



WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Strength of **Connections**

Annual Report
2023



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Board & Staff

Andrew da Roza	Chairperson
Robert Chew	Treasurer
Dr Winslow Munidasa	Director
Frances Cheang	Director
Koh Kah Yeok	Director
Dane Anderson	Director
Jennifer Lim	Director
Dr Lee Cheng	Director
Tina Doran	Director
Swapnil Mishra	Director
Tham Yuen Han	Executive Director / Clinical Director
Cesar Balota	Corporate Services Director
Yvonne Yuen	Senior Counsellor & Operations Manager
Anna Chua	Finance & Admin Manager
Leslie Goh	Communications & Relations Manager
Simon Ling	Communications & Peer Support Executive
Nirmala Turasamy	Admin Executive
Noor Sida bte Abdullah	Counsellor
Alvin Seng	Counsellor
Sonam Damani	Counsellor
Whitney Mah	Counsellor
Roy Yeng	Counsellor
Afandi Ahmad	Recovery Guide
Jess Ang	Recovery Guide
Enid Chia	Recovery Guide
Oliver Ackermann	Associate Counsellor
John Chua	Associate Counsellor
Chai Bin Hua	Associate Counsellor
Jennifer Chan	Associate Counsellor
Isobel Barclay	Associate Counsellor
Stanly Leung	Associate Counsellor
Gowri Kirchberg	Associate Counsellor
Alex Lim	Associate Counsellor

List is correct as at 31st December 2023

WE CARE

Mission

- **Advocate** for persons with addiction, and their families
- **Provide** evidence-based clinical treatment for addiction
- **Deliver** community-based recovery programmes, in order to facilitate re-integration into society
- **Elevate** professionalism and expertise for addiction treatment

Vision

To be the **leading community hub** of addiction recovery in Singapore

IPC Reference	CFG060012
Charity Registration Number	01888
Unique Entity Number (UEN)	200506089N
Bankers	DBS Bank Ltd CIMB Bank Berhad, Singapore Branch
Corporate Secretary	Tricor Singapore Pte Ltd
Auditor	Fiducia LLP

WE CARE Community Services is a company limited by guarantee and registered under the Charities Act. As a charity with Institution of Public Character (IPC) status, we provide programmes and services for persons who are in recovery from addiction, as well as their family members and significant others.

A full member of the **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)**, **WE CARE** is in its 18th year of operation in 2023.

Message

Andrew da Roza

Chairperson

This year has been a very busy year for **WE CARE**.

We have substantially grown the number of clients, the numbers of therapy sessions and the numbers of therapy hours. As a result, we have added several wonderful professional addiction treatment therapists to our clinical "family".

We are considering a number of solutions to meet our need for more therapy space.

We have also faced several financial challenges arising from inflation, which included: utilities cost rises; stamp duty increases; and salary and benefits rises in the sector.

Increasing charity governance requirements, multiple audits, and other regulatory requirements have also increased our capital costs and our ongoing administrative and human resources costs.

We are, therefore, very thankful for the grants and support from the *Ministry of Social and Family Development*, the *National Council of Social Service*, the *Tote Board*, *Community Chest*, the *President's Challenge*, *Singapore Pools*, the *National Council on Problem Gambling* and the *National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre*.

We would also like to acknowledge our partners at the *National Addictions Management Service*, *Institute of Mental Health*, *Singapore Prison Services*, the *Singapore Management University* and the *Singapore University of Social Sciences*.

Our gratitude and thanks also go to *Marina Bay Sands*, *The Grace*, *Shua and Jacob Ballas II Charitable Fund*, the *Isaac Manasseh Meyer Trust Fund*, *C K Holdings* and *ChemOne Holdings*.

Thank you also to generous individual donors, in particular, *Dr Guo Song*, *Mr Chen Yaoji*, *Mr Danny Teoh*, *Mr Tang Chuan Ann*, *Mr Lim Hock Leng* and *Mr Robert Chew*.

With 4 fundraising events conducted, we raised donations in the amount of SGD 369,505 - almost quadruple that of the preceding year in 2022.

2022 saw the introduction of 2 directors to the Board. **Ms Tina Doran** who has more than 30 years of experience in client management in the financial services industry, joined us in July; and in September, we welcomed **Mr Swapnil Mishra**, banker, author and educator and a prior volunteer at **WE CARE**.

In accordance with the maximum ten-year Board tenure requirements of the Charity Commissioner, I am stepping down from the Board.

I am very proud of what **WE CARE** has accomplished over this period - and the many hundreds of people we have helped to find and to stay the course in addictions recovery.

They are the true heroes in the **WE CARE** family - and I have drawn great inspiration, strength and courage from their example.

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Country Club
ber 2023
port addiction recovery

WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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S Y Lee

T H Tan



Message

The stress of the Covid pandemic resulted in a spike in services demand, where we experienced a 36% increase in caseload by end 2022, in comparison with pre-Covid 2019.

So, even as pandemic safety measures were lifted in 2023 and we welcomed the resumption of more in-person sessions and activities at the **WE CARE** centre, we were faced with the urgent challenge of space. With the higher caseload and a slightly bigger staff team to serve more people, we needed more amenities for counselling, Drop-in activities and workspace for staff.

After failing to secure the rental of the newly vacated Block 4, next to our current premises at Block 5, we embarked on a creative restructuring of the existing space to make room for the most essential amenities.

We renovated and refurbished 3 existing indoor meeting and storage space and we secured additional space by extending the rental of our current built-in premises to include the open space behind block 5. By Q3, we managed to create 3 new counselling rooms, 2 of which will be housed in mobile office-pods alongside our outdoor garden. These pods also serve as accessible small-group meeting rooms for the smaller recovery support group which are less than 10 in person. The clinical team of 10 part-time counsellors now also have a dedicated hot-desking room. While we managed to resolve the space constraints in 2023, we are mindful that in the long term, we will need to consider the financial viability of growing our capacities to meet with increasing demand for our services, in view of an increasingly crowded fundraising landscape.

With this increased capacity, we managed to log almost 4,000 counselling sessions in 2023. Recovery support group meetings hit a high of 720 hybrid meetings by end 2023; a 24% increase over 2022. This increase in service provision was driven primarily by 2 factors – Firstly, by more referrals from the *Singapore Prison Services* to *Project SAFE 1.1*, a Community

Chest-funded programme that is tailored specifically for prison inmates serving their last leg of a drug rehabilitation sentence; and secondly, an increase in open referrals into our *Sober Living Framework (SLF)* programme.

Under *Project SAFE 1.1*, where an annual target of 60 cases has been set, we have surpassed the 3-year cumulative target of 180 cases, closing 288 cases by December 2023.

In an independent programme outcome research conducted by *Verian* (formerly *Kantar Public*), it was found that service users displayed a heightened awareness of potential triggers, and 67% of the interviewees were able to articulate strategies for sustaining drug abstinence. Overall, the findings suggest that *Project SAFE 1.1* has been effective in equipping service users with strategies to sustain their sobriety, particularly in tempting situations.

We are thankful for the continued funding support from *NCSS* and the *Community Chest* for *Project SAFE 1.1*. But with the impending reduction of funding for this project after 2024, we will need to reconsider the financial viability of this service for the prison population, given the more urgent need of meeting increasing demand for services and support from service users in the larger community.

Sober Living Framework (SLF) is the core service offering at **WE CARE** under which a majority of our service users are registered. The SLF programme is aimed at people from all walks of life in the community, catering to all forms of substance and behavioural addictive issues.

In 2023 alone, we handled more than 730 referrals under the SLF programme. Of this, close to 70% of requests are made by persons personally suffering from one or more addiction issues, or by a related family member impacted by their addiction.

Tham Yuen Han

Executive Director

An important tenet of **WE CARE**'s mission is to increase awareness for early intervention of addictions, encourage help-seeking behaviour and deliver affordable community-based recovery programmes for persons and families in the community.

So, we are very heartened to see this continued increase in help-seeking behaviour where people in the community come forward willingly to seek help, not because they are compelled by institutions. It is also a clear affirmation of the need that professional help and support continue to be made available to people in the community in an affordable and timely manner.

A significant trend we have noted is the change in the demographic profile of the people that we serve. Based on aggregated data of our registered service users, we note that those within the age range of 13 to 34 years now comprise 43% of total service users in 2023. In comparison, this age group comprised only 38% in 2021, and 25% in 2019.

Along with the changing age profile, we saw an increase in educational and literacy level as well. Guided by this observation, we expanded on our social media outreach in 2023 through *Instagram*, *TikTok* and *Facebook*. At the same time, in the offline space, we stepped up on outreach events, awareness talks and educational workshops to all the major educational institutions in Singapore.

We took a concerted effort to drive more focus on youth-related issues such as gaming, internet and pornography use, eating issues, alcohol abuse and experimental substance use. We held more than 40 talks and community events last year, and reached 2,640 participants, driving home the messages for preventive needs, early detection, intervention and support for various forms of addiction and mental health issues.

In 2024, with a team dedicated to driving community outreach and education, we will continue to advocate

for prevention, early detection and intervention, with greater focus on engaging a more youthful audience.

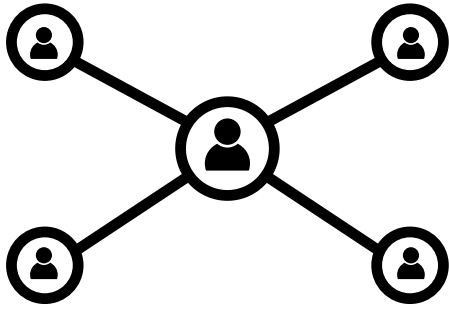
We plan to increase engagement with the youth segment via higher educational institutions and secondary schools. Parallel to this, we plan to introduce more therapy services to meet the needs of a younger demographic profile. In 2023, we trialed 2 new programmes – **NOCOSO** and **SAGE**; both of which are attended by participants in the 20s to 30s age group.

NOCOSO is designed to tackle non-contact sexual offending behaviour, whilst **SAGE** is a facilitated support group to address disordered eating behaviour. In 2024, we plan to extend collaborations with our community partners to increase awareness for both these programmes, especially with the educational institutions.

The progress we made in 2023 are the fruits of dedication from all our staff, volunteers and partners. I extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to each and every one of you - for championing the cause of addiction recovery and continuing to serve and advocate for an often marginalized and stigmatized group. Our gratitude also goes to all the partners, sponsors and donors who have made our vision possible. It is only with your unwavering support, that we can realize our mission to transform and rebuild the lives of those entrapped in addictive disorders.

On a final note, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to our outgoing **Board Member Mr. Andrew da Roza**, who has devoted close to 10 years serving as Chairman on the **WE CARE** board. Stepping down from the board in 2024, Andrew has been instrumental in bringing **WE CARE** to its current level of professionalism and growth. On behalf of all our staff and beneficiaries, my utmost gratitude to Andrew for his undivided dedication to our cause and for his generous support and guidance through the years.

2023 in numbers



734
referrals handled
714 (2022)



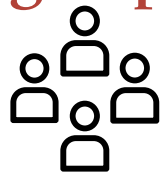
621
caseload served
662 (2022)

volunteers



194
people
78 (2022)

recovery support group meetings



720
meetings
581 (2022)

fundraising & donations



	2023 (\$)	2022 (\$)
Fundraising	281,332	59,416
Matching Grants	88,172	36,019
Donations	101,663	132,620

WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES

counselling therapy provided

(Includes Individuals, Families and Group Sessions)



3,971
counselling sessions
provided
5,054 (2022)



4,549
hours
provided
5,707 (2022)



outreach audience

2,640
outreach
audience reached
2,487 (2022)



NAMS & hospitals
1,207
people



halfway homes
& schools
422
people



MBS
336
people



others
675
people

Current Programmes

SOAR Substance or Alcohol Recovery

A structured therapy programme for individuals with substance, prescription medication and/or alcohol abuse problems. The therapeutic process is conducted in a safe, non-judgemental environment, through counselling and also support from the recovering community, to maintain motivation and effect lasting changes.

SPLA Sex, Porn and Love Addiction

This therapeutic programme is for individuals with sex, pornography and/or love addictions. Through a collaborative process of exploring antecedents, psychoeducation, and assessing the present needs, the client will be better informed to identify their therapeutic goals and develop an individualized treatment plan under the therapist's guidance.

IGA Internet and Gaming Addiction

To help individuals with internet and/or gaming addiction, this programme works with the affected individual or their family members to help them understand the problem and collaboratively develop a treatment plan that not only focuses on reducing use but also encourages positive lifestyle habits.

GRIP Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme

To help individuals struggling with an uncontrollable urge to keep gambling, clients in this programme learn to identify how their urge to gamble comes about; the triggers, resources available to help manage it; and through that, develop a relapse prevention plan.

ATO Atypical Theft Offending

Through individual, group, and couples/family therapy, as well as workshops and self-help support groups, this programme works with clients and significant others to understand the behaviour, identify accessible coping resources and develop strategies that prevent further compulsive shoplifting.

ADAM Anxiety Depression or Anger Management

ADAM is a skill-based programme designed expressly to help recovering persons who struggle to manage their anger or express negative emotions effectively. Participants receive guidance in positive coping behaviours and develop skills to express themselves effectively so that their needs get communicated without escalating to volatile exchanges.

CSO Counselling for Significant Others

Providing care and support for individuals struggling with addiction can be challenging and may at times evoke feelings of loss and helplessness. This programme works with significant others to help them understand the recovery process and to identify the challenges they face, so that they can better manage, build healthy boundaries, and support loved ones.

SMART Self-Management and Recovery Training

A self-empowering recovery support group for addiction recovery where participants raise and discuss issues and challenges; and where crosstalk is encouraged so that social learning can take place. The facilitator provides direction and contextualizes the participants' sharing using evidenced-based tools while ensuring a safe space for expression and learning.

Mindfulness Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention

An open group to learn and practise mindfulness, which helps participants to develop awareness of their physical and mental states, and learn to be comfortable with acknowledging or managing thoughts and feelings as they come. Mindfulness has been found to be effective for individuals with a history of addictions or reactive behaviours.

NOCOSO Non-Contact Sexual Offending Programme

The NOCOSO programme is developed to help clients abstain from non-contact sexual offending behaviours. Through the process, participants will increase awareness of their behaviours, learn about triggers, develop healthy coping mechanisms, establish accountability for their own actions, develop empathy for victims and other persons harmed, and prevent future offending.

Current Programmes

SAGE Support and Awareness Group for Eating

This group programme is developed to help clients better understand their eating habits and behaviours. Through this process, participants will achieve better understanding of the various eating issues, increase awareness of their own behaviours, learn about triggers, develop a healthier relationship with food, establish healthy coping mechanisms and prevent future occurrences of negative eating cycles.

F&F Family & Friends

A facilitated support group where family members and close friends of recovering persons share and learn from each other's experiences in providing support for someone with addiction. Facilitators also cover techniques and strategies they can adopt to take care of their own mental health.

12-Steps Introduction to 12-Steps Principles

The 12-Steps were created by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous to establish guidelines to overcome an addiction to alcohol. Because of its success, the approach has been adapted for other addiction support groups.

SAFE Support for Recovering Addicts and Their Families through Empowerment

An initiative spearheaded by NCSS in collaboration with Singapore Prison Service to treat former inmates and their families. The objective of the programme is to prevent drug relapse and re-offending amongst former offenders with a drug history.

RiSE Reintegration into Society through Employment

A structured programme to match beneficiaries with job coaches who work with them to assess their needs and goals in order to prepare them for returning to working life. Tutors are provided to upskill them in their journey to reintegrate into the community at large.

TiDE Tech Inclusion Digital Enablement

An initiative that loans out digital devices to beneficiaries to enable them to communicate, attend meetings and receive counselling services online. The devices also allow beneficiaries to be digitally connected, find information on the internet, and take online courses.

NOCOSO (Non-Contact Sexual Offending)

in Focus

In 2023, we continued to focus on the **NOCOSO (Non-Contact Sexual Offending)** therapy programme, designed to assist clients in refraining from engaging in paraphilic (non-contact) sexual offending behaviours.

After its pilot launch in 2022, the NOCOSO therapy programme doubled in participant enrolment, in full trial in 2023

The programme is overseen by trained professional counsellors and has been introduced to the public through our on-going outreach initiatives.

If you are unsure whether the NOCOSO therapy programme is suitable for you or if you would like to learn more about it, please reach out to our helpline at **3165 8017** or email us at help@wecare.org.sg. Clients are assured that all information is handled with utmost confidentiality.



Outreach

WE CARE sought to reach out to a more diverse population in 2023. Amongst some of the places where public awareness talks were conducted were religious institutions (Novena Church) and educational institutes (NYP, SMU, NUS & NTU).

In our report last year, we covered our expanding efforts to focus on issues more relevant to youth: *Internet & Gaming Addiction, Binge Drinking, Sex, Porn and Love Addictions* and Eating Issues. In line with this directive, our outreach efforts involved addiction awareness talks to students from the *Working With Youth* elective in *Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP)* to aid in their project work. Aside from our on-going collaborations with *NUS, Hwa Chong Institution* and *National Junior College*, we also conducted a workshop for the *NTU* counselling team to share our expertise in addiction and to support referrals from their university.

In 2024, we will look to continue with more collaborations. As the emphasis on youth continues, so will we, in our bid to provide education and awareness for parents, educators and caregivers alike.

Social Media

Apart from conducting awareness talks at educational institutes, social media represents perhaps the best avenue to reach youths. Consequently, in an effort to increase our audience, we have taken steps to enhance our online presence.

We have been posting content on all major social media platforms, with a frequency of 3 posts per week. Additionally, we have introduced a new short-form video format to drive higher engagement. Our content covers a range of topics aimed at educating and raising awareness about addiction. Furthermore, we provide updates on activities at **WE CARE**, including outreach initiatives, outings, classes, and major holiday celebrations to give potential clients and volunteers an accurate insight into the life of recovery.

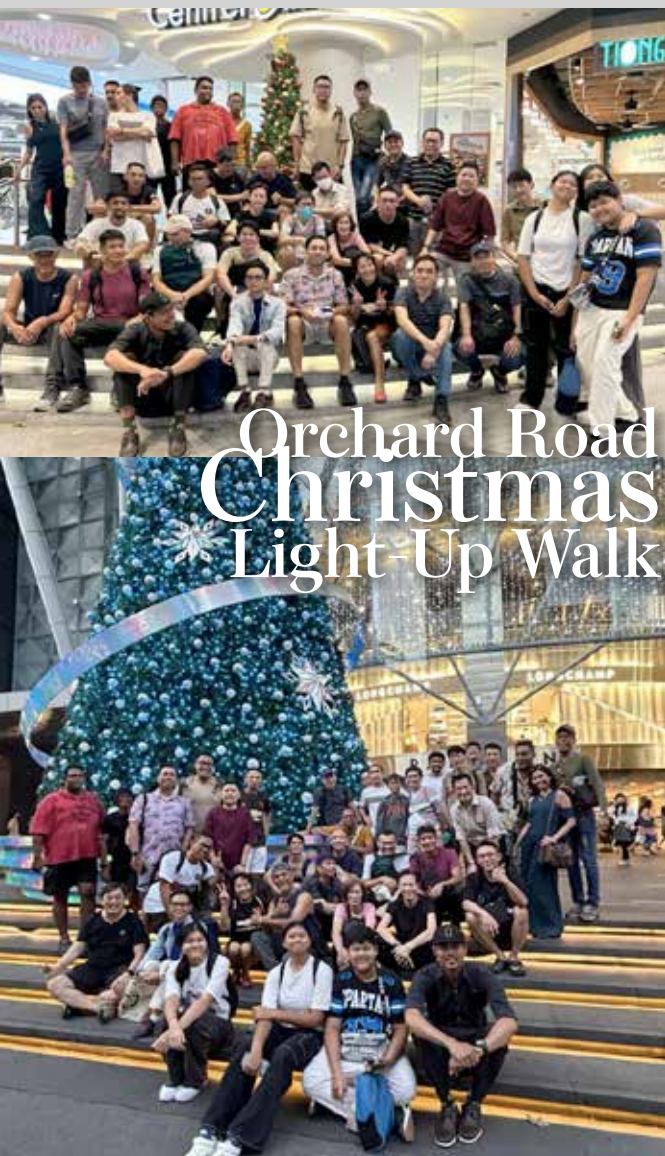
To connect and stay in touch with **WE CARE**, visit us on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or LinkedIn @wecarespore.



Centre Highlights



National Day BBQ 2023



Orchard Road Christmas Light-Up Walk

A popular year-end outing to check out the mesmerizing Orchard Road Christmas light display. Organised for the FairPrice Walk for Rice initiative, it is a great way to give back to the community.

14th Finisher Awards

A key event at WE CARE that celebrates the milestones in our recovery journey, this bi-annual event saw 24 recipients at the 14th and 15th Finisher Awards.



15th Finisher Awards



Pickleball

We got in on one of the fastest growing sports in the world. Held either at Kampong Ubi CC or the courtyard behind the centre.

Held every 3 years, this year's Asia Pacific Orchid Conference at Singapore Expo witnessed some of the most beautiful and exotic orchids in Asia.



Asia Pacific Orchid Conference



Visit from Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) Community Corrections Command (COMC)

Officers from DRC and SPS visited our centre to understand how WE CARE works and the services that we offer.



SAFE Family Day

The *Project SAFE Family Day* was a fun-filled day for families to bond and rebuild connections with one another.



Sands for Singapore Charity Festival 2023, themed *Where Hearts Come Together*, enables non-profit organizations and the public to come to make a collective difference to society.



Sands for Singapore Giving Festival & Heartstrings Walk



Collaboration with Church of St. Alphonsus (Novena Church)

In a collaboration with Novena Church, we set up a booth at the church grounds, and participated in a video to raise awareness on addiction and recovery.





Walk for Rice



For the 2023 edition of the NTUC FairPrice Walk for Rice initiative, **WE CARE** covered a total of 525.3km. This raised 1,751 bowls of white rice, brown rice and oatmeal respectively for needy families.



National Addictions Awareness Day (NAAD) 2023



Organised by the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) biennially to raise awareness about the different addictions and platforms to seek help, the 2023 edition was held at the National Library.

MacRitchie Treetop Trail



Nature walks are well-participated activities at **WE CARE**. Together with students from National Junior College, we completed the MacRitchie Treetop Trail, covering its well-known 250m-long freestanding suspension bridge.



Charity Bread Collection & Distribution

In collaboration with Meals On Wheels, a charity that organises food collection and distributes to those in need, **WE CARE** volunteers spend one weekday to pick up artisanal bread to share with our beneficiaries and neighbouring social service agencies.

Community Outreach

With Covid restrictions relaxed in Singapore, 2023 marked a significant milestone for **WE CARE**'s community addiction awareness efforts, reaching over 2,640 individuals — a record high for our organization.

The notable surge in engagement can be attributed to the ongoing national focus on mental health awareness. With unrestricted movement islandwide, nearly all our outreach was conducted in person, allowing for more meaningful connections and increased impact — a perennial goal of ours.

In 2023, we also observed a rise in the number of youths (persons aged 13 to 34) that we assisted, comprising some 43% of our total clients. As a result, we have intensified our outreach efforts to better reach this demographic. We visited educational institutions like *Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP)*, *Singapore Management University (SMU)*, *National University of Singapore (NUS)*, *National Technological University (NTU)* and others. A host of similar public awareness engagements have also been planned for 2024.

We began conducting community awareness talks on mental health and on addiction to religious organizations. In August, we were invited to the *Church of St. Alphonsus*, also known as *Novena Church*, to provide addiction recovery support to the church's community and to collaborate on a video on addiction.

The video can be viewed at the church's YouTube channel. Steps have been taken to initiate discussions with other religious organizations to reach out to populations not routinely served by addiction treatment facilities.

We highlight a few outreach efforts of note.

Tampines West National Day Carnival 2023

awareness to the heartlands by promoting understanding and addressing the stigmas surrounding addiction.

In keeping with the carnival atmosphere, we offered a game where residents could win a prize by answering questions on misconceptions about addiction. This gave us the opportunity to interact with visitors on a more meaningful level. Many stopped by our booth, and it was encouraging to meet young persons with a good understanding of addiction, and a sound appreciation that it is a mental health condition.

Addressing the truth behind stereotypes allows us to advocate change to create a more inclusive and compassionate Singapore.



WE CARE was invited to be part of *Tampines West's National Day 2023 Celebration*. The festival saw many community partners present, as well as food trucks, carnival games, live performances and a fireworks show.

Aligning with our mission of advocacy, this event allowed us the opportunity to engage with the residents of Tampines West, bringing addiction



Conversations on Youth (COY) 2023

Organized biennially by the *National Committee on Prevention, Rehabilitation and Recidivism (NCPR)* and the *Ministry of Social and Family Development*, Conversations is a Symposium that supports youths-at-risk and youth offenders.

To come up with a coordinated line of action to tackle issues faced by youths, NCPR works with government agencies as well as community organizations like **WE CARE**.

For 2023, Conversations explored the complicated world that our youths grow up in, and the multiple influences on their individuals, family and social environment. 3 key areas of focus were outlined:

1. Preventing substance abuse among youths
2. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational offending and,
3. Preventing youth sexual offending

Addiction Awareness Talk for Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) students

WE CARE was invited by the *NYP School of Health & Social Sciences* to deliver a talk about cyber/gaming addiction and sexual addiction to their Diploma in Social Work students.

The purpose of this session was to enhance the students' understanding of these critical and often stigmatized issues. By shedding light on these topics, we hope to empower the students with knowledge that can be applied to their studies and future social work practice.

It was heartening to engage with these young individuals who demonstrated empathy and a genuine interest in addressing societal issues.

We thank Nanyang Polytechnic for providing us with the platform to share our expertise and insights with their students. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to raising awareness and understanding that addiction is a mental health condition.



WE CARE welcomes collaborations with other organizations, to raise awareness about addiction and the services that **WE CARE** provides for treatment and support. Other than talks, the centre can run a booth or organise activities to educate the public on the resources available for treatment, and to dispel the stigma surrounding this mental health issue.

National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)

We continue our longstanding partnership with National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) where we visit the detox ward every fortnight to share with the patients the services that we provide. Towards Q4 2023, NAMS began organising visits to our centre every alternate week. This initiative enabled NAMS patients to engage firsthand with our staff and recovering community and provides a deeper engagement all round.

WE CARE also supports and participates in the National Addictions Awareness Day event, which is organised by IMH and NAMS, and provides a national platform to observe addiction awareness. Aimed at eliminating the stigma around addiction and to encourage those with addiction issues to seek help, it leverages on NAMS' partners to raise public awareness through education.

Singapore Prison Service

WE CARE runs an ongoing programme with Singapore Prison where persons with a drug history who are on tagging can come to the centre for community-based counselling treatment and to participate in centre activities.

The programme also extends help to the partners and families of the prison offenders, and has shown good results.

State Courts

In partnership with the State Courts, WE CARE treats offenders, caught for shoplifting whose behaviour the Courts deem as having a psychological bias.

Pre-sentencing protocol

In more recent years, the Courts have also referred persons who have been sentenced for non-contact sexual offences. Upon their release, they can start treatment with the centre, in order to rehabilitate them and prevent re-offending.

Singapore Pools

The long-term relationship with Singapore Pools began with conducting addiction workshops for their newly hired staff to learn about problem gambling and gambling addiction.

It includes a referral process where Pools is able to refer patrons with potential gambling issues to WE CARE for counselling and treatment.

Collaborative efforts are also made to raise awareness in the community about gambling.

Pools is also a regular supporter of WE CARE's fundraising efforts.



WE CARE collaborates with MBS in a number of ways. We conduct addiction awareness talks to introduce the services provided by the centre to newly hired MBS employees who are deployed at the casino. This forms a part of their Responsible Gambling Programme, which assists their patrons in getting help, and also trains their staff on how to direct patrons to help.

We participate in the annual Sands for Singapore Charity Festival which is typically spread over 3 days. Besides showcasing a number of Sands' partner charities, it helps them to raise funds.

We are also a regular participant in the Community Chest Heartstrings Walk which is co-organised by MBS. In 2023, we fielded 30 staff, volunteers and beneficiaries on this 4 km trek around Marina Bay.

NUS College of Peter and Alice Tan (CAPT)

The collaboration with the CAPT student hostel at NUS includes an addiction awareness talk at their premises, where students are encouraged to initiate discussions on matters related to addictions.

NUS students will also organise activities that involve the recovering community at **WE CARE**, so they can get a better appreciation of the issues and challenges that recovering persons face.

Hwa Chong Institution (HCI)

Every year students from HCI organise activities and participate in them together with recovering persons at the centre. These range from beach cleanups, to language lessons, first-aid workshops and origami classes.

We have also conducted addiction awareness talks at assembly time.

National Junior College (NJC)

Likewise, students from NJC organise activities for our recovering community – from Bollywood dancing, to crafting rainbow looms, to Henna Art sessions and going out on walks, such as the MacRitchie Treetop walk.

WE CARE has also trained the peer support students at NJC on the fundamentals of addiction, recognising the signs and symptoms associated with this mental health disorder, and how they should approach their peers.



Community Partnership

Singapore Management University (SMU)

WE CARE has collaborated with SMU in a number of ways. We were involved in the *Project X* initiative, a university-wide programme which allows students to take on real-world challenges by working on projects with corporates, non-profit and government organizations. Students from the Economics Department conducted a study to determine the economic value of the work done by the centre, and they derived that for every dollar that is invested in **WE CARE**, \$9.80 of benefits are generated for society.

The centre also conducts addiction awareness talks and trains peer support students in addiction-related matters.

Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)

The centre is collaborating with SUSS to create e-learning modules which will be made available to educational institutions and interested members of the public. They will cover addictions and behaviours that youths are increasingly more prone to.

We have also hosted groups of students, both from SUSS and from overseas universities visiting Singapore through SUSS, to help them understand more about addiction and the treatment resources available here.

Meals on Wheels

This organisation works with its partners to collect food to redistribute to individuals and families in need.

WE CARE collects bread from one of their partner organisations on one weekday a week, and shares the loaves with our beneficiaries and other social service agencies at the Kembangan-Chai Chee Community Hub.



Fundraising

As operations resumed to normalcy after the pandemic, we were able to organize a full calendar of four fundraising events in 2023. These included two charity movie screenings (*Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* in June and *The Goldfinger* in December), an art exhibition (*It Takes A Kampung*) in July, and a *Charity Golf* event in October.

In total, 2023 saw a record year of funds raised, at \$369,505 aggregate for the 4 events. Total fundraising costs were a modest \$75,772, the bulk of which were venue costs. There were no professional fundraiser costs; **WE CARE** staff handled the organisation of all events.

This was an encouragement for **WE CARE**, as with the increasing demand for our services, every dollar raised is crucial in enabling us to help not only those recovering from addiction, but their families and loved ones who journey with them as well.

We remain hopeful for a promising 2024 and will continue to strive in our fundraising efforts to better serve the recovering community. Fundraising plans for the next year include a charity movie in May, a Chinese orchestra music performance in September, and in and in November, a treasure hunt race based on the American reality television series, *The Amazing Race*. The target funds to be raised is \$265,000, which with the judicious management of individual event costs, we hope to benefit more fully from the *Enhanced Fund-Raising (EFR)* programme grants from the Tote Board and the government.

We are continually on the lookout for creative ideas and may look at other avenues to bring in funds.



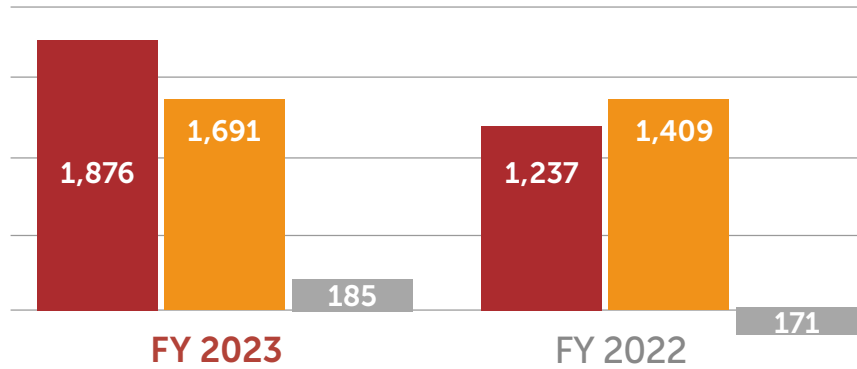
SGD
369,505
 raised in total, including
 matching grants received



Key Financial Highlights

Income & Expenditure

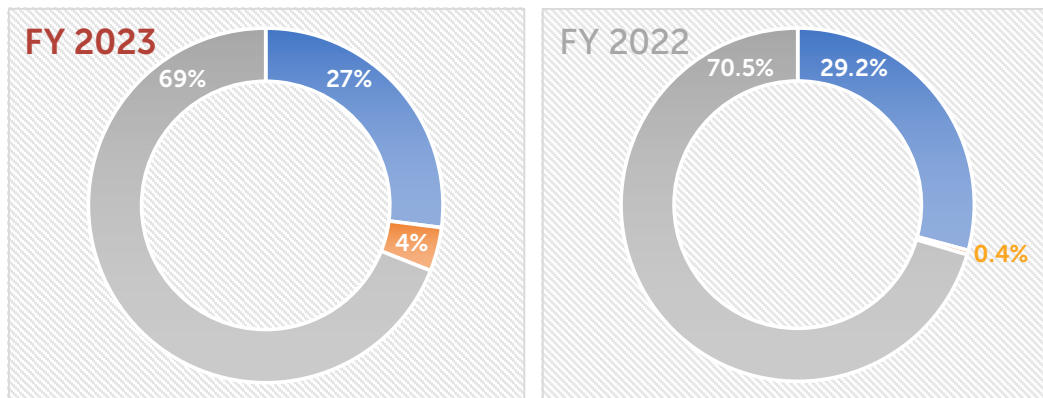
(SGD '000)



	FY2023	FY2022
Income	\$ 1,876	\$ 1,237
Expenditure	\$ 1,692	\$ 1,409
Surplus / (Deficit)	\$ 184	\$ -172

How money was spent

(SGFD '000)



	FY2023	%	FY2022	%
Admin and Governance	\$ 454	27	\$ 411	29.2
Fundraising	\$ 76	4	\$ 5	0.4
Charities Activities	\$ 1,162	69	\$ 993	70.4
	\$ 1,692	100%	\$ 1,409	100%

Reserve Ratio

FY2023	FY2022
1.61	1.83

Governance

Governance Policies

In matters of governance, **WE CARE** takes guidance from the Code of Governance guidelines set out by the **Commissioner of Charities**.

Governance Evaluation Checklist

WE CARE makes annual submissions of the Governance Evaluation Checklist through the online Charity Portal at www.charities.gov.sg.

The Role of The Board

The Board's role is to provide strategic direction and oversight of **WE CARE**'s programmes and objectives and to steer the charity towards fulfilling its vision and mission through good governance. As part of its role, the following matters require Board approval:

- Approve budget for the financial year and monitor expenditure against budget
- Review and approve quarterly financial statements
- Regularly monitor the progress of the charity's programmes.

Term Limit of Board

To enable succession planning and steady renewal in **WE CARE**, the Board has a term limit of ten years. In particular, the Treasurer has a term limit of four years.

In the current Board, there are **2 members** who have served more than 10 consecutive years.

- Name: *Dr Winslow Munidasa*

Reason: The Board values Dr Winslow's expertise as one of the foremost authorities on the clinical treatment of addictions. Dr Winslow is also a Founding Member of **WE CARE**.

- Name: *Frances Cheang*

Reason: Frances has been retained in view of her long experience at **WE CARE**, and her continued commitment and energy. The Board also recognises Frances's vast experience in compliance matters in KPMG, and in her role as honorary treasurer of ComChest.

Board Meetings

The Board meets regularly; there were **3 meetings** in FY2023. Its committees also meet regularly, as needed. The table that follows, shows the composition and attendance of the Board and its committees.

Board Member and Current Board Appointment(s)	Date Appointed	Board Meeting Attendance
Andrew da Roza Board Chairperson Chairperson, Fundraising & Human Resource sub-committees	1 Nov 2014 1 Jun 2018 (appointed Chairperson)	3/3
Robert Chew Director, Treasurer	1 Apr 2022 16 Dec 2022 (appointed Treasurer)	3/3
Frances Cheang Director Chairperson, Audit sub-committee	11 Oct 2007 16 Dec 2022 (appointed audit sub-committee Chairperson)	3/3
Dr Winslow Munidasa Director	5 May 2005	2/3
Koh Kah Yeok Director Member, Fundraising sub-committee	11 May 2016	3/3
Dane Anderson Director Member, Human Resource sub-committee	1 Aug 2017	2/3
Jennifer Lim Director Member, Fundraising sub-committee	2 Jun 2020	1/3
Dr Lee Cheng Director	2 Jun 2020	1/3
Tina Doran Director	14 Jul 2023	1/1 (joined Board in Jul)
Swapnil Mishra Director	25 Sep 2023	1/1 (joined Board in Sep)

Board

Sub-Committees

Board Committees, each with its own defined Terms of Reference, function under the auspices of the Board. Each committee is chaired by a Director, assisted by members approved by the Board. The table below, depicts the summarised terms of reference and composition of the sub-committees in 2023

1. Audit Committee

Assists the Board to oversee the internal controls and risk management system, financial reporting, appointment of external auditor, internal auditor and whistle-blowing.

- Frances Cheang, *Chairperson*

2. Human Resource Committee

Assists the Board in matters relating to human resource, recommends organisational structure, management development, succession planning, performance evaluation and compensation.

- Andrew da Roza, *Chairperson*
- Dane Anderson, *Member*

3. Fund-Raising Committee

Assists the Board in overseeing the overall fundraising activities, and advises the Board on matters concerning all fund-raising programmes

- Andrew da Roza, *Chairperson*
- Koh Kah Yeok, *Member*
- Jennifer Lim, *Member*

Executive Management

- Tham Yuen Han, *Executive Director*
(Appointed to position since 18 December 2013)

Management Team

- Tham Yuen Han, *Clinical Director*
- Yvonne Yuen,
*Senior Counsellor and
Operations Manager*
- Leslie Goh,
Communications and Relations Manager
- Anna Chua,
Finance and Administration Manager
- Cesar Balota,
Corporate Services Director

Corporate Governance Statement

The Board accepts its role without remuneration, and pledges not to accept personal favours or gifts from any interest groups, so as to maintain the integrity of serving for public trust and community good.

All the members of the Board have also declared that during the period under review and while holding their appointment as directors, they have had no personal or vested interest in any of the business transactions contracts or joint ventures into which **WE CARE** had entered.

To support succession planning and renewal of the Board, **WE CARE** is constantly on the lookout for volunteers with diverse skill-sets to contribute in

ensuring our service quality to the community we serve.

The Board conducts self evaluation to assess its performance and effectiveness once every 3 years.

The Board ensures that there is a process to identify, and regularly monitor and review the charity's key risks.

The roles and responsibilities of the Board Chairman and the Executive Director are kept separate in order to maintain effective oversight.

The Executive Director and management team consult with relevant Board Members and the Subcommittees where advice is sought, through meetings, telephone calls and electronic mails.

Conflict of Interest Policy

WE CARE has implemented a Conflict of Interest policy based on the Commissioner of Charities guidelines. All Board members and staff have read the policy and on a yearly basis, have signed the declaration form to renew their commitment and to acknowledge that they have understood the policy.

No Abuse Policy

Since 2018, **WE CARE** has put in place a policy where all staff and volunteers declare and commit to our policy of no substance abuse.

Disclosure of Remuneration

Disclosure of annual remuneration of three highest paid staff who each receives more than \$100,000, in bands of \$100,000.

Remuneration Band	No. of staff
Between \$100,000 up to \$200,000:	2
From \$200,000 and above	0

None of the above staff serve in the Board of the charity

Purpose of Restricted Funds

WE CARE has disclosed its restricted funds in the Financial Statements. Please refer to the Financial Statements for more information.

Arm's Length / Undue Influence

WE CARE discloses that there are no paid staff who are close members of the family of the Executive Head or a Governing Board Member, who each receive total remuneration exceeding 50,000 during the financial year.

Reserves Policy

The charity has a reserve policy for long-term stability of the operations and it ensures that there are sufficient resources to support the charity in the event of unforeseen circumstances. As a general rule of thumb, the charity has 1.5 years of operational expenditure kept as reserves. The reserve level is reviewed yearly by the Board to ensure that the reserves are adequate to fulfil the charity's continuing obligations.

The reserves that have been set aside provide financial stability and the means for the development of **WE CARE**'s principal activity. For details of the reserves, please refer to the complete set of financial statements that can be found on our website www.wecare.org.sg and on the Charities Portal www.charities.gov.sg.

I AM AN ADDICT, BORN AND RAISED.

I am cross addicted to both gambling and drugs. From a very young age I was aware that addiction was in my blood but did not think I could do anything about it - I thought that since those were the cards I was dealt, I'd just have to learn how to work with them. It's like when someone is born into royalty: They might not want to be king but along the way they grew into that role.

As I grew up, I came across many people who commented that I had an "addictive personality", but I paid them no mind. As I look back on my recovery journey, it's clear that there were warning signs that I either ignored or was too caught up to see. You would think that multiple trips to DRC (Drug Rehabilitation Centre) would have succeeded in getting my attention, but they did not.

I made my first bet when I was in Primary 5, and had my first drug when I was 15. At the time I didn't think much of it - they were rites of passage and I was more than happy to be in on them.

Let me begin with gambling, which started innocuously with my auntie helping me make a \$5 bet on Newcastle United to win. The wager seemed to make watching football more interesting, and since the adults in my family were doing it, why not? There wasn't a week that went by where my family weren't stressing over the results of 4D, Toto or football games. Gambling was normalised in the culture I was brought up in, so I saw nothing wrong. Not only was it a way to add excitement to watching live football games, but it came with the promise of quick money.

Where else in the world can you double your money in 90 minutes but in a football match?

My gambling habit didn't truly take off until I got into NS - the first time when I had any semblance of an income. Granted, it wasn't much, but I felt more powerful now that I had some earning power. And so, I channelled this newfound power into my gambling habit. I started making larger bets more frequently, and even started making bets on credit.

I started chasing losses, and borrowed from people to either gamble some more or pay off debts. I have since learnt that these are hallmarks of a compulsive gambler.

At those times, the scary thing was that I was unaware of how destructive my behaviour was, on both myself and those around me. In fact, it felt right. But I was merely making ends meet.

On to my drug problem. It started at 15 when the stars aligned, but in a very distorted way. Within a few days of my trying my first joint of marijuana, I was given my first sleeping pill by my parents. At that time my father had a month's supply of sleeping pills prescribed for him after a slipped disc surgery had resulted in an infection. He was having problems falling asleep, thus the prescription.

Like most teenagers my age, I had a tendency of sleeping and waking up late during the weekend which would then lead to me being unable to fall asleep on Sunday night. Driven by my frustration, I complained to my parents who then proceeded to give me one of my dad's sleeping pills. Again, innocent in itself.

The experience was similar to my mum giving me Panadol when I had a fever. Within half an hour, I was out like a light and had the best sleep of my

life. To make things better (or worse), I woke up feeling more refreshed than I had ever been.

This experience with my parents led to the development of a very dangerous belief - that when I was feeling something negative, I could simply medicate the negativity away.

From then on, whenever the opportunity for me to use drugs arose, I would take it. This extended to alcohol, and carried on for the next 15 years. When I reached legal age, my drug use took off in a similar way to my gambling when I entered NS. Self-medicating with whatever substance I could get my hands on became a way of life.

Coupling the trauma I had from being in a dysfunctional family with the fact that my closest circle of friends had also started gambling, using drugs and drinking alcohol, my addictions progressively became the centre of my universe.

From the ages of 20 to 30, every action I took in life was to feed my addiction. Just constantly finding legal and illegal ways and means to get more drugs or money, and no one was spared.

Sure, in the past I have tried to quit many times, usually when I ran out of money and drugs, but never truly succeeded. I could never attain a meaningful length of sobriety because I would always end up giving in to my temptations. I had reached a point where I was convinced I was stuck in this vicious cycle and there was nothing I could do about it.

I am now 31 and have finally found true recovery. The idea of recovery came into my life after a chance meeting with an old secondary school friend a few months before I turned 30. He gave me the basic facts and asked me to go to a 12-Step meeting, saying that more would be revealed.

That first meeting changed my life, because I met other addicts just like myself, but who had somehow been clean for a few years. They spoke about experiences that were eerily similar to mine, with a sense of freedom that I desperately craved. They seemed to have found the answer.

I eventually found a sponsor who then suggested that I go for detox in **NAMS (National Addictions Management Service)** and subsequently, **WE CARE Community Services**. More than 15 years of active addiction had driven me to a point of hopelessness and exhaustion, so I was willing to take on any suggestion that offered even the tiniest glimpse of hope. I'm glad I did, because if I had not, I would not be writing this today.

Detox helped me through the initial recovery process, but it is **WE CARE** and the 12-Step groups that have helped me stay in recovery. Through these 2 avenues I was able to change my environment from a completely toxic one to one that I feel safe in.

They offer me every tool one could possibly need in recovery, and through their support, I'm slowly piecing my life back together.

Above all, recovery for me has been a journey in self-discovery. I've learnt so much - about myself, why I used to engage in destructive behaviours, why some of the belief systems I developed throughout life were completely whack.

More importantly, I've learnt how to correct the errors. It was tough to admit that basically everything I previously thought was right was in fact wrong, but it was a pill I'm truly happy I swallowed.

REBUILDING MY LIFE, ONE DAY AT A TIME

I was serving my second stint in DRC in 2022 before I heard of *Project SAFE (Support for recovering Addicts and their Families through Empowerment)*. During my last month inside, I was informed I would receive 9 months of support from **WE CARE** as part of my aftercare. In my mind, I told myself I have nothing to lose. I have tried many times to break my addictive behaviour on my own and I have failed time and again.

I was determined to break the habit once and for all and I told myself any help would be good.

I contacted **WE CARE** shortly after I left the *Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC)*. I met up with my counsellor and started my sessions with **WE CARE** under Project SAFE. As I used to work in a professional job before I was arrested by CNB, it was tough for me to return to my last job while under tagging. After realising my ability to secure a job would be challenged, I felt defeated and rejected.

However, my counselor helped me to pick myself up and I started filling my days with visits to **WE CARE** to ensure I was gainfully occupied during that period of time. I started becoming very active at **WE CARE**'s drop-in Centre and also contributed my time as a volunteer leading the peer-led Lunch Meetings. I was also actively participating in the weekly Bread Run, which is a programme where volunteers collect unsold bread from a number of cafes and re-distribute them to charities.

Our collection day is Friday, and we usually collect enough to share with other charities.

During that period of my life, I encountered numerous low points. Each time, I was able to process them with my counselor. I was also able to learn new and better ways of coping which was critical in helping me overcome those issues instead of running back to drugs which was my go-to escape previously. Despite the challenges I faced with re-integrating back into the larger community, I found strength and support through my second family in **WE CARE**.

WE CARE is instrumental in my recovery journey. The non-judgemental nature of the centre made it easy for me to feel safe, connected and supported despite feeling rejected by the community at large. The activities at **WE CARE** are diverse and comprehensive and that allowed me to build new healthy relationships with other recovering addicts at the centre while I was actively cutting ties with my previous friends, some of whom continued using drugs. Eventually, I started to overcome my own personal demons and traumas and when my DRC sentence was ending, this enabled me to get ready to look for active employment.

Eventually, my tag was cut in May. I started to attend job interviews in June and was fortunate to quickly secure a job. I returned to my previous profession in the education sector in July. This would not be possible without the support and encouragement from the staff at **WE CARE** as well as the support from other recovering persons there.

Since my return to my previous industry, I am glad to report that I have been doing well at my job. Also, I continue to go to **WE CARE** weekly for their evening Mindfulness Sessions. Because of what **WE CARE** has taught me, I am also actively volunteering at another social service agency which focuses on equipping ex-offenders with the skills and means to set positive goals to change their lives so that they can give back to society eventually.

I am very grateful to have been introduced to **WE CARE** during this difficult period of my life. I have definitely become a stronger person and a more empathetic individual while recovering from my addiction habits which had become entrenched over the years.

Because of **WE CARE**, I am hopeful that recovery is possible even for the most hardcore of addicts.

One just needs to start with the yearning to quit drugs for good.

Kyle & Steven

KYLE - FROM BEHIND BARS TO A BRIGHT NEW FUTURE

I can't remember the exact date I first came to **WE CARE**, but I do recall meeting my future counsellor during my DRC incarceration in 2022.

From there on, I was intrigued by **Project SAFE** and **WE CARE**.

My first impression of the **WE CARE** environment was good and everyone I met at the centre seemed happy and balanced.

I enjoyed the one-to-one sessions with my counsellor because I could share my inner self and express my feelings genuinely for her to evaluate without prejudice. They also help you develop a positive mindset, point you in the right direction, and help you to look at issues from different perspectives.

For the group sessions, I appreciate that the empathy shown by the other participants and the counsellors are great. I personally try not to dwell on the sharing of negative experiences, and focus on the positive instead.

Because of **SAFE**, I now have a career, and have good relationships with family, my partner and friends.

I have no doubt that every recovering person has their own issues, but the community at **WE CARE** never gives up on helping, sharing, and caring as one to support each other positively. It takes many helping hands to elevate each other positively.

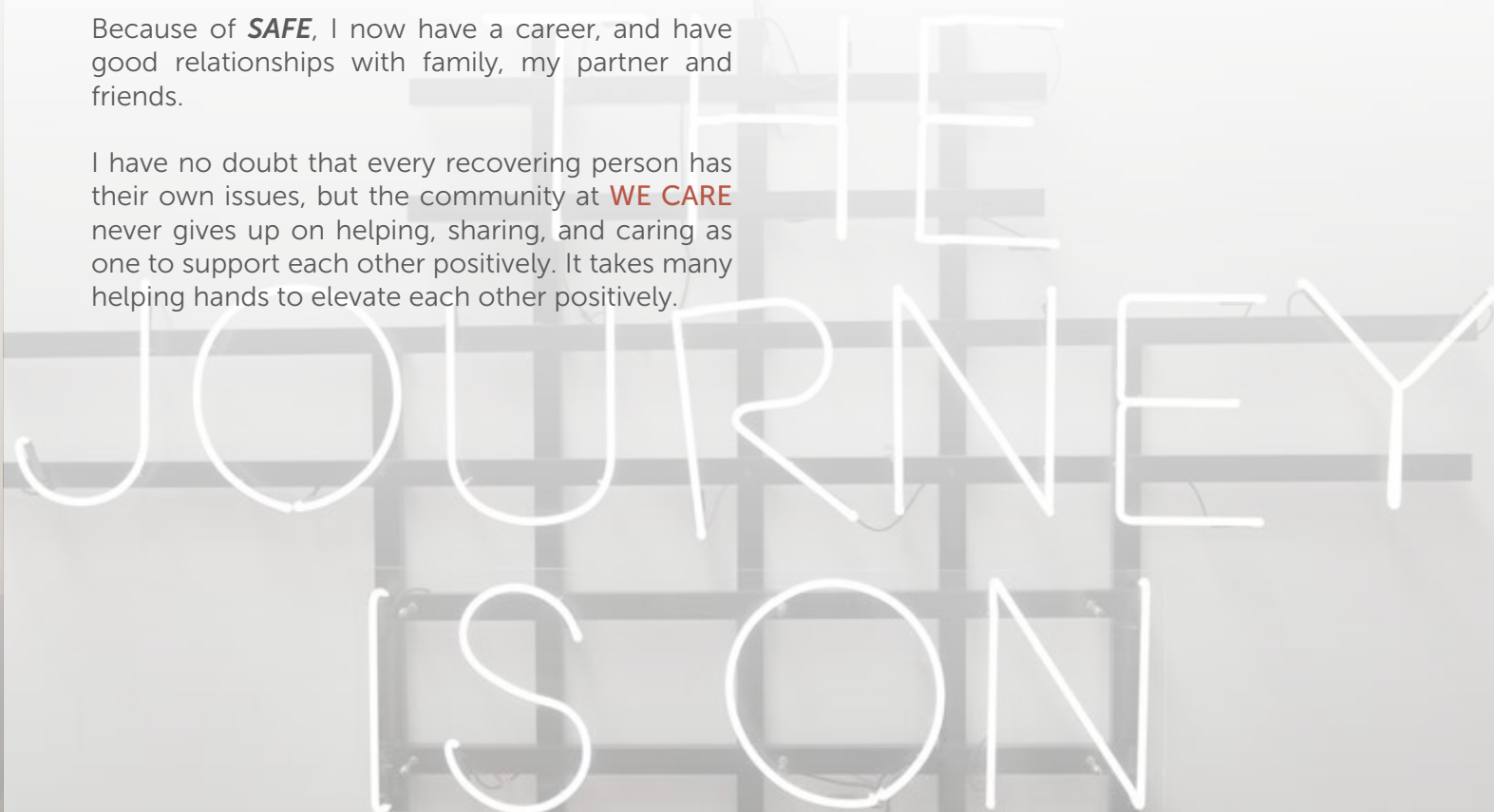
STEVEN - EMBRACE THE JOURNEY: FROM STRUGGLE TO STRENGTH IN RECOVERY

I first came to **WE CARE** on 8th June 2021. I was selected by **Singapore Prison** to participate in **Project SAFE** while I was in DRC 1. I had no idea what **Project SAFE** was and knew very little about **WE CARE** at that time.

Words like "**Counselling**", "**Recovery**", etc are very new to me. Questions like "**Why do I share my personal issues with someone I don't even know?**" pop up in my mind. I was very reluctant to attend the 21 required sessions for **Project SAFE** initially.

However, my perception changed after attending a few sessions. I feel welcomed whenever I'm at **WE CARE**. It's a "family" and "home" feeling.

WE CARE certainly plays a very big role in my recovery. It's not only the staff, or the programmes and activities, it's the environment that gave me opportunity to connect with people who have the same problems and issues.



NAVIGATING ADDICTION RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION

Joseph Wong was once a teacher, but he found himself struggling in that role. Suffering from burnout due to the stresses of his job, he started taking prescription sleeping pills in 2008 in order to help him cope. He used the pills to numb himself, to let him finally rest easy at night, escaping from the problems that troubled his mind. Of course, this was not a sustainable solution to his problems, and Joseph began to develop an addiction.

He took pills to cope when he was feeling sad, then began taking them when he was happy, something which happens to many who struggle with addiction. They set about associating substances with good feelings and then to rely on them for their happiness. Eventually, his motivation at work declined, and he went from teaching full time to part time before switching exclusively to student care. Even then, he could not handle the work. In 2018, he turned from sleeping pills to methamphetamine, trusting it for the energy he needed to make it through the day.

Joseph believes that, during this part of his life, he lived under the illusion that his drug use was somehow liberating. Because he felt less constrained by his doubts and fears, he judged those who were not using, assuming they were wasting their time and the potential for new life experiences. He began to isolate himself, and his family and old friends stopped contacting him. He does not put blame on them. He doubts they even knew how to approach him in that state. Eventually, the consequences of his actions caught up with him, and his perspective on his drug use began to change.

Around this time, he was arrested by the *Central Narcotics Bureau* and sent to the *Drug Rehabilitation Centre*. Once sober, he realized how much of a slave he had become to his addiction. After three and a half months, he was released clean... and directly into the COVID pandemic and the isolation of an extended lockdown. Staying sober in this state proved too much of a struggle, and Joseph relapsed and was arrested again. This time, a criminal charge followed.

While he was waiting to receive his sentence, Joseph learned about **WE CARE**, and he was able to speak to a counsellor and begin participating in their programmes. He says it was during this period that his mindset finally shifted. He realized that those trying to overcome their addictions share a common struggle, regardless of demographic or background, and he began to feel a sense of unity with other clients. When he was eventually sentenced, Joseph spent eighteen months in prison, but he served out his sentence with the support of the community at **WE CARE**. Every three months, he was visited by his counsellor, and he continued to receive e-letters from the staff and his fellow clients. Released finally in November of 2022, he was more determined than ever to stay sober.

Of course, determination alone is rarely enough to overcome addiction. Joseph needed a support network to help him along on his recovery journey, and the isolation he had experienced from friends and family as a result of his drug use meant he could not rely solely on them. Fortunately, **WE CARE** provided him the community support he needed. Spending time together at the *Drop-in Centre*, recovering persons can take their minds off of their cravings for unhealthy behaviours by engaging in a wide variety of constructive activities. These include exercise, yoga, self-expression through art, mindfulness exercises to support mental serenity, lunch meetings where they can share and discuss their feelings and experiences, and a wide variety of self-help groups, including *Narcotics Anonymous*, which Joseph has attended since 2021.

Joseph's time at **WE CARE** eased his isolation and helped him to adjust to and start enjoying normal life again. This proved to be what he needed to finally maintain his sobriety, and he has been clean for more than a year at this time of writing.

In the interim, he has acquired a diploma in social work and a job offer from the same organization which helped him to recover. Now, working as the Centre Manager, he helps others on their own paths toward freedom from addiction. His duties, amongst others, include planning outings and outreach, and making sure clients are taken care of and are not feeling isolated here.

When asked about his experience with addiction as a Singaporean, he notes that there were positive and negative aspects. He believes that denial weighs heavily on Singaporean culture. Employers, for example, don't seem to want to know that their employees are dealing with mental health problems. He was actually dissuaded from seeking help with his burnout in 2008. Had he not been pressured to refrain from treatment, he may not have felt the need to use prescription drugs as a coping mechanism.

Nowadays, things are certainly not perfect, but they do seem to be improving, likely supported by the government's efforts to promote mental health awareness. This is good news, considering that Joseph partially attributes the lack of initial support that he received to low societal awareness of mental issues. Many people see addiction as a "bad word" and are disinterested in understanding it, preferring to ignore the possibility of it affecting them or their families. However, Joseph says that Singaporeans are forgiving, and things got better when people were able to recognize the effort he was putting into his recovery.

Many have the misguided impression of addiction as solely a moral failure, but those who understand that it is a mental disorder are sympathetic and helpful. To him, people are more accepting in this era and are less affected by Asian concerns of bringing shame to one's family. He believes that recovering individuals like him, assisted by the programming offered at organizations like **WE CARE**, can help these people learn to better understand the nature of addiction and how they can help.

Now that he is drug-free, Joseph seems much happier with the kind of person he has become. He says he used to be biased and judgemental towards others. Those days, though, are behind him. Having finally matured, he says, he has become more accepting of people for who they are. With his head finally clear, he is more humble, more realistic, more loving. Asked what aspect of his recovery he is proudest of, he replies that, when he relapsed, he lost the trust of his loved ones. When he got clean, he was able to open himself up to others again and began to gradually reconnect with people and earn back their trust. Today, he is glad to be able to frequently spend time with his mother and sister.

He also has a message for those still taking the first, difficult steps along their path toward sobriety. He reminds them to **"remove their ego,"** and to set aside their shame and their pride in order to ask for the help they need. He says there are many kind people in Singapore and around the world who are willing to help those who muster the courage to reach out and ask for support.

He also reminds them that triggers don't go away and that the easiest solution is not always the best. Slipping back into compulsive behaviours will only bring temporary relief from one's pain. Learning to examine his feelings in the third person allows him to reflect on and eventually overcome his triggers and find lasting stability.

Written By

James Mroczka

FROM RAVES TO RECOVERY

I won't mince my words. My story isn't a fairy tale of redemption, but a real-life fable of chasing the party scene, getting entangled with addiction, and eventually clawing my way back for the sake of my son.

It wasn't a dramatic rock bottom, with no single earth-shattering moment. It was a slow drift, a gradual accumulation of missed work deadlines, strained relationships, and a nagging sense of unease. At 16, what began as weekend clubbing and overseas raves with friends morphed into a regular escape. The initial social thrill wore thin, and weekends started to bleed into weekdays. Using and drinking became a routine, and the vibrant social life I once had, dwindled.

The consequences started stacking up and as I look back now, this period of active addiction is best described by one of the first words I heard someone utter in my first meeting - unmanageable.

The final straw came with a simple realisation:
I was losing everything.

Work became a struggle and making rent felt like an exercise in survival. My friends and family, initially tolerant, grew distant. My mental health took a nosedive, and the loneliness that fueled my reliance on substance became a suffocating presence. I was letting everything slip through my fingers.

The decision to seek help came when I felt the most cornered, and lonely. I've come to learn that a primary trait of addiction is isolation, which is exactly what I had done - I had become an island. It was on this island, however, that I decided to completely surrender. Either my body was going to give way or I was going to give up.

Recovery was a rollercoaster, especially at the beginning. Life doesn't magically get better overnight - shame, guilt, and the constant fear of relapse were my unwelcome companions. However, as I somewhat reluctantly embraced the program's structure, a sense of control slowly returned. Therapy sessions helped me unpack a whole host of things: Decades worth of emotional baggage, the root causes of my addiction as well as the unhealthy coping mechanisms I had developed.

One of the biggest challenges is being a single mum. Make no mistake about it, raising my young son while battling my own demons is no easy task. Balancing recovery meetings, therapy sessions, and the constant needs of my son is a daily juggle. There are days, I admit, when all I want to do is crawl back into bed. But seeing my son's innocent face - he is the single most vital motivator to keep going.

Relationships were another hurdle. Rebuilding trust with my family was a slow, painstaking process. A year of consistent effort finally yielded a tentative olive branch from my mum, which I nurtured with cautious hope. Friendships fared differently.

Some drifted away, with their lives moving in different directions, but a few true gems have remained a constant source of support for me even till today.

My recovery programme emphasises the importance of building a strong support network. I've found solace in the fellowship - a group of individuals bound by shared struggles and a common goal. These connections, forged in the steel of vulnerability and understanding, have really kept me going. Knowing that someone is just a phone call away, that I am never alone in this fight, is something that I will forever be grateful for.

All that said, the anchor that keeps me grounded is my son. Every day, the responsibility of raising him is a tangible reminder of the life I am fighting for. I am not fighting for myself, I am really fighting for us.

Of all that's happened in my recovery journey, the one event that sticks out is when I hit one year of sobriety. Celebrating a year sober with my family and the people who had supported my journey wasn't a dramatic scene, but a quiet moment of immense significance. Looking around that room, I saw the relief in my family's eyes, the genuine joy on the faces of the fellowship, and the pride. It was a powerful moment, a validation that all the struggle, pain, hurt and tears, were worth it.

In that meeting, while I was sharing about my journey over the one year, it hit me. A year of sobriety brought me more than I ever could have imagined.

Today, I live my life with a renewed purpose - to be of service to other recovering addicts, to give back. I hope that in sharing my story, raw and unfiltered, I will offer hope to those still suffering.

To anyone that's struggling: **"One day at a time, never look back or think too far ahead."** These lines may be repeated countless times and seem super cliché, but there's a reason why they've endured.

They work.

Perspectives

CONFESSIONS OF A RECOVERY GUIDE

Hello.

My name is Ahmad and I am a Recovery Guide.

These are words I would have never thought of uttering just two years ago.

Two years ago. That was when my life changed. Before I get to where we are now, allow me to rewind to when my life's trajectory pivoted into uncharted territories. You see, back when I was younger, the allure of the unknown, the thrill of rebellion, and the whispers of escape got me started on a path of darkness and eventually lured me into the world of drug abuse.

It's often said that curiosity killed the cat, but for me, it was more like the claws of curiosity digging deep into my soul. The first time I experimented with drugs, it felt like an adventurous escape - a way to step out of the confines of my mundane reality and into something extraordinary. However, what started as an occasional dalliance soon became an insidious companion that refused to leave.

Fleeting curiosity soon transformed into helplessness and hopelessness. I had become a functional addict: Someone who could maintain a facade of normalcy while secretly being consumed by his addiction. Deep down, I knew that I was spiralling out of control.

The Law's intervention: A Forced wakeup call

As with any journey down a dark path, there's a point when the road ends, and the truth catches up. For me, the law caught up - pulling me out of my self-destructive cycle and forcing me to face the consequences of my actions. I still remember it vividly...

Monday, 1 Aug 2022:

The most embarrassing, humiliating and terrifying day of my life. At about 4.30 pm, there was a knock on the door and before I could react, eight CNB (Central Narcotics Bureau) officers barged in and proceeded to search the house. It was a helpless feeling as they handcuffed me, sat me down on my bed and barraged me with questions.

I was then led down to the car park, where they searched my car. In a state of unimaginable daze and shock, I was then squeezed into a van and brought to Cantonment Police Station. From then on, everything felt surreal. An out-of-body experience. I have never felt so helpless. So alone.

The arrest by CNB was a humiliating wake-up call, a stark reminder of the person I had become and the life I was throwing away. Sentenced to DRC, I found myself at a crossroads that offered me a chance at redemption and to rebuild my life. It was also, however, a daunting journey into the unknown, paved with fear and uncertainty.

A New Beginning: Finding Hope in Fellowship

After three months in DRC, I was assigned to **WE CARE** as part of my Community Based Programme. It was here that I was introduced to the concept of fellowship: A community of individuals who had walked the same path and understood the struggles of addiction.

Like most first-timers, I was sceptical and resistant to the idea of opening up to total strangers. In time, the fellowship essentially turned my life around. They provided a lifeline that helped me navigate the tumultuous waters of addiction and find my way back ashore. Life started making sense - the fear and uncertainty about my future gradually faded as recovery took priority.

Ahmad Recovery Guide

Paying it Forward: A New Purpose in Life

At the end of 2023, I was presented with an opportunity to be a Recovery Guide. Despite my initial reservations and lack of experience, it didn't take me long to say yes. The reason being I needed (and found) a purpose - a calling that gives meaning to my life and direction to my recovery journey.

I am now able to pay it forward, using my experience and story to inspire hope and provide support to those who are trying to find their own way out of the darkness and into recovery.

As I write this, I have been a Recovery Guide for almost four months, and each day has brought a new experience. The past few months have been a sharp learning curve that's underscored the importance of having an open heart and an open mind.

My initial takes on what it takes to be a Recovery Guide will be the subject of another article. Essentially it requires empathy, compassion, good communication skills, resilience, patience, knowledge and most importantly integrity, authenticity and commitment.

For me, these not only make a good Recovery Guide but also form the foundation of what makes us better humans. I am still a work-in-progress – as a Recovery Guide, a human and a person in recovery. Working at **WE CARE** allows me to discover myself and has been a healing experience, a chance to turn my past mistakes into a force for good. Every day, I am reminded of the person I used to be and the journey I have taken to become the person I am today.

Thanks to **WE CARE**, I've grown so much. Recovery's a roller coaster, but it's here I learned the importance of resilience, the power of support and the magic of transformation. I am grateful for the second chance I have been given, and I am committed to using it to make a difference in the lives of others.

Yes.

My name is Ahmad and I am a Recovery Guide.



FINDING HOPE AND GIVING BACK

For many, the path of addiction can be isolating and filled with despair. Yet often amidst the shadows of struggle, stories of hope shine through. Shiloh (not his real name), a donor to **WE CARE**, shares his journey from addiction to advocacy, and why he continues to support the cause and the transformative work done by **WE CARE**.

Shiloh's story begins as a recipient of **WE CARE**'s services. Struggling with addiction at that time, he found solace and support in the compassionate guidance provided by his counsellor. "I am forever grateful," Shiloh reflects, acknowledging the pivotal role **WE CARE** has played in his recovery journey.

As a person in recovery, his first-hand experience with addiction fuels his commitment to ensuring others receive the same lifeline he found within the walls of **WE CARE** at the beginning of his journey.

When asked what aspects of **WE CARE**'s work resonate most with him, Shiloh, recounted that it was the holistic approach to recovery. He praises the organization's focus on recovery and its non-judgmental environment in their drop-in centre. Through counselling sessions, Shiloh was able to confront his addiction and regain hope for the future.

Shiloh's aspirations for **WE CARE** are simple yet profound – he hopes the organization continues to treat those battling addiction, providing a safe haven for recovery. His donations aim to foster growth and ensure that **WE CARE** remains as a charity that serves as a beacon of hope for individuals and families affected by addiction.

In a world where temptation and instant gratification run rife, Shiloh stresses the importance of supporting addiction awareness and recovery. He emphasizes that the heavy stigma surrounding addiction is ever-prevalent, often stemming from a lack of understanding on the complexities of addiction. Centres such as **WE CARE** offer a critical lifeline for those seeking to break free from its grip.

Shiloh acknowledges the profound impact **WE CARE** has had on him. Through their support, he regained hope and understanding that addiction is not insurmountable – a sentiment he hopes to share with others through his ongoing support.

Shiloh's story is a testament to the transformative power of empathy and support. His journey from addiction to advocacy showcases the profound impact of organizations like **WE CARE**, illuminating the path from struggle to recovery. Through his generosity, Shiloh continues to inspire hope and create change, one donation at a time.



Zac Volunteer Fitness Instructor

Driven by a passion for fitness and a desire to give back to the community, I volunteer at **WE CARE**. This role allows me to share the numerous benefits of exercise and the joys it can bring, while also learning from the valuable feedback of the program's beneficiaries.

It's especially rewarding to see participants growing stronger and confidently performing the exercises. This newfound ability translates into their daily lives, empowering them to do more, like carrying groceries with greater ease or climbing stairs without getting winded.

My hope is that they will utilize this knowledge to incorporate exercise into their free time, fostering a healthy habit and motivation as they witness further improvements in their strength, flexibility, and overall well-being.

Volunteering at **WE CARE** has also fostered significant personal growth. The beneficiaries' stories expose me to experiences far removed from my own, teaching me to cherish and appreciate the things I have.

It's a humbling reminder that everyone faces challenges, but by offering support and encouragement, we can empower them to persevere and strive for a brighter future.

WE CARE fosters a close-knit community, where both beneficiaries and volunteers bond and welcome new members with open arms. I've witnessed first-hand the positive impact this supportive environment has on everyone involved.

WE CARE has been incredibly supportive of my group training sessions, ensuring I have the necessary equipment and providing ongoing assistance. I'm grateful for this opportunity and wholeheartedly encourage others to volunteer. The rewards are immense – you'll learn from others and experience significant personal growth.

Witnessing the positive impact on the beneficiaries' lives is truly inspiring, and the sense of accomplishment you gain from contributing to their well-being is unmatched. Join us at **WE CARE** and discover the joy of giving back while enriching your own life in the process.



Perspectives

My dreams often took unexpected turns, diverging from the paths I had once envisioned. Life's journey led me through twists and turns, straying from my initial expectations. Yet, amidst these deviations, I have found valuable lessons in acceptance, particularly in relationships, work, health, and spirituality.

This story starts with the beginning of my professional career – as a chef.

In kitchens where I chased the adrenaline rush and recognition of a top chef, long hours accompanied my passion. It mirrored the rock-and-roll lifestyle glorified by Anthony Bourdain in *"Kitchen Confidential"*, a book that captivated me very early in my life.

The pressure eventually took a toll, and the anxiety and exhaustion I experienced drove me to substances, a coping mechanism that offered diminishing returns. This approach was not sustainable, and I left working in restaurants to become a private chef. This continued to give me a sense of purpose, while my stress levels and reliance on substances became somewhat alleviated.

Gratitude fills my heart for the culinary skills I honed, paving the way for a significant chapter in my life. In 2015, as a skilled migrant, I, along with my then-pregnant ex-wife and our young daughter, embraced a new beginning in Melbourne—a decision propelled by a quest for better work-life balance.

The frenetic apace of restaurants, however, no longer appealed. Fish filleting became my next chapter. To some it may seem like simple and mundane job, but I found it to be an enjoyable, fulfilling and therapeutic experience. Additionally, the foundations laid while I was a chef enabled me to pick the trade up easily. It also gave me more bandwidth for family time, but before long I was searching for something new.



Cue, an injured friend. One day, he asked if I could help mow his lawn - he had injured himself and could not do it on his own. I'm glad I agreed to help because a new passion was sparked. The physicality, fresh air, and satisfaction of a manicured lawn resonated with me on many levels.

I joined horticulture school, and gardening became my sanctuary. Weeding demanded mindfulness – a present-moment focus, a stark contrast to past anxieties. It also strengthened me physically, turning into a free gym with a generous dose of vitamin D.

Witnessing new shoots emerge from fallen trees offered a powerful lesson in resilience – finding a second, third or even fourth wind despite being knocked down. Moreover, the kindness of clients who offered fruits and delights from their gardens fostered a sense of community.

I loved my gardening job so much that I worked at it for the next 6 years. I would have never thought my path of being a chef would lead me to being a horticulturist. I owe so much to gardening - from the humility I felt from standing under trees that have been around the last 100-plus years, to the kindness and warmth of my clients offering me fresh silver beet, lemons, oranges, olives, coffee as well as Greek and Italian sweets.

A devastating separation from my family in 2018 shattered my dream of a happy home. Gardening became my therapy, a way to maintain physical health that nourished my mental well-being. In the quiet moments of weeding, I discovered the connection between physical exertion and mental clarity. When my physical health is good, my

Julius Volunteer Gardener

mental health gets the support it needs to stay healthy too. Many times, when I was working in the garden, I entered a state of flow. Not trying to sound too new age or woo-woo but in this zone, I often gained insights about myself and of the world - all of which plays a part in nurturing my spirituality.

Autumn, with its falling leaves, became a metaphor for letting go. Just as trees shed leaves to survive winter, I too needed to release what no longer served me.

All the introspection led to a deep personal excavation. Unhealthy relationships, outdated beliefs, and destructive behaviours were identified and discarded – bagged up like the fallen leaves I had done with so many times.

One consequence of my separation was a belief in self-reliance. I saw myself as a lone wolf, afraid to open up or to trust people. Years of isolation had engendered resentment and a sense of victimhood. While my lone wolf belief helped me immensely by making me more independent and discerning, it also caused much isolation and pain. Ultimately, I became resentful towards God for what happened to my dream of a happy family.

However, my return to Singapore in 2022, initially driven by substance abuse and untreated bipolar disorder, marked a turning point. Facing despair, I sought help from a recovery fellowship and it was here that I truly began to understand the power of letting go.

The program emphasized spiritual principles, including surrender and community. This resonated deeply, becoming an extended autumn of releasing years of baggage. Most importantly, I learned to ask for help, a crucial step in relinquishing my self-sufficiency.

My first year of sobriety coincided with a new gardening job. While less prestigious and financially rewarding than my past roles, working alongside migrant brothers from India

and Myanmar taught me the value of humility. Kneeling to weed, raking leaves, and greeting guests at the country club chipped away at my pride.

This newfound humility opened my eyes to past mistakes in my relationships. It allowed me to forgive myself and others, replacing victimhood with a willingness to learn and grow. It also softened my heart, allowing me to receive feedback with an open mind.

Recovery is an ongoing journey, one that requires a lot of letting go (and surrender). It's about embracing vulnerability, authenticity, and service to others.

Coming to **WE CARE** allowed me to shed the mask of "being okay." Here, I found a safe space to share my struggles amidst a community of acceptance, love, and support. Counselling sessions, recovery meetings, and the camaraderie of fellow members help me to heal both mentally and spiritually.

Gardening at **WE CARE** has become a cornerstone of my well-being. It's a place to practice mindfulness, exercise, and connect with nature. Most importantly, it's a collaborative effort. Nurturing plants, maintaining irrigation systems, and beautifying the space are all shared responsibilities. We are an ecosystem, working hand-in-hand.

This sense of belonging replaced the image of the lone wolf. I am no longer adrift; I am part of a pack, journeying together towards recovery. Sharing stories, offering support, and witnessing the growth of the garden mirror our own transformation.

As I write this, it is autumn in Melbourne – a poignant reminder of the transformative power of letting go.

Perspectives

I grew up with a brother who was addicted to heroin, alcohol and cannabis.

I was 10 years younger than him, and his addictions had a huge impact on my parents, sister and me. I never knew what mood he would be in when he walked in the door. Violence was common as he suffered from hallucinations and paranoia secondary to psychosis from the drugs.

I spent many nights unable to sleep, hiding under my bed and wishing for help from him and from the people who would turn up at our house threatening us because he owed them money. He got expelled from school so many times that eventually the education board banned him from school completely, at the age of 16.

He had a fabulous personality when he wasn't high and found interviewing for jobs easy. He was, however, never able to hold down a job once the employer became aware of his addiction.

I am happy to report that my brother eventually overcame his addictions - on his own - but it took 20 years and a lot of loss and suffering for him and everyone around him.

As a confused child, I often wondered why no one helped him or us. He had friends that were also addicts so I knew it wasn't uncommon - so why were we not being helped? This was in the pre-internet era and there was a huge stigma surrounding mental illness and addiction. I realise there probably were places around that could have helped him, but my parents were too ashamed to ask around and thus there was never any help for us.

Our family remains to this day fragmented because of addiction. I still wonder from time to time if things would be different if help had been more accessible.

Fast forward to today - I am a doctor and a proud mother. I started practicing during the height of the methamphetamine addiction in Australia. Our emergency department was constantly half full - overdoses, people hallucinating from the drugs and others who had reached rock bottom, begging for help.

I spent a lot of time talking to them and their families and realised that being the first point of contact for a person seeking help was extremely important.

My interaction with them could propel them forward, give them hope and begin to remove the stigma they were feeling or cause them to leave and not seek help again. I regularly used the word brave to describe how I felt about my patients who had come to ask for help in a world where there remained a huge stigma surrounding addiction.

When I moved to Singapore 15 years ago and stopped practicing medicine, I devoted my time to having and looking after my 4 children. When my youngest turned 4, I realised I wanted to do something more with my time and looked for volunteering opportunities. I started asking friends and acquaintances for recommendations that might be a good fit for me.

I am usually quite fussy in because integrity is important to me. I wanted to volunteer at a place that did good work and did it to high ethical

Donna Volunteer Helpline Manager

standards. One recommendation was **WE CARE**, a caring and supportive organisation both with clients and staff. And so, I emailed in, and the rest is history.

I started volunteering on the helpline and have really enjoyed the experience. Even though I am not seeing these people in person, the same theory from my time in the emergency department applies.

Often, I am the first person that the caller has voiced their concerns to and had the vulnerability to admit they need help. That takes courage. Being able to validate their feelings and encourage them to continue the process is so important.

I need to be able to gauge quite quickly how to approach the caller. Some have made up their minds about seeking help and they are moving

forward no matter what - those are the easier calls. Some are calling to feel out the centre and they are the callers that need a lot more care. Surprisingly, my Australian accent is often an icebreaker. The caller is not expecting my voice and we spend a minute or two discussing my accent, where I am from and how I ended up volunteering for **WE CARE**. This diffuses anxiety and allows the caller to feel comfortable before we move into a deeper and more vulnerable conversation.

I have now finished my Masters in Psychiatry, Psychology and Neurosciences and am starting my Master of Counselling. I hope to continue on the helpline for some time before eventually moving into addiction counselling face to face.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to work with an organisation that provides the help that I wish was available to my family when I was young.

Donor Acknowledgement

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WE CARE aims to be the leading community hub of addiction recovery in Singapore. We treat all forms of addictions, including alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex, gaming, internet and compulsive behavior like shoplifting.

Our core services are:

- Counselling for recovering addicts and their families
 - Educational and therapy programmes
 - A drop-in centre
 - A hub for recovery support groups
 - Community outreach & public awareness talks

For more information on what we do, please go to:
www.wecare.org.sg



WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES

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