: “I was attracted to the job because it involved planning and implementation of programmes . . . and people. I find myself staying on year after year because it is so satisfying to see people’s lives being improved because of the collective effort of my colleagues.”

Another member of the team is Mr Lam Cher Soon, current Vice-Chairman of YRP and Director of Corporate Services of Singapore Prison Service (SPS). Cher Soon adds: “I’ve been with SPS for 27 years now because this vocation is very meaningful. It is not just about helping ex-offenders; we are contributing to the safety and security of Singapore. I can also say that I am here for selfish reasons because my job builds a safer society for my children to grow up in.”

OVERCOMING STIGMA

“The Yellow Ribbon advocacy campaign was the first of its kind in the world,” Tong Hai describes, “There was no model or formula we could follow. We were going into uncharted territory.”

“It was a lot of laborious community outreach,” Leonie adds. “We just kept reaching out doggedly. And we did lots of strange things – unprecedented in prison work – like movie screenings, art fairs and job fairs right on prison premises.”

An example of unprecedented programmes is the nurturing of art in prison. In the early 2000s, it was unimaginable. Leonie recalls: “People mocked us. ‘Can inmates paint? Sing? Compose songs?’ Not just members of the public, even colleagues sniggered behind our backs.” Nonetheless, the real intent of allowing inmates to draw and to write music is to give them a visceral but tangible channel to express their thoughts, struggles and aspiration – in essence, the voice in their heart. This is so the public may empathise and support the inmates’ rehabilitative journey.

Thus, the team persevered. They packaged the artwork, framed them with the ex-offenders’ heartfelt words and presented them to the public. The response was overwhelming. The Prison Art

Programme has improved by leaps and bounds since. The Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition is now a regular fixture on the national calendar. In addition, YRP has organised concerts and poetry and songwriting competitions.

It was not only the public and staff who were sceptical in the beginning; even the very people whom YRP was trying to help – the inmates themselves – did not believe that the campaign could benefit them. When asked to volunteer their testimonies or be ambassadors for the campaign, they shrunk back. It was understandable. Prejudice against ex-offenders was so pervasive that it would spell a death knell for their future if their backgrounds were revealed.

What an exhilarating difference 10 years have made! Yes, 10 years on, YRP has seen a slew of innovative initiatives of national scale launched, such as the Yellow Ribbon Fund and Yellow Ribbon Prison Run, garnered extensive support from employers to hire ex-offenders, and is widely recognised by the public, corporations and schools. SPS and Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) are invited overseas yearly to share their success story. While there is no clear link between the national recidivism rate and the work of YRP, the steady decline of the national recidivism rate has given YRP a boost to continue its work.

THE MARK OF YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT

These four friends are in the best position to compare the rehabilitation scene before and after Yellow Ribbon Project was implemented. YRP was originally designed to be a public showcase of existing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, no more and no less. Astoundingly, the campaign took on a life of its own and began to transform even the social fabric of the country.

First was the alleviation of stigmatisation against ex-offenders. More and more members of the public voiced their willingness to embrace ex-offenders; reforming offenders gained confidence to ask for support as they witnessed the tide of acceptance. Second, it brought rehabilitation needs into the public eye, and this allowed individuals and corporations whose heartstrings were tugged to step forward and make their contributions.

Tong Hai beams: "Without YRP, we would never have seen the groundswell like what is happening now. There are as many efforts being initiated on the ground as strategies initiated by the government and aftercare agencies."

Many examples come to mind immediately. Leonie remembers an encouraging phone call she received three years into the YRP campaign. It came through the YRP hotline. GiGATT International Marketing, a medical equipment distributor company, offered to give tattoo removal services to inmates so that they could have a fresh start. The innovative proposal was radical. "Before YRP, such an unsolicited call would never have happened," Leonie explains.

Due to GiGATT's proposition, the tattoo removal programme was established. Tattoos are a highly visible way of identifying their wearers with gangs. So the Tattoo Removal Programme helps inmates who vow to renounce their gang memberships by removing visible gang-related tattoos so that they can integrate into normal society. The programme eventually won an award. Going forward, the million-dollar Yellow Ribbon-GiGATT/QUANTA Tattoo Removal Programme will be administered at the Changi Medical Centre in Changi Prison Complex over two years. The programme is part of Singapore Prison Service's zero tolerance policy for gang-related activities in prison institutions and is supported by GiGATT International Marketing Pte Ltd and QUANTA System SpA.

Kenneth relates another story from four years ago. An inmate, Mr Darren Tan, sat for his A-Level examinations in the Prison School and dared to dream about a law education. He applied to National University of Singapore with his grades . . . and was accepted. The predicament was that he could not leave the prison for the university pre-admission interview. Miraculously, the university dean was open to travelling to Changi Prison to interview him. Another obstacle was Darren's finances – he did not have enough money to purchase a laptop, much less pursue a university education. However, a company that knew about YRP agreed to sponsor all four years of his university fees. "Three weeks ago, Darren got his law degree," Kenneth ends with quiet satisfaction.

Darren would not have realised this dream opportunity and his degree if YRP had not first sown the seeds of compassion and openness in people like the university dean and the sponsor. Another spin-off of this story was that a member of the public read about Darren in the newspapers and donated a lump sum of \$25,000 to Yellow Ribbon Fund STAR Bursary.

Awareness has also inspired many noble volunteers to come forward. For instance, one administrative manager, Mr Philip Lim, was invited to Dining Behind Bars. He learned about the purpose of rehabilitation and, thereafter, influenced his Rotary Club friends to participate. Whenever YRP sent out emails like SCORE Bakery mooncake order forms, Philip would conscientiously circulate the information.

Ground efforts range from startling displays of generosity, like big donations, to ingenious schemes. One example of ingenuity was Mdm Jenap, better known as 'Catwoman' in the marathon circuit. Jenap is in her 50s. In 2012, she ran for 12 hours straight with the aim of inspiring more people to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run and to donate generously to the Yellow Ribbon Fund. Her effort raised over \$130,000 for YRF.

YELLOW RIBBON CONTINUES TO RIPPLE

After 10 years, no sector of society is unaffected by the YRP message. One key group of people are students. More schools now are willing to involve their students with ex-offenders, whether it is cooperating in a Chingay performance or to scribe their testimonies. The interesting thing is that the Yellow Ribbon ripples are triggering their own ripples. An illustration of this is Mr Jimmy Ler, an ordinary member of the public who agreed to donate money to YRF. Having heard the YRP message, he responded by signing his company up to employ ex-offenders and connected business contacts to YRP to fund CSR programmes and services, and the ripple effect further widens.

THE END GOAL OF YRP

The people who first initiated the campaign a decade ago are still learning new things. Former Director of Prisons Mr Chua Chin Kiat put the new revelation into words: "The Yellow Ribbon message of giving second chances may be most relevant to the ex-offenders now because they are the ones who need it the most, but we will know that YRP has succeeded when the message permeates all levels of society. By the simple act of forgiving a person, whether it is on the train or at a sales counter or at home, you are positively impacting the person. When you give the person a chance, he will pay it forward and give others a chance. The end result is a more forgiving and gracious society."

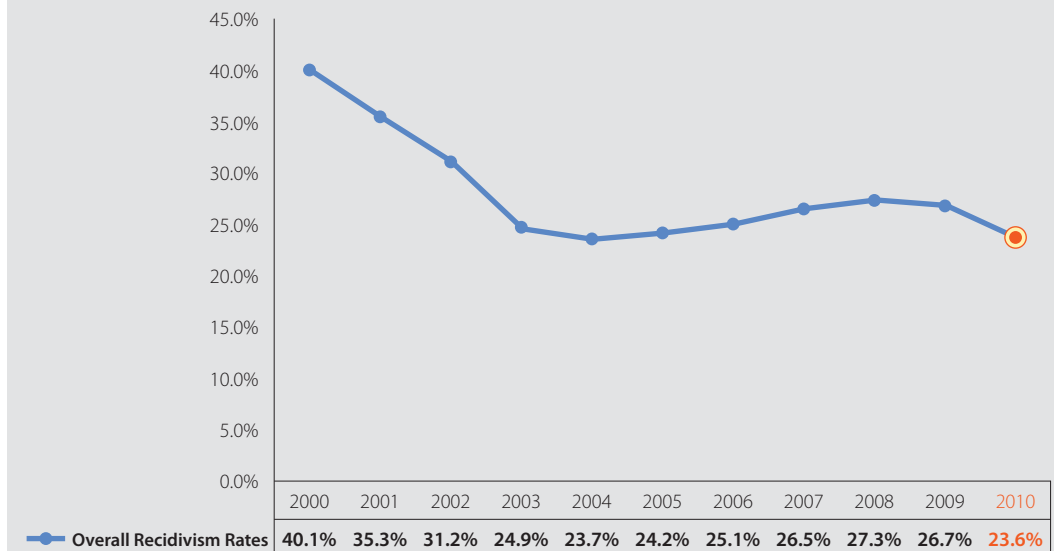
Cher Soon experienced this revelation when he started adopting the YRP message as his personal philosophy. "I began to treat colleagues, family and members of the public with this message at the foremost of my mind. Rather than take offence or blame others, I forgive and give second chances. The result is that I become a more positive person. And I discover that the outcome of my efforts usually end up better than I thought."

With this understanding, it becomes all the more important to share the YRP message with whoever is open to receive it. Today, the prison model in many countries still emphasises punishment and incarceration above rehabilitation. More enlightened nations see rehabilitation simplistically as only job placement or mandatory supervision. YRP hopes to share its alternative viewpoint with more nations. The Ribbon must determinedly run its course, spreading its message of fearless grace to inspire lasting transformation of ex-offenders' lives, for the safety and good of all society.

RECIDIVISM RATES

The best testimonial for rehabilitation efforts is fewer reoffences. The 2-year recidivism rate for Singapore has dropped from 40.1% for the cohort of 2000 to 23.6% for the cohort of 2010.

Chart 13.1 Overall Recidivism Rates in Singapore



13 METTLE FOR REAL CHANGE

Dr Lim Yun Chin, a psychiatrist with Raffles Hospital and the Singapore Prison Service, shares the three 'Cs' of building resilience for real change: Commitment, Challenge and Control.

I must tell you about my patient, Joe (not his real name). I first met him when I was a doctor in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC). He suffered from addiction to drugs and had been incarcerated for many years.

He shared with me his struggles with addiction and mental illness. He had a co-morbid disorder meaning he suffered from both addiction and a mental illness. Hence, he needed to invest more effort to get out of his bondage of addiction and the scourge of mental illness.

But as with the all-too-familiar stories of inmates being incarcerated for addiction, the recovery is short-lived and after release from prison they soon find themselves back behind bars again. That was the case with Joe. I knew he was sincere in his desire to recover but his bondage to drugs had become too entrenched. So I found him whenever he came back to prison.

When he was outside the prison, he got married and had a child, but, soon after, he found himself imprisoned again. He spent about two decades of his life in prison. The extended period of incarceration would have crushed any human spirit. I must confess that my hope for his eventual recovery also faded when I encountered him repeatedly.

While he struggled with his addiction, he tried to make full use of his time during incarceration.



He ploughed his energy into studying and achieving his O-Level certificate.

Over the course of his years in prison, I often lost contact with him. One day, he visited me with his elderly mother. It was an exhilarating moment to see him again. He had been out of prison for some time and he related to me an inspiring story about how he never gave up overcoming all adversities to pick himself up and start afresh.

DETERMINATION TO CHANGE

During his repeated imprisonment, his wife left him and, when he was released, he was left with his young child and his elderly mother to care for. It dawned on him that if he didn't change, he would surely return to prison and the two people he loves most in this world – his mother and his child – would be abandoned to the elements.

He made a vow to Commit himself to care for his loved ones and to take whatever adversities that life threw at him as a Challenge, and he pledged that he would take Control over his life and take ownership for his every act.

In that decisive moment of his life, he unlocked the secret of resilience embodied in the three 'Cs', namely, Commitment, Challenge and Control. Resilience brings with it hope. It means that, while a person cannot change what has happened in the past, he can always look toward the future.

COMMITMENT, CHALLENGE AND CONTROL

Commitment is to find a sense of purpose in one's life. In the case of Joe, the commitment to his mother and his child is crucial to his recovery. It gives him the inner strength to resist the lure of drugs and to push himself in his job to earn money for his child's education and his mother's medical bills. The hours are long but he tells himself that this is the least he can do for his loved ones.

Commitment gives him the strength to adapt to the adversities he faces daily. He faces struggles

at work and yet he remains optimistic. He works hard and has recently been promoted at work for his effort.

Commitment helps him to embrace changes and to thrive during changes. He reminds himself that he has a responsibility to his loved ones and he can weather any stress because they are worth it.

Challenge – whereas once he took refuge in drugs, he now sees every adversity as a challenge that he can overcome. He is amazed at his own optimism when he sees the daily stress of living a challenge as something not to avoid or deny. Setbacks become transient and therefore he wants to combat the challenges he faces. The future to him is hopeful as he sees his child's growing happiness.

Because he sees life as a challenge, he can now set goals for himself in terms of increasing his competence at work and plan how he can be more successful. Setting personal goals was such an alien experience in the past because drugs hijacked whatever motivation he had – to be sober. Taking life as a challenge also gives him a sense of perseverance, emboldening him to trust in the process and never give up.

Control is the belief that he does have control over his life and need not be in bondage to drugs. Because he feels this sense of self-autonomy, he develops a positive belief in his abilities. This further reinforces his resilience. Because of this feeling that he is in charge, his self-respect grows stronger by the day. It also means that he can learn to enhance his problem-solving skills and he feels a sense of self-mastery.

Control also means that he is now the master of his own destiny. He can choose to be happy and he accepts that life is a matter of riding out the bad times and looking forward to better ones, all the while waking up each morning giving thanks for the good and choosing to be happy despite whatever grief, sadness or stress the day holds.

Acquiring resilience does not erase life's difficulties. Instead, it gives us the strength to tackle problems head-on, overcome adversity and move on. The most optimistic message of resilience is that it can be achieved through efforts made and lessons learned. Resilience can be cultivated. So be patient with yourself, and just do your best.

14 THE NEXT LAP

Society evolves, as do the needs and aspirations of ex-offenders. The Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) needs to recognise this evolution, and adapt in tandem to stay relevant. It will continue to require in its next lap audacious dreams, large doses of grace, and the courage to believe in transforming ex-offenders beyond the prison walls.

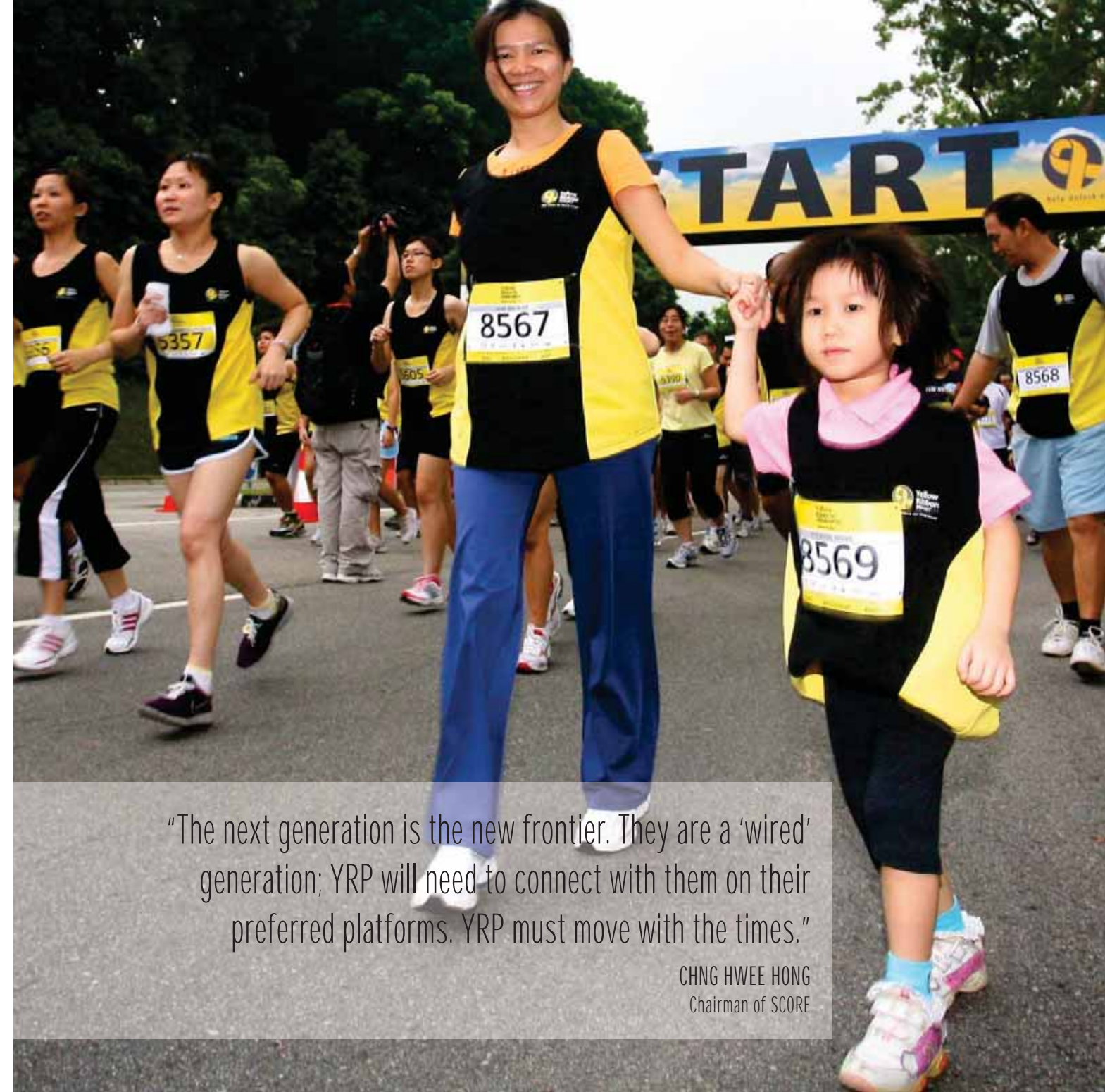
Singapore's coordinated rehabilitation and reintegration efforts began more than 10 years ago, with the Singapore Prison Service (SPS), Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) and Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network coming together to help ex-offenders reintegrate into society. Many more organisations have joined in since.

THROUGH CARE

Mr Soh Wai Wah, Director of Prisons (DP), observes: "I feel we are getting ever closer together. My dream is that, although we are many different agencies, we will work together as if we are one agency – Working As One Rehab Team. We are ready to embark on the next level of working more closely together by taking a throughcare approach."

He issues this challenge to Singapore society: "We are ready. Are you?"

Mr Chng Hwee Hong, Chairman of SCORE, and Mr Teo Tze Fang, CEO of SCORE, nod in



"The next generation is the new frontier. They are a 'wired' generation; YRP will need to connect with them on their preferred platforms. YRP must move with the times."

CHNG HWEE HONG
Chairman of SCORE

agreement. The three leaders have gathered in the DP's office to cast the YRP vision for the next lap. Notwithstanding these men have vastly different roles and widely divergent responsibilities, they have a common vision and passion that bonds them closer than the artificial walls of an organisation. Today, this *together-as-one* spirit is also reflected in stakeholders involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

Wai Wah elaborates on the throughcare approach: "The concept of throughcare is that we must begin with the end in mind. At the point of admission into prison, what is the end state that we desire of the inmate? For some prison systems in the world, it is merely that his stint in prison is a safe and secure one. For Singapore, the end state should extend beyond the point of his release, into his life outside of prison. Our desired end state is that he is reintegrated into society and will not return to prison."

He continues: "In the concept of throughcare, we should bear this desired end state in mind from the day of an inmate's admission into prison. So, how we treat our inmates and the kind of activities and programmes we arrange for them should have this end state in view."

The implication is that the incare treatment of an inmate should anticipate the aftercare arrangements being provided for him. And the agencies involved in aftercare should follow through on the work done on the inmate during his incarceration.

Apart from SPS, there are other agencies involved in incare work, such as the religious bodies providing succour, as well as the grassroots in the community attending to the needs of the inmate's family. SPS has also expanded its work into the aftercare realm, providing supervision to inmates upon their release. Many more non-government organisations are involved in aftercare work, from providing halfway house services to casework. The community at large is also needed as neighbourhood friends and colleagues and employers.

This entire throughcare concept covers many different phases of an inmate's rehabilitation journey and requires all agencies involved to work more closely together, as well as the involvement of the community at large.

YRP STAYS ON THE CUTTING EDGE

However, looking ahead, YRP needs to consider new frontiers and grow wider to influence new sectors of society.

Hwee Hong takes the 'iGen' as an example. "The next generation is the new frontier. But they are wired differently, literally. They are a 'wired' generation, which means that YRP will need to connect with them on their preferred platforms – through social networking, the Internet and smartphones. YRP must move with the times."

At the same time, YRP aims to go deeper. This means a deeper understanding of the real needs of ex-offenders. Tze Fang explains: "On a superficial level, we think that a person who has wronged society should be grateful for a job, any job. But we have to look at the reality as well. Singapore's standard of living is relatively expensive, and ex-offenders have to make a living. Their chances of staying crime-free will increase if they are matched to jobs that take into account their capability and they have opportunities for job advancement just like normal Singaporeans."

Tze Fang was especially struck by a conversation he had with an ex-offender which helped him to see the nitty-gritty obstacles that face a new releasee. Jack (not his real name) had been put away for 10 years. In that one decade, Singapore had changed dramatically. Cost of living had gone up; computers and smartphones became indispensable for work; employers expected more initiative of their staff. Jack had not wasted his time behind bars. He had studied in the Prison School and was referred to a sales executive post. He was grateful that his position was above entry level and so his income was able to sustain a modest living. However, he had a challenge – his sales team used smartphones to stay connected as they moved around. He could not afford one. Without a smartphone, it was difficult to prove himself at work. However, if he did not do well at his job, he could not make enough to buy a smartphone. It was a vicious cycle. When Jack's new circle of wholesome friends invited him out for meals, they found him evasive and antisocial. In reality, he had to reject their friendly gestures because the cost of an MRT ticket and lunch, so affordable for his friends, would make a serious hole in Jack's pocket.

This conversation gave Tze Fang many insights. "This will be the next stage for YRP – to help public members have a deeper understanding of people like Jack."

BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL

What would be the big audacious goal for YRP? "Yellow Ribbon Project will no longer be needed," Tze Fang says firmly, "We aim to work ourselves out of a job." He continues: "It is for the Yellow Ribbon (YR) spirit – the spirit of giving second chances – to become spontaneously the spirit of Singapore within the next 10 years."

When society at large embraces the YR spirit, efforts will no longer be needed to persuade employers to offer employment to ex-offenders who have paid their dues, no longer will fellow workers ostracise a reformed colleague who opens up about his criminal past, and families will no longer feel stigmatised simply because they have one member behind bars. This is an achievable goal. Wai Wah, Hwee Hong and Tze Fang are confident that at the rate of efforts SPS, SCORE and CARE Network are putting in to harness collaboration and resources to help ex-offenders, coupled with the broad acceptance by the community towards the YRP cause, YRP's norm can become society's norm – where the reintegration of ex-offenders is initiated by the community rather than by any government agency or non-profit organisation.

"I believe in collaboration and scalability. Let me coin it as 'collaborative scaling'. All that we have learned so far can be and



"Working As One Rehab Team, our desired end state is that an ex-offender is reintegrated into society and will not return to prison."

SOH WAI WAH
Director of Prisons

should be replicated and scaled accordingly by our partner organisations, and extrapolated onto the community. All of this will create a multiplier effect, making this audacious goal achievable," Hwee Hong adds.

Wai Wah also agrees that the goal is reachable: "Nowhere else in the world is there such synergy among partner organisations, and such openness and compassionate response from the public. We are all different; some are government ministries, some are non-profit organisations, some are corporate organisations, while others are simply individuals with big hearts. Yet somehow, I believe we can work as if we are one to achieve this."

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Eventually, the YRP dream is not merely to change the lot of a small group of ex-offenders but to transform and promote greater community involvement. YRP's impact is not merely confined to the beneficiaries who are helped. In reaching out to ex-offenders who need help, the benefactors will find themselves changed by the experience, and find themselves more forgiving and gracious. And society as a whole will be transformed.

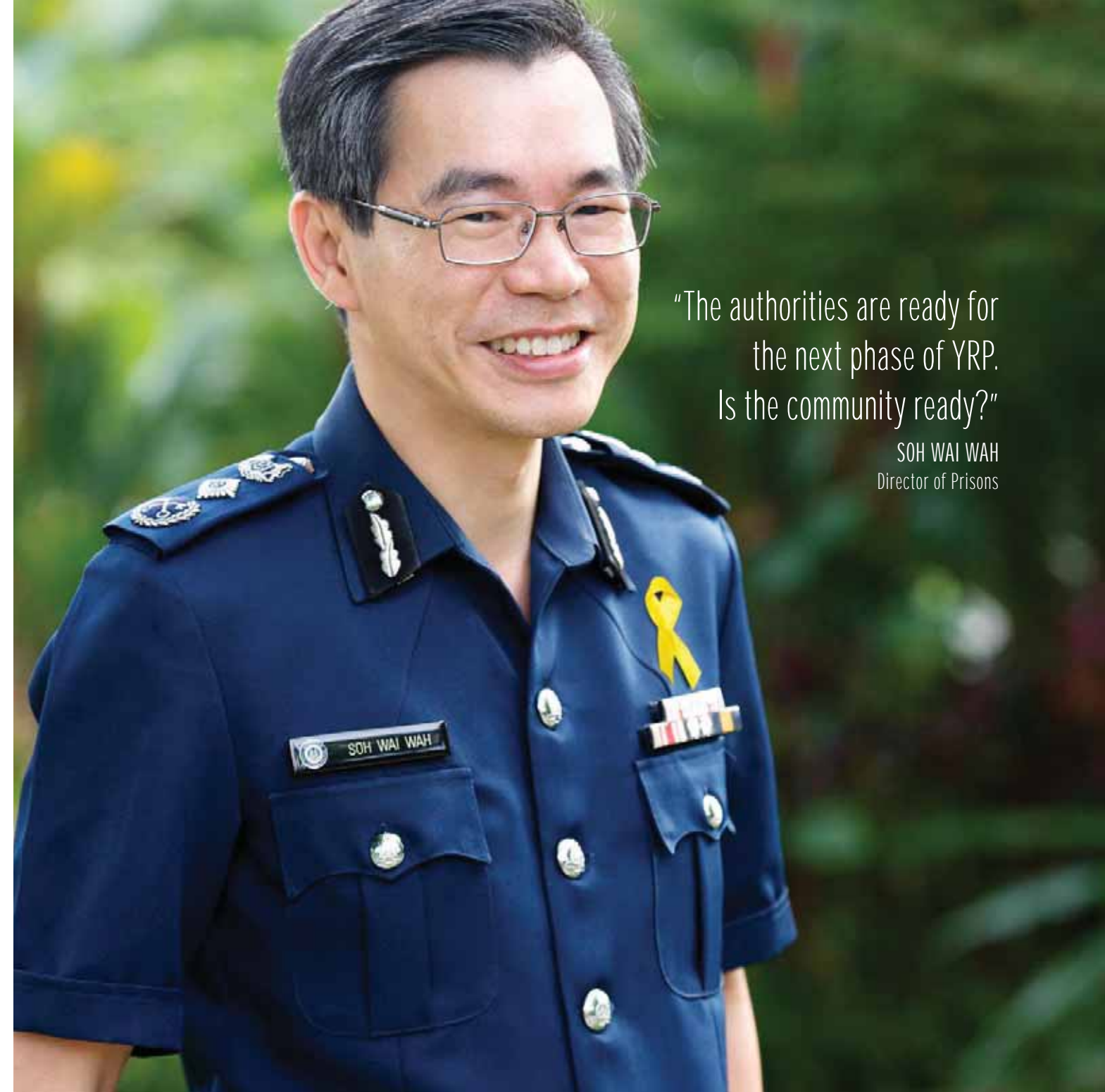
15 LET'S BE READY

The Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) has traversed a challenging and thrilling journey. It will continue to conceive and break new grounds in rehabilitation research and practices. To succeed, however, it will need everyone to participate in this noble adventure – hearts, souls and hands.

I visited a country in North Asia in 2012 and spoke with my counterparts there. They told me of a phenomenon there gathering pace – elderly people with a chequered criminal history, who are estranged from their families, without economic means and accommodation, hungry and frail, do not find a prison sentence a deterrence. This is certainly not what we hope to see in Singapore.

Singapore's criminal justice system is highly efficient and punitive. This means that offenders caught are sentenced to relatively long sentences. Should they reoffend, they spend an even longer time in prison.

For the sake of future generations, this vicious cycle of reoffending must be broken. Our rehabilitation effectiveness must level up and match our law enforcement effectiveness. The Singapore Prison Service is already committed to doing more as we venture into the aftercare arena. We need society at large to join in with renewed vigour as well.



“The authorities are ready for the next phase of YRP. Is the community ready?”

SOH WAI WAH
Director of Prisons

The Yellow Ribbon Project has served as a wonderful inspiration, providing the Singapore Prison Service, SCORE and our community partners the platform to help ex-offenders reintegrate into the society. It has been 10 good years of working together thus far. We will need even closer collaboration for the next lap. The authorities are ready for the next phase of YRP. Is the community ready?

Soh Wai Wah
Director of Prisons

“For Yellow Ribbon Project to succeed, it will need everyone to participate in this noble adventure – hearts, souls and hands.”



RECOGNITIONS FOR YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT

United Nations Department of Public Information Award (2007)

In 2007, Singapore Prison Service, with Burson-Marsteller (SEA) Pte Ltd, was presented the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI) Honourable Mention Award for driving awareness, acceptance and action for ex-offenders through the Yellow Ribbon Project. This award recognises outstanding projects and public relation campaigns that best exemplify the ideals and goals of the United Nations.

National Community Safety and Security Program Award (2007-2008)

In 2007 and 2008, Yellow Ribbon Project was presented the National Community Safety and Security Programme (CSSP) Award. This award recognises outstanding projects and community volunteers on a national level that tackle community issues and problems and address the safety and security of the community.

Public Relations In the Service of Mankind Excellence Award (2008)

In 2008, Yellow Ribbon Project was presented the "Excellence Winner" Award by the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore Public Relations In the Service of Mankind (IPRS PRISM) Awards under the category Best Public Service Campaigns – Public Sector. The PRISM Awards are given to organisations and individuals in recognition of outstanding contributions and achievements in the practice of public relations to raise its level of professionalism. The awards are part of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore's (IPRS) ongoing objective to enhance the standard of public relations practice in Singapore through recognition of best efforts.

Minister for Home Affairs' Award for Operational Excellence (2009)

In 2009, Yellow Ribbon Project was presented the Minister for Home Affairs' Award for Operational Excellence for its Tattoo Removal Programme. This programme, in collaboration with GiGATT International, has provided the opportunity for many inmates to renounce their gang membership and facilitated their reintegration into society as law-abiding and gainfully employed citizens.

International Corrections and Prisons Association Certificate of Special Commendation (2012)

In 2012, Yellow Ribbon Project was presented a Certificate of Special Commendation from the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) to recognise the high standards of work that the project has achieved in supporting the reintegration of offenders into society in Singapore.



ABOUT YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT

Launched in 2004 by former President of the Republic of Singapore Mr S R Nathan, the Yellow Ribbon Project seeks to engage the community in accepting ex-offenders and their families, giving them a second chance at life, and to inspire a ripple effect of concerted community action to support ex-offenders and their families.

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Singapore 507658
Tel: 65-6513-1597 or 65-6214-2857 Fax: 65-6546-0871
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To find out more about each of the individual CARE Network partners, please contact:

Ministry of Home Affairs

New Phoenix Park 28 Irrawaddy Road
Singapore 329560
Web: www.mha.gov.sg

Singapore Prison Service

407 Upper Changi Road North
Singapore 507658
Web: www.prisons.gov.sg

Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises

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Singapore 507658
Web: www.score.gov.sg

Ministry of Social and Family Development

512 Thomson Road #07-00 MCYS Building
Singapore 298136
Web: www.msf.gov.sg

Industrial and Services Co-operative Society Ltd

237 Alexandra Road #04-19 The Alexcier
Singapore 159929
Web: www.iscos.org.sg

National Council of Social Service

Ulu Pandan Community Building
170 Ghim Moh Road #01-02
Singapore 279621
Web: www.ncss.gov.sg

Singapore After-Care Association

81 Dunlop St
Singapore 209408
Web: www.saca.org.sg

Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association

2 Sengkang Square
#05-01 Sengkang Community Hub
Singapore 545025
Web: www.sana.org.sg

THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE

Unlocking Life's Second Chances

THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE is a story about giving hope. It is about unlocking life's second chances for ex-offenders to help them find new lives beyond the prison walls.

The Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) embodies this spirit of hope. For 10 years, It has been passionately engaging and galvanising the community – families of ex-offenders; corporate, non-profit and government partners; and the general public – entreating them to believe that every ex-offender who takes personal responsibility for his own life can be transformed and reintegrated successfully into society.

Commemorating its 10th Anniversary, this book chronicles YRP's inception, journey, and triumphs as well as challenges. It also features ex-offenders whose transformed lives are a testament to the relentless work and contribution of the people behind the project. Reverberating with grit, resolve and hope, the stories will set your heart ablaze to extend your hands in unlocking second chances for ex-offenders.

Truly, every transformed life is a trophy of hope and belief.



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