

Project Concordia

Category 7- Service Learning

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SECTION I: OVERVIEW

1. Area of Concern

The problem of ex-convicts and their children not being able to reintegrate back into society has been a rising problem. According to a 2016 study, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises found that only 4% of Singapore companies were willing to hire ex-offenders. This backs up our needs analysis survey which showed that many people had negative impressions of ex-offenders since many felt they would re-offend. Their children were also ostracized due to their parents' background; thus they shunned away from others. They may feel worthless and useless and thus resort to further crime as a means of seeking acceptance. All these cause a vicious cycle of marginalism towards ex-offenders and their families.

Our beneficiary (Singapore After-Care Association; henceforth SACA) has emphasised that volunteers are crucial in helping ex-offenders open up to the rest of society. However, many governmental initiatives have not been successful in getting people to volunteer for the cause: many attend events (e.g. Yellow Ribbon Run) but are unwilling to commit to being a regular volunteer due to sensitivity issues. This does not help since long-term encouragement is needed to improve the already low self-esteem that ex-offenders and their kin have. More can be done to educate people (especially students) about the plights of the ex-offenders. Hence, our project is needed as a platform for awareness, to allow ex-offenders to reintegrate back into society.

Last year, our events were based around promoting awareness and allowing for interaction between ex-offenders and the public. However, we realised that we were not as effective in our initiatives due to our lack of knowledge. This year, we decided to focus on gaining experience through **increased direct interaction with our beneficiaries and target audience**. Using our knowledge, we would then **spread awareness through volunteers and the student population** instead of the general public since it would be more effective to start from groups of people closest to us and spread our message to the public from there.

2. Underlying Problem

Given that there is an increasing trend of stigmatisation towards ex-offenders, and **a lack of assistance and immense difficulty for such individuals to be accepted by society**, how may we reintegrate these ex-offenders back into our society by **organising meaningful activities that promote bonding between society and ex-offenders; especially amongst the youths?**

3. Plan of Action

Our plan of action is detailed in the table below which also indicates the date of completion of each action. We started with a needs analysis to identify the issues faced by ex-offenders and had meetings with our beneficiary to better understand them. Our main aim was to promote bonding between ex-offenders and society, since a lack of mutual understanding was the root problem that led to larger problems like increased levels of stigmatisation and fewer employment opportunities . We further supplemented this main aim by conducting fundraising for SACA and conducting public outreach to raise awareness about this issue to the broader community. We started by finding suitable interaction opportunities such as gala dinners, talks and interviews so that we could better understand the problems they face reintegrating into society. We also conducted recruitment of around 100 volunteers from various schools, and sourced for sponsors for the movie screening, given that it was an event that cost us a huge amount of money.

SECTION II: IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN

Dates	Progress	Objectives
Jan - Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings with beneficiaries - Reflect on last year's progress and discuss PoA for the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand problems faced by beneficiary
April	<p>Avengers: Endgame Movie Screening cum Exhibition (24/4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Golden Village @ Great World City - Exhibition booth containing posters about the problems ex-offenders face in society was created - Around 500 attendees in total 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness - Platform for interaction - Raise funds
Jun	<p>Creation of Website (8/6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Features essays written by student volunteers and ex-offenders and information about upcoming events <p>ISCOS Camp and Sharing Seminar (11/6, 25/6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching ex-offenders about technology in contemporary society - Interaction with the ex-offenders <p>YFC Social Bazaar (14/6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising awareness about the difficulties faced by the ex-offenders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provided valuable insights into the lives of ex-offenders and a convenient way for volunteers to find interaction opportunities - Offer direct assistance to ex-offenders, allowing them to reintegrate back into society.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sell our merchandise <p>Interview with Ex-Offenders (19/6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enlighten the public on the hardships faced by the ex-offenders in reintegrating back to society <p>Jamiyah Islamiyah Halfway House Family Day (23/6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bonding with the ex-offenders through a gala dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundraising and outreach - Interactive sessions to defeat existing stereotypes
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Funds raised were channelled to our beneficiary for organising activities and hosting events

SECTION III: PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. Accomplishments

Our movie screening event helped us raise the majority of our total funds. We sold **175 \$20.00 and \$50.00 tickets**, earning us **\$8,600**. **30 students** volunteered to help out at the movie screening, who got to learn more about our cause by immersing themselves into it and helping at the exhibition booth. A lot of them brought their own friends into the project as volunteers, helping us to further expand our outreach. We **interacted with a minister, prison wardens and ex-offenders** via an exhibition. We have also **interviewed numerous ex-offenders and conducted the sharing sessions** during the June Holidays. We got to better understand the problems ex-offenders face when reintegrating into society, such as not knowing how to use modern technology and being unfamiliar with public transport, which are parts of our lives that we take for granted. We recruited a total of **100 volunteers** to participate in all our events and have **375 followers on Instagram**, with the account currently active to upload posts biweekly.

2. Reflections

Through this project, we learnt about the psychological plight the ex-offenders face. They face a lack of acceptance, trust and support from society. This can be seen by how they are unable to get hired easily and their reliance on support groups, which were a few of the many problems that the ex-offenders raised to us during our interaction sessions. However, we are pleased to say that we have successfully met our objectives, fundraising, outreach and promoting interaction between the public and ex-offenders. We participated in ex-offenders-based events that allowed us to glimpse into their everyday lives. Hence, the overall success in our initiatives has proven that we have made a substantial impact on our community. Last but not least, in hindsight, we could have invited more volunteers for our events to further increase outreach.. We will work with the next batch of members of Project Concordia to bring the project to greater heights.

3. Scope of Impact

Community Impact

Members of the public could learn more about the Singapore After Care Association, as well as the problems that ex-offenders face in society. We hope that the public is more well-versed on how to interact with them. We also hope that our initiatives have made the public more sympathetic towards ex-offenders, thus promoting social cohesion and reintegration.

Community Involvement

We managed to get around 100 volunteers from schools all across Singapore, who were key in ensuring the success of our project and the running of the different events. Through a briefing conducted by SACA spokespersons for us and the volunteers, we have become more knowledgeable about our cause. We wish to inspire these volunteers to contribute more of their time and effort to our cause, helping them to improve on their outreach and public education skills.

Resolution of UP

Given that there is an increasing trend of stigmatisation towards ex-offenders, a lack of assistance and immense difficulty for such individuals to be accepted by society, we have conducted meaningful interaction in the form of sharing sessions and dinners so the public and volunteers can better understand the difficulties that they face. We have also raised \$8,600 and reached out to an estimated 800 members of the public, as well as around 100 ex-offenders. More importantly, we have ensured that our project can be sustainably developed by involving students from a diverse range of schools and education levels in the problem-solving process and empowering them to make a difference. We hope that future batches will be able to take up the mantle and build on this foundation, to truly provide sustainable and meaningful interaction for ex-offenders in the form of regular initiatives to not just create upright individuals, but also encourage bonding from both public and family to create a resilient support system.