

EFFECTIVE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Brief Facts on Singapore

Singapore is an independent island city-state, located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, lying just south of Malaysia and north of Indonesia's Riau Islands.

At just 710 km² (or 274 miles²), it is the smallest nation in Southeast Asia. However, with approximately five million residents, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The majority of the population are Chinese (75%), followed by Malay (14%), Indian (9%) and other ethnic origins. In Singapore, English is the official and working language.

The crime rate in Singapore is one of the lowest in the world, with 661 cases of reported crime per 100,000 persons in 2009.¹ Incidents of violent crime are rare in Singapore. Conscientious law enforcement, coupled with very strict drug and gun laws, which include capital punishment, mean that drug abuse and firearms are limited in Singapore.

B. Background of Singapore Prison Service (SPS)

Singapore Prison Service is one of the strategic Home Team agencies under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). In collaboration with the other law enforcement agencies, such as the Singapore Police Force, the Singapore Civil Defence Force, the Immigration and Customs Authority, the Central Narcotics Bureau, the Internal Security Department, the Home Team Academy, the Casino Regulatory Authority and the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises, we strive to make Singapore a safer home for all.

There are currently 14 prisons in Singapore, made up of 13 male prisons and one female prison. As of the end of April 2010, our prison population is 13,756, with locals forming 85% of the total, convicted mainly of drug and property-related offences; and foreigners, the remaining 15%, convicted of immigration offences. Our Drug Rehab Centre population makes up 5% of our inmate population.

Ninety per cent of the Drug Rehab Centre inmates are males. About 6% of inmates (770 persons) are on Community-Based Programmes, where they serve out the tail-end of their sentence in the community. It is noted that the prison population has been on a steady decline after peaking at more than 18,000 in 2002.

As part of SPS's "clusterization" strategy for better resource and offender management, we conceptualized the idea of co-locating all prisons in one place, in a super prison complex in the late 1990s. The Changi Prison Complex, first operationalized in 2004, currently comprises two clusters of five different prison institutions each. We will have four clusters in total when it becomes fully operational. It is a modern, high-rise, high-density and high-tech super prison, and perhaps the most densely populated prison in the world. With this, we expect to achieve a certain economy of scale of operations, to have our various prisons share common services, and in the process, to be able to reap significant operational efficiency.

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¹ <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html#socind>

II. OFFENDERS' REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

A. Management of Youth Delinquency and Offending

The management of youth offending falls largely within the purview of a separate ministry – the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS). For young offenders, up to 21 years old, there is a graduated system of sanctions where suitability of probation is considered ahead of institutionalization, as part of a holistic and integrated family-based approach in managing delinquent youths. Imprisonment for young offenders is used only as a last resort, given their young age and recognizing the fact that imprisonment may not necessarily be the most effective way of addressing the problem.

1. Diversionsary Sentencing Options

Instead, where applicable, diversionsary community-based rehabilitation programmes are employed for young offenders, including:

(i) *Fine/Bond*

Youths and/or parents may have to pay fines or damages arising from the offence. The Court may also impose a bond on the parents so as to ensure that they continue to monitor and supervise the youths.

(ii) *Community Service Order (CSO)*

Youths who are given the Community Service Order are required to perform 40 to 240 hours of unpaid community service. CSOs help to build respect and empathy for others through meaningful service to the community.

(iii) *Weekend Detention Order (WDO)*

Youths who are placed on WDO will be detained at an Approved Institution or a Detention Place during weekends, for a maximum of 52 weekends.

(iv) *Probation*

Probation is a key community-based rehabilitation programme, whereby youths may also be placed on probation for 6 to 36 months, as an alternative order option. During this period, they are required to report regularly to the Probation Officer and have to comply with conditions of the Probation Order, such as restriction checks and participation in relevant programmes. The Probation Officer will also work with the probationers' parents to impart parenting tips on management of the probationers and strengthen family bonds, as well as to support and assist in the probationer's rehabilitation. Where necessary, the probationers may also be assigned volunteer "befrienders" for positive engagement and support. Probation is usually given in conjunction with the Community Service Order or Detention Order.

2. Institutionalized Sentencing Options

For recalcitrant youth offenders, for instance, youths who breached the community-based Orders, the Court has the discretion to issue any one of the following residential rehabilitation options:

(i) *Detention Place*

This mandates youths to reside in a place of detention for a maximum of six months.

(ii) *Approved School Order*

Under this Order, youths are ordered to reside in an Approved School such as the Singapore Boys' or Girls' Home for two to three years.

(iii) *Reformatory Training Order*

This Order applies to youths above 16 years old, who may be ordered to undergo reformatory training in prison for up to three years. Youths between 14 to 16 years old can be sentenced for reformatory training if they were beyond control in the Boys' or Girls' Home.

B. Management of Prisoners

In Singapore, imprisonment serves the following purposes, summed up in the acronym "P.R.I.De":

- *Punishment*

- Reformation
- Incapacitation
- Deterrence

The Singapore Prison Service is responsible for administering these purposes, within a spartan environment and strict regime. As professionals in corrections, Singaporean prison officers are constantly reminded that serving time should never be a waste of time. If we are able to use the time in prison, through suitable programmes, to dissuade prisoners from reoffending after release, we can prevent many thousands of new crimes every year. Their re-entry, if managed well, is a potentially powerful leverage point for reducing further social harm.

This mindset shift reflected the Singapore Prison Service's desire to add value by helping offenders to change as their "Captains", driven by our Vision and Mission which was re-crafted in 1999.

1. Singapore Prison Service's Vision and Mission

(i) *Vision*

"We aspire to be captains in the lives of offenders committed to our custody. We will be instrumental in steering them towards being responsible citizens, with the help of their families and the community. We will thus build a secure and exemplary prison system."

(ii) *Mission*

"As a key partner in Criminal Justice, we protect society through the safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders, co-operating in prevention and aftercare."

2. Current Situation

There are currently more than 10,000 prisoners who complete their sentences and return to our communities every year, and the overall recidivism rate² stands at 26.5% for the cohort released in 2007. Overall, there has been a sustained improvement in the recidivism rates in the past years, with small increases recently due to the unfavourable economic situation. The main motivation for the Singapore Prison Service's efforts is the rehabilitation and re-entry management of prisoners whilst they are still in prison, with the aim of reducing harm in society post-release, contributing to a safer Singapore.

3. SPS's Rehabilitation Framework

The Singapore Prison Service's *Rehabilitation Framework* was first developed in 2000 as a deliberate operating model that guides our offender reformation effort. The Framework articulates a structured and comprehensive approach for all rehabilitation efforts, and ensures optimization of our limited resources by allocating programmes based on risks and needs of prisoners. It is based on the philosophy that:

- Offenders' reintegration potential is maximized through the building of family and/or social ties and the delivery of programmes targeted at improving prisoners' offending behaviours, attitudes and skills;
- Rehabilitation begins from the time an offender first enters the prison system and continues even after their release, hence underlining the importance of aftercare programmes and services for ex-offenders.

With a *Through-Care* approach in mind, our rehabilitation framework consists of three distinct phases, namely, *In-Care*, *Halfway Care* and *Aftercare*. We work in close collaboration with other government organizations and community partners to ensure the seamless transfer of care of offenders and integrated support of offenders in the community.

(i) *In-care Phase*

(a) *Assessment and Classification*

During the In-Care phase, every prisoner will be assessed and classified according to their security risks and rehabilitation needs at admission, using the Revised Level of Service Inventory (LSI-R). The

² Recidivism, defined as the percentage of every cohort released who reoffend and return to prison, is a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Singapore Prison Service. This KPI has been tracked since 1998, using a two-year rate.

assessment facilitates accommodation and the allocation of programmes to prisoners.

Based on the assessment, they will be classified into three general classes, with the aim of helping us to channel appropriate resources for our inmates:

- Class 'A' – Prisoners with low risk and needs, who are unlikely to reoffend.
- Class 'B' – Prisoners with moderate risk and needs, who are less likely to reoffend if rehabilitation is given.
- Class 'C' – Prisoners with high risk and needs, who are likely to reoffend unless intensive rehabilitation is given.

Where applicable, specific risk tools will also be used to measure the extent of substance abuse, violence and sexual offence.

Currently, most of our resources are targeted at Class B and motivated Class C inmates as we believe that they would give us the best returns with the resources invested.

(b) Personal Route Map (PRM)

The rehabilitation classification derived will be used to chart the Personal Route Map (PRM) for every prisoner. They provide details on the appropriate criminogenic and non-criminogenic programmes respectively, taking into consideration the responsivity of individuals (e.g. mental capacity and functioning).

A prison officer will be assigned as a *Personal Supervisor* to the prisoner on admission, to monitor and review the Personal Route Maps of all prisoners placed in his or her charge throughout their periods of incarceration.

(c) Rehabilitation Programmes

There is a suite of rehabilitation programmes provided for prisoners to facilitate purposeful engagement during incarceration. Prisoners are allocated programmes according to their needs identified in the PRM. Some of the key rehabilitation programmes include:

(1) Specialized Treatment Programmes (STPs)

These programmes are developed and delivered by prison counsellors and psychologists, which target the prisoners' criminogenic needs in five main areas:

- Pro-Social Thinking
- Anger & Emotional Management
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Managing and Overcoming Violence
- Sexual Offending Treatment.

These programmes aim at increasing prisoners' motivation to change, through understanding of the root of their offending behaviours, as well as equipping them with the necessary skills to avoid relapse.

(2) Education

Education, a social-levelling tool, is highly encouraged for all eligible prisoners.

In 2000, the Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School) was set up to help centralize teaching resources. In addition to the academic classes, prisoner-students in the Prison School are also given opportunities to participate in co-curriculum activities that impart life-skills and promote good social values. The performance of these students is found to be consistently better than those of private candidates, and is comparable with mainstream schools.

In the same year, the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA), was initiated in the Prison School. The NYAA programme is a national effort co-ordinated by NYAA Council to involve all young people, from the age of 14 to 25, in healthy and wholesome habits.

The Scheme is a collaboration between the Singapore Prison Service and the National Youth Achievement Award Council to provide creative opportunities for young reforming offenders to develop

psychological, intellectual and physical abilities for successful rehabilitation, while engaging the community in this process.

Through this programme, it allows prisoners to channel their energy and resourcefulness positively, providing them with the opportunity to fortify character and resolve while setting personal goals. At the same time, participants get to develop personal qualities such as self-reliance, perseverance and a sense of responsibility to themselves and society. The programme has been expanded to include young women offenders in the Changi Women's Prison.

Apart from formal academic studies, there are also other educational programmes offered to prisoners to enhance and accelerate their literacy level, such as basic literacy and numeracy courses.

For those who are more vocationally-inclined, the Workplace Literacy and Workplace Numeracy (WPLN) series are provided instead. The WPLN series, a national initiative, focuses on upgrading the proficiency and skills of participants, from primary level proficiency to the equivalent of GCE 'A' levels, to ensure that they remain relevant in the workforce.

(3) Employment and Vocational Training

Work is provided to instil the sense of responsibility, discipline and self-respect that comes from gainful employment. In partnership with the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), a statutory board that runs the prison industries in Singapore, various jobs and skills training opportunities are made available for prisoners, for instance, in industrial bakery, laundry, call centre skills and even digital media design.

At the same time, various job placements and accredited vocational training are also offered to provide opportunity for skills training and development, thereby enhancing prisoners' employability upon release. For example, under the "Train & Place" programme, prisoners are trained in prisons with a subsequent job placement upon release, while for the "Place & Train" programme, prisoners are matched with a job prior to their release with subsequent on-the-job training attachment after release.

In addition, the Career Resource Centres were set up in 2005 to provide career guidance services and assist prisoners to secure employment before release, through job readiness skills training and an online job search portal.

(4) Family-focused Services and Programmes

In general, incarceration of a family member not only creates emotional strain, but also financial difficulties for the families of prisoners, which could result in broken families and youth delinquency.

To ensure that families are not thrown into financial distress, and that relationships are not irrevocably strained by a family member's imprisonment, the Singapore Prison Service actively engages families of the incarcerated in a variety of ways.

In July 2006, the Family Resource Centres (FRCs), were set up to serve and assist prisoners' families, especially those impacted by the incarceration of their loved ones. These centres, outsourced to community welfare organizations, offer information and referral services, short-term financial assistance, and even case management services for families with more complex needs, with the aim of enhancing families' coping skills and, ultimately, building supportive family networks for prisoners to return to upon release. In particular, for prisoners who have children, it is crucial not only to ensure that the parent-child bond remains intact, but to assist in preventing the inter-generational offending cycle.

In addition, community partners are also engaged to conduct family-focused programmes on various topics ranging from communication and reconciliation issues, to parenting and marital issues, as it is recognized that prisoners who have supportive families are more motivated to change and have a better chance at successful reintegration.

We also encourage visits and letter writing, and try to minimize the impact of incarceration on family members.

(5) Religious Programmes

Religion is recognized as a strong intrinsic motivator of change. Hence, the Singapore Prison Service relies heavily on volunteers from our communities to provide religious counselling programmes to help in offender management and augment our rehabilitation programmes.

As a multi-racial and multi-faith country, religious services and programmes are catered to the six main denominations, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism.

In recent years, a more holistic approach to religious counselling was adopted. Where the conduct of traditional religious programmes centres on scripture reading, the revised approach incorporates rehabilitation elements and follow-up support in the community upon release.

(6) Community Reintegration Programme

In preparation for prisoners' eventual release, the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP) is delivered during the pre-release period to assist prisoners in their transition back into the community, addressing their reintegration needs identified during the pre-release review, such as coping skills, family/social support, employment and so on.

(ii) *Halfway Care Phase*

During the *Halfway Care* phase, suitable prisoners are allowed to serve the tail-end of their sentences in the community. There are various community-based programmes that cater specifically to the needs of different categories of prisoners, elaborated on as follows:

(a) Home Detention Scheme

This scheme provides an avenue for the early release of prisoners with good family support and who are typically of low risk, and hence would be most amenable to successful reintegration.

Prisoners selected for Home Detention have to wear electronic tags while they are on the Scheme, and are allowed to serve out the last months or year of their sentence living with their families or in their private residences under a temporary release license with set conditions, such as curfew hours and mandatory reporting.

(b) Halfway House Scheme

This scheme offers prisoners who have little or no family support, who may have no homes to return to, or whose family environments are judged to be detrimental to sustained desistance, but who are nevertheless desirous of staying crime-free, an alternative way of serving their sentences in the community.

There are currently ten Halfway Houses contracted for this scheme. These Halfway Houses, typically operated by social service or religious organizations, provide hostel-like lodging for prisoners for up to a year, in a safe and nurturing environment for gradual reintegration. Prisoners on the Halfway House Scheme are required to work during the day and return to their assigned hostels for evening curfew.

(c) Work Release Scheme

This scheme allows suitable prisoners, especially for the longer-term prisoners and those who do not qualify for the preceding two schemes, to leave prison premises for employment during the day, while requiring them to return to a low-security prison in the evenings. Work and electronic tagging are mandatory under this scheme.

To date, the Singapore Prison Service has placed some 26,000 prisoners on our various Community-Based Programmes, with 1,550 prisoners on such placements in 2009. The completion rates stands at over 90% consistently over the past years. More importantly, it is found that prisoners serving community-based rehabilitation register a lower recidivism rate, at less than 16% for the 2007 release cohort (compared to the overall recidivism rate of 26.5%).

(iii) *Aftercare Phase*

To facilitate a continuity of care for the prisoners upon their release, the Community Aftercare Programme (CAP) is provided for these prisoners at the Aftercare phase. Research has shown that the first six months

of release has been the most vulnerable period for ex-prisoners, who are often confronted with and struggle with the harsh reality of re-entry. This voluntary post-release programme is therefore aimed at supporting ex-prisoners in their reintegration journey, up to a period of six months. Prisoners who sign up for CAP will be assigned Aftercare Case Managers to help them deal with their reintegration challenges in the five domain areas, including employment, financial, accommodation, coping skills and family/social support.

III. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REINTEGRATION

Reducing reoffending is a core business of the Singapore Prison Service. The reformation of prisoners, through rehabilitation and reintegration, is one of the most difficult and challenging tasks for any correctional service.

As highlighted in the preceding segment, home and work are the two key ingredients which facilitate successful reintegration. An offender who has a supportive family and is able to remain in gainful employment after release will have a much higher chance of not reoffending.

It requires an integrated and multi-faceted approach to reduce reoffending, involving not just the offenders and the Prison Service, but also other government and non-governmental organizations, the community, as well as families of offenders. This has been the operating philosophy for reducing recidivism in Singapore.

A. In-Care Community Engagement

Involvement of the community starts during the In-Care phase to augment our rehabilitation programmes, which would otherwise be limited.

1. Volunteers

At present, there are more than 1,400 volunteers who come into our prisons to provide religious and social counselling to prisoners during their time in prison, and for some, even after their release. These volunteers have been an inspiration for prisoners, providing hope and guidance to them. The dedication and hard work of our volunteers, many of whom hold regular jobs in the daytime, have certainly made an impact amongst prisoners who look to them for motivation to start life anew.

In 2009, prisons embarked on a review of our volunteer engagement approach, with a view to ensuring better community resource mobilization in support of our core businesses of safe custody and rehabilitation of prisoners. A Volunteer Engagement Framework was hence developed, targeting three broad areas as outlined below:

(i) Volunteer Management Structure

This refers to a systematic structure that serves to direct, co-ordinate and integrate the effort of prison volunteers, in collaboration with various key partners, towards achieving effective delivery of well-designed programmes. This structure will also be involved in policy development and strategizing initiatives, and buttresses volunteer administration and the roll-out of new volunteer-run programmes.

(ii) Alignment of Volunteers

The effective alignment of volunteers involved the following areas:

- (a) Suitability assessment of applicants to determine their motivation to work as prison volunteers, as well as to enable matching of expertise and rehabilitation needs upstream. In addition, their suitability for continued service in prisons will be evaluated.
- (b) Training and development plans that continually seek to renew volunteers' skills in order that they remain relevant.
- (c) Engagement platforms that enhance interaction opportunities at all levels to promote effective communication and strengthen partnerships.
- (d) Effort/facilities that promote volunteers' welfare and recognition of contributions to further their sense of belonging and identification with prisons. Volunteers who are aligned with Prisons' Mission, Vision and Values are key partners in furthering our custodial and rehabilitation efforts.

(iii) Outcome-based Volunteer Programmes

This includes identification and assessment of volunteer programmes to ensure they are not only in line with our rehabilitation framework but also contribute towards positive attitudinal changes in prisoners.

2. Community Agencies/Voluntary Welfare Organizations (VWOs)

Currently, there are more than 50 community agencies and VWOs in Singapore, both religious and secular organizations, who work directly with the prisoners and have become our close partners in our rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

B. Aftercare Community Acceptance and Support

Rehabilitating and preparing offenders during incarceration is only one part of the equation. Preparing the community and creating conditions that encourage sustained desistance from criminal behaviour by ex-offenders is the other. Their eventual release into the community necessitates a concerted effort to prepare the wider community to accept, accommodate and support the released offenders willing to live as law-abiding citizens.

1. The ‘Second Prison’

However, many ex-offenders have to live with the stigma of having served time behind bars. The suspicion and prejudice that ex-offenders face after release can often be more punishing than the prison sentence itself, with many finding themselves stepping into a ‘second prison’ of invisible bars, societal mistrust, discrimination and even contempt. Therefore, the conditions in the community must be conducive to successful reintegration.

2. Unlocking the ‘Second Prison’

In a rather conservative country like Singapore which upholds traditional values (such as ‘bringing honour to the family name’), imprisonment is a taboo that shames the family. Hence, changing the mindset of the Singaporean public towards ex-offenders has been a challenging and arduous process.

Leading the efforts to garner community acceptance and support for ex-offenders, the Singapore Prison Service has invested considerable resources and energy into this area, as elaborated on in the following section.

(i) Co-ordinated Aftercare for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network

Formed in May 2000, the CARE Network brings together the major community and government organizations responsible for the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Singapore Prison Service, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises, the National Council of Social Service, the Industrial & Services Co-operative Society Limited, the Singapore Aftercare Association and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association. The Network, co-chaired by Singapore Prison Service and SCORE, engages the community in rehabilitation, co-ordinates member agencies’ activities and develops innovative rehabilitation initiatives for ex-offenders. The Yellow Ribbon Project (to be further discussed in the subsequent section) is one major campaign developed and launched under the CARE Network.

(ii) Publicity and Communications Efforts

For some years now, the Singapore Prison Service has commissioned a series of print and television advertisements, with bold and innovative messaging, to place greater commitment and emphasis on rehabilitation to enable offenders to renew and restart their lives.

The messages centre on providing offenders with the opportunity to restart their lives and integrate back into the community, thus reducing the burden of repeat crime-rates on the community, such as:

“As a prison volunteer, you can help break down walls.”

“He’s already served time, but will you still be passing judgment?”

“Who says ex-convicts can’t serve society with conviction?”

“Most of our guests who checked out have no desire to return.”

(iii) Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP)

As a flagship of community engagement initiatives, the Yellow Ribbon Project was first conceptualized and launched in 2004 to promote a more accepting society, one that is willing to give ex-offenders a second chance at making good. It exists to bring hope, confidence and opportunity to ex-offenders determined to lead crime-free lives.

The Yellow Ribbon Project, the only national 'second chance' campaign, was inspired by a popular 1973 song, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree", by Tony Orlando. There are three lines in the song that describe an offender's desire for acceptance and forgiveness: "*I'm really still in prison. And my love, she still holds the key. A simple yellow ribbon's what I need to set me free.*"

The Yellow Ribbon Project has three goals – the 3 "As":

- Generate *awareness* of the difficulties ex-offenders face after release, of giving second chances to ex-offenders;
- Encourage *acceptance* for ex-offenders from families and the community as they return to free society; and
- Inspire public *action* to support their reintegration and continued rehabilitation.

Therefore, the central message of the Yellow Ribbon Project to the wider Singapore community is that they hold the key to unlock the 'second prison'.

(iv) Community Events

Every YRP season is marked by several major community events which will define the YRP campaign for that year, one of which will be pitched as an anchor event and marketed as the highlight for the campaign. With every season, the theme and focus shift from one level of engagement to another, as each YRP campaign builds upon the successes of the preceding year.

The initial years focused on creating awareness, and progressively evolved into engaging the community and mobilizing the ex-offenders in recent years. Centred around the theme of 'Giving Back' in YRP 2009, the launch and anchor event was "Beyond the Run" and some of the highlights included 'Community Arts Exhibition', 'Wear-A-Yellow Ribbon', 'Tribute of Love I – Cooking Competition', and 'Tribute of Love II – Giving Back'.

(v) Yellow Ribbon Fund

The Yellow Ribbon Fund was set up to sustain the Yellow Ribbon effort in supporting community-initiated programmes which help ex-offenders and their families. To date, the Fund has raised more than \$7 million.

Now into its seventh year, the Yellow Ribbon Project has become a runaway success in Singapore, having won many awards for its innovation and social purpose. The Singaporean public has responded with uncommon enthusiasm to the Yellow Ribbon cause, turning up at Yellow Ribbon events in large numbers, and donating generously to the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

Some of the key achievements of YRP include:

- 94% of the population is aware of the Yellow Ribbon, with about 60% expressing willingness to accept ex-offenders as either a friend or colleague;
- Approximately 300,000 members of the Singaporean public have attended at least one Yellow Ribbon event, with more than 900 signed up as new volunteers and 400 ex-offenders mobilized for each campaign;
- More than 1,800 employers are willing employ ex-offenders, with more than 2,500 ex-offenders having benefited from such employment opportunities;
- More than \$7 million has been raised for the Yellow Ribbon Fund, benefiting more than 26,000 clients; and
- The project received honourable mention at the 2007 United Nations Grand Award for campaigns deemed to be forward looking.

The most poignant encouragement came from the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the main Yellow Ribbon event in September 2007, addressing ex-offenders: “If you have made a mistake, if you have offended, then there has to be punishment. But if you have taken the punishment and you are prepared to correct yourself and make good and come back onto the right path, if you make the effort, we should give you the second chance.”

The success of the Yellow Ribbon Project is attributed to a combination of winning factors, without which it could not have attained the scale and depth of success that it enjoys today. Broadly, the critical success factors can be categorized into:

- **The People Factor:** people lie at the heart of the YRP efforts. It is the collective effort of like-minded people, from key political figures to the members of public, who propel the Project forward;
- **Branding:** effective brand positioning has also been instrumental for the success of the YRP campaign. The simple icon of a yellow ribbon and the meaning associated with it is easily identifiable and recognizable by all strata of society;
- **Effective Use of Levers:** there has been continuous leverage on the media, celebrities and the community as force multipliers to amplify the spread of the message and enlarge the reach of the Project;
- **Touching the Hearts of the Community:** in order for the community to embrace the YRP, it is essential to both touch and convince them with rousing testimonies and compelling messages.

(vi) Legislative Change

In line with the aims of Yellow Ribbon Project, several laws and civil service processes were changed to make it less discriminatory for ex-offenders trying to find a job.

The Registration of Criminals Act was amended in May 2005 to render the records of first time offenders who are fined less than \$2000 and/or imprisoned for less than three months and who have remained crime and drug free for at least five years as spent. It is estimated that about 30,000 such offenders have benefitted since the law took effect.

In March 2006, the Singapore Civil Service amended their job application form, to conform with the amended Registration of Criminals Act. Where in the old forms, job applicants were asked if “they had ever been convicted in court”, or if “they have a criminal record”, the new form does not require ex-offenders who fit the changed laws to declare that they have a past criminal record.

(vii) Inter-Ministry Committee

As another spin-off with the heightened awareness of the reintegration challenges, an Inter-Ministry Committee was set up in April 2009 to study and propose recommendations to address the problem of reoffending.

The Committee recommends a focused and comprehensive approach to effectively address the problem of offending and reoffending. One of its key recommendations is activating community-based networks to provide protective factors for offenders through strengthening existing familial, religious and social support systems. In addition, it also proposes introducing specialized treatment programmes and mandatory community aftercare programmes for high risk-needs offenders.

With the high-level support and mandate given through this Committee, it has generated swift and effective community response and action, gearing up to contribute to the cause of easing offenders’ re-entry.

IV. CONCLUSION

Prisons are often described as places where bad people go to get worse. The Singapore Prison Service takes a radically different view. Prisons must not be mere jailhouses, but transformational places, where crime is deterred even as strayed lives are steered back on course.

Serving time should never be a waste of time. The period of incarceration allows the Singapore Prison Service an opportunity to work at reforming lives, showing them that crime does not pay, teaching them a marketable skill, giving them an education, all with one end in mind – to reduce the chance of an offender reoffending after release. One less recidivist means one less crime, which means one less victim of crime and one less harm caused, hence a safer Singapore for all.

Rehabilitation and reintegration are the two key ingredients for successful offenders' reform. Both, however, cannot be confined to within prison walls. Rehabilitation involves not just programming for the individual criminogenic risks and needs of the offender, but must extend to enhancing his or her familial ties and future employability. Reintegration, by definition, must involve whole communities, starting with awareness, then acceptance and then practical action to make the inevitable re-entry of the ex-offender a positive one.

Any correctional service that hopes to reduce reoffending must make a concerted effort at preparing the community to receive the offenders that it is about to release. The Singapore experience, in recent times, at reducing reoffending has been an encouraging one. It is a task which involves political support, multi-agency collaboration, grassroots activism and the active engagement of civil society. The Singapore Prison Service chose, quite early on, to assume leadership for this issue, and has continued to strategize, innovate and invest our energies and resources into finding new and more effective ways of dissuading reoffending, collaborating with all who share the desire for a crime-free society.