

IGNITING CHANGE

SPARKS

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

WWW.SACA.ORG.SG

SACA

The Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) is a key aftercare agency providing welfare and rehabilitation services for discharged offenders and their families. The Association recognises that, upon release, the discharged offender (thereafter referred to as client) would face challenges related to employment, stigmatisation, and acceptance by the family and others. It also recognises that, during a client's imprisonment, the family may be faced with several emotional and financial problems.

SACA was formed in 1956 and was registered as a charity and attained IPC status in 1984. The Association is a voluntary welfare organisation affiliated with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and is also a member of the Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network.

SACA's aim is to assist clients and their families to cope with problems arising from the offending behaviour and the consequent incarceration. This is done with the belief that such assistance would give clients the chance to reintegrate into society successfully thereby reducing the chances of recidivism.

With compassion and patience, we hope to inspire the community to look beyond our client's labels and provide them with the opportunity to start afresh.

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The Honourable The Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

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Community Service: Lee Ah Mooi Old Age Home (Thomson)



13 clients from the Case Management Programme offered their services to brighten the morning of the elderly residents on 22 April 2018. Clients were enthusiastic in carrying out the tasks assigned and did their best to bring smiles to residents' faces!



Charity Film Preview 2018

On 26 April 2018, the Association hosted its annual charity event. Thanks to The Walt Disney Company (Southeast Asia) Pte Ltd, we secured screening rights to the long-awaited Marvels' Studio franchise, The Avengers: Infinity War. We would like to thank Mr Louis Ng, Member of Parliament (MP) for Nee Soon Group Representation Constituency (GRC), for gracing our event as Guest of Honour. This year was our best yet, we raised \$280,000 with the generous support of our sponsors: Certis CISCO Security Pte Ltd, DBS Bank Ltd, Singapore Airlines Ltd, GIC Private Ltd, Progress Galvanizing Pte Ltd, and Singapore Totalisator Board.



CNB Drug Awareness Talk

On 28 April 2018, CNB provided SACA's volunteers with a look into the different types of illegal drugs currently being abused, as well as the corresponding harm they cause and the penalties for their misuse. Learning never ends at SACA!



Staff Bonding in Batam

On 30 April, SACA's staff sailed across the sea to Batam for a day of relaxation! There, we visited a coffee factory, where we sampled Kopi Luwak, the most expensive coffee in the world. After a buffet lunch shopping was how we spent the rest of the day!



Racial Harmony Day

Each year, SACA celebrates the rich diversity of cultures in Singapore with a scrumptious feast! This time, we also tried our hand at traditional games (such as five-stones and chapteh) and tried on ethnic garments of various races.



Family Day

22 July 2018

Getting wet in the hotter than usual months in the middle of the year is a refreshing treat! 104 clients and family members were treated to a day of fun at Wild Wild Wet. Staff also engaged them in constructing DIY Photo Frames, for keepsakes with which to store photos from the joyous day. We hope our clients had a blast!



Credit: Wild Wild Wet Singapore

ESP Event : MINDS CAFÉ

The third event for the Education Support Programme this year challenged the minds and creativity of our ESP students. New and existing students bonded over board games and food at MINDS Café, which offered them a well-deserved break from juggling work and study.



A Return to Batam!



Following the success of the staff trip to Batam, SACA's volunteers paid a visit to the island as well. This time, they were able to taste popular kueh lapis and visited the quaint sounding The Illusion Trick-eye Museum.



Wise Words, Warm Hearts

We ask four VAOs for their very real and candid tips on their volunteering journey!

SACA is always grateful for the warm support of our Volunteer Aftercare Officers (VAOs) in the work that they do with clients; be it as Befrienders, in the Initiative for Incarcerated Mothers and Affected Children (IIMAC) programme or the family-connect @ State Courts initiative. For new VAOs, the journey ahead will be an exciting one, but more experienced VAOs will tell you that the work comes with its own set of challenges, despite the best intentions of volunteers to support those who need guidance in life after prison. We've compiled tips from VAOs on how they manage the work that they do. Perhaps you can pick up a trick or two!



“After client’s release from prison, and if he makes contact, make yourself available and try to meet up. This is a crucial period when the client needs a friend. I also set reminders for weekly calls and monthly meet ups (if possible), and for their birthdays, so I can call them or send a birthday card to prison. Hari Raya, Chinese New Year [and other special festivities] are great opportunities to say hi as well!” - Triwina Wahyudi (Joined July 2017)

“For us [volunteers], if we cannot make it [for appointments in Prison], we cancel it right? But for clients, that may be the only [visit] for them, so they look forward to it. [There was once] when I went to Tanah Merah Prison, I was 15 minutes late, and my client was so disappointed! He thought I wouldn’t come anymore. I was like, oh my gosh, I didn’t know it means so much to them so you have to be [responsible].” – May Hui (Joined May 2002)

“I tell [clients] that they can inform me or SACA if they want to change their befriender and that I will not ask for the reasons. I will then [have a chat with] Aishikin or Nur [to find out] if [the request is due to] my shortcomings so that I can work and improve on them. In this way, I can grow in my befriending journey. I should not take this personally!” - Lim Kah Keng (Joined May 1998)

“My take on volunteering can be summed up in A-B-C: Acceptance, Building rapport and staying Connected. Without acceptance, we are unable to move forward to build rapport. It is also important to remain connected with them and to let them know that we are committed to this journey with them!” – Clara Yap (Joined May 1998)

“One puff, and I wasted over 30 years.”

VAO Seng* has a colourful past, but is now determined to help others treading the path of drugs and crime that he has turned his back on.



Seng decided that enough was enough. In his own words, Seng candidly remarked, “I [have] faced [everything] already – enjoy also enjoy already, jialat also jialat already, suffer also suffer already. I thought [to myself], it’s enough.”

Speaking to him, it is clear that Seng has many talents and strengths, chief of which is his perseverance and dedication to making life better – for others and him. Once he decided he wanted to stay clean, he started working with the first employer that took a chance on him. He ended up working there for eight fulfilling years, winning the best employee award in his very first year, gaining the trust of his bosses as a responsible and hard worker.

We often come across members of the public approaching SACA to volunteer because they want to do something meaningful by helping others. Indeed we cannot be more thankful to our Volunteer Aftercare Officers (VAOs) for their selfless contribution to the betterment of their fellow Singaporeans who struggle to leave a life lived on the wrong side of the law.

But ever so often, we get a special gem. Someone who has walked a dark path, only to emerge from it stronger and wiser, wishing to guide others like him to a brighter tomorrow. VAO Seng is one such individual.

Seng had spent part of his youth and much of his adult life involved in everything from robbery to the running of illegal gambling dens in order to feed his heroin addiction. He had also owned a moving company and was briefly in the casino business. Along the way, Seng met like-minded individuals who were quite willing to break the law for fast profits, often landing themselves in hot soup with the authorities and with peers. Life, unsurprisingly, was chaotic and unstable.

In 2006, after living a life of crime for more than 30 years,

So what prompted him to be a volunteer with SACA? Seng’s wife, a VAO with SACA herself, saw his strengths in connecting with people from all walks of life and the potential to give back to society. Hence she encouraged him to volunteer. Seng’s kind-hearted nature has always been evident. He was always looking out for others and willing to help his friends in trouble. When he worked as a shipyard supervisor, he often spent his salary on food and drinks for his workers, as they were underpaid and he empathised with how tough their jobs were.

With his belief that people can change, just like he did, if they have the will, Seng often starts his first session with clients with the words, “I was just like you.”

We thoroughly enjoyed our chat with Seng. Not only did we get a snapshot of how life as a heroin addict and gambling den owner was like in Singapore’s early years, but it reminded us that one’s capacity and potential to make a difference in this world is endless. All the best in your journey, Seng!

**Name has been changed*

MINDS Bakers

In line with encouraging the community to do their parts in extending a helping hand to beneficiaries, SACA is dedicated towards supporting local community efforts. This year's Appreciation Night dinner is special as we will be gifting our guests with cookies from MINDS Bakers!

MINDS Bakers is one of the Social Enterprise units started by MINDS in 2012. These units are created to provide work engagement and employment opportunities for their beneficiaries – Persons with Intellectual Disability (PWIDs). Back then, the unit consisted of five beneficiaries and one training officer. They flipped to the easiest recipe from a cook book and baked MINDS' first batch of cookies. Since then, the team has expanded greatly and the beneficiaries have been trained in various aspects – food handling, scoping, reading the weighting scale, and more.

Through this work engagement, beneficiaries feel a sense of accomplishment and confidence. For one, they are provided with allowance in return for their hard work. Additionally, some of them, given the right tools, are able to independently bake cookies and treats outside MINDS kitchens for their families.

Today, they have a wide range of cookies and baked treats to boast of! MINDS Bakers offers a wide variety of packaging and customised solutions for weddings, birthday parties and corporate events. All sales proceeds generated goes on to pay the beneficiaries a monthly allowance, a morning tea break and lunch in MINDS.

Do consider them should you be looking for door gifts, while supporting a good cause, you will not be disappointed!

Visit them at: <https://www.se.minds.org.sg/>



The aroma of baked goods is therapeutic to anyone.



Drawing from the Heart

“When I paint sunflowers, I want it to be a very happy thing. It is a bright flower that shines a pathway for people if they’re in a lot of pain.”

For most of her life, art has always been an extension of Jane*. Her passion for the arts was apparent from a young age, which led her to practice drawing.

It is a means through which Jane is reminded of the things and people around her who she is grateful for. “When I was inside [the halfway house], these experiences push you to go back to your roots. I missed drawing so much at the time, I frequently sneaked doodles in the books that we read... little things from my memory.”

Realising her talent, her mentors at the halfway house encouraged her to take the plunge and enrol for a diploma course in the arts. Despite initial fears – “I was very sceptical, so old already.” – Jane received support from her family, friends, and SACA, and has recently graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art.

An art piece that is of significance to her is a still life painting of a kitchen table, inspired by her family and togetherness. “In the past I seldom went home for dinner but now I try to. So this painting is to encourage people that family is important.” Jane is now closer than ever with her Mum, who is her strongest pillar of support.

Through it all, Jane has remained humble and thankful. “I’m not a professional artist, but I feel that I lead an artist’s life.”, Jane quips. She believes the defining characteristic of an artist is being open to experiences and appreciating the simple joys of life.

“It is important to experience simple things with a rich heart,” she believes. Indeed, Jane takes inspiration from our everyday lives, from traveling, to reading, to observing human connections.

She hopes to influence reflective thought and conversations through her art pieces, reminding us to stop and treasure the simple moments around us.

We wish Jane success in her future endeavours!



Jane is a graduate of SACA's Education Support Programme, graduating with a Diploma in Fine Art from NAFA. She has graciously gifted her oil painting to our Guest of Honour, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, at this year's Appreciation Night dinner.

*Name has been changed

Essay Writing Competition

Realising the talent of prison school inmates, SACA's Education Support Programme (ESP) has hosted an annual Essay Writing Competition since 2012. This year, 118 students from various institutions participated in the event held on 28 May 2018. The essay titles were derived from motivational quotes that centre on journeys, believing in oneself and venturing beyond boundaries.

The scripts have undergone two rounds of grading before the winners were selected, whose families were treated to NTUC vouchers. Excerpts from the winning entries featured here highlight the internal struggles of inmates as they prepare to leave their past behind and confront the present, which entails believing in themselves and receiving support from loved ones around them.

Amateur Category

Title: Journey

Have you ever reflected on the decisions that you have made in life? All the paths you have chosen, all the obstacles that you have faced, all the people you loved or hurt? It can be a truly overwhelming experience.

The first major junction in my life's journey came about when I was sent to Australia, at the age of 15. As I was there alone, I had to decide whether to adhere to my family's hopes and expectation, or submit to the allure of new found freedom. Taking the easier path, I set out to indulge in all the offerings of this new found land. Giving free reign to my senses in the land Down Under, soon, alcohol and cigarettes became part of my daily life. As school slowly became an afterthought, I started experimenting with drugs. Pills, mushrooms, LSD, and weed; nothing was too exotic which eventually set me down a slippery slope towards the abyss.

Even after returning to Singapore, my drug use was not left behind in Down Under. Hiding behind the façade of a decent job, I soon graduated to heroin and methamphetamines as I was constantly chasing the next trip to nirvana, even if I had to suffer hitting the nadir of paranoia and desperation, as the effect of the substance wore off. I just could not let this poisoned manna go.

My addiction reached a point where I no longer cared about the people around me. Just as the cannibals of New Guinea fed on their kinds, I fed on the emotions and feelings of my family and loved ones as I continued down a slope, that if I slipped, I might never be able to climb up and out. On 9 October 2009, I finally slipped. In order to pay for my growing addiction, I started

trafficking. As long as the money was right, any drug or weight was acceptable. This came to a crushing end when I was arrested with 1.3kg of heroin.

With a mandatory death sentence for anything above 15 grams, I knew this was the end. Whenever I closed my eyes, I would see myself on a platform, with a hood over my head and a noose around my neck. This image haunted me from sixteen months.

February 2010, just as I was going over the edge, I caught a rock. This rock was the news that if I pleaded guilty, I might be given a lighter sentence. Agreeing to the terms, I started a new journey as an inmate, with a jail term of 22 years and 8 months.

Prison gave me a lot of time to reflect on my journey in life so far; its every action, every word and every broken relationship. More fortunate than most, my family never gave up on me, my friends accepted me.

"There is still a chance!" I told myself.

Nowadays, my family, every friend and every stranger that come into my life, telling me not to give up, are like rocks embedded on the slope I had fallen down from. They give me the courage and persistence to pull myself up again, and journey towards a clean and safe life.

As Shira Tehrani said, "You can't do anything about the length of your life, but can do something about its width and depth." Maybe, my life's journey will one day encourage another person, just like me, to not give up even when you fall.



Open Category Title: Believe

I am twenty-six years old this year and for most of my life, I was clueless as to what I believed in, in fact, I was more familiar with the antonym and the enemy of the word "Believe", which is "Doubt". Throughout my incarceration I discovered many quiet moments to mull over life. I realised that I was in denial to certain flaws and that I adopted a very passive and complacent attitude in life. Also, I fail to give myself credit when it is due. During once of these moments it occurred to me that I did not necessarily need a solo story to inspire others to be motivated. I just needed the right words and pure intentions to let others who are struggling know that there is always hope.

I had a random thought about drugs once, and the huge role it played in my life. It led to my incarceration and instead of continuing to blame myself and wallowing in my own pool of self-pity for the rest of my sentence, I decided to embrace my situation. To me, the worst feelings to experience is not anger or sadness, in fact, I feel that regret and disappointments are what damages our souls the most. At this point in life, I decided to stop regretting getting involved in substance abuse. As long as I have a heart that beats, I shall live. As long as I had a mind to think, I shall think positively. Instead of making excuses for myself, I feel that I should believe in myself. We should never give ourselves the labels that we often give ourselves, especially negative ones.

Believe. There are many aspects to this one word. Aside from the most common relation to religious faith, the idea of being true and having faith that something exists struck home for me. I had to believe in myself, that I could change my own life around if I only had

faith in myself. The first step I took was getting rid of "Doubt", after successfully accomplishing that mission, I proceeded to get rid of Doubt's brother, "Worry". My mother once said to me "Worrying is just like a rocking chair, you rock and rock but it gets you nowhere."

Sitting in this silent hall now as I am writing this together with many others, I am ready now to share with the world what I believe in, and what this word means to me. When I finally accept that I am exactly like the universe, ever-changing, then maybe I could have a second shot at life. Everyone that has ever given up and gave in to doubt still have a shot in this life. When you start to believe in yourself, and love your own soul, only then will you be able to fully love those around you. Only then will you be able to face the challenges you stumble upon bravely. You may not claim victory over every challenge life throws you, but believing that there is goodness and truth that exists in this world would be fuel to keep you going. I want to share with everyone the light that I found at the end of my tunnel – Pain, it is only temporary, whatever demise and hurt you are experiencing will eventually pass. However, giving up? Giving up is forever. Do not give up after each failure, in the word "Believe", the alphabet "I" comes before the alphabet "E". Make this a reminder that "I" stands for yourself, that you should start believing in yourself first, before you can start to truly believe in "E" – everyone else.

Finally, when you believe in yourself, you will come to realise that maybe it's not the past that has a hold on us, but the fear of it that keeps us from moving forward.

Project Soteria

SACA has had recent history of collaborating with Nanyang Polytechnic's Diploma in Social Sciences (Social Work). We have had many interns coming on board our team, and just last year, we jointly published RISE, a series of guidebooks for families of offenders. This year, a group of students decided to switch the focus from clients to the practitioners working in the correctional aftercare setting.

These practitioners work with clients of complex backgrounds, helping to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-offenders into society. As such, meeting with the demands and challenges of work can have negative repercussions on practitioners' well-being, and could pose a threat to their safety – mentally, emotionally, and physically. This toolkit hopes to promote safety protocols and the practice of self-care.

The toolkit consists:

Safety Manual

Highlights the importance of practicing safety protocols for organisations, and facilitates application of safety practices recommended through case stories, which comprise interviews with practitioners.

Self-care Guide

Provides practical steps that one can take to understand the importance of self-care. Also recommends activities that practitioners can adopt.

Memo Pad

Designed to encourage practitioners to be aware of the well-being of colleagues, and show their appreciation through writing notes of affirmations for each other.

Habit Tracker

Through colourful lists, practitioners are encouraged to break negative habits or patterns and adopt good practices. It could be as simple as taking more breaks throughout the work day, or engaging in physical exercise.

Card Game

Be the first player to obtain a set of Work, Sleep and Self-care hour cards!



Healthy Mind, Healthy Spirit

Whether you're a social worker, a volunteer, or simply one of the millions of employees in sunny, hectic Singapore, fully disengaging from work can be a challenge. Why not try meditation?

As social service professionals will attest, they were once innocent students who had no issues grasping the concept of "self-care". Who doesn't know how to take care of themselves, right? But since those carefree days, we've probably faced clients with substance abuse issues, traumatic life histories and crippling physical and mental health problems on a daily basis, and suddenly few know what self-care means anymore.

Regardless of your occupation, how does one take time away to relax and, heaven forbid, enjoy yourself with your friends and loved ones?

But you know what they say about helping yourself before helping others – in the event of an airplane

emergency, put the oxygen mask on for yourself first before you attend to others, because if you're out, then what good can you be? Taking time away for yourself to tend to your own needs and emotions will not only make everyday tasks and challenges more bearable, but help you be more productive as well.

Mindfulness meditation and self-care strategies have been shown to relax your mind and improve symptoms of anxiety and insomnia and lower blood pressure, great for clearing your head after a long day of sessions with clients, or starting your day with a positive headspace. If you're new to meditation, check out these meditation apps for an easier start to a new routine you could incorporate as part of self-care.



Headspace

Describing itself as "your personal meditation guide, right in your pocket", Headspace has themed sessions that come in packs to suit your needs, such as the happiness meditation packs, work and performance meditation packs, and health meditation packs, among others.



Tide

Tide is a treasure chest full of sounds of nature to help you focus, meditate, and even drift off into peaceful slumber. It includes a focus timer to help you concentrate on your task, a guided breathing option and a tide diary to record your focus or sleep data.



Calm

Whether you're a beginner or advanced meditator or even somewhere in-between, the guided meditation sessions that are available for durations from as short as 3 to 25 minutes will be perfect for you to practice calming the mind no matter how crazy your schedule looks.



10% Happier

Built for "fidgety sceptics", 10% Happier is for those of us who are feeling ambivalent about trying out meditation, but are determined to achieve better mental health. You might find the practical application tips to your relationships, work, etc. really useful and right up your alley.



SACA NEEDS YOU!

SACA has several events coming up in the next year and we invite you to join us in making these events memorable for our clients and guests.

If you are able to contribute towards our event in any way, do write in to enquiries@saca.org.sg !

Here's how you can help:

- Goodie bag items
- Venue sponsorship
- Food sponsorship
- Talent in media (Photography, Videography, Design, and more!)
- Contribute as a guest writer for SPARKS and SACA's website




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