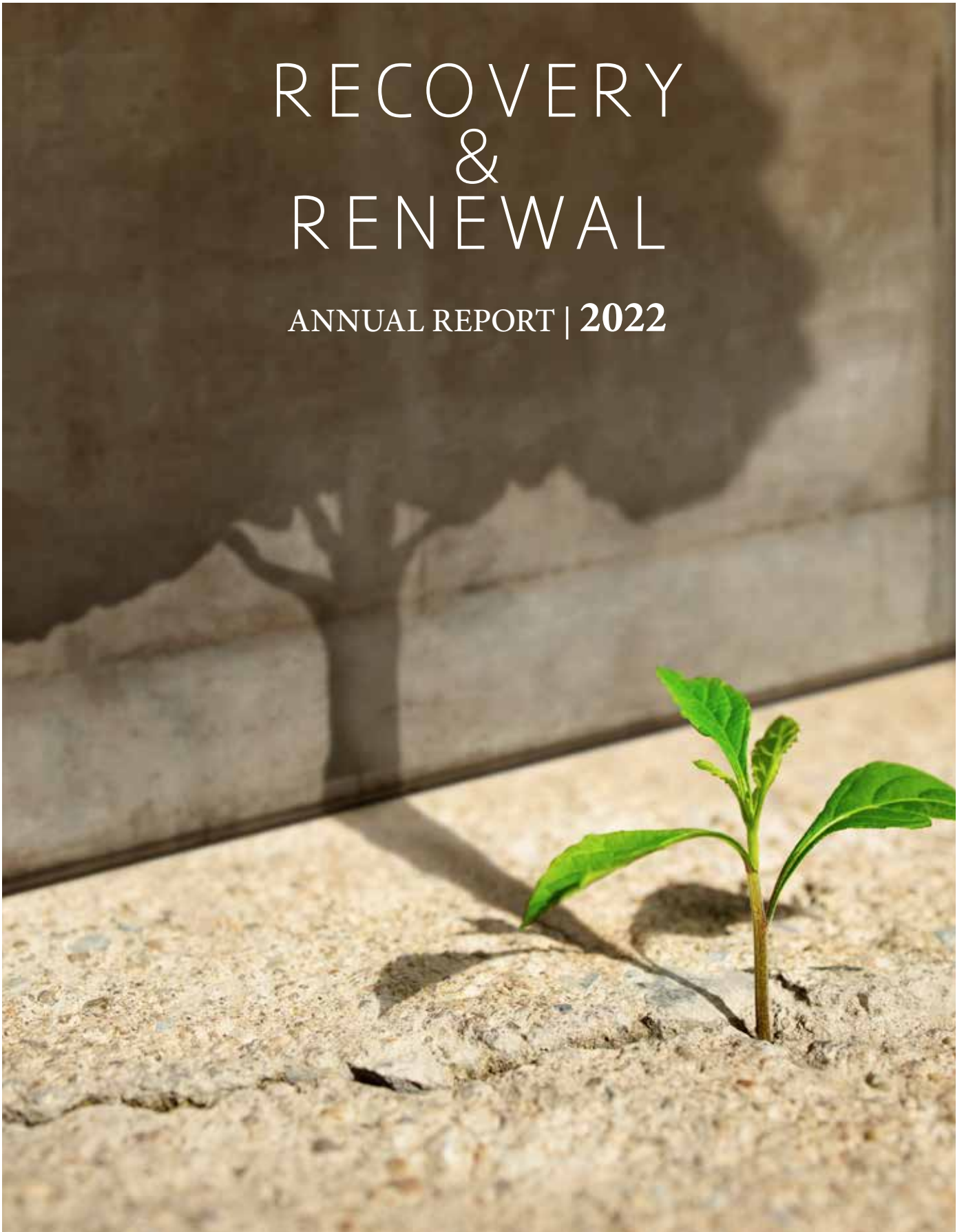




WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES

RECOVERY & RENEWAL

ANNUAL REPORT | **2022**





KNOW SOMEONE WHO
NEEDS HELP?



WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES

A non-profit addiction
recovery centre open to
all persons

Contact us at:

☎ **3165 8017**

@ help@wecare.org.sg

i www.wecare.org.sg

Sands for Singapore Charity Festival

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BOARD & STAFF

Andrew da Roza	Chair
Frances Cheang	Treasurer
Dr Munidasa Winslow	Member
Koh Kah Yeok	Director
Dane Anderson	Director
Jennifer Lim	Director
Dr Lee Cheng	Director
Robert Chew	Director (Joined 1st April 2022)
Tham Yuen Han	Executive Director
Yvonne Yuen	Senior Counsellor & Operations Manager
Gloria Tan	Corporate Services Director
Anna Chua	Finance/HR and Admin Manager
Leslie Goh	Communications and Relations Manager
Simon Ling	Communications & Peer Support Executive
Nirmala Turasamy	Admin Executive
Noor Sida bte Abdullah	Counsellor
Alvin Seng	Counsellor
Sonam Damani	Counsellor
Whitney Mah	Counsellor
Roy Yeng	Counsellor
Ahmad Khairi bin Abu Bakar	Programmes Executive
Afandi bin Ahmad	Recovery Guide
Jess Ang	Recovery Guide
Enid Chia	Recovery Guide
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
Stanly Leung	Associate Counsellor
Gowri Kirchberg	Associate Counsellor
Alex Lim	Associate Counsellor

List is correct as at 31st December 2022

WE CARE

Mission (2022)

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

Vision (2022)

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

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

A full member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), **WE CARE** is in its 17th year of operation in 2022.

MESSAGE

While it was anticipated that COVID-19 would bring many physical health challenges to Singapore, it was not anticipated that it would bring so much mental health and emotional distress.

During the COVID period and its aftermath, more people experienced anxiety, depression and loneliness; and tensions among family members were heightened by living in close proximity in confined spaces; and by unfamiliar uncertainties and new physical dangers.

Those in our community who were already vulnerable to using drugs, alcohol, gambling, gaming, smoking, pornography use and other distressing ways to cope with their distress, turned (or returned) to these destructive behaviours in dramatically increasing numbers. As Singapore relaxed the safety measures and opened up in mid-2022, **WE CARE** planned for service users to return to our centre for treatment and recovery activities.

However, we did not anticipate that the demand for **WE CARE**'s community addiction recovery treatment would continue to grow. Cases rose 36% from 2019 to 2022 - and it is clear that these reverberations from the COVID-19 period are set to continue.

In response to the increasing desire for community treatment, **WE CARE** has tapped on technology and also increased the number of therapists in our therapeutic team.

It is unsurprising that the major challenge to meeting the desire for **WE CARE**'s services is having enough space at our centre. Each day, our increased numbers of service users and

staff are managing constraints to conducting counselling, holding meetings and running activities.

Space is important in providing a high level of therapeutic care, safety and confidentiality.

WE CARE has been exploring viable options to increase usable space, with minimal disruption to our daily operations.

In addition, there is a pressing need for more donations and sustainable sources of funds, to support the increase in treatment services and activities.

Last year, only one physical fundraiser, a **Charity Movie** event, could be conducted, raising gross funds of \$60,000 - considerably less than our target of \$300,000.

We are grateful that the Government continues to be a generous and stalwart supporter of **WE CARE**.

The Government has also made the application for grants easier by housing all grants under one unified website and simplifying the application process.

WE CARE, our service users and staff have continued to benefit from the deployment of technology. We have been able to improve the efficiency of our operations, lower costs and to reach out to our service users in their homes and places of work.

Some service users feel more empowered, secure and safe in the "virtual world" - and technology has given them the confidence to seek help and stay on the recovery journey with us.

Andrew da Roza

CHAIRPERSON

I and the **WE CARE** team, give our wholehearted thanks and gratitude to **NCSS** for their unwavering support and wise guidance.

WE CARE would be unable to assist our service users without the grants and funds 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 thank you all.

We acknowledge the valuable partnerships with **National Addiction Management Services, Institute of Mental Health, Singapore Prison Services and the Singapore Management University**. Your faith and trust in us is so very much appreciated.

We wish to express our gratitude to our corporate donors **Marina Bay Sands, The Grace, Shua, and Jacob Ballas II Charitable Fund, The Isaac Manasseh Meyer Trust Fund and Swiftx Solutions Pte Ltd**. Your warmth and compassion for our service users inspires all of us.

Individual donors continue to be generous and we would like to mention, in particular, **Messrs: Guo Song; Chew Khean-Aun Emrys Myles; Lee Kway Leong, and Robert Chew**. Your generosity is so very much appreciated.

I would like to thank our hardworking staff and managers and our committed volunteers - whose individual acts of kindness and sacrifice make **WE CARE** a loving and supportive family. Your dedication has enabled our service users to change from day-to-day survivors to life-long thrivers.

We closed the year with a sharpened focus on our vision: ***to be the leading community hub of addiction recovery in Singapore*** - and our mission to:

- **advocate for persons with addiction and their families**
- **provide evidence-based clinical treatment**
- **deliver community-based recovery programmes to facilitate re-integration into society**
- **elevate the professionalism and expertise of addiction treatment in Singapore**

ANDREW DA ROZA
CHAIRPERSON

MESSAGE

It has been a year of adjusting to the new normal.

As restrictions finally lifted in 2022, the centre began to fully open its doors. Counselling, support group meetings and activities resumed fully, and were offered in hybrid (physical as well as online) mode wherever feasible.

Overall, our caseloads from 2019 to 2022, before and after the pandemic, rose 36%. Most addictions registered double-digit percentage increases. Also on the rise was the number of caregivers, including family members and significant others, who needed treatment. More concerning were the cries for help in sex/pornography matters, which affected 1 out of 5 persons who sought help at **WE CARE** last year. And eating-related issues also took on an upward trajectory in 2022, provoked like many other mental health matters, by Covid-imposed isolation and stressors.

As safety measures eased and the community settled into the new normal, many expected a dip in service requests from the prior year (2021). But the demand for our services continued its upward trend. Alongside fellow mental health specialists, **WE CARE** anticipated that the isolation and stress of coping during the pandemic would bring about more mental health issues.

To address emerging trends, we successfully piloted 2 new programmes:

The **NOCOSO (Non-Contact Sexual Offender)** programme was developed to

help clients abstain from non-contact sexual offending behaviours such as voyeurism, exhibitionism and frotteurism. The programme aims to help participants increase awareness of their behaviours, learn about triggers, develop healthy coping mechanisms and prevent future offending.

The support group **SAGE (Support and Awareness Group for Eating)** helps persons with eating issues to understand 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.

The **SAFE (Support for Recovering Addicts and their Families through Empowerment)** programme which is a collaboration with the NCSS (National Council of Social Service) and SPS (Singapore Prison Service) also saw greater numbers as more inmates were placed at our centre for treatment.

With more persons coming to the centre, more activities were offered, such as mindful movement, art sessions, exercise, nature walks and language lessons. There was new-found interest in gardening, which a generous donation of 2 hydroponics systems and several species of orchids helped to generate.

In tandem with the increase in service users and visitors, a weekly cook-in began to take shape, where both beneficiaries and volunteers would come together to prepare lunch. Putting together a meal for so many, with little resources but many hands,

Tham Yuen Han

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

created a sense of camaraderie as well as opportunities for staff, beneficiaries and volunteers to bond in true Singaporean fashion, over a hearty communal meal.

In 2022, we welcomed Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) into our stable of recovery support groups (RSGs). Support groups are a lifeline for recovering persons and the presence of SA reflects the effectiveness of groups as a valuable source of care, support and encouragement. Now, **WE CARE** plays host to 7 12-Step-based self-help groups which hold weekly meetings on our premises.

WE CARE had a record year for public education as we reached out to almost 2,500 persons in nearly 60 talks, held physically and online. Two thirds of our audiences were in secondary schools and

institutions of higher learning, and public awareness remains a vital component of our mission to reduce the stigma surrounding addiction.

I would personally like to thank our staff, recovery buddies, volunteers and the partners we work with for their dedication and passion for our cause. We look forward to serve this community with renewed compassion and care.

YUEN HAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

REVIEW OF 2022



REFERRALS HANDLED

2022	2021
714 served	773 served

CASELOAD SERVED

2022	2021
662 served	650 served

RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

2022	2021
581 meetings	485 meetings

VOLUNTEERS

2022	2021	2022	2021
78 pax	89 pax	1,332 hours	1,183 hours

KEY SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

COUNSELLING SESSIONS PROVIDED (HOURS)

2022

4,355
hours

2021

3,995
hours

OUTREACH

2022

2,487 **57**
reached events

2021

1,506 **29**
reached events



DONATIONS RECEIVED

2022

\$142k

2021

\$259k

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. The group aims to reintegrate the participants into the community, and re-establish relationships with their loved ones.

WTG

Women's Therapy Group

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

NOCOSO

Non-Contact Sexual Offending Programme

CURRENT PROGRAMMES

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

SAGE

**Support and
Awareness Group
for Eating**

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

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**

YOUTH-CENTRIC ISSUES

During and post-pandemic, much light has been focussed on the importance of mental health and well-being. The lock-down period saw many people turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as online gaming, gambling, social media, and pornography use to cope with the negative emotions resulting from isolation.

In 2022, although restrictions began to relax, **WE CARE** continued to see a sustained number of calls for help with addiction-related issues, more so with a younger demographic.

WE CARE's response to the concerning trend is to expand our efforts to focus on issues which are more relevant to the youth population. The four areas identified include Internet & Gaming Addiction, Binge Drinking, Sex, Porn and Love Addictions and Eating Issues.

With existing and new treatment programmes catering to these four areas, we intend to increase our efforts in reaching out to the youth segment by working closer with schools and institutes of higher learning by providing support in terms of education and awareness for parents, educators and caregivers alike.

SUSS E-LEARNING MODULES

In-line with our direction to focus more on addictions and compulsive behaviours faced by the youth population, **WE CARE** will be working with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) to develop a series of web-based e-learning modules.

The series of e-learning modules will be designed to encompass easy to digest bite-sized information on four main areas of concern commonly faced by younger persons including, Internet & Gaming Addiction, Binge Drinking, Sex, Porn and Love Addictions and Eating Issues. With technical and industry expertise in developing digital learning lessons, the team at SUSS will be working closely with our counsellors to put together four mobile friendly, e-learning modules targeted at youths and their primary caregivers. We aim to provide awareness, education and resources for help in a manner that is engaging to youth.

This project is targeted to be launched in 2023 and will be publicised to schools, institutes of higher learning and youth communities.

CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS



Talented students from the **National Junior College** imparting their artistic craft skills.

RAINBOW LOOMS

WE CARE set a new record in this year's **NTUC FairPrice Walk for Rice** initiative with a total of 785.6km covered through five different walks. This translated to 7,856 bowls of rice and oats raised for needy families. An excellent opportunity to give back to the community, and despite the wet weather, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries alike all pitched in.

WALK FOR RICE 2022



True to our mission of empowering persons with addictions to reclaim their dignity and improve their quality of life, **WE CARE** continues to support its clients in various capacities. In March 2022, **WE CARE** endorsed yet another of its clients for the 8th run of the Peer Support Specialist Programme (PSS) by the **National Council of Social Service (NCSS)**. Simon completed his practicum placement at **WE CARE** and upon graduation joined the organisation as a full-time staff assisting in communications and peer support.

PEER SUPPORT

SPECIALIST PROGRAMME (RUN 8)





Visiting our furry friends and learning from the experts at **SPCA** on their mission to help the local stray population.

SPCA
VISIT & TALK

CHUA MIA TEE EXHIBITION

Taking in the artistic creations of **Chua Mia Tee**, Singapore's most acclaimed artistic forerunner in realism.



Marina Bay Sands welcomed us to the LKY Musical and to experience the Skypark Observation Deck.

THE LKY MUSICAL @ SANDS THEATRE, SINGAPORE



ASIAN CIVILISATION MUSEUM



Exploring the traditional roots and contemporary designs of exquisite batik art textiles.



SEA AQUARIUM

Post-lockdown, one early outing was to the popular SEA Aquarium.



WEEKLY WORKOUTS

Breaking a sweat at our twice-weekly workout sessions for staff and beneficiaries led by our fitness fans.

MINDFUL
MOVEMENT
CLASS WITH

REBECCA



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As Covid restrictions began to ease, **WE CARE** saw a significant increase in community addiction awareness talks from 2021 to 2022. Reaching over 2,400 persons, this represented a 65% increase from the 1,506 persons reached in 2021 – marking a new record for us.

The increase can be attributed to several factors, most notably, the importance of mental health awareness as many were affected adversely during the lockdown. Outreach to educational institutions more than doubled from 795 to 1,606 persons reached. Interestingly, the majority of these education talks were still conducted digitally via Zoom.

Our community partners, like the **National Addictions Management Services (NAMS)**, **Marina Bay Sands (MBS)** and **Singapore Prison Service (SPS)** saw fit to resume physical awareness talks. The Sands for Singapore Charity Festival was a major event that spanned over three days and saw an estimated 350 persons stopping by to chat with our team, and also helping to raise funds.

Engagement with Singapore Pools punters and halfway homes remain relatively muted, however ground sentiments are optimistic that outreach efforts will revive in the coming year.

The overall increase in community outreach is a significant achievement for **WE CARE** and is consistent with achieving our vision of becoming the leading hub for addiction recovery in Singapore. With restrictions continuing to ease, the number of public education talks is certain to rise in 2023.



TALK

AT ITE COLLEGE CENTRAL

WE CARE conducted a general addiction awareness talk with a focus on peer support elements for the Peer Support Leaders in their student population.



STAFF EDUCATION ON RESPONSIBLE GAMING AT MARINA BAY SANDS

Resuming educational training for staff of Marina Bay Sands on responsible gaming and how to look out for customers who may need assistance.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND FUNDRAISING AT SANDS FOR SINGAPORE CHARITY FESTIVAL

The 3-day charity festival returned after a two-year hiatus with local community partners including non-profit organisations and social enterprises.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FESTIVAL AT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE (NUS)

Sharing of recovery story and addiction awareness at the College of Alice and Peter Tan, NUS during the Community Engagement Festival 2022.



SINGAPORE POLICE FORCE (SPF) BEDOK DIVISION SAFETY SECURITY WATCH GROUP SEMINAR

WE CARE was invited by the SPF Bedok Division to speak on compulsive shoplifting and atypical theft issues.

ADDICTION AWARENESS & EDUCATION TALK AT TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC

Staff, interns and volunteers of WE CARE sharing with students of Temasek Polytechnic on addiction and youth-related cyber issues.



FUNDRAISING

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS

In 2022, the continued restrictions on public gatherings and social distancing guidelines hampered any effective fund raising activities. Challenges also persisted in conducting virtual fundraising events as the majority of our community partners and donors had grown wary of the digital sphere and looked forward to a physical fundraising activity.

As Covid restrictions were gradually lifted in June, **WE CARE** organised a Charity Movie screening of the popular DC Extended Universe comic world, ***Black Adam***. The event took place at Shaw Theatres, Paya Lebar Quarter and was successful in raising almost SGD 60,000 before dollar-to-dollar matching grant support.

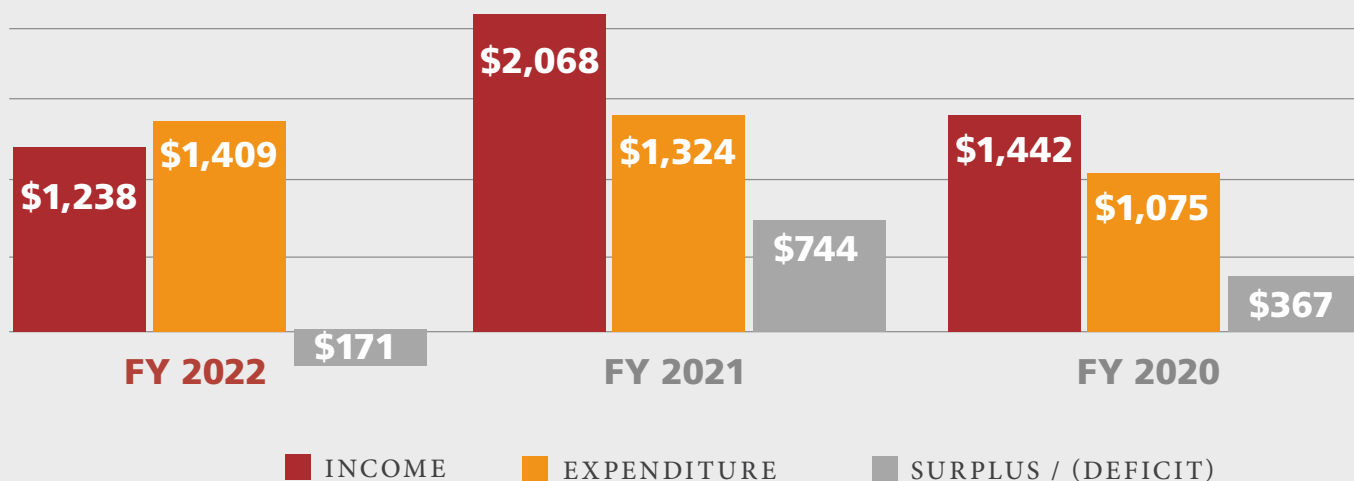
In light of our increasing number of cases, **WE CARE** plans to enhance our fundraising efforts in 2023 to support our treatment programmes and activities to better serve the growing recovering community.





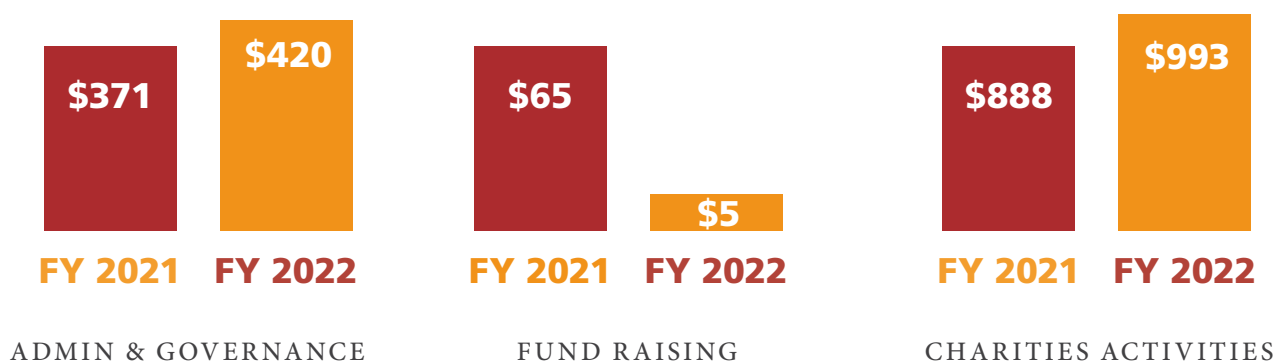
KEY FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE (‘000)

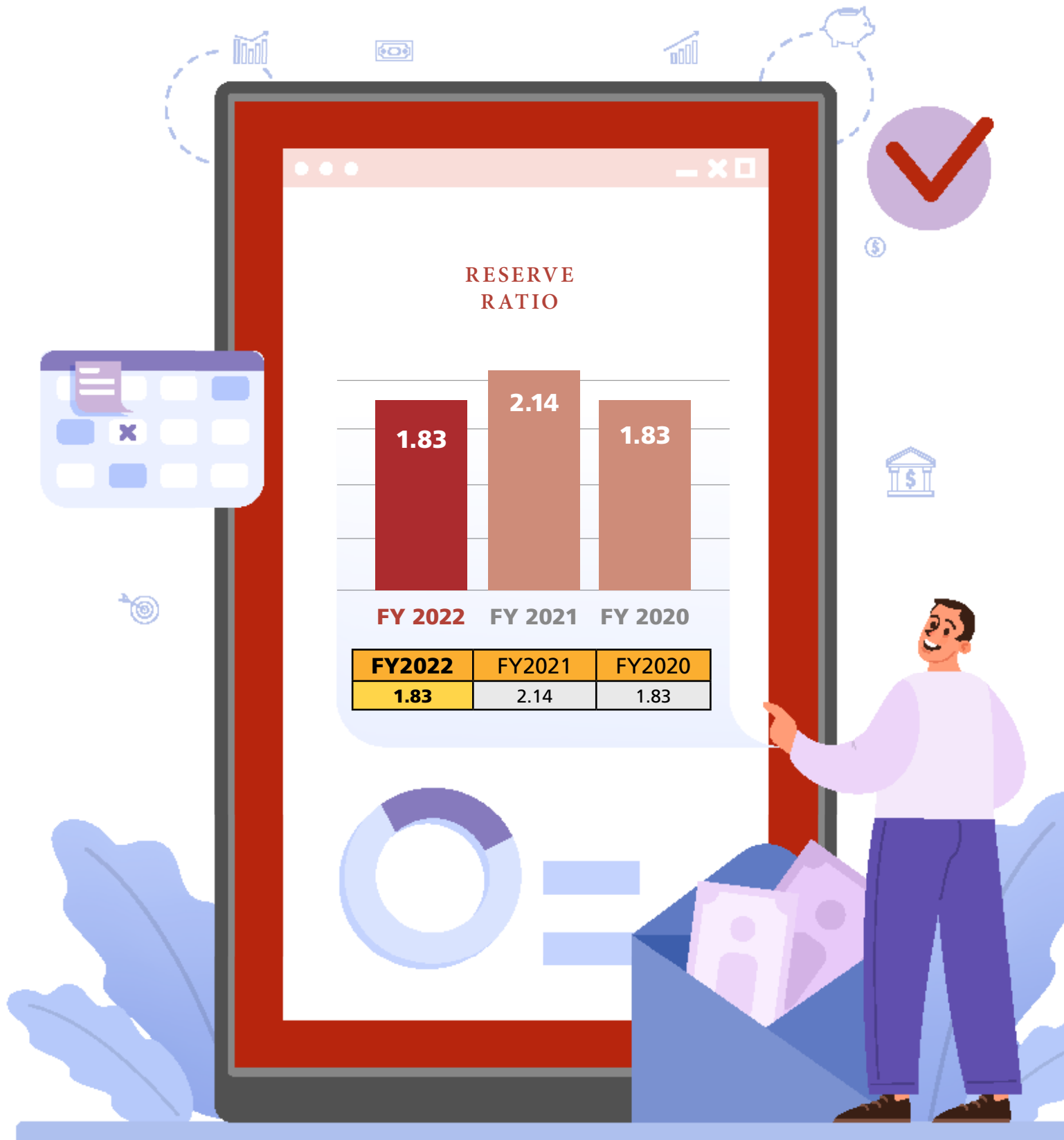


	FY2022	FY2021	FY2020
Income	\$ 1,238	\$ 2,068	\$ 1,442
Expenditure	\$ 1,409	\$ 1,324	\$ 1,075
Surplus / (Deficit)	\$ (171)	\$ 744	\$ 367

HOW MONEY WAS SPENT (‘000)



	FY2021	%	FY2022	%
Admin and Governance	\$ 371	28	\$ 411	29%
Fundraising	\$ 65	5	\$ 5	<1%
Charities Activities	\$ 888	67	\$ 993	70
	\$ 1,324	100%	\$ 1,409	100%



GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE POLICIES

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

GOVERNANCE EVALUATION CHECKLIST

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

BOARD GOVERNANCE

The Board held a total of **2 meetings** in FY 2022

*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. As such, we have to retain the services of such volunteer Board members for as long as they are able to contribute to our cause and mission, and willing to do so.



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



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 STORY

RECOVERY IS A LONG JOURNEY WHICH WE SHOULD NOT GO THROUGH ALONE.

Isaac who is currently 25 years of age, first encountered substance after his National Service days. He was introduced to it when he was working on an e-commerce platform and was arranging a delivery.

A client agreed to purchase some products if he would take a few puffs of a substance. He did, but did not experience any effect, although it made an impression on his mind.

It was during Covid, when he felt isolated and alone that he contacted the former client and tried it again.

He was soon hooked. Neglecting his old friends, he started taking drugs with his new friends and his social circle was “replaced by a more powerful and negative one.”

When he was picked by CNB together with his friends, he was sent to DRC (Drug Rehabilitation Centre).

When he was there, he heard about the programme Project SAFE (Support for recovering Addicts and their Families through Empowerment) from other inmates. He was also informed about **WE CARE** Community Services, the charity organisation that was running the programme.

Curious, he attended the programme briefing, and decided to sign up for it.

He has not looked back.

“I thought the programme was very different. We were individually assigned a counsellor and a peer support staff from an agency who would follow up with us.”

Essentially, the programme gave him something to look forward to: “A new place, a new space, a new community.”

He found the centre welcoming. “Everybody knows everybody. It’s somewhere where you can belong.”

It was something he needed before he went back to society at large, and to his family and friends. It also provided the time and space to find his footing, new directions and passions.

He felt that the peer support staff, or recovery guides, were always supportive and willing to help.

Counselling helped him through a lot, as did the many activities at the centre such as mindful movement. He feels that for those who are not exposed to, and have never experienced them, bringing these activities to them may well give them new direction or purpose in their recovery. For Isaac, counselling helped him the most and he credits his counsellor, who helped him work through his issues, and who “was very real and cool about everything and truly listened.”

His counsellor gave him tools to help him “see where I am and where I want to be”, which proved “very powerful for managing my addiction.”

WE CARE is where those who need help can find positive friends. He encourages those who are recovering to step out of their comfort zone and try something they have not tried before. “You never know. New doors might open.”

Coming out of prison, many may have a mindset that may not be “ideal for re-integrating back into the community.” **WE CARE** can provide the environment to “let you take a hard look at how you have lived your life so far” and to find purpose in their new journey.

If there is one thing Isaac would like to see, it would be a greater diversity of peer support staff, so as to be able to address the different needs of inmates from prison and DRC. He also hopes that the role of the peer support staff can be expanded so they connect inmates to resources for mental wellness, personal wellness and career guidance.

He feels that he at 25, he has squandered some of his prime years, but he has made a fresh start and is determined to “keep clean and not hurt my family.” Although he has many options he can pursue, studying is one definite goal, and he may first work before diving into psychology or sociology, fields of study which will enable him to help others.

Isaac has a word of advice he wishes to share:

**“RECOVERY IS A LONG JOURNEY,
BUT WE NEED NOT GO THROUGH IT ALONE.”**



RECOVERY

STORY

THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Recovery Gives Me the Power to Choose

The first time Sha tried substance, his body initially felt unwell, although he did experience the euphoria at some point. He did not feel that drugs were fundamentally bad, and at the beginning, he was able to control his intake. It was when the frequency of use increased, that “things started to escalate and got the better of me.” Life became unmanageable.

His dependency affected him physically and mentally – he lost weight, developed physical ailments, and experienced hallucinations. Unable to manage, he decided he needed help, and unaware of the availability of detox at NAMS (National Addictions Management Service), he surrendered himself to the police, with the support of his family.

This led to a 6-month stint in prison. There he was introduced to the recovery support group Narcotics Anonymous (NA). He is grateful for the support that they provided, and getting to know persons who stayed clean for 15 or 20 years, motivated him to stay on the path of recovery. He came to realize that many of those at the NA meetings shared the same issues and struggles that he did.

Reflecting on his experiences, he realised that he needed to uncover the reasons for his past choices. He was advised to seek help from a counsellor with expertise in substance use disorders, and was introduced to **WE CARE** Community Services.

Sha is grateful to **WE CARE** for providing a safe recovery space and platform. He is particularly impressed by the anonymity provided by the

centre, the non-judgemental environment, the counselling and group sessions, and the recovery support group meetings. The rules at the centre allow everyone to be treated equally, and mutual respect is observed. “One’s anonymity is protected, everyone is advised not to lend or borrow money, and encouraged to be mindful and to draw healthy boundaries with one another.” This has made him feel safe and comfortable.

He also appreciates the other programmes, such as RiSE which helps clients to upgrade their skills and to work with job coaches on their employment choices, and for Mindfulness sessions where he learned how to deal with cravings and difficult emotions.

The activities were also engaging. Sha enjoyed attending baking sessions and yoga lessons. He liked the lunch meetings for the diversity of the participants and how everyone gets to share and to learn from each other’s experience.

Sha believes that as human beings, we always have a choice. We have control over the decisions we make and how we react to situations in our lives. “I am my worst enemy. I ask myself why, why was I doing this, why did I choose to use substance?” He realized his problems were already present in his childhood, but he never confronted them.

“I just wanted to numb myself and avoid acknowledging or resolving these issues. What I’ve learnt is that it is not just about finding a right time to confront your problems but also about who you disclose them to. It will be better

when you are approached by the right people and institution, so that they can provide a safe place for disclosure and seeking help."

One of the challenges he faced was in his early recovery, after spending 6 months in detention. His circle of friends expressed curiosity about his whereabouts and he was conflicted about telling them the truth. In the end he shared with some of them, but their response took him aback.

"That was really stupid of you," they declared.

Today there are no regrets about the decisions he made. Sha acknowledges that understanding this took some time, but sometimes "all we need is time and space to figure things out."

It has been a beautiful, painful and interesting journey for Sha. It has taken time for people to trust him, and to understand what he has gone through. Some have stayed, while others have left.

"As a society, we can be a force for change and reduce the stigma associated with substance abuse."

Recovery has many definitions and Sha sees it as a "journey of growth." He wants to lend his voice and experience to changing society's perception of addiction and to empower those affected by addiction to seek help.

"We are responsible for creating platforms of awareness. Addiction knows no boundaries; it

can affect anyone. For everyone who is going through a battle with addiction, you are not alone."

Sober since Oct 2018, Sha is looking ahead to the time when he can celebrate 10 years of sobriety, 20 years, 30 years and so on.

"I used to feel very shy and was not very articulate. I am proud of myself for being able to talk about these things now." He can now share about his past, and he knows that someone out there who needs motivation and encouragement may get that after hearing about his experiences.

He has made people miserable during his days of using substance, and in recovery he has the opportunity to approach them to apologise and to give them his word that it will not happen again.

Wherever a recovering person is on their journey, Sha wants to share this mantra: "Regardless of any obstacle, don't lose hope."



RECOVERY

STORY

THE DIFFERENCE: LOVE & SEX ADDICTION

Sex addiction or compulsive sexual behaviour disorder, according to the ICD-11*, is characterised by a pattern of failure to control sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive sexual behaviour. Love addiction can be defined quite similarly, with the dependency being around behaviours with seeking the “perfect” relationship and their associated emotional patterns.

April 2022 marked three years in my sex addiction treatment. Through therapy and support groups, I have also acknowledged the label of love addict. I initially sought help when my sexual proclivities were consuming a large portion of my day. My decade-long conduct led to negative implications in school, family, and self-esteem. Despite these consequences, I continued to fail at reducing those behaviours.

In the area of sex, it was simple to define the problem. I had been living out a pattern of pornography, hook-ups and cruise clubs that consumed most of my day. In addition, I utilised much of my headspace planning and executing these trysts. I had deluded myself into thinking that “making love” was how I would experience my emotional highs and lows. Eventually, I found that those impulsivities were becoming more distressing to my well-being.

My recovery became more profound when I started processing my love avoidance with my therapist. In the romantic department, I’ve yet to experience a committed relationship which I had always attributed to my uncertainty around my sexuality and gender identity. I viewed myself as undeserving of happiness and thus self-sabotaged most friendships and romantic correspondences. Eventually, I found myself anorexic emotionally with even the little intimate connections I had.

Sex and love addiction can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Sexualised behaviour was how I acted out the feelings of loneliness and shame that came from being avoidant of love.

At the same time, I manifested those feelings of isolation through avoiding emotional intimacy even with friends and family. As a result, I turned to the unhealthy physical and emotionally charged coping pattern of sex and love addiction.





Growing up, I inherited a skewed blueprint as an offspring of a dysfunctional marriage. Through talking and processing some of those early beliefs, I realised that my addiction played an insidious role in how I viewed people and interactions. In addition, I held many ideals that contributed to my low self-esteem and in the long run, made dating and intimacy difficult.

In my recovery, I have learnt to let people into my life. Whether through professional mental health services or other suggestions in recovery, the manner in which I view sex and love has become less distorted. Sex addiction and love addiction are some ways by which I navigate my unhealthy focus with sex and relationships. With my addiction, there is a familiarity around performing the same unhealthy rituals hoping for different results. I have realised that the distinction between sex addiction and love addiction isn't always as clear in my recovery. Thus, I usually view experiences through either or both lenses in recovery. In doing so, I confront my destructive addictive patterns so that they don't continue to rule my life.

**International Classification of Diseases – The global standard for diagnostic health information (11th Revision)*



RECOVERY STORY

FROM BEHIND THE LENS TO BEACON OF HOPE

Violence, quarrels, and cries were my earliest memories. I was the product of a dysfunctional family – my father abandoned us for another family when I was still a child, leaving my mother to raise my brother and I single-handedly. As a person with a strong traditional upbringing, my mother never formally divorced my father as she held on to hopes of giving us a father figure.

I was often left alone as my mother had to work several jobs to make ends meet. I became socially and emotionally withdrawn, and my peers soon made me their target of bullying. This only served to increase my lack of respect for myself, emotionally and physically.

“Continuously tormented by bullies, I felt that I was never respected in any way”.

As I approach my early 30's, the stressors of life accumulated to breaking point. My father passed on, leaving my family with financial debts and dramatic clashes with his second family. A year later my mother suffered a stroke and shortly after my marriage was also called off, just weeks prior to the wedding.

Back then, I was also working in an extremely toxic environment and because I had no sense of emotional respect or boundaries, I was constantly manipulated by my superior – making me believe that I was worthless, and no one would ever employ me.

“My boss crushed my self-esteem to the lowest point when I was already such a withdrawn person”.

It was during this dark point in my life that I started my voyeuristic behaviours – videoing other men in public washrooms. I could not fathom why I was doing what I was doing. I did not get any form of sexual gratification from the act, nor was I sexually attracted to men.

“It was very bizarre and totally out of character. I’m an educated person and I know that my actions are wrong, yet I was unable to control myself. I simply recorded the videos for the sake of recording and did not even review the videos”.

Eventually, I was arrested for voyeurism. It was an extremely traumatic experience being handcuffed and taken away by the police. They even raided my home and confiscated my computer and hard disk. Needless to say, I lost my job as well.

However, this was the turning point. I knew something was alarmingly wrong with me. The very next day after my arrest, I went straight to the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) to seek professional help and despite not getting any answers, I persevered and went to a private mental health clinic instead.

I was fortunate to meet an experienced doctor who diagnosed me right away with depression and voyeuristic disorder – that marked the beginning of my journey in recovery. Not long after, I was referred to **WE CARE** Community Services for counselling and subsequently joined a self- help recovery support group which I diligently participate in, every week till this day.

In recovery, I begin to understand myself on a deeper level. Working closely with my counsellor, I identified various core needs that were not met including emotional respect, sense of control and the meaning of healthy boundaries.

My sense of boundaries was so non-existent that it was only through counselling that I discovered I was molested in my 20's. I also realized that my lack of a father figure contributed to my curiosity of men and my voyeurism was a way of taking out my pain on others by giving me a false sense of control.

“Although my underlying issues and stressors triggered my offensive acts, understanding the root causes of my condition ensures that I do not re-commit again. I understand it is not an excuse and I fully accept the consequences of my actions”.

Instead, I am grateful that now I am learning to respect and love myself regardless of how others treat me. Self-care is crucial to me. I live by a set of healthy routines ensuring regular exercise and mindfulness practice that helps me to stay mentally focussed and in good physical health.

Learning healthy boundaries is just the beginning, I am now more ready and willing to speak up if I am bullied or when I feel my boundaries are crossed. Managing my emotions and stress levels are also crucial, especially during this anxious period of awaiting my sentencing.

Today, despite the dysfunction in my family, I can see how they are supportive in their own capacity. I am also truly appreciative that I am currently working for an organization that values and respects me. My direct superior is

aware of the full extent of my situation and does not judge me at all. On the contrary, he encourages me to persevere in my recovery and reassures me that he will do his best to retain my job after I serve my prison sentence.

While it is nerve-wracking to share my story publicly, I do so in hopes that if anyone is facing dark times, know that you are never alone. Even if you do not have the financial means or friends and family, there are various support groups and charity organizations available to help – all you need to do is ask.

I sincerely hope that the stigma of mental health issues will be more readily addressed so that help can be rendered to those in need before a disaster happens.

If I were to sum up my recovery, I would quote the words of my counsellor that have helped me see my whole journey in a different light.

“I have gained so much more than what I've lost since the day I started my recovery journey”.



PERSPECTIVE: COUNSELLOR

“THE WILDERNESS RESCUED ME. I HAVE BEEN SHAPED BY MY EXPERIENCES IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS. FEELING COMFORTABLE IN THE WILD GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE TO BE WHO I AM, NOT WHO OTHERS WANT ME TO BE.” -

Ben Fogle, adventurer and writer

Wilderness Therapy is a treatment option for behavioural disorders, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Wilderness therapy programmes can increase social involvement, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, social support, and physical activity. This can decrease discomfort and psychological distress.

Although camping in nature is prohibited in Singapore*, hiking in nature has been a preferred pastime for many locals. Some of my favourite trails in Singapore are MacRitchie Trail, Chestnut Nature Park, The Green Corridor (North Trail), Mandai T15 Trail and Clementi Forest.

How I started hiking

My idea of hiking came about when I was in DRC awaiting to be released. With my imminent freedom, I wanted to do something that was different and challenging. I decided that I would walk from the north to the south of Singapore. When I was freed, I started walking around the neighbourhood parks and nearby nature parks to prepare myself. I remember during the walks that I was filled with thoughts of shame, fear and addiction. Nonetheless, I kept on the routine of walking every morning as that was the certainty and fresh air I needed.

My north-to-south walk wasn't fully realised, and I only managed to walk from Sembawang to Queenstown, a journey of 8 hours. One of the highlights was walking through the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, wading through the jungle with no paths in sight and just the GPS on my phone to guide my way. In the distance I could hear

the gunshots from the nearby live firing range, and at that time I couldn't help but let fear get the best of me. Fortunately, the warmth of the sunrays shining through the jungle canopy, the comfort of the rustling leaves as the cool breeze passed through, and rejuvenation from the tree-filtered fresh air relieved my stress and turned my fear into excitement. I felt alive in nature!

My idea of walking across Singapore was abandoned, but my love for nature hikes didn't cease. I started roaming around Singapore looking for interesting nature walks, and my interest was extended to many recovery persons who shared the same passion.

Therapists often talk about “self-care”, and I had little idea what it meant until I started my hikes in nature. It was an avenue to cast aside my regular rhythm of life, spend some time to self-reflect, prioritise my life goals, and engage in rich conversations with friends without the everyday distractions of SMS-es and emails.

I realized that in my addiction to drugs I had sequestered myself in isolation. When I started my journey towards recovery I needed to embark on the re-calibration of connection: Connection with nature, connection with others, and most importantly connection with myself.





Connection with Nature

“TO BE WHOLE. TO BE COMPLETE. WILDNESS REMINDS US WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN, WHAT WE ARE CONNECTED TO RATHER THAN WHAT WE ARE SEPARATE FROM.”

– Terry Tempest Williams, author and conservationist

Being outdoors, engaging in different activities can help reduce stress. What is good about the wilderness is that nature can be calming in itself. I boost this calmness by taking hikes, applying mindful movement, or simply taking in the beauty that is around me.

Studies have shown that symptoms of anxiety and depression can be addressed through different sights, sounds and experiences in nature. Also, changing the scenery by way of other environments is crucial for maintaining good mental health. The ability to focus and to solve problems improves.

In addiction, the body depletes in nutrients, and spending time outside in the sun can replenish them. Sunlight is an excellent source of vitamin D, which increases energy levels and boosts the immune system. This can lead to a rise in serotonin, which is known to improve mood, raise energy levels, and address mental health symptoms.

For me, being sober meant facing a void in my life. Recovery presents the opportunity to try new things, so engaging in outdoor activities is time spent well. These activities help fill the time that was once consumed by drugs, and they help me grow accustomed to a new life in sobriety. Spending time outdoors in the sunshine helps reset my internal clock, thus improving my circadian rhythm and regulating sleep patterns. I realized that having a good sleep was important to prevent a relapse, and I do not need sleeping medication like I did before.

Connection with Others

While I was doing the numerous hikes alone, I slowly realized that hiking with someone else was a fun and healthy way to connect with others. I started broadcasting my interest in hiking in the recovery chat groups, and I invited one or two persons to join me in my hiking trips. I noticed one advantage of hiking with friends was that I was more motivated to hike and so I was more consistent with maintaining the activity. I also realised that I became more adventurous with my choice of trails, and I frequently enjoyed going further into the wild, and feeling safe while doing so.

While I was attempting to learn about myself, I discovered the importance of listening to other people's stories as well. Here, my friends provided a valuable resource to understanding recovery. By sharing my own experiences, I get to process my thoughts, and I also get to listen to my friends' constructive feedback on my experiences.

I not only expand my worldview but also bolster friendship in the recovery group. That kept me away from my addiction and let me cultivate a sense of belonging to the people in recovery.

Connection with Self

“BELONGING SO FULLY TO YOURSELF THAT YOU’RE WILLING TO STAND ALONE IS A WILDERNESS — AN UNTAMED, UNPREDICTABLE PLACE OF SOLITUDE AND SEARCHING.”

– Brené Brown, research professor and storyteller

After experiencing numerous lows in my addiction, I needed to challenge myself in a manner that would steer my life in a new direction. By overcoming the physical and mental hurdles of enduring the challenges of Mother Nature, be it trudging knee-deep through mud in Clementi Forest, or walking up a steep incline in the rain at Bukit Timah, there was a renewed sense of purpose and resiliency.

It was the inner resolve to combat whatever struggles or hurdles that lay before me, that enabled me to work through whatever shame, trauma, and addiction that I had experienced in my life. Hiking was a wonderful opportunity for reflection, doing so helped me overcome any challenges that I faced in recovery in a peaceful setting. Reflecting and spending time alone or with a friend provide excellent sources of motivation for recovery, allowing me to maintain my sobriety for the long haul.

By removing myself from the demands of daily life in order to experience the silence and solitude of the wilderness, I receive self-healing, rejuvenation, self-knowledge, and spiritual insight. This has allowed me to understand my place, purpose, and direction in life.

The Path Ahead

“A WALK IN NATURE WALKS THE SOUL BACK HOME.”

– Mary Davis, artist and spiritual teacher

It brought me great joy when **WE CARE** Community Services learned about my passion, and they have requested that I lead the nature walks for their beneficiaries. I loved how we resonated with each other through the stories that we told, as we basked in the pleasures of nature.

I hope to take the adventures of hiking in nature to greater heights. Whilst I plan to hike overseas, I also wish to structure the hikes with other activities such as mindful movement, meditation, group reflection etc. Nature hikes are the foundation to my physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. They form the lifeline that guides me and keeps me alive and free.

**Camping is permitted in 4 areas in natural settings.
Refer to NParks for more information.*



PERSPECTIVE:

Former Head and Program Director
of **WE CARE**



WE CARE was originally a small outpatient clinic focusing on addictions run by what was then called CAMP, the addictions program at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). It was an extension of the hospital, and funded by it.

In early 2007, the hospital ended its stewardship of the agency and **WE CARE** became an independent freestanding clinic. However, there was little to no funding or leadership.

I had worked as a clinical director for CAMP for two years and had left before its “independence”. Dr. Winslow contacted me and asked me to return to head up **WE CARE**. I did so in July 2008 and became the Program Director. We planned to hire a full-time Agency Director as soon as we had proper funds. It was seen as important to hire a local who would continue to foster the agency’s success. We did so in 2009, and brought Joseph Leong on board.

I stayed full time until June of 2010 but returned for three-month stints three times with the last one ending in June 2011.

When I was first hired, we had only S\$20,000 in our bank account, but within 4 months we were beginning to be stable with S\$250,000 in our coffers. I give much credit to Mala, Manjit, and the Board for getting the agency back in good running order.

Marjorie Nixon

We were also fortunate to bring on several outstanding therapists and counsellors. Among them were Tham Yuen Han, who is now the Executive and Clinical Director and Yvonne Yuen, currently a senior counsellor and the Drop-in Centre Manager.

It must also be noted that without the support of the Singapore Government, **WE CARE** would not have been a safe place for people suffering from addictive disorders to recover, heal and transform.

Since then, it has indeed grown by leaps and bounds, and looking at the newsletter alone, I can see how much it has developed and how much further it can go. I am looking forward to hear about the 18th birthday jubilee celebration and wish the centre continued success and growth.



*Marjorie on a retreat to Sungei Ringgit
with staff and beneficiaries*



PERSPECTIVE: VOLUNTEER

Hi, my name is Rebecca and I'm a yoga teacher. I've been teaching yoga, mindfulness and movement for nearly ten years which, to me, sounds like a long time. I've shifted gears more than most, career-wise: I've sung and acted professionally, completed a degree in philosophy and survived a lengthy stint in New York's fashion industry. I'm so pleased to discover that I've been working longer in yoga and wellness than in any of those other fields.

That yoga teaching is my actual job often feels like I'm getting away with something and, in a lot of ways, I am. It's the first career that's asked of me only what I'm able to give, and has provided me with infinitely more in return. After all, the healthiest and most sustainable relationships are those in which reciprocity flows freely among all parties. Not that relationships can or should be measured according to some basic, transactional formula. I'd argue that a successful relationship involves the elevation of both parties, such that – as the saying goes – “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

One's job certainly constitutes a kind of relationship. At its simplest, the job relationship can be purely transactional: “effort + time = paycheck.” Real life rarely takes its simplest form, though, and I've definitely experienced unsustainable, unhealthy job-relationships. Until I started teaching yoga.

I mean it when I say I've always done yoga. My mom did prenatal yoga in an effort to ease her pregnancy with me, and so I have practiced since before I could breathe. When I was a kid, she and I followed Jane Fonda's Yoga Workout on VHS tape, in the living room, brightly clad in 80's spandex. As an adult, I practiced yoga – if inconsistently – to various ends: physical fitness, stress relief, an excuse to wear leggings

as trousers (my spandex game remains on point, if refined). Only when I began my stint as a trailing expat spouse, in Toronto, Canada, was I able to study yoga more intensely and to consider it as a possible means to a higher end. Ultimately, I completed 500 hours of Teacher Training before I began working as a teacher. I've done hundreds of hours in continuing education, studying pre-natal and restorative yoga along with biomechanics and somatics.

Teaching yoga seemed exotic compared to any of my previous corporate gigs. I quickly noticed my preference for certain teaching scenarios. I taught mostly in yoga studios, my classes attended by people who hoped that yoga postures and movements would facilitate fitness and relaxation. Sometimes, though, I taught in the wild: a lunchbreak class in a tech office, a post-shift session for hospital nurses, a gentle mobility class at the senior center. It felt like the best kind of ambush. Once a week, I would appear and bring the yoga to them. I developed a passion for presenting yoga, movement and mindfulness as practices for daily life, rather than an esoteric series of exercises to be accessed only within the confines of a yoga studio.

When my husband and I moved to Singapore, my visa didn't allow me to freelance as I had in Canada. Luckily, the yoga teacher grapevine led me to a newly-opened studio in East Coast, and I worked there happily until the owners moved to Sydney. Then Covid happened. Around the middle of the pandemic, Singapore removed the work pass option for Dependent Pass holders. It's true that I exist in the privileged,



if untethered circumstances of not needing to work. When one is prevented from working, however, what may look like freedom can start to feel frustratingly limited.

Mid-pandemic, I found myself tackling a particularly daunting project: I needed to stop drinking alcohol. At the time of this writing, I have been sober from alcohol for two years and three months (but who's counting?). The process has been eye-opening, filled with agony, ecstasy and countless in-between states. Because I steadfastly prefer my own company, I didn't seek out a program or any outside help, apart from the support of friends and family. There are as many paths to sobriety as there are sober-seeking people, but the emphasis on community is common among all approaches. One year in, I knew that if I wanted my recovery to stick, I needed to expand my resources beyond friendships and willpower.

Oxford defines "volunteering" as, "to offer to do something without being forced to do it or without getting paid for it." And yet, without sounding too cynical (I hope), it seems to me that there exist precious few among us volunteers who are "not getting paid." If we expand the notion of payment beyond financial compensation, then I think it's fair to say that most volunteers do get paid, at minimum, in the currency of good feeling. The real magic of volunteering happens when that good feeling arises from well-aligned beliefs and goals: when what is freely offered is truly meaningful to everyone involved.

In light of my jobless abundance of free time, and my absent foothold in the real-life world of recovery, I cast a broad Google-search net, hoping to find relevant places to apply my time and energy. Enter: **WE CARE**. Within two weeks of submitting an application, I began teaching Mindful Movement. The hour-long classes are certainly yoga-adjacent, but I

don't call it "yoga," because it's important that everyone feels welcome. Sometimes "yoga" can sound intimidating or non-inclusive, like an esoteric series of postures to be done within a yoga studio. In Mindful Movement, I try to keep the activities simple but scalable. I emphasize choice and encourage everyone to exercise their agency, above all else. My underlying focus is to teach movements and breathing techniques that specifically can help people in recovery: developing balance, coordination and relaxation.

WE CARE's mission statement includes the goal of, "empowering persons with addictions to reclaim their dignity and improve their quality of life." As a movement and mindfulness teacher, as someone recovering from alcohol addiction and as a human being, I believe wholeheartedly in this objective. I feel extremely grateful to have been welcomed into such an open-minded, compassionate, inclusive and vital community. I volunteer my time joyfully, finding myself richer with each visit to the center. I treasure this relationship which is, to me, so very much greater than the sum of its parts.





PERSPECTIVE: SERVICE USER

For as long as I can remember, I thought that it was “Me against the world”. It was a line that seemed to appear a lot in movies and songs, which I could really relate to. As I grew up, it was a concept that was reinforced (mostly by my father) again and again until it became one of my core beliefs. As I navigated through 15 years of active addiction, it was this belief, together with several other false beliefs, that formed the basis of my personality. I spent a good portion of life not fully understanding the concept of recovery - I didn’t even know about the existence of a recovery community.

Loneliness and hopelessness became a recurring theme in my life because I felt like no one could ever begin to understand the things I was going through. I knew in my heart that I was an addict and I felt like I was doomed to a life of addiction, just like my father. In my mind, there was nothing I could do except to learn how to cope with it.

I spent a good portion of my life on the fringes of society and had grown accustomed to being ostracised by both family and society. Despite my best attempts, I just could not get the people around me to understand. I felt like I was on a lower social and moral standing compared to the general population, and throughout the years suffered multiple kinds of punishments -

either from school or law enforcement. These punishments typically involved serving some sort of “time out”. Whether it was a suspension from school or a jail sentence – the belief that it was “me against the world” grew stronger.

From the inside looking out, removal from society may seem like the right thing to do. However, from the outside looking in, I can tell you that it’s not. What I’ve found is that while connection isn’t the only component of recovery, it plays a vital role.

“Connection is the opposite of addiction” is a line that I hear a lot and it is precisely this connection that I was deprived of. Connecting with others, especially people who are like-minded and seemed to be telling my story through their lips, effectively ended my isolation and showed me that it was in fact not “me against the world”.

Being a part of a community at **WE CARE** has benefited me in many ways but the greatest thing it has provided is support - especially in my moments of weakness where relapse seemed like the only option. In early recovery, I found sobriety to be extremely daunting because essentially, I had to find a new way to live. I would have to let go of my past life which included friends or family that had played a big

part in my life when I was in active addiction. The idea of admitting that most of what I previously thought was right was in fact wrong, was not only overwhelming but left me feeling hopeless and lonely.

Repeated failures in life had led me to conclude that every decision I made or every endeavour I pursued would inevitably end in failure, so why would recovery be any different?

Well, knowing that I am not alone has made all the difference. Previously, I perceived that asking for help was a sign of weakness. What I did not realise was that it took even more courage and strength to admit that I needed help and that everything was not okay. By being able to tap on the experience and support of a community that consisted of people who were also in recovery, I am rewarded with different perspectives on how a problem can be tackled or in certain situations even the solution to my problem. Those around me are able to see my blind spots and guide me accordingly.

At certain stages, the level of motivation to stay in recovery has wavered greatly. The benefits of a clean and sober life are at times not enough for me to keep going - this is where a community has helped immensely.

I have encountered individuals who have had

substantial lengths of clean time, who speak with a sense of joy, freedom and peace that I find very attractive. I desperately want the liberation from pain, guilt and remorse that they seemed to have attained - if they succeeded in finding a new way to live, then why not me?

One of the biggest “benefits” that I derived from active addiction was a mental “crutch” that enabled me to function in society. Without this “crutch” that I relied on for so long, I was left feeling lost and precarious, incapable of functioning normally in society. Again, this is where being part of a community proved invaluable. It offered me an avenue to not only relearn social skills but also to develop and reinforce positive habits. In the short term, support from the community acted as the “crutch” which enabled me to walk again. Eventually, I came to the realisation that I never needed a “crutch” in the first place.

Recovery is a tough and demanding journey but with the support and encouragement of a community, I know that the chance of arresting my addiction increases greatly. As I slowly integrate myself more with a community, no longer do I think that I need to fight my battles alone. Instead, I have come to believe that what we cannot do on our own, we can achieve as a group.



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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**

WE CARE is located at:

Kembangan-Chai Chee Community Hub

11 Jln Ubi #01-41, Block 5

Singapore 409074

Tel : 3165 8017

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E-mail: help@wecare.org.sg



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