



SACA

Sparks December 2022 Issue

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE VAP

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This is a special issue of Sparks. In this edition, we look back at the last 25 years of the Volunteer After-Care Programme and commemorate key milestones; all of which would not have been possible without the support and dedication of SACA's volunteers.

Reflecting on one's purpose

We can all agree that being a volunteer comes with a set of colourful experiences.

On one hand, there are experiences that reaffirm one's reason and decision to be a volunteer. On the other hand, there are also challenging experiences that may leave one questioning the value they can bring as volunteers.

Earlier this year, the VAP team facilitated a consultation session between SACA case managers and some volunteers. One of the questions asked by a volunteer was about his role as a befriender.

"Inmates already have prison counsellors, case managers or reporting officers, and the befriender may not be able to give the inmate a job or help him find housing. What then is my role?"

Interestingly, a case manager shared that she faces existential questions about her role from time to time too.

While the volunteer's question may have been specific to befriending, it resonated with many other volunteers who performed other roles.

For example, volunteers involved in our Initiative for Incarcerated Mothers and Affected Children (IIMAC) & Singapore Prison Service-Family Service Centre (SPS-FSC) collaboration wishes they could do more for families and children beyond referring them for help to external agencies.

The truth is that the journey of recovery for our clients and their family is long, and they may seek help from more than one agency at different stages. **Roles aside, everyone makes a difference and has a unique part to play.**

The journey is not always smooth

The volunteering experience is both exciting and trying. There may be times where volunteers are on the receiving end of frustrations felt by clients and families as they navigate the many challenges faced externally and internally.

MESSAGE

There are times too, when volunteers face the disappointment of seeing their clients relapse. Regardless, we have seen how volunteers choose to stay as their constant; ready to journey with clients when they go through pain and difficulties.

What is truly humbling to know is that volunteers do this willingly and choose to be a pillar of support for clients and their families, on top of their own personal responsibilities in life.

Supporting in more ways than one

Aside from journeying with individual clients through befriending, SACA volunteers also reach out to family members through our IIMAC & SPS-FSC collaboration.

The support given to families will soon expand through our upcoming initiative - Family Befriending.

Our volunteers also help clients through tuition support, accompanying case managers for home visits, and ad hoc duties like delivering food rations.

Every day, we are moved by the dedication of our volunteers. In the last month alone, we have seen volunteers go out of their way to help in small but meaningful ways. We have volunteers who, despite having to take up to two hours to travel to prison, still show up without fail to do their part.

We have volunteers who use their day-off to attend to clients and some who come down to SACA to help the VAP team with ad hoc projects. We even have a volunteer who went the extra mile to accompany the father of an inmate to the Social Service Office to apply for financial aid. The list goes on.

We are extremely grateful for the support that our volunteers have shown over the last 25 years and we look forward to their continued support in the years ahead. We would like to thank all the volunteers who have been there for our clients and their families, from the bottom of our hearts.

**FROM
ELISA, PAT, RYAN & SYAZA (THE VAP TEAM)**



SAY HELLO

MEET PAT

While she looks forward to the prospects of a yummy breakfast & Iced Teh C every morning, her motivation to get up comes from the hope of witnessing breakthroughs in the lives of others, and as well as her own!

A true *empath* at heart, she enjoys connecting with people through games and dancing with friends.

A Social Work Associate in the VAP team, Pat is the facilitator for the IIMAC & SPS-FSC programme.

Her commitment to the work she does is derived from her curiosity as to how trust can be cultivated, within clients themselves as well as with others, despite past mistakes.

patricia



Pat's Mantra:
Even the worst of our mistakes are miracles in the making.

MEET ELISA

Outside of work, Elisa likes reading, writing, listening to YouTube and creating photo books!

Her motivation to get up every morning stems from the love for her family and responsibility she feels towards her different roles (including the practical side of hanging up laundry before going to the office!).

On the weekends, she enjoys spending time with friends & family, going out for meals and attending church service.

Elisa is the Volunteer Manager of the VAP team and helps oversee the various volunteer initiatives.

She was drawn to this specific role as she has always been deeply inspired by individuals who have a big heart for ex-offenders.

elisa



Elisa's Mantra:
No pain, no gain. Growth is the goal in life and there can be no growth without challenges.

MEET RYAN

He appreciates his quality me-time, hanging out with friends and going to church.

Even though he admittedly cannot live without his phone (just like most of us...), he also enjoys spending time outdoors cycling and playing or watching football. When it comes to food, he is always up for fried chicken and laksa!

Ryan is currently studying part-time and is a Social Work Associate at SACA; primarily supporting the Befriending programme.

His motivation to carry out the work he does comes from his belief that everyone deserves a second chance in life, regardless of their history.

Ryan



Ryan's Mantra:
When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

MEET SYAZA

She is a loyal fan of the Iced Teh Tarik found at the coffee shop near SACA's office and a spicy food connoisseur!

Aside from being an avid reader, she enjoys indulging in a good Netflix binge, loves football and has a newfound appreciation for hiking and being immersed in nature.

A Social Worker, she supports IIMAC and will facilitate the upcoming Family Befriending initiative.

Syaza's passion to be part of the aftercare sector is based largely on her hope of bringing relief to the lives of clients & their families who face the stigma of incarceration.

syaza



Syaza's Mantra:
Even the worst days last 24 hours.

TO THE VAP TEAM

VAP OVER THE YEARS

Today, the Volunteer After-Care Programme is supported by more than 200 volunteers who play a key and necessary role in the space of reintegration. VAP has flourished tremendously in the last 25 years - this would not have been made possible without the dedication of all the volunteers we have had the privilege of having as part of SACA's journey thus far.

TWENTY FIVE YEARS

Together with former Director of the Prisons Department, Mr Poh Geok Ek, SACA launched the Volunteer Development Programme (now known as the Volunteer After-Care Programme) back in 1997. Check out some of VAP's key milestones over the last 25 years:

1997 FORMATION OF THE VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

A review of SACA's programmes and services was conducted in 1996/97 and one of the recommendations put forward in the report was to have a programme which involved the public as Volunteer After-Care Officers, dealing directly with discharged inmates.

The objective was to encourage community involvement in helping ex-offenders return to society as accepted members of the community.

1997 was indeed a significant year in SACA's history – the VDP was launched on 16 August. At the start, it was an all-women affair; 24 female volunteers were recruited and trained to befriend and provide aftercare support to female inmates.



VOLUNTEERS WANTED

I was freelancing at that time, going through the newspaper and then I saw 'Volunteers Wanted'. I was invited to the first meeting at Dunlop Street, where I met other potential VAOs, all eager to contribute to society. We were a mixed group of maybe 10 to 12 - admin & HR personnel, a lawyer, a media producer and even a nun!

The pioneer batch didn't have any counselling experience or comprehensive training that the present VAOs enjoy. So [you can] imagine the rude shock several of us had when our clients returned to their vices just 1 to 2 months post-release! This happened in spite of constant contact with them... until they went M.I.A. Soon after, we were told these 'missing' ladies were incarcerated again.

Thereafter, a "counselling session" was arranged with [trainer] Benny Bong to help us better understand our role & limits as befrienders, so as to restore our confidence & calm our rattled conscience.

Well, we survived...and over the years, we got used to such challenges. And I'm still with SACA, haha!

Liang Chian
SACA volunteer part of the pioneer batch



"[It was] the thought that inmates needed someone who can empathise, accept them for who they are and guide them to their next stage of their life [that made me volunteer with SACA]."

When I first started, female volunteers were only allowed in Changi Women Prison. Those days, the sessions were held in a small room. The inmates would be in the other small room and we communicated through the glass panel.

Balbir
SACA volunteer part of the pioneer batch





1998

BEFRIENDING PROGRAMME EXTENDED TO MALE INMATES

With the pilot programme's success, befriending was extended to male inmates over at the former Moon Crescent Prison in 1998.

2012

INITIATIVE FOR INCARCERATED MOTHERS AND AFFECTED CHILDREN (IIMAC)

Supporting mothers who are incarcerated and ensuring that their children & caregivers receive access to help and resources.

Over the years of interacting with inmates and their families, my perspective of them changed. I no longer saw them as incorruptibly 'bad' people incapable of change but saw them as individuals no different from myself. Many of them were victims of circumstances, coming from impoverished or dysfunctional families.

They had dreams and aspirations too, shattered by a regrettable moment of anger or impulse that made them fall on the wrong side of the law. Underneath the façade of guilt, fear and regret they were no different from me or any other normal person.

Siew Lian
SACA volunteer with IIMAC since its inception



2017

FAMILY CONNECT @ STATE COURTS

Providing support and resources to family members at the point of sentencing of their loved ones.

[After the sentencing of a loved one], family members need emotional support and assurance that we can help them with the resources that we have.

We give them space before we approach them. Some might reject us as they think we are reporters, but [others] are surprised that we are volunteers [who are willing to] help them.

May
SACA volunteer who supported family-connect



2019

THROUGH-CARE BEFRIENDING

Building rapport between volunteers and clients through a shared interest or activity conducted in prison.



During the process of doing [craft], we get to know one another. I will ask them why they choose certain designs and I will explain my choice of design.. I will also share my life experience. Everyone will listen to each other and contribute ideas [to others' problems].

We talk about strengths, we don't talk about limitations and weaknesses, and encourage and learn from one another. [Doing] craft is the best time for you to share.

Clara
SACA volunteer who has led on a craft session



Covid-times: Craft through zoom



2023

FAMILY-BASED BEFRIENDING

Providing families of first-time offenders with the necessary support and connection to resources needed to help them through this new and uncertain journey.

A lot of the work in the aftercare sector has been largely client-centric, which is great! But as the sector has grown, there has been a shift in focus to the families of incarcerated individuals as they are often the "silent victims" of an incarceration.

Just as much as the individual needs to be guided through his/her incarceration and subsequent reintegration, the families too need to be supported. We have seen the positive outcomes of individual befriending through our very own befriending programme. Hence, we hope that befriending can equally benefit families of the incarcerated.

Syaza
A Social Worker at SACA supporting the Family-based Befriending programme





10 YEARS OF CARE. 10 YEARS OF IIMAC.

The impact of incarceration goes beyond the individual. It also creates a lasting impact on their loved ones, with the hardest hit usually being the children.

Research has shown that children of incarcerated parents are more likely (than the average child) to drop out of school and engage in anti-social behaviour.

It is especially so when mothers are the ones incarcerated and have no choice but to leave caregiving responsibilities in the hands of somebody else. This drastic change is equally challenging for both the child and the caregiver.

IIMAC was born out of the realisation that there was a gap in the system.

Oftentimes, mothers who face imprisonment may not be able to ensure that their children and caregivers looking out for them have access to the proper support and resources they need during their absence. This could be financial, medical, emotional or other types of daily needs.

In partnership with Changi Women's Prison, the Initiative for Incarcerated Mothers and Affected Children (IIMAC) was launched in February 2012 with the aim of looking into addressing this gap and providing support to incarcerated mothers, their children and the caregivers.

Through IIMAC, SACA steps in as a bridge between the inmate and their family, with a large part of the process helmed by our very own volunteers.

They assist with interviewing the incarcerated mothers to understand the concerns they have for their children and caregivers, subsequently reaching out to the family to check on their well-being and connecting them to relevant agencies for the necessary support.

But what does being a bridge look like in reality and what does it truly take to be part of IIMAC?

Jenny, a new volunteer with SACA, shared that she was drawn to the aftercare sector because she was seeking a volunteering opportunity that was more long-term.

While she initially thought of volunteering as a Befriender, being a mother herself, IIMAC resonated with her. When asked how she prepared herself and the mind-set she adopted, she explained:

I think it's good to go in [to prisons] by managing your own expectations first.

It is a very different world and you are not going in there to save someone. You are just going in there to be a friend and listen to someone. And with that, you don't overthink.

When volunteers go into prison and meet with the mothers, it is the very first encounter between both parties.

Jenny shared:

If you think about it, I'm a stranger to them (the inmates). They are strangers to me. And [yet], they're going to sit and tell me their life story - it's quite amazing.

I would assume some may not have been open to share, but they were just so ready to tell their story.

It's very privileged information and as difficult and sad as some of the stories are, if you sift through them, they're very human stories. And everyone needs someone at some point in time.

Vulnerability is a two-way street. While the inmates are ready and willing to share their side, IIMAC volunteers play a very important role in creating a safe space for them to open up in a short amount of time and figure out areas of concern together.

Beyond what the inmates share, volunteers also have to be able to pick up on other aspects that could be a potential area of concern as well.

On the other side of the bridge are the loved ones. After hearing from the inmate, volunteers reach out to the family to check in on them through phone calls or home visits.

Connecting with family members requires sensitivity. Oftentimes, they are working through complex emotions while coming to terms with what is happening to their loved ones.

While volunteers get in touch and follow-up on the areas of concern brought up by the inmate, most family members appreciate the simple gesture of being reached out to and are thus willing to open up.

They are coming to terms with what is happening to their loved ones. Their stories are also equally as sad as their loved one in prison. Again, it's about listening to how they are coping through all this.

We have had the privilege of meeting volunteers from all walks of life via IIMAC. While each of them come with their own life stories, wisdom and motivation, there is a distinct commonality - their dedication and compassion. This is what has allowed IIMAC to thrive over the past decade.

To all our volunteers who have helped build a bridge for the incarcerated mothers, the affected children and their caregivers to access the help they need, thank you for being there for our clients and their families.

Alvin, a volunteer who has been supporting IIMAC since the very beginning, shared his experiences with cases over the years. One of his more heartening memories was of a mother who called him back even after the case was closed to give an update and express her gratitude. He shared:

I feel that for the fact that the NOK (next-of-kin) chose to call us back - it's a good sign. In my opinion, at least they trust [to contact] the person that they have not met...only talked [to] over the phone. But that means there's a certain level of trust [built].

The fact that they called means that there is a genuine concern from the other side and they remember us. And that there's still one last chance to reach out.

A decade later, IIMAC remains relevant. The initiative is on-going, with volunteers going into Prisons monthly to interview incarcerated mothers.

“They (ex-offenders) have made a mistake in their life and through [my experience] working with them, I came up with a philosophy and that is - who doesn't make mistakes? And when we make mistakes, what is the very first thing that we always hope to get? It's forgiveness from others.

And now that we can be the 'others', why are we not forgiving them? When we have the ability and power to forgive, why do we stinge on it? That is what drives me to continue [working] with offenders. In fact, I think they have a lot of stories to tell.”

Alvin
SACA volunteer since 2007

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PAST

I've been exposed to volunteering at an early age and always regarded volunteers as an integral component of community work. Being part of the VAP team in SACA strengthened that perspective, as I saw how the volunteer-led programmes helped make a difference in the lives of many clients we supported.

Managing, shaping and stabilising the VAP was a collective effort by full-time staff and volunteers. The success of the programme would not have been possible without the volunteers who came with vast knowledge and experience; all ready and willing to contribute their time and skills.

It was a rich, fulfilling, eye- & mind-opening experience for me. I was heartened to meet many passionate, kind, and talented individuals during my stint as a VM at SACA. It was amazing to witness the willingness of these wonderful individuals, dedicating their time and effort to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders back into society.

I wish nothing but the best for the volunteers and the VAP team. May you continue to do good and reap success in the meaningful work that you do!

Haslinda

SACA Volunteer Manager 2008 to 2011



Volunteers are not staff. They might not [feel comfortable] to say certain things to clients. So sometimes they want someone to step in and help them, to make their work easier. I really liked this part where I could be an advocate for either side - clients or volunteers.

When volunteers are empowered, not just by words but by actions as well, they will have the reassurance that they are not alone [in doing the work and managing challenges]. [This is] especially when we engage with them when they need us.

Some of the most memorable moments during my time as VAP's manager were bonding sessions with my volunteers and the Appreciation Nights that we planned for them. And of course, whenever volunteers return to service.

[What I would say to new volunteers is this:] In some way or form, your presence no matter how short, your suggestions no matter how small, would have an effect on clients.

So embrace every challenge and manage your expectations, for yourself, your client and organisation.

Fadzillah

SACA Volunteer Manager 2011 to 2014



From VAP's humble beginnings, I think the programme has grown tremendously. Now, not only does VAP assist offenders and ex-offenders, it is also helping families.

In terms of the work that volunteers are doing, it has expanded [over the years]. They started with only 1-1 befriending but they also ventured into group work [subsequently]. Not [just being part of] group work, but some of the volunteers were key core trainers for other volunteers from different agencies to run [these very] group work programmes, such as coping skills in Prisons.

[One of my takeaways from my experience is] how our volunteers join SACA without any expectation but in return, [still] give so much back to the clients that they're working with. [They don't expect] anything in return, not even awards. They just purely want to help. Seeing that, while working with the volunteers, made me feel that there are people out there who genuinely want to help. That is something I've always taken away with me - come in without expecting anything and, in return, doing something good for someone else.

[To the volunteers:] Just spear on doing what you do, providing help & services to people who need them!

Aishikin

SACA Volunteer Manager 2014 to 2021



MATCH MADE IN MARVEL HEAVEN



**Name has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

This was truly a match made in (Marvel) heaven. Both befriender and client are fans of the cinematic universe, both are foodies, and more importantly, both had the commitment to take the relationship to where it is today, 12 years on. Kai Peng and Ari* first met 12 years ago, when Kai Peng took Ari on as his third ever client since he started volunteering with SACA. Since then, what was initially a befriender-befriendee relationship has evolved into 12 years of care and conversations over yummy food. Here's how they did it:

1

Bonding through common interests

Kai Peng and Ari might have had different life experiences, but if there is one thing that can be counted on to bond two people, it is the love they have for the *Marvel* Cinematic Universe. Kai Peng, a self-professed "Super Marvel Fan", even presented Ari with an Ironman-themed gift during SACA's 60th Anniversary celebrations.

With Ari's love language being receiving gifts, he recalled that moment gleefully and said it was something that he would never forget.

In addition to Marvel, Kai Peng and Ari also love spending time eating good food. Ari described not liking Japanese food before the influence of Kai Peng, who introduced him to the best Japanese food eateries that our little island has to offer. Ari now says that he will never turn his back on good sushi!

2

Celebrating milestones together

This 12-year friendship has seen its share of milestones. Throughout their time together, Kai Peng has witnessed Ari's growth and been an ever-present at some significant events in Ari's life, like his wedding. Kai Peng shared:

I was so touched to see both of them at that ceremony, [and I had] a lot of flashbacks as to how he transformed to where he is right now.

Kai Peng is very proud of the journey that Ari has embarked on. Inspired by his befriender-turned-friend, Ari shared that he wants to be able to give back to society, just as Kai Peng has done.

"If my befriender can do it, I can do it too!" was Ari's mantra as he started volunteering with youth organisations.

Eventually, he turned his passion for helping others into a career, a decision that would not have been possible if Kai Peng had not come into his life to show him how significant a stranger can be in another person's life. Ari reflected:

Kai Peng saw my progress from my release, to my polytechnic days, to the start of my career and then my career switch. Everything was guided and Kai Peng has been there to give me good advice.

3

Mutual respect for each other's strengths

While it is undeniable that Kai Peng had played a part in guiding Ari in becoming the person that he is today, Kai Peng was quick to counter that Ari was already a driven person to begin with, and had clear goals in mind that helped him achieve what he wanted in life.

Ever the humble volunteer, Kai Peng refused to take any credit for the changes that Ari has made in his life. He explained:

There is so much that we (volunteers) can do but the clients play their own important role [in achieving their goals].

Nevertheless, Ari appreciates the guidance and the listening ear that Kai Peng has provided, the constant and stable presence in his life for the past 12 years; part elder brother, part guardian angel.

4

Being present with & for each other

No relationship can work if both parties are not willing to put in the time and effort to cultivate it. For Kai Peng and Ari, they approach their relationship confident in the knowledge that the other is always there for casual chats and lunch dates.

Whenever Kai Peng visits other clients in prison, he would call Ari out for a quick lunch to catch up as Ari lives nearby. The pair also message each other regularly to give updates on what is going on in their lives.

But of course, both Kai Ping and Ari are aware that they have their own commitments and are busy with their own lives so it may take time to respond.

This mutual understanding and respect that they have for each other, and of course their shared interests, all play a part in keeping the relationship going.

“I began to treat him like my brother, my friend.”

**Kai Peng
SACA Volunteer**



**Kai Peng and Ari at SACA's
60th Anniversary Gala Dinner**

VAP HIGHLIGHTS 2022

CHATFORMS: KEEPING IN-TOUCH DURING COVID TIMES

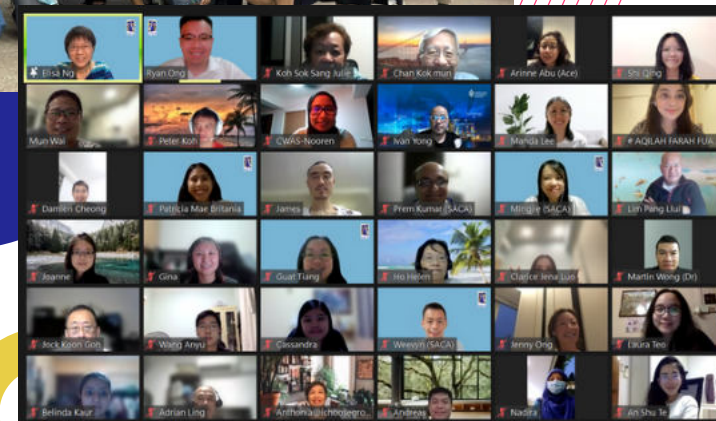
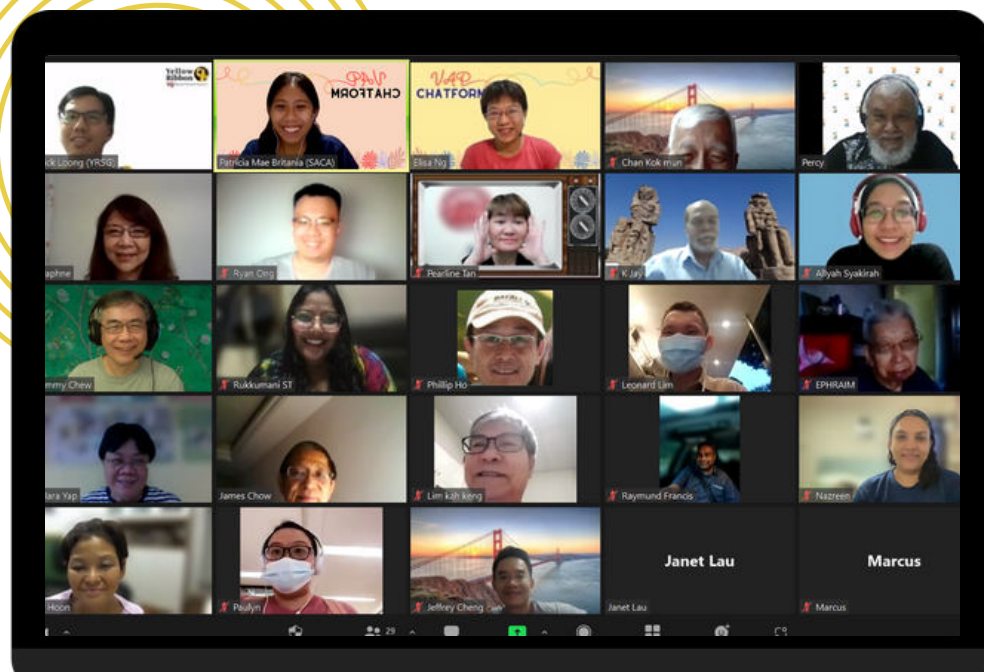
During the peak of the pandemic, the VAP team kept in touch with volunteers through Chatforms - an online platform where volunteers can come together virtually and share their experiences & passion in volunteering.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING: GETTING EQUIPPED WITH NEW SKILLS

Volunteer training continued both online and in-person. Training was conducted for new Volunteer After-Care Officers (VAOs) who were starting out for Befriending & IIMAC. Volunteers were also invited to attend ad hoc training opportunities that covered topics related to reintegration & rehabilitation.

TEAM BONDING: CONNECTING THROUGH FUN & GAMES

With social restrictions eased up, coming together for fun & games was extra meaningful! Volunteers came together for an afternoon of games at MIND Cafe earlier this year.



A GLIMPSE INTO APPRECIATION NIGHT 2022



*SACA Appreciation Night 7 Oct 22
Out at the Movies!*

After a three-year hiatus of in-person events due to covid-19, Appreciation Night finally made its face-to-face return in 2022!

Volunteers, partners & invited guests were treated to a movie experience at Projector X: Picturehouse. The movie of choice was See How They Run – Disney's witty and whimsical take on a classic whodunit.

The evening kicked-off with a welcome speech by SACA's Chairman, Mr Jeffrey Beh, followed by an awards segment for volunteers.

Fifty-six volunteers were recognised for reaching key service milestones over the past three years when no recognition events were possible.

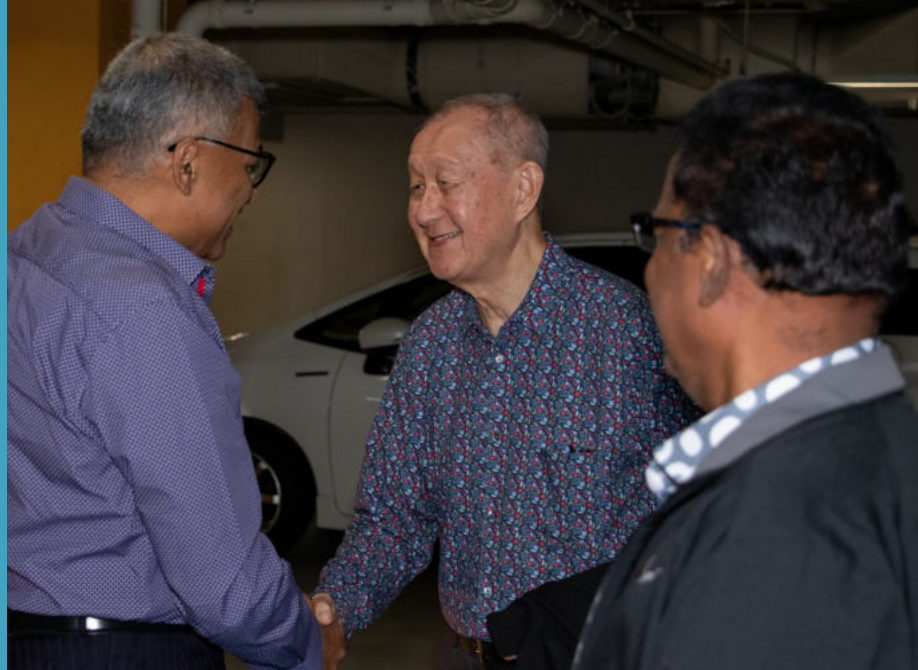
SACA also had the honour of recognising the efforts of two individuals who were part of the pioneer batch of volunteers and have been supporting our clients since 1997.

Awards were given out by Mr Beh and as well as our Patron and Guest-of-Honour, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon.

Marking the VAP's Silver Jubilee, it was fitting for us to pay tribute to the people who were part of the journey from the very beginning.

Having been established and jointly developed with the Singapore Prison Service (SPS), we were delighted to have Commissioner of Prisons, Ms Shie Yong Lee, join us on behalf of SPS to mark this special milestone.

We enjoyed catching up with our volunteers, partners and invited guests in-person for the first time since 2019.



SNAPSHOTS OF AN2022



**TOO OFTEN
WE UNDERESTIMATE
THE POWER OF
A TOUCH,
A SMILE,
A KIND WORD,
A LISTENING EAR,
AN HONEST COMPLIMENT,
OR THE SMALLEST ACT OF CARING,
ALL OF WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL
TO TURN A LIFE AROUND.**

LEO BUSCAGLIA



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