

# **Project Work - Written Report**

## **#7-24 Project HOPE**

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*Multi-Year Project*

## Section I: Project Overview

### **AREA OF CONCERN**

According to Straits Times article ISCOS' executive director Lisa Lim: She helps ex-inmates get back on their feet (April 24, 2017), the odds of offending for children with parents who are offenders are on average 2 1/2 times higher than children with parents who are not offenders. This is largely due to the lack of parental guidance that children of ex-convicts are facing. In many cases, such children come from single-parent families in which parents are either serving their terms in jail or busy working to support the household. Without a role model to guide and advise them, this increases the chances of children mixing with the wrong gang. This leads to a higher chance of children offending when they grow older.

According to a 2009 study by US researchers Murray, Farrington, Sekol, and Olsen, children of incarcerated parents were about twice as likely as their peers to exhibit antisocial behavior problems. Another study by Nesmith & Ruhland, in 2008 found that up to 70% of children of incarcerated parents have emotional or psychological disorders. Children may shun away from their peers as they feel like they are outcasts (due to lack of parental presence unlike their peers). This further worsens the problem since children are unwilling to open up to others. This may result in children developing mental illnesses that would deprive them of a happy childhood.

## **CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED**

Our beneficiary (New Life Stories) has emphasised that volunteers play a crucial role in helping the children to open up since volunteers are able to take the place of parents and offer guidance and encouragement to the children. It is also important that volunteers are able to commit on a long-term basis to develop trust and rapport with the children. However, a large majority of Singaporeans are unwilling to commit to becoming long-term volunteers due to sensitivity issues and fear of interacting with ex-convicts' family members. We attribute the general unwillingness to interact with the children as a result of lack of awareness regarding the plights of the children. The lack of interaction between children and the public further worsens this gap which will ultimately result in the children being neglected by society. This is a big problem since it greatly increases the chance of these children offending. Thus, more interaction between the children and the public would help them to develop greater sympathy and concern for the children. This would encourage more members of the public to volunteer with the children.

## **UNDERLYING PROBLEM**

Given that there is a general lack of guidance and care towards children of incarcerated parents, which negatively affects their growing process and may increase their chances of offending, how might we create opportunities for more interaction between volunteers/ members of society and the children and equip them with skills and values while promoting increased awareness and understanding for these children so that the increased guidance and understanding towards the children would reduce their chances of offending and allow them to better integrate them into society?

## PLAN OF ACTION

Dates	Progress	Objectives
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>Early Reader Programme (Every Sat)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Since September 2018</li> <li>- Read and interact with a child under the beneficiary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Platform for interaction</li> <li>- First-hand understanding of problems faced by the children</li> </ul>
<b>Jan - Feb</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meetings and discussions with beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understand problems faced by beneficiary</li> <li>- Reflect on last year's progress and discuss PoA for the year</li> </ul>
<b>Mar</b>	<b>NLS Volunteer Sharing Session (12/3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Met with other NLS volunteers</li> <li>- Shared about different experiences while working with children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn about better methods to interact with children</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<b>Bake Sale (16/4-18/4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Held in Hwa Chong Institution</li> <li>- Sold cookies + distributed brochures</li> <li>- Encouragement board (Wall of Love)</li> </ul> <b>Punggol Playfest Outing (28/4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organized + Facilitated outing to mini-carnival at Punggol</li> <li>- Opportunity for volunteers to interact with children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raise awareness for cause</li> <li>- Raise funds</li>   <li>- Platform for interaction</li> <li>- Fun activity for children</li> </ul>

<p><b>July</b></p>	<p><b>Restorative Practice Workshop (13/7)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By professional counsellors</li> <li>- Learn methods to understand with children and families</li> </ul> <p><b>Educational Seminar by Yayasan Mendaki (20/7)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen to speakers/ professionals on how to better interact with children from less privileged backgrounds</li> <li>- Interact and get to know other beneficiaries working for the same cause</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning opportunities (better empathize with children)</li> <li>- Platforms for awareness (sharing of ideas with other like-minded volunteers)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aug - Sep</b></p>	<p><b>Mendaki Art Workshop (18/8)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Volunteers guide and interact with children while doing fun art activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Day Camp cum Storytelling Session (11/9)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional storyteller to read to children + reading-related activities</li> <li>- Inculcate love for reading while developing other skills (creativity, teamwork etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Platforms for interaction</li> <li>- Fun activities for children</li> </ul>

## Section II: Implementation of the Plan

### ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES TO DATE

Date	Progress
<b>Mar</b>	<b>Volunteer Sharing Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Interacted with around 20 volunteers</li></ul>
<b>Apr</b>	<b>Bake Sale</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Sold over 200 cookies, raised \$380</li><li>- Outreach to over 200 teachers and students</li></ul> <b>Playfest Outing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Interaction between around 30 families and 15 volunteers</li></ul>
<b>Jul</b>	<b>Restorative Practice Workshop</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Involved over 30 volunteers</li></ul>
<b>Aug - Sep</b>	<b>Mendaki Art Workshop</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To involve around 30 children and volunteers</li></ul> <b>Day Camp cum Storytelling session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To involve around 20 children and families</li></ul>

Currently, we have 2 initiatives (Art Workshop & Day Camp) which we have postponed until August and September to better meet the requirements of the beneficiary and the children (which are still schooling). The funds raised through our initiatives were used to purchase new books for our beneficiary's Early Reader Programme which directly benefits the children.

### **Section III: Project Outcomes**

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

In total, we have raised \$380 for New Life Stories through our bake sale. This year, we wanted to focus more on promoting direct interaction with the children this year, as we felt that this would have a larger impact on the children. We could also learn more about the plights of the children which would make our awareness campaigns more effective. In order to achieve our goals, we attended many workshops and sharing sessions to learn from others on how to better interact with the children. We were able to interact with over 50 volunteers and many other organizations (e.g. Yayasan Mendaki) through the educational seminar. In our events like the Punggol Playfest Outing, we were able to help both volunteers and ourselves gain first-hand experiences of interacting with the children through reaching out to approximately 40 children and families. Furthermore, the guardian of the child we have worked with as part of our Early Reader Programme over a span of 10 months, has been very pleased with our service. She informed us that our constant guidance in his schoolwork has helped him achieve the EAGLES award and the Edusave Bursary award for being the top 15% in his school. We also have over 700 followers on Instagram, allowing us to reach out to the public to spread awareness for our beneficiary.

## **REFLECTIONS**

We encountered many difficulties in coordinating our events. There were many last-minute cancellations of events due to various reasons (e.g. lack of volunteers on beneficiary's side). This caused many children to become disappointed. To prevent this problem, we planned events with our beneficiaries months before the event and also offered volunteers (from our school population) to help with the events.

Through our project, we have come to realise that many children are willing to open up to volunteers, however they are extremely sensitive and would become extremely sad and disappointed when volunteers 'abandon' them after a period of interaction. To prevent this, volunteers need to be able to commit to the service for a long period of time so that the trust between volunteer and child can continue to strengthen. This would allow children to become more open and accepting of others. As such, we have decided that we will continue volunteering with our beneficiary even after our project has ended.

## **SCOPE OF PROJECT**

Last year, our outreach was mainly limited to the school community due to our lack of resources. This year, we were able to tap on our beneficiary's connections with other organizations (e.g. Yayasan Mendaki) to organize activities that involved both volunteers from external organizations and members of the public. Our project has also become more meaningful since we directly involved the children in our activities this year, unlike last year where we raised awareness without directly interacting with the children. In many of our initiatives, we were able to converse with volunteers from different backgrounds (e.g. students, working adults). This largely helped with our awareness campaign since we were able to share our knowledge with other members of the public instead of just restraining ourselves to the student level. Hence, our scope has widened this year to include more members of the community.