

# WE CARE Community Services



## 2019 Annual Report

Volunteer Appreciation Event Dec 2019

## Vision

To be a leading centre for the transformation of persons with addiction

Unique Entity Number  
(UEN) 200506089N

*Gardens by the Bay gives free admission to charities*

## Mission

Transform individuals with addiction through community-based recovery programmes  
Support families through education and specialist services  
Develop partnerships to facilitate reintegration into society  
Advocate acceptance of persons with addiction

Charity  
Registration  
Number  
01888

WE CARE Community Services Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and registered under the Charities Act  
A charity that provides programmes and services for persons who are in recovery from addiction, as well as their family members and significant others  
With Institution of Public Character (IPC) status, and full member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

IPC Reference Number  
200506089N

## Operating Address

Kembangan-Chai Chee Community Hub  
11 Jln Ubi, Block 5, #01-41 Singapore 409074  
[www.wecare.org.sg](http://www.wecare.org.sg)

**Board of Directors**

**Andrew da Roza (Chair)**

**Desmond Lum (Deputy Chair)**

**Anthony Lee (Treasurer)**

**Frances Cheang**

**Koh Kah Yeok**

**Dane Anderson**

**Lim Yun Chin (resigned 1 June 2019)**

**Winslow Munidasa**

**Toime Marius Elmar (resigned 23 Sep 2019)**

**Nguyen Co Gia (resigned 23 Sep 2019)**

**Auditor Fiducia LLP**

**Team WE CARE**

**Tham Yuen Han (Executive Director)**

**Yvonne Yuen (Operations and Services)**

**Sam Heng Wai (Finance and Admin)**

**William Fong (Finance and Admin)**

**Leslie Goh (Communications & Relations)**

**Noor Sida bte Abdullah (Counsellor)**

**Lina Ng (Counsellor)**

**Chai Bin Hua (Counsellor)**

**Sofia Tian Heredia (Counsellor)**

**Oliver Ackermann (Counsellor)**

**Nirmala Turasamy (Admin Executive)**

**Afandi Ahmad (Peer Support Specialist)**

**Jess Ang (Peer Support Specialist)**

**Patrick Lim (Peer Support & Program Executive)**

**"ALL IDEAS  
GROW OUT OF  
OTHER IDEAS"**



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Staff and others at Strategic Planning Day Oct



# A word from Andrew

**WE CARE** expanded our services and service users dramatically in 2019, and we are on the cusp of becoming a charity with a million dollar operating cost budget.

This has changed our funding needs, and also stretched our human capital resources.

As a charity, we deliver professional psychological and other therapeutic services to the addiction community, their families and employers.

Outcomes in addiction treatment are associated with the length of time service users remain in recovery treatment. Empathy, compassion, kindness and non-judgmental support are essential ingredients to service user retention.

In addition, successful recovery outcomes are linked to the skilful use of evidence-based treatment plans and approaches. Thus, we seek team members who embody the attitude and the expertise and experience that make addiction treatments effective.

The challenge is that **WE CARE** competes among public and private psychiatric clinics, hospitals, vocational and other institutions, for the scarce number of trained, professional addiction therapists and recovery partners.

Our continued focus in 2019 has therefore been to attract and retain the right talent, and to secure the funds that we need to achieve this.

It may sound paradoxical, but **WE CARE** is heartened by the increase in the number of our service users in 2019. This indicates to us that many more people in our society are willing to come forward to seek and receive help and support.

National campaigns such as "Beyond the Label" have done much to chip away at the stigma and shame of mental illnesses, such as addictions.

In addition, in January 2019, the Government endorsed the role that evidenced-based treatments for addiction would play in reducing the cycle of recidivism in our prisons, and in the levels of crime. This was cited by the Singapore Prison Service's annual report released in 2019, which stated that more rehabilitation and aftercare support led to "changes in the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) to strengthen rehabilitation, while maintaining a tough stance against drugs."

As a result, some limitations have been removed that allow unlimited attendance at the Drug Rehabilitation Centres, and more first-time offenders can be streamed into formal treatment and recovery services, rather than incarceration. **WE CARE** is proud to be working with Singapore Prison to assist in this national effort to treat and to reintegrate former drug offenders into our caring and inclusive society.

We are most grateful for the Government's initiative in introducing the Bicentennial Community Fund (BCF) in 2019. This has enabled **WE CARE** to receive a combination of funding support from both the BCF and the Tote Board that matched, dollar for dollar, the individual and corporate donations we were able to raise in our fundraising events.

We are also grateful to NCSS, Community Chest, the Tote Board, Singapore Pools, our corporate donors Grace, Shua and Jacob Ballas Charitable Trust; HY Building & Maintenance Services; Italian Chamber of Commerce; Marina Bay Sands and KPMG; and our individual donors (apart from directors and their families) Anjali Parmar, Lee Tzu Yang and Ollivier Guillaume Claude Jacques. Their support has enabled us to touch many lives in our community – bringing our experience, strength and hope to recovering persons and their families and friends.

Three of our directors chose to retire from the **WE CARE** Board in 2019: Dr. Yun Chin Lim, Mr. Marius Toime and Mr. Co Gia Nguyen. Dr. Lim was one of the original founders of **WE CARE**. Without his vision, dedication and support, **WE CARE** would not be where we are today. Both Mr Toime and Mr Nguyen have worked on the **WE CARE** Board with energy and purpose, furthering our strategic direction, and supporting our fundraising efforts.

We thank these directors for their fine service, and we wish them well for the future.

Looking ahead, **WE CARE** realises that the increasing use of technology and tele-mental health services gives us an opportunity to change our service delivery model. It enables us to deliver more services, to more service users, in unique and effective ways.

However, we are mindful of service users who are not familiar with new technologies or do not have access to them, and we will not leave them behind. Our face-to-face services will always be available for new clients and to distressed clients in need of mental health support in person. Technology will be accretive, but will not displace the human contact in our treatment and support.

Facing multiple resource challenges and increased service demands in 2019, the **WE CARE** Management team did a truly remarkable job. I thank them for their tireless work and commitment to our service users.

# A note from Yuen Han

**W**e had a fruitful year in 2019. We achieved our strategic goals of growing our clinical services and expanding our reach to a wider community. We fine-tuned and consolidated our primary programme, the Sober Living Framework (SLF), which guides our overall service delivery and programming.

Throughout the year, we served 603 persons with various issues and conducted close to 2,800 hours of individual or group therapy for 482 active cases. This is a 34% rise in the caseload served as compared to 2018. We experienced an increase in people seeking help on their own volition, many of whom found us through the web or by word of mouth from existing clients.

At the same time, we continued to see support from our network of community, legal and hospital partners. With their collaboration, we were able to provide integrated care to our beneficiaries that often present with complex medical, psychological, legal and socio-economic needs.

Our appreciation goes out especially to the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS), the State Courts and the various family service centres and halfway homes that have come together with us to provide timely support for some of our clients in their most dire state of need.

2019 also saw the start of Phase 2 of the SAFE project which we first piloted in 2014. Entitled SAFE 1.1, the project is spearheaded by NCSS in collaboration with the Singapore Prison Service, whereby **WE CARE** is the primary service provider to deliver an intervention programme that aims to strengthen families of drug offenders through a coordinated approach. The project started in July 2019 and entailed a comprehensive programme with both case management and counselling interventions.

Whilst SAFE 1.1 was focussed on drug rehabilitation, our partnership with Singapore Pools gave us the opportunity to reach out to persons at risk of problem gambling. Through this partnership, we were able to reach out to many relevant audiences at major gaming events, to advocate for early intervention when one is at risk of problem gambling.

Hence in 2019, we held a record 81 addiction awareness outreach events and talks, reaching 2,000 participants at various collaborative events with partners such as Singapore Pools, NAMS, Marina Bay Sands, SACA, SOTA and the Hindu Centre. We are grateful for their continued support and collaboration.

As we conducted more outreach and responded to greater demands for our therapeutic services, our resources and staff were stretched to the limit.

Addiction therapy is a complex discipline and Singapore as a whole has a scarcity of professionals who have the necessary experience and perseverance to pursue this field of work. Hence, retaining and growing a clinical team that can meet the high service standards is an imperative for us.

To this purpose, in 2019, we conducted a review of our talent retention and compensation policy so that we can continue to attract and retain our best talents.

We are pleased to report that with the support of NCSS and the 'Growing with People' project, we embarked on a comprehensive review of our people practices in 2019. Tapping on the funding support for HR consultancy guidance, we were able to benchmark our HR practices and identified gaps and strengths for further improvement of our compensation and benefits structure.

As we grow in service delivery and standard levels, we want to keep our focus on ensuring a conducive and meaningful work environment for our staff team as well.

For we understand that only helpers who feel valued and appreciated can give of their best to the people they serve.

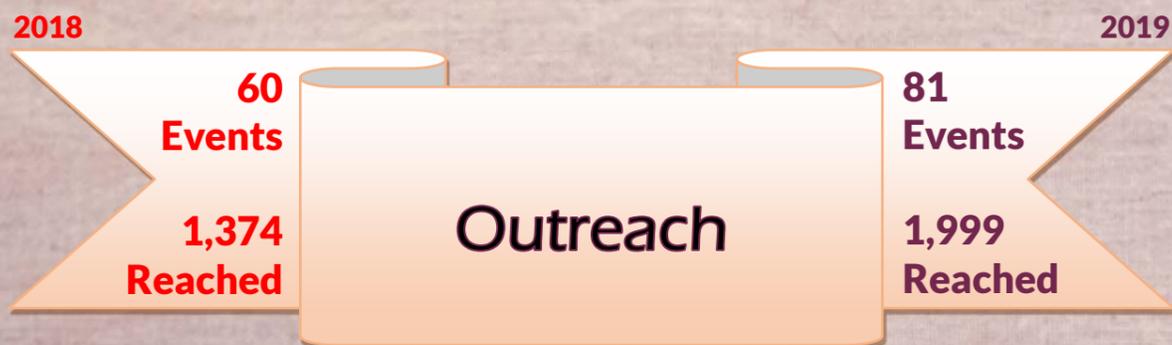
On this note, I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to Mr Sam Heng Wai, our trusted HR and Admin Manager, who stepped down to retirement in December 2019. Heng Wai served unselfishly with us from 2014 to Dec 2019 and was instrumental in helping to bring **WE CARE** to our present level of services.

With his departure, we welcomed a new member to the management team, Mr William Fong. A finance veteran and Certified Public Accountant, William brings with him many years of corporate as well as social service experience, having worked in senior financial and management roles in Timberland, Virgin Mobile and Brahm Centre, among others, as well as volunteering regularly at **WE CARE**. With the injection of fresh management perspective to the current team, we look forward to 2020 with renewed energy and anticipation.





# Key Service Highlights



# Current Programmes

Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019

• 'One day at a time'

Lunch meeting

1. 30pm - 2. 30pm

Courage Room

English class

2. 45pm - 3. 45pm

Board Room

Introduction 12 steps

3. 00pm - 4. 30pm

Serenity Room

IT class

4. 00pm - 5. 00pm

Main Office

AI Anon

7. 00pm - 8. 00pm

Wisdom Room

Augustine Fellowship

8. 00pm - 9. 00pm

Serenity Room

## SOAR • Substance Or Alcohol Recovery Programme

A structured therapy programme designed for people with substance, prescription medication and/or alcohol abuse problems. Conducted in a safe non-judgemental environment, where issues can be worked out and long-lasting change effected.

## GRIP • Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme

Persons with an uncontrollable urge to keep gambling are treated with this counselling programme where they learn about urges, triggers and recovery and how to develop a relapse prevention plan.

## SLPA • Sex Love Porn Addiction Recovery Programme

This therapy programme is structured and designed for people with sex, pornography and love addictions. The treatment plan is tailored to the client's needs and immediate and long-term goals will be established in the treatment planning.

## ATO • Atypical Theft Offending

Designed for compulsive stealing or shoplifting behaviour, this unique and specialized outpatient treatment programme incorporates individual, group, and couple/family therapy, as well as educational workshops and self-help support groups. The goal is to prevent further shoplifting while upholding the dignity and self-respect of clients.

## IGA • Internet Gaming Addiction

For persons with internet and/or gaming addictions, **WE CARE** has customised this structured therapy programme. The programme helps them to understand, manage and stop compulsive internet use, video and mobile gaming.

## ADAM • Anxiety Depression or Anger Management

ADAM is a skill-based programme designed expressly to help recovering persons who experience difficulty managing their anger, or expressing negative emotions effectively. Participants learn coping behaviours to assert their needs effectively and manage their angry responses.



## CSO • Counselling for Significant Others

Developed primarily for family, friends or significant others of persons who are either in recovery, or struggling with a substance or behavioural dependency problem. Clients receive counselling support and learn skills to manage the chaos in their lives, explore relationship issues, learn self-care, and understand how best to support their loved ones.

## SMART Recovery • Self-Management and Recovery Training

SMART is the leading self-empowering support group in addiction recovery. Participants learn tools for recovery based on the latest scientific research and take part in a worldwide community that includes free, self-empowering, science-based mutual help groups.

## Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention

An open group to learn and practice mindfulness, which helps participants to break away from their own destructive habitual patterns. Caters to persons with a history of addictions, reactive behaviours and/or mood disorders.

## Women Therapy Group

This weekly group for women in recovery provides a safe space to share their stories of struggle and hope. It also aims to reintegrate the participants into the community, and re-establish relationships with their loved ones.

## 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. This introductory workshop is conducted every month over 4 sessions.

## Family and Friends (F&F)

This is a facilitated support group which helps family members and close friends of recovering persons to learn about addiction. It helps them to understand what the recoveree is going through and how best to support them. It also covers techniques and strategies they can adopt to take care of their own mental health.

# New initiatives



# Project SAFE 1.1

**S**AFE is an initiative spearheaded by NCSS in collaboration with Singapore Prison Service to treat former inmates and their families. First launched as a pilot programme in 2014, it was hailed as a success on its 2-year completion.

The objective of the programme is to prevent drug relapse, and re-offending amongst former offenders with a drug history.

It is well documented that addiction affects not only the addicted person but the entire family as well. Often the family goes through as much, if not more, difficulty and suffering as their addicted family member.

In its second phase, it has been relaunched as Project SAFE 1.1 from the later half of 2019.

With the help of professional counsellors, SAFE buddies, support groups and the support of the family, persons affected by addiction have a real chance at recovering and re-integrating into the community.

**WE CARE** has been appointed by NCSS as the primary service provider to undertake all treatment for SAFE.

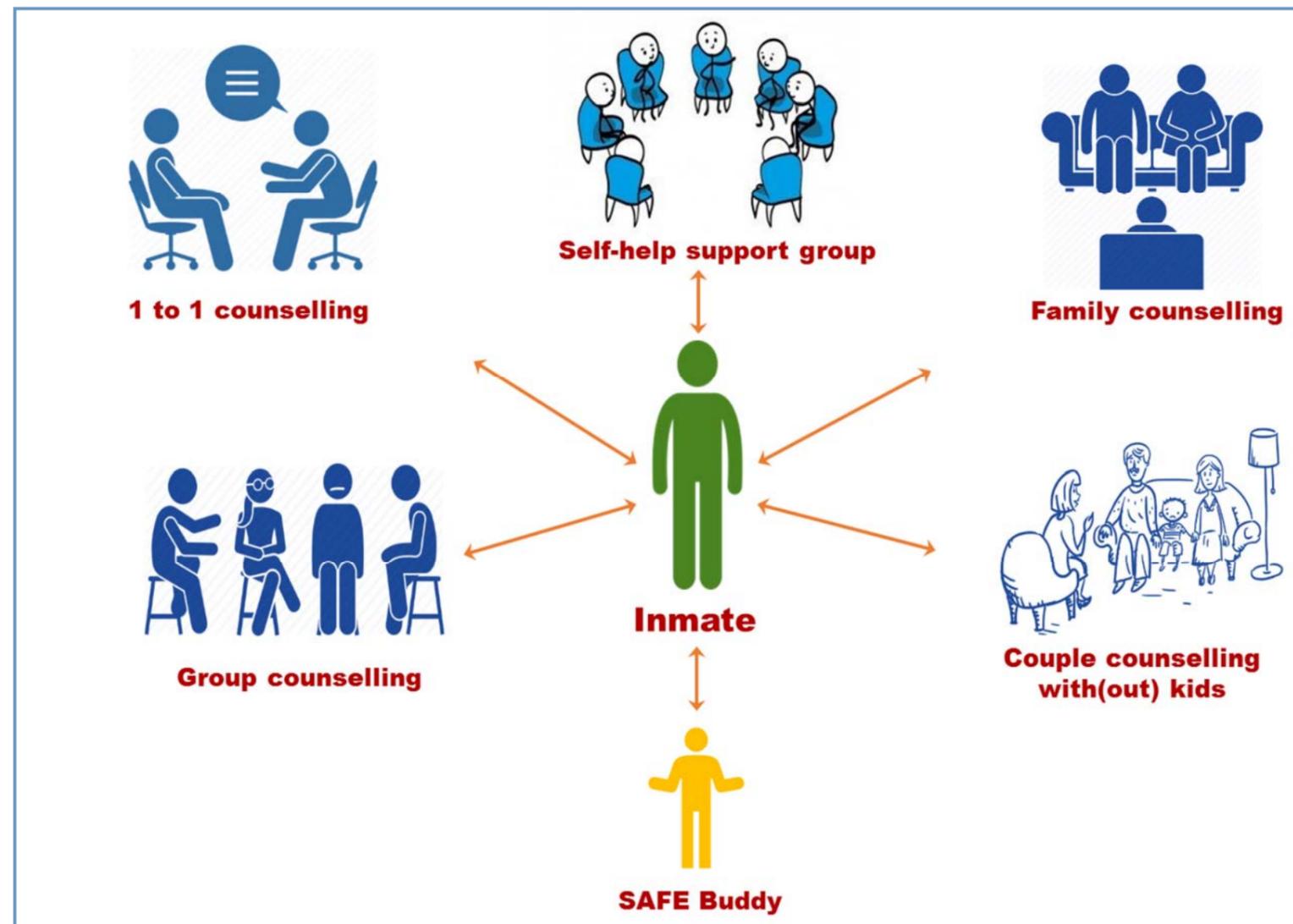
## SAFE stands for

**S**upport for recovering **A**ddicts and their **F**amilies through **E**mpowerment

In the expanded 1.1 launch of Project SAFE, recognition is given to the vital role that family and loved ones play in the recovery of an addict.

The programme helps families to bond, share experiences and provide mutual support through closer interaction.

## HOW SAFE Works



# Centre Highlights





Stretching out with a Qigong trainer



Tea appreciation workshop



WE CARE participates in the annual HeartStrings Walk



With just a chair, one can exercise to stay fit



Experiencing Minimalism at the National Gallery



Our first Volunteer Appreciation Event took place in 2019



The Finisher Awards celebrate milestones in clean time



The multimedia Lumina starts in the evening



Getting ready for a baking session



Working fit with badminton



Workshop on how to manage money wisely



Learning how to brew a good coffee



Getting coached in computer software



Art is one of the most popular activities at WE CARE

# Community Outreach





Students from SOTA tune in to an addiction awareness



Personnel from a Shanghai addiction facility visit



Raffles Institution students at an interview



Medical students from Seoul learn more about addiction



Macau Helpline personnel pose queries

# W

**E CARE** reached out to almost two thousand persons in 2019. It was a nearly 50% jump over the 1,374 audience in 2018. From 60 events in 2018 to 81 in 2019, this represents a one-third increase in outreach efforts.

Many of the audience we reached out to resulted from our collaborations with Singapore Pools and Marina Bay Sands (MBS). As part of ongoing efforts to create awareness, **WE CARE** conducted talks and outreach activities— to their clientele in the case of Pools; and to staff, when it came to Sands.

Besides awareness talks at educational institutions like School of the Arts (SOTA) and organisations such as the Hindu Centre, **WE CARE** regularly visited Singapore Prisons, National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) and halfway homes. Likewise we hosted visits from halfway houses, charities such as Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) and various educational institutions at our centre.

We also welcomed overseas delegations — including from Shanghai, Seoul, Myanmar, Macau, Brunei and Bahrain — who wanted to understand our how **WE CARE** works, and how we treat the recovering community.



Reaching out to visitors at Wisma Geylang



At a Singapore Pools outreach event



Engaging with staff at MBS MarketPlace event



Staff from treatment centres in Myanmar ask questions



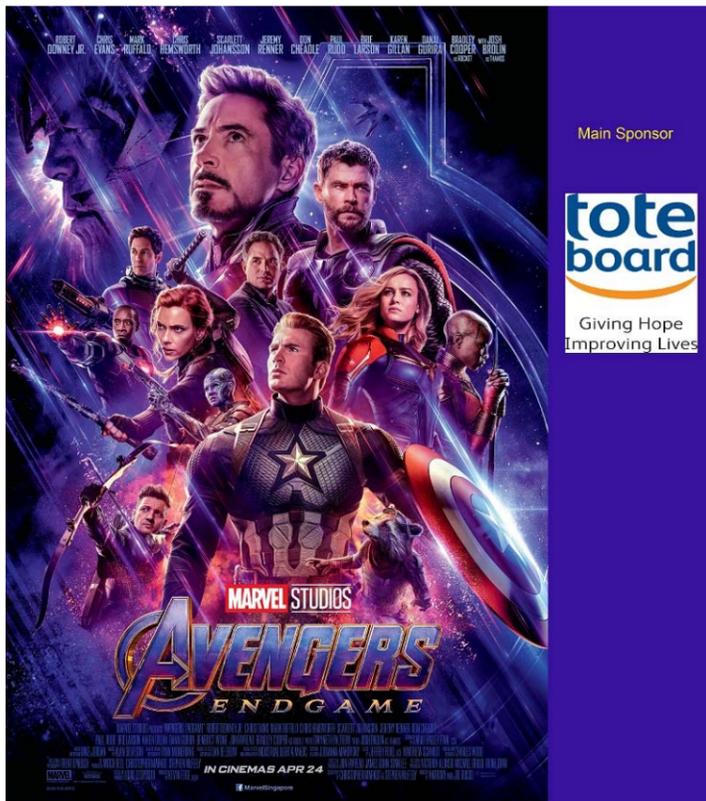
SACA brought their staff and volunteers to visit **WE CARE**



Briefing staff and volunteers at the Hindu Centre



# Fundraising



Main Sponsor



Giving Hope  
Improving Lives



# WE CARE had 3 fundraisers in 2019.

The tentpole campaign was the Charity Golf Event which took place at the Singapore Island Country Club. This was bookended by 2 well-known movies – Avengers: Endgame and Frozen 2 – which were held at Shaw Theatres.

The Board and staff of WE CARE wish to express our gratitude to every well-wisher, supporter and donor and to everyone who helped in one way or another to make the events a success.

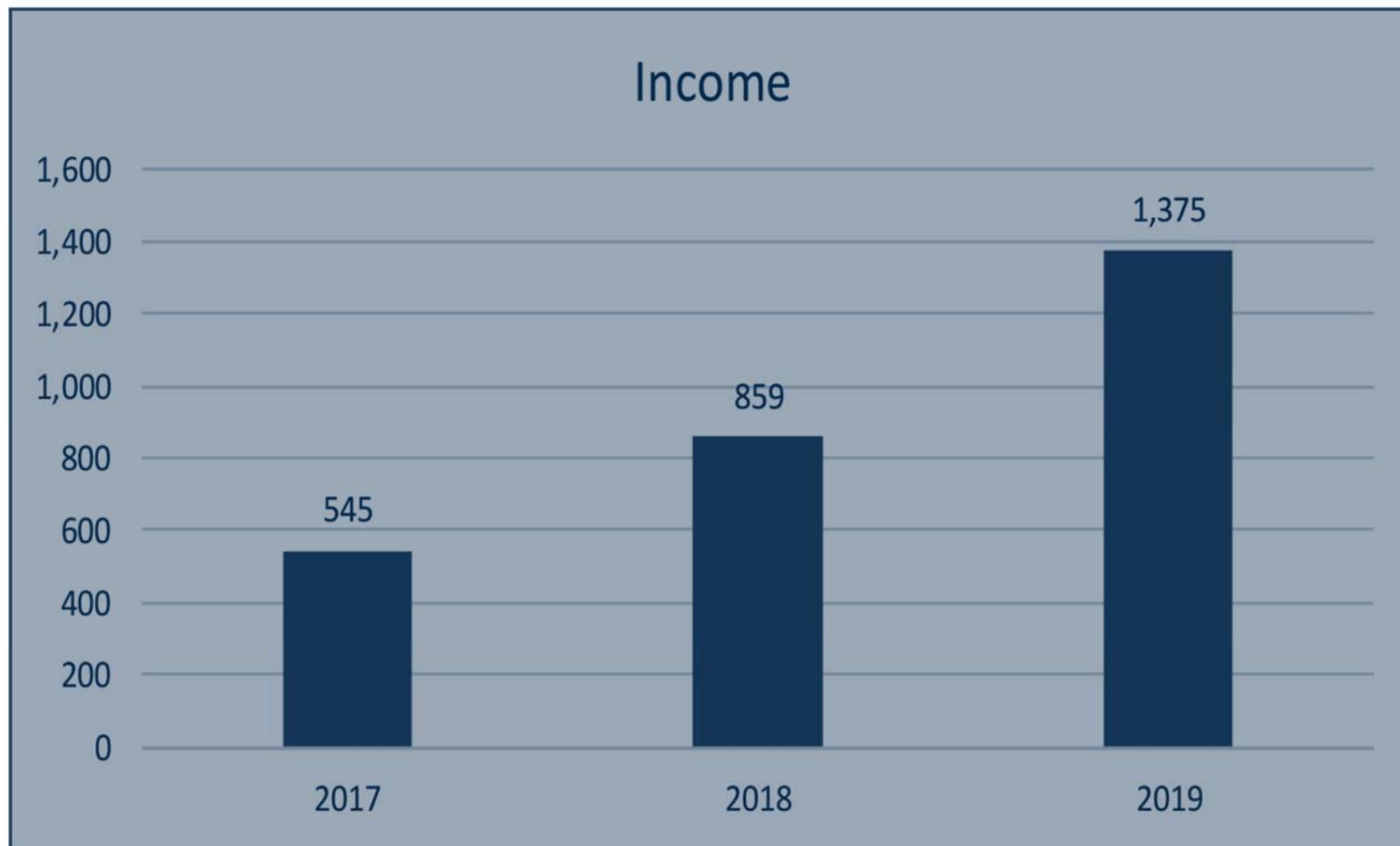
Special thanks to the Tote Board and the BCF who, between themselves, matched all funds raised.



# Key Financial Highlights 2019

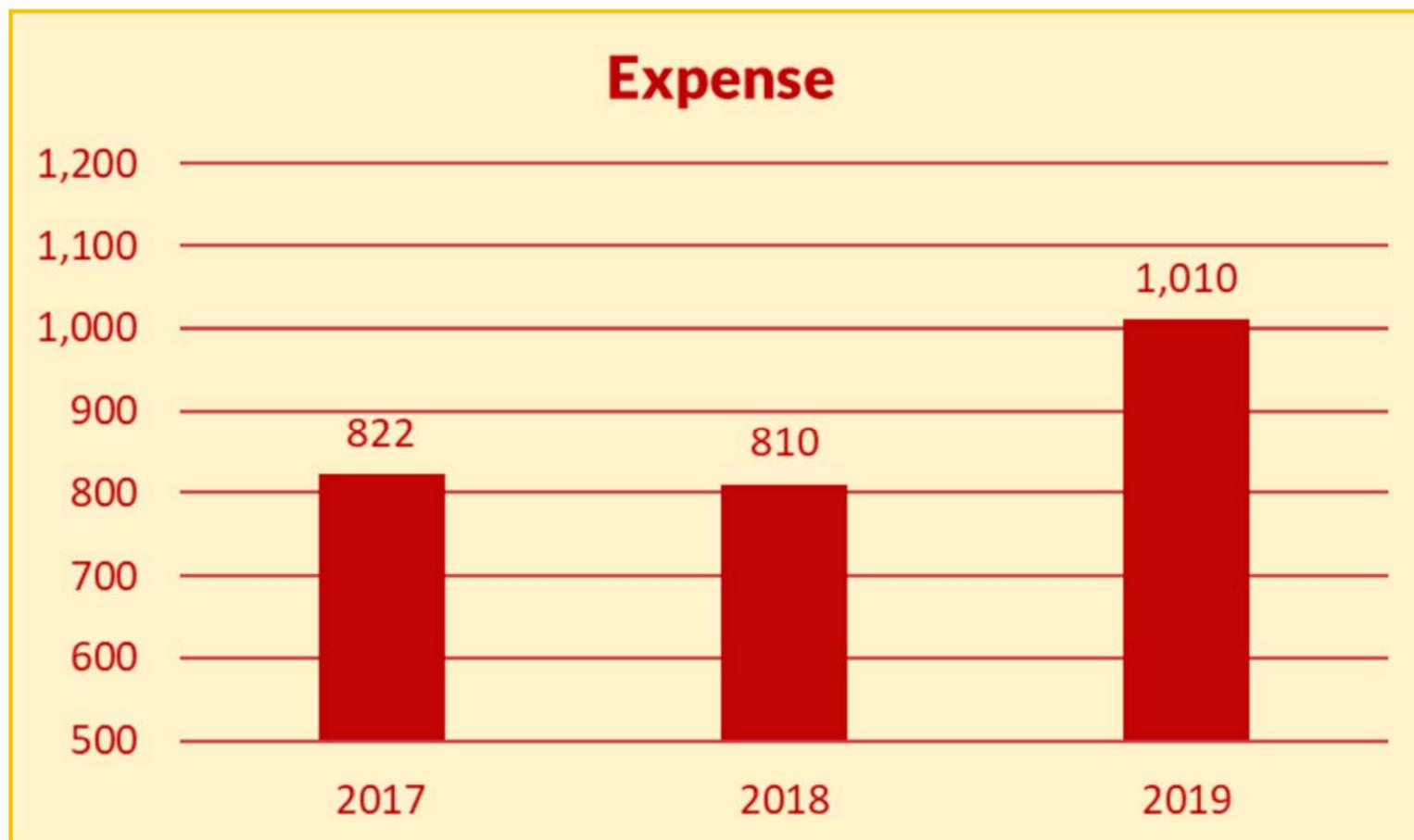


For the complete set of the 2019 audited accounts,  
kindly refer to our website at [wecare.org.sg](http://wecare.org.sg)



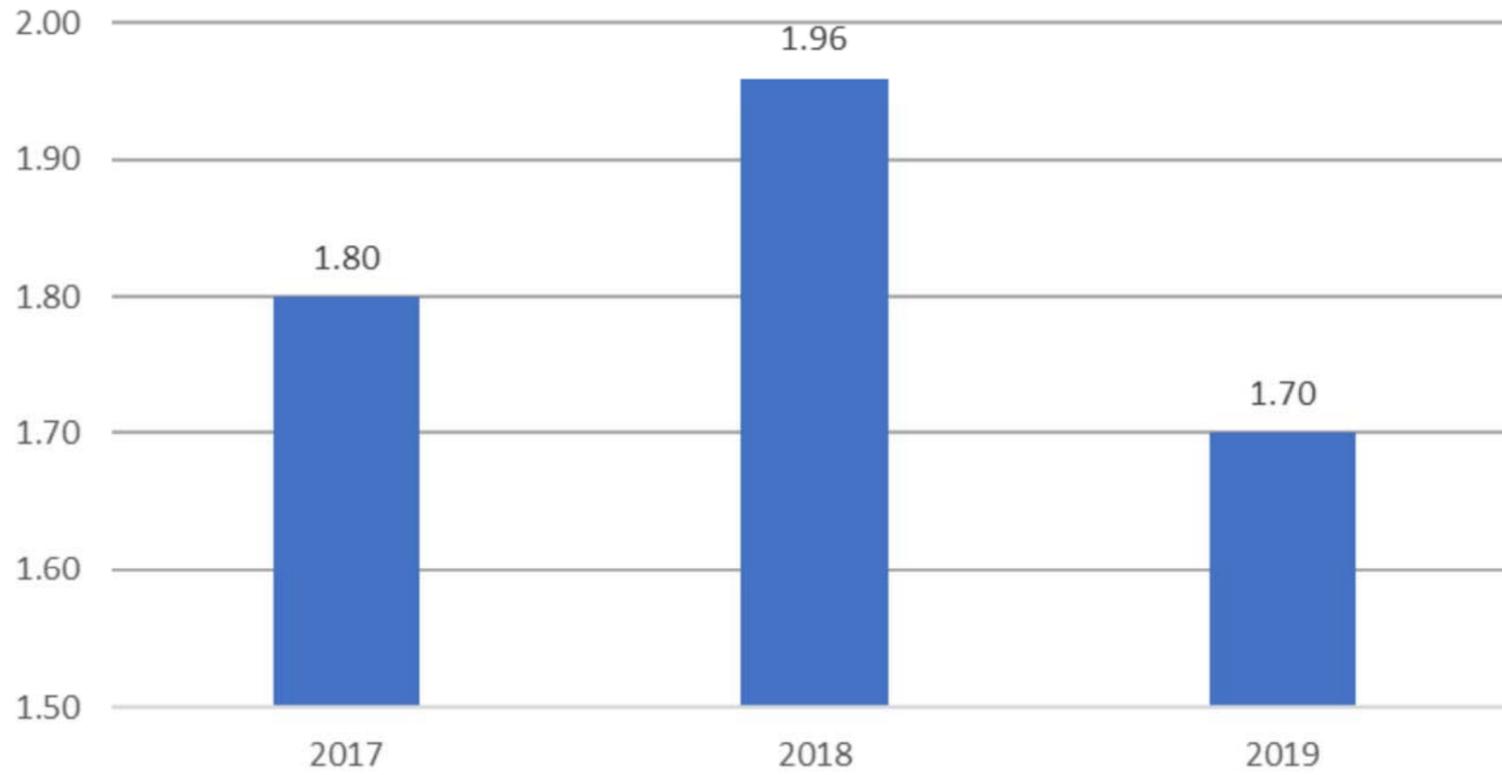
All figures are in S\$'000

Summary	2017	2018	2019
Total Income	545	859	1,375
Total Expenses	822	810	1,010
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	-277	49	365



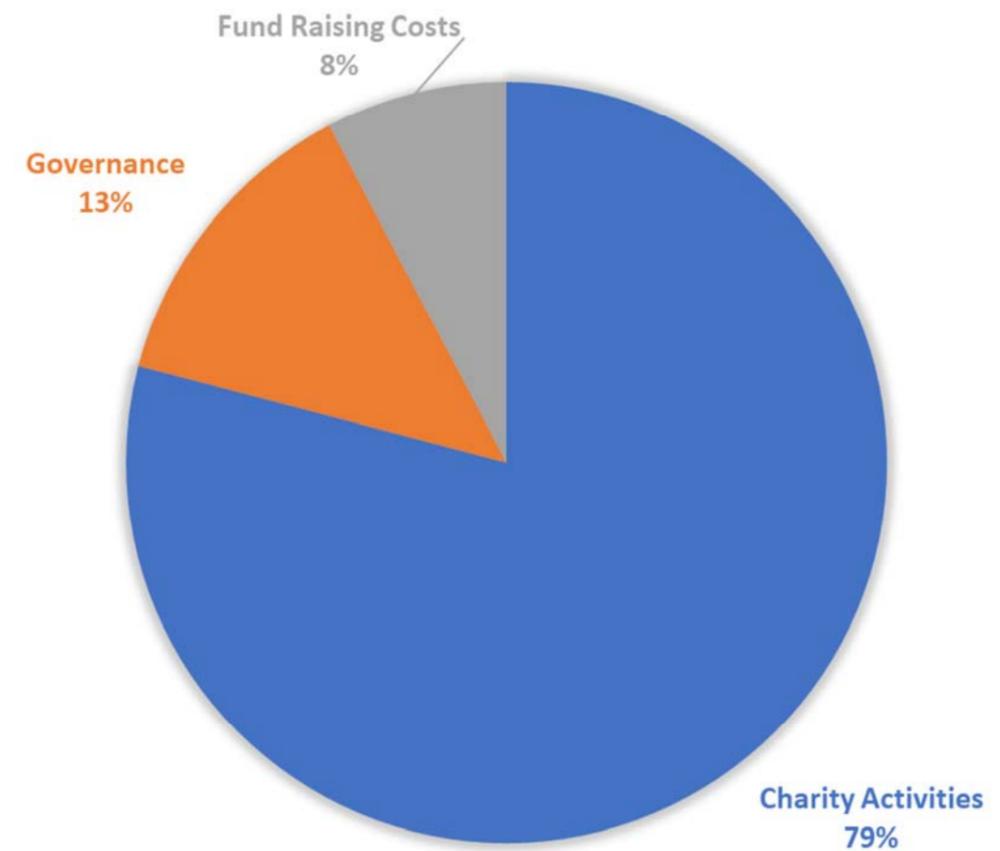
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## Reserve Ratio



The reserve ratio measures the amount of reserves against the operating expenses of **WE CARE**

## HOW EVERY DOLLAR WAS SPENT



For the complete set of the 2019 audited accounts, kindly refer to our website at [wecare.org.sg](http://wecare.org.sg)

# Governance

## Governance Evaluation Checklist

WE CARE makes annual submissions via the Governance Evaluation Checklist through the online Charity Portal at [www.charities.gov.sg](http://www.charities.gov.sg)

## Governance Policies

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

## Arm's Length / Undue Influence

No staff of WE CARE is a close member of the family belonging to the Executive Head or a Board member, and who has received remuneration exceeding S\$50,000 during the year.

## Corporate Governance Statement

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

All Board members have also declared that during the year and while they were directors, they had no personal or vested interest in any of the business transactions or contracts into which WE CARE had entered.

To maintain effective oversight, the roles and responsibilities of the Board

Chairman and the Executive Director are kept separate. The Executive Director and management team consult with relevant Board members and the Subcommittees when advice is needed, through meetings, telephone calls and electronic mails.

WE CARE believes that competent, experienced and committed Board members will ensure that we continue to be relevant and sustainable.

As such, instead of limiting their tenure of service, we retain the services of volunteer board members for as long as possible,

# COMPLIANCE

# REGULATIONS

# STANDARDS

Board Member	Attendance
Andrew da Roza	3 / 3
Desmond Lum	2 / 3
Dane Anderson	3 / 3
Anthony Lee	2 / 3
Frances Cheang*	2 / 3
Dr Winslow Munidasa*	1 / 3
Koh Kah Yeok	2 / 3

\* Frances Cheang and Dr Munidasa have served on the Board for more than 10 years. They have been retained in view of their long experience at WE CARE, their commitment and energy. The Board values Dr Munidasa's expertise as one of the foremost authorities on the clinical treatment of addictions. It also recognises Frances' vast experience in compliance matters in KPMG, and in her roles as honorary treasurer of ComChest and WE CARE.

## Policy on No Substance Abuse

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

To support succession planning and Board renewal, WE CARE looks out for volunteers with diverse skill sets to contribute, ensuring our service continuity and quality to the community we serve.

The Board conducts self-evaluation to assess its performance and effectiveness once every 3 years, with the first to be conducted in May 2020.

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

## Conflict of Interest

WE CARE has implemented a Conflict of Interest policy based on the Commissioner of Charities guidelines.

All Board members, directors and staff have read the policy.

On an annual basis, they sign the declaration to renew their commitment and to acknowledge they have understood the policy.

# Perspective



The view from regular donor D

### ***Hi D, give us some background information about yourself, where you are from, how you came to Singapore, and what you do.***

I'm originally from Estonia, another small yet technologically advanced country on the world map. I've been calling Singapore my home for the past 5 years and hope to stay for years to come. I absolutely love Singapore - the cityscape, the greenery, the weather and how it's a window to the rest of Asia. It's wonderful how many different cultures are blended together. Very grateful for the opportunity to live here!

Professionally, I've been working in HR and Talent Acquisition for the past decade. It's been fulfilling to contribute to the nation's economic growth by connecting talent to businesses. My most recent feat was scaling a Singapore startup from 350 to 1,200 people across 10 Asian countries in less than 2 years. I'm an advocate for holistic career growth and increasing awareness about employees as individuals who go through their personal and professional ups and downs. I'm currently on a mission to seek for ways organisations can provide the support people need to do their part for the world. I believe that everyone needs some assistance when becoming more self-aware before they are able to positively contribute to the world around them.

### ***Do you know of friends or co-workers who have been affected by addiction? How did you feel about their struggle?***

I know plenty of people who have been or are currently going about their lives while living in the depths, or on the edge, of an addiction. From personal experience I know that the struggle with addiction is overwhelming, especially as there's often lack of self-awareness of being in this addictive behaviour cycle to begin with. There's a lot of denial. The only way out of the pain is to fuel our addiction with the very thing that is causing it. And we often tend to protect and justify our addictive behaviours because we don't see another way out of the discomfort. And it's a state of being that makes us feel so alone, resulting in isolation and an inability to form connection to others because we think they wouldn't understand us.

What we must remember is that being addicted doesn't make anyone a bad person. It just means they've lost their way and are seeking for ways to ease the pain. While reaching out for something external to make us feel better may initially be just a habitual quick fix (and may even work!), it often turns into an addictive behaviour and getting out of that vicious cycle becomes harder as time goes by. It takes a toll on people's lives, families, friendships and relationships. Unfortunately, admitting defeat - that we can't handle it on our own - and asking for help is not easy because of the taboo around addictions.

### ***What is your own personal view of addiction?***

Being in recovery myself, I now have a better idea how addictions work on a mental, physical and spiritual level. The thing with addiction is that it can be so subtle. It sneaks up on us. It just takes over our lives, thinking and behaviours, sometimes without us realising it. We must remember that it's no one's fault - it's just the way our bodies and minds are geared and some of us are just more receptive to addictions. In recovery circles, we refer to addiction as a progressive disease that only gets worse with time, never better unless the person steps on a recovery path and makes drastic changes to their lifestyle.

I personally believe that we all have addictive behaviours and thinking patterns of some sort. Some are less obvious than the ones the majority of us may be more familiar with i.e alcohol, drugs, eating, gambling, etc. During my own recovery journey, I've come to understand that addictive behaviours can flare up in other ways: mindless social media scrolling, seeking drama, choosing to stay in unhealthy relationships.

Unfortunately, the thing with addiction is that the recovery and healing can only commence once the person in its grip realises they can't go on like this. In my view, addiction is not a weakness. Addiction for me means courage, strength and inner wisdom. But rebuilding our lives takes effort, from becoming aware of our troubles and conflicts to dedicating time and taking action to resolve those. But like they say - pain is the cornerstone for growth.

### ***Why do you donate to WE CARE? What is your impression of what we do?***

I came across **WE CARE** when I was looking for ways to contribute towards Singapore's addiction treatment and recovery efforts. It was great to see that the centre helps to address such a vast range of addictions, especially as they all have their nuances. For example, someone struggling with binge-eating may not fully relate to the experiences of another person who is not able to control their drinking.

I learnt that the centre was also facilitating 12-step recovery programme meetings, which I think is fantastic! Anyone struggling with addiction will need a support network around them.

### ***Addiction is a mental health condition that is affecting increasingly more people. What more can society do to help?***

In my opinion, it probably comes down to one thing - encouraging each other to ask for help! We're all so used to running our lives, sorting things out and being on top of everything. It's often seen as a weakness when someone admits they need help, whatever the circumstance. It would be fascinating to see how societies and people would change if we all start to remind each other that it's okay not to be okay more often. But the reality is that we don't pause to reflect often enough and — as a result — are often disconnected from self-awareness and don't even know that we're in addictive and recurring behaviour patterns that cause us pain.

Again, from personal experience, I think people often struggle to express what they actually feel and think. Almost as if we're expected and geared to say the "right" thing at all times and not admit something's off. I believe that if societies, organisations and communities would help people to develop a sufficient vocabulary for self-expression and encourage them to reach out for help, things would start to shift drastically for everyone.

And of course, there's a wide-spread belief that addictions only affect a certain part of the population from a specific cultural or economic background — which is far from the truth! Addictions can impact every single one of us, regardless of our background. The more people open up about their addictions, their experiences and struggles, the more people can relate.

It's my personal hope for the whole world that more of us become more comfortable saying these 3 powerful words out loud: "I need help!"

# Perspective

Regular volunteer Andrew Lim shares his view

### ***How did you come to volunteer at WE CARE?***

During my undergraduate days, I studied sociology, anthropology, and psychology, and developed a strong interest in looking at mental illnesses, mental health issues, mental disorders — or whatever term is in fashion these days — from both the psychological and sociological points of view (my current role model is the American psychiatrist and anthropologist Arthur Kleinman). In my final year, I thought long and hard about what sort of career I wanted, and decided that I wanted to join the mental health space in some capacity.

I first came to know about **WE CARE** through my first career stint. Aside from doing some good and feeling some good, I came to volunteer with **WE CARE** because I hoped to gain more knowledge about addiction, how it is lived, and what recovery looks like — within the community, and beyond what the media typically portrays about addiction.

### ***What do you want to gain from volunteering at WE CARE?***

I started to volunteer at **WE CARE** primarily because I wanted to help. I saw myself as possessing certain skills that someone else could potentially benefit from. I also wanted a meaningful way of spending my time outside work.

At the same time, I wanted to understand how persons recover in the community — who they are, and how they get on with life and how they navigate life's challenges. In my younger days, I heard so much about addiction, typically some sort of substance like drugs or alcohol, through the lens of the media but rarely about the real-life experiences of those who live with them. Volunteering at **WE CARE** has changed my impression of addiction somewhat, and has given me ideas as to how society can look at and tackle the issue more productively — and where I myself can play a role.

Indeed, another significant reason why I volunteered is because I am interested in entering the mental health space, and hope that volunteering could teach me a thing or two about mental health practice in a community setting. In future, I hope to pursue clinical research and practice that is culturally sensitive and systemic in implementation. Addiction is a particularly thorny issue in Singapore that is not well-understood, and is thus ripe for both research and exposition.

### ***How long have you volunteered at WE CARE? How has volunteering here changed your expectations in any way?***

Once a week, I provide tutoring in computer skills, and have been doing so for the last six months. I was initially asked to teach Microsoft Office skills, but as my student started to pick up the basics of Microsoft PowerPoint, Excel and Word, we eventually moved on from these programs and gravitated to other skills and content that she also wanted to explore and learn.

For example, upon hearing her ambition to become a nurse in future, we got down to the nuts and bolts of how to maintain a professional resume, and exploring the job portals of various healthcare institutions to find out about different kinds of nursing positions on offer, and the specific areas of nursing that she wanted to set her sights on.

On an ad-hoc basis, I also write for the **WE CARE** newsletter as well as do photography for **WE CARE's** events — the latest events I covered include the Volunteer Awards Ceremony and the Finisher Awards, which honour individuals who have reached a certain number of milestone years in their recovery journey.

### ***Challenges faced while volunteering? What have you learned while volunteering?***

No challenges so far!

From the point of view of practical experience, I am glad to have had the chance to practice my mentoring skills, and to have gained some practical photography expertise from shooting events. It has also been a pleasure meeting new friends at **WE CARE**, who have been patient and tolerant with me.

At a more abstract level, I have also found that addiction is but one shade of many colours in the life of a person with recovery. It has been heart-warming to see people meeting and speaking to each other like family, hugging without restraint and keeping high spirits amid the daily challenges of life. I have also had the pleasure of having several of my stereotypes about addiction and recovering persons debunked.

I hope in some way to take what I have learnt in my time at **WE CARE** to a wider society and public that remains largely indifferent, if misinformed, about what addiction is. Addiction is a complex issue which — because it is largely approached within the confines of the law and mental illness — speaks to me also about the broader issue of human suffering.

I would like to steer the conversation, no matter how small, from focussing on the disease of addiction to the people who live with it and why — to ask, as Gabor Maté once said, "What happened to you?" instead of "What's wrong with you?".

*Andrew responded to questions posed by fellow volunteer Fred Chin*

# Recovery Stories



Kelvin Q shares

Kelvin has 2 pieces of advice he wants to share.

First, never give in to despair.

Even when things look bad and there seems to be no way out, hang on in there. There is always a way to solve things, to sort out matters. No matter how dark it is, there is always light ahead.



Secondly, when you do anything with passion or love, you will get results.

I never had any green fingers before, but I take care of the plants with care and concern. I even talk to them. I've seen plants thriving because someone loved them so much they played soothing music to nurture them.

He has lived in several halfway homes, seen death first-hand, and nursed suicidal thoughts. In his darkest hour, he saw signs that convinced him life had to go on.

He thanks his pastor and church brother who pointed him the way to **WE CARE**. Here, he finally found acceptance, and peace of mind.

The activities at **WE CARE** keep him busy and he has less time to think about alcohol. He finds comfort in doing art work, especially in calligraphy, and later took to gardening, without any previous experience or training.

Never give in to despair. However bad it gets, there is always light ahead



It was in the army that I had my first taste of beer and cigarettes.

Beer was really cheap in National Service — I remember it was 60 cents a can back in 1971.

Little did I know that **BEER** really means Beginning Enjoy, Ending Regret.

Nanyang University dropout, boss of his own graphic design company, husband, father of two sons, hot-headed and arrogant Kelvin Q says he accepts everything that has happened to him.

“I am glad for all my experiences. I accept what I am, and where I am now.”

He used to drink when he needed to relax, when he wanted to be creative, and later to numb himself from life's problems and worries.

At one point, he stopped eating and just drank. This led to a stint at the hospital.

Know your priority. If recovery is not your priority, you are not ready.

Scottie's first job was in a mobile phone shop,

He had to deal with customers.

More of an introvert by nature, he found this hard.

“I didn't dare to talk to customers for the first few days.”

It made him anxious.



“So I used drugs. It took care of my anxiety and made me confident. I could talk to people. Then I just continued using.”

“Initially it was fine, but eventually all my pay went towards drugs. I couldn't get up on time and I got fired from work because I was high.”

The cycle repeated. Each time Scottie would find new work, and the drug taking

would start, and it would affect work to the point that he had to be let go.

When he was out of work, he continued using, and had to resort to fake marriages with foreigners as well as theft to get money. He was caught and went to prison.

On his release, he checked himself into NAMS. He assumed that after detox, things would be fine. He did not fully understand how recovery works. He was afraid of “a lot of things. I didn't dare to go out.” He isolated himself, because he didn't want to associate with his old drug-using friends.

Before long, he succumbed to drugs again, and for the next 2 years, he used. One day, when he was hallucinating badly, his mother called the police and IMH. After 2 weeks in detox, he was discharged. He relapsed straight away but took a little too much.

Passing out, he woke up in hospital with 6 stitches. He realized this time that he could have really died.

It dawned on Scottie that his life could have ended. And so he decided to try something different. He came to the place he had heard about in NAMS. And he continued to come, every day, for 9 straight months, to **WE CARE**, to work on his recovery. He made new friends, and he learned how to cope.

Today, Scottie is looking forward to the future. Something he has never dared to think about. “I look at things differently now. I look at life with hope.”

Scottie, who will be 1 year clean in May\* shares:

“I used to ransack the whole house and not find 10 cents.

Now, there's money everywhere.”

“One of the most amazing things about recovery is when you realise that people are starting to trust you.”

“**WE CARE** has taught me how to be grateful and how to take responsibility.



I have learnt how to commit to things. Life has become happier.”

\*2019



## Brenda shares

You wouldn't know it when you meet this vivacious and energetic person, but Brenda has had a constant struggle with drug addiction for years. What nearly shattered her though was the psychosis fuelled by her use of methamphetamine.

Her condition made her lose touch with reality – to the extent where she was deemed a danger to herself, and required hospitalisation.

But thanks to the help she received from **WE CARE** and the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS), Brenda eventually fought her demons.

### Psychosis – A Devastating Condition That Never Leaves

Brenda never felt she had a problem with addiction, and always believed that she was able to handle herself while on drugs. For the past twenty years, she has always maintained control. But things started to spiral in 2014 when she took crystal meth or 'ice'.

The psychosis that came along with it made her perceive that she was constantly being followed, and caused her to become very paranoid. She started isolating herself from others, while still denying any degree of addiction. People started telling her how they could no longer recognise her, as her appearance had changed drastically.

In 2018, a close friend saw the severity of the situation, and finally checked her into NAMS that same year. On the seventh day of detoxification — a treatment employed to remove toxins from body — Brenda experienced withdrawal symptoms so unbearable, she had to be hospitalised.

This was her first near-death experience.

To make matters worse, her mother passed away while she was warded. When Brenda was finally discharged, she relapsed immediately, giving in to the meth once more, simply because she did not think about the consequences. Nor that it would once again uproot her life. But it did.

With her mother gone, she lived alone and her battles with addiction returned. Attending classes for a diploma course proved challenging as psychosis made it difficult for her to distinguish delusion from reality.

Not wanting to give up, she persevered to complete her studies and to prove that she could finish what she started.

But by the end of 2018, Brenda's psychosis had become so severe that her brother's only choice was to bring in the police. He feared she was a danger to herself.



History repeated itself – she was hospitalised in October and then admitted to NAMS again.

However, this time it was different, as she was determined to kick off the addiction for good. Interaction with fellow patients gave her the opportunity to relate her experiences and this was crucial in helping her to get discharged successfully.

But it was the fear of knowing how easy it was for relapse to occur again that pushed her to seek help at **WE CARE** after NAMS.

There, things changed for the better. She found the support and treatment she had never experienced before.

Her peers at the centre were genuine and non-judgemental, and they gave her the warmth that made her feel welcome. They took their time with her, never once pushing her into opening up when she was not ready.

It was a slow process, yet they were determined to aid her in overcoming her addiction. Brenda realised that this was a place where she could find joy in life again, but more importantly a place where it was safe to share her experiences and receive the support she never had before.

At the centre's support group meetings, like-minded individuals with similar struggles provided her an avenue to articulate her issues. This paved the way for her to make new friends.

To this day these are the very same people she spends most of her time with.

### Small Steps Each Day, A Huge Achievement for a Lifetime

Constantly being involved in support group meetings, and in activities with her new friends in and out of the centre, drugs no longer consume every aspect of her life. Being in the presence of others with readily available help has been effective in giving her the support to stay clean.

The thought process of weighing the consequences of going back to drugs, introduced by her counsellor, is effective in distancing herself from them. With drugs out of her life, she no longer suffers from psychosis. These are the tools Brenda uses daily to stay on the right track.

These days, she seldom has triggering thoughts and has been living her new drug-free life for close to a year.

In fact, Brenda will be celebrating her one year mark this month (October 2019).

Gentle reader, if you have come this far, it may come as a surprise to you that Brenda is a transgender woman. You may well wonder if her gender identity has made it difficult for her to seek addiction treatment. Fortunately, she has never once felt discriminated against when she sought help. The staff at IMH treated her like any other patient, and **WE CARE** hosts Narcotics Anonymous support groups for LGBTQ individuals (LGBTQ-NA).

Professionalism is always key to addiction recovery. Brenda has been a recipient of treatment in the most welcoming of ways, and is deeply appreciative of how accessible **WE CARE** has proven itself to be, accepting anyone regardless of orientation or gender identity.



continues on the next page



## Geena recounts her story

My mum got sick and tired when I was using and threw me out of the house. I was sent to a home for the mentally challenged, as I had been “diagnosed” as schizophrenic. I was there for a month, before I found a job and rented a room.

I continued to use while working. I reached a point when I couldn’t manage my finances, and was smoking on the job. I realized that if I continued in this way, I would lose my job and be homeless.

So I checked myself into rehab in NAMS. When I was undergoing detox, I came to know about **WE CARE**. So when I was discharged, I came here. I attended meetings and I’ve made some excellent friends.

I also did not know I was pregnant and I only realized it when I was in my sixth month. To be honest, if I had known earlier, and if it had been possible, I think I would have terminated my pregnancy. I was in no position to look after myself, having just come into recovery. And I certainly didn’t think it was wise to have a child.

When I realized there was nothing I could do, I decided to approach a close relative, who said I should keep the baby and they would help me along the way.

So the decision was made. When I was in labour, someone in recovery was in the delivery ward with me. The support from recovery friends has been amazing – today they continue to help me babysit my son!

The recovery guides from **WE CARE** have been with me throughout, and I feel that **WE CARE** is an excellent place to recover.



About 3 months after my son was born, I received a message from my younger brother to say that my mother would like to see us. And so just before the new year (of 2019), we reconciled. That was the very first time my mum had set eyes on my son.

It has been challenging, to raise my son as a single parent, take him to day care, and manage my work. My free time and my leave have been spent on my son. Workwise, I am lucky my boss and my colleagues are understanding.

Geena has been sober for more than a year now. She celebrated her year of clean time at the 7th Finisher awards.

She continues to come for meetings and enjoys joining in the badminton sessions whenever she can.

“No matter how bad the situation may be, if you are willing to do what it takes and sacrifice your old habits, the possibilities are endless as to how far you will go.

If you don’t try it, you will never know.”

Recovery stories are a **WE CARE** staple in every quarterly newsletter, and in each issue, we focus on the recovery of someone that **WE CARE** has journeyed with.

Recovery is a unique journey and every person’s journey is truly individual.



*From previous page*

Brenda is now proud to revisit NAMS and **WE CARE** with a very different purpose — offering her support to newcomers battling their addiction.

The once timid and shy girl would never have imagined she would one day befriend strangers and be their guiding light, or address a room full of people.

She stays humble about the good she’s giving back to the community, but could not be more proud of being her best version of herself today — a Brenda with newfound confidence and self-esteem.

*Brenda’s journey is related to volunteer Fred Chin, a psychology postgraduate from the University of Glasgow who has a passion for understanding human behaviour through a scientific approach.*

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