

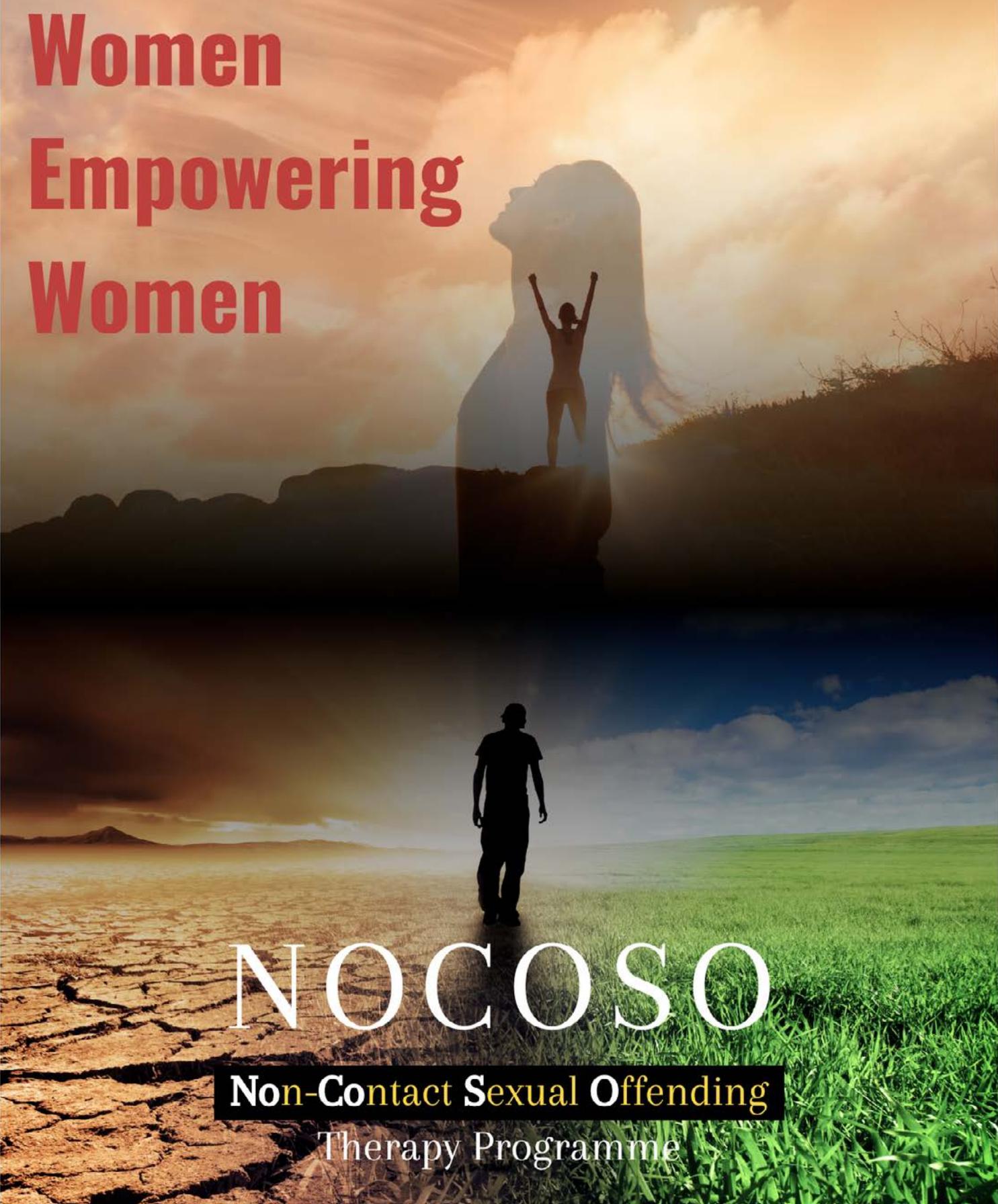
March 2024



**WE CARE**  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

# WE CARE News

**Women  
Empowering  
Women**



**NOCOSO**

**Non-Contact Sexual Offending**  
Therapy Programme

# WEW (Women Empowering Women)



Earlier this year, data released by CNB revealed that there was an increase in the number of female drug abusers in Singapore. In total, 454 female drug abusers were arrested in 2023 compared with 408 in 2022. Additionally, among the new abusers arrested in 2023, 182 were female, compared with 171 in 2022.

To help deal with this worrying trend, **WE CARE** is piloting the **WEW (Women Empowering Women)** programme in collaboration with DRC (Drug Rehabilitation Centre).

It is designed to provide a safe place for women who have been released from DRC to come together and support each other while at the same time building meaningful connections.

The programme is launched to time with **International Women's Day** which takes place on 8th March.

The topics covered within the programme are based on 4 pillars - Emotional, Social, Mental and Physical. Amongst other things, participants will learn about:

- Substance use disorder and its effects on women's health
- Conflict resolution

- How to cope with triggers and stress
- How to manage high-risk situations
- Safety and self-protection

The objective is to help them deal with the multi-faceted issues they face, and also aims to break the cycle of addiction.

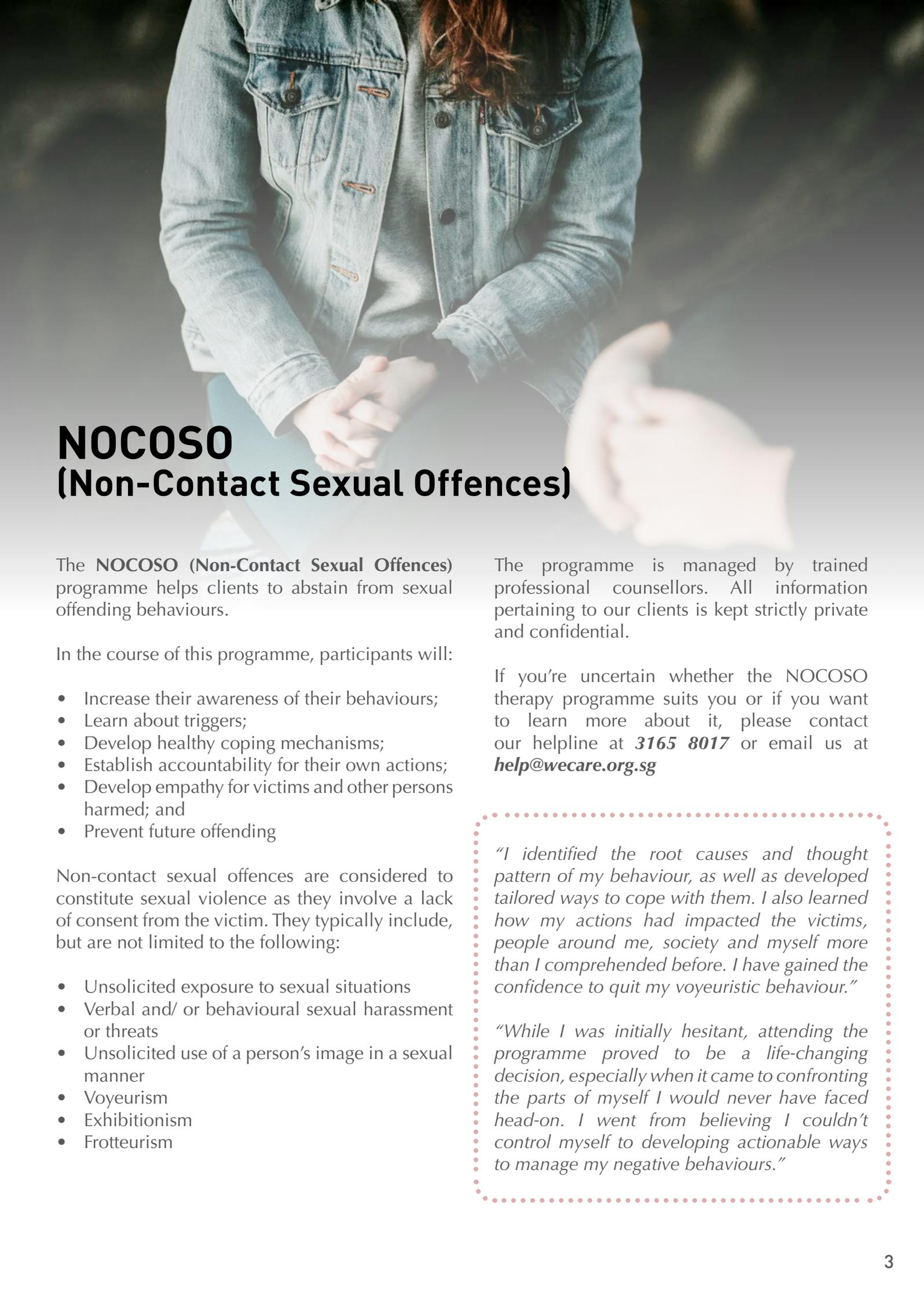
The programme is managed by trained professional counsellors and peer support specialists.

To learn more about WEW, call our helpline at **3165 8017** or write to [help@wecare.org.sg](mailto:help@wecare.org.sg)

Some testimonials from the earlier version of the WEW programme:

*"I enjoyed the programme. These ladies journeyed with me on my recovery."*

*"Women's therapy provided me a safe space where I can share my deepest secrets with like minded women. Also provides me tools to cope with everyday life."*

A person with long reddish-brown hair, wearing a light blue denim jacket over a grey top, has their hands clasped in front of them. The background is dark and out of focus.

# NOCOSO (Non-Contact Sexual Offences)

The **NOCOSO (Non-Contact Sexual Offences)** programme helps clients to abstain from sexual offending behaviours.

In the course of this programme, participants will:

- Increase their 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

Non-contact sexual offences are considered to constitute sexual violence as they involve a lack of consent from the victim. They typically include, but are not limited to the following:

- Unsolicited exposure to sexual situations
- Verbal and/ or behavioural sexual harassment or threats
- Unsolicited use of a person's image in a sexual manner
- Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism
- Frotteurism

The programme is managed by trained professional counsellors. All information pertaining to our clients is kept strictly private and confidential.

If you're uncertain whether the NOCOSO therapy programme suits you or if you want to learn more about it, please contact our helpline at **3165 8017** or email us at [help@wecare.org.sg](mailto:help@wecare.org.sg)

*"I identified the root causes and thought pattern of my behaviour, as well as developed tailored ways to cope with them. I also learned how my actions had impacted the victims, people around me, society and myself more than I comprehended before. I have gained the confidence to quit my voyeuristic behaviour."*

*"While I was initially hesitant, attending the programme proved to be a life-changing decision, especially when it came to confronting the parts of myself I would never have faced head-on. I went from believing I couldn't control myself to developing actionable ways to manage my negative behaviours."*



## 16th Finisher Awards

Celebrating  
Recovery

# My Thoughts on the Sixteenth Finisher Awards

One could scarcely ask for a better introduction to this organization and its work than to have the privilege of attending the Finisher Awards. At the sixteenth edition of our biannual Finisher Awards, we were able to congratulate twenty recipients as they celebrated one, three, five, or seven years of continuous recovery from their addictions. It is obvious that overcoming one's addiction is a deeply personal journey. However, attending the Finisher Awards makes it very clear that a recovering person does not have to go through it alone. Executive Director **Tham Yuen Han** put it best when she reminded clients that "It's your journey," but "It is always our honor to walk with you on that journey."

As an outsider, neither a recovering person nor a longtime staff member - and certainly not an expert on the treatment of addiction - I was actually fairly nervous going into the Awards. Wandering around the room as people filed in, or sitting in the front row snapping photos during the ceremony, I worried about becoming a nuisance, but I am glad to say that my anxiety was unfounded. Everyone I spoke to made me feel welcome and was happy to help me collect my thoughts on this important event. If I ever find myself struggling with addiction, I hope that I can surround myself with the kind of support I witnessed there.

Indeed, while watching the Awards' proceedings, a recurring theme became very clear, which is only natural because it can be found within this organization's own name: **Community**. A great, very diverse gathering of people assembled that night, a large enough group that it has become necessary for us to move the Awards from our own facility to a larger, more auspicious venue. Again and again, recovering persons who came to our new stage to accept their awards shared their thoughts on their journeys, and again and again they had multiple supporters to thank. They thanked family members, fellow clients, and of course they thanked their mentors at **WE CARE**. Our staff obviously have valuable





professional advice for our clients, but what cannot be overstated is the value of knowing someone acknowledges and accepts you, that they are invested in your recovery and are willing to support you even when you are at your very lowest.

I was lucky enough to be able to speak to married clients Ernie and Manap. They met through **WE CARE**, but both reiterated that they made their journeys to recovery separately, and that they have fallen down on those journeys before. In this, they are certainly not alone. In the easier and harder times alike, though, both of them have relied on their community at **WE CARE**. Earlier in his journey, Manap was not able to find the support that he needed at home or with friends, who were still using. Luckily, he was able to find it here.

He and Ernie maintained that it is always necessary to continue coming into the Centre, even when it gets especially difficult, and even if it currently feels unnecessary. Ernie explained that, to overcome one's addiction, it is necessary to remain open-minded, honest with oneself, and committed to the work. After all, the risk of falling down again is always there if one becomes careless or overconfident. Even if that happens, though, it is not too late. As Director Tina Doran

reminded us, **“Keep coming back.”** When they were unsure that they could trust themselves, Ernie and Manap put their trust in the Centre. Now, Ernie has just received our final Award for being seven years in recovery, and Manap has been in recovery for nine.

Because addiction is so stigmatized, those who want to get better may feel isolated and may worry that they must suffer in silence. I sincerely hope that the Finisher Awards can help serve as a reminder that this is not the case. By offering awards to those in recovery, giving them a chance - amidst all of their supporters - to take a bow and share their thoughts if they feel comfortable, we can help remind them that their recovery matters. They deserve to be proud of how far they have come, and it is imperative that they know that they are never alone, no matter how hard things become for them. Again, Ms. Tham was able to perfectly encapsulate why we are here: **“To give hope.”**

- *James Mroczka is a student from the University of Mississippi who interned at **WE CARE**. He has an interest in international affairs and enjoys watching jetplanes and practising his German in his spare time.*





## Recovery Story: Joseph

# 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 counselor 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 counselor, 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 behaviors 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.

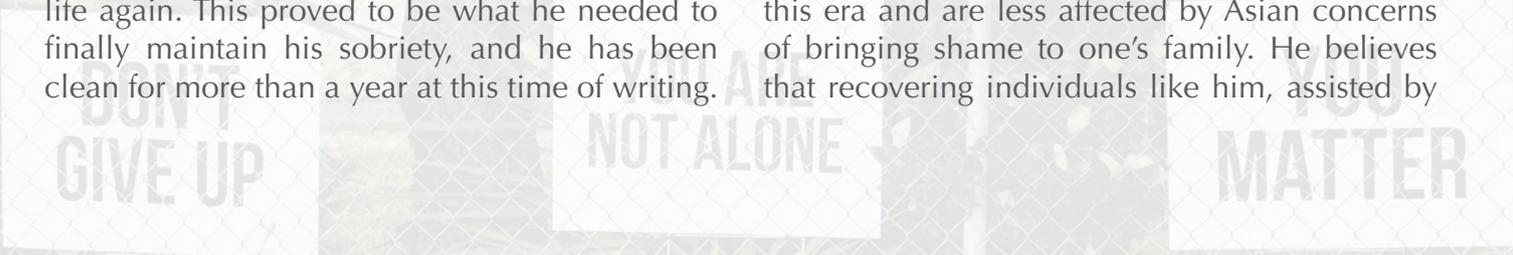
Joseph's time at **WE CARE** eased his isolation and helped him to adjust to and start enjoying normal life again. This proved to be what he needed to finally maintain his sobriety, and he has been clean for more than a year at this time of writing.

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.

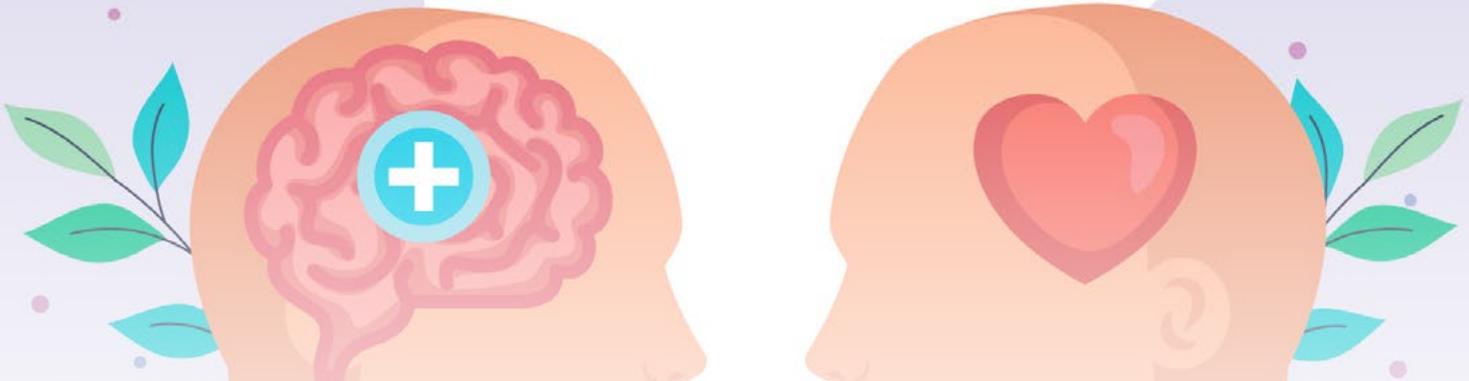
Now that he is drug-free, Joseph seems much happier with the kind of person he has become. He says he used to be biased and judgemental towards others. Those days, though, are behind him. Having finally matured, he says, he has become more accepting of people for who they are. With his head finally clear, 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 behaviors 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.***

-  
**by James Mroczka**





# Recovery Stories of Hope and Growth

Reintegrating into society after incarceration is a journey fraught with emotional complexity, impacting not only the individual transitioning but also their family and loved ones. This struggle is particularly acute for those battling drug addiction, as it can serve as a potent trigger, heightening the risk of relapse and subsequent re-incarceration. Gain insight into this formidable period through the firsthand experiences of two individuals who successfully navigated its challenges as beneficiaries of our **SAFE** program.

## **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.

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



## Charity Movie **The Goldfinger (2023)**

In our most recent Charity Movie event, **WE CARE** organised our first ever Mandarin movie, ***The Goldfinger***. This highly anticipated Hong Kong production was a crime thriller based on a true story and starred acclaimed actors Andy Lau and Tony Leung.

The event took place on 30 December 2023 – the same day the movie premiered locally on the big screen. Although it was the Saturday on the last weekend of the year-end holiday season, it was heartening to see a strong turnout of support from gracious donors, community partners, fellow social service agencies, members of our board, staff, the public, and our beneficiaries.

We were very fortunate to have the event graced by the Guest of Honour, ***Mr. Seng Han Tong***, former Minister of Parliament. Mr Seng and his team played a pivotal role in reaching out to his network for support and more importantly, in raising awareness of addiction treatment and recovery in Singapore.

We would also like to thank the ***Tote Board*** for their unwavering support, as well as ***Singapore Pools*** as our Lead Sponsor for this Charity Movie. We also gratefully acknowledge the generosity of our donors, especially ***Dr Guo Song***, ***Mr. Robert Chew***, the grassroots supporters of our Guest of Honour, ***Mr. Seng Han Thong*** and our ***Board of Directors*** for their contributions.

As this was the first time we featured a Mandarin movie as a fundraiser, we were unsure how audiences would respond. However, much to our surprise, feedback was highly positive, even from non-Mandarin speaking viewers.



Here are some of reactions from our viewers. Additionally, you can check out their candid videos on our social media platforms @WeCareSpore.

-----  
*"Honestly, it was the first time watching a Mandarin movie since 'I Not Stupid'. I could see why the lead actors were big screen legends. It was even more surprising to learn that the movie was based on a true story."* - JA

*"I don't speak Chinese, but the most fun part for me was the experience of catching the movie together with all my friends in the theatre. Thank you!".* - BU

*"You could see how manipulative a person can be and how he played the stock market! Thank you **WE CARE** and all the sponsors for making this possible".* - AZ

To a charity organisation like **WE CARE**, fundraisers like these provide crucial financial support which enables us to continue our mission in providing evidence-based clinical treatment for addiction and to deliver community-based recovery programmes to facilitate re-integration into society.

Once again, a **big thank you** and we look forward to your continued support.



## CREATING AVATARS IN THE GAMING WORLD: A REFLECTION

The rise of gaming addiction in recent years has captured widespread attention as the gaming industry experiences enormous growth. In particular, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (*MMORPGs*) have become extremely popular across various genres, offering players an expansive and limitless fantasy world to explore.

Within this virtual realm, millions of individuals have their personalized avatars to express themselves via virtual characters that allow them to go beyond physical and societal constraints. These avatars, serving as digital representations, empower gamers to fashion personas with diverse physical and personality traits, providing an escape from the limitations of reality. In the gaming universe, one can alter gender, hairstyle, height, and more, without fear of judgment.

Unlike the real world, where changing inherent characteristics is a challenging effort, avatars offer a perception of perfection free from vulnerabilities or inadequacies.

Ben X, a Belgian-Dutch film directed by Nic Balthazar in 2007, demonstrates how avatars can

be a significant way of coping with our struggles in our day-to-day lives. The main character of the film is a teenage boy named Ben with autism spectrum disorder, specifically Asperger's syndrome. Ben is being bullied severely at school and escapes into the online fantasy realm known as ArchLord. By transforming into an impressive hero within the game, Ben finds solace and strength.

In an early scene, Ben proudly announces his achievement of a certain level in ArchLord, symbolizing the recognition and acceptance of his dignity and power by millions of online gamers. Playing alongside a princess in the game, he becomes her 'hero.' Reflecting on the disparity between the gaming and real worlds, Ben remarks, "In games, you become who or what you want to be. Whereas in real life, you can be only one person and you must teach him everything, even how to laugh in a way that people like." Due to his unique biological and psychological makeup, Ben's difficulties forming social bonds are sensitively depicted in the film. Faced with feelings of weakness and incompetence, Ben creates a virtual self, a hero, offering him momentary relief and a sanctuary from his challenges.

However, the problem of coping with our problems in real life with a virtual weapon is that the problems do not really disappear. They stay with us like the monster under the bed that we dare not look at. Real problems necessitate genuine changes in our thinking, behavior, and emotions.

To initiate these changes, we must confront the relationships that are difficult for us, the situations that make us feel the way we do, the emotions we avoid, and the reactions we manifest in situations that challenge us. Uncovering the answers to these inquiries often exposes our vulnerabilities, and it's harder to grapple with them than to just acknowledge them.

Conversely, the illusion of attaining perfection exacerbates our vulnerability, as it contradicts our inherent human nature. The pursuit of perfection is a paradoxical rule that distorts its own essence when initially established.

In the movie, Ben decides to get revenge on his tormentors as a way to cope with what has happened to him. Regardless of the morality of Ben's actions, it underscores the idea that facing real-life problems is a prerequisite for discovering new alternatives. In times of difficulty, seeking support from others often proves to be the most constructive approach.

Each form of addiction, including gaming addiction, serves a function, albeit with potentially devastating consequences. Addiction may act as a means of numbing oneself or establishing an ineffective way of connecting.

However, the commonality among all addictions is their role as compensation for specific emotions. Consequently, before casually labeling gaming avatars as mere addictions, it is essential to reevaluate their purpose in our lives. They might be useful resources for introspection and self-knowledge, assisting in ending dependence cycles.

-  
**by Merve**

*Merve is a volunteer at **WE CARE**. She is a clinical psychologist and academic researcher focusing on behavioral addictions. She also finds joy in immersing herself in popular culture, analyzing characters, plot dynamics, and the underlying themes presented in these narratives. She thinks that it is a unique lens through which she brings psychological theories into daily life, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human experience.*



## WATCH THIS SPACE!

The past few years have seen an increase in the number of people we've treated - in the last 2 years, we have treated more than a thousand recovering persons and their family members. An increase in cases naturally means more counselling sessions to be conducted, which means that more space is needed. There are, however, space constraints at the centre, so it's not like we could've just added a new room whenever we needed one. We needed to find innovative ways to work with what we already had, and that's exactly what we did.

First, we turned a storeroom into the counselling room that's now known as **Casuarina**. The storeroom was initially used to store your standard

storeroom stuff - files, supplies and certain sports equipment. If we wanted to empty out the room, we'd have to rearrange the stuff that was already inside. Tricky, but doable.

How we dealt with the problem was to repurpose the lockers that were located directly outside. This was done by getting new doors that essentially split certain compartments in half - done easily enough thanks to an efficient carpenter. It also required some enforced spring cleaning on the part of each support group the lockers were assigned to - tedious, but I think we can all agree that a little spring cleaning every now and then benefits everyone.



Next on the agenda was to ensure that the room mimicked the same vibe as the other counselling rooms. Fitting it out with a new air conditioner and some furniture was easy enough, but we encountered a problem with the waterproofing. We realised that whenever it rained, because of where the room was located, water would seep in and basically flood the entire room.



After some troubleshooting, we arrived on a few changes that needed to be made: New flooring, better drainage and new windows. All these involved extra costs, which we had no choice but to front, but also extra time. Thankfully, after a few long weeks, we had ourselves a new counselling room. We did not anticipate the process to be so drawn out but we're glad we did it because we now had one extra room for counselling.

Adding Casuarina eased the space constraints a little, but the mission for more space continued. Little did we know, an even bigger monster lay in wait.

Back to the drawing board - how could we add more space? We didn't have any more storerooms to convert and our bid to add the neighbouring block vacated by Willing Hearts had just been rejected, so our hands were tied.

Through a moment of inspiration, a plan was hatched. We would create rooms out of thin air, in the form of pods or containers that were similar to the temporary ones set up at construction sites, only sleeker. There was an open area located behind the centre that was perfect - after confirming that the measurements met safety guidelines, we set things into motion.

Given the location of the open area, it would not have been feasible for a pre-made pod to be lifted via a crane from the main road. Instead, they would have to transport each individual piece to the site and subsequently put it together modularly.

Finding a contractor with the capabilities to achieve such a project was tough but easier than the actual building process, which was drawn out due to a myriad of issues on the end of their supplier.

To cut a very long story short, the pods have finally been put up. The finishing touch was waterproofing stickers whose delivery was delayed by almost a month. They've been fitted out in a similar fashion to Casuarina with new decor and brand new air conditioners, and look much better than we anticipated.

Our experiences with adding new counselling rooms over the past year or so hasn't exactly been the smoothest, but when you look at the big picture, it's all worth it. What's a few hours of stress, brainstorming, problem solving and dealing with contractors compared to the benefits of the end product?

Three extra rooms may not sound like much on the surface, but what they mean is that we can accommodate about 240 more counselling sessions per month. And as we continue to grow, we look forward to more expansion, and creating more rooms out of thin air!

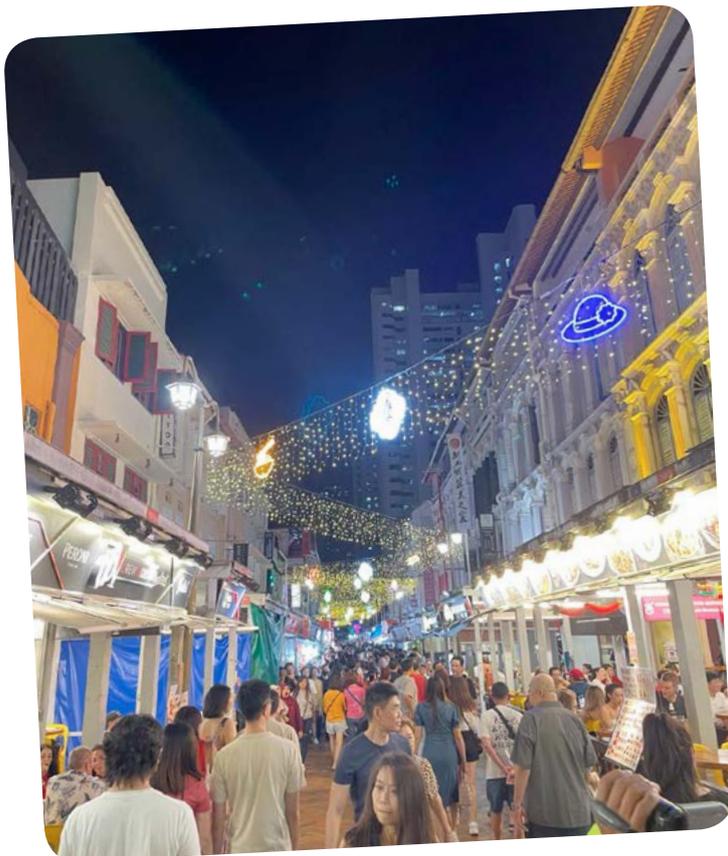


# Experiencing Chinese New Year For The First Time



Moving to Singapore, I was aware that I was going to spend Chinese New Year here, and I must say, I was a little bit intimidated. I had heard that it can be chaotic and maybe even overwhelming for an inexperienced person such as myself. However, I am so glad that I was lucky enough to be in Singapore for it. Chinese New Year showed me so much about this country that I could not have learned otherwise.

Before moving here, I had very little idea of what the celebrations would be like. I assumed it was similar to Christmas in my family; a small family gathering and some festive songs and films here and there. I was very pleasantly surprised to see that traditions run deep when it comes to Chinese New Year, and people love to celebrate as much as they can. Celebrations last for days, weeks even.



My first impression of Chinese New Year happened at a mall. I truly did not expect such crowds shopping their hearts away. To my surprise, people were not shopping for gifts like I would do for Christmas or even New Year's in my home country of Turkey; they were shopping for themselves! I must say, as a shopping enthusiast, I absolutely loved this tradition. But from what I understand now, it is not just about consumerism; shopping for a new year symbolizes a fresh start. By shopping for new clothes, people welcome more fortune and luck into their year. What a beautiful symbol for this wonderful holiday!

Although shopping was a very fun tradition to partake in, arguably the biggest element of the Chinese New Year celebration is the food. It unites families and friends and provides such a joyous reunion for all. Families start preparing food days before their reunion dinners and celebrations. I have never seen such tremendous effort put into

cooking before, but it makes sense. It wouldn't be a Chinese New Year celebration without stuffing yourself with delicious food. I caught what I can only imagine is a glimpse of this tradition in the **WE CARE** cook-in the day before Chinese New Year. There was so much food and so many activities to do to increase one's fortune. We tossed some salad and ate some amazing foods and desserts. I had a lot of fun.

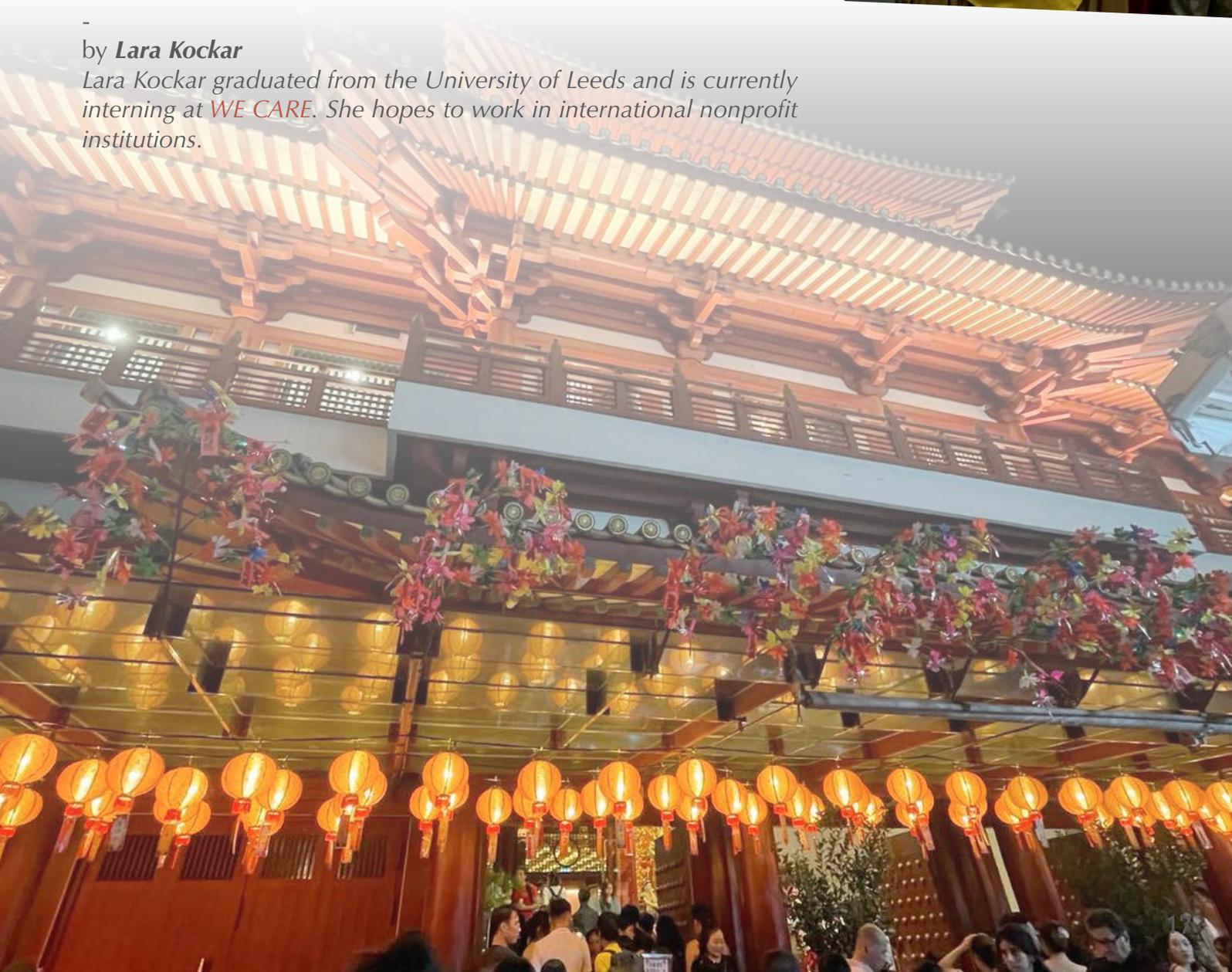
Lastly, I was amazed by how the city celebrated it in general. Everywhere I went, I would see little shops and streets decorated for Chinese New Year. I saw little pots of kumquat trees and flowers, alongside red scrolls at every doorway. From the chaotic market stalls in Chinatown to the beautiful drone show in Marina Bay, the whole city looked so beautiful and festive. I mean, I got to see a dragon made out of drones right above me; that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

When it comes to understanding Singaporean culture, nothing does it like immersing yourself in these festivities. Chinese New Year showed me the traditions, joyousness, and unity of Singapore, and I just loved it.



by **Lara Kockar**

*Lara Kockar graduated from the University of Leeds and is currently interning at **WE CARE**. She hopes to work in international nonprofit institutions.*





## Pickleball fever hits WE CARE

Pickleball is a sport that is suitable for everyone.

Every now and then, a new sporting trend emerges. Some manage to stay relevant, while others fade. One such sport is Tchoukball, which burst onto the scene about 15 years ago and now has its own local governing body, the Tchoukball Association of Singapore (TBAS). This is when you can tell if a sport has officially arrived - when the government sets up a National Sports Association (NSA).

The latest sport that has seen a sharp rise in popularity is Pickleball, and at **WE CARE** we've recently got in on the action.

For the benefit of those who haven't heard of it, here are a few basics:

1. It's a mix of table tennis, tennis, and badminton
2. Played with a wiffle ball, and paddle instead of a racket
3. Played on a court that's similar in size to a badminton court



Fortunately for us, we're located right across the road from Kampong Ubi CC, which has two badminton courts that are perfect for Pickleball. Securing the courts can however be a bit of a challenge because badminton courts are high in demand. So when the courts aren't available, we hold our games at the courtyard located behind the centre.

Here are a few photos:



The courtyard doesn't have an existing net, but thankfully we managed to procure one online and setting it up is pretty straightforward. It's also easier to get a game going as opposed to a sport like football, which requires more people to play. With Pickleball, you only need two! It's also not as physically demanding, making it perfect for people of all ages to play.

Even though our first-ever game was only in January, Pickleball has proved to be extremely popular. We now play weekly on Fridays with at least six players each time, and we foresee needing another net sooner rather than later.

Here are what some of our beneficiaries have to say about Pickleball:

*"I used to play tennis and badminton, so picking Pickleball up wasn't tough. I'd seen videos on social media of people playing and always wanted to try, but the opportunity never presented itself, so I was pleasantly surprised when they started playing at WE CARE. Every week is now spent counting down to Pickleball day!" - JT*

*"I broke my ankle not too long ago, and needed to slowly ramp up my physical activity after removing the brace. Pickleball is perfect because it isn't too intense - I can get away with minimal movement and still have fun. I'll definitely look to play more often once my ankle is further along in its recovery." - Ju*

*"I don't count myself as a sporty person, but decided to give it a try when I saw the rest playing one day. The rules were a little tricky to get used to at the start, but after about an hour everything worked out. I love how it's such a simple game and yet gives you such a good workout." - JM*

One of the best activities recovering persons can add to their routine is exercise and is something that we encourage at WE CARE. If you're looking for a good workout or want to pick up a new sport, come join us! **Games are every Friday at 3pm.**



# Dealing with (and Embracing) Life Change

My name is Rebecca, and I have lots of experience with large-scale life change. I have moved internationally, undergone significant career changes, and, for the past three years, worked to heal from a very toxic relationship with alcohol. Throughout everyone's life, change occurs progressively, one thing leading incrementally to another until eventually things become materially different. Sometimes, a person intentionally elects to take the proverbial hard left turn in their life. Other times, Big Change just drops from the sky without a warning or a welcome. All of these scenarios have one common factor: choice. Even in cases of change by force majeure, everyone gets to choose how they react. That might sound like a lot of responsibility (it is, sorry), but it's also true. In fact, cultivating your reaction may prove to be your biggest resource, especially when circumstances are beyond your control.

Life change can really throw a wrench into things. Part of this disruption stems from the loss of a sense of normalcy and control. On a good day, the future's fundamental uncertainty does my head in. When the tides of life turn significantly or unexpectedly and that narrow margin of predictability disappears? Chaos reigns. Fear of the unknown can hold people hostage in unhealthy situations with apparently no way out. Unfortunately, as they say, often the only way out is through.

Twice, my partner and I have moved internationally. The first move from New York to Toronto was great practice for the much bigger, subsequent move from Toronto to Singapore. Both changes involved intensive planning and high emotions. I managed the logistics easily enough, but I was a persistent, emotional wreck. Sure, a big emotional response makes sense when leaving one's country, continent, friends, family, and culture. However, at the time, drinking alcohol was my primary coping strategy. I drank more and more heavily, all in the name of putting one exhausted foot in front of the other. Because drinking one's feelings is the opposite of coping, it only made things more distressing and chaotic. Despite knowing it



was a problem, for a long time I essentially gaslit myself through denial, blame (of self and others), and negotiation to avoid changing. Eventually, I felt like I had no other choice, and so I embarked upon the most illuminating and rewarding experience of my life. Have these three years been easy? Heck no. It turns out that moving across the world is nothing when compared to the intense exploration, excavation, and education required to find sobriety and then hold on to it.

It helps when change is a choice, but even then, it can be hard to trust the process. Navigating any new landscape involves vulnerability, receptivity, and a healthy dose of acceptance. The early stages of big change, when the unknown outweighs the known, are terrifying. I think the best thing to do in this scenario is to focus on your "musts," that is, what you really need, while taking in your new circumstances. An objective perspective will help you to identify new resources, and use – or create – what you need for support. Adapting from there involves striking the delicate balance between retaining your identity, while simultaneously releasing old behaviors and building more helpful habits. Maintaining resilience is maybe the most critical part of the process. This means being okay with feeling vulnerable, weathering setbacks, and looking determinedly forward, even when it feels like you're moving backward.

Each of my international moves has entailed a heavy transition period coupled with a steep learning curve. Same with quitting alcohol. The first few months felt deeply unstable. I literally had to re-learn how to live: how to socialize, how to manage my time, how to experience my thoughts and emotions without covering them up. Taking things one day at a time really does help. Fortunately, progress begets progress, and even when I struggled (and I struggled a lot), I found myself gathering new information and coping tools that helped me to continue forward. Instead of letting the challenges drag me down, I tried

to acknowledge and embrace the strengths and supports that carried me through the tough times. Maintaining a positive outlook throughout Big Change is actually a matter of survival. Finally, while an incremental mindset definitely helps to curb feelings of overwhelm, it's also a good idea to take the occasional step back. Re-focusing on the bigger goal, and the broader context offers a great reminder of what life change is really about: personal growth and expanded perspectives.

People tend to overlook an important aspect of all life change: grief. You can keep looking forward while still acknowledging what you're losing in the transition. Ideally, life change represents improvement, but it's still okay to miss the life you're leaving behind. My heart breaks each time my life shifts significantly, as I mourn past versions of myself and environments I once called home. If grief is the price we pay for love, I see this sadness as ultimately a good thing. No matter how excited and frightened I am about the future, there is a sweetness to remembering, and a deep gratitude for the previous experiences that have created this version of me, and where I am today. Beware of getting stuck in those memories, but sometimes the best way to notice your progress is to look back at where you started.

Everyone copes with life change differently, and everyone ought to follow the process that makes the most sense to them – even if that means making it up as you go along. However, one source of undeniable, universal support is kindness. I don't mean toxic positivity, and I definitely don't mean accepting circumstances that are harmful or misaligned with your values. I do mean being nice to yourself and going easy on self-criticism. Remembering that, while what you're attempting is new and seems impossible, many before you have succeeded and so will you. A focusing on strengths and resources will help you to maintain a positive outlook that promotes self-awareness and support. Celebrate milestones and accomplishments of all sizes. I vividly remember the satisfaction and relief I felt from finally finding a store in Toronto that sold shower curtains. The first morning that auntie at Fun Toast remembered my coffee order offered gave me a crucial first glimpse of feeling at home in Singapore.

Big life changes take a long time to settle, and the further along you go, the further apart these revelations and milestones become. That's also

part of the process. A major challenge in dealing with long-term change is how to keep going once the excitement wears off. When this happens, it can take enormous patience to re-focus on the basics: embrace the discomfort, take it one day at a time, and always look forward. Try to hang in through both the dramatic and the mundane, aim for consistency, and know when to adapt, to rest, and to ask for help.

I'm currently at the threshold of another Big Change: Returning to live in the US after seven years in Singapore. The emotions are intense, and the sheer volume of organizational tasks involved is enough to make me question why, again, am I doing this? There's more that I don't know than I do know, and it feels scary and uncertain and all of those vulnerable ways. I wouldn't mind a crystal ball. And yet, when I step back, I catch glimpses into what the next chapter holds, and it's exciting. I have confidence that I can handle this transition, and I am committed to taking things one step at a time with patience and self-compassion. I know that I can do this, because I've done it before, and it has always – eventually – been okay. My support network is vast, and will help me with whatever I can't handle myself. I wouldn't be who or where I am without embracing changes and challenges. And so I'm sad, but I'm also ready.

So, if you're contemplating embarking on a new life change, or if you're facing a big, unforeseen change, try to take a deep breath. Coping and staying resilient through challenge is how we grow and learn. It will not always feel like sparkles and unicorns, but I do believe that life is the most magical during times of transition. Even if what you're facing seems insurmountable, know that you've emerged from challenges before, and will again. Trust the process, believe in yourself, and remember to ask for help. We are all, always, writing our story in real time. I know this next chapter won't be easy, but I'm excited to meet the person I'll become in the process.

***Note:** I will continue to write for the **WE CARE** newsletter, but my Mindful Movement classes will finish at the end of March. It has been my great privilege to meet and work with everyone at **We Care**. Thank you for your patience, focus, kindness, and for keeping a sense of humor while trying to balance on one leg, with closed eyes. Y'all really are the most wonderful.*

- by **Rebecca Nance**

# HIGHLIGHTS

Discovering new joys in recovery.  
Exciting events and activities from  
the recent past.



Charity movie – The Goldfinger (30 Dec)



Addiction Awareness Talk at Darul Aman Mosque



Christmas cook-in celebration (Dec 2023)



CNY 2024 celebration: Visit to River Hong Bao



16th Finisher Awards



HIV Awareness Talk with Dr Rayner Tan



ARFA Partners Visit



Light To Night Walk



NUS Medical Society Outreach



Peace Centre Art Walk



Sound Bath Experience with Melanie & Jean



Pickleball



Weekly Workouts with Zac

# Transforming Lives. Restoring Families.

Counselling | Therapy Programme | Drop-in Centre | Recovery Support Groups | Events & Activities



**WE CARE**  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

We are located at:

**Kembangan-Chai Chee  
Community Hub**

11 Jln Ubi #01-41, Block 5  
Singapore 409074

Tel : 3165 8017

Fax : 6491 5338

E-mail: [help@wecare.org.sg](mailto:help@wecare.org.sg)

**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 behaviours 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

For more information on what we do, please go to: [www.wecare.org.sg](http://www.wecare.org.sg)

Counselling sessions are private and confidential.



## Help is just a phone call away

If you have a problem with addiction, or if you know someone who has issues, call us at **3165 8017** or email [help@wecare.org.sg](mailto:help@wecare.org.sg)

*The first step in getting better is to ask for help*

## About This Publication

Editorial Team:

**Leslie, Simon, Jat.**

Contributors:

**James, Lara, Merve, Rebecca, Kyle, Steven.**

## WE CARE needs your help.

**WE CARE** Community Services Ltd is a registered charity.

We provide treatment for all forms of addictions and our services are open to persons of all races, cultures and religion.

To fund our programmes and services, we depend mainly on donations from individuals and corporations.

Your support enables us to provide quality care to individuals and families affected by addictions and compulsive behaviours.

As we are an approved Institution of Public Character (IPC), donations to **WE CARE** are tax deductible.

To make a donation:

Write a cheque payable to "**WE CARE Community Services Limited**". Alternatively, go online to make a donation at:

- [Giving.sg/we-care-comunity-services-limited](http://Giving.sg/we-care-comunity-services-limited); or
- [Wecare.give.asia](http://Wecare.give.asia)

