

# WE CARE Community Services

## Annual Report

2020



Staff Strategic Meeting Oct 2020 on Zoom

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# Annual Report 2020

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# Board and Staff

Andrew da Roza **Chair**  
Anthony Lee **Treasurer**  
Frances Cheang **Member**  
Koh Kah Yeok **Member**  
Dr Munidasa Winslow **Member**  
Dane Anderson **Director**  
Jennifer Lim **Director**  
Dr Lee Cheng **Director**

Tham Yuen Han **Executive Director**  
Yvonne Yuen **Senior Counsellor and Operations**  
William Fong **Finance and Admin**  
Leslie Goh **Communications and Relations**  
Nirmala Turasamy **Admin Executive**  
Noor Sida bte Abdullah **Counsellor**  
Alvin Seng **Counsellor**  
Sonam Damani **Counsellor**  
Patrick Lim **Program Coordinator/PSS**  
Afandi Ahmad **Recovery Guide**  
Jess Ang **Recovery Guide**  
Sofia Tian Heredia **Associate Counsellor**  
Oliver Ackermann **Associate Counsellor**  
Lina Ng **Associate Counsellor**  
John Chua **Associate Counsellor**  
Chai Bin Hua **Associate Counsellor**  
Jennifer Chan **Associate Counsellor**  
Isobel Barclay **Associate Counsellor**

# Mission

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

# Vision

- + **To be a leading centre** for the transformation of individuals with addiction

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

Now in our 16th year of operation, **WE CARE** is a full member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>IPC Reference</b>               | CFG060012   |
| <b>Charity Registration Number</b> | 01888   |
| <b>Unique Entity Number (UEN)</b>  | 200506089N  |
| <b>Bankers</b>                     | DBS Bank Ltd<br>CIMB Bank Berhad, Singapore Branch                            |
| <b>Corporate Secretary</b>         | Tricor HEP Corporate Services Ltd<br>(A division of Tricor Singapore Pte Ltd) |
| <b>Auditor</b>                     | Fiducia LLP   |

# A Word from Andrew

**T**he Board of Directors and I warmly congratulate and applaud the **WE CARE** management and staff for their remarkable flexibility and adaptability in the face of the Covid-19 restrictions in 2020.

Covid-19 has challenged our community's mental health in a way never seen before in Singapore.

More people have fallen from use to abuse and then into the dependency of addictions. Those in good recovery have found themselves relapsing.

Advances in technology and its availability has led to new burgeoning addictions, such as gaming, online gambling and Internet pornography.

Being trapped at home, and the attendant anxiety and depression, has led to more smoking, compulsive eating and working, and a lack of basic self-care.

On the other hand, I am pleased to say that most of our service users have been able to seamlessly transition their recovery work and support using a new hybrid clinical protocol, involving Zoom video calls; telephone calls; and when permitted, carefully orchestrated face-to-face engagements at our community drop-in centre.

Some service users preferred this hybrid model, and it also attracted new service users. Further, it seems likely that we will all be living with Covid-19 for the foreseeable future. **WE CARE** therefore plans to continue and develop our hybrid model.

On the donations side, **WE CARE** was not able to hold any of our "real world" fundraising activities that we planned in 2020. Instead, the generosity and support of our individual and corporate donors found its way to our online appeals and through cash donations. We are very grateful to them.

**Covid-19 has challenged our community's mental health in a way never seen before in Singapore**

In particular, **WE CARE** would like to thank: Christ Methodist Church, The Grace, Shua and Jacob Ballas Charitable Trust, PayPal and C K Holdings (2003) Pte Ltd.

Further, the Government, quickly recognising the plight of social service organisations such as **WE CARE**. They provide us with generous and timely

grants and rent rebates, which enable us to maintain our services and upscale our technology to develop and improve our hybrid model.

We are very grateful for the tireless support and guidance of NCSS, and we warmly thank: the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Tote Board, the ComChest, The President's Challenge, the Singapore Prison Service, Singapore Pools, the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre and the National Council on Problem Gambling.

As a result of their generosity, our current reserves fund indicates that **WE CARE** continues to be financially sound and secure; and ready to take on whatever the future holds.

Two of our directors chose to retire from the Board in 2020: Mr. Tony Lee and Mr. Desmond Lum. Mr. Lee was an exemplary treasurer whose financial expertise served **WE CARE** well. He has now returned to his native United States and we wish him well now he is "back home". Mr. Lum was one of the early Board members of **WE CARE**, and has held various positions, including Chairman and Vice-Chairman. His guidance and dedication enabled **WE CARE** to go from strength to strength over the years, and we are very grateful to him.

Looking ahead, **WE CARE** anticipates the challenge of fundraising using online platforms. However, we are rising to meet this challenge with online: competitions; games; and cinema programmes.

## As community addiction recovery experts, **WE CARE** will continue to be the front line defence in our community

As community addiction recovery experts, **WE CARE** will continue to be the front line defence in our community - both for the established addictions and the new, technology-enabled addictions.

We will strive to develop our hybrid clinical protocol to support addiction and mental health recovery in novel and engaging ways - and **WE CARE** is committed to assisting our community and our service users to navigate our new mental health technology. This is a time when they need it the most.

Andrew da Roza

Chairperson

# Executive Director's Message

I have no doubt that 2020 will go down in our collective memory as one of the most challenging years of our times. Like most other charities working on the frontline, **WE CARE** and the community we serve have been severely hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

If nothing else, the pandemic has pushed the issue of mental health to the forefront of our attention. For many of our clients who were already struggling with pre-existing mental health conditions, the uncertainty and fear of losing loved ones, livelihood or their own health as a result of this new unknown disease were major stressors on both their mental conditions and their recovery journeys.

Those who had just begun to develop new healthy routines by coming to our Drop-in centre suddenly found themselves isolated at home - their recovery programmes disrupted; and social connections curtailed as a result of safety measures.

Despite the challenges, I am grateful that all our staff, associates and volunteers went to great lengths to ensure that our community continued to receive the level of support and services that are needed throughout these difficult times.

Though the centre had to close for the greater part of 2020, we continued to deliver all our essential services, from individual and group counselling to support group meetings and wellness activities via virtual platforms

throughout Phases 1 and 2 of the circuit breaker periods.

In the process, we helped many clients who lacked the digital savvy or knowhow to adapt and learn a new way of connecting, through digital channels such as Zoom, Doxy or Microsoft Teams.

## 2020 will go down in our collective memory as one of the most challenging

For those lacking the means and tools to connect digitally, we helped with loans of laptops, handsets and data top-up cards so that they could continue to connect online to all the programmes and counselling services made available.

By the end of 2020, we saw a threefold increase, compared to 2019, in new clients signing on for addiction-relation support and therapy services.

All in, our clinical team delivered close to 3,000 sessions of group, family and individual counselling via online, telephone and face-to-face crisis interventions. This represents a 30% increase in therapy hours and counselling sessions conducted in 2020 over the whole of 2019.

Mindful of the risk of isolation that social distancing and movement restrictions may have on our community, we stepped up on various online programmes and activities as well. Our goal was to



ensure that even with physical distancing, our community of clients remained socially connected at such times. Through the whole of 2020, our team of Recovery Guides hosted daily support group meetings without fail, even on public holidays and weekends.

We held a record 532 support group meetings in 2020, the majority of which were either hybrid or virtual meetings. Many of our volunteers stepped up to the challenge too, during this time.

Through our new RiSE programme, 10 volunteer life and executive coaches guided some 30 clients through their studies and career journeys. Coaching and tutoring sessions were conducted online and at least 11 clients have been successfully placed into jobs through the first year of the RiSE programme.

Covid-19 is reshaping industries, including social services, in ways that are likely to be permanent.

For **WE CARE**, it has accelerated the transformation of how we deliver our services, and many of our back office and financial processes. In the process, we have seen many benefits in terms of efficiency of time and resources.

We also found a more effective way of reaching a younger audience in the form of online outreach with educational institutions or online counselling with more tech-savvy clients.

More importantly, we were able to bring many of our clients along with us in this journey of transformation and technology adoption. As they too learned to adapt and cope with the new norms, many have expressed a new-found sense of

confidence and empowerment that technology is after all not so daunting.

While transforming the care we provide today in preparation for the future, we remain committed to providing a high quality of service and support to the community that we set out to serve - families affected by addiction and its related conditions.

Most of all, we will seek to ensure that those who are less adept at the fast pace of change necessitated by these difficult times will not be left behind and will still be able to access our services.

## We will come out of this pandemic a stronger and more resilient organisation

The resilient performance in the past year would not have been possible without the commitment and hard work of our staff, associates, volunteers and Board members.

With the increased demand for support from more clients, our team has risen admirably to the challenge despite the many uncertainties and disruptions brought about by Covid.

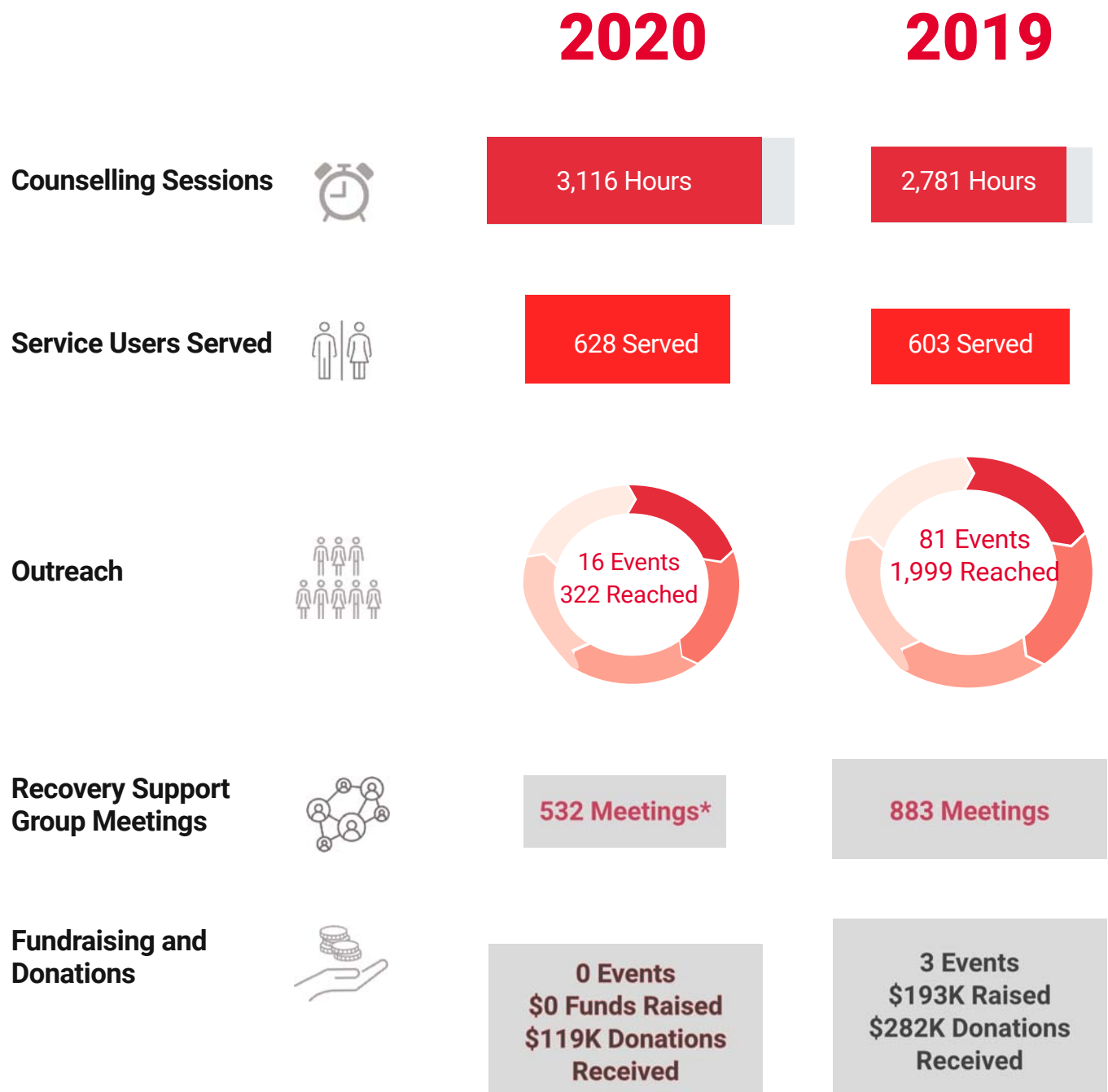
Our clients who placed their faith in us during such times inspired us to continue to give our best.

I am confident that with the commitment and trust of all who make up this community at **WE CARE** - our clients, staff, volunteers, community partners and Board members - we will come out of this pandemic a stronger and more resilient organisation.

*Yuen Han*

# The Year in Review:

## Key Service Highlights



\* Meetings held at WE CARE only. Due to Covid, many meetings migrated online and are not included.



When the pandemic hit Singapore, the use of technology allowed staff to work from home, continuing to deliver counselling and other services to our clients. It also enabled discussion and facilitated team collaboration.

# Our Current

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>SOAR</b> | <b>Substance or Alcohol Recovery</b>            |
| <b>SPLA</b> | <b>Sex, Porn and Love Addiction</b>             |
| <b>IGA</b>  | <b>Internet and Gaming Addiction</b>            |
| <b>GRIP</b> | <b>Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme</b> |
| <b>ATO</b>  | <b>Atypical Theft Offending</b>                 |
| <b>ADAM</b> | <b>Anxiety Depression or Anger Management</b>   |
| <b>CSO</b>  | <b>Counselling for Significant Others</b>       |

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Programmes

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

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

A weekly group that seeks to provide women in recovery a safe space to share about their stories of struggle and hope, and receive support from other women in recovery. The group aims to reintegrate the participants into the community, and re-establish relationships with their loved ones.

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

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.

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

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

## SMART

**Self-Management and Recovery Training**

## Mindfulness

**Mindfulness-based Relapse Training**

## WTG

**Women's Therapy Group**

## F&F

**Family & Friends**

## 12-Steps

**Introduction to 12-Steps Principles**

## SAFE

**Support for recovering Addicts and their Families through Empowerment**

## RiSE

**Reintegration into Society through Employment**

# New Initiative: Project RiSE

In July 2020, just three months after the circuit breaker was imposed, **WE CARE** launched its new RiSE Programme.

RiSE, which stands for Reintegration into Society through Employment, seeks to partner beneficiaries who are ready to (re)enter the workplace with career coaches.

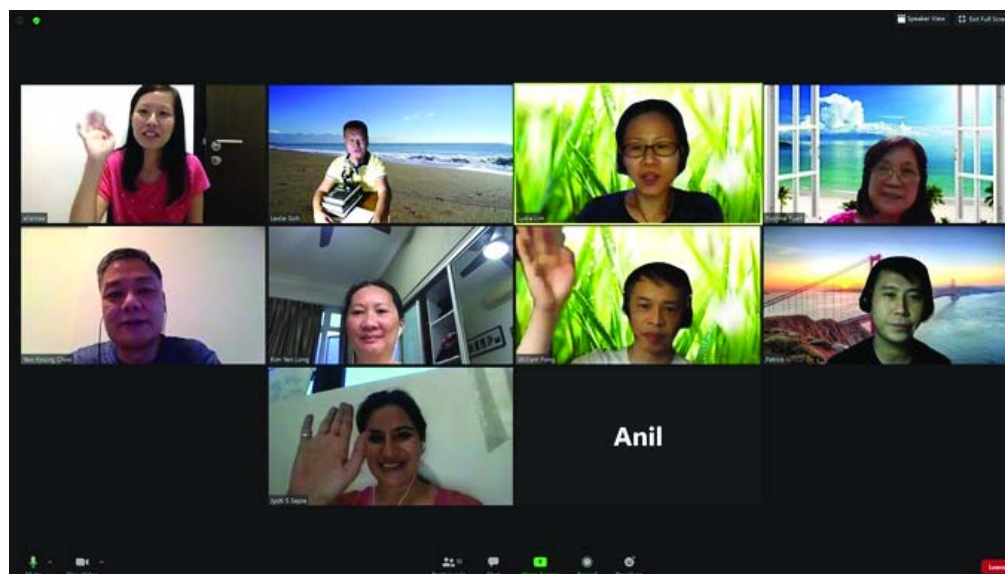
With support from their counsellors, beneficiaries are enrolled into the programme, where coaches work closely with them to determine their areas of work interest, and identify work skills which will benefit them.

The initiative also extends to those who are in employment and are looking for a mid-career switch.

All job coaches are volunteers, as are the tutors who are deployed to upskill the beneficiaries. These skills range from resume writing to computer skills to Business English.

**WE CARE** is also looking out for more employers who are open to hiring former recovering persons, to participate in this initiative.

## Job coaches work with our beneficiaries to get them into employment



An early discussion between RiSE job coaches and **WE CARE** staff

# Centre Highlights

Centre activities were disrupted in 2020, when the circuit breaker was imposed in April.

Because of the limitations on numbers when restrictions were later relaxed (first to a group size of 5, and subsequently to 8), it was a challenging time.

Gradually some activities migrated onto an online platform, and for their efforts, **WE CARE** is especially thankful to volunteers who helped to make this possible.



President Halimah visits **WE CARE**

Baking sessions are a popular activity



Creating a Henna design

Lights! Music! Zumba in progress



Tae kwon do for health and self-defence



Conversational Thai

Guided walk in Thomson Nature Park





# Community Outreach

In 2020, we reached out to an audience of 322, a tremendous drop from the 1,999 in 2019.

Essentially, on-site outreach sessions could not be conducted due to the Covid-19 situation, from April onwards.

In the last few months of the year, **WE CARE** pivoted to online outreach, as some organisations, such as educational institutions, became open to online talks.



Compared to every 10 we reached in 2019, we were only able to connect with 2 in 2020

*Awareness talk for Marina Bay Sands staff*



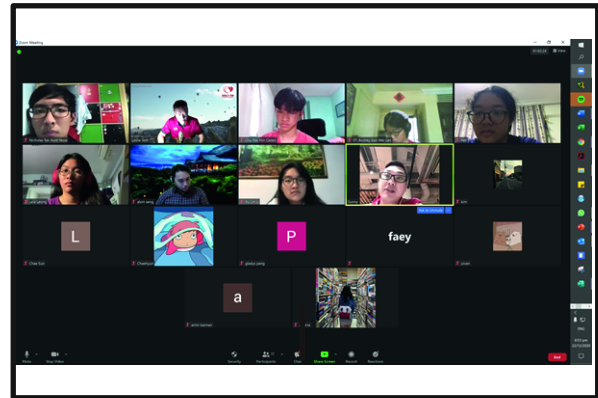
*Medical students visit from Sahmyook Unniversity*



*NUS students at an online outreach session*



*An online awareness talk with NJC students*





# Fundraising & Donations

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Funding raising events involving physical gatherings were put on hold in 2020.

Donation drives were rolled out on the online platform giving.sg, and together with donations from traditional sources, including bank transfers, cheques, and cash, this helped to bring in donations amounting to some \$119,000 from well-wishers.

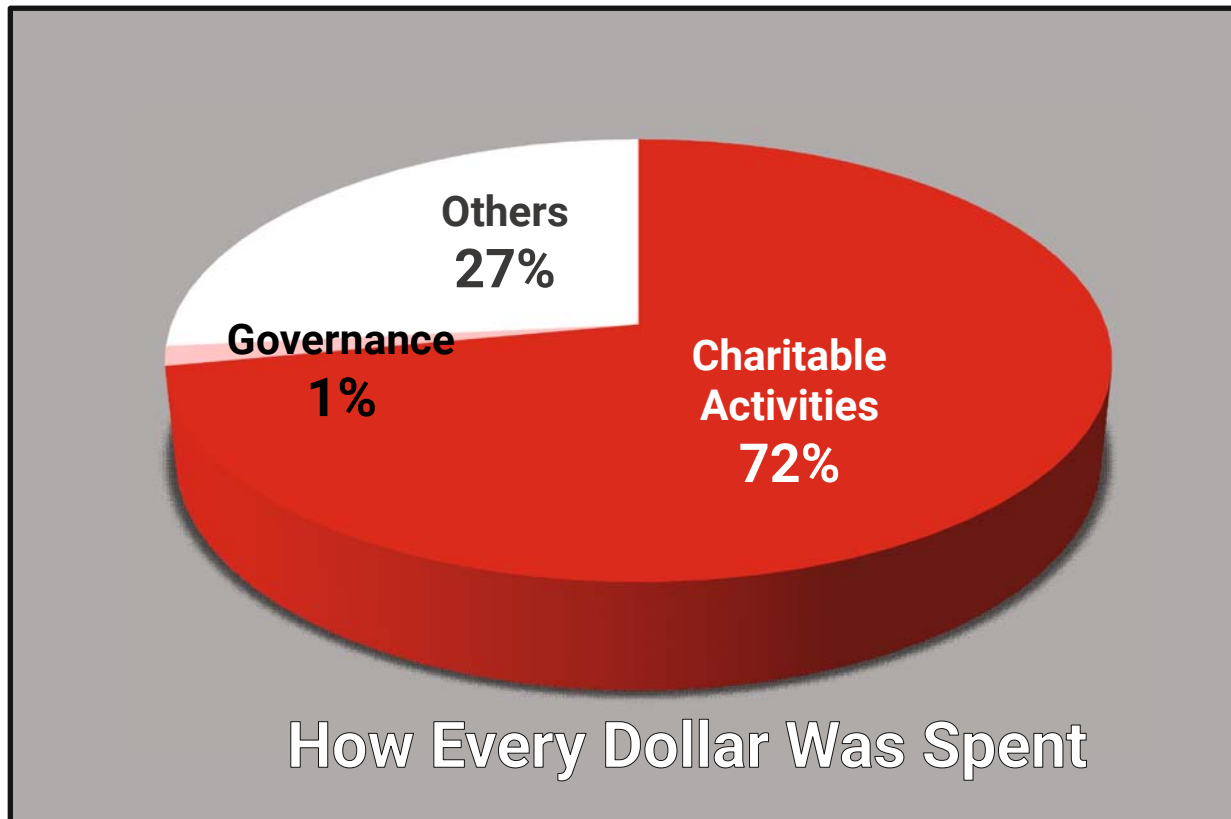


Some of the donation drives that **WE CARE** launched on giving.sg



# Key Financial Highlights

| Financials                    | FY 2020             | FY 2019             | FY 2018             |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Donations                     | \$ 118,706          | \$ 311,630          | \$ 247,113          |
| Grants Received               | \$ 1,010,423        | \$ 916,530          | \$ 505,730          |
| Other Income                  | \$ 315,115          | \$ 147,200          | \$ 106,000          |
| <b>Total Income</b>           | <b>\$ 1,444,244</b> | <b>\$ 1,375,360</b> | <b>\$ 858,843</b>   |
| Fundraising Costs             | \$ -                | \$ 59,322           | \$ 31,456           |
| Cost of Charitable Activities | \$ 774,143          | \$ 720,611          | \$ 582,400          |
| Governance Costs              | \$ 15,390           | \$ 7,028            | \$ 3,100            |
| Other Expenditure             | \$ 285,647          | \$ 223,069          | \$ 192,789          |
| <b>Total Expenditure</b>      | <b>\$ 1,075,180</b> | <b>\$ 1,010,030</b> | <b>\$ 809,745</b>   |
| <b>Net Incoming Resources</b> | <b>\$ 369,064</b>   | <b>\$ 365,330</b>   | <b>\$ 49,098</b>    |
| <b>Reserves</b>               | <b>\$ 2,246,424</b> | <b>\$ 1,877,360</b> | <b>\$ 1,408,320</b> |



## KEY RATIOS

### Fundraising Ratio

**0%**

### Programme Ratio

**72%**

### Reserves Ratio

**2.08 years**

## Notes

**1.**

The **Fundraising Ratio** measures fundraising efficiency. It is computed based on the formula:  
*Fundraising activities / Donations*

**2.**

The **Programme Ratio** measures funds deployed on charity programmes versus fundraising and overheads. It is computed based on the formula:  
*Charitable activities / Total expenditure*

**3.**

The **Reserves Ratio** measures how long the operations of the agency can be sustained by the funds available at the end of the year. It is computed based on the formula:  
*Reserves / Total expenditure in the current fiscal year*

# 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).

## Board Meetings

The Board held a total of 4 meetings in FY 2020

| Board Member         | Attendance |
|----------------------|------------|
| Andrew da Roza       | 4 / 4      |
| Desmond Lum          | 1 / 1      |
| Anthony Lee          | 4 / 4      |
| Frances Cheang*      | 4 / 4      |
| Dr Munidasa Winslow* | 3 / 4      |
| Koh Kah Yeok         | 4 / 4      |
| Dane Anderson        | 4 / 4      |
| Jennifer Lim         | 1 / 2      |
| Dr Lee Cheng         | 2 / 2      |

## Governance Policies

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

\*Frances Cheang and Dr Winslow 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 Winslow'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

WE CARE believes that competent, experienced and committed Board members will ensure that we continue to be relevant and sustainable for the future and as such, we retain the services of such volunteer Board members for as long as possible, instead of limiting their tenure of service.

## Corporate Governance Statement



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

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

To support succession planning and renewal of the Board, **WE CARE** is constantly on the lookout for volunteers with diverse skill-sets to contribute in ensuring our service quality to the community we serve.

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

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

The roles and responsibilities of the Board Chairman and the Executive Director are kept separate in order to maintain effective oversight. The Executive Director and management team consult with relevant Board members and the Subcommittees where advice is sought, through meetings, telephone calls and electronic mails.

### No Abuse Policy

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

**WE CARE** discloses that there is no paid staff, being a close member of the family belonging to the Executive Head or a governing Board member of the charity, who has received remuneration exceeding \$50,000 during the financial year.

### Conflict of Interest Policy

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

# Recovery Stories

Five years ago, when her sister suggested that she should take an online quiz on alcohol drinking, Linda did it without giving it much thought.

The result surprised her. It told her she was very likely an alcoholic.

She asked herself if she was denying she had an alcohol issue.



As a marketing professional in the software industry, Linda was expected to entertain clients. Drinking was part of the job. Since she enjoyed drinking and drank regularly at social events, it became a source of pride for her that she could keep up with her clients.

It soon progressed to drinks after work with friends at pubs. Still, life went on, she was coping with work, her personal life was fine and her health was good.

Even when she found herself capable of polishing off 2 bottles of vodka in 3 days, Linda did not find that strange.

Then she started drinking at home. Friends who were asked to help her buy liquor at the airport duty free shop noticed that she was making more frequent requests. They began to question her drinking habit.

At the same time, work pressure was building.

Her work day now began with a drink.

One morning a colleague asked if she had been drinking – they could smell the alcohol on her. She admitted that she was...

## I broke the hearts of my family members

So when she completed the online quiz that her sister had suggested, she could not quite bring herself to believe that she was becoming an alcoholic.

Her sister arranged for her to see a counsellor at **WE CARE**. Her counsellor confirmed what she had started to realise: She had an addiction to alcohol.



She resisted going to the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) or the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) for fear of being stigmatised.

Instead she began to attend the lunchtime meetings at **WE CARE**.

4 months and a few relapses later, she was admitted to NAMS, when her health began to take a toll.

This began a cycle of NAMS visits, followed by relapse, with each recovery period lasting shorter than the previous one.

In the end, she was in and out of NAMS no less than 8 times.

She stole from her mother, and as Linda puts it. "I broke the hearts of my family members."

She had 3 close calls on her health. First it was a bout of gout, followed by a near collision with a car.

Finally a year and a half ago, she felt numbness spreading to all her limbs; her veins were shot and she physically did not have enough strength to actually get up.



She ended up spending 6 weeks in hospital and was informed that her liver had lost almost half its functionality.

She realised that she had to stop her drinking.

Strengthening her conviction was her sense that her higher power was telling her to get it done.

For her recovery to be effective, she broke off a 3-year relationship with a fellow alcoholic.

She also renewed her programmes and counselling sessions at **WE CARE**. And this time, she feels that she finally "understands

recovery".

"I get it now."

She wants to thank her counsellor for helping her in her recovery journey and for providing a different perspective to look at things. She also acknowledges that the "safe place and sheltered environment" provided by **WE CARE** has helped her.

Linda is now employed full-time in the service industry. She wants to move on with her life, and put 2 decades of drinking behind her.

Today, Linda is sixteen months sober (as at Jan 2020).

## Recovery Stories

After the Finisher Awards e-ceremony earlier this August, I had the privilege to sit down one afternoon to chat with first-year award recipient Puspa over Zoom.

She told me about how she had recently become the cat-mother of three lovely kittens, Siamese/Maine Coon mix, each no more than six months old.

"I have always had a heart for cats," she said. "Before, I used to take care of this tabby cat, but had to return it to foster care because there were a lot of issues."

"I remember feeling very down for the next two days. Coincidentally, my sister called and told me that someone wanted to give kittens away – not one but three!" she said, laughing heartily.

In between attending **WE CARE** meetings whenever she can, caring for her kittens has kept Puspa busy these days – mostly because of how much she has to chase after them! Yet, she does not regret her decision one bit.

### There is such a thing as recovery - nothing is impossible.

"They help to occupy me while I'm at home, and it helps my stress levels go down. I talk to them every day; even though I'm so tired, they always make my day!" she said, smiling widely.

When I asked her to share a little about her days before **WE CARE**, Puspa's bubbly demeanour softened into an



expression of thoughtful and reflective calm.

"For 30 to 40 years, I never did anything with my life. I never met people. I just isolated myself with drugs. I went to the coffeeshop and 7-11 because they had my favourite alcohol, vodka and so many things."

"I tried to stop, but whenever I tried to stop by myself, I could not – I would always go back to my old patterns," she added.

Her turning point came when she completed the inpatient detoxification programme at NAMS. But, as Puspa shared, it was a turning point not only for the body, but also in perspective and social support.

"I felt that I had had enough. I wanted to change my life. Enough is enough. I didn't want to keep going back to square one anymore."

At the time, she also met volunteers from **WE CARE**, who had visited NAMS to share with patients their stories of recovery, and



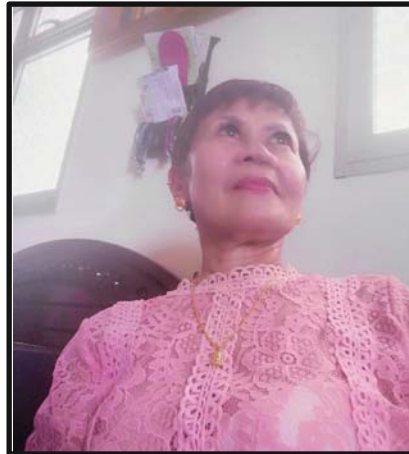
to extend an open invitation to continue their recovery at **WE CARE**. Together with new friends whom she would eventually meet at NA group sessions, she credits them all for where she is today in her recovery.

"I am so thankful to all of them, to have had them with me through my journey of recovery. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to do it."

Eventually, Puspa started attending as many of **WE CARE**'s activities as she could – lunch meetings, SMART recovery groups, mindfulness sessions, and more – every day, from 10am in the morning until the sun went down, when she would move on to NA meetings which ran from 7 to 9 pm – reaching home only at 10pm. Even during this pandemic season, she tries her best to continue these activities as they go online.

As I listened, I thought of how recovery is not so much an end point as it is a journey that one needs to take steadily and

mindfully, step by step. I also remembered how, when Puspa had received her award, one of the audience members, Jess, had expressed her admiration for Puspa and her philosophy of 'Not to do the next wrong thing'.



On hearing this, Puspa smiled.

"Actually need to add the second part: 'Just to do the next right thing'."

Not to do the next wrong thing, just to do the next right thing. What did it mean?

Seeing the puzzled look on my face, Puspa explained herself, which I summarize, hopefully not too badly, in three points:

1. **Keep it simple.**

"My life is very simple. In the morning, I have my eggs and coffee. Then I keep myself busy."



2. **One day at a time.**

"We can always plan far ahead for what we want to achieve, but I never do. Just focus on today."

3. Most importantly:  
**Keep coming back.**

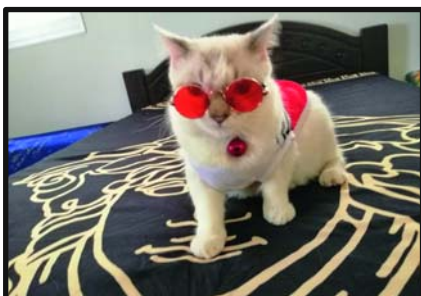
"It is never too late. Just keep coming back. Don't leave the room before the miracle happens."

Her final advice for those out there thinking about recovery?

"There is such a thing as recovery – nothing is impossible. Come to **WE CARE** if you want to know more about recovery. Just come.

Then you will know what recovery is."

*The writer, Andrew Lim, a regular volunteer at **WE CARE**, thanks Puspa for her time, warmth and words for thought – as well as her rich, throaty laughter, which made his day.*



# Recovery Stories

After graduating from university, Prince was ready to enter a new phase of his life - entering the workforce. This chapter in Prince's life soon took a twist when his curiosity about substances was piqued.

Like many others, he started using substances, confident that he could manage it. While the intensity and variety of his substance use had gradually increased, it spiralled out of control when he was based overseas for work. As a young working expatriate who was away from his loved ones, there was no one around to control him.

"I started to use substances so frequently that the intensity was scary even to myself."

When he was actively using, he spent a large part of his salary to feed his addiction. Prince also compared his temper during this phase, to a sleeping volcano - erupting without warning, anytime and anywhere. His family members would often be at the receiving end and even though he regretted these outbursts afterwards, Prince couldn't control them. At



that point, he wasn't in the driver seat, the substances were.

"Substance abuse has brought me to a stage where my whole lifestyle is messed up."

After almost 18 years of using substance, Prince was introduced to **WE CARE** and since then he has diligently embarked on his recovery journey. Before, when he had tried to stop on his own, his attempts were unsuccessful due to several reasons: withdrawal, loneliness and relationships which involved substances.

"One of the most important things for us to know is that we are no longer alone. Every one of us in recovery

is going through the same thing, everyone has relatable stories and we draw strength from each other. This knowledge and assurance kept me grounded in my recovery."

At **WE CARE**, Prince attended recovery meetings such as the 12-step recovery programme and daily lunch meetings. He was very determined to recover and as long as work permitted, he would "sign up and join any meetings or activities."

Prince also went for counselling sessions at **WE CARE**. Together, with his counsellor, he worked to resolve issues that perpetuated his addiction by teasing apart aspects

of his personal life which were intertwined with substance use as well as to process and unpack his past relationships.

Prince is now 22 months into recovery [at May 2021] and he is still as determined to remain clean. He considers recovery a lifetime journey.

“Life is back to normal but recovery is not just about not using drugs; it is actually a whole new way of life. From my perspective, there are 4 factors: work, family, recovery and relationships. I want to maintain the balance in these 4 aspects. To me, that is recovery.”

This is not to say that he does not experience hurdles. These come in the form of dreams, cravings and triggers. When confronted with these hurdles, he would react by applying what he has learnt and not give in.

## **Addiction is a mental health condition and recovery is more than “just stop using”**

“The moment I have a craving, I reach out to someone. I just have to talk it out. The more I talk about it, the more I let go of it. I would acknowledge it and say, ‘Yes I have a craving’, but that’s it. I let the thought pass and do not entertain it.”

Another on-going hurdle that Prince is experiencing is the closure of the drop-in centre at **WE CARE** due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the circuit breaker, some might think that since no one can leave their home, there is no opportunity to relapse. In his opinion, there were several opportunities for relapse to occur. The circuit breaker was a very challenging time because he could not go to **WE CARE** for meetings and activities.

Even so, Prince decided to use this period to spend more time with his parents. This strengthened the ‘family’ factor of his recovery goals.

Through it all, Prince is thankful for his family, his sponsor for the 12 Steps program, the fellowship and his partner who have always been supportive. Never giving up on him or pressing him to recover, they trusted him and gave him personal space. It is never “How come you are still doing it?”, it is always “What can I do to help?”.

Prince also expresses his gratitude to **WE CARE**.

“Without organisations like it, there will be a lot more of us suffering who don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel. Everyone, especially the staff, is so warm and caring. They don’t judge us and they give us a safe and supportive space for recovery.”

He encourages those who are just starting out or thinking about it, to “just join” and involve themselves in meetings and activities.

“When we connect with others in recovery, we know that we are no longer alone. This kind of moral support is very important. It can be daunting at first, but when you take the first step to connect with others, you make new connections that will help in recovery. You will only know it if you try, it will only work if you work it - so just do it and enjoy the fruits of recovery after that.”

As part of his recovery, Prince also gives back to the community. He volunteers at the Greenhouse and he chairs the lunch meetings at **WE CARE** on Fridays.

“One of the best ways to secure your recovery is to give back, so I am doing service whenever I can,” he shares.

Lastly, Prince hopes that more people will understand that substance abuse is deeply linked to the mental health struggles that each individual faces. Addiction and recovery is really more than simply putting a brake on using substance.

*By Valerie Tay*

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## WE CARE Community Services



**WE CARE** participated in NParks' Trees of the World event, where SSAs were invited to decorate a tree in the Botanic Gardens. Above, the team in action in the day, and below, the tree all lit up at night in Christmas splendour

