

20
24

annual
report



WE CARE
COMMUNITY SERVICES



at the heart of recovery:
acceptance
&
healing



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Board & Staff

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Jennifer Lim
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Treasurer
Director
Director
Director
Director
Director
Director
Director
Advisor

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Executive Director and Clinical Director
Corporate Services Director
Senior Counsellor & Operations Manager
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Communications and Relations Manager
Communications & Peer Support Executive
Communications & Events Executive
Admin Executive
Counsellor
Counsellor
Counsellor
Counsellor
Counsellor
Centre Manager
Recovery Guide
Recovery Guide
Recovery Guide
Locum Counsellor
Locum Counsellor
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Locum Counsellor

Mission & Vision

Mission

- **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

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 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 19th year of operation in 2024.



“ Together, with the support of their partners, stakeholders, and the wider community, **WE CARE** continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those that they serve. ”

Mdm Halimah Yacob

Patron

In recent years, Singapore has witnessed a concerning rise in mental health issues, particularly among our youth. Left unaddressed, these challenges can drive individuals to seek solace in substances or maladaptive behaviours, rather than receiving the support and treatment they truly need. This, in turn, contributes to the growing problem of addiction within our community.

WE CARE recognises the urgent need to address these interconnected issues holistically. The organisation remains steadfast in its commitment to support individuals and families affected by addiction. Recently they have also consciously moved upstream in their efforts—expanding their focus to prevention and early intervention. Through awareness talks and the training of peer support students and leaders, they are empowering communities to recognise and respond to mental health and addiction challenges before they escalate.

Together, with the support of their partners, stakeholders, and the wider community, **WE CARE** continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those that they serve.

I invite you to read their annual report to learn more about their ongoing initiatives and the impact the Board, staff and volunteers of this charity have made on the vulnerable group of persons, and their families, affected by addiction.

celebrating
Recovery

“ 2024 was a period of **significant activity and growth...** to fulfill our mission of **fostering recovery and resilience** within the community. ”



Robert Chew
Chairman

It is with a profound sense of responsibility and honour that I step into the role of Chairman for **WE CARE** Community Services in 2024. I extend my sincere gratitude to my predecessor, Mr. Andrew da Roza, for his commendable leadership and significant contributions, which have guided **WE CARE** to its current position of strength and recognition. While succeeding him presents a significant challenge, I am energised by the opportunity to lead an organisation increasingly acknowledged for its vital work, especially as mental health and addiction challenges become more prominent within Singaporean society.

The past year, 2024, was a period of significant activity and growth for **WE CARE**. Our dedicated team served 690 individuals and families, conducting almost 3,300 counselling sessions. We observed notable shifts in the demographics and needs of those seeking help. Significantly, the proportion of youth among our clients continued to rise, with individuals aged 13 to 34 now comprising 43% or more of our clientele. We are addressing a growing number of cases related to digital dependencies, including compulsive use of online pornography and problematic gaming behaviours.

In response to these evolving needs, **WE CARE** has significantly intensified its efforts in upstream prevention and community. We more than doubled our outreach initiatives, increasing from 44 sessions in 2023 to 101 sessions in 2024. Through these efforts, we successfully engaged with over 2,600 individuals, raising awareness and encouraging early help-seeking behaviour.

Meeting this increasing demand requires continuous growth in our capacity and capabilities. This would not be possible without the steadfast support of our diverse network of stakeholders. **WE CARE** is immensely grateful to all our funders, donors, and partners whose generosity enables us to fulfil our mission of fostering recovery and resilience within the community.

We are thankful for the essential grants and unwavering support received from **the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the National Council of Social Service, Tote Board, Community Chest, the President's Challenge, Singapore Pools, the National Council on Problem Gambling, and the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre.**

Our collaborative work is strengthened by our valued partnerships with the **National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)** at the **Institute of Mental Health (IMH)**, the **Singapore Prison Service (SPS)**, **Singapore Management University (SMU)**, **Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)**, and the **National University of Singapore (NUS)**.

Our heartfelt gratitude also extends to all our donors. We wish to specifically acknowledge the generous contributions from **Marina Bay Sands, Sian Chay Medical Institution, Shi Qi, ABR Holdings Ltd, ABWIN, BH Global Corporation Ltd, Dr Lim Soon Hock, Neo Group Limited, Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, Tat Hong Holdings Ltd, and Woodlands Memorial.**

We are particularly honoured and delighted to welcome **Mdm. Halimah Yacob**, former President of Singapore, as the Patron of **WE CARE**. Mdm Halimah's longstanding commitment as a champion for the vulnerable and less fortunate serves as a powerful inspiration to our staff, volunteers, and the Board.

Looking ahead, the **WE CARE** Board and I are committed to another year of purposeful service. We look forward to working alongside the dedicated staff of **WE CARE**, continuing our vital work in supporting individuals and families affected by addiction, and striving to make a meaningful difference in our community.

Message

As we reflect on 2024, we do so with a deep sense of purpose and progress. This year has marked another important chapter in our ongoing commitment to support individuals and families impacted by mental health and addiction issues. The growing number of people reaching out to us underscores both the rising need in our community and the trust placed in **WE CARE**'s services.

In 2024, we received 832 referrals—up from 734 in 2023—and registered 690 cases served, compared to 621 the prior year. This continued growth reaffirms the critical role we play in the mental health and addiction recovery ecosystem.

Notably, we observed the rising demand for support related to problematic online behaviours—particularly pornography use and online gambling. These emerging patterns reflect the evolving nature of addiction in a digital age, and they reinforce the need for agility in our responses. In anticipation of this trend continuing, we have prioritised specialised and accredited training for our staff to ensure we remain responsive and equipped to meet these complex challenges.

Addressing the Rising Needs of Youth

Building upon our observations in 2023, the trend of young persons aged 13 to 34 seeking professional help for both substance and behavioural issues continued and indeed intensified in 2024. This demographic now comprises at least 43% of all clients served, highlighting a critical area of focus for our work. In response, we expanded our early intervention efforts through targeted outreach and educational talks.

Over the past year, we conducted a record 101 educational events and talks, reaching more than 2,600 individuals. One-third of these initiatives were delivered in schools and institutes of higher learning,

while the remainder extended to social service agencies, hospitals, and community organisations. These efforts were designed to enhance early detection and intervention for those at risk of developing addiction-related issues.

Looking ahead, we plan to further scale our awareness efforts, especially within educational institutions, schools and online platforms—key spaces where youth are most engaged.

Strengthening Sector-wide Professional Capacity

Beyond direct services, we continued to play a growing role in sector-wide capacity building. As demand from partner agencies for training and guidance increased, we explored new pathways to deliver structured training and consultancy.

In 2024, we forged strategic collaborations to extend our impact. Locally, we partnered with SUSS UniLEARN to co-develop e-learning modules on topics such as problematic drinking, overeating, and digital addiction. On the international front, we collaborated with the *International Problem Gambling and Gaming Certification Organisation (IPGGC)* to co-create a certified course on disordered gaming treatment for local Singapore professionals. We are proud to have been officially recognised as an approved training provider by IPGGC in 2024, with the programme slated for launch in 2025.

Charity Transparency Award

In 2024, **WE CARE** is honoured to have received the Charity Transparency Award, an initiative by the Charity Council to recognise excellence in governance and transparency in the non-profit sector. This recognition affirms the robust best practices we have implemented to ensure accountability, and it reflects



our ongoing commitment to responsible stewardship of the trust and resources entrusted to us.

Continued Commitment and Heartfelt Thanks

The progress made in 2024 is a reflection of the collective dedication of our team, our partners, and the broader community. Together, we are not only meeting immediate needs but also shaping a future of greater understanding, earlier intervention, and more effective support for those affected by addiction and mental health challenges.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to adapting, innovating, and serving with compassion and integrity. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has journeyed with us in 2024. With your continued support, we will press forward—transforming lives and strengthening communities, one person at a time.

Tham Yuen Han
Executive Director



“ Together we are shaping a future with more effective support for those affected by addiction and mental health challenges. ”

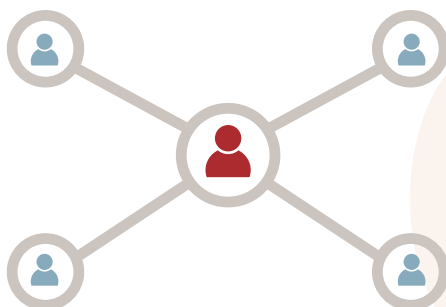


Review of 2024

832 referrals
handled

734 (2023)

714 (2022)



690 caseload
served

621 (2023)

662 (2022)

volunteers



148
people

194 (2023)

78 (2022)

recovery support group meetings



424
meetings

720 (2023)

581 (2022)

Key Service Highlights

counselling sessions

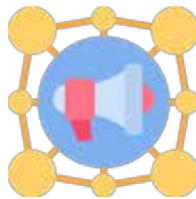
(Includes Individuals, Families and Group Sessions)



3,296
counselling
sessions (hours)

3,073 (2023)

4,355 (2022)



2,608
outreach
audience reached

2,640 (2023)

2,487 (2022)

donations

donations received

year	SGD
2024	277,000
2023	271,000
2022	142,000



Current Programmes

SOAR Substance or Alcohol Recovery

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.

SPLA Sex, Porn and Love Addiction

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 individualised treatment plan under the therapist's guidance.

IGA Internet and Gaming 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.

GRIP Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme

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.

ATO Atypical Theft Offending

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

ADAM Anxiety Depression or Anger Management

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.

CSO Counselling for Significant Others

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.

SMART Self-Management and Recovery Training

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 contextualises the participants' sharing using evidenced-based tools while ensuring a safe space for expression and learning.

Mindfulness Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention

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.

NOCOSO Non-Contact Sexual Offending Programme

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.

SAGE Support and Awareness Group for Eating

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.

F&F Family & Friends

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.

12-Step Workshop Introduction to 12-Steps

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.

SAFE Support for Recovering Addicts and Their Families through Empowerment

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.

SPLA and NOCOSO

Sex, Porn & Love Addiction and Non-Contact Sexual Offending Programmes

2024 saw a jump in the number of clients we served for **SPLA** (Sex, Porn & Love Addiction) – up about 50% from 91 clients in 2023 to 137 in 2024.

This group is expected to be the second largest category of vulnerable persons that we treat at the centre.

In line with this trend, the recovery support group SA concurrently increased their meetings to twice weekly at the centre.

In 2024, **WE CARE** was offered booths at **The International Society of Addiction Medicine (ISAM) Regional Conference 2024** and the **Symposium on**

Problematic Porn Use, where the focus was on sex and pornography issues. Both events provided meaningful engagement, allowing us to spread the word about our programmes like SPLA and **NOCOSO** (Non-Contact Sexual Offending).

For 2025, **WE CARE** envisages that the trend of more youths coming forward to get help will continue. We will also undertake more upstream work with institutions of higher learning to train their peer support leaders to recognise signs of addictive behaviour, and to advocate for getting help before SPLA or other issues become problematic .

GRIP Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme

Similar to SPLA, the **GRIP** (Gambling Recovery Intervention Programme) saw a marked increase in the number of clients with gambling issues served – from 39 clients in 2023 to 71 clients in 2024, a rise of 82%.

One factor that contributed to this increase was the number of referrals from our partners, including from **NCPG (National Council on Problem Gambling)**.

We continued the training that we conduct perennially for **Singapore Pools (Appropriate Response Training)** and **Marina Bay Sands (Responsible Gambling Programme)** to introduce their new staff to problematic gaming issues, and the treatment options available for their patrons.

Additionally, the self-help support group that focuses on gambling (**Gamblers Anonymous**) holds their meetings at the centre, which has in turn increased the awareness about counselling services offered at **WE CARE**.

The proliferation of online gambling sites is one factor that has contributed to this increase. Coupled with attractive incentives to participate, such as the offer of instant credit to beginners, the temptation to engage may prove hard to resist.

Another concerning trend has been the weaving of gambling elements into video games. In particular “loot boxes” and similar mechanisms have drawn scrutiny because of concerns over their resemblance to traditional gambling. These mechanics raise doubt about their contribution to gambling-related harm and the potential for addiction.

Community Partnership

In 2024, we expanded our network of community partnerships and deepened collaborations with existing partners.

We maintain our valued partnerships with Singapore **Prison Service (SPS)**, **NAMS (National Addictions Management Service)**, **Singapore Pools**, **Marina Bay Sands (MBS)** and the **State Courts**.

On the academic front, we conducted awareness talks and training workshops for student peer leaders in institutions of higher learning such as SIT, SUSS and SMU to educate them on the signs and symptoms of addiction as well as the resources available for treatment should someone they know be struggling with addiction.

One partnership we would like to highlight is with **Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)**.

We are co-developing 4 e-learning modules with the **SUSS UniLEARN**, focussing on 4 addictions that are

prevalent amongst youths – binge drinking, eating issues, internet /gaming and pornography. Aimed at providing accurate information on these issues, they will create greater awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding addiction. They will be released to the public by the end of Q1 2025.

We also became an SUSS community partner for their ***NIE301 Learning with Communities*** module – a course that students are required to complete in order to graduate. The collaboration involves collaborating with a group of students to work on a project related to addiction and for the students to plan activities to engage with the **WE CARE** community of recovering persons.

Moving ahead, **WE CARE** plans more meaningful engagement with institutions of higher education, whether through training their student peer leaders, conducting talks or participating in mental wellness fairs.

Training and Consultancy

With the increase in requests for workshops and consultancy from other agencies who are attending to recovering persons, we plan to build on our collective expertise to offer training and consultancy as a service.

This has started with the co-development of the 4 e-modules with SUSS which focus on 4 addictions that are prevalent amongst youths – binge drinking, eating issues, internet /gaming and pornography.

In the mental health sphere, there are gaps in the training ecosphere which we are well-placed to explore.

Our collaboration with the **International Problem Gambling and Gaming Certification Organisation (IPGGC)** will result in the co-creation of a certified course on gaming treatment in Singapore, for which **WE CARE** will also be an approved training provider.



Centre Highlights



Asian Civilisations Museum visit



OSSEA Orchid Show 2024 @ Tanglin Mall

We had the chance to take a look at various competition orchids – the best in Southeast Asia!



Hari Raya Celebrations



SOS conducted the training for staff, helpline volunteers and **SAFE** buddies, equipping them with skills to respond to someone in crisis.

Be a Samaritan: Suicide First Responder Training by SOS



16th and 17th Finisher Awards

Our signature event happens twice a year – in January and July. We recognised **34 recipients** over both editions in 2024, celebrating their milestones in their recovery journey spanning 1 through 7 years of sobriety

Mandai Nature Walk



Nature walks are one of the most popular activities at **WE CARE**, with Mandai and Jurong being the highlights!

Jurong Lake Walk



Sands for Singapore Charity Festival 2024

In its 10th edition, the festival in 2024 revolved around the theme of *'Where Hearts Come Together'*. Throughout its 3 days, non-profit and other organisations as well as the public came together to make a collective difference to society. It resulted in the **Heartstrings Walk** around Marina Bay, jointly organised by **Sands** and **ComChest**.



Photographic Society of Singapore (PSS) course + Reframing Lives photo exhibition

Staff and beneficiaries attended a course by **PSS**, which culminated in a 3-day photo exhibition. Who knew that we had talented photographers amongst us!



Visit to the Indian Heritage Centre

The centre traces the history of the Indian diaspora and how they have contributed to the development and communities in the Southeast Asian region.



Embracing the Fukusa Experience

Held at the Peranakan Museum, the intricate and beautiful Japanese Gift Covers on display are a window into the Japanese practice of formally presenting gifts with silk covers.



The wedding shoes of our Recovery Guide **Jess Ang** were on display at this movement aimed at creating greater awareness of the art of repair.

Conducted by our volunteer **Melanie**, an artist who is also exploring the use of the arts in movement and healing, the sessions focus on the restorative power of Somatic dance movement.



Shake Your Senses



Repair+ Movement

Understanding Neurodivergence

Paul Chin, the lead psychologist at APSN, provided an in-depth overview of *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)* and *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*, in a talk held for our staff.





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

Community Outreach



In 2024, **WE CARE**'s community addiction awareness efforts picked up from where it left off in 2023 – reaching over 2,600 individuals over a record 101 events.

With the national focus remaining firmly on mental health awareness, we were able to form many meaningful connections, raising awareness of addiction being a mental health disorder, as well as the various treatment resources available.

In 2024, efforts to reach out to youths also continued. For the second year running, youths (persons aged 13 to 34) accounted for more than 40% of the clients we served, and as national reports have suggested, that number will likely grow in the coming years.

As such, the need to reach this demographic is as important as ever. We engaged almost every *Institute of Higher Learning (IHL)* in some capacity – some examples include conducting workshops for the peer supporters of **Singapore Management University (SMU)** and **Singapore Institute of Technology (SiT)**,

conducting a workshop for **Singapore Polytechnic (SP)** lecturers, participating in the *NUS University Health Fair* via a booth and taking in **Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)** students as part of their service learning module.

We were also invited by **Temasek Polytechnic** to speak to their students about the harms of drug addiction during the inaugural *Drug Victims Remembrance Day* – a day held to acknowledge the harm caused by drug abuse and also to remember the victims who have been harmed by neglect, abuse or violence.

Additionally, we also conducted community awareness talks on mental health and addiction for congregants of **Darul Aman Mosque** and will strive to reach out to other religious organisations that are not routinely served by addiction treatment facilities.

More engagements are planned for 2025.

We highlight a few outreach efforts of note.





Spreading the value of lived experience at Healing & Recovery Conference 2024

WE CARE was invited to be part of **Club HEAL**'s inaugural *Healing & Recovery Conference 2024*. Held at the Lifelong Learning Institute, the one-day conference brought together mental health professionals, advocates, caregivers, students and individuals with lived experiences to promote open discussions and knowledge-sharing aimed at advancing the mental health landscape in Singapore.

The conference theme is one that aligns with **WE CARE**'s mission - to empower individuals with mental health conditions and support their reintegration back into the community.

In addition to having a booth at the conference where attendees could come and ask questions, our Clinical Director also led a breakout session that focused on how having staff with lived experience is integral to an organisation like **WE CARE**.

The mental health landscape has improved in recent years, with more resources being made available to anyone who may need them.



International Society of Addiction Medicine Regional Conference 2024

Organised by the **Institute of Mental Health (IMH)**, in partnership with the **International Society of Addiction Medicine (ISAM)** and the **Asian College of Schizophrenia Research (ACSR)**, the conference was held over two days at One Farrer Hotel.

It was a platform for healthcare professionals from around the world to network, exchange knowledge and discuss developments in the field of addiction medicine.

At the conference, there was a focus on behavioural addictions and our Clinical Director spoke on *Working with Youths on Problematic Porn Use* during one of the breakout sessions.

Together with a booth that we set up, the engagement was fruitful as we were able to connect with professionals who specialise in different aspects of addiction treatment.





Visits from overseas organisations and schools

As a community hub for addiction recovery in Singapore, **WE CARE** welcomes visits from fellow social service agencies, institutes of higher learning and organisations in the mental health space.

In 2024, **WE CARE** saw an increase in visitors from beyond our borders, including **Imperial College London (United Kingdom)**, **EHWA Womans University (South**

Korea), **Karaganda Buketov University (Kazakhstan)** and **Macau Social Services (China)**.

The interest in visits from overseas groups testifies to the globalness of addiction and the willingness of organisations to learn how recovering persons are treated in other jurisdictions.

Pornography: The New Drug?

WE CARE at the Symposium on Problematic Porn Use

Problematic pornography use has become an increasingly prominent issue in recent years. This growing concern is reflected in our caseload, which saw a significant increase of over 50% in 2024—from 91 cases in 2023 to 137 cases last year.

In light of this trend, we were pleased to share our therapy services and programmes for individuals struggling with problematic porn use at the *November 2024 Symposium*, held at the Furama Riverfront Hotel.

Organised by **Indigo & Co** and **Lakeside**, the event attracted over 350 participants and featured keynote addresses by **Dr Paula Hall** and **Dr Eric Dooley**, both widely recognised experts in sex and pornography addiction.

Our presence at the symposium included an agency booth, which provided a valuable opportunity to engage with fellow mental health professionals. Many showed strong interest in our **SPLA** and **NOCOSO** programmes, underscoring the growing demand for specialised support in this area.



Community Partnership

We are committed to being socially conscious and responsible to our stakeholders by actively cultivating and maintaining strong, collaborative relationships. We prioritise open communication, shared learning, and mutual respect, and appreciate their continued support and contributions. Through regular engagement and collaborations, we strive to build a community of care and partnership that uplifts and supports those on the journey of recovery.

National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)

We continue our longstanding partnership with *National Addictions Management Service (NAMS)* where we visit the detox ward every fortnight to share with the patients the services that we provide.

In 2024, we reached out to 232 individuals.

NAMS also refers clients to **WE CARE**, after their detox at their facility is completed.

Singapore Pools

We have built a long-standing partnership with **Singapore Pools** that includes providing ongoing training to their staff on responsible gaming, identifying signs of problematic gambling, and offering appropriate support to patrons showing early signs of gambling issues.

Beyond customised training, the collaboration also includes a referral system where **WE CARE** offers therapeutic interventions for Pools' patrons in distress.

Additionally, we work together on community initiatives to raise awareness and promote responsible gaming.

Singapore Prison Service

WE CARE has partnered with **SPS** to deliver *Project SAFE*, a highly successful rehabilitation initiative that has supported over 360 participants referred by the Prison. Funded by **NCSS**, Project SAFE is a step-down care programme specially designed by **WE CARE** for inmates serving sentences for drug-related offenses. Now in its sixth year, the programme focuses on relapse prevention and offers a comprehensive blend of individual group, and family counselling.

In addition to supporting the participants themselves, Project SAFE extends crucial assistance to their families and partners, recognising the importance of a strong support network. A key aspect of the programme is the pairing of each participant with a *Recovery Guide*—someone with lived experience—who accompanies them through their recovery journey and helps them to integrate into the wider recovery community. This connection facilitates the development of a pro-social support network that encourages long-term success.

The 8-month programme has received very positive feedback from participants. Furthermore, an independent study conducted by Verian and commissioned by **NCSS** has reported promising outcomes, highlighting significant improvements in participants' attitudes and coping mechanisms.

National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)

WE CARE collaborates with **NCPG** to work with referrals who have gambling-related issues.

Marina Bay Sands (MBS)

WE CARE collaborates with **MBS** in several ways. We provide addiction awareness talks and introduce our therapeutic services to newly hired MBS employees, as part of their *Responsible Gambling Programme*. This ensures employees are equipped to direct patrons to appropriate help.

We also participate in the annual *Sands for Singapore Charity Festival*, a three-day event that showcases Sands' charity partners and helps to raise funds.

Additionally, **WE CARE** is a long-time supporter of the *Community Chest Heartstrings Walk*, co-organised by MBS. In 2024, we fielded 30 staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries for the 4-km walk around Marina Bay.

State Courts

In partnership with the **State Courts**, **WE CARE** treats offenders who have been caught for shoplifting whose behaviour the Courts deem as having a psychological bias.

In more recent years, the Courts have also referred persons who have been sentenced to non-contact sexual offences. Upon their release, they can start treatment with the centre, in order to rehabilitate them and prevent re-offending.

NUS College of Peter and Alice Tan (CAPT)

The collaboration with the CAPT student hostel at NUS includes an addiction awareness talk at their premises, where students are encouraged to initiate discussions on matters related to addiction.

NUS students will also organise activities that involve the recovering community at **WE CARE**, so they can get a better appreciation of the issues and challenges that recovering persons face.

Hwa Chong Institution (HCI)

Every year students from **HCI** organise activities and participate in them together with recovering persons at the centre. These have ranged from beach cleanups, to language lessons, first-aid workshops and origami classes.

Singapore Management University (SMU)

WE CARE has collaborated with **SMU** in a number of ways. We were involved in the **Project X** initiative, a university-wide programme which allows students to take on real-world challenges by working on projects with corporates, non-profit and government organisations.

The centre also conducts addiction awareness talks and trains peer support students in addiction-related matters.



Singapore University of Social Science (SUSS)

In partnership with **SUSS UniLEARN**, four e-learning modules on addictions and behavioural issues increasingly affecting youths are nearing completion. These will be launched in the first quarter of 2025.

The modules feature interviews with recovering individuals, caregivers, and counsellors, offering learners deeper insight into each topic.

We have also begun our role as a community partner for the *NIE301 Learning with Communities* module, collaborating with student groups to brainstorm, plan, and run events that raise awareness about addiction.

Additionally, we have hosted student groups from both SUSS and overseas universities visiting through SUSS, helping them gain a better understanding of addiction and the support resources available in Singapore.

Meals on Wheels

This organisation works with its partners to collect food to redistribute to individuals and families in need.

WE CARE collects bread from one of their partner organisations on one weekday a week, and shares the loaves with fellow social service agencies at the Kembangan-Chai Chee Community Hub.

Fundraising and Donations

SGD
558,736
raised in total, including
matching grants received

We conducted 3 major fundraising events, and a minor arts-related one in 2024: A charity movie *Furiosa*, the latest instalment of the Mad Max saga; the first-ever **WE CARE Charity Concert** held in collaboration with Reverberance; the **Amazing WE CARE Race**, and an arts-related event.

In total, SGD 307,293 were raised from these events, before the dollar-to-dollar matching and grants from the government. Total fundraising costs were a modest SGD 68,071, the bulk of which were venue costs. We are proud to state that **WE CARE** staff handled the majority of the organisation of all events.

Demand for our services continues to increase, and we rely on every dollar raised to support the recovery of individuals and the families who journey with them.

We are committed to strengthening our fundraising in 2025, so as to better serve Singapore's recovering community. Fundraising plans for the next year include a charity movie, a fitness-based fundraiser where donors pledge to support individuals who undertake completing a certain physical activity every day, and a gala lunch to commemorate **WE CARE's 20th year of operations**.

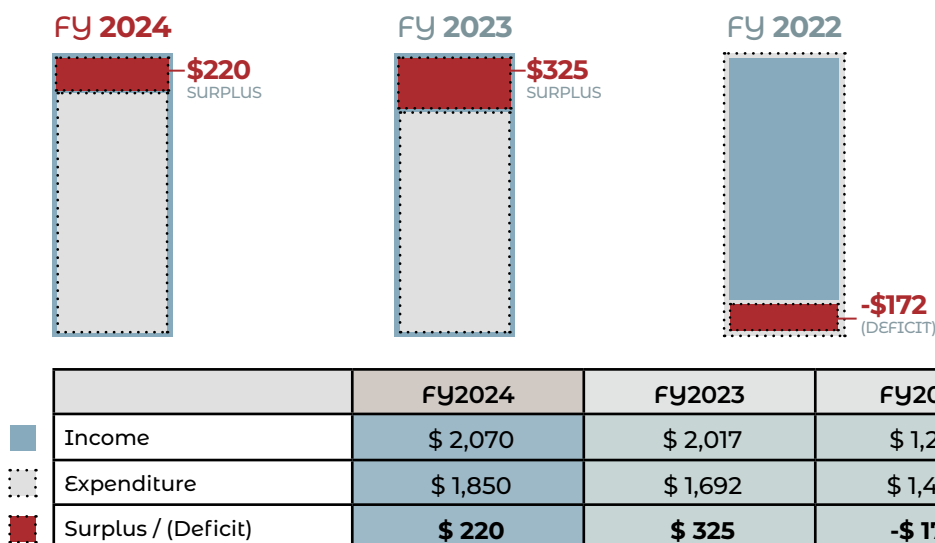
With the prudent management of individual event costs, we hope to benefit more fully from the *Enhanced Fund-Raising (EFR)* programme grants from the **Tote Board** and the **Government**.

We are continually on the lookout for creative ideas and will possibly look at other avenues to bring in funds.



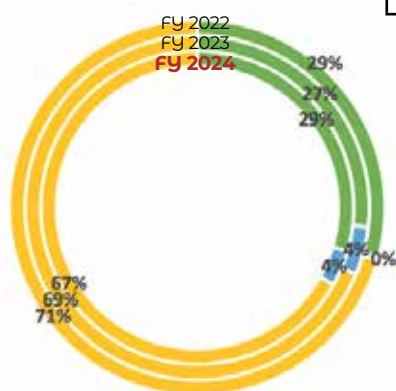
Key Financial Highlights

Income & Expenditure (SGD '000)



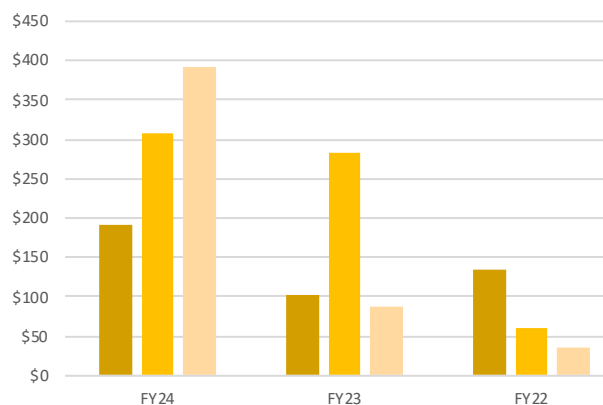
How was money spent (SGD '000)

	FY2024	%	FY2023	%	FY2022	%
Admin and Governance	\$ 546	29%	\$ 454	27	\$ 411	29.2
Fundraising	\$ 68	4%	\$ 76	4	\$ 5	0.4
Charities Activities	\$ 1,236	67%	\$ 1,162	69	\$ 993	70.4
Total	\$ 1,850	100%	\$ 1,692	100%	\$ 1,409	100%



Reserve Ratio

FY2024	FY2023	FY2022
1.62	1.61	1.83



Source of Income

	FY2024	FY2023	FY2022
A- Donations	\$ 192	\$ 103	\$ 133
B- Fundraising Events	\$ 307	\$ 282	\$ 59
C- EFR Matching Grants	\$ 393	\$ 88	\$ 36

Figures are in thousands (,000)

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.

The Role of The Board

The Board's role is to provide strategic direction and steer **WE CARE** towards fulfilling our vision and mission through good governance practices. One of its core duties is to provide financial oversight, including budget planning, services provision and safeguarding the reserve fund. The **WE CARE** Board is involved in:

- Setting and monitoring the annual budget and operational plans
- Reviewing and approving quarterly management reports on financial performance and programme updates to track the progress of charity services

In alignment with the Code of Governance, we have expanded on this framework by creating a Governance Manual that outlines specific governance practices for the Board and Management Team, tailored to **WE CARE**'s operations. The manual serves as a comprehensive guide for formalising governance principles and practices within **WE CARE** to ensure accountability, responsibility, and transparency in all aspects of the organisation.

Term Limit of Board

To enable succession planning and steady renewal in **WE CARE**, the Board has a term limit of ten years. In particular, the Treasurer has a term limit of four years. In the current Board, 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.

Board - Succession Plans

WE CARE remains mindful of succession planning to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of our board and organisation. In 2024, we marked a significant leadership transition as our long-serving Chairperson, Andrew da Roza, stepped down. Robert Chew stepped up to assume stewardship of our centre.

We are also pleased to share that Andrew continues to serve as an advisor to the board, where his experience and deep commitment to our mission remain invaluable. Additionally, we appointed Swapnil Mishra as Treasurer in April 2024, strengthening the board with his banking industry expertise.



Board Committees

Each Board Committee operates under clearly defined Terms of Reference and functions under the oversight of the Board. Every committee is led by a Director and supported by members appointed with Board approval. The table below outlines the summarised Terms of Reference and composition of the committees in 2024.

1. Audit Committee

Assists the Board to oversee the internal controls and risk management system, financial reporting, appointment of external auditor, internal auditor and whistle-blowing.

- Frances Cheang, Chairperson
- Lai Chin Yee, Member

2. Human Resource Committee

Assists the Board in matters relating to human resource, recommends organisational structure, management development, succession planning, performance evaluation and compensation.

- Tina Doran, Chairperson
- Dane Anderson, Member

3. Fund-Raising Committee

Assists the Board in overseeing the overall fundraising activities, and advises the Board on matters concerning all fund-raising programmes

- Andrew da Roza, Chairperson*
- Robert Chew, Chairperson*
- Koh Kah Yeok, Member
- Jennifer Lim, Member

**Mr Chew took over as Chair after Mr da Roza stepped down in April 2024*

Executive Management

Tham Yuen Han,
Executive Director / Clinical Director
(Appointed since 18 Dec 2013)

Management Team

- Tham Yuen Han,
Executive Director / Clinical Director
- Cesar Balota,
Corporate Services Director
- Yvonne Yuen, Senior Manager,
Drop-In Centre and Operations
- Leslie Goh,
Communications and Relations Manager
- Anna Chua,
Finance and Administration Manager

Board Meetings

The Board held a total of **3 meetings** in FY 2024.

The table below shows the composition and attendance of the Board and its committees.

Board Member	Board Meeting Attendance
Robert Chew	2/3
Swapnil Mishra	3/3
Frances Cheang	3/3
Dr Winslow Munidasa	0/3
Koh Kah Yeok	2/3
Dane Anderson	1/3
Jennifer Lim	1/3
Dr Lee Cheng	1/3
Tina Doran	1/3
Andrew da Roza	2/3*

**Mr da Roza attended 1 meeting as Chair, and 1 as Advisor*

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 Committees where advice is sought, through meetings, telephone calls and electronic mails.

Staff Matters

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.

Disclosure of Remuneration

Disclosure of annual remuneration of three highest paid staff who each receives more than \$100,000, in bands of \$50,000.

Remuneration Band	No. of staff
Between \$100,000 up to \$150,000:	2
From \$150,000 and above	0

None of the above staff serve in the Board of the charity.

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.

Purpose of Restricted Funds

WE CARE has disclosed its restricted funds in the Financial Statements. Please refer to the Financial Statements for more information.

Reserves Policy

The charity has a reserve policy for long-term stability of the operations and it ensures that there are sufficient resources to support the charity in the event of unforeseen circumstances. As a general rule of thumb, the charity maintains 1.5 years of operational expenditure as reserves. The reserve level is reviewed yearly by the Board to ensure that the reserves are adequate to fulfil the charity's continuing obligations. The reserves that have been set aside provide financial stability and the means for the development of **WE CARE**'s principal activity. For details of the reserves, please refer to the complete set of financial statements that can be found on our website www.wecare.org.sg and on the Charities Portal www.charities.gov.sg.

Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) & Cybersecurity

Environmental Consciousness

WE CARE is committed to being environmentally conscious and responsible in our operations. As part of our sustainability efforts, we have upgraded and fully digitalised our client management and record referral system to reduce the use of printed case notes, files, paper forms and templates paper usage. With the effective rollout of our enhanced client management system by Q3, we not only drastically reduced paper, printing and photocopying usage, clinical staff also achieved observable savings in time. By enabling real-time online submission of client registration forms, treatment progress forms, discharge forms, feedback forms, and standard assessment forms (such as the *ORS*, *SRS* and *ACEs*), clinical staff are able to devote more of their time on providing the essential clinical services and less time on basic administrative tasks

Aside from our client management system, the centre subscribes to the principle of reduce, recycle, reuse. The lighting in the centre now deploys LED lights in favour of fluorescent lighting.

Additionally, our hydroponics system, a key feature of our garden, is powered by solar energy and serves as one of the wellness activities offered enjoyed by many of our beneficiaries.

Information Technology, Data Privacy Management & Cybersecurity

WE CARE takes data security and digital safety seriously. In 2024, we achieved DSI Accreditation, affirming our commitment to maintaining high standards in information security. To further strengthen our cybersecurity framework, we engaged *CyberSafe* in the same year to support and enhance our protective measures. As part of this initiative, all staff underwent mandatory training in cybersecurity practices, ensuring that our team is well-equipped to uphold the integrity and safety of our digital systems.



Hang on Tough

A little more than two years ago, Mat was released from prison with no plan. He had close to no money in his pocket, he did not have a home to go back to, and did not have a job that would help sustain himself.

Most people would look for a quick fix – and as someone with lived experience in the Singapore drug scene, any quick fix would have involved the trafficking of drugs.

“The money was too good” is a common refrain amongst those who have trafficked drugs. Once you get a taste of it, you never forget (it), Mat told me. Thankfully, he resisted this option, because he knew exactly where that road would lead – back to the jail cell that he had left just a couple of hours ago.

In that jail cell, he knew he had hit rock bottom but had hope that things would get better. He looks back now and sees hitting rock bottom as a necessity. It gave the push needed to make a better life.

It may seem a little counterintuitive – why would someone wait until disaster strikes before feeling the need to make any changes? Shouldn't they have seen it coming and nipped things in the bud? The harsh reality for most people suffering with addiction is that the disaster warnings are ignored in favour of addiction.

Addiction doesn't stop, and what we aim to do at **WE CARE** is to give each client, Mat included, the tools they need to manage things when addiction comes knocking.

Prior to release, a counsellor and recovery guide from **WE CARE** had visited Mat to give an introduction to the centre and to encourage him to come in for treatment and support. He didn't remember much about what was said, only that some support would be available.

So, with no expectations and an open mind, he made his way to the centre.

Mat's journey into the world of addiction began at the age of 13 by experimenting with cannabis, beer and glue sniffing. It was his introduction to “Brown Sugar” (Heroin), however, that marked a significant turning point.

He recalls vividly his first experience with Heroin – after smoking it with a friend, he had fallen off the roof of a single-story house but felt no pain at all. It's a stark reminder of the drug's power and effectiveness.

3 years later, education became the least of Mat's priorities. The need for money to support both his family and drug habit had grown to be more important, and when his father made him pick between schooling or working, the choice was clear.

The thing about addiction is that slowly, over time, it consumes everything. Finances are one of the first to be hit – the higher your tolerance becomes, the more drugs you'll need to achieve the same effect, the more you'll have to buy. It was an expensive lifestyle, one that was paid for with his part-time salary, and theft.

Eventually finding a full-time job at Adidas enabled him to purchase a resale flat for his parents and younger sister to live in. He looks back at this event with fondness, because finally, he had been able to give his family a better life. Finally, all that suffering counted for something.

The cause for celebration did not last long, because it was with this new house that he started, in his own words, “all that nonsense”.

There's a lot of talk about going on with life “lost”. It's a state when someone is so intoxicated that he or she doesn't remember anything – something that so many persons in recovery have become so familiar with.



Fast forward 36 years, Mat sits before me recounting his story with tears welling up in his eyes.

It has been a long and tiring journey, but ultimately touching. He has overcome long odds – about 147 months spent in prison, 3 strokes of the cane and multiple years of sleeping rough, but the important thing is that he has made it.

Just prior to sentencing for his last prison stint – for absconding from urine supervision with CNB – he asked his Higher Power for one last chance. This was not the first time he had made such a request, so what was different? The difference was, he says with complete earnestness, is that by that point he had completely surrendered.

Due to the length of the period absconded, there was a possibility of a long sentence. He resolved to his Higher Power, and to himself, that if he got leniency, he would make the changes necessary to turn his life around. No more nonsense.

The sentence ended up being relatively lenient, and so far, he has been holding up his end of the deal.

He is clean, has a flat that he can call his own, is gainfully employed, and living a life beyond his wildest dreams. He agreed to share his story because he knows it can empower others, especially those in early recovery, that staying clean is possible. He wants to say to those struggling, a line which people in **WE CARE** have heard hundreds (or thousands) of times:

Hang on tough.

by **Mat**

Mat has been coming to the centre regularly for the past 2 and a half years, and is always one of the first to sign up for outings. He also regularly buys vadai for the centre, as a way of giving back.



Out From The Fires of Addiction

During the 1970s, Singaram grew up in a neighbourhood notorious for drug use and secret societies that promoted the consumption and abuse of drugs.

Singaram himself began using drugs at the age of 14, after his friends and neighbours introduced them to him. This resulted in a continuous cycle of consumption eventually leading to an addiction.

“People normally work in the morning and sleep at night.” Singaram described his experience, “But I sleep in the morning and work at night.” Addiction made the process of getting a job very difficult. Even after finding work in the 1980s, his company cheated him by withholding his pay. In a drug-fuelled emotional rage, he set fire to the company building, resulting in a 9-month prison sentence for arson.

During his time in prison, Singaram met several prison counsellors who attempted to help him with his addiction but were ultimately ineffective. They could not relate with Singaram in the slightest and seemed to recycle the same advice – “*Don’t use*”, “*You’ve been like this for too long already*”, and “*Think of your parents*”.

Those experiences left Singaram disenchanted, and with a negative perception of counsellors as a whole.

Upon release, Singaram continued to struggle. Going to work remained a major difficulty, and Singaram’s addiction caused him to be hospitalised multiple times. Those stays led to a mountain of hospital bills, exacerbating his already dire financial situation. Even paying for food and public transportation became a problem. Deep down, Singaram knew that his current way of life was unsustainable.

Furthermore, he lived in a flat with his mother and younger brother, while his sister lived in Australia. After the death of his mother, her flat was scheduled to be sold – this left Singaram with a pressing need to find some housing, failing which he would be forced into a life on the streets.

Addiction typically involves a burning of bridges, and Singaram is no exception. He has unfortunately lost support from everyone in his family apart from his sister, who continues to keep in contact with him even till this day, despite being in another country.

Singaram, however, doesn’t place any blame on his family. He understands their reasons for losing contact and bears no resentment whatsoever.

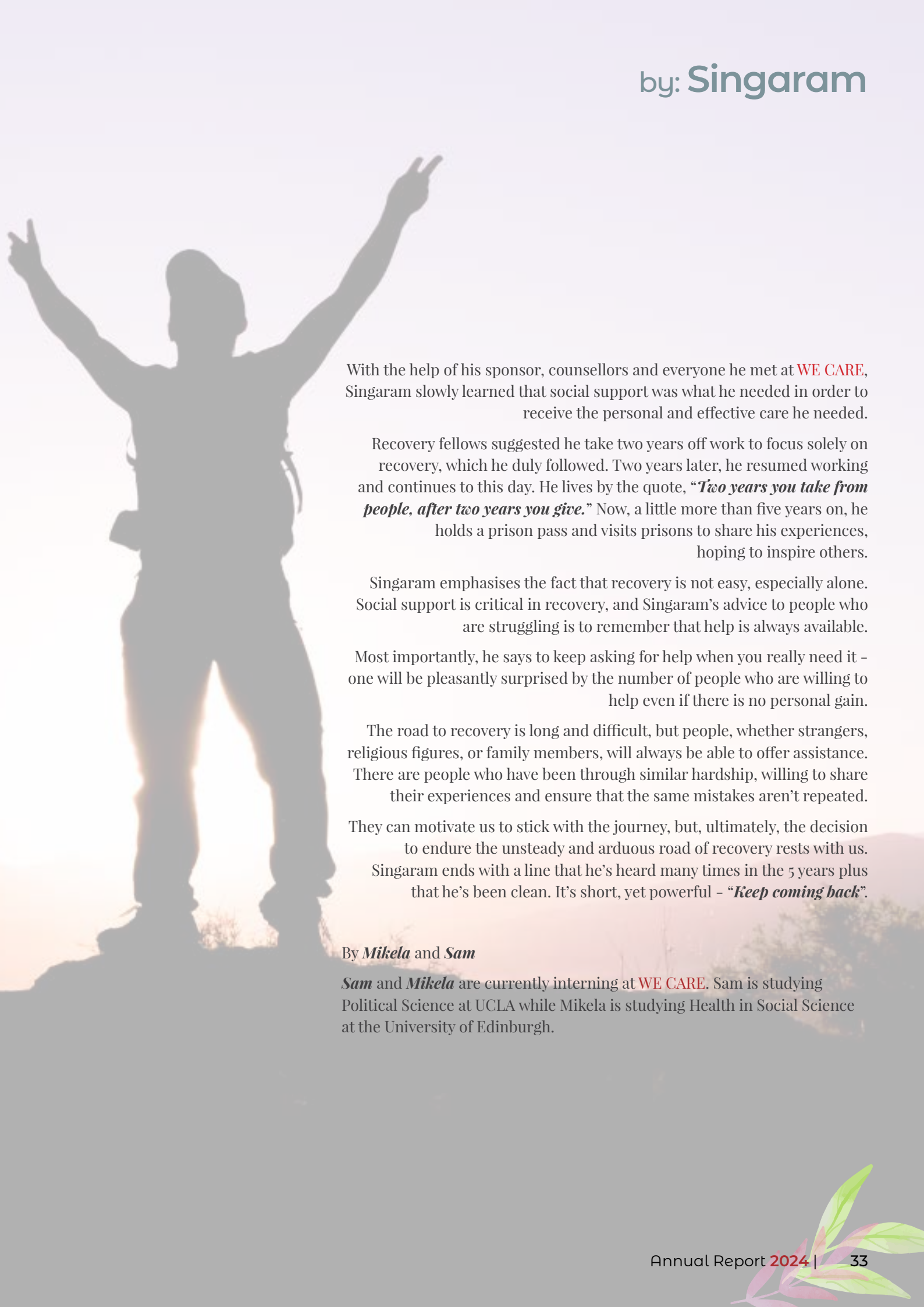
Singaram eventually turned to Christianity and met a pastor who helped him onto the path of recovery. However, this was still not enough as the pastor could not be with him at all times of the day.

“I was scared.” Singaram said, “If I stay alone, I will relapse.”

Singaram first sought help at **WE CARE** in 2015. At first, he was wary of counsellors due to his previous experiences with the prison counsellors. He was also sceptical of programmes such as Narcotics Anonymous since he was afraid of revealing his story.

What he found instead, was the complete opposite. His counsellor didn’t try to dictate his actions, but instead offered a genuine listening ear. “Her kindness motivated me to stay committed to my recovery journey.” he says gratefully.





With the help of his sponsor, counsellors and everyone he met at **WE CARE**, Singaram slowly learned that social support was what he needed in order to receive the personal and effective care he needed.

Recovery fellows suggested he take two years off work to focus solely on recovery, which he duly followed. Two years later, he resumed working and continues to this day. He lives by the quote, “*Two years you take from people, after two years you give.*” Now, a little more than five years on, he holds a prison pass and visits prisons to share his experiences, hoping to inspire others.

Singaram emphasises the fact that recovery is not easy, especially alone. Social support is critical in recovery, and Singaram’s advice to people who are struggling is to remember that help is always available.

Most importantly, he says to keep asking for help when you really need it – one will be pleasantly surprised by the number of people who are willing to help even if there is no personal gain.

The road to recovery is long and difficult, but people, whether strangers, religious figures, or family members, will always be able to offer assistance. There are people who have been through similar hardship, willing to share their experiences and ensure that the same mistakes aren’t repeated.

They can motivate us to stick with the journey, but, ultimately, the decision to endure the unsteady and arduous road of recovery rests with us.

Singaram ends with a line that he’s heard many times in the 5 years plus that he’s been clean. It’s short, yet powerful – “*Keep coming back*”.

By **Mikela** and **Sam**

Sam and **Mikela** are currently interning at **WE CARE**. Sam is studying Political Science at UCLA while Mikela is studying Health in Social Science at the University of Edinburgh.

Falling into Place

He had come to the point when he thought that everything would be lost after *DRC (Drug Rehabilitation Centre)*. But in the year since Bobby has completed his stint there, he is “amazed that everything is falling into place”.

Now in his mid-30s, he has started a new job with a travel company where he feels valued and useful. At his interview, he was aware that he would either have to be honest or hide his drug history. He chose to be candid. And was happily surprised that they offered him a position. He is aware that many organisations would not have been as open. The human resources department also makes a point of checking in with him regularly, and he feels that his wellbeing is taken care of.

5 years ago, Bobby tried drugs out of boredom when his coworkers introduced him to them. In the beginning it was a way to stay awake, but later and in some circles, he was offered drugs so he could relax with the company he was keeping.

Becoming addicted, he continued using drugs until he was “caught by CNB and thrown into DRC”.

DRC itself was a wake-up call. He had never been in a situation where his freedom was so restricted. He likens it to “living out of a box”. Before he left DRC, he had sat in a talk which **WE CARE** had conducted. Up till then, he had never heard of the organisation. But his assigned counsellor met with him in the last 2 weeks before he left DRC on a Friday. The following Monday, Bobby showed up at **WE CARE**.

It was August 2023. And also a low point for him – he had lost his career, received a mark on his record, and faced an uncertain future. It was hard to accept his situation. There were times when he felt like giving up on life.

In the next few months he attended counselling sessions, on his own and in groups, and also participated in activities at the centre as his recovery was on its way. The purchase of his flat went through, and luckily, he found good tenants for it.

But he also lost his father.

He has met persons who have gone into DRC a second or third time, and he is determined not to go down the same path. “I will only be wasting my time, repeating the cycle again”. And long-term drug use would only harm his health.

One challenge he had was running into persons that he knew in his drug using days. “It’s not possible to avoid situations like these. Singapore is quite small”.

When that happens, he smiles, says hello and goodbye, and goes on his way. He does not want to maintain contact with characters from his past.

From the start of his recovery, in his free time, he has made a point to go out, visiting a park, trying out a new café, catching a movie, window shopping, or looking for furniture and accessories for his home. It is a habit he has inculcated to make sure he is unable to indulge in any potentially risky behaviour, because “you can’t misbehave when you are out in public”.

Although he no longer has to wear his tag, he still has the habit of getting home by 8pm, the curfew limit he used to observe. He intends to take his time before exploring night life again. “I am in no hurry,” declares Bobby.

Coming to **WE CARE** has helped him, and learning the stories of others too. Knowing those who are recovering stably inspires him, while the stories of peers who have returned to DRC makes him more resolved not to go down that path again. “I will be losing too much if that happens”.

He intends to get his driving licence and take up a mental health course of some kind, such as in counselling.

“I want to tell others that it is not the end of the world. Which is what I myself felt before. Take it one step at a time. Do not give up. Everything happens for a reason. Remain positive. Have a positive mindset. “

He feels lucky that things are now falling into place.

“I no longer have to look over my shoulder. I don’t worry if anyone wants to look inside my bag”.

Bobby wishes he had known about **WE CARE** earlier. He would have gone in on his own to get help instead of waiting for the law to catch up with him.

With more than a year of sobriety, and a career that is taking off, Bobby has gotten his life on track.

If not for WE CARE, I may be dead somewhere.

When I first arrived at **WE CARE**, I recognised Scott by the sounds emanating from the piano in the pantry. He played with so much confidence that one would have been hard done to tell that he had (and still has) anxiety disorder.

This anxiety was part of the reason why he abused substances – they helped him cope and consequently gave him the confidence to go about life.

If this isn't your first time reading a recovery story, you might notice a recurring theme: substances are often abused because of their ability to give someone Confidence and to help them Cope.

Nevermind chasing the 5 Cs in Singapore. In active addiction, 2 Cs are the ultimate goal.

Scott was born into a hostile environment unfit for any child. His father was an alcoholic, and he would abuse Scott almost daily. As a result, Scott would be walking on eggshells, hypervigilant of any signs that his father would beat him.

"I'm always in a life or death situation, even today," Scott shares, highlighting the gravity his childhood had on the rest of his life. Fortunately, despite his incomprehensible childhood pain and the decades-long substance abuse that ensued, Scott now copes with his anxiety in healthy ways and has been sober for six years.

When his parents got a divorce and sold their house, he sought refuge at a friend's house. "Nobody cared about me, so I did what I wanted." From the age of 13, Scott

started to hang out with other kids who did drugs, and it was then that he discovered their therapeutic value.

Sometime during the ages of 13 to 35, he resolved that he would use drugs until the day he died. They made him feel normal, and numbed him enough so that he didn't feel anxious constantly.

He first went to *NAMS* in 2016 and relapsed as soon as he was discharged. Prior to this, he had cut off his using friends while "white-knuckling" substances for seven months. He didn't make any more friends, as "no normal person would have wanted to befriend him". It was also during this time that his loneliness led to the realisation that without friends, recovery was impossible and that life was meaningless.

Fast forward to 2018, when Scott entered **WE CARE** straight after discharge and realised that there was in fact, a life outside of addiction. This life, however, demanded him to confront his anxiety, live alongside it and forge new connections.

He almost didn't make it to the doors of **WE CARE**, though. It was only through the medication prescribed to him on the day of his discharge that he could overcome his anxiety and take a leap of faith into recovery.

He no longer takes antidepressants, and during his time at **WE CARE**, he has made countless friends. To Scott, friends are "the most important thing."



“From 13 to 35, I didn’t learn a lot of things. I was just using drugs and didn’t really grow up. It was only when I came to **WE CARE** that I matured and learned to grow up. Spending time with people who were more mature than me helped me learn to be more mature. If not, I don’t know where I could learn to grow up.” It’s clear to see how having friends had helped him greatly in his recovery journey.

Scott doesn’t believe there is a one-size-fits-all cure for anxiety, and he can’t seem to pinpoint exactly what has helped him cope with his anxiety. The most important thing is that he has reached the point of acceptance when it comes to his anxiety.

He now knows that nothing bad will happen to him if he steps out of his comfort zone – despite the voice in his head constantly saying otherwise.

One habit he has stuck with is playing the piano out in public, regardless of who is around him or how anxious he feels. While it forces him to step out of his comfort zone, he does it anyway because he knows it’ll help.

Scott has just completed his diploma in Social Services, with a focus on senior services, and is inspired to both give back to others and continue his studies. When he first arrived at **WE CARE**, he couldn’t string two English sentences together. Now, during this interview, he was really proficient.

Scott is also a gym rat, and he’s resolved to train for the rest of his life. A healthier activity to resolve to do for life, if you may.

He shares, “I love the gym. I’m 41 now. It’s better to start exercising and build up your muscle because at this age you start to lose muscle. I’m not afraid of death; I’m afraid to grow old and waste my quality of life. I’ve used for a really long time, so I’m not going to waste any more time.”

As the interview was coming to an end, I asked if he had anything else to add. Yes, he exclaims.

He says to me, gratefully – “If not for **WE CARE**, I may be dead somewhere.”

by **Mikela** and **Scott**

Mikela was an intern at **WE CARE**, and studies at the University of Edinburgh.

Scott is currently a beneficiary at **WE CARE** and is a regular at our Drop-In Centre.



Recovery Stories

2 years on.....

Recovery stories are often about triumph, but what's not shared a lot (except in closed, 12 step meetings) is how painful some days can be. And how painful some experiences can be. I'd like to shed some light on that, and talk about the pains of recovery - not the pains before recovery, but during.

It's been a little more than 2 years, and people outside of recovery always ask me - **do you miss it?**

The instinctive answer is yes. I feel it every time I walk past people having some beer, or chance on a video of someone online in America or Europe smoking weed. I feel it every time I overhear my family talking about the Hong Bao Toto draw. I feel it almost every day.

How can you not miss something that's biologically designed to make you feel good?

Sure, I do get a little in my feelings, but the difference now that I'm in recovery is that the following thought is always: I won't be able to control myself. This is accompanied by thoughts of all the harm I've caused.

And it stops me.

This is one of the biggest benefits of being in recovery and going for counselling.

I've been made aware of all the bad things that my brain chose to discount when I was using and gambling. It's human nature to focus on the good things and forget the bad. This isn't exclusive to addicts, it's just basic human nature. It's just that addicts have an extra effective way of magnifying the good parts and an extra efficient way of suppressing the bad. Addicts want it turned up to 100 all the time, and don't know when to stop.

About the good things - there's a constant battle for supremacy in my mind. It's a daily tug of war between the rational and irrational, and when there's a trigger or

urge - team irrational starts with a sizable advantage. In those moments, I fortunately have a bunch of tools I can use to turn the tables.

2 years on, it doesn't feel so much like a war anymore. In active addiction and the early days of recovery, however, it sure felt like I was fighting for my life. And that's what led me to recovery - a complete surrender in trying to win the battle on my own. I walked into **WE CARE** defeated.

Now that I've shared about what I miss, it would make sense to share what I don't miss. This is just one thing about the past that my brain automatically discounts every time there's a trigger or urge. Picture this:

I'm standing at a traffic intersection along Geylang Road, phone in hand, eyes on the online casino, praying for a 20 or 21 at the blackjack table.

There are 20 minutes left in my lunch break, and if I don't win the next two hands where I'll be going all in on both hands (quadrupling my money is the only way I'll have enough), I'll face going through the rest of the week with no money to my name. Worse - I'll also have to go through a few days of extreme opioid withdrawals (think a hangover, but 100 times more agonising).

If I win both two hands, I'll have enough to cover things just for that day. I'll quickly take my winnings to the dealer down the road and get my supply for the day, and rush back to office.

Tomorrow is another day, another battle.

Now think about going through that 7 days a week, every week, for a few years. Sure, there are days where I'm "lucky" enough to be on a winning streak, but any extra money I gain doesn't last. Winnings from gambling goes to the pills, and with the pills: The more I have, the

faster they finish. There's no sense of rationing because the goal is to turn things up to 100 every day, on two fronts. I am, after all, cross-addicted to drugs and gambling.

To the layman, this seems incredible and unrealistic, but that was my life. I'd always resolve to not repeat the same mistake. To be more prudent with my money. But every month, before I could catch myself, I'd be scrambling again at the same traffic intersection. I really knew better, but I just. Could. Not. Stop.

The cycle of stress, anxiety and depression was extremely exhausting – so when I look back at those times, then the answer is “No, I don't miss it.”

This article, however, isn't just about the pains or how I miss the good times. It's also about how life has become more fun, and how I now have better times. I never thought I'd say it, but here I am.

It feels like I've unlocked a new level in life, and I'm achieving things I never thought I would. I recently got a second diploma (which I completed with a 4.0 GPA) and feel like I'm just getting started. I definitely never thought of doing a second diploma, and never thought the day would come where I'd have paid off my legal moneylender and credit card debts.

Well, these two things have become reality. My reality now, is beyond my wildest dreams and it's all because I'm in recovery. I'm more present in my loved ones' lives, and I'm in an incredibly fulfilling relationship.

I could go on all day about how life has become better but I won't – if you need more convincing, just flip the page and look at the smiles throughout this newsletter.

2 of the most important things I've learnt in recovery is that life is not perfect – it'll never be, and that the world doesn't revolve around me.

Believe it or not, for how imperfect my life was in the past, I was extremely perfectionistic. It was all or nothing, and I constantly wanted it all. Accepting that life was not perfect was tough, but with this refreshed perspective, my world isn't rocked so hard anymore when things go wrong.

I've gotten to a point in recovery where acceptance comes fairly quickly, and it all comes from the strong foundation I laid here in **WE CARE**.

2 years on, I've just turned 32, grateful for the 2 things I feel I've taken way too long to learn.

by **Jat**

Jat began as a beneficiary at **WE CARE** before joining our staff. He is currently part of the Comms team.

From Pills to Peace

Yasmine's journey through addiction is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Like many who have been through this struggle, it is a story of struggle, introspection, and ultimately, recovery.

It all started innocently enough when Yasmine began experimenting with prescription medication at the age of 20. Initially, it was just a casual indulgence once or twice a week. However, as time passed, this occasional habit soon escalated into an addiction, involving daily use by the time she turned 24.

To sustain her addiction, Yasmine resorted to unfavourable measures, including clinic hopping and sourcing for supplies from the black market. The vicious cycle seemed unbreakable, and Yasmine found herself trapped in a downward spiral of substance abuse.

Her life took a turn when she relocated to Australia in 2014. Faced with limited access to prescription medication, Yasmine turned to marijuana (weed) as a substitute to cope with the added challenges of adjusting to a new environment. Yasmine didn't perceive her substance use as an issue, and instead found solace in the camaraderie of friends who shared similar lifestyles.

Returning to Singapore two years later, Yasmine found herself introduced to methamphetamine by fellow using friends, as weed was not readily obtainable. Justifying its use as a means to cope with irregular work hours, she convinced herself that it aided her productivity despite the obvious potent and destructive consequence of the drug.

Despite the concerns of her family and the warning signs of her deteriorating health, Yasmine remained mired in her denial, convinced that she had control over her addiction – all while continuing to engage in reckless behaviours such as not sleeping for days, and driving under the influence.

It wasn't until her arrest and incarceration in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) in 2016 that Yasmine was forced to confront the harsh realities of her situation. Although she attended individual counselling sessions during her 6 month sentence, the absence of a structured aftercare programme left her vulnerable to relapse upon her release as she rushed to jump straight back to work.

With 4 years of abstinence from substances, Yasmine was determined to remain clean. However, the onset of the Covid pandemic proved to be a challenging time for her as with many others. Struggling with the isolation and uncertainty, she found herself once again succumbing to the lure of using prescription medications as a means to cope.

The withdrawals Yasmine experienced from prescription medications proved to be an excruciating ordeal marked by intense physical and psychological distress. Alongside grappling with the torment of withdrawal symptoms, she also faced the additional burden of weight gain. Amidst these challenges, Yasmine found herself in a tumultuous period at home and at work, burdened by mounting responsibilities and navigating through personal problems and increasing stress from work. Despite her struggles, she hesitated to reach out for support, viewing it as a testament to her perceived weakness, thus compounding her isolation and struggles.

In 2022, Yasmine unfortunately turned back to meth once again in an attempt to tackle her weight issues and wean off prescription medications. This undoubtedly led to her second arrest within months and subsequently an 8 month sentence back in DRC.

This time however, she was determined to break free from the cycle of addiction and decided to join the *Project SAFE* (Support for Addicts and their Families through Empowerment) programme at **WE CARE** upon her release.

Although she was initially sceptical about the effectiveness of counselling, and felt that it was risky for a group of recovering addicts to be together, she remained open-minded and was willing to participate in the group programmes such as the lunch time support group meeting.

“When I attended my first lunch-time support group meeting, they closed the meeting with the serenity prayer and I thought to myself is this a cult or what?”

Continuing to attend the sessions initially out of obligation to fulfil the programmes’ requirements, Yasmine aimed to quickly complete the mandatory sessions and move on.

However, amidst one of these gatherings, a sharing struck a chord within her: “addiction is a lifelong disease with no cure.” This simple yet profound statement sparked a shift in her perspective. As she grew acquainted with fellow members and forged meaningful connections, Yasmine found solace and support in their shared experiences. Through their stories and camaraderie, she gradually came to recognise the value of these sessions, ultimately embracing the principles encapsulated in the serenity prayer.

Unlike her previous experience, Yasmine chose not to hastily return to work following her completion of the programme. Instead, she prioritised her recovery journey, diligently attending sessions at **WE CARE** twice a week. After six months of focused effort and self-reflection, she eventually resumed her professional responsibilities.

This time around, Yasmine gained a newfound understanding: there existed a distinction between merely abstaining from substance use and actively engaging in the process of recovery. Reflecting on her past struggles, she acknowledged the absence of essential tools to navigate the complexities of recovery during her initial attempt at sobriety.

Despite having a supportive network of family and friends, Yasmine grapples with the challenge of discussing her addiction with them, fearing their apprehension and worry that she might relapse into drug use. However, finding solace in the non-judgmental environment at **WE CARE**, Yasmine discovers a safe space where she can openly express her emotions without fear of stigma or reproach.

As Yasmine approaches the milestone of 18 months in recovery, she reflects on the progress she has made while not being complement, especially during periods like holiday seasons. Despite the temptation, she remains resolute in her commitment to sobriety, drawing strength from new healthy coping mechanisms and strategies she has learned.

With the increasing responsibilities she faces in her professional life, Yasmine acknowledges the potential triggers that may threaten her recovery. However, rather than succumbing to anxiety about the future, she embraces the mantra of taking things one day at a time – a valuable lesson gleaned from her experiences in group therapy. By focusing on the present moment and prioritising self-care, Yasmine navigates the complexities of her journey with resilience and determination.

Today, Yasmine stands elegantly as a beacon of hope and inspiration for others struggling with addiction. While her journey has been marked by setbacks and obstacles, she remains steadfast in her commitment to recovery. With the support of **WE CARE** and her newfound community, Yasmine looks forward to a future filled with promise and possibility.

by *Simon* and *Yasmine*

Simon is currently on the **WE CARE** Comms team. *Yasmine* joined **WE CARE** as part of Project SAFE and drops in regularly at our Drop-In Centre.

Finding Serenity in the Sky

Didier was living the dream of many adolescents. He was playing for the Singapore national football team, and had an extremely supportive girlfriend. She had pulled him out of, in his own words, mediocrity – a casual interest in football and average skills in the sport, and convinced him to abandon his initial plans of quitting the sport.

She accompanied him to training, and her influence pushed him to train diligently. The good times, however, did not last. She ended up breaking up with him, sending him off into the darkest period of his life.

Devastated from the break up and longing for a way to cope, he gave in to his friend's offer to take ecstasy during a night out. This temporary relief pulled him away from his many goals, almost permanently ruining his life.

Amidst the turmoil of his legal issues and substance abuse, Didier made a pivotal choice to reclaim his life by pursuing nursing in school. It turned out to, however, be a double-edged sword – despite bringing him respite from his legal troubles, it also expanded his knowledge of drugs and taught him how to be “his own doctor”.

The easy access to substances in the emergency department became a dangerous temptation that Didier knew he couldn't resist. “I would steal vials of valium to sleep better at night,” he recalls.

Realising his life was spiralling out of control yet again, he mustered the courage for another decisive shift. He became a flight steward, a role he has grown to love and has successfully held for the past 11 years.

Yet, even in his new career, Didier struggled with substance abuse, turning to sleeping pills to manage the demands of his job and in particular, the erratic time zones. These pills took a toll on his body and mind,

and his dosage soon got out of control. The pills put him on autopilot mode where he ate at night without recollection, compounding the problem by making him feel lethargic and bloated the following day.

He would then work out intensely, resulting in injuries that required surgery to heal. While on medical leave, in a bid to cope with the boredom and lethargy, he took even more pills. The final straw came when he lost access to his daughter – only then did he finally decide to seek help.

Didier checked into *NAMS* for detox, marking the beginning of a new chapter. It was the beginning of his recovery journey.

Though Didier was addicted to these substances, he didn't consider himself a “hardcore addict”, alluding to the fact that he wasn't abusing the “harder stuff” – heroin and methamphetamine. It's a common misconception that if one isn't doing the “hard stuff”, their situation isn't that bad.

It does not matter what the substance or behaviour is, the damage done is all the same.

His addiction was more like his dirty little secret. He explains, “I feel that prescriptions are worse because they're easier to get and easily accessible from doctors, for pain.”

Although initially sceptical about **WE CARE**, Didier soon found it to be a place where he didn't need to hide his struggles with addiction, and where he could relate to others rather easily. Finally, he had found his kind. Finally, his addiction did not have to be kept a secret.

The support he received at **WE CARE** paired with daily activities at the drop-in centre kept him occupied during draggy days and helped him regain a sense of

purpose, as he felt less useless and could finally return to the job he enjoyed so much.

His biggest challenges of insomnia and pain persisted – fortunately, Didier has found healthier ways to cope such as hot baths, ice baths, massages, and acupuncture. He has learned to manage his insomnia without relying on sleeping pills, because he believes, “Even if I perform poorly at my job because of a lack of sleep, I will crash the next day and have a good sleep, so I’ve learned to accept it for what it is.”

His newfound strength in recovery stems from accepting what he cannot change and focusing on what he can control, which are his responses to triggers like insomnia and pain. Even when prescribed painkillers post-surgery, Didier resisted the temptation to take the painkillers when he did not feel pain, a decision wholly driven by his desire to avoid the darkness of relapse.

Didier stays motivated in his recovery because he wants to avoid returning to his old ways as much as possible. He describes his time in active addiction:

“Going back into that hole is such a dark place to go, and going to that place feels like it’s Groundhog Day, where it repeats again and again with no ending. That’s one thing I don’t want to go through.”

His desire to get high from substances isn’t there anymore, he says, as he knows he was a prisoner to it and cannot control himself with it.

He has also tried to give back to others who are struggling. He offered a place to stay to a homeless man he met at *NAMS*, helping him get back on his feet in the process. That man is currently holding a job and has his own place. “It feels good to help someone,” he states, “and I don’t want to be the one just receiving. It’s a two-way street.”

Didier believes the best parts of **WE CARE** in helping him recover is its support system, the drop-in centre, lunch meetings, *SMART* recovery, and mindfulness. He recognises that the holistic approach to recovery has been instrumental in his recovery journey.

Now, as he prepares for a promotion at work, Didier reflects on how far he’s come. He no longer uses injuries as an excuse to avoid responsibility. Instead, he’s built resilience, honesty, and a commitment to enjoying the journey of life.

During our interview, Didier blushes as he laughs, saying the serenity prayer is surprisingly effective in helping him cope with anger or stress at work. Whenever he gets mad or irritated, he recites the serenity prayer from lunchtime meetings: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.” Thanks to learned mindfulness and the serenity prayer, Didier feels able to let go, stating, “I don’t take things too seriously. Life is a lot less stressful and more relaxing.”

Didier’s story is one of reclaiming control of a life once lost, through perseverance and open mindedness. Despite any challenges and setbacks he faces, he continues to prove that he is the arbiter of his own success, determined to create a better life for himself and his daughter.

by **Didier** and **Mikela**.

Mikela was an intern at **WE CARE**, while **Didier** is still a flight steward who comes to the centre regularly. He thinks that staying connected is the most important thing in recovery, because no one can do it alone.

Honour the Past Without Hurting the Future.

One of the most profound lessons I've learned is that closure, like happiness, is an inside job, stemming from within. My recovery journey embodies not only my battle with drug addiction but also the essential process of grief.

Here's my story.

Alex was more than a life partner; he was my confidant, companion, sweetheart, and listening ear. A true source of inspiration, he often took on the role of my punching bag and, above all, he was my rock. Selflessly, he always put others before himself, embodying kindness and generosity in every aspect of his life.

I may not have been enthusiastic about birthday celebrations, particularly my own, but Alex transformed each year into a memorable occasion, often through travel adventures. Alex's selflessness shone through, and despite my hesitations, I treasured every moment of those experiences.

This article honours a remarkable bond formed 17 years ago, one that has remained steadfast through all of life's challenges. This person, my other half and true love, has always stood by me without judgment, embracing life with an open heart. Irreplaceable in my life, Alex will never be forgotten. I have faith that when the time comes, I will not only meet my maker but also be reunited with Alex, continuing our journey together for eternity.

Alex was a private person who chose not to flaunt our relationship, reflecting his belief that true connections do not need to be broadcasted. This quiet strength, perhaps rooted in his upbringing, showed me that love can be deeply felt without constant display. I admired his perspective, which reminded me that genuine affection often thrives in subtlety.

I am sharing this article to honour the profound impact Alex had on my life. While his absence leaves a significant void, I recognise the importance of moving forward, just as he would have encouraged me to do. By reflecting on our memories and the lessons he taught me, I hope to carry his spirit with me as I navigate this journey.

He had expressed a desire to be the first to go, believing I was the stronger one and could handle loss more effectively. How mistaken he was! With a heavy heart, weighed down by sadness, I must say that his wish was granted.

I still remember the day we met, though I won't dive into the details. Every day after that, I found myself more and more drawn to Alex's charm. I can't believe I was hit with love at first sight! Alex made the first move and asked me out on a date—August 20, 2007. That was the start of our 17 amazing years together. We often snuck time for each other at work, and before long, everyone knew we were a couple. We were inseparable!

We shared so many happy moments! Sure, we had our little arguments, but we always made up with a kiss and a hug, and everything felt right again. I'm proud that we've managed to keep our spirits up and not stay angry for long. After we moved in together, we built a cosy little home, just like any couple. Our neighbours welcomed us with open arms, and we never felt out of place in our lovely community.

Tragically, in September 2020, our world was shattered when Alex received a diagnosis of stage 4 lung cancer—an advanced and terminal condition that left us in a state of disbelief. The moment the doctor delivered the news was one of the most heart-wrenching experiences of my life. It felt as though the ground had been pulled

from under me, and the weight of the prognosis was almost unbearable. I realised we didn't have much time left together, and the thought of losing him was overwhelming.

Despite the grim reality, Alex and I decided to embrace a mindset of positivity. We often shared moments of laughter and warmth, trying to cherish the time we had. Alex was an incredible fighter; even in the most challenging moments when despair threatened to take hold, he would summon every ounce of strength. I tried to put on a brave front for him, providing support and encouragement. But deep inside, I was struggling. I felt like a train wreck, frazzled and helpless as I watched the person I loved face his illness.

As I looked at Alex, I couldn't help but admire his resilience. He tackled his condition with an unwavering sense of dignity, courage, and bravery that left me in awe. He inspired me every day with his determination to live fully, even in such dire circumstances. That was my Alex—remarkably brave and endlessly inspiring despite the odds.

As Alex's condition deteriorated, he became noticeably weaker, ultimately leading us to the difficult decision of placing him in hospice care—a choice that weighed heavily on my heart. Yet, amidst the sorrow, there was also a sense of relief knowing he was receiving the comprehensive medical attention he needed in his final days. Despite this support, I took it upon myself to maintain a sense of control. I attended every medical appointment with him, sitting beside him in sterile waiting rooms and listening intently to the oncologist, urologist, and palliative care doctors as they outlined his condition and treatment options.

In addition to managing his healthcare, I carefully organised visits from our friends and family, ensuring that love and support surrounded him during his stay at the hospice. Each day, without fail, I made the trip to see Alex in the hospice. My world had become synonymous with his; I had devoted my entire social life to him, and every moment I spent by his side was a testament to my unwavering commitment.

On that fateful Monday morning, just soon after midnight, I was only four minutes away from the hospice when Alex took his last breath. Though it pains me to think that I wasn't there at the moment

he departed, I find solace in knowing that he passed peacefully, just as he had wished. The nurses reassured me, describing how calm and serene he looked in his final moments, free from the grips of pain that had plagued him for so long.

Our bond had always been profound; we were inseparable companions who shared adventures, laughter, and quiet moments. We never felt the need for the company of others, finding joy in our twosome. My heart aches with the regret of not being at his side when he needed me most. Yet, in reflection, I am grateful that Alex appeared restful in those final days—tired but not sickly—as if he had gently let go, peacefully slipping into eternal rest, returning to his maker.

I needed to escape temporarily to reflect on the experiences I've endured over almost the past four years. After 17 years together, I needed to grieve, and a week, a month or any given time alone simply wasn't enough to ease the pain. The void left by Alex was monumental, and no words could fill it. I found myself in tears often, thinking about what could have been.

Today, I'm moving forward, buoyed by the unwavering support of my family and friends. I've accepted that death is a certainty, and I know Alex is in a better place. I am immensely fortunate to have loved him and to have received his unconditional love in return. He once expressed how lucky he felt to have me by his side.

While I wish we had more time together, I refuse to dwell on our challenges. Instead, I celebrate the joyful moments we shared. I still speak to Alex daily, and a simple "Good morning," "Good night," and "I love you" keeps his memory alive. This article serves to honour the love between same-sex couples. Our relationship, which may have begun physically, evolved into something profoundly meaningful. I've become more forgiving, tolerant, and patient—a better person because of him.

Our bond was built on companionship, strength, and trust. My Alexander the Great may be gone, but I love him to the moon and back.

Rest my dearest, rest.

To encourage and affirm those facing similar situations—past or present—I would like to share a beautiful poem from *The Kindred Project*, Vol. 2.

Dedication



*To the grief-stricken and lonely.
To the downtrodden and exhausted.
To the addicts and those fighting
to break the cycle.
To those who've been left for dead.
To those who had to leave to live.
To the lovers all alone.
To those still finding their way home.
To the musicians.
To the mothers.
To the fathers.
To those called upon
to raise sons and daughters.
To anyone starting over, again.
To anyone searching for answers.
To the runners.
To the empaths.
To the healers and outcasts.
To you.
To us.
To all.*

Everyone experiences unimaginable pain in their own way, and it's important to honour that without judgment. Nearly a year into my recovery, I've learned that the best choice I made was to keep moving forward—not because of unwavering strength, but because I owe it to myself to explore what's possible beyond the pain.

Recovery has taught me that happiness is attainable, even when navigating trauma. I can embrace joy while healing and work towards leaving pain behind. I can hold multiple emotions at once and recognise that I exist on a spectrum that validates all of my feelings and the various ways I process them. Striking a balance between joy and grief is essential for my journey.

Giving up has never been an option on this path of self-discovery and resilience.

by *Nazri*

Nazri came to **WE CARE** on the SAFE programme, before moving on to SLF. He continues to be a constant and joyous presence at the drop-in centre.



My Post-Release Reintegration Journey

by: John Chen

Overcoming addiction is not an easy task. Every day can be a struggle against our internal emotions and external pressures.

Can we ever recover from addiction? I view recovery as a journey, not a destination. We constantly need to keep ourselves and our lives in check and in balance.

In my past releases from *Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC)*, I found myself jumping back to work almost immediately as I thought that would mean normalcy to me. I wanted to be able to work and support myself so I would not be a burden to my family.

As Einstein said, ***insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results***. The third time round, I chose to focus on my self-care. Self-care or self-love is one of the most important steps for recovering addicts to achieve because it is oftentimes one of the root matters that we ignore in addiction.

For me, going to **WE CARE**, attending lunchtime meetings, SMART recovery and other activities together with the active recovery community helped me to re-integrate smoothly. I often get help or suggestions from people I meet.

I used to think recovery was about staying clean. It is more than that. I began my self-care journey to discover my values and what I enjoy doing rather than seeking validation and being an over-achiever. I started to focus on wellness in my recovery. The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as the *active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health*.

Wellness Is Multidimensional

There are many wellness models out there. Just like our recovery is multifaceted, these are some of the wellness dimensions that I found useful in helping me work towards my optimal state of health and wellbeing.

Physical: Nourishing a healthy body through exercise, nutrition, sleep, etc



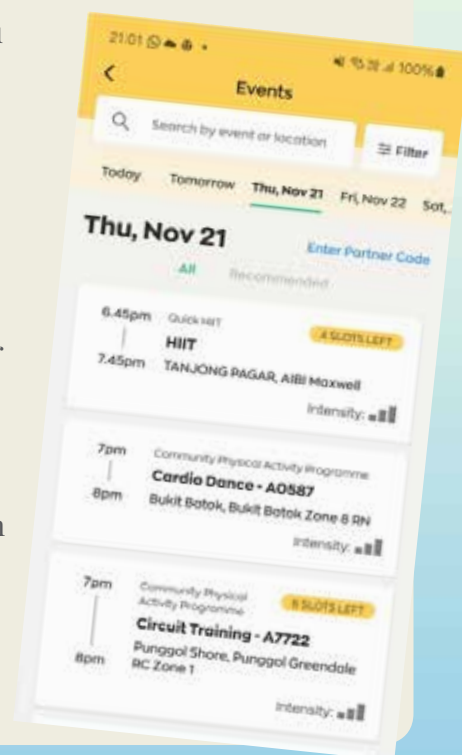
Download **HPB's Healthy365** app for free. You can join many free fitness activities near you to stay fit and make new friends. I screenshot the event details and seek my *Reintegration Officer's** approval.



Redeem your free fitness tracker watch from HPB. You can clock your steps to exchange for grocery or F&B vouchers. I use the watch to track the quality of my sleep.



Join us for a game of pickleball every Friday in **WE CARE**. Easy to learn and play!



Social: Connecting and engaging with others and our communities in meaningful ways.



Go to **eventbrite.sg** and search for URA, NLB, NParks, My Community for free guided tours and activities around Singapore you can join with your loved ones.



Visit **volunteer.gov.sg** and find a cause you are passionate about. I joined *Team Nila* under Sports SG to get behind the scenes of local and international sporting events, learn new things and network with other volunteers.

*A **Reintegration Officer** supports supervisees upon their release from prison. They are also in charge of things like the setting of curfew timings



Financial: Meeting basic needs and managing money for the short- and long-term.

- ✓ I find visiting the nearest SSO office to process my application for **ComCare Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance** more efficient.
- ✓ Apply for **MediFund** with your nearest hospital. It provides financial assistance for Singaporeans who are unable to pay for medical bills after using government subsidies, insurance, and MediSave. Most people would have applied for **Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS)** that provides subsidies for medical and dental care at participating clinics
- ✓ Explore bond-free sponsorships to further your studies. They are offered by **Yellow Ribbon SG Star Bursary** or **SAFRA** and their partners



Mental: Engaging the world through learning, problem-solving, creativity, etc.

- ✓ Search and register online for **SkillsFuture Advice workshop**. You can get updates on the latest offerings like *SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme (SCTP)*, *Jobseeker Support Scheme*, upcoming *Mid-Career Training Allowance*, *Workfare Skills Support Scheme* (offers training allowance & cash reward for completing training). I got a career mentor from the *Volunteer Career Advisors Initiative* to advise me on my career development plan.

- ✓ Approach **YRSG** (sponsored courses) or **ISCOS** (Skills Assistance Subsidy Scheme - with at least 3 months of full-time employment). I completed the YRSG-sponsored 5-week full-time course on *WSQ Higher Certificate in Food Services (Culinary Arts)* conducted by HCSA Academy to learn the joy of cooking. I received \$840 as an allowance for completing the course.



by **John Chen**

John joined **WE CARE** as part of Sober Living Framework. He's a full-time people developer and part-time backpacker

Perspectives: Interns

Besides clinical interns, who clock their practicum hours with **WE CARE** to fulfill the requirements of their field of study, we are fortunate that other interns also want to spend time helping out at the centre.

Over the last 2 to 3 months, 4 interns have stepped through our doors. Two, Sam and Lingchen, arrive courtesy of Absolute Interns, with whom we have enjoyed a 3-year collaboration, where they match promising candidates with corporates and charities. Sam hails from *UCLA* and Lingchen, *Butler University*. Writing in on their own accord, Mikela from the *University of Edinburgh* and Saumyaa from the *University of British Columbia*, have chosen to spend their summer break to work at **WE CARE**.

Growing up in a digital age, I was immersed in media that often romanticised substance use, making it seem glamorous or even desirable. As a student in Scotland, where binge drinking is practically a rite of passage, I became accustomed to seeing substance use as a normal part of social life.

However, my time at **WE CARE** opened my eyes to a deeper, more complex reality in which youth's growing dependence on virtual modes of engagement presents an increasing challenge with online addiction as well. Despite society's growing understanding of addiction as a curable brain disorder rather than a moral failing, I noticed that the stigma surrounding addiction remains deeply ingrained in Singaporean culture.

Fortunately, events like **WE CARE**'s Finisher Awards, which celebrates the grit and determination of individuals who have overcome decades-long addiction, proves that supporting people with kindness, practical resources like recovery programmes and drop-in centres, and celebrations of their milestones in recovery, actually help people recover.

The 17th Finisher Awards ceremony I witnessed was a powerful reminder that recovery is not just possible, but something to be celebrated. The event also played a crucial role in reducing stigma by highlighting the milestones in recovery, spreading the vital message that anyone can overcome addiction with the right help and mindset.

Another highlight of my time at **WE CARE** was engaging with the beneficiaries themselves. Listening to their stories about their past as well as their hopes for the future was incredibly inspiring. Each person's journey reinforced the idea that change is always possible, and it takes small but meaningful actions one day at a time. These conversations also deepened my understanding of addiction as a coping mechanism for various mental health challenges, including familial or relationship issues, conditions like anxiety and depression, or the pressures and demands of work.

Working on the helpline further broadened my perspective. I gained firsthand insight into the prevalence of addiction in Singapore and the essential role that a drop-in centre offering activities, social support, and affordable counselling, plays in helping those in need.

Despite extensive existing research on the biopsychosocial aspects of addiction, I was surprised by how pervasive the belief in addiction as a moral failure still is. I remember sitting in on one of **WE CARE**'s outreach awareness talks aimed at educating social workers about the signs of addiction and how to handle related situations. When asked to choose from a list of what they believed addiction to be, a significant number of people selected "a moral failure". It was shocking, but also enlightening to see how minds could be changed through education and the discussion that ensued over the 2-hour session.

Mikela, Sam, Lingchen, Saumyaa

By the end of it, participants seemed to have shifted their views and were asking more informed questions about addiction. This session also highlighted for me the broad scope of addiction. It's not just about substances; it's about any learned behaviour that becomes difficult to stop, whether it's gambling, gaming, watching porn, compulsive dating, or being online. In our increasingly digitised world, many more people can relate to the concept of addiction, even if they don't engage in substance use.

The most significant lesson I took away from my time at **WE CARE** is the critical importance of advocacy in reducing stigma around addiction and mental health. Writing stories of beneficiaries' recovery and creating educational posts for **WE CARE**'s Instagram allowed me to play a small part in educating others about the multifaceted nature of addiction and sharing tips to improve mental health.

I also had the pleasure of joining various activities at the drop-in centre, such as mindful movement, art club, and pickleball. Laughing over lunches at Thursday's cook-ins, participating in the Mandai nature walk, and attending the 17th Finisher Awards weren't just enjoyable – they were integral to the sense of community and support that **WE CARE** fosters.

My time at **WE CARE** has taught me that addiction is a complex, multifaceted issue that requires empathy, education, and resources to tackle. The fight to reduce stigma continues, but with every story shared and every milestone celebrated, we move one step closer to a world where addiction is understood, not judged.

–*Mikela, University of Edinburgh*, who wanted to work at a place that uses a person-centric approach to care and holistically rehabilitates and empowers persons to change their lives for the long term.



Mandai nature walk

Interning at **WE CARE** has definitely been an eye-opening experience for me. As a shy person who would rather listen politely to others talk, I learned a lot from the stories of the beneficiaries here. This experience not only allowed me to meet amazingly talented people but also deepened my understanding of addiction and recovery.

Interviewing people like Enid, Syarif, and Singaram were so enlightening as I was able to understand how they fell into the trap of addiction, how they coped, how their mindset transformed, and ultimately how important **WE CARE** is to these people.

WE CARE really is a family that was brought together by kind and like-minded people all with the goal of helping their community and others in need. The 17th Finisher Awards was a signature moment for me – seeing people who had struggled for years talk about how they were able to reclaim their lives and set new goals was extremely fulfilling.

I realise that recovery is a journey with its own set of challenges and triumphs and each small victory, whether it is achieving a milestone in the number of years clean, accepting heading to prison, or becoming a recovery guide, is a testament to the strength and determination of the individuals I had the privilege to work and talk with.



As a university student, studying psychology, I approached the opportunity to intern at **WE CARE** as an academic endeavour. Little did I know that through this experience, I would gain a wealth of invaluable experiences and become part of a community. Working on the **WE CARE** helpline was an integral part of my internship experience. This role placed me in direct contact with individuals seeking support, which required patience, empathy, and an understanding of the complexities surrounding addiction.

However, sometimes I encountered situations where I felt uncertain about how best to provide support or handle particularly difficult conversations. During these moments, my superiors' patience and guidance were of great help. They offered constructive feedback and practical advice on how to approach similar situations in the future. Their support helped me understand how to balance empathy with effective problem-solving. This process of learning through direct experience and mentorship enabled me to grow more confident and skilled in my role.

I also had the opportunity to attend *Singapore Care Network Connect Event* which offered a platform to meet and learn from seasoned professionals in the

It's not only the people who I interviewed either. Many of the beneficiaries come from backgrounds marked by trauma, loss, incarceration and addiction that had often been entrenched for years. Talking to them and listening to their stories, I was honestly struck by the resilience they displayed and the courage it took for them to confront their respective challenges. They taught me the importance of self-care and seeking support from others when needed.

WE CARE was also a really fun place to work at. The banter between all of the staff was genuinely really funny and I really felt that everyone was working together as a family in support of themselves, the beneficiaries and the clients. The other interns here were also amazing people and really fun to be around. I really enjoyed working and experiencing **WE CARE** together with them. My internship really was a transformative experience as the stories of the beneficiaries and the dedication of the staff left a great impact on me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have been part of such an important and meaningful organisation.

–**Sam**, *UCLA*, who wished to learn more about how addiction affects persons and their lives, while also gaining experience in communicating with others.

field of addiction recovery. The events were not only educational but also served as a testament to the collaborative spirit within the recovery community.

Throughout my internship, I formed strong relationships with the other interns. Together, we learned from each other, and grew as a team. These connections added a personal layer to my professional journey, making the experience all the more rewarding.

The most memorable part of my internship, however, was attending the Finisher Awards, a ceremony that celebrated the achievements of individuals in recovery. Listening to the stories of those who had overcome addiction was both moving and inspiring. It brought to life the theoretical knowledge I had gained in my studies, offering a personal perspective to the concepts of addiction and recovery. The event underscored the power of community support and the significance of acknowledging and celebrating every step towards recovery.

–**Saumyaa**, *University of British Columbia*, who wanted to join **WE CARE** to further her knowledge in the field of addiction recovery and gain valuable experience.

My time at **WE CARE** has been overwhelmingly positive. Before interning at **WE CARE**, my understanding of addiction, particularly the experiences of individuals in recovery, was limited. Although I had learned about addiction in an academic setting, I had never delved into how it affects people on a personal and social level. My education covered the scientific aspects of addiction but not the anthropological dimensions.

As an anthropology major, my goal at **WE CARE** was to explore the multifaceted impacts of addiction on the relationships surrounding those in recovery. Anthropology has equipped me with the tools to understand the various ways people express mental or physical distress, which I was able to apply to addiction at **WE CARE**.

During my college years, I lacked hands-on experience in exploring addiction recovery. However, given the rising prevalence of addiction globally, I became interested in how addiction is perceived and addressed in Singapore. At **WE CARE**, I observed daily interactions between staff and recovering individuals, providing me with opportunities to engage deeply and gain a nuanced understanding of addiction.

WE CARE's culture of respect, compassion, empathy, and care was particularly striking, especially in an Asian context where addiction is often stigmatised. Witnessing the genuine care and support offered to clients was heartwarming and eye-opening.

From the very first day, the **WE CARE** team welcomed me warmly and introduced me to another intern.

Initially, I was nervous about meeting new people, particularly from different cultural backgrounds. However, over time, I became comfortable and at ease. The close-knit workspace facilitated easy communication with staff and clients alike. After a month, I was joined by two new interns, and we quickly formed friendships, further enriching my experience.

Highlights of my internship included attending the 17th Finisher Awards and participating in various planned activities. Although my time at **WE CARE** was brief, I gained crucial insights into addiction through interactions with knowledgeable individuals. The work environment was relaxed, allowing interns to dress casually and collaborate comfortably in the office. Our tasks varied daily, from designing social media posts for **WE CARE**'s Instagram to assisting staff with their workloads.

Overall, my internship at **WE CARE** was a memorable and invaluable experience for me as an anthropology student. It provided me with essential insights into addiction, a topic often misunderstood. I will miss the **WE CARE** team, the recovering individuals, and my fellow interns. I am grateful that my first internship was with **WE CARE**.

- **Lingchen**, *Butler University*,
who has a passion for service, selflessness, and a willingness to serve others, especially those in non-profit organisations, and vulnerable communities.



Saying No: Life as an SOP

Camping overnight at the front door with a baseball bat, in fear of illegal money lenders knocking on our door. Surviving an entire month on a diet of just maggi curry noodles and luncheon meat. Lying in bed, wide awake at 3am because I could hear my father verbally abusing my mother.

Before I was an addict, I was a compulsive gambler and alcoholic's son.

There was a sense of unpredictability that plagued my household for close to 30 years which we, with every bet he lost and every bottle of Johnnie Walker Double Black he drank, learnt to get used to.

I did not enjoy life partly because I was constantly walking on eggshells. I did not ask for it, but whether I liked it or not, this was my life. And I hated it.

I did not know it at the time, but once I got into recovery it became clear as day that I was an SOP (Significant Other Person), too. What also became clear was the fact that addiction is something that's passed down through generations.

It may skip a generation or two, but trace the family tree of a person in recovery and you'll almost certainly find a descendant who suffered from addiction.

Many studies have arrived at this conclusion, including one led by researchers from Washington University in St. Louis in 2023. After combing through genomic data of over 1 million people, they discovered shared genetic markers underlying substance use disorders.

As I wrote this introduction, a line popped into my head – I am not responsible for my addiction, but I am responsible for my recovery.

It's the same for an SOP. They aren't responsible for the family they're in, but there are things they can do to better manage the situation they find themselves in.

We lived in 3 different apartments in 5 years, and each move brought with it hope of a fresh start, even though the reasons for us moving weren't exactly kosher.

It did not matter, however, which neighbourhood or house we were in, because the person living inside of it never changed.

Between my mother, brothers and I, we have years-of-therapy worth of trauma to unpack. Even though I am 2 and a half years clean, and am supposed to have worked through my resentments from the past, I still cannot find it in myself to forgive my father.

I don't blame him as much today, thanks to the empathy I've learnt from working with newcomers in my various self-help support groups, but nonetheless there is still some blame and I am comfortable with the fact that it may never fade.

The levels of blame and resentment may not have been as high if I had gotten help. To be honest, I didn't even know that I could get help.

In fact, we find this to be the case for most of the SOPs we see at **WE CARE**: They call to enquire about seeking help for their loved ones, only to realise that they need help too. They are also comforted to know that it is not the end of the world if their family member, mired in addiction, does not want to seek help.

At **WE CARE**, the Family and Friends support group runs twice a month. It's geared to help the family and friends of those suffering from addiction to navigate the different challenges they face.

An example of a challenge, one that I never figured out how to navigate, is knowing where to draw the line between supporting and enabling.

If their husband or father is deep in the throes of a gambling addiction, what do they say when he goes

to them begging for a financial bailout? If they don't help him, his creditors are going to come down hard, putting pressure on both their family and his job.

If they help – keep in mind that this probably isn't the first bailout to be given – he's not going to feel the pinch. Or rather, the pinch isn't going to be very hard. He would have gotten away again.

Next time he finds himself in a hole, he knows that they're going to be there to help and before anyone notices, they're stuck in a toxic and simply unsustainable cycle of enabling.

The solution to problems like these aren't usually black and white. There's often a middle ground that's mutually beneficial to both parties, and that's what we try to help SOPs find when they come to **WE CARE** for support.

Sometimes, the middle ground takes a long time to be found. Seeing a counsellor does not solve all the problems overnight, but with each session the SOP takes a step in the right direction until one day, they are finally able to say No.

Personally, it was only after 20 years that I managed to gather the courage to say No to my father. A year later, my brothers and mother said No. And since then, we haven't looked back. For the first time in my life I feel like we're a real family.

I managed to say No only after 20 years, with no form of help. I can't begin to imagine how different my life would have been if I had gotten help earlier.

The life of an SOP is tough, and extremely stressful. There are hundreds of thousands of addicts around the world, and even more SOPs suffering in silence. If they get the help they need, perhaps they won't have to wait 20 years like I did.

By **Jat**

Jat is in the **WE CARE** Comms team

Perspectives: Volunteer

A Journey of Growth and Compassion: My Experience as a Helpline Manager at WE CARE

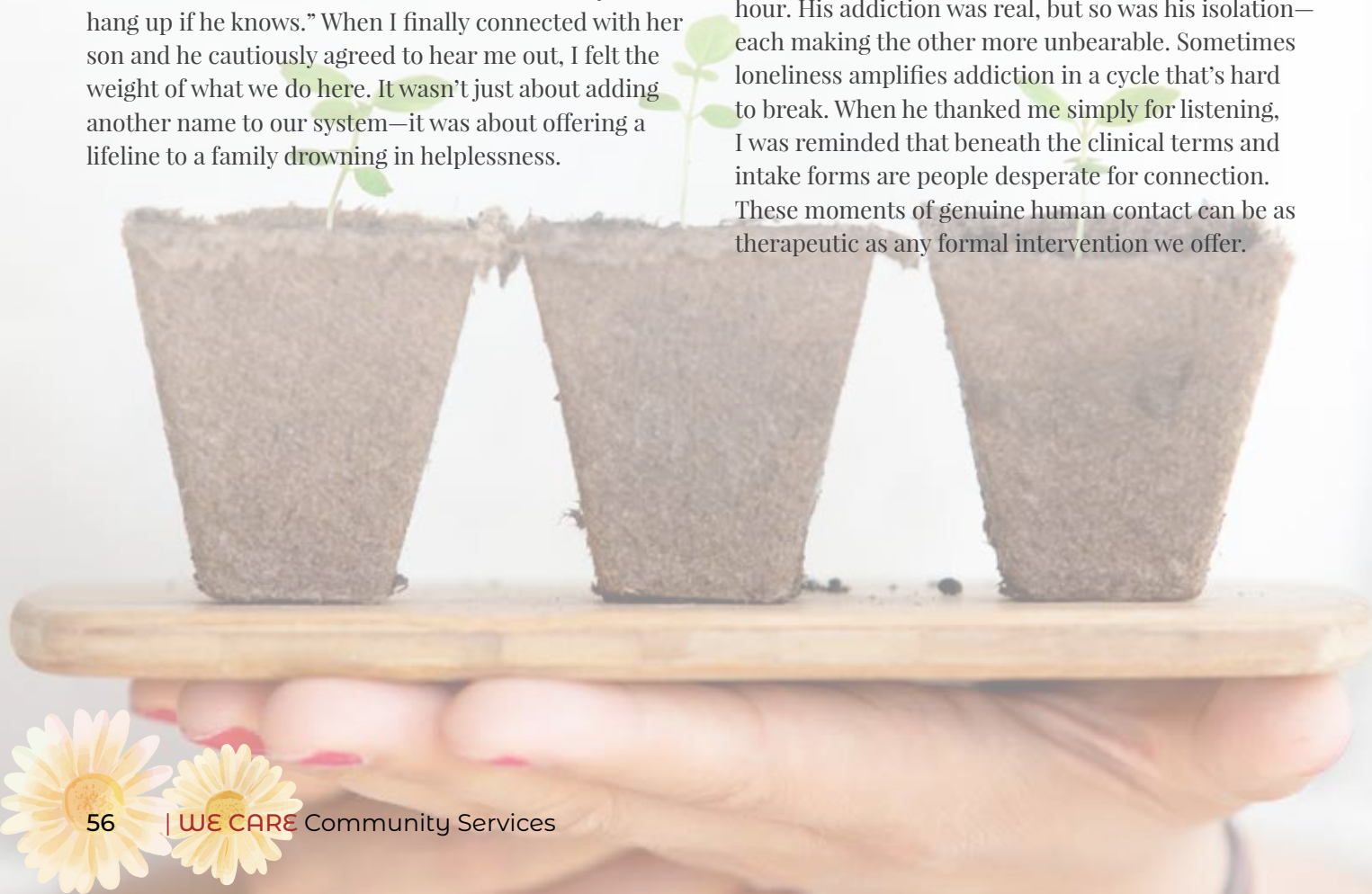
I came to **WE CARE** carrying my own experiences of loss within my family, where addiction and mental health struggles had left their mark. As a beginning mental health practitioner, I saw this as an opportunity to deepen my understanding and contribute to a cause that is deeply personal to me.

Initially, I expected my role to be largely administrative — registering new clients over the phone. However, I quickly realised that the role is not just about paperwork; it is about holding space for individuals at some of their most vulnerable moments.

“Could you call my son but not tell him I reached out?” A mother once asked me, her voice raw with worry. “He’ll hang up if he knows.” When I finally connected with her son and he cautiously agreed to hear me out, I felt the weight of what we do here. It wasn’t just about adding another name to our system—it was about offering a lifeline to a family drowning in helplessness.

Not every call goes as planned. The man who spoke in urgent whispers about being watched left me rattled. His reality was so different from mine, yet his fear was palpably real. We never got to discussing services; he wasn’t ready. But as he thanked me for believing him when “no one else would,” I realised that sometimes just being truly heard is its own form of help. I still wonder how he’s doing.

Then there are the calls that break your heart in quiet ways. “Actually, I’ve already been struggling with this for many years,” an elderly man told me after we’d discussed treatment options. “I’m just hoping someone can hear me out.” We spoke for nearly an hour. His addiction was real, but so was his isolation—each making the other more unbearable. Sometimes loneliness amplifies addiction in a cycle that’s hard to break. When he thanked me simply for listening, I was reminded that beneath the clinical terms and intake forms are people desperate for connection. These moments of genuine human contact can be as therapeutic as any formal intervention we offer.



What keeps me coming back is watching shame dissolve, even if just for a moment. When someone shares their narrative construct of failure and self-blame, I get to remind them that their addiction began as an attempt to solve unbearable pain, not create it. The relief in their voice when they feel seen as a whole person—not just their struggle—reminds me why this work matters.

To those supporting **WE CARE**: You should know that our callers look like everyone and no one in particular. They are your neighbours, your family members, your colleagues. They call from corner offices and homeless shelters. From college dorms and retirement communities. What unites them isn't their circumstances but their courage to reach out when everything in them wants to hide.

What we offer isn't just services. It's a moment of dignity in a world that too often looks away. And for me, it's the privilege of saying, ***"I hear you. You matter. And you're not alone in this."***

by **Colin Toh**

Colin is a newly practicing therapist whose appreciation for the richness and complexity of the human experience inspires his curiosity for integrative therapeutic approaches to support personalised healing and growth.



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WE CARE aims to be the leading community hub of addiction recovery in Singapore.

We treat all forms of addictions, including alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex, gaming, internet and compulsive behavior like shoplifting.

Our core services are:

- Counselling for recovering addicts and their families
 - Educational and therapy programmes
 - A drop-in centre
 - A hub for recovery support groups
- Community outreach & public awareness talks

For more information on what we do, please go to:

www.wecare.org.sg



WE CARE
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