

# DISCUSSING EARLY RELEASE PROGRAMMES IN SINGAPORE

*Soh Wai Wah*  
*Director, the Singapore Prison Service*

## INTRODUCTION

The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) has undergone tremendous transformation over the last ten years. Beyond just rehabilitating offenders, we have also focused our efforts on helping them to renew and restart their lives as productive citizens, who add value to their families and society. SPS recognised that preparation for an offender's re-integration back to society starts from the onset of incarceration. Hence, a rehabilitation framework was introduced for a "throughcare" approach to be adopted towards preparing offenders for their return to the community. Not only are the offenders prepared for re-integration, concurrent efforts are also carried out to increase awareness and acceptance of offenders by their families and the community, thus preparing them for the offenders' eventual release.

## SPS REHABILITATION FRAMEWORK

2. SPS' rehabilitation framework (see Figure 1 below), which sets out the rehabilitative programmes that offenders go through at each incarceration stage, is premised upon the operating philosophy that a seamless "throughcare" approach is necessary for the rehabilitation of offenders and their subsequent reintegration back into community.

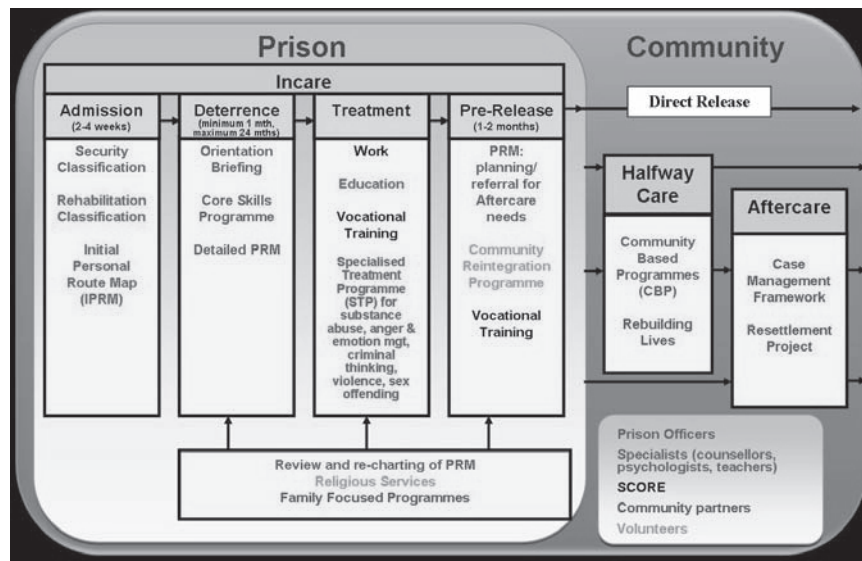


Figure 1: SPS Rehabilitation Framework

3. In order to prepare offenders for reintegration, they undergo various programmes during their period of incarceration. SPS introduced the classification system, using the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) as an assessment tool, to assess the risks and needs of each offender upon his admission. The offender would then be accorded specific treatment programmes based on his level of risks and needs. During the in-care phase, a personal route map is required to be charted for each offender to determine his specific treatment needs required during his incarceration.

4. After an offender's personal route map is charted, programmes that will address his treatment needs and enhance his reintegration potential will be accorded to him. SPS adopts a holistic approach in enhancing an offender's reintegration potential. Education and vocational training equip offenders with knowledge and skills. Work therapy gives opportunity for offenders to inculcate positive work habits, attitudes and responsibility. Specialised treatment programmes target the offenders' specific

criminogenic needs. The engagement of the families and community also start immediately upon admission of the offenders to ensure that family ties are not severely strained by imprisonment. Families are engaged through regular visits and family focused programmes. Volunteers from religious organisations and voluntary welfare organisations are also engaged to come into prison to befriend offenders and counsel them.

5. The transition from a highly controlled prison environment to the life outside prison walls is a big one. Hence, during the half-way care phase, early release programmes, with follow-up and supervision in the community, play an essential role to prepare inmates for gradual reintegration into community. Thus far, about 18,000 offenders have been emplaced on the various schemes in CBP and the completion rate is about 95%. CBP will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

6. SPS acknowledges the difficulties faced by ex-offenders in seeking to reintegrate back into the community. With the help of community partners, SPS has put in place a support structure for ex-offenders upon their release. Aftercare managers from Singapore After-Care Association and Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association are assigned to guide and help source for services required by ex-offenders for up to 6 months under the Case Management Framework. Services from various agencies include financial assistance, employment assistance and accommodation arrangement.

### **COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMMES**

7. Incarceration punishes not just the offender but also the family. The prison environment is also a highly artificial one that does not adequately prepare an offender for life outside the prison walls. For successful rehabilitation and reintegration to take place, it must be carried out in the community and with the support of the community. Hence, rather than directly releasing an offender without any strong support network, Community Based Programmes (CBP) serve to provide a graduated approach towards reintegration of an offender.

8. The spirit of CBP is to allow suitable offenders to serve the tail-end of their sentence in the community and also to involve the community, especially the offenders' families, in their rehabilitation and reintegration. For offenders who do not have supportive families, the help of halfway houses is enlisted to provide a caring and conducive environment for gradual reintegration. There are various CBP that offenders can undergo, namely, the Home Detention (HD) Scheme, the Work Release Scheme (WRS) and the Halfway House Schemes.

9. The following is a brief description of the various CBP:

a. Work Release Scheme (WRS)

The Community Supervision Centre (CSC) is a work release camp operated by SPS which houses suitable offenders at the tail-end of their sentence. These offenders will work during the day and return to the CSC after work. The CSC also functions as a reporting centre for offenders who are on other community-based programmes. Offenders with supportive families will subsequently be allowed to return home towards the end of the WRS.

b. Halfway House Schemes

Offenders of lower risk are emplaced on this scheme and will stay in halfway houses during the tail-end of their sentence. At the halfway houses, the offenders are engaged in work and treatment programmes. The halfway houses also serve to provide a conducive environment for reintegration of offenders without supportive families.

c. Home Detention (HD) Scheme

Some low-risk offenders are allowed to serve the tail-end of their sentence at home where

their families provide a warm and supportive environment for the offenders' re-integration. Offenders would either be engaged in work or pursue academic studies while on the HD scheme. Electronic tagging and monitoring is a mandatory component of the HD scheme. Random reporting at the Community Supervision Centre may also be required of the offenders.

10. To ensure that only suitable offenders are emplaced on CBP and for them to successfully complete CBP, SPS has in place a three-prong approach towards the placement and supervision of offenders on CBP, namely:

- a. A thorough selection process;
- b. Preparation at Pre-employment Centre;
- c. Community Supervision.

### **Thorough Selection Process**

11. All penal offenders upon admission are screened for eligibility for placement on one of the CBP. The eligibility screening is based on the criteria stipulated in the legislation.

12. Thereafter, the offender is assessed for suitability for placement on the CBP by Prison Officers of the institution in which he is housed. Principal considerations when assessing an offender's suitability are his likelihood of re-offending, propensity towards violence, sexual deviance, risk to society and his level of family support. The offender's responses towards rehabilitation during incarceration and general conduct in prison are also taken into consideration.

13. SPS also introduced the tool, Singapore Prisons Short Risk Scale<sup>1</sup> (SPSRS), to predict an offender's probability of re-offending. Offenders with a high risk of re-offending would usually not be considered for emplacement. For those who have known drug abuse history, an additional tool, the Drug Composite Scale<sup>2</sup> (DCS) would be administered to ascertain the offender's risk of going back to drugs. In addition, psychologists from SPS' Psychological and Counselling Services Branch would further assess the suitability of those who have exhibited violent and/or sexual tendencies.

14. The Programme Placement Panel (PPP), comprising the Superintendent of the prison as the Chairman, and other relevant officers, convenes monthly to discuss all eligible cases for placement on CBP. Thereafter the cases are forwarded to an Advisory Committee (formed by reputed members of public) for consideration. Director of Prisons then endorses the emplacement of the offenders, on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

### **Preparation at Pre-Emplacement Centre**

15. Offenders recommended for placement will then be transferred to the pre-employment centre one month before his date of emplacement. At the pre-employment centre, he will undergo a series of programmes to prepare him for re-integration.

16. The Rebuilding Lives Programme, comprising family intervention and other relapse prevention modules, is administered to offenders during the pre-employment phase. The objectives are (i) to prepare offenders going on CBP and their families adequately for their eventual reunion by equipping them with the relevant skills and knowledge; (ii) aid the offenders and their families in coping with the various issues and stressors during their emplacement on CBP, e.g. effective communication at

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1 The Singapore Prison Short Risk Scale (SPSRS) is a locally-normed tool derived from the Level of Service Inventory - Revised used to estimate risk of general re-offending. It contains 9 items of both historical and dynamic factors.

2 The Drug Composite Scale (DCS) is a tool used to estimate the risk of drug relapse for drug users. The score is calculated from the SPSRS, the Drug Abuse Screening Test, Drug Taking Confidence Questionnaire and Social Desirability Scale, some of which are locally derived scales.

home; (iii) rebuild or enhance the offenders' relationships with their families; and (iv) equip offenders with relapse prevention skills. With this programme booster, we seek to enhance the chances of these offenders successfully completing their CBP as well as reintegrating to society as responsible and contributing citizens after their full release.

17. Apart from the Rebuilding Lives programme, the offenders are also put through foundational skills training to enhance their employability and job-preparedness upon their release. These programmes include the Employability Skills training, interview skills and resum? writing, and basic IT skills training. At the pre-employment centre, potential employers will also be invited to conduct job vacancies briefing and job placement exercises to ensure that the offender is employed upon placement on CBP.

**Community Supervision**

18. Upon the placement of an offender on CBP, the Community Supervision Centre (CSC) undertakes his supervision throughout the placement period. Under the CSC structure, prison officers who traditionally perform their roles within a prison setting, now take on the role of Reintegration Officers and they perform multi-faceted roles in the community. This ranges from reintegrative functions such as liaison with inmates' families and community partners, engaging inmates in regular dialogues, to supervision and disciplinary roles such as conducting work site visits, halfway house visits and handling minor violations of regulations.

19. In order to ensure that the Reintegration Officers know their offenders prior to their placement on CBP, the officers engage the offenders one month prior to their placement in the pre-employment centre. Information and knowledge of these offenders would also be handed over by the officers looking after the offenders during the in-care phase to the reintegration officers through case conferences. As such, the knowledge and rapport built up over time is carried over into the community supervision phase.

**STATISTICS PERTAINING TO CBP**

20. The completion rates<sup>3</sup> of offenders who had undergone CBP had been healthy, being generally maintained above 80% for the last 5 years (see Table 2 below). The healthy rates of completion enjoyed by SPS could be partially attributed to the relatively stringent criteria for placement on CBP. Going forward, a challenge for SPS would be to allow more inmates to benefit from a period of placement on CBP prior to release, whilst maintaining the completion rates at a healthy level.

**Table 2: Completion Rates for various CBP for 2004 - 2008**

CBP	Completion Rate for Year / %				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
HD	98.7	96.0	96.7	98.3	98.5
RS	97.1	100.0	100.0	88.2	89.5
WRS-HWH	93.6	84.7	84.9	81.9	90.8
WRS	86.1	88.3	82.8	79.4	90.0
HWH	95.7	92.3	100.0	70.0	81.3
LT-HWH	98.8	95.8	93.3	89.6	90.9

3 Completion rate is the ratio of inmates who have successfully completed the programme over the total number of inmates emplaced on the same programme (less number of inmates who did not complete the programme due to factor(s) outside their control (e.g. medical reasons, etc)).

4 Caution needs to be exercised in the interpretation of such statistics. Similar to efforts elsewhere which seek to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of prisons-based programmes, the above comparison suffers from a lack of control group and self-selection bias. Generally, inmates who are selected for such programmes are better behaved in prison, display more positive attitude, and have fewer criminal antecedents. Hence, the observation should not be interpreted as a scientific validation.

21. SPS defines recidivism rate as the percentage of local offenders detained, convicted and imprisoned again for a new offence within two years from their release. Offenders who were emplaced on CBP had consistently performed better than offenders who were not placed on CBP<sup>4</sup>. For the latest year of comparison in 2006, recidivism rates for offenders who had been emplaced on CBP was 12.9%. The overall recidivism rate for the general population was 25.1%.

### **CONCLUSION**

22. SPS believes that for rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into the community to be effective, a coordinated systemic effort is required. Hence, early release programmes do not function independently, but are set within the overall Rehabilitation Framework. Within the prison system, inmates go through various rehabilitation programmes at each incarceration stage. In the community, SPS works with community partners and harnesses community resources to facilitate the ex-offenders' reintegration. At the national level, SPS endeavours to change society's mindset towards giving ex-offenders a second chance through the Yellow Ribbon Project. Through these efforts, SPS has embarked on an on-going journey with a rehabilitation focus, constantly seeking to be more effective in rehabilitating offenders and steering them towards becoming responsible citizens.