



**WE CARE**  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

# Resilience

ANNUAL REPORT

**2021**





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# Board and Staff

<b>Andrew da Roza</b>	Chair
<b>Frances Cheang</b>	Treasurer
<b>Koh Kah Yeok</b>	Member
<b>Dr Munidasa Winslow</b>	Member
<b>Dane Anderson</b>	Member
<b>Jennifer Lim</b>	Director
<b>Dr Lee Cheng</b>	Director

<b>Tham Yuen Han</b>	Executive Director
<b>Yvonne Yuen</b>	Senior Counsellor & Operations
<b>Veron Njo</b>	Corporate Services Director
<b>Anna Chua</b>	Finance and Admin
<b>Leslie Goh</b>	Communications and Relations
<b>Nirmala Turasamy</b>	Admin Executive
<b>Noor Sida bte Abdullah</b>	Counsellor
<b>Alvin Seng</b>	Counsellor
<b>Sonam Damani</b>	Counsellor
<b>Whitney Mah</b>	Counsellor
<b>Patrick Lim</b>	Program Coordinator/PSS
<b>Afandi Ahmad</b>	Recovery Guide
<b>Jess Ang</b>	Recovery Guide
<b>Enid Chia</b>	Recovery Guide
<b>Sofia Tian Heredia</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Oliver Ackermann</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Lina Ng</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>John Chua</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Chai Bin Hua</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Jennifer Chan</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Isobel Barclay</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Stanly Leung</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Gowri Kirchberg</b>	Associate Counsellor
<b>Benjamin Lio</b>	Associate Counsellor

*List is correct as at 31st December 2021*

# We Care

## 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

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

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

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

# Commentary

The challenges and anxieties caused by the pandemic have taxed our community's ability to cope with their mental health.

Resources to manage mental health issues are likewise strained.

It speaks volumes about the state of mental health in Singapore that **WE CARE** has tended to more service users in 2021 than at any other time.

In the same manner that the management and staff of **WE CARE** have been flexible and adaptable in dealing with the restrictions brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, they have been equally versatile when restrictions began to lift.

**Even as the centre gradually opens up, we envisage the hybrid model to be the dominant operating mode for counselling service delivery. Nonetheless, we envisage greater activity level at the centre as more service users start to return to take part in activities and meetings.**

Staff too are looking to meet, collaborate and work together in-person rather than remotely as more are allowed to return to the workplace. And with the increasing caseload, **WE CARE** will look at ways to

recruit new staff, while retaining its existing workforce, as it copes with the greater demands on its services.

We wish to express our thanks to **NCSS** for their support and guidance. We are also thankful for the support from the **Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Tote Board, Community Chest, The President's Challenge, Singapore Pools, the National Council on Problem Gambling and the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre.**

We wish to express our gratitude to our corporate donors **The Grace, Shua and Jacob Ballas Charitable Trust, C K Holdings, Marina Bay Sands, Keppel Care Foundation, ChemOne Holdings Ltd, Keystone Cable (S) Pte Ltd, KPMG, NTUC Foundation and Isaac Manasseh Meyer Trust Fund.**

No less generous were our individual donors, and we would like to thank, in particular, **Mr Lim Hock Chee, Ms Susan Harmer, and Mr John Yam.**

We were especially fortunate that both corporate and individual donors donated generously to the Charity Golf fundraiser that we conducted. It was overwhelming to see people coming out to support **WE CARE** despite the Covid-19 situation.

The Government has continued to be generous and supportive of social service agencies with grants and funding. While actively championing the need to digitalize,

# A Note from Our Chairperson

it has set up initiatives and has made support and help available to any agency wanting to utilize technology to improve their operations.

One aspect of **WE CARE** that should not go unmentioned is the tireless efforts of our volunteers. Without their contribution of more than a thousand hours of their personal time last year, we would be hard pressed to provide the services of job coaches, hotline managers, tutors and activity leaders in nature walks, baking lessons and art sessions. Their dedication is all the more remarkable in light of the challenges and restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

Of note too is that nearly half of these volunteers are students in institutions of higher learning. It is heartening that young persons are already aware of addiction and reaching out to this community. Surely it is a healthy sign that these young individuals are finding ways to engage with **WE CARE**, and actively thinking of ways to pare down the stigma that surrounds addiction.

We look ahead to 2022 with the hope that the pandemic situation will ease, and a semblance of “normality” will return. In the meantime, **WE CARE** will maintain its position as the front-line response for addiction.

**The Board of Directors and I wish to extend our admiration and heartfelt gratitude to the WE CARE team for their tireless work in 2021.**

**Andrew da Roza**  
Chairperson



# Commentary

Looking back at 2021, we have crossed many milestones. Throughout the last 2 years, we have journeyed with our recovering community through the vagaries and uncertainty of the pandemic, the stress of social distancing and the challenging times of new technology adoption in order to stay socially connected.

By 2021, we have successfully transitioned into a hybrid model of service delivery. Online delivery has also become an integral mode of service delivery, whether for therapy, support group meetings, outreach or centre events. All our services are now conducted seamlessly in a hybrid model with both on-site and online participants.

Tapping on technology grants, we have remodelled our whole IT/ facilities setup to enable efficient digital connection throughout our premises such that all our programmes can be supported and delivered effectively in hybrid mode across all our facilities.

Along with the swift technology transformation, our recovering community too has fully embraced the use of Zoom, online forms and digital payment. While many of our service users welcomed the easing of Covid-19 safety measures even as Singapore opened up slowly in 2021, some have caught on to the convenience and accessibility of virtual meetings. Even as they returned to the workplace towards the end of 2021, many continue to access our services, such as the lunch-hour support group meeting, via their digital devices during a work-break.

If 2020 laid the foundation for rapid technology adoption in our previously traditional mode of service delivery, 2021 saw these new norms of digital adoption taking root among many of our service users, especially the younger ones.

Just as the pandemic has hastened the pace of technology adoption within the community, it has also brought mental health issues to the forefront. In 2021, we continued to experience an increase in demands for our counselling and support services. We handled more than 770 referrals, and served and supported 650 cases and families, who attended close to 4,000 hours of group, family and individual counselling with our team of counsellors and recovery guides. This represents a 45% increase in cases served over a 2-year period; as compared to pre-Covid 2019.

In response to this, we also stepped up on public education efforts to increase awareness on mental wellness and psychological resilience. We refocused our public awareness efforts to the online platform in 2021, where we conducted close to 30 events and talks for educational institutions, schools and agencies. Through these public education talks, we reached out to more than 1,500 people, on topics ranging from gaming, substance, gambling, online addiction and related mental health issues.



# A Message from Our Executive Director

My heartfelt thanks to the many individuals, donors, volunteers and partners who have supported us throughout this difficult year. We are enormously grateful for their ongoing support. Most of all, my sincere appreciation of the team at **WE CARE**, the clinical associates, volunteers and recovering buddies and peers who have worked alongside us throughout these times. They have risen up to the demands for more services and support despite the challenges of the pandemic.

As we enter 2022, we foresee that our community will continue to experience the mental health fallout of the pandemic. As an organisation, we will strive to support the recovering community, particularly those who have newly fallen into the trap of addiction. Above all, we remain committed to our cause and mission to cultivate an environment that supports and nurtures growth and healing, for all our clients and for fellow co-workers, associates and volunteers alike.

We enter the new financial year with hope and strength, so that we may continue to serve the community with passion and compassion.

**Yuen Han**  
Executive Director



# Review of 2021



## COUNSELLING SESSIONS

2021	2020
<b>3,995</b> hours	<b>3,116</b> hours

## REFERRALS SERVED

2021	2020
<b>773</b> served	<b>628</b> served

## RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS\*

2021	2020
<b>485*</b> meetings	<b>532</b> meetings

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

## VOLUNTEERS

<b>1,183</b> hours	<b>89</b> number
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# Key Service Highlights

## CASELOAD SERVED

2021	2020
<b>650</b> served	<b>502</b> served

## OUTREACH

2021		2020	
<b>1,506</b> reached	<b>29</b> events	<b>322</b> reached	<b>16</b> events

## DONATIONS RECEIVED

2021	2020
<b>\$259k</b>	<b>\$119k</b>

Before Govt matching and grants



# Current Programmes

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.

**SOAR**  
Substance or  
Alcohol Recovery

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.

**SPLA**  
Sex, Porn and  
Love Addiction

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

**IGA**  
Internet and  
Gaming Addiction

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.

**GRIP**  
Gambling Recovery  
Intervention  
Programme

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.

**ATO**  
Atypical Theft  
Offending

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.

**ADAM**  
Anxiety Depression  
or Anger Management



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.

## **CSO**

**Counselling for Significant Others**

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.

## **SMART**

**Self-Management and Recovery Training**

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.

## **Mindfulness**

**Mindfulness-based Relapse Training**

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.

## **WTG**

**Women's Therapy Group**

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 addiction. Facilitators also cover techniques and strategies they can adopt to take care of their own mental health.

## **F&F**

**Family & Friends**

# Current Programmes

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.

**12-Steps**  
Introduction to  
12-Steps Principles

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.

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

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.

**RiSE**  
Reintegration into  
Society through  
Employment

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

**TiDE**  
Tech Inclusion Digital  
Enablement



## Hybrid Service Delivery

Restrictions brought about by the pandemic required the centre to adopt ways of delivering our services in an online mode. At the beginning of the circuit breaker, we had to quickly move our telephone system into the cloud and arm our staff with laptops, headsets and Zoom accounts to work from home. This allowed us to communicate with each other, reach out to our partners, and more vitally, to conduct counselling sessions for our service users online.

In 2021, as restrictions gradually lifted, online modes transitioned into hybrid formats – to allow recovering persons to participate physically onsite or via Zoom.

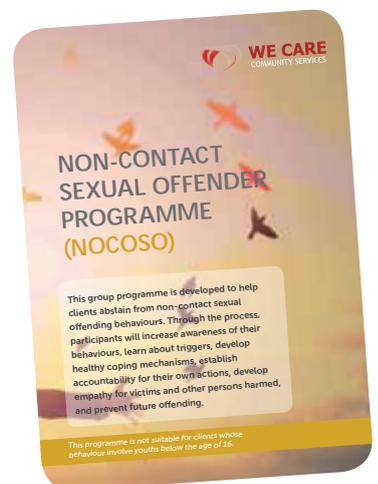
As restrictions relax further in 2022, the hybrid mode of delivery is expected to become the norm for counselling treatment. As part of our efforts to help service users who are unable to receive our services digitally, we have rolled out an initiative **TIDE** – Tech Inclusion and Digital Enablement – to loan out laptops, tablets or smartphones to those who cannot afford to acquire digital devices. By bridging the digital divide, we enable disadvantaged service users to attend meetings and work on recovery with their counsellors.

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## NOCOSO

### Non-Contact Sexual Offender Programme

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



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## SAGE

### Support and Awareness Group for Eating

This support group aims to help persons with eating issues to understand more about their behaviours and to develop an awareness of the way they behave. By learning to develop healthy coping mechanisms, they can begin to regulate their emotions, cultivate a healthier relationship with food, and be more mindful of their perception of body image, food and exercise.



# Centre Highlights

## Beach Clean-up

Student volunteers from **Hwa Chong Institution** conducted Conversational Malay lessons, first-aid sessions and a organised a beach clean-up at Changi Beach.



Students brief the participants on picking up litter



Participants stretching before they start

**WE CARE** raised 450kg of rice for needy families in the **NTUC FairPrice Walk for Rice** initiative. The walks were well-received and presented an opportunity to give back to the community.

## Walk for Rice



Participants at a walk to the East Coast



A night walk in Orchard offers a view of the festive Christmas lights



## Pet Health Talk

Zoe from **Pawsitive Sensations** gave tips on pet nutrition as well as how to massage our pets





Participants stretching before they start



Volunteer Roy conducted a walk to 3 quarries. The group stops at Hindhede Quarry to take in the landscape

## Nature Walk

Nature walks are a good way to inculcate a love of the nature and to promote general health

## Computer Skills



A volunteer tutor helps to brush up the computer skills of service users

## Singapore Zoo



The Singapore Zoo is a favourite attraction for volunteers and service users at WE CARE

## Cataloging Library



NJC students help to catalog the books in the WE CARE library

## Hepatitis Talk

A talk on Hepatitis C was conducted by Gilead for staff and service users



## Birthday

The centre celebrates events, special occasions as well as birthdays

This birthday celebration was for a staff member as well as a service user

# Community Outreach

Outreach improved considerably in 2021, as more organisations became digitally-enabled and were more open to having talks conducted online.

In 2020, our outreach efforts were reduced to 16 events and an audience reach of 322 persons, with the bulk of these accomplished before the full brunt of the pandemic was felt from Apr 2020.

In 2021, outreach bounced back up to 29 events, while reaching 1,506 persons, five times the 2020 audience.

In essence, outreach recovered to three-quarters of what we were able accomplish, pre-epidemic in 2019.

To do so, we focussed on a strategy of reaching out to educational institutions, and pivoting our outreach efforts online.

With institutions of higher learning (IHL), we have forged two or more years of community relationships with the National University of Singapore (NUS), National Junior College (NJC) and Hwa Chong Institution (HCI). We conduct talks for these institutions and they engage with the community at **WE CARE** by organising activities such as a beach clean-up event at Changi Beach, or conducting art sessions at our centre.

Efforts with community partners were more muted, in view of safety restrictions, such as with Singapore Prisons, the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS), Marina Bay Sands and Singapore Pools.

In 2022, engagement with most of our partners is expected to resume. Outreach in 2022 is expected to exceed pre-Covid times.



WE CARE presented a talk on Internet and Gaming addiction at the National Addiction Awareness Day talk, broadcast live over YouTube and FaceBook.

## NAAD



*Our counsellor (pictured at extreme left) joined the panel discussion and the Q&A that followed the talks*

## Outreach SG Poly



*This addiction awareness workshop was conducted for educators and staff at Singapore Poly*



## Outreach at RI

*Junior college-level students at Raffles Institution listen to an addiction awareness talk*

## Outreach to SMU

*SMU peer support leaders learn about addiction online and how to approach fellow students who may be in need of help*



# Fundraising and Donations

In 2021, fundraising could not be conducted on-site and in-person.

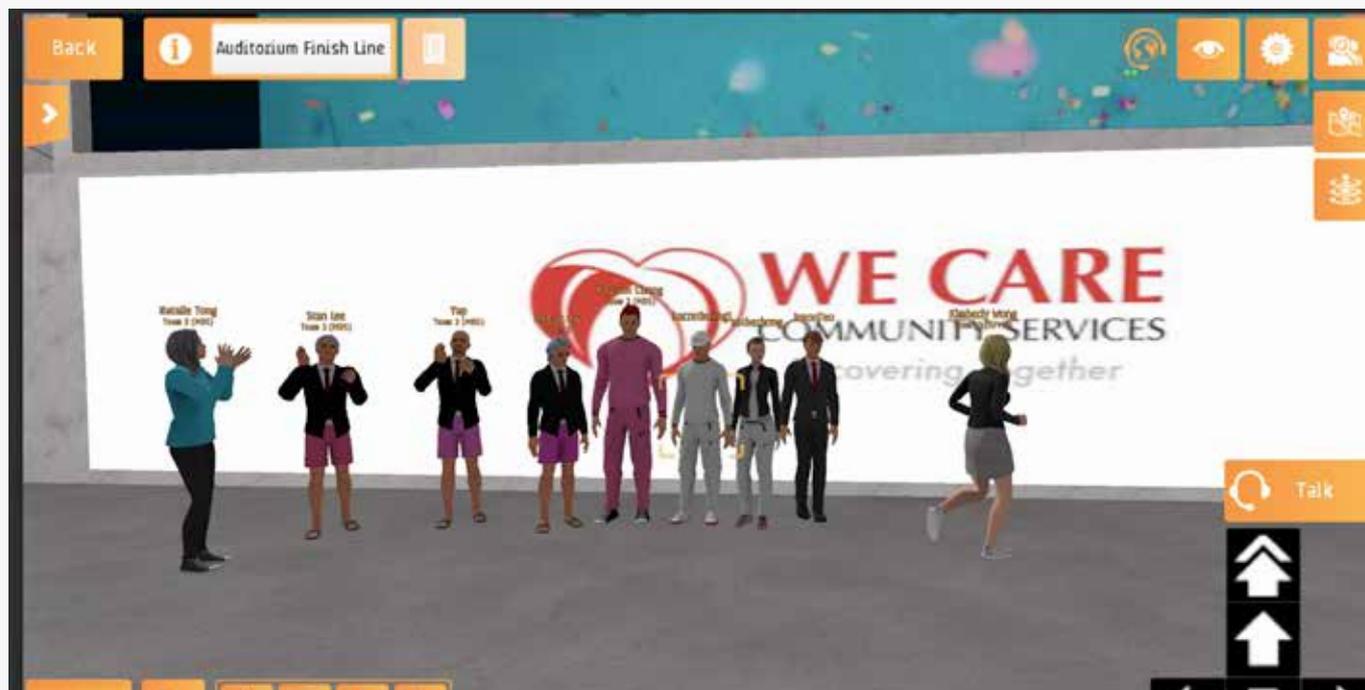
Instead, charities had to fundraise using online platforms such as giving.sg and fundraising events could only be conducted online.

At the beginning of 2021, an online fundraising race was conducted. The premise of the race was to collect a cure to a virus in an elaborate escape room, where players move from one location to another, collecting clues to the location of the virus vaccine.

As restrictions lifted somewhat in late 2021, a charity golf event was organised and raised gross funds of \$140,000 (before expenses, government matching and grants).

## Online Race: Recover the Vaccine

An online escape room was the backdrop for a fundraiser where participants race to secure a cure for a virus.



*A group photo of some of the avatars adopted by participants*





## Charity Golf

We were overwhelmed by the generosity of donors and participants at The Charity Golf fundraiser



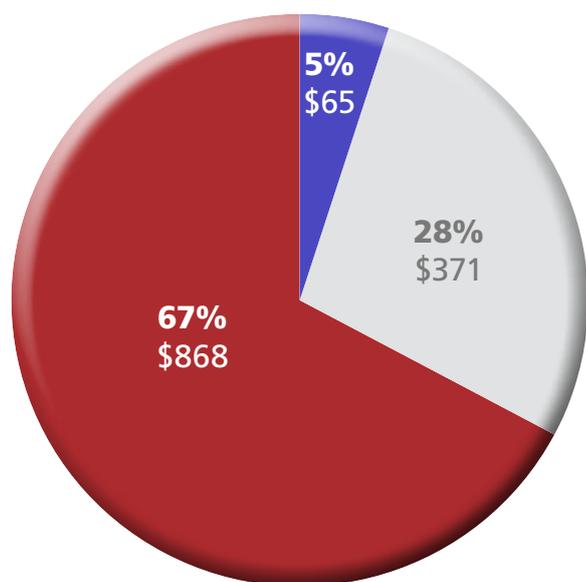
# Key Financial Highlights

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ('000)



	FY2021	FY2020	FY2019
Income	\$ 2,068	\$ 1,442	\$ 1,375
Expenditure	\$ 1,324	\$ 1,075	\$ 1,010
Surplus / (Deficit)	\$ 744	\$ 367	\$ 365

## HOW MONEY WAS SPENT ('000)



- ADMIN & GOVERNANCE
- FUND RAISING
- CHARITIES ACTIVITIES

**TOTAL: \$1,324**

	FY2021	%
Admin and Governance	\$ 371	28
Fund Raising	\$ 65	5
Charities Activities	\$ 888	67
	<b>\$ 1,324</b>	<b>100%</b>



### RESERVE RATIO



	FY2021	FY2020	FY2019
Reserve Ratio	2.14	1.83	1.7



All figures are in SGD '000

# Governance

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

## Governance Policies

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 Evaluation Checklist

### Board Governance

The Board held a total of **3 meetings** in FY 2021



03

Andrew da Roza	3 / 3
Frances Cheang*	3 / 3
Dr Munidasa Winslow*	1 / 3
Koh Kah Yeok	3 / 3
Dane Anderson	2 / 3
Jennifer Lim	1 / 3
Dr Lee Cheng	2 / 3

\*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.

### Arm's Length / Undue Influence

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.

### No Abuse Policy

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



# Recovery Stories

**“Recovery is not impossible,  
just come and try it out.”**

An introvert by nature, Dan is usually a man of few words. Yet on that Saturday morning, he didn't display a hint of shyness and was earnest in wanting to share his story. Apart from the slight nervousness that surfaced when Dan realised he had been talking for a good while. It was touching because Dan had stepped out of his comfort zone with the hope that his experience can help other people who are affected by addiction.

At 15 years old, Dan was still in school. He wasn't very studious and his motivation for attending school was to meet up with his friends. Dan was also at the age where a sense of belonging and identity is especially important, which was why he fell into the wrong crowd. Together with his friends, Dan started with drinking beer and gradually, after being comfortable with drinking, they went on to try drugs.

This was the start of a vicious cycle that plagued Dan for the rest of his young adulthood. Following his first use of drugs, Dan couldn't stop. Now his motivation for going to school is meeting his friends to use drugs. Along with his grades, his addiction problem became worse. Dan's family also suffered when they realised that Dan was stealing money from them to feed his newly acquired harmful habit.

During that time, drugs were very prevalent in Dan's life. There were people using in his school, neighbourhood and subsequently in National Service (NS) as well. This contributed to his continuous use as drugs were everywhere in his social environment.

Dan couldn't complete his education. He was caught in school for drug possession and suspended. Before enlisting in NS, Dan was incarcerated. In NS, Dan's group of friends were also those who were using drugs. He tried to stop using but he didn't know how else to occupy his time.

Even when Dan started working, it was a seemingly never-ending cycle of using, being incarcerated, stopping for a while after being released and going back to using again. This was true for both himself and his friends. Dan revealed that during this period, he didn't have any friends who were not using. Even the people he met in prison were those who are using.

Dan's family didn't understand why he was using drugs. Dan himself also didn't understand. He couldn't identify the root cause of his behaviour. He just knows that whenever he feels bored or when he is back in his neighbourhood, he will want to start using.

When Dan was incarcerated, he would go for counselling and join halfway house programs, and stay clean for a few months before relapsing. He couldn't endure the withdrawal from not using for long. Dan didn't know how to stop this cycle, he didn't have any solution for it.

After Dan's release from prison in 2017, he recalled that his counsellor had told him about **WE CARE**, a place where he could seek help. At that time, he didn't really consider it as a viable option, but he kept this information in mind. A week later, he realised that he kept



*Dan in earlier times.*

seeing the **WE CARE** signage in his vicinity and thought he should try dropping by **WE CARE**. That was what Dan did. He dropped by **WE CARE** and started a new life journey.

“I saw a counsellor from **WE CARE** and everyone at the centre is very friendly. They will smile and welcome me, without judgement. I felt a kind of warmth and care that I didn’t get in my whole life. I also met other like-minded people so I decided that when I am free, instead of hanging out with my old friends who are still using, I will come to **WE CARE**. They feel like my second home and family. Even when I have a job now, I would try to schedule my lunchtime at 1.30pm so I can join the lunchtime meetings.”

Dan’s face lit up when recounting about how well he got along with the people at **WE CARE**, especially the recovery guides. He is able to connect and be open with them, talking and sharing about anything under the sun. Dan felt that **WE CARE** is a place where one can make new connections with recovering persons and break out of the cycle of using. **WE CARE** is where he found hope and where his recovery began.

The journey of recovery journey is hardly ever smooth sailing. Likewise, when Dan first started his recovery journey, he was very confused. It was an abrupt lifestyle change as his life now revolved around attending recovery meetings and not using drugs. Dan also didn’t know how to manage his emotions and in the beginning, he thought that being in a relationship would help him manage his feelings and aid his recovery. However, Dan soon realised that this wasn’t the case. He was emotionally unstable and didn’t know how to handle everything that was going on, resulting in his relapse after a week.

Even though his relationship and recovery failed, Dan didn’t give up. He learnt lots from this misstep – how to be honest, how to love himself and how to fill the void on his own. Dan used an interesting analogy to sum this up: “Imagine having an unwashed cup and trying to use it. No matter how much water you pour in the cup, you will still be drinking contaminated water. So, before I can pour anything and drink from it, I will need to wash my cup first.”. Through counselling and joining recovery activities, Dan learnt that in order to break the cycle and to avoid disappointment, he needs to love and care for himself first.

# Recovery Stories

Counselling sessions also helped Dan to recognise the root cause behind his using behaviour – the feelings and emotions that arise when he gets bored. Besides the counselling sessions, Dan also joins other group sessions such as mindfulness therapy and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings. He feels that by joining such activities, he can gain new knowledge and skills. After learning about meditation during mindfulness therapy sessions, Dan feels very peaceful now.

“I am a stubborn person but recovery is possible even for me. I found hope and friends who are not using. **WE CARE** has given me a very strong foundation to build on. There are many different varieties of help available at **WE CARE**. This allows me to stay firm in my recovery. It’s been 3 years and 4 months. Now, I don’t use no matter what. I don’t even drink any alcohol and I am no longer influenced by my environment. I still live in the same neighbourhood, but walking around doesn’t bother me. My mindset, behaviour and attitude have changed. My relationship with my family is also amazing, they have forgiven me for what I did in the past. Life is beautiful. I am working, earning a living and being a productive member of society.”

Dan also enjoys other **WE CARE** activities such as going on nature walks and movie screenings. These activities allow him to connect with others, forming new friendships. Dan finds that as long as he is within the **WE CARE** compounds, there will always be something for him to do. This taught him that life is not boring, he does not need to use because there are other activities to participate in and alleviate his boredom.

With the COVID-19 pandemic now, Dan misses the physical connections and interactions during meetings. Yet he learnt to appreciate, tolerate and practice patience.

“We have to accept that we cannot meet physically now and find another solution – which is to meet online. I haven’t seen my friends in months, but I know that when we get to meet, we will be able to connect immediately. We have a real bond you see.”

Dan gave another example to illustrate his changed mindset. Due to the pandemic, Dan lost his job. In the past when he loses a job, Dan will turn to using. Now, he accepted it, went on to upgrade his skill set and found a better paying job.

Instead of lamenting about the lost time, Dan decided to live in the present moment and look forward to the future. While practicing patience, Dan has a bucket list comprising of all the things he couldn’t do in the past. At the top of his list is travelling, once it is safe to do so! I think Dan’s present outlook on life is very admirable.

When this is mentioned to Dan, he smiled bashfully before going on to express his gratitude to **WE CARE**.

“I am truly grateful for all that **WE CARE** has done for me. They gave me my life back. I don’t need to use and I don’t want to use. Many people think that stopping is a problem, but it is possible, it can be done. One can get out of the cycle of going to jail, find hope, make new friends, form new habits and live a new lifestyle. I was the creator of my problems and I created my own chaos. But I can also



find my own solution now. Recovery is a lifelong solution for me.”

Besides focusing on his recovery and enjoying his new lifestyle, Dan would like to do his part to fight the stigma surrounding addiction. He used to think that once someone falls into addiction, they will always be “a bad person” and can never change. After coming into recovery, Dan realises that those who are suffering from addiction are humans as well. Like all other human beings, someone suffering from addiction might make many poor choices, but that is not to say they can’t change or make amends.

“I made a lot of bad choices because of my life circumstances and that led me to addiction. Through the help I received, I am trying to become a responsible member of society. I am one of the many others who are willing to change. Yes, there are people who will continuously relapse. But they are also those who need more time. It doesn’t mean that they are not willing to change. Even with multiple relapses, you will never know when they might stop using for good. One day they might, so we need to support them and provide hope for these individuals.”

Dan hopes that if you or someone you know is suffering from addiction, you can be open-minded and seek help.

**“Recovery has worked for me and many others like me. Come to **WE CARE** and try it out. Recovery is not impossible.”**



*When safety restrictions were lifted, Dan was able to realise his dream of travelling*

*We have blurred the images in our stories and perspectives, in line with our policy of preserving the anonymity of our service users.*

# Recovery Stories

## “Addiction is not the end, there is recovery.”

In 2010, Gary experienced a loss in his life - his partner's passing. It was a difficult time for him especially because he didn't know of anyone he could talk to about what he was going through. Amid his grief, he went MIA on his job when he was posted to Copenhagen.

There, a friend suggested that he attend a circuit party with him to get Gary out of his grieving state. Gary didn't know anything about the circuit party scene or substances and at his friend's insistence, he agreed.

This party was Gary's introduction to substance. He was in a vulnerable state of mind and didn't think much about it. After the party, Gary knew that such a substance existed and that it was used quite often.

When Gary came back to Singapore after 2 months, he found himself using substances once every few months. This then increased to usage on a monthly basis, before it quickly escalated to a weekly cycle and then on alternate days. This lasted for 5 years.

Gary tried to engage in other activities such as seeking employment to distract himself from using. However, he just wasn't in a stable state of mind to stay in any job for long. Finally, Gary decided to go back to school and further his studies.

During his first semester in university, Gary was diagnosed with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). He didn't actually give his diagnosis much thought because

too many things were going on. Instead, Gary stopped using substances, took daily medication and concentrated on school.

Throughout his first year, he achieved great results and also made it on the Dean's List. Yet this did not continue into his second year.

“Within a year of taking daily medication, my viral load went down to undetectable. My life was just as good as living without HIV. But I was still feeling very lonely. After the semester break, I found out that I could still use substances while continuing my education and way of life. Nothing has changed much. Initially, I was actually rather fearful that taking substances will affect my viral load but when you get comfortable with your situation, all kinds of weird ideas come out.”

Soon, Gary's results suffered. He was either physically or mentally absent in classes. His classmates could tell that he was using substances and did not want to be associated with him. Gary was isolated and he did not know how to seek help. This perpetuated his substance usage.

At that time, Gary was seeing a social worker for his HIV diagnosis. Slowly, as the rapport improved, and his social worker gained his trust, Gary was asked if he was keen to tackle his addiction problem. Prior to this, Gary had not identified himself with an addiction. His social worker introduced him to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and his first meeting was held at **WE CARE**.

Gary is a pioneer member of the LGBTQ NA fellowship. When he went for his first NA meeting, he was very shocked that there were only a few people. Gary felt that he wasn't able to relate to the other members. He was also put off by the fact that they were just reading from the screen. This is actually because the LGBTQ NA fellowship was newly set up then.

"I thought I just needed to attend a few meetings and I would recover. So, I was actually alternating between staying clean and using every couple of months."

Subsequently, he started to use substances daily, affecting his ability to attend classes. One of his professors recognised that Gary was displaying signs of addiction. Gary's professor told him that he can't go on like this. His professor wanted Gary to pause, take a break and sort out his addiction problem so he suspended Gary from school. This break helped to make Gary who he is today.

Gary started to attend NA meetings again. This time, he was shocked as well but for a different reason. The LGBTQ NA fellowship had grown so much from when he was last present and now there were more members that he could relate to. Gary's social worker also introduced him to Lifeline, a crash course on recovery that informs participants of available programs, help and other available resources. At Lifeline, Gary made a friend who was involved in WE CARE activities. This led to Gary's decision to sign up as a WE CARE drop-in member.

"Initially, I still didn't dare to go to WE CARE because I felt that it was rather intimidating. There seemed to be a wide demographic and it was hard for me to relate to them. However, one of the members started to lay the groundwork for all LGBTQ members to feel comfortable. She went to WE CARE daily, spoke to everyone and is a representation of all of us. I was very inspired by her courage."

Gary's recovery journey also involved being a private hire car driver. Driving helped him to remain focused, have a direction in life and be in control. Being able to make trips to different places and earning from the trips gave him a sense of satisfaction. With a flexible schedule, Gary was able to drop by WE CARE for counselling and meetings such as SMART Recovery and NA. This was when Gary realised that recovery wasn't so bad. There was so much to learn and he was happy every day with his new life.

However, this profession is not where Gary's interest and passion lies. He was starting to get unhappy and couldn't see himself being a private hire car driver for the rest of his life. Gary knew he had to do something before this unhappiness sets in and jeopardizes his attempt at recovery. With his partner's encouragement, Gary applied for a position back in his first company and to his surprise, he was hired again.

# Recovery Stories

“Now I have a perfect working attitude and I will also apply what I learnt in recovery at work. In the past, I would be bitter if others criticised my work performance, but now, I take any criticism in full stride. This is the magic of recovery.”

Gary credits his counsellor at **WE CARE** for helping him experience this magic. She taught him to be authentic and provided a safe space for Gary to truly be himself. This allowed Gary to acknowledge the traumas that he has gone through.

“I learnt to accept that HIV is a consequence of my actions and to take this in good stride. Without this experience, I wouldn't have met my social worker or the people at **WE CARE**. I wouldn't have my addiction problem solved. I think my life fell into place quite uneventfully. Because during addiction, my life revolved around so much drama and hurt. Feelings and emotions were messed up since it was the substance that was in charge. My soul was dead, I had no soul. Recovery gave me back my soul and now I am a better version of my pre-addiction self.”

**WE CARE** is no longer an intimidating place for Gary. When asked about his favourite activity at the centre, Gary found it difficult to choose because he feels that just being there with familiar faces such as the Recovery Guides is wonderful. The wide demographic that once frightened him is now a plus point especially during lunchtime meetings.

“You get to interact with a variety of people who are suffering from different kinds of addiction. You can just listen, understand their struggles and feel connected because everyone here is working on recovery together. The opposite of addiction is connection.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as with most activities, lunchtime meetings are carried out virtually. Gary mentioned that this brings about certain constraints as it is almost impossible to bond and connect with other participants on a deeper level, through a virtual platform.

Gary maintains that it is not about the activities that they do at **WE CARE**, rather, it is about doing the activities together. Participating in activities with recovering persons allows him to have some normalcy in his life because this is not what he can do with others who are still using substances.

Throughout this chat, Gary had expressed his gratitude to several individuals who have made a difference in his recovery journey. To his HIV social worker who helped him with his treatment, who took time to listen and understand him and who kickstarted his recovery journey. To his professor who helped him in school and who pushed him to start recovery again. To his counsellor and everyone at **WE CARE** who played key roles in his recovery. And to his partner and family for supporting him.

“With all these experiences, it is nice to share with others who are not yet at the recovery stage of their lives. I want to let them know that recovery can happen.”

So, when there is an offer to share his experience, Gary takes it on without hesitation and has shared his journey on outreach talks.

“I hope that my experience will help to raise awareness on addiction and recovery. If someone is suffering from addiction, I want them to know that not all hope is lost. There is a place such as **WE CARE** that can bring hope and recovery. **WE CARE** is a safe and conducive space. Here, you can be authentic and acknowledge that it is ok to have a problem. You will have an avenue to seek professional help and work with them, have someone to listen to you and show concern to you.”

Lastly, Gary would also like to share that addiction is not the end. It is the beginning of recovery. It is the beginning of a learning process that some people have to go through. One just has to choose recovery. Have the courage to choose recovery and seek help because help is available.

**“I am very lucky, recovery gave me back a life that is worth living. It is important for us to be aware about the people around us who might be suffering from addiction, to recognise addiction as a treatable disease and to not hold any stigma against them.”**



*Gary with a cuddly toy*

*We have blurred the images in our stories and perspectives, in line with our policy of preserving the anonymity of our service users.*

# Recovery Stories

## We are not bad or evil people, we are just people with bad habits

Those who know him well call him Nezha, after the deity in Chinese mythology. The one with a rebellious streak.

Growing up, Alvin's only caregiver was his mother. He describes his family as one that is "incomplete" and "broken". His father was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety, which led to him abusing his own prescription drugs. Alvin's father also had a gambling addiction. Even though his mother took very good care of Alvin and his brother, it was challenging for her to shelter them from an early exposure to drug use in their home environment.

Since Alvin was a child, there was a lot of discordance in his family. It was made worse by his father's mental illnesses and his rivalry with his brother.

As a result, Alvin experienced trauma from a young age. Later on, he was also unable to escape from the trauma and pain of losing his loved ones to mental illness.

Like Nezha, young Alvin was rebellious. He became a delinquent, committing petty crimes such as stealing and vandalism. Subsequently, he was expelled from school and sent to the Singapore Boys' Home. Still, Alvin hated drugs and he held deep grudges against people who use drugs.

Unfortunately, Alvin's brother fell into addiction as well. This deepened Alvin's hatred, knowing that drugs and addiction have destroyed his family. When his mother

passed away, he decided to cut off ties with his brother because he didn't want to be associated with drugs or anyone who used them.

Alvin focused on his career, achieving success in both his professional and personal lives. He was very driven and enjoyed the satisfaction from checking off his achievements like milestones. Little did Alvin know that his unresolved traumas were setting him up for another encounter with drugs.

"I thought I could choose to forget all the trauma that happened during my childhood days. I thought if I just sweep them under the rug and ignore them, I'll be okay."

Like many others before him, Alvin believed he could be a functioning addict. But as his habit deepened, he found himself making excuses and engaging in malingering.

In 2018, things went downhill for Alvin. He went through a breakup and it brought back feelings from his childhood traumas. Alvin felt all alone and lost - there was no sense of belonging, no goals to work towards and no routines to fall back on. He stopped working and started to use drugs every day to heal from this broken relationship and cope with the abandonment issues that had resurfaced. During this period, there was a lot of self-blame. Thoughts of worthlessness intruded: "Was it because I am not good enough? Was it something I did?" Alvin would also self-harm in an attempt to get his ex's attention. While Alvin knew that he had fallen very deeply into

addiction, he didn't know how to stop using drugs.

"Drugs were actually a solution for me at that point in time because when I used drugs, emotions came running in. I felt that I belonged because there was the company of fellow drug-using 'friends'. I just wanted to feel happy always, so I got addicted because it makes me feel happy and comfortable in my own skin."

When Alvin was in addiction, his brother, who was in recovery, had tried to reach out but he didn't really know how to help him. The turning point came when Alvin was caught in 2019 and charged with multiple counts under the Singapore Misuse of Drugs Act.

"I knew then that I have hit rock bottom and I can no longer excuse my use of drugs as a means of numbing myself."

Alvin's brother brought him to the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) for treatment. After 2 weeks of inpatient treatment, his brother continued to aid Alvin with his recovery by bringing him to **WE CARE**.

It was a very challenging period for Alvin as he had so many charges and was expecting to be incarcerated for 3 to 4 years. While Alvin was receiving treatment at **WE CARE**, he still felt very lost. He couldn't accept that he had to live his life surrounded by addicts. He wanted to be somebody who is not associated with addicts. He also did not want to be known as one. However, as Alvin was still on

trial, he felt that there was nothing left for him to do. Furthermore, when he was caught, all his "friends" who had used drugs with him, disappeared. His brother was the only one that came to his help, so Alvin decided to give **WE CARE** a try.

"In the beginning, I was still very confused. Since I am going to prison, why not I continue using drugs and just make myself happy? Or should I just try to recover?"

Alvin went to **WE CARE** daily for 10 months. He attended the One Day At A Time lunch meeting, SMART Recovery, 12-Steps Program as well as counselling sessions. The lunch meeting is a group therapy meeting where recovering people share their experiences, strengths and goals. Alvin enjoyed these meetings because the environment is pleasant and he felt that he is not alone in his recovery.

As he spent more time with recovering people, he realised that they have also been through a lot of challenges and each of them has their own struggles. Yet, the recovering people at **WE CARE** were very happy and they took things day by day. Every clean day is a new accomplishment.

"My recovery is just like a jigsaw puzzle. I know that it is going to be very difficult because it is like a 5000-piece jigsaw puzzle. So, I will listen to stories from others at **WE CARE** as well as attend counselling sessions, and slowly piece these experiences together to form a complete puzzle."

# Recovery Stories

At first, Alvin didn't believe in counselling, he only found out that counselling was useful after his counsellor had helped him unpack and process his childhood traumas. Alvin also learnt how to manage his emotions without having to turn to drugs. His counsellor's emphasis on honesty also motivated him to open up, surrender and accept the issues he is going through. With his counsellor's guidance, Alvin realised that there were co-dependency issues that he needed to tackle as well. In the past, he would need affirmation from others to feel good about himself.

"I was always trying to give and take care of others, but I wasn't happy then. Now I know that I cannot pour from an empty cup. I need to be happy first so others can receive my love and attention. After 6 months in recovery, I learnt that life is not about using drugs. Life is about having a routine, setting goals and practising self-care."

Just as Nezha had his teacher's care and support, Alvin also found a sponsor to guide and advise him in his recovery journey.

A piece of advice stood out, which Alvin would like to share:

If someone wants recovery, they should just do recovery.

Like Nezha, Alvin could be stubborn and rebellious. While Nezha had the mindset that killing others is not wrong since they are bad people, Alvin had also always insisted on this idea that taking drugs is "not wrong". He didn't sell drugs nor did he influence others to take drugs, so he wasn't in the wrong.

Alvin's sponsor guided him by analysing this idea and pointing out that he should always manage his own issues and not justify whether he, or anyone else, is right or wrong. Instead, Alvin should look inwards, at his own behaviour.

"Did I use drugs? Did I become abusive to myself and those around me?"

Alvin likens the process of doing recovery to that of cultivation in Chinese wuxia (martial heroes) novels - you will need a conducive space with no disturbance from the external world. He had originally kept a few contacts - who were still using drugs. This turned out to be a trigger because they would invite Alvin to use drugs together with them. So, Alvin decided to burn his bridges, he blocked them and changed his phone number to minimise such disturbances that threatened his recovery. Besides his sponsor, Alvin would like to thank his family for their support. His aunt never gave up on him even though she couldn't understand why he took drugs. His brother, who understood, had reached out and accompanied Alvin in his recovery journey even when they hadn't been in contact for 11 years.

Alvin is also grateful that **WE CARE** is here for him and everyone who is suffering from addiction.

"You just need to say that you had a very bad day and everyone at **WE CARE** will understand."

The story ended when Nezha turned over a new leaf, but for Alvin, this is his new

beginning. After serving his sentence in 2020, he is now starting over and pursuing a career in his previous profession.

“In life, there are always ups and downs. It is impossible that one’s life is always on a peak. So now, I just want to live simply, contentedly and really enjoy the little things in life.”

Importantly, Alvin is still doing recovery.

Alvin maintains that recovery is a journey that cannot be rushed.

“It is really one day at a time. No matter what the situation is, things will pass and when you come to this stage, you need to work really hard. You need to want recovery, surrender and accept it.”

Alvin also hopes that people suffering from addiction are given a second chance to begin their lives again.

**“We are not evil people. We are just people who are going through problems in life and trying to find solutions to our problems.”**



*Alvin with his brother  
(in the foreground)*

*We have blurred the images in our stories and perspectives,  
in line with our policy of preserving the anonymity of our service users.*

# Perspective

## Hiking the Recovery Journey

Father, master's student, beneficiary, avid hiker and explorer – these are the many hats that Roy wears. Besides enjoying nature hikes, he also likes engaging in the arts through acting, painting and music. Recently, Roy took up another role - being a volunteer at **WE CARE**. He is the organiser and trusty guide for **WE CARE**'s nature walks.

Roy's love for hiking started as a result of a few life-changing events. A few years ago, he was an avid runner, but after hurting his knees during a hike at Mount Kinabalu, Roy couldn't continue to run anymore.

"Ever since I was a child, I always liked to embark on adventures. It is a fantasy of mine to get lost in a place. Since I can't continue running, I took up hiking instead. Hiking became such a wonderful activity and I managed to experience the many benefits that hiking can offer. It was like a therapy for myself when I am faced with stress and challenges, I can simply get lost in the moment during hikes."

The other life-changing event was getting into addiction and recovery. Roy shared that he got into a negative spiral at a point in his life and was introduced to drugs. This became a problem that led him to be incarcerated twice. After his second incarceration, Roy turned to his family for help. Through an online search, they found **WE CARE** and Roy started his recovery by attending peer support meetings and counselling sessions.

During his recovery, Roy set some goals for himself. He wanted to become healthy again and he knew that hiking is a way to improve his physical and mental health, so he made a promise to himself that he would go on many hikes. Roy also wanted to explore so he decided to do just that and not stick to a single hiking location.

From walking around his neighbourhood, to visiting all the nature locations in our little red dot, Roy's most memorable hike was an 8-hour adventure from Sembawang to Queenstown. This hiking route also covered the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve which inspired him to embark on more nature hikes.

Roy would set off for his hiking adventures thrice a week during recovery. Even now, he is actively hiking on a weekly basis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he would either go on hikes alone or invite a friend along.

What makes hiking so attractive and appealing to Roy?



*Roy, at a stop on one of his walks*

# Volunteer: Roy

“It is difficult to describe. For myself, the major benefit is that I get to eat well and sleep well after hiking. This is an important thing when it comes to recovery because for some people, they are unable to sleep or eat well. Some also have quite varied sleeping and eating times that they cannot control. I think this is partly because our bodies need to be on the move. When I hike, I also get to enjoy the beautiful scenery and see the wildlife. Interacting with the animals around is pretty fun. And of course, let’s not forget the fresh air. I feel a lot of positivity when I take in the fresh air. This helps me to clear my mind, so I can take on the challenges of the day without much difficulty and with positivity.”

What started out as a sole adventure gradually turned into a group adventure when Roy started to get his friends onboard to hike together. Soon, the news got around and Patrick, who is **WE CARE**’s Program Coordinator, approached Roy asking if he would like to volunteer by organising and guiding nature walks. Roy agreed immediately. He felt that such an activity is essential as he had experienced the benefits and positivity of hiking and wanted to share it with everyone at **WE CARE**. Moreover, part of his recovery plan is to give back to the community so he readily took on this volunteering opportunity.

These nature walks proved to be beneficial for **WE CARE**’s beneficiaries and the good feedback that was received, affirmed that. The participants commented that they managed to learn more about the different nature locations in Singapore.

“There are so many areas in Singapore that are truly interesting, the many nooks and crannies that we get to immerse ourselves in. We get the chance to see things that we don’t usually see in our everyday lives, which can be very uplifting and invokes a sense of adventure. After walking and taking in the sights, we do feel more rejuvenated.”

Another benefit of hiking with a group is the opportunity for bonding. Participants get to share their recovery journey with others and form friendships along the way. This helps to bring one out of isolation and supports their recovery.

“The hiking experience is valuable because it allows us to do the sharing on a one-to-one basis, in a smaller group. It is very cathartic when we are able to let our thoughts and emotions out without any fear of being judged since we can understand what our peers are going through. This is truly a wonderful experience and I also get to benefit from hiking together with other beneficiaries! I always find the stories very inspiring. Each recovering person has gone through challenging times but they are able to get through it. It is a chance to help myself also when I listen and learn from their experiences. What’s more unique about our nature walks is that the **WE CARE** counsellors and staff join us as well. We chat, laugh and have a good time together. This creates a sense of belonging for a recovering person, letting you know that you are not alone in your recovery journey.”

If you try to envision the experience as Roy describes them, it feels as though nature walks

# Perspective

are mini-therapy sessions except that they are conducted out in nature. When asked, Roy explains that there is a programme termed as Wilderness Therapy, which combines therapy and outdoor nature experiences such as hiking! Roy also shared that this is something he wants to venture into when he completes his Master's program in counselling. Though this concept of conducting therapy in the wilderness is exciting, it is also tough because of various concerns, especially that of the client's safety.

Similar to wilderness therapy, nature walks also come with a set of challenges. As an experienced hiker and responsible guide, Roy would anticipate and prepare for potential challenges before conducting the walks.

Initially, Roy was very worried that there might be accidents or unpredicted emergencies, so he prepared and brought along first-aid kits, raincoats and insect repellent among other items. Roy also constantly ensured the safety of the group and made sure that individuals don't wander off since they can get lost if they are not guided. After a few experiences, he was able to relax because everyone was nice and friendly and there was little trouble during their hikes.

These nature walks are conducted once every 3 months. Previously, Roy took them to Thomson Nature Park and Chestnut Nature Park. After their first adventure at Thomson Nature Park, everyone was very excited and word got around, resulting in more signups for the second adventure. Roy had actually planned for a third adventure, however the COVID-19 pandemic and safety restrictions put a halt to this plan. Roy also wishes to

bring beneficiaries on a walk to visit the Triple Quarries. "It is very beautiful, we will be able to see the mountain quarry and the lake below. We will also pass by the green corridor which is a nice place for a walk."

Roy hopes that the nature walks will resume, once safety restrictions are sufficiently relaxed. When asked about the increasingly prevalent issue of addiction in society and how society can help persons who are suffering from addiction, Roy had this to share:

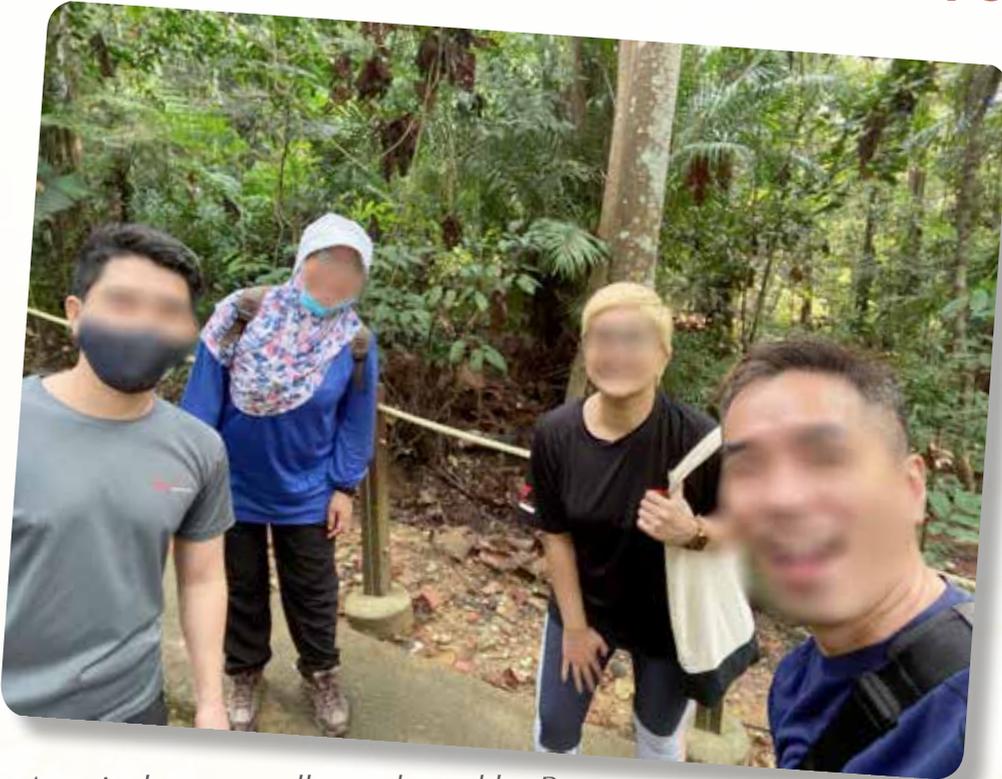
"The biggest problem with addiction is that it tends to result in isolation. In order to overcome isolation, people suffering from addiction need to be reconnected with others. They need to understand that they don't need to handle their problems alone. An addiction is usually a coping mechanism, it is their own method of trying to deal with negative situations. One thing I learnt at **WE CARE** is that you don't have to turn to harmful substances or behaviours and use them as coping mechanisms. You can find your own solutions by mingling with others at **WE CARE**. I think that this is very powerful and I am always grateful to **WE CARE** for providing this safe space for beneficiaries to reconnect with others and build their social networks."

This is also another motivation for Roy to volunteer. He understands that for some, it might be daunting to volunteer their services at **WE CARE** because there are still misconceptions and stigma against people suffering from addiction.

"'Will my safety be compromised?' 'Will others judge me?' 'Will I get myself into trouble?', these are all valid concerns. But



## Volunteer: Roy



*A typical group walk conducted by Roy*



the thing is, seeking help is most important for those who are suffering from addiction. It takes a lot of courage to step forward and seek help. In order to facilitate this process of getting help and recovery, we need to give these individuals a safe place to make mistakes. The recovery journey is not an easy one and people tend to slip. We need to let them know that we will always support recovery. So, take that leap of faith, volunteer and support recovery."

Prospective volunteers can also be assured when volunteering at **WE CARE** because there are clear guides and rules in place to ensure the safety of both beneficiaries and volunteers.

Roy believes that there are many volunteering avenues. For himself, he is trying to figure out ways and means to contribute more. Roy has attended a facilitation course for SMART

Recovery and is looking forward to helping out with this program. He is also open to helping out in other aspects, but being with nature is still his passion. Roy hopes to go on more nature walks with other beneficiaries when the Covid situation improves.

"Those who are around me know the kind of positivity I project and my resilience when facing problems. They are also curious about hiking so it is not difficult to attract participants. From here, we can advocate and let more people experience the benefits of hiking. That's my main focus and passion now."

Roy also encourages those who would like to volunteer to follow their passion and interest. Be motivated to share the joy with others before engaging and committing to a volunteering activity.

*We have blurred the images in our stories and perspectives, in line with our policy of preserving the anonymity of our service users.*

# Perspective

**“It is important for us to take care of ourselves before we can care for others.”**

As with other illnesses, be it physical or mental, addiction affects not just the individual, it also impacts one’s family and friends. Similarly, recovery is also not a solitary journey. Lily is a mother walking alongside her daughter in this journey and she shares about her experience when addiction took over her loved one’s life.

Lily has been a homemaker ever since her first child was born. She led a typical Singaporean lifestyle. In her free time, she would participate in different activities such as attending aerobics classes and going out with friends and family.

But everything changed when her daughter was affected by addiction.

About a decade ago, Lily’s then adolescent daughter started to spend more time with her friends, eventually mixing around with the wrong crowd and developing a drinking habit. Initially, Lily wasn’t very worried, but progressively as her daughter went clubbing and drinking on a regular basis, her worries grew.

Before long, her family realised that something was wrong. At that point in time, Lily and her husband did not know anything about addiction, they just knew that their daughter required help. However, their daughter wasn’t inclined to. Over the next few years, there was nothing they could do, except to watch addiction take over their daughter’s life. Coming from a close-knit family, Lily and her daughter have a strong loving bond. During active addiction, her daughter had

a 180-degree change whenever there was alcohol in her system. Lily lived in fear then because after drinking, her daughter would start to abuse her. The abuse started out verbally in the form of shouting, before turning into physical harm. Lily’s daughter would lose her temper and throw things when she was intoxicated.

After one such incident, Lily had a talk with her daughter the following day and told her what had happened. Lily’s daughter had no memory of the incident and was very shocked. She couldn’t believe and did not expect herself to abuse her mother. That was when she realised that she needed help.

Upon knowing that her daughter’s decision to seek help, Lily’s family sprang into action to assist. Previously, Lily’s son had done some research on addiction, so after her inpatient treatment at NAMS, he introduced his sister to **WE CARE**.

While her daughter participated in recovery meetings, Lily also tried her best to provide support. She signed up for various support group meetings such as Family & Friends and the Women’s Therapy Group in **WE CARE** as well as the BRIDGE Family conducted by NAMS.

“No matter what, she is my daughter. Some people attend support group meetings to learn about addiction and help friends. As a mother, how can I not do that? During family support group meetings, everyone will first share about their week and how they have been. Then either the counsellor or participants



# Caregiver: Lily

will suggest a topic or issue that they want to surface and seek advice on. Most participants are there because they want to gain some encouragement and learn from others' experiences. Attending these meetings help a lot because by being present, you can feel that you are not alone in this journey."

Besides learning from others' experiences, participants in these support groups also learn about the importance of self-care and how to practice it. However, practicing self-care is easier said than done. Lily revealed that her daughter's recurring cycle of relapse and recovery had affected her to a large extent.

As Lily's daughter is a perfectionist, she gets upset and stressed out whenever she is unable to meet her own expectations. When this happens, she will turn to alcohol. Her family tried to set boundaries to help her with recovery. They decided to stop giving her money and ban drinking at home, but these boundaries were ineffective once the stress sets in. Lily recalled herself standing at the window looking out for taxis that might be sending her daughter back. At times, they also had to fetch her because she would drink until she blacked out. It was during those years that Lily slowly neglected caring for herself.

"I knew that I have to practice self-care, but when the relapses happened, I just felt so down. I fell into depression and I would just shut myself off from the world completely. It soon became a pattern that follows my daughter's addiction cycle. When she stays clear of alcohol, I will always be there. However, when she relapses, there will be a distance between us because I would be disconnected from everyone."

This cycle lasted for a few years. Lily's daughter would turn to alcohol whenever she

is stressed out and forego her meals, resulting in health complications and hospital stays. After recovering from her health issues, she would stay clean for a few months before relapsing again. The last straw came when Lily's daughter started to physically abuse her and hit her head.

The abuse brought Lily back to her childhood days during which her father would also drink and abuse her mother. So, when the abuse happened to herself, Lily's fears resurfaced and she felt that she had had enough.

Lily chased her daughter out of the house. It wasn't an easy decision to make, but as Lily had learnt in support group meetings and therapy sessions, she had to protect herself. After this episode, Lily's daughter confessed that she didn't intend to abuse Lily – that she couldn't control herself. This struggle with control and the subsequent loss of control are commonly faced by persons affected by addiction. As Lily puts it, "You know that it is a deep hole, but you still fall inside. That's why it is called addiction."

To Lily and her family, addiction is a sickness. They were told that in the course of addiction, there will be a turning point normally termed as rock bottom. Rock bottom is usually described as the stage where the individual is at their lowest or when they decided that they have lost enough to addiction.

In January 2020, Lily suffered from a stroke and this was the turning point for her daughter. While Lily was in the hospital, her daughter assumed her mother's role as a caregiver. She took charge of arranging everything for her mother. Even after Lily was discharged, her daughter continued to take care of her and the household.

During this time, both Lily and her daughter also started to return to their religion. Lily believes that this is a major source of strength for her daughter because taking care of her and the entire household can be very challenging. It also comes with a considerable amount of stress, which is a trigger for her daughter, but she has managed to overcome it. In the past, Lily's daughter used to think that she can only turn to alcohol in times of stress. Now, she realised that she has other sources of support to depend on, such as her higher power and mum. She is also aware that the recovery journey may not be smooth sailing but she is determined to stay clean because her mother needs her.

Here, Lily highlighted 2 factors that she thinks are key in securing her daughter's recovery. Firstly, having a change in lifestyle. Lily had observed that after her stroke, there are changes in her daughter's lifestyle and attitude. Secondly, the willingness to choose recovery and give up the substance. Lily's daughter also willingly took up the role of being her mother's caregiver and dedicated her time to Lily as well as the household, instead of spending time drinking. These factors act as anchors that ground her daughter's recovery foundation.

"Now, I believe that changing one's lifestyle is key if they are struggling with addiction. Not every day is sunny but my daughter knows that as long as she doesn't start on the first drink, she will be fine."

With a stronger foundation and determination than before, Lily's daughter hit the one year mark of recovery in January 2021. Achieving this milestone is an emotional moment for everyone in the family.

"Previously, when attending **WE CARE** Finisher Awards, I used to contemplate whether my daughter will ever get there and achieve what others have done. So, when she did, it was a big thing for us. I know that one year may seem trivial and relapses can still happen even when you are many years clean. But for my daughter, I just want her to take one day at a time and celebrate the little achievements. One day clean is also a milestone to be proud of."

Lily believes in the power of sharing as the problems faced by caregivers are similar. She hopes that her story can provide support and encouragement for others whose loved ones are also affected by addiction. Through sharing, Lily also hopes to advocate the importance of self-care among caregivers.

"This is my experience, it doesn't mean that it will happen to everyone. Having a stroke is not a good thing, but it did happen. I didn't practice self-care and totally shut myself out from everyone. I always tell others to come back to support group meetings. Attend these meetings for yourself. You need to be strong so you can help your loved one and you do this by taking care of yourself. Don't wait until your health suffers or till you have been so abused."

Reflecting on her experience in her daughter's recovery journey, Lily expresses her gratitude to **WE CARE**. In the past, she was at a loss when addiction took over her daughter's life. Lily didn't know many things, she wasn't sure what addiction is, how to help her daughter or how to take care of herself.

"I didn't know what addiction is and how it occurs. My entire family drinks occasionally



during festivals and celebrations. Drinking is a very normal thing, especially since alcohol is readily available everywhere in Singapore. At **WE CARE**, I learnt about addiction. It is when your life is totally changed, turned upside down. It is a sickness, one that is ongoing."

Lily is also grateful to be part of a group of friends from support group meetings. Just like every other friendship squad, they have a group chat to support and communicate with each other on a daily basis!

To readers whose loved ones might be coping with addiction, Lily wants you to know that you are not alone and that there is help available.

**"I want to let others, who might be in similar shoes as me, to know that help is available. The programs here at **WE CARE** are all very useful. From here, they can encourage their loved ones to seek help. If their loved ones are not ready to seek help, the caregivers can also choose to sign up and help themselves first. Even though we are caregivers, we also need to live our own lives apart from our loved ones and their addiction. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are not alone. There is help available and we can get it. It is important for us to take care of ourselves before we can care for others."**



Lily



Lily with her daughter



Lily relaxing with her family

*We have blurred the images in our stories and perspectives, in line with our policy of preserving the anonymity of our service users.*

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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)

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