

OFFENDER REHABILITATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND PREVENTING RE-OFFENDING IN SINGAPORE

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I. THE SINGAPORE CONTEXT

A. Singapore the City-State

Singapore is an island city-state located at the southern tip of the Malayan Peninsula, lying south of Malaysia and north of Indonesia's Riau Islands. At just 710 km² (274 miles²), it is the smallest nation in Southeast Asia. (In comparison, combined, the five boroughs of New York City are slightly larger at 790 km².) Unsurprisingly, Singapore is also the most densely populated country in the world.

In 1819, the British East India Company, led by Sir Stamford Raffles, established a trading post on the island, which was used as a port along the spice route. Singapore became one of the most important commercial and military centres of the British Empire, and the hub of British power in Southeast Asia. During the Second World War, the British colony was occupied by the Japanese after the Battle of Singapore, which Winston Churchill called "Britain's greatest defeat". Singapore reverted to British rule in 1945, immediately after the war.

Eighteen years later, in 1963, the city-state, having achieved independence from Britain, merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the Malayan Federation. However, the merger proved unsuccessful. Less than two years later, it seceded from federation and became an independent republic on 9 August 1965, and was admitted to the United Nations on 21 September of that year.

Since independence, Singapore's national income has risen dramatically. Foreign direct investment and industrialization created a modern economy focused on industry, financial services, education and urban planning. According to the International Monetary Fund, Singapore was the fifth wealthiest country in the world in 2007, in terms of GDP (PPP) per capita. In December 2008, the foreign exchange reserves of this small island nation stood at around \$174 billion (source: Monetary Authority of Singapore, www.mas.gov.sg). In 2009, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Singapore the tenth most expensive city in the world in which to live — the third in Asia, after Tokyo and Osaka.

With approximately five million residents in 2008, Singapore's population is highly diverse. People claiming Chinese heritage form a majority (75%), with large populations of people of Malay (14%), Indian (9%) and other ethnic origins. English is the official and working language. Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil are also widely spoken.

Singapore is a parliamentary republic, patterned after the British Westminster model. Its legal system is based on English Common Law traditions. Singapore is well known for her corruption-free national, public and corporate governance. Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perception Index ranks Singapore as the fourth least-corrupt country in the world, after Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden (joint first), and before Switzerland (fifth), Germany (14th), the United Kingdom (16th), Japan (18th) and the USA (joint 18th).

Singapore has a highly developed market-based economy, and is consistently rated as one of the most business-friendly economies in the world. Her economy depends heavily on exports and refining imported goods, especially in manufacturing, with significant electronics, petroleum refining, chemicals, mechanical engineering and pharmaceutical industrial sectors. Singapore has one of the busiest ports and airports in the world, and is an important global financial centre. It operates the fourth largest foreign exchange trading centre after London, New York City and Tokyo.

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B. Police and Crime Rate

The overall level of crime in Singapore is low. With 670 cases of reported crime per 100,000 population in 2008 (source: Singapore Police Force, www.spf.gov.sg), the crime rate in Singapore is one of the lowest in the world. Incidents of violent crime are rare in Singapore. In 2008, there were 0.54 murders and 90 violent crimes, per 100,000 population. Again, very low numbers, and certainly one of the lowest in the developed world. Conscientious law enforcement together with very strict drug and gun laws, which include capital punishment, mean that drug abuse and firearms are limited in the country.

The Singaporean Police is consistently professional and any report involving a crime incident will be handled in accordance with prescribed standards. Police assistance can be readily obtained by dialling the standard emergency number. Every district within Singapore has a dedicated neighbourhood police centre, and any neighbourhood police centre will accept the filing of a police report, not just the district where the crime took place.

Selected International Comparisons of Murder & Incarceration Rates (source: UN Human Development Report, www.unodp.org)		
	Murders/ 100,000 Population (latest available, 2000- 2004)	Prisoners/ 100,000 Population (2007)
Singapore	0.5 (2008)	250
Japan	1.0 (2007)	62
Australia	1.3	126
France	1.6	85
Canada	1.9	107
UK	2.1	124
USA	5.6	738

C. The Singapore Prison Service

Singapore’s penal history can be traced to 1925 with the setting up of penal settlements to house convicts transported from British India. The Singapore Prison Service was institutionalised as a department on its own in 1946 when Mr GE Bayly became its first Commissioner.

1. Changi Prison

Built in 1936 as a civilian prison, Changi Prison was the last prison constructed by the British in Singapore. During World World Two, following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the Japanese military detained about 3,000 civilians in Changi Prison, which was built to house only 600 prisoners. The Japanese also used the Selarang Barracks, near the Prison, as a prisoner-of-war camp, holding some 50,000 Allied — predominantly British and Australian — soldiers. Although POWs were rarely if ever held in the civilian prison, the name “Changi” became synonymous, erroneously, in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere with the POW camp.

2. The Singapore Prison Service Today

Since Singapore’s independence, the Singapore Prison Service has undergone tremendous changes as she remade herself, time and again, into what is what is today a highly progressive prison administration.

The Singapore Prison Service, in her modern guise, is a department within the Ministry of Home Affairs. Together with the Police, Immigrations, Civil Defence and Central Narcotics Departments, we make up what is popularly known as the *Home Team*, a collection of governmental agencies dedicated to safeguarding the safety and internal security of Singapore.

Today, the Singapore Prison Service operates a total of 13 penal institutions and drug rehabilitation centres, and provides safe and secure custody for about 12,000 inmates.

3. Purposes of Imprisonment

Put in the simplest terms, the Singapore Prison Service exists to protect society and to make Singapore a safer place for all. This is our mission. The Service also aspires to become an exemplary Prison Service; to run a model prison system, and to be a shining light in the world of prison systems.

In order for us to achieve our mission, and move closer to our vision, it is essential that all in the Service possess a clear understanding of the basic purposes for putting people in prison. The Singapore Prison Service subscribes to four purposes of imprisonment.

First is *Punishment*. The Singapore Prison Service administers the custodial sentences, and the corporal and capital punishment meted out by Singaporean Courts. Imprisonment is punishment. As such, Singaporean prisons are, first and foremost, spartan, and the regime of incarceration, strict.

Second is *Incapacitation*. By incarcerating criminals, especially the hard-core and long-termed imprisoned, the Service denies them an opportunity to re-offend.

Third is *Deterrence*. Life in prison must never be better than life outside. By running a strict and stringent regime, The Singapore Prison Service deters those in custody from wanting to re-offend after release, and the like-minded outside prison from doing similar harm.

And the fourth is *Reformation*. For those willing and able to turn their backs on a criminal career, the Singapore Prison Service offer rehabilitative programming and aftercare support to help them reintegrate into our communities after release and live crime-free lives.

Punishment, incapacitation, deterrence and reformation, they all prevent crime and reduce harm. One less crime means one less victim of crime, and one less harm committed. Clearly, the more successful the Singapore Prison Service is at our work, the more society is protected, and the safer Singapore becomes.

4. Business Model

The Singapore Prison Service has three core business areas: (a) Executing Justice, (b) Reducing Reoffending, and (c) Preventing Offending.

The first business area, *Executing Justice*, is our bread and butter. Here, we serve mainly the Courts and other law enforcement agencies. We execute the sentences and corporal punishment ordered by Singapore's Criminal Courts, and also provide effective and efficient remand services to fellow law enforcements bodies. The Courts see us as reliable partners, and Judges are fully confident that convicted persons sent on to Singaporean prisons will always be treated humanely and dealt with in an entirely professional manner. The Police and other law enforcement agencies which rely on us to hold their remand suspects do so in full confidence that their detainees are safe, secure and properly treated.

The Singapore Prison Service's second business area is that of *Reducing Re-Offending*. Reforming the ex-offender, so that he does not offend again, involves both rehabilitation and reintegration.

The time in prison avails us with a golden opportunity for rehabilitation. For the deserving and suitably motivated, the time spent in detention can be profitably deployed into unlearning previously destructive behaviours, learning a trade or skill, or resuming formal education. Indeed, serving time should never be a waste of time.

Every year, more than 10,000 prison inmates complete their prison sentences and return to Singaporean communities. If the Singapore Prison Service is able, through our various programmes both inside and outside prison walls, to dissuade them from re-offending, we can prevent many thousands of new crimes every year.

The Singapore Prison Service also aims to *Prevent Offending*, our third business area, in two ways. One, by not waiting for the person-at-risk, who is a potential prisoner, to commit a crime that lands him in prison before we start on his rehabilitation, but by intervening further upstream and preventing him from earning his prison sentence in the first place. And two, by leveraging on the considerable criminal knowledge that

we have in our prisons, the Singapore Prison Service helps the Police and other law enforcement solve and prevent crime.

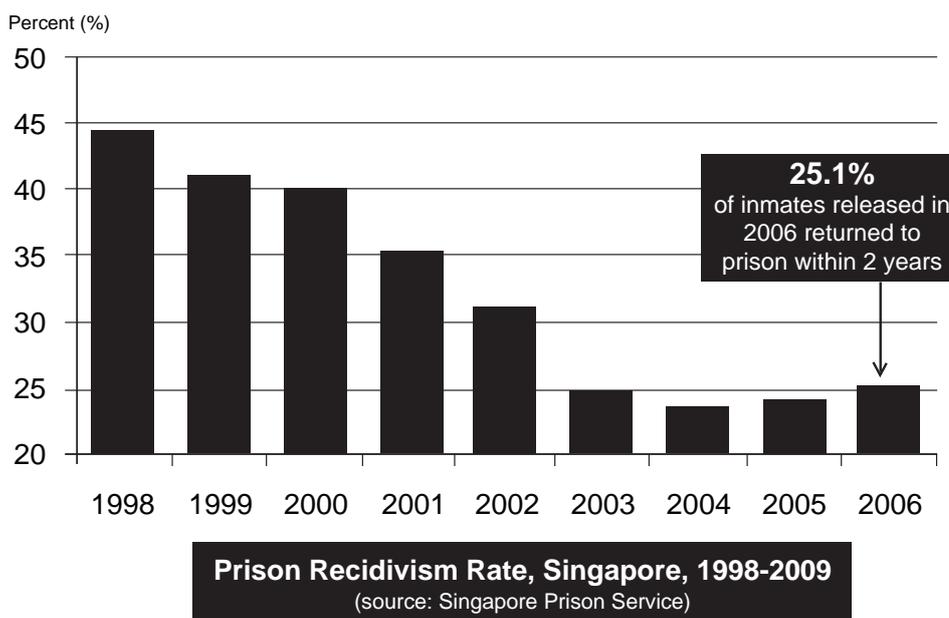
Again, just as with executing justice and reducing re-offending, the more successful the Singapore Prison Service is at preventing offending, the safer Singapore becomes.

II. REDUCING RE-OFFENDING

Reducing re-offending is a core business of the Singapore Prison Service. The reformation of offenders so that they do not re-offend after release, through rehabilitation and reintegration, is perhaps the most difficult and challenging task for any correctional service. Thankfully, the Singapore Prison Service has enjoyed some success in this area in recent times, and continues to make practice innovation.

It certainly takes a village to turn an ex-offender from a potential re-offender into a “never-again-offender”. We recognise that nothing short of an integrated and multi-faceted approach is required to reduce re-offending, one that involves not just the offenders and the Prison Service, but also other government and non-governmental organisations, the community, as well as families of offenders. This has been the operating philosophy for reducing recidivism in Singapore.

Recidivism, defined as the percentage of every cohort released who re-offend and subsequently return to prison, is a key performance indicator for the Singapore Prison Service. We use a 2-year rate, and have been tracking it since 1998. Encouragingly, we are witnessing a sustained improvement in the recidivism rate. It has fallen to an all-time low of 23.7% for the cohort released in 2004, from what was 44% for the batch released in 1998.



A. Home and Work

There is really no secret to reducing recidivism. It is well known, and universally accepted, that family ties and gainful employment are the two key ingredients stopping an offender from re-offending.

An offender who has family that still cares about him, who visit him in prison; an offender who has family that he cares about, children or parents, or siblings perhaps; will have a much higher chance of not re-offending. We also know that the longer an ex-offender is able to remain in gainful employment after release, the better his chance of not returning to criminal behaviour.

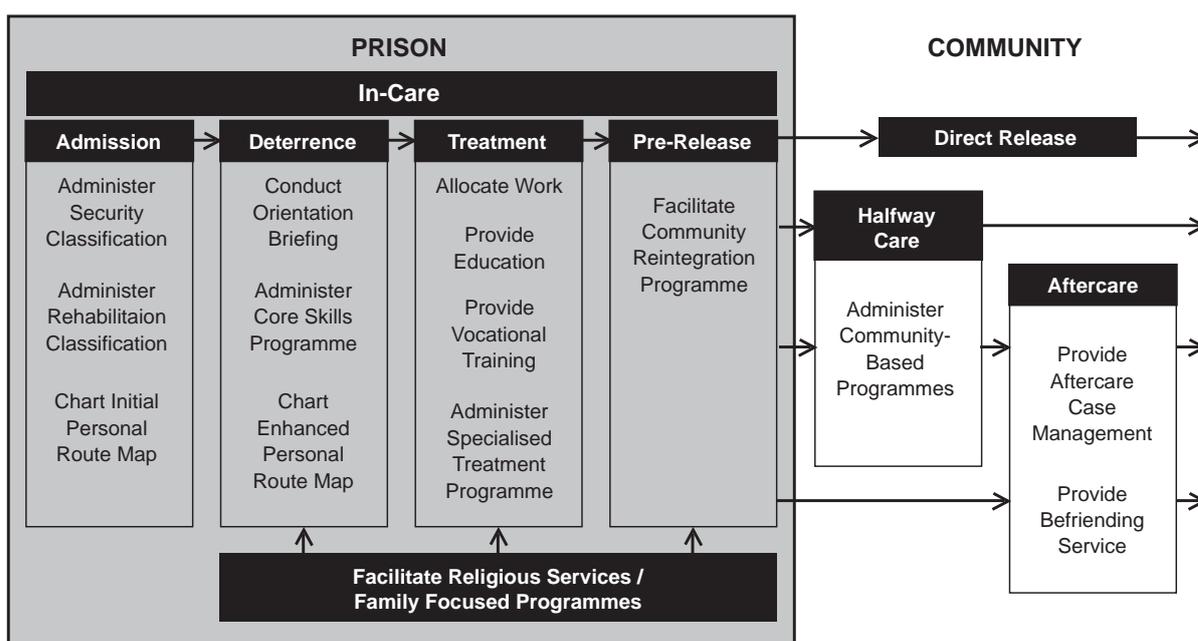
The Singapore Prison Service therefore targets our rehabilitation and re-entry efforts at these two areas — Home and Work. We go upstream, and as much as possible, help keep the family bonds of the offender

intact. We encourage visits and letter writing, and try to minimise the impact of incarceration on the members of his family, who are of course innocent. Also, keeping the children of the incarcerated in school is especially important if we are not to perpetuate a vicious cycle across generations.

At the same time, we go downstream to prepare the offender for employment while he is still serving time, and if necessary, to place the offender in a job even before he is released.

B. The Rehabilitation Framework

The Singapore Prison Service's *Rehabilitation Framework*, first developed in 2000, guides us in our offender reformation effort. The Framework articulates a structured and comprehensive approach for all rehabilitation efforts, and ensures that our limited resources are optimized by allocating programmes based on risks and needs.



The Framework dictates that we seek to maximize inmate reintegration potential through the building of social ties and the delivery of programmes targeted at improving offender attitudes and skills. We also aim to ensure aftercare support for ex-offenders through the seamless transfer of care of offenders and integrated support of offenders in the community.

Working closely with other government organizations and community partners, rehabilitation begins from the time offenders first enter the prison system, and continues even after their release. With such a *Through-Care* approach in mind, the SPS' rehabilitation framework consists of three distinct phases, namely, *In-Care*, *Halfway Care* and *Aftercare*.

1. In-Care Phase – The Period in Prison

During the period in custody, which we call the *In-Care* phase, offenders are enrolled in rehabilitation programmes which address criminogenic risks and needs. Formal prison programming aims to encourage change by targeting the offenders' belief and value systems, motivation levels and criminogenic needs. To prepare offenders for reintegration, we also aim to help them forge strong family bonds and increase their employability.

All offenders entering the Singapore prison system are subjected to classification at admission. At this point, every one is given an initial security, as well as a rehabilitation, grading, both dependent on assessments of the risks and rehabilitative needs presented. The rehabilitation classification so derived then informs a *Personal Route Map* that will be charted for every offender. The *Personal Route Map* details the appropriate rehabilitative programmes and treatment plan, and is tailored to individual needs.

(i) *Treatment Stage – Specialized Treatment Programmes*

During *treatment stage*, offenders are equipped with relevant skills and knowledge to enhance their reintegration potential.

The Singapore Prison Service administers a suite of *Specialised Treatment Programmes*, developed and delivered by prison counsellors and psychologists, which target criminogenic risks such as substance abuse, violent behaviour, sexual offending and criminal thinking. Delivered either individually or through group sessions, these programmes aim to increase offenders' motivation to change, to help them to understand the roots of their offending behaviours, and to equip them with the necessary skills to avoid relapse.

(ii) *Work, Vocational Training and Employment*

Gainful employment after release is an important protective factor against recidivism. Recognising this, the Singapore Prison Service invests heavily in preparing the offender for post-release employment even while he is still serving time, and if necessary, will place the offender in a job even before he or she is released.

To do all these, the Singapore Prison Service relies on the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), numerous individual volunteers and social service organizations in what must necessarily be a collective community effort.

SCORE is an independent statutory body, and Prisons' main partner, for providing vocational training and employment services to inmates and ex-offenders. SCORE's energies are focused on enhancing the employability of offenders and preparing them for the eventual reintegration into the national workforce.

Although prisoners in Singapore are not compelled to work during incarceration, many do. In our prisons, work is used to instil the sense of responsibility, discipline and self-respect that comes from gainful employment.

SCORE, working with Prisons, either manages or facilitates the operation of industrial workshops within our prisons. In Singaporean prisons, we operate both traditional industries — like our industrial-sized bakery and laundry (the largest in Southeast Asia) — and new economy ones, like the Call Centre and SCORE's Digital Media Design business.

In 2007, more than 4,000 inmates worked in SCORE's industrial workshops inside our prisons. SCORE also trained 5,500 inmates for post-release employment, and placed 2,500 of them into jobs even before release.

SCORE adopts a two-pronged approach in relation to maximizing the employability of prisoners. Through vocational training and work-skill upgrading, offenders are made "ready for work" while still in custody. At the same time, actively signing up potential employers, maintaining a job bank and on-going job placements ensure that "work is ready" for offenders at the time of release.

2. The Prison School

In addition to work, The Singapore Prison Service has found education to be a good transformational tool, particularly for younger offenders, and is especially proud of our *Prison School*. Run like a regular school, the Prison School offers over 500 young inmates another chance at formal education every year. There, they study and sit for both junior and senior high-school diplomas.

Year after year, student inmates attending the Prison School continue to surprise us by achieving results that are comparable with, and sometimes often better than, those turned in by mainstream schools. Many of the inmate graduates from the Prison School have been successfully admitted into Singaporean polytechnics and universities after release.

3. Fostering Family Relationships

We know that positive relations and family support are critical to the successful reintegration of offenders. To keep family ties intact, and also ensure that relationships are not irrevocably strained by a

member's imprisonment, the Singapore Prison Service actively engages families of the incarcerated in a variety of ways. Our aim is to help families cope better with a member's incarceration and, ultimately, to build supportive family networks for offenders to return to upon release. Many families have benefited from our family programmes.

4. Visitations

We encourage letter writing and regular prison visits. The inconvenience of travel to prisons for face-to-face visits is a commonly-cited deterrent to regular family visitations in many countries. Although distances are short in Singapore, the Singapore Prison Service still makes wide use of video-conferencing to make prison visitation a near painless process. We have established, at considerable cost, satellite visit centres, typically located close to major underground stations, which open early and also on weekends, where friends and relatives can go to for remote teleconferencing visits with their loved ones in prison.

5. Helping Families of the Incarcerated

When someone breaks the law, commits a crime, does a harm, he or she would usually be caught by the Police, prosecuted, tried and, if found guilty, convicted and sent to prison. Most people would think that this is the end of the story.

The truth is that almost every prisoner has family — parents, siblings, spouse or children — who are, of course, innocent, but would nonetheless still suffer the impact of the prisoner's incarceration. Incarceration of a family member not just creates emotion strain, but often also financial difficulties for the families of prisoners. Many need help and will require our assistance.

In this connection, the Singapore Prison Service has, in 2006, set up *Family Resource Centres* in several of our prisons to provide assistance and support specifically to the families of offenders. These Centres, outsourced to community welfare organizations, are able to offer information and referral services, short-term financial assistance, and even case management services for families with more complex needs. Our community partners who operate the Family Service Centres also conduct family-focussed programmes on various topics ranging from communications to reconciliation issues, to parenting and marital issues, and serve as points of contacts for the families to turn to in times of need and crisis.

6. Halfway Care Phase – Staged Release Back to Communities

(i) *Community-Based Rehabilitation*

No matter how comprehensive rehabilitation programming efforts are within prison, the prison environment remains removed and remote from regular life. Successful reintegration can be aided by having offender rehabilitation continue into the community. Community-based rehabilitation is used by the Singapore Prison Service to ease the transition of offenders from an institutional setting back into a communal one. Our programmes are designed to place the responsibility for reintegration squarely on the offender, while leveraging on community resources to achieve the best rehabilitation situation for the reforming prisoner.

Rather than directly releasing an offender who, due to years of incarceration, often has little or no ready support system in the community, the Singapore Prison Service uses several *Halfway Care* schemes to effect a more graduated re-entry. This allows an offender the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge learnt in prison in a normalized environment.

During the *Halfway Care* phase, suitable offenders are allowed to serve the tail-end of their sentences in the community. Our various Community-based Programmes cater specifically to the needs of different categories of offenders. Those with family support can return to their homes, with electronic monitoring, under the *Home Detention Scheme*. Longer-term offenders and those who do not qualify for home detention can be emplaced on the *Work Release Scheme*. Privately-run *Halfway Houses* provide a caring and conducive environment for gradual reintegration.

(ii) *Community-Based Programmes*

(a) Home Detention Scheme

The Home Detention Scheme provides an avenue for the early release of offenders who are typically of low risk and most amenable to successful re-integration. Offenders 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. These may include keeping curfew hours and periodic mandatory appearance at designated reporting centres. Involvement in full time employment or education is compulsory for prisoners undergoing home detention.

(b) Halfway House Scheme

The Halfway House Scheme offers offenders 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.

Halfway Houses, typically operated by social service or religious organizations, provide hostel-like lodging for offenders. Contracted by the Singapore Prison Service, these Halfway Houses take in offenders placed on the Scheme for up to a year, and are selected because they are able to avail their residents with a safe and nurturing environment. Offenders 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

As its name suggests, the Work Release Scheme allows suitable offenders to leave prison premises for employment during the day, while requiring them to go back to a low-security prison in the evenings. Contingent on their progress, offenders placed on the Scheme may graduate to the Home Detention or Halfway House Schemes.

We have found that such a scheme enhances self-esteem, gives the offender a chance to contribute to society by being productive, inculcates good work habits, and develops a sense of responsibility as the offender supports his family with the wages he earned.

7. The Singapore Experience So Far

To date, The Singapore Prison Service has emplaced some 26,000 offenders on our various Community-Based Programmes. Our experience so far has been encouraging. Completion rates have been consistently high, at about 96%. Offenders serving community-based rehabilitation are invariably lesser recidivists compared to those who do not participate. Also, survivability (that is, the period of desistance to future re-offending) is also longer.

In Singapore, community-based rehabilitation not only frees up prison capacity, but also encourages lower recidivism.

III. PREPARING THE COMMUNITY

The best rehabilitation regime during incarceration is of no use if ex-offenders find themselves rejected at every turn when they are released into the larger community. It is a sad fact that many ex-offenders have to live with the stigma of having served time behind bars. Almost invariably, they are discriminated against, ostracized, and generally looked down upon. Some will, for one reason or another, return to crime, cause another harm, get arrested again, and repeat the cycle.

Like it or not, prisoners eventually get released and return to free society. Accordingly then, conditions in the community must be conducive for re-integration if the aim is for re-offending to be reduced. Rehabilitation and preparing the inmate when still in prison is only one part of the equation. The other must be the preparedness of wider community to accept and accommodate released prisoners willing to live law-abiding lives. Doing one while neglecting the other will, certainly, be counter-productive.

Alas, preparing the community and creating conditions that encourage sustained desistance from criminal behaviour by ex-offenders is a difficult, complex and, often, seemingly insurmountable task. A task which involves political support, multi-agency collaboration, grassroots activism and the active engagement of civil society. That as it may, any correctional service hoping to reduce re-offending must make a concerted effort at preparing the community to receive the prisoners that it is about to release. For some years now, the Singapore Prison Service has invested considerable resources and energy into this area.

A. The CARE Network

The Singapore Prison Service, for reasons of jurisdictional and resource constraints, must necessarily concentrate its efforts at offender reform within the prisons. However, the task of reducing re-offending, clearly, cannot be confined within prisons, or be left solely to prison administration. Inevitably, successful rehabilitation and reintegration requires multi-agency, government-community and public-private co-operation.

Indeed, this has been our approach in Singapore, and the motivation for the creation of the CARE (Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-Offenders) Network. Formed in May 2000, CARE brings together the main players, both in government and in the community, who are responsible for offender reintegration in Singapore. The Singapore Prison Service provides leadership for the CARE Network, whose other members are the Ministry of Home Affairs; SCORE, the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports; the Singapore Aftercare Association; the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association, The National Council for Social Services, the Industrial and Services Co-operative Society (ISCOS, which is a co-operative for ex-offenders).

The C.A.R.E. Network is an alliance which pools resources and coordinates activities, in the belief that we are far more effective acting together, rather than going it alone. C.A.R.E.'s vision of "Hope, Confidence and Opportunities for Ex-offenders" cannot be any clearer and is in need of fulfilling now, more than ever.

The CARE Network is perhaps best known for the *Yellow Ribbon Project*. Less well known, but no less successful, is the *Case Management Framework* that was conceived and implemented by the Network. The Case Management Framework has provided, and continues to give, aftercare support to more than 5,000 ex-offenders.

B. The Yellow Ribbon Project

Regrettably, the suspicion and prejudice that ex-offenders face after release can often be more punishing than the prison sentence itself. Many ex-offenders find themselves literally stepping into a second prison. This time it would be a prison with invisible bars, of mistrust, discrimination and even contempt.

Led by the Singapore Prison Service, the Yellow Ribbon Project is now in its sixth year. Through the Yellow Ribbon Project we hope to promote a more accepting society, one that is willing to give ex-offenders a second chance at making good. In order to reduce re-offending, it is important that we help unlock the second prison for our inmates, even as we let them out of the physical one.

The Yellow Ribbon Project, the only national second chance campaign of its kind anywhere in the world, exists to bring hope, confidence and opportunity to ex-offenders determined to lead crime-free lives. Its purpose is to generate *awareness* of the difficulties ex-offenders face after release, encourage *acceptance* of their return to society, and inspire public *action* to support their reintegration.

In 2008, the Yellow Ribbon Project distributed more than 340,000 yellow ribbon packs islandwide, signed up 133 new employers willing to hire ex-offenders, and collaborated with 45 community partners in organizing various Yellow Ribbon activities.

It was thus most encouraging when Lee Hsien Loong, the Prime Minister of Singapore, agreed to front our main Yellow Ribbon event in September 2007: a mass walk followed with a carnival at the Changi Prison Complex. In a wonderful show of community support for the Yellow Ribbon Project, more than 10,000 people turned up on a beautiful Sunday morning in their walking shoes and had a terrific time. That day, we all took double encouragement from the Prime Minister's words to 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.*"

In Singapore, September is "Yellow Ribbon Month". Every September, we organise numerous community activities, including concerts, walks and runs, art exhibitions, and other public outreach events to spread the Yellow Ribbon message. Together with a carefully orchestrated media campaign, the Yellow Ribbon Project has become a national movement in Singapore and a runaway success.

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*.

The Fund, set up to support community-initiated programmes which help ex-offenders and their families, has raised more than \$5million. The Fund does commendable work supporting and sustaining the Yellow Ribbon effort, and also helps deserving ex-offenders and their families directly, to the tune well in excess of \$1.5m in 2008.

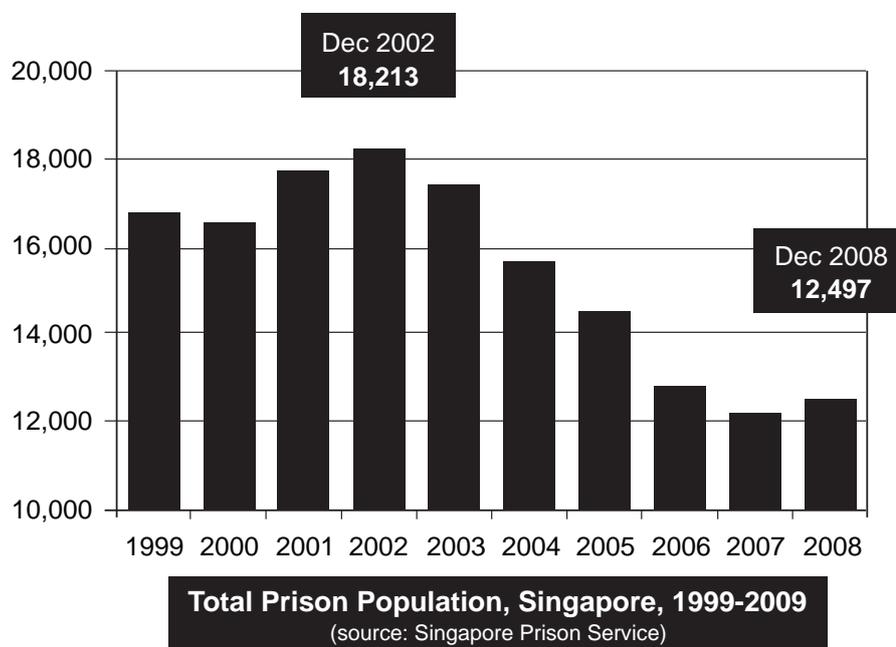
The response from volunteers and employers in Singapore to the Yellow Ribbon Campaign has been no less heartening. At end 2008, some 1,700 volunteers, almost as many as regular prison staff, come into our prisons and detention centres on their own volition to providing training and counselling for prison inmates. Almost 2,000 Singaporean employers are registered in our job bank, ready to offer employment to inmates and ex-offenders.

A wide-ranging survey conducted by the Singapore Prison Service in 2006 to gauge public perception of our community engagement initiatives found that more than 80% of the Singaporean public indicated awareness of the Yellow Ribbon objectives and, more encouragingly, about 70% expressed willingness to accept ex-offenders either as friends or colleagues. These findings were replicated in later surveys ran in 2007 and 2008, offering broad indications that the Yellow Ribbon Project has been consistently successfully at engendering awareness, acceptance and public action in support of offender reformation.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. The Smart Thing to Do

Today, about 12,000 men and women are incarcerated in Singaporean prisons. At about 250 per 100,000 population, it is a high imprisonment rate, generally indicative of Singapore's tough stance on crime. However, the inmate population has been on a steady decline after peaking at more than 18,000 in 2002. More encouragingly, we are witnessing a sustained improvement in the recidivism rate, which has fallen to record low levels.



Serving time should never be a waste of time. The period of incarceration allows us in the Singapore Prison Service an opportunity to work at reforming lives, at knocking some sense into the inmates, at showing them that crime does not pay, at teaching them a marketable skill, at giving them an education, at helping them to have another shot at life. The Singapore Prison Service does all this with one end in mind – to reduce the chance of a prisoner re-offending after release.

Why? Because one less recidivist means one less crime, means one less victim of crime, means less harm caused, means a safer Singapore for all. Offender reform is really the smart and practical thing to do.

B. It Takes A Village

Rehabilitation and reintegration are the two key ingredients for successful offender reform. Both 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 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.

The Singapore experience, in recent times, at reducing reoffending has been an encouraging one. Crucially, the Singapore Prison Service chose, early on, to assume leadership for this enterprise, and has continued to plot, strategize, innovate and invest our energies and resources in finding new and more effective ways of dissuading re-offending, collaborating with all who share the desire for a crime-free society.

C. The Captains of Lives

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

The officers and staff of the Singapore Prison Service style ourselves as the *Captains in the lives* of offenders placed in our custody. We are a key partner in criminal justice. We protect society through the safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders, co-operating in prevention and aftercare.

In this way, we seek to build a secure and exemplary prison system.