

Second Chances

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Single-Year Project

AREA OF CONCERN

Ever since the birth of this project and our numerous discussions with our beneficiary, the Singapore After-Care Association, we have realised that the reintegration of ex-offenders is one of the pertinent issues that Singaporean society faces today. According to Industrial & Services Co-operative Society's (ISCOS) executive director Lisa Lim in a Straits Times article, ex-offenders are "lost" when they are released, especially when they have little support from those around them due to prison officers serving their needs instead of their families.

In this process, ex-offenders feel isolated from the general populace, causing them to lack self-confidence and fall into a cycle of self-defeat. This reduces interaction between ex-offenders and the wider society, culminating in socially-accepted discrimination that prevents them from progressing in society. Recidivism rates increase as a result. 3 out of 10 offenders were sent back to prison for repeat offenses in 2015, a 9-year high. Such an issue prevents ex-offenders from contributing to society.

Although this has been identified as a large problem in Singapore, actions and initiatives to help such beneficiaries have not been effective at resolving these issues, especially at the student level. Issues like sensitivity regarding their identities and a lack of interest due to little relevance hamper the progress that such organisations make. Not many student-initiated projects have worked with both ex-offenders and the general public, hence our project is necessary to facilitate understanding and awareness between the student population and ex-offenders as a conduit of mutual empathy.

In this light, Second Chances chooses to use a unique range of methods to reach these two communities who we reach out to, both to provide opportunities for ex-offenders to interact with the community and bring attention to this important problem. In this process, ex-offenders can be better reintegrated into a society in which they can actively contribute and not feel ostracised in.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

After holding discussions with our beneficiary, we identified 3 challenges.

Firstly, SACA, which so far faces a **\$300,000** deficit in its annual **\$1.6 million** yearly operating budget, had mentioned how they were lacking in funding, as their main focus is not on fundraising, but instead on working individual cases for their clients.

Secondly, despite being around for more than 60 years, a majority of the public is still **unaware about the Singapore After-Care Association**, and the services it provides for the ex-offenders, thus **making it difficult** for the organisation to achieve its main purpose of **reintegrating ex-offenders back into society**.

Lastly, SACA **loses contact with their clients**, the ex-offenders, after they complete their sentences, making it **difficult for them to identify factors causing them to reoffend**.

UNDERLYING PROBLEM

Given that there is an **increasing difficulty in reintegration** for ex-offenders, and a **lack of awareness of this issue** amongst members of society, how can we help **identify the shortfalls** that **explain why such individuals** are not **getting reintegrated back into society**, and **raise awareness** of these issues within the public sphere?

PLAN OF ACTION

Dates (2018)	Progress	Objectives
Jan - Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online research, news articles - Meetings with Singapore After-Care Association and New Life Stories - Obtained brochures and publicity materials for fundraising sales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand problems faced by ex-offenders - Plan activities more targeted towards identified problem - Discuss PoA
April	<p>Movie-Screening (26/4/2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Movie screening (Marvel's <i>Infinity War</i>) at Capitol Theatre on opening day - Interaction between volunteers, ex-offenders' families and public - MP for Yishun Mr Louis Ng gave a speech beforehand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High-publicity activity to raise awareness - Movie allowed participants to bond - Gave ex-offenders a night of fun and joy
May - Jun	<p>Second Chances Blog</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Essays written by ex-offenders - Showcase hopes and aspirations - Vetted blog posts - Designed and published blog - Added forewords to link stories to their predicament - Scheduled blog posts on website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness about their journey - Reveal their true personality - How their dreams relate to the public - Strike empathy with public - Show how public can help them achieve <p>Through sorting and analysing the essays for the blog, we identified the gaps and reasons as to why these ex-offenders repeat or even</p>

		<p>commit these offences. From family issues to mixing with the wrong company, a multitude of different key issues cause ex-offenders to be unable to reintegrate back into society.</p>
<p>Aug</p>	<p>Mr. Bean Fundraising Sale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contacted Mr. Bean for sponsorship - Sale of Mr Bean food items - Distribution of pamphlets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call for volunteers through pamphlets - Bring publicity within the school - Change student attitudes towards ex-offenders - Collect funds to host future interaction sessions - Educate students on understanding the plight of the ex-offenders

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Date	Progress
Dec 2017	Formation of core team
Apr 2018	SACA Movie-Screening Event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reached out to 60 ex-offenders and their families - 8 volunteers at event
May 2018	Planning of blog with SACA
Jun 2018	Vetting of blog posts, publishing of blog <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 posts to date - Approximately Bviewers
Aug 2018	Mr Bean Fundraising sales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reached out to approximately 200 students in Hwa Chong Institution - B volunteers helped to facilitate sales - Raised \$300

PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We have managed to raise **\$300.00** for SACA through our school-based fundraising event. To facilitate with the events that we organised, we recruited a total of **10** volunteers. Through immersing themselves in these events, the student volunteers were also able to learn more about our cause. On the online blog, there are currently **10** posts that have been put up on it, with each being posted on a weekly basis. We also have more than **1000** viewers to date.

2. REFLECTIONS

Before we had begun working on this project, we all had a common **negative misconception** of ex-offenders. However, we soon realised that they are just like every one of us, the only difference being that they made foolish mistakes which greatly affected their future. It is inevitable that people like us will make many mistakes in life. Furthermore, our interactions with them only served to **reinforce our view** that the mistakes these individuals made were but immature decisions, for they did not show any rudeness whatsoever in their actions, but instead **were polite and respectful in their mannerisms**. As such, we as a group feel that it is unfair to have a single mistake stemming from pure mischievousness resulting in a person's reputation being ruined for life. Our experiences have proved that many ex-offenders are not only aware of their mistakes, but have a **renewed passion to succeed in life**. Therefore, we feel that we should all the more **give them the opportunity to excel**.

3. SCOPE OF IMPACT

Community impact: Members of the public are able to understand more about SACA and learn more about the life of ex-offenders through collection of essays written by the ex-offenders, depicting about the life they had in prison, and therefore, appealing to the emotions of the readers. We hope that the public are more well-versed on the prevalence of the issues that ex-offenders face when in our society, and that they can continue to support the Singapore After-Care Association.

Community Involvement:

We managed to get a total of **4 core team members**, and **4 volunteers** from Hwa Chong Institution to assist us at the charity movie screening. Through a briefing conducted by staff from the Singapore After-Care Association, the members of the core team and the volunteers were taught how to interact with the ex-offenders present during the event, and were also made more knowledgeable about our cause. We sought to involve and inspire these volunteers to contribute their time and effort into our cause, and to improve their public interaction skills.

Resolution of AOC/UP: Given that there is a lack of awareness about the plight of ex-offenders, and therefore causing a societal stigma among them, we have raised **\$300.00** for SACA and also reached out to approximately **1350** members of the public through our initiatives, we have managed to tackle the fundraising and awareness raising aspects of our project.

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