

CAT 4 RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Group 4-048

PROJECT RECONNECT

Ang Ping Chien Jarrel 4A2 (03)

Law Jia Kai 4A2 (13)

Zhou Yi Yang 4A2 (31)

Chong Zhan Ming Ethan 4S3 (02)

ABSTRACT

Project Reconnect aimed to change the negative mindsets that some students have on ex-offenders through the use of a comprehensive and engaging documentary. The documentary provided viewers with opinions from various groups like the public, business owners and the ex-offenders themselves. Students were presented with the experiences of these ex-convicts so that they would be able to empathise and see them in a more positive light. We hope to create a more accepting society, where members of the public and employers play an active role in providing ex-convicts with a second chance at life to lower recidivism rates.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Research has shown that almost half of all ex-offenders return to jail within 5 years of release. This shows that recidivism rates are high in Singapore and many ex-offenders experience hardships such as discrimination, social stigma, difficulty in finding jobs etc. We believe that everyone deserves a second chance and society should be more accepting of ex-offenders who are determined to change. Therefore, we have embarked on this project to shed light on their situation and help in their reintegration into society.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of Project Reconnect were to

- portray the difficulties ex-offenders face in the reintegration phase
- Change the negative mindset that some students have on ex-offenders

1.3 Target audience

The target audience was high school students from HCI. They are employers and leaders of the future and we felt that by changing their mindsets towards ex-offenders, they too can provide ex-convicts with a second chance at life to lower recidivism rates. Also, values and beliefs of students have not been set in stone, making it easier to change some of their mindsets.

1.4 Resources

We decided to film a documentary as we felt that a documentary was a more interesting and engaging way to raise awareness about the stories of ex-offenders as well as to educate viewers to be more open-minded and accepting of them.

The full 22 minute documentary can be accessed through this link:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGbZc-PGn88>

2 REVIEW

2.1 Literature Analysis



Almost half of ex-offenders return to prison within 5 years of release: Shanmugam



ST VIDEOS ▶



According to (Straits Times, 2019), almost 50% of ex-offenders return to prison within 5 years of release. It was stated that a lot of these ex-offenders return to jail as they lack social support. This includes the negative labels which have been placed on them, causing ostracism. It mentioned that a big factor in recidivism is that ex-offenders are unable to find a job due to their criminal record. This leads to them going back to crime to make a living.

By Louisa Tang

02 Jul 2019 06:00AM

(Updated: 02 Jul 2019 06:30AM)



Bookmark



Singapore

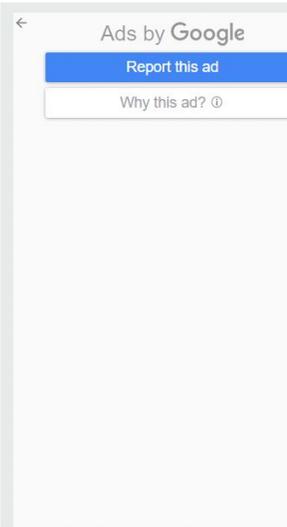
The Big Read: The Internet never forgets — ex-offenders struggle for redemption in the digital age

The digital age has made it harder for individuals who had brushes with the law to reboot their lives with a clean slate, say ex-offenders and experts.



This was taken from (Channel News Asia, 2019), which states that with the rise of the digital age, ex-offenders find it harder to to reboot their lives with a clean slate due to the permanent and viral nature of the internet. This, again, also shows that social stigma has made it difficult for ex-offenders to lead a normal life after crime.

Society must free ex-offenders from 'second prison'



This article from (Straits Times, 2016) shows that current resources are still insufficient to change this negative mindset of the people and even though companies claim to be willing to hire ex-offenders, they may not actually do so, implying the presence of an underlying bias in society towards these persons.



People

10 Former Offenders Who Defied The Odds And Turned Their Life Around

This article from (MSNews, 2018) shows us many examples of ex-convicts who were able to turn their lives around. They include Darren Tan who became the first law student with a criminal past, Barry Yeow who was a drug addict-turned-professional painter as well as many more inspiring characters. These examples show that people are capable of change and we should not deny them a second chance.

We also referred to studies which posited that the public's perception about the ex-offenders' capacity to change plays a crucial role in one's acceptance towards ex-offenders as well as one's willingness to interact with them (Bastian et al, 2013).

A local study (Tan, Chu & Tan, 2016) suggested that effective anti-stigma interventions to change the public's mindsets about ex-offenders in the local cultural context include 1) Disseminating success stories of offenders who have successfully desisted from further crime, 2) Emphasising the malleability of offenders' behaviour and 3) Reducing the negative emotions aroused in members of the community.

Therefore, we felt that filming a documentary would be the best way to raise awareness of the plight that some ex-offenders face.

2.2 How we differ from other projects

Not many documentaries have discussed this topic in Singapore. Yellow Ribbon Project Singapore only had short clips of interviews or promotional videos for some of their events. They are also mainly targeted towards an older audience and not students. Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) focuses more on rehabilitation of ex-offenders and it is mainly targeted at business owners and the ex-offenders themselves. Thus we feel that our project and documentary provide a unique pathway to help overcome the problem of social stigma and high recidivism rates of ex-offenders.

3 METHODOLOGY

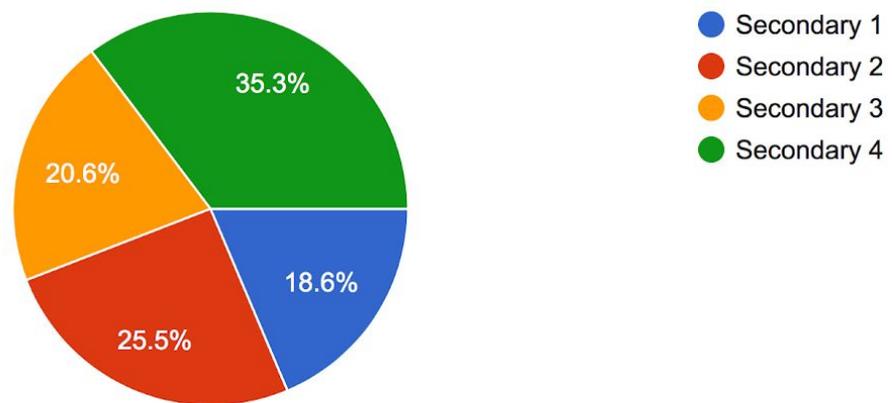
3.1 Needs Analysis

We created a survey and conducted it with 102 high school students. Our survey has shown that many of the students hold negative impressions of ex-offenders and many also stated that more has to be done to help society accept and reintegrate ex-offenders into society.

3.2 Survey Profile

What level are you in?

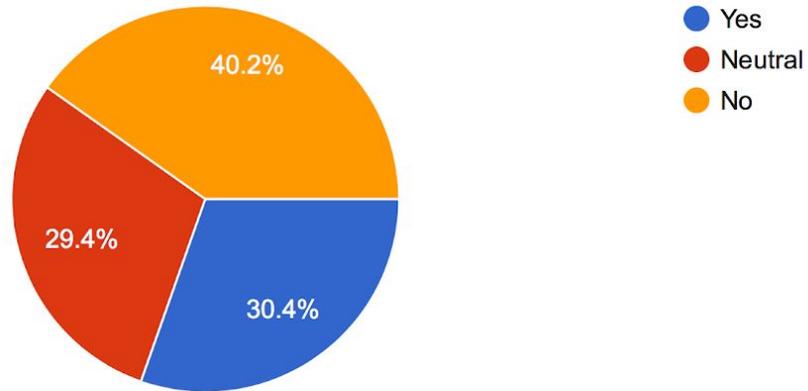
102 responses



3.3 Survey Responses

Are you supportive of having ex-convicts working in places you frequent?

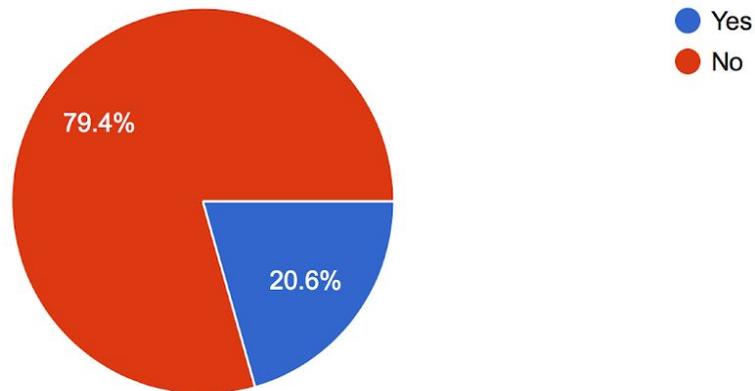
102 responses



As you can see, around 40% of the respondents were not supportive of ex-offenders working in places they frequented. This shows that a lot more has to be done to change this negative mindset.

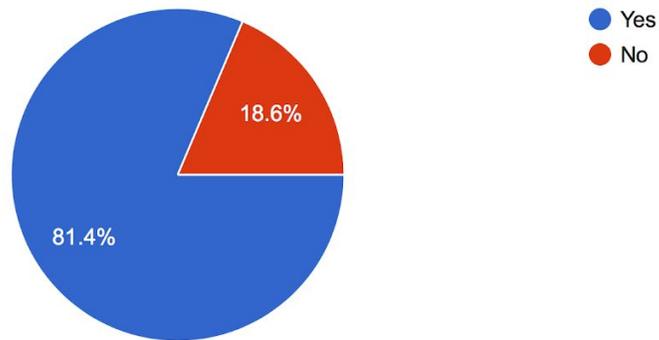
Do you think there is sufficient awareness about ex-convicts in our society?

102 responses



Do you think more should be done to increase awareness of ex-convicts in our society?

102 responses



Many also stated that there was insufficient awareness and resources about ex-offenders and that more has to be done.

What are your general impressions of ex-convicts?

+/-	Positive			Negative			
Responses	Hardworking	Pitiful	Changed	Dangerous	Not trustworthy	Uneducated	Unkind
Numbers	18	10	14	19	15	13	13
Percentage	17.6%	9.8%	13.7%	18.6%	14.7	12.7%	12.7%

If you were an employer, would you consider hiring THEM?

+/-	Positive			Negative			
Reasons	Reintegrate them	Help them	2nd chance	Lack experience	Harm reputation	Can hire others	risky
Numbers	16	9	14	13	21	17	12
Percentage	15.7%	8.8%	13.7%	12.4%	20.6%	16.7%	11.8%

What efforts do you think will be necessary or effective to help reintegrate ex-convicts into our society?

+/-	Positive		Negative	
Responses	Public exposure	Education	They cannot change	Should not waste resources
Numbers	30	28	21	23
Percentage	29.4%	27.5%	20.6%	22.5%

Many respondents had negative impressions of ex-offenders and some of their responses inspired us to create a documentary.

3.3 Development of resources

In order to film our documentary, we first reached out to many businesses including food and beverage companies to try and get some interviews. However, that failed as none out of the thirty could divulge any information. We then did some research and found individuals that we could contact via Facebook. Thankfully, Mr Barry Yeow, an ex-offender who is now an artist and owner of 5seventeen studio gallery, agreed to do an online interview with us.



We then contacted Mr Jabez Tan, an ex-offender who is now the founder of Soon Huat Bak Kut Teh. We managed to get an online interview with the manager, Mr Leong and a face-to-face interview with an employee, Mr Seng.





We then filmed other relevant scenes for our documentary at places such as the Supreme Courts and conducted interviews with some members of the public.





After that, we started to edit and finish the documentary.

4 Outcome & Discussion

We hope Project Reconnect has made a positive impact on the advocacy of a more accepting society as well as the reintegration of ex-offenders. In general, we felt that we have done a good job despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. If we were to do this again, we would like to have more in-person interviews instead of online ones as it affects the video and sound quality of the documentary. A further extension would include interviewing ex-offenders of different races so as to get a broader and fairer view on this issue. We would also like to work together with Yellow Ribbon Project Singapore to publish this documentary so that there would be a greater audience and we could make a greater impact.

5 Conclusion

We planned to film our entire documentary in person, however, due to the current situation, we had to turn to video calling and the overall quality of these video calls are compromised. Also, we were only able to meet up to film after the circuit breaker which made our schedule very tight. Furthermore, only 1 out of the 30 Food & Beverage businesses we approached got back to us. Fortunately, we were still able to get in touch with some kind souls such as mr Seng, mr Leong and mr Barry Yeow, which enabled us to put in our best effort for the documentary. We were able to adapt according to the situation and managed to overcome all the obstacles to finish our final product. Through conducting these interviews, we have learnt the lesson of being resilient as we were rejected many times. We also learnt the importance of teamwork when executing such a demanding project which was exacerbated by the pandemic. This project has provided us with great opportunities to not only understand the challenges ex-offenders face but also many lessons about teamwork and tenacity.

References

Ng, C. (2019, June 29). Almost half of ex-offenders return to prison within 5 years of release: Shanmugam. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/almost-half-of-ex-offenders-return-to-prison-within-5-years-of-release-shanmugam>

Tang, L. (2019, July 1). The Big Read: The Internet never forgets - ex-offenders struggle for redemption in the digital age. Retrieved from <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/ex-offenders-internet-never-forgets-criminal-record-jobs-employ-11676726>

Hermes. (2016, July 14). Society must free ex-offenders from 'second prison'. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/society-must-free-ex-offenders-from-second-prison>

Lee, V., & Lee, V. (2018, September 9). 10 Former Offenders Who Defied The Odds And Turned Their Life Around. Retrieved from <https://mustsharenews.com/former-offenders/>

Xiao Xian Tan, Chi Meng Chu & Gabriel Tan (2016) Factors Contributing towards Stigmatisation of Offenders in Singapore, *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 23:6, 956-969, DOI: [10.1080/13218719.2016.1195329](https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2016.1195329)

Bastian, B., Denson, T. F., & Haslam, N. (2013). The roles of dehumanization and moral outrage in retributive justice. *PLoS one*, 8(4), e61842. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23626737/>

