

ANGELINA JOLIE

Disney
MALEFICENT

IN CINEMAS 29 MAY

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Rating To Be Advised

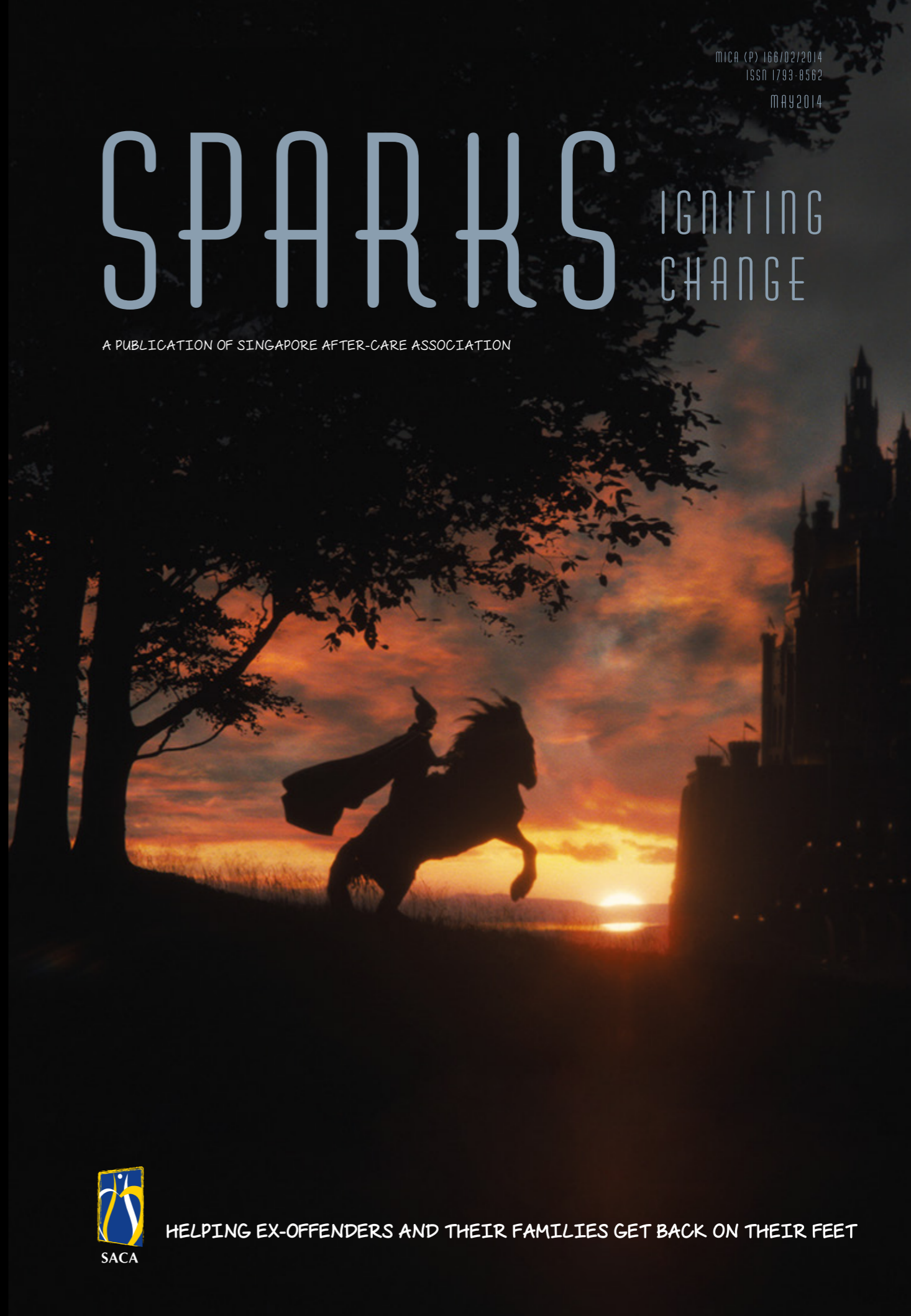
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SPARKS

IGNITING
CHANGE

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SACA

HELPING EX-OFFENDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES GET BACK ON THEIR FEET

EDITOR'S NOTE

The list of top villains in the reel world includes such famous names as Darth Vader, Magneto, Loki, Voldemort and Hannibal Lector. Somewhere in that list lurks Maleficent. But who is this character Maleficent? She wears a dark black robe (like Darth Vader); she has horns (like Loki), has a pet crow and possesses the power to shake kingdoms and bring kings to their knees (like Voldemort).

YET IS MALEFICENT A TRUE VILLAIN? OR IS IT HER APPEARANCE THAT MAKES HER A VILLAIN?

Society tends to judge people based on appearances and we label them conveniently and speedily without much thought or sensitivity. Of course, deviant behaviour will always earn the displeasure of the community. That is rightly so. But perceptions can be tainted. What we see may not be what it truly is. Think about it - because the person has a tattoo, must he be a triad member? Because the person did time in prison, must he be a bad egg deserving all the stigmatization and prejudice that life can throw at him?

When a community holds a certain point of view (be it real or imagined) towards a particular group of people, that point of view becomes magnified and sadly becomes a stereotype. Stereotyping has grave underlining connotations and consequences.

Bryant (2013) explained that "once someone has been successfully labelled as a criminal or deviant, the label attached may become the dominant label or 'master status' which is seen as more important than all the other aspects of the person. He or she becomes a 'hooligan' or 'thief' rather than a father, mother or friend. Each label carries with it prejudices and images and this may lead to others interpreting the behaviour of the labelled person in a particular way." A man is not defined by how much money he has in the bank or the position he commands in his day job. Sometimes we forget that an ex-offender (who has done time and paid his dues towards society) is also a husband to a wife; a father to a son and a friend to someone.

Through Bryant's writings, there is another sociology scholar that I have come across. Wilkins (1964), in his research and writing, pointed out that when someone is labelled a deviant the person gets cut off from society and lives in a deeper subculture, which further isolates from the wider community.



Call it herd instinct or the basic human desire for companionship and acceptance, this labelled person then associates with like-minded others and shields himself away from the one entity that could help as it offers some form of normalcy - society at large. The irony is that it is society itself that has labelled that person deviant and almost certainly would not be willing to reabsorb that person into the fold because of his deviancy. Thus isolation almost certainly pushes that person back into criminal activity as the only way to survive. Such is the tragic fate of many ex-offenders and the impact it has on their respective families.

So when we look at a character like Maleficent, we have to see beyond the pitch black robes and the menacing-looking horns and wings. We have to suspend our disbelief (and bias) and see her for who she truly is - a beautiful but hurt soul who wants nothing more than peace, love and harmony with her immediate environment. It is the All-or-Nothing mantra that makes Maleficent's stature soar as the movie unfolds and makes the audience wish that life could have been kinder to her. This is the classic tale of Sleeping Beauty retold through the eyes of the antagonist and how a ruthless betrayal turned her heart stone-cold.

To me, this is not just another Hollywood flick with a big name in it. This movie has gravitas and meaning. It is about demonstrating heart, love and true forgiveness when the odds are stacked against and the options are few. It is about being at peace, reconciling the past and moving forward confidently into the future. Indeed the spirit of Second Chances resonates throughout the movie.

SACA needs and values your support. Last year we achieved a significant milestone in our fundraising efforts. We were able to raise \$137,000 in the event in 2013 to make up for the shortfall that goes towards the funding of much-needed counselling, welfare and educational programs for the benefit of our clients. By being present at

this Charity Film Preview, making a donation and showing your support to the cause, you are sending a strong signal to the wider community that the marginalized voices among us are not muffled. The plight of offenders, ex-offenders and their families are heard.

In an interview, Angelina Jolie (who plays Maleficent) summed it up very nicely; 'She isn't the pretty princess. She isn't a beautiful queen. She's a very awkward, pointy, slightly scary-looking horned creature who goes through a lot in her life, as we discover. Maleficent is actually a great person. But she's not perfect. She's far from perfect. In general, it's a very good message to say, "Let's look at something from the other side."

There is a bit of a Maleficent in each of us. We have been hurt to varying degrees, felt helpless and disappointed enough to not keep count anymore. However, does it mean that we give up and stop loving and hoping? Hatred demands more and more emotional space until it crowds out all positive emotions and leaves us gasping for breath. Like Maleficent we can learn and strive to be better. The road to recovery requires a suspension of guilt and bias; and empathy to see things from the other side.

Enjoy the movie folks! May the Rainbow Fairy bless and keep you in her whimsical magic always. This is Eric Lue here signing off - Vale! ;)



Danggschē

谢谢

Thank You

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Merci

Takk

Terima Kasih

None of us got to where we are alone. Whether the assistance we received was obvious or subtle, acknowledging someone's help is a big part of understanding the importance of saying thank you.

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KIITOS

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Harvey Mackay

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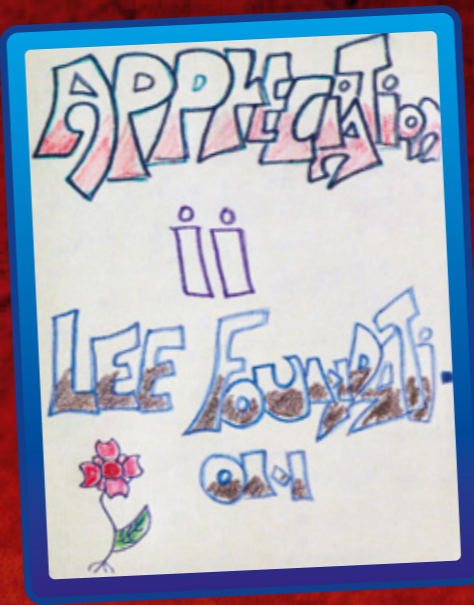
Рахмат

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Dankie

The Importance of Saying Thank You!

These pages are dedicated to the Lee Foundation which has so generously supported SACA over so many years. Education is instrumental in opening new doors to career opportunities and previously un-imagined possibilities for an ex-offender. However, many ex-offenders' dreams of pursuing an education are hampered due to a variety of reasons. The reasons include a lack of knowledge on upgrading opportunities, lack of family support and guidance, as well as financial constraints. The Lee Foundation Education Assistance Scheme (LFEAS) provides the opportunity, through a co-funding scheme, for our clients to pursue GCE and tertiary qualifications.

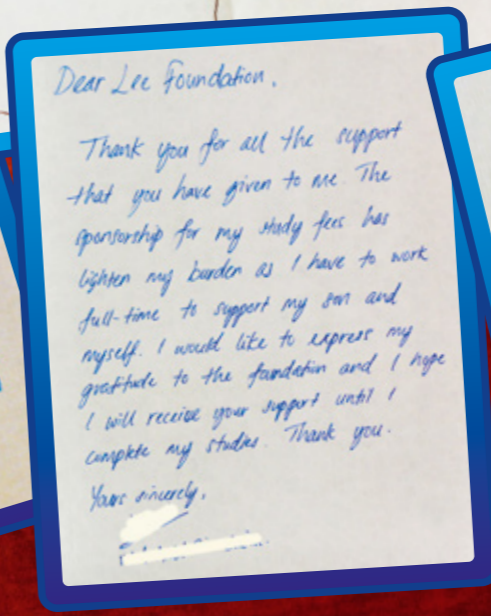
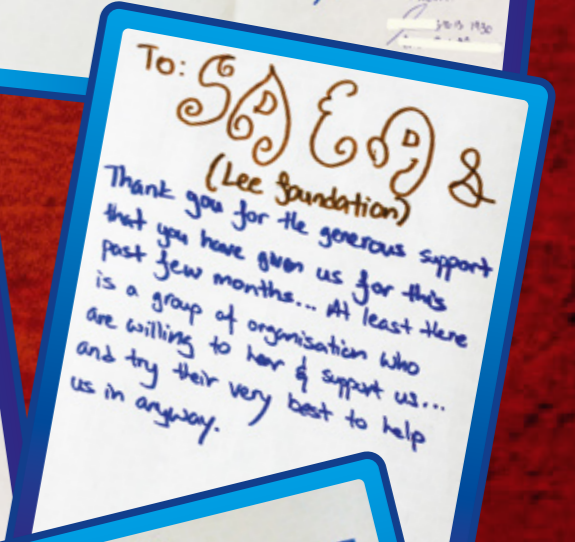
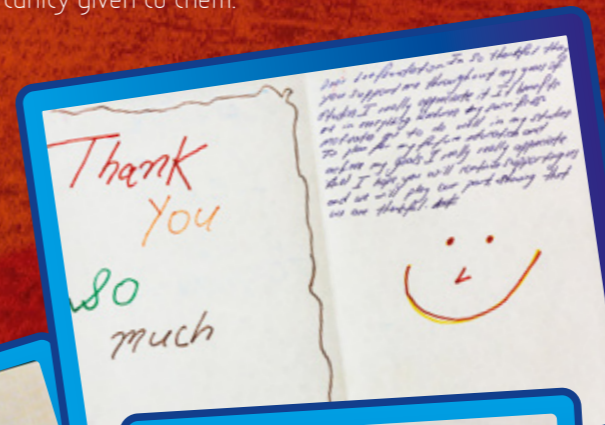


Applicants eligible to apply for the scheme includes those who have been released from prison or the drug rehabilitation centre (DRC) not more than 2 years prior to the application. In addition, inmates who are due for release soon and wish to pursue their studies after release may also apply.

Apart from monetary assistance, LFEAS beneficiaries will be placed under SACA's Education Support Programme whereby caseworkers will work closely with them throughout the course of their studies and involve them in various other initiatives like team-building, peer-to-peer interaction and community service

aimed at their total development. The objective is to foster a sense of community-mindedness and gratitude in these people so they themselves can be valuable members of society.

The generosity and good work of the Foundation in partnership with SACA is worthy of mention. The student-clients of the LFEAS program are also reminded to make full use of the opportunity afforded them as a result of the generosity of the Foundation. They regularly also write to the Foundation to express their gratitude for the opportunity given to them.



SACA Volunteer Appreciation Night 2013

TREASURE!

In today's fast-paced digital world of e-mails, e-cards and e-commerce., the personal touch matters. This is especially so in the charity and NGO-sector where caring for beneficiaries has to be personalized and undertaken with a human touch. After-care and counselling cannot be "e-care", done remotely via computers and terminals. We are talking about people here. And for a community-based organization like SACA, our volunteers are key as they very often are the face of the organisation.



Volunteers are generous donors. They donate their time, energy and expertise to a cause they believe in. Through this they are able to raise awareness and be the much-needed spokesperson for both the cause and the organization. It is with this in mind that SACA organises the annual Volunteer Appreciation Night as a gesture of thanks to the many volunteers who have given of themselves in the cause of reintegrating lives.

Held at the Furama Hotel on 22nd November 2013, the Guest-of-Honour for the event was Associate Professor Ho Ping Kee, who is also the Patron for SACA.



It was an evening whereby staff and volunteers came together in comradeship. There were lucky draws and various on-stage games to keep the audience entertained. However, it was the brave testimony from Mr Pee Kong Eng of Breakthru Mission, together with his SACA befriender, Ms May Hui, which earned the loudest applause on the night. Mr Pee spoke about the struggles he faced after his life in prison and how community support and family has helped a person like him stand on his feet again. It was very emotional but inspiring. Everyone applauded Mr Pee's courage and determination to lead a better life.



Perhaps the highlight of the evening was the performance put up by the staff of SACA. They performed the Bruno Mars hit "Treasure". It was a simple catchy song and dance item but the heart-felt emotion was there for all to feel. Volunteers and guests present were all very impressed. Despite everyone's busy schedules, kudos to the staff who stepped up and organized such a memorable and meaningful finale.



Recently I attended an Easter service. A story was shared:

A young priest was tasked to deliver a sermon by the senior priest. On the day itself, he stood in front of the congregation and asked the congregation if they knew what he is going to say. The congregation answered in unison "No". And he replied "I don't know either" and he ended the sermon.

The senior priest insisted that the young priest attempt the sermon again. On the second day, the young priest stood in front of the congregation and asked the congregation if they knew what he was going to say. The congregation answered in unison "Yes". The young priest replied "Good! Then there is nothing else for me to say" and he ended the sermon.

The senior priest felt frustrated; and demanded that the young priest make amends. On the third day, the young priest stood in front of the congregation and asked the congregation if they knew what he was going to say. Half of the congregation said "Yes"; and the other half said "No". And the young priest said "Great! Then those who know what I am going to say tell those who do not know."

So what do we know about the plight of ex-offenders and the struggles that they face on a daily basis? Besides that cute little yellow ribbon that many pin on their shirts and tops, what do we understand about the cause of reintegration and second chances?

Most of us come from a more fortunate background. We have our families and friends to love and support us; and some of us are doing so well in life that we seldom pause to spare a thought for the less fortunate in our midst. It is inevitable with everyone living life at breakneck speed – it is really difficult to slow down and look back at the people who are sick, abandoned and marginalized.

Sociology scholars like Roots (2008) contend that criminal convictions have always carried collateral consequences in addition to their formal penalties. According to him, the current system (and situation) urges ex-offenders to be productive citizens but spurns them from full-fledged membership in polite society regardless of their successes. Roots observed that formerly-convicted individuals meet with a wide range of social and occupational disabilities like facing employment discrimination, banishment from many careers (notably in the financial, trust and professional sectors) , occasional inability to obtain professional licenses, and general disenfranchisement from a political system that has little incentive to listen to their grievances.

While the recidivism rate in Singapore is about 27% (2013 figures) compared to over 60% in the United States, the challenges facing ex-offenders are universal. Problems relating to finances, accommodation and job placement are common. The odds are heavily stacked against an ex-offender with no support system

upon his release. Lacking in decent job opportunities with limited possibility of meaningful career progression and no home to return to after a period of incarceration it is really not hard to understand that some return to their old and troubled ways.

What is even more worrying is this: many of these ex-offenders are also fathers and husbands. Their unfortunate absence from the family unit has greatly reduced their interaction time with their children and wives (and partners). This will in turn reduce their effectiveness as role models and bread-winners for their families. The family unit is precious and must be protected and nourished. When families are broken through incarceration, it is likely that the cycle will be handed down to the next generation.

In my limited time here in SACA, I have seen all kinds of clients who have knocked on SACA's door seeking assistance. Some are young ex-offenders and perhaps cushioned by their youth; they are able to project a certain level of positivity and resilience when facing the future and seeking help. Others are just clueless and live life day-to-day from hand-to-mouth. And there are some with an overwhelming sense of despair and hopelessness even though they have just been given back their freedom.

Sometimes I would try to imagine what it would be like to walk out of Changi Prison gates with no one waiting for me outside and I am required to face the world out there by myself. What would I do? Where do I go? Who do I call for help? For some without support these questions can be tough and the answers non-existent.

Certainly there is no lack of government assistance available. The Yellow Ribbon Community Project (YRCP) is one such community-based volunteer initiative which I think is yielding the right results so far. According to a press statement released by Singapore Prisons in 2013, this program has 390 registered and trained volunteers

benefiting 800 families of inmates. Unquestionably, YRCP alone is not enough. More can be and should be done at all levels to help the plight of ex-offenders and their families.

It is easy to understand why certain employers exhibit reluctance in employing ex-offenders; or landlords unwilling to lease out their properties to them. There is no guarantee that an ex-offender will not bite the hand that feeds; go back to his old wanton ways and disappoint the community (again). After all, recidivism does exist. Blame the individual; blame society; blame life or blame the government, there is no quick-fix solution to this problem.

The truth is there will be no solution until we as a society begin to understand the plight of ex-offenders and the challenges they and their families face in the process of reintegration. Instead of labelling and stereotyping, we ought to take the first step to embrace and change our mind-set towards them.

The words "reintegration" and "second chances" are not mere buzzwords thrown around for agencies to raise money for this cause. Real transformation takes courage, empathy and love. And transformation requires acute awareness. Many in our community are unaware and form prejudice opinions from events they do not understand. For those of us who are aware of the plight of ex-offenders and their families, it is our moral duty to speak up and do our best to dispel prejudice. We should not shy away from such topics and thereby create a failure to communicate. Things may not change overnight. An individual's effort may appear ineffective. But it's a start and everything adds up. There are many things out there that can make us happy and make life worthwhile. We may not see them yet; but they are there. There is always hope for a better life and a better environment for all.

Sometimes all we need is a spark to get the fire burning in the right direction.

Chasing THE SPARK

SACA relaxes: RIVER SAFARI



"The earth has music for those who listen." George Santayana

Our work environment is such that we tend to be so focused on the tasks and matters at hand that we lose sight of the simple but important fact that we are all part of a larger environment. While we interact and help our clients, we need to understand balance and know when to take a step back to enjoy a quiet moment and to remind ourselves that life is more than work.

On 17th March 2014, we gathered at The River Safari in Mandai for an afternoon of back-to-nature team-bonding. The River Safari is Asia's first and only river-themed wildlife park inspired by the world's most iconic rivers like the famous Mississippi River, the Congo, Nile, Mekong and Yangtze River.

The entire visit was nothing short of awesome! So many exotic animals and creatures that is distinct to their regions! There were beavers, giant river otters,

manatees, Mississippi paddlefish, killer catfish, sting rays and an opportunity to get up-close and personal with the short-furred squirrel monkeys in their natural environment. In addition, there are also predators like jaguars and monstrous alligators; as well as the Brazilian tapir and the maned wolf to wow visitors.

One of the key highlights for many visitors (including all of us) must be the panda exhibition. The panda exhibition showcases the very adorable red pandas and the giant

pandas Kai Kai and Jia Jia from China. Nothing beats seeing a real live panda as opposed to watching it on National Geographic. Such a huge creature, yet so mild and looking so cuddly.

The exhibition informed us that Pandas are on the list of endangered species and that the danger for extinction is very real. According to the World Wildlife Federation, there are only about 1,600 mature giant pandas left on this earth. It makes one really ponder about the trade-offs between

break-neck progress, rapid economic development and modernization as opposed to keeping a part of the eco-system intact. What is good about this exhibition is that it provokes important thoughts and prompts reflection among visitors with regards to the wider environment and our value system.

For us, it is not just a day of fun and laughter away from the office. It is about team bonding; and taking a step back from the daily routine of work to recharge and refresh.

