

COMMEMORATING THE YELLOW RIBBON PROJECT'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY



PART 2

CELEBRATING SECOND CHANCES

YELLOW RIBBON: OUR JOURNEY OF SECOND CHANCES

PART 2

Celebrating Second Chances

Over the past 20 years, the Yellow Ribbon Project has successfully garnered community support for second chances and beyond, both locally and internationally.

Reintegration Success Stories

Ex-offenders are finding fulfillment through meaningful work, faith, and community service, thanks to the Yellow Ribbon Project's support. Their journeys showcase the resilience and hope that come with second chances, highlighting the project's role in fostering personal and societal transformation.



“

Be afraid to go back to prison – because if you are not afraid, then you will get complacent.

”

Dr. Mohamad Riduan Ishak

Executive Director
Tarkiz Pte Ltd

Dr. Mohamad Riduan, or Dan as he prefers to be called, has been going in and out of the Singapore Boys' Home since young. He first started smoking at the tender age of 11, grew up on the streets and had experimented with various drugs. Dan was incarcerated and last released in November 2005.

Now at 50 years old, Dan is still going in and out of the Singapore Boys' Home, but now as a volunteer with the Singapore After-Care Association and Yellow Ribbon Community Project, working with the boys and their families. Not wanting others to go through what he did, Dan decided to help others overcome their addictions through volunteering. He shared that his late mother had suffered the most from his past addictions and this became his greatest motivation to remain clean.

Mr. Naresh Kumar s/o Ravisandran

Equestrian Assistant

Riding for the Disabled Association of Singapore

Naresh Kumar's journey from a troubled past to a fulfilling life as an Equestrian Assistant at Riding for the Disabled Association Singapore (RDA) was nothing short of remarkable. Battling a tumultuous youth marked by violent crimes and drugs, Naresh found redemption through his passion for working with animals, with support from the Yellow Ribbon Project and the community after his release in 2020.

Naresh shared that the impact of the Yellow Ribbon Project had been key in reshaping public perceptions of him and providing him with opportunities in his reintegration journey. Today, Naresh is paying it forward by sharing his story with ex-offenders, serving in a church ministry, and caring for the well-being of horses at the RDA. As a recipient of the Yellow Ribbon Fund-Mapletree Skills Training Assistance to Restart (STAR) Bursary, Naresh is also currently pursuing a part-time Diploma in Veterinary Technology.

Naresh envisions a future enriched by family, community contribution, and advocacy for animal welfare. Naresh's journey is a testament to the transformative power of second chances and unwavering community support.

“

Nowadays, I face less stigma and have access to resources that allow me to upgrade myself.

”



“

My father's gambling (habit) had robbed me of (my) childhood, but it was my own drug habit that took away the life I had.

”



Mr. Thomas Koh

Addiction Counsellor

National Addiction Management Services

Thomas has come a long way from battling addictions, hitting rock bottom and attempting suicide. As his mental and physical health crumbled, so did Thomas' business. At 39, he found himself divorced and facing criminal charges, bankruptcy, and life-threatening health problems. Seeking professional help was his turning point, and he is now happily married, a proud parent, and dedicated to helping others battle their addictions. To Thomas, the Yellow Ribbon Project was a lifeline in reducing societal stigma and providing crucial support during his recovery journey.

Since becoming sober, Thomas has joined the National Addictions Management Service. He is now giving back by volunteering as a befriender with the homeless, mentoring individuals in their recovery journey, and advocating for policy changes to help ex-offenders feel more accepted.

Thomas hopes to continue sharing his recovery journey and contributing to the recovery community on a voluntary basis, even after retiring from his professional career.

Ms. Alexis Tan

Volunteer

The Salvation Army Prison Support Services

Alexis used to have the idea that she would be forever young and was dabbling in ecstasy to sustain her partying habits. During her only incarceration in 2002, a prison officer asked her what she would want to do when she was older. This was an aha moment for Alexis, as she asked herself “What memories do I want to look back on when I’m old?”

Alexis turned to religion as a form of solace. She also attributed her change to her family’s support and the religious community. She is now also a volunteer with The Salvation Army, and she hopes to plant a seed of change by inspiring others to embark on their own self-realization journey and to guide them to practise self-forgiveness.

“
Community is very
important in our
rehabilitation journey,
we cannot do this alone.
”



“

Drug addiction is a battle, that's why the support system is important. If we can really come together, we will definitely see more success stories.

”



Ms. Hannah Chun

From battling her own addiction to supporting women with addictions, Hannah has come a long way. For 10 years, Hannah had struggled with her recurring relapse, even giving birth during her second incarceration. Her drug use had taken a toll on her health and strained family relationships, and she knew she had to seek help to break her cycle of incarceration.

At Hannah's lowest, she accepted her friend's offer to go to church, and soon made a breakthrough, unlearning and relearning how to live again. Hannah is now volunteering at halfway houses and speaks to people recovering from addictions. She acknowledged that it would be difficult for family members of recovering addicts but appealed to them to walk the recovery journey with their loved ones, as they would never know when their breakthrough moment would be.

Mr. Gopal Mahey

Psychotherapist

Centre For Psychotherapy & Singapore
Anti-Narcotics Association

Gopal is a husband, father, son, brother and a person in recovery from poly-substance use disorder. His journey of recovery had been long and complex, stemming from a chaotic childhood where he struggled with feelings of neglect. Even whilst being a counsellor, Gopal was addicted to methamphetamine. His incarceration forced him to confront his choices and begin his journey toward recovery and redemption.

Today, Gopal is a psychotherapist helping others facing similar struggles. Since the launch of the Yellow Ribbon Project, Gopal noticed a significant shift in society's attitudes towards ex-offenders. The Yellow Ribbon Project provided a platform for people like him to share his stories and find support within the community.

Gopal envisions a community where former offenders and those in recovery can find the resources, support and opportunities they need to thrive.

“

Ruptures do happen, but ultimately, it's about restoration, and I hope that sharing my story would allow us to put ourselves out there to share stories of not just pain and struggle, but also success.

”



“
Just give yourself a chance.
Go to a support group and
listen. Give yourself a
chance, surrender everything
and have acceptance.
”

Mr. Azmi Bin Abdul Rahman

Agents of Change

Azmi was incarcerated a total of 9 times for drug abuse and involvement in secret society activities. Over the years, he made countless promises to his family and friends, but never fulfilled them as he struggled immensely with his sense of identity.

In 2011, Azmi was employed as an intern before being converted to a full-time staff. The stability provided by his employment, as well as the structured environment of a halfway house sparked a change in him. He aspired to be like his colleagues, and to learn to change the way he speaks and behaves. Despite the doubts from others, Azmi was committed to change and reached out to like-minded friends and support groups for advice. Now, Azmi has been clean for 13 years and runs his own support group, “Agents of Change”. He hopes to be a role model to others by sharing his own experiences with them.

Mr. Alif Bin Harith

Reforming Support Group

Alif Bin Harith was in prison for drug offences and subsequently placed on Community-Based Programme at Jamiyah Halfway House. He completed his programme in March 2017 and continued to volunteer and perform community work with Jamiyah. Besides performing and supporting at events, Alif also joined the Reforming Support Group to offer befriending support to ex-offenders, and support to their families. On top of that, Alif also volunteers with the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association as a peer leader and participates in their community events.

Alif shared that the past 7 years had fostered personal development in him, and he had also developed a sense of purpose and fulfilment. He felt supported by many organisations and people in his recovery journey, which motivated him to play his part in supporting others, their family and to give back to the community.

“

Break the stigma that ex-offenders are not good employees. Give more opportunities to ex-offenders and allow them to take on different roles and responsibilities (at work).

”



“
Providing employment opportunities, offering mentorship, and fostering a supportive and inclusive environment can go a long way in helping ex-offenders reintegrate successfully into society.
”

Mr. Christopher Adrian Chia Hsien Loong

Social Worker

Lakeside Family Service Centre

If you happen to meet Christopher without knowing him, his towering figure and sleeve tattoos may intimidate you. This scary facade disappears the moment you hear his friendly greeting and infectious laugh.

At the tender age of 15, Christopher dropped out of school, joined a secret society, and started experimenting with drugs. He started trafficking drugs to sustain his habit, leading to multiple incarcerations. In his fourth prison term, Christopher was given the opportunity to study in prison where he emerged top of his cohort. Upon his release, he continued to study at Singapore Management University and graduated with a BSc of Social Sciences with double majors in Sociology and Psychology. Despite his achievements, he was unable to sustain stable employment, fell back into drugs, and landed back in a Drug Rehabilitation Centre.

Christopher completed his detention in 2019 and begun working as a social worker at Lakeside Family Service Centre. Now, he guides and supports ex-offenders by drawing from his own experiences to inspire and motivate them on their reintegration journey. His journey serves as a reminder that every life touched matters, embodying the spirit of hope, resilience, and the transformative power of second chances.

Mr. Lezan Bin Ariffin

Head of Programmes
Goal Aspiration

Lezan Ariffin had renounced gangs in 2018 and participated actively in rehabilitation programmes in prison. He was exposed to theatre during his last incarceration under the Theatre Arts Programme, led by theatre veteran Ms. Peggy Ferroa, where he was trained in acting, scripting, and facilitating forum theatre. Lezan has since acted in various short videos, skits, as well as theatre productions after his release.

Lezan's journey was not smooth sailing – he struggled with self-esteem issues as well as a lack of knowledge of available resources for his recovery process. One of Lezan's greatest turning points was when he joined Goal Aspiration, a drug recovery group. Now, he is not only contributing back to the group, but also helms the position of Head of Programmes. Lezan hopes to give back to society by being an anti-drug advocate, and by providing resources to individuals who struggle to find direction in their recovery journey.

“
Awareness comes from having the
right information. A more aware
and informed public will be able to
support ex-offenders better.
”



Championing Second Chances

A growing number of businesses are embracing second chances by hiring ex-offenders and providing supportive work environments to help them reintegrate into society. Through nurturing talent and fostering growth, these employers are transforming lives and contributing to a more inclusive, compassionate society.



Inclusion isn't just something we talk about; it's about being true to who we are.

Ms. Rachel Lee

HR Director

Mexican Food Corp SV Pte Ltd /
Guzman y Gomez Singapore

Guzman y Gomez (GYG) Singapore believes in people and their potential - regardless of their background. Everyone has a story.

Staying true to the company's core values of 'Be Real', GYG wants their employees to become the best version of themselves. This stemmed from their belief in second chances and the transformative power of employment in rebuilding lives. GYG wants to give ex-offenders the platform to discover that and grow from within.

Rachel shared that GYG's experience in hiring ex-offenders has been incredibly rewarding and valuable for the company. It is not a walk in the park but since they have decided to commit towards being an inclusive employer, GYG decided to embrace the challenges that came with it. In addition, the company believes that having employees from different backgrounds will enable them to learn from challenges and strive to become better.

Rachel strongly encourages everyone to live with integrity by treating everyone with the same respect and dignity, to see beyond past mistakes and recognize the potential within every individual. She calls for the public's support towards initiatives like the Yellow Ribbon Project and advocates for inclusivity in our communities. She believes that together, we can create a society where everyone has the opportunity to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully.

Ms. Iris Wu

Regional HR Director
Amara Singapore

Amara Singapore has been employing ex-offenders since 2018. Besides ensuring a conducive work environment for all, the hotel provides training, development and mentorship programmes to help them reintegrate back into society through employment.

Iris shared that Amara Singapore's experience working with ex-offenders has been positive and encouraging. They have shown dedication and hard work. The hotel also appreciates their unique perspectives and contributions to the team.

Since the launch of the Yellow Ribbon Project, the hotel noticed increased awareness and support for ex-offenders' through employment and rehabilitation efforts. The society had also become more open to giving them a second chance, and Amara Singapore appreciates this shift towards a more inclusive and compassionate community.

“
Consider the potential of hiring ex-offenders. They deserve a chance to rebuild their lives, and your support can make a significant difference. Let's work together to create a more inclusive society.
”



“

Dashmesh Singapore has long continued our employment of ex-offenders as we believe that nobody who is seeking a second chance deserves to be excluded from work or society.

”

Ms. Malika Parmar

Assistant Manager (Import)
Dashmesh Singapore

Dashmesh Singapore has been employing ex-offenders since the early 2000s and has continued to do so as the company believes in being inclusive. Malika shared that Dashmesh Singapore has been intentional in organising team bonding events to build a sense of belonging among employees, including ex-offenders. She said that employees who feel valued and have a sense of belonging will ultimately become invaluable additions to the company.

Malika noticed that society has generally become more open to accept ex-offenders over the years and there were many occasions where ex-offenders have shown how capable they were given the opportunities. She said that people should not be defined by their mistakes but instead be given the chance to rebuild their future.

Mr. Gurdip Singh

Sole Proprietor
Drumkin Impex

Drumkin Impex has been employing ex-offenders since the 1980s. Gurdip said that many of them who had been employed were generally disciplined and hardworking, and what they needed were respect and coaching along the way.

Gurdip's experience with ex-offenders had strengthened his belief in providing opportunities to those who have made mistakes. He also believes in equal treatment and the value of second chances for all individuals.

“
When I talk to my employees (who are ex-offenders), I tell them to forget about their past, and let them know that we are all equal.
”



“

We've seen a stark change within society, most apparent being societal attitudes towards ex-offenders - there's an increased sense of acceptance, tolerance and inclusivity.

”



Ms. Shirin Nadia

HR Manager

Nando's Chickenland Singapore Pte Ltd

Since 2013, Nando's Singapore has had over 400 ex-offenders come through their doors as employees. Guided by the four internal brand pillars of “Everyone is Welcome”, “Be the Best Me”, “Fired Up Work Experiences”, and “Part of More”, Nando's prioritizes creating a positive work environment through inclusive engagement programmes and comprehensive training initiatives for ex-offenders. The company also offers training and career development opportunities for ex-offenders.

Shirin shared that the experience has been a win-win for both parties and she's proud to have witnessed many individuals grow personally and professionally within the company, with some even advancing to managerial positions or leveraging their experience at Nando's to establish their own ventures. She believes the Yellow Ribbon Project has played a crucial role in breaking stereotypes associated with ex-offenders and given them the opportunity and confidence to come forward, share their stories and inspire others.

Nando's values the richness that diversity brings – not just in running a business but in creating a better world for us all to live in. Building a workplace that embraces diversity and inclusivity while being grounded in values with clear purpose has allowed Nando's to provide ex-offenders with a fresh start and be part of their journey back into society.

Building Stronger Futures

Community partners are essential in helping ex-offenders lead productive lives and strengthen family units. By mentoring volunteers, offering support, and promoting public acceptance, they play a vital role in the Yellow Ribbon Project's efforts to build a more inclusive and supportive society.

Ms. Tan Mon Fui, Edna

Yellow Ribbon Champion

Yellow Ribbon Community Project

Edna began her volunteering journey as a Prison Befriender and now serves as the Yellow Ribbon Champion (overseeing Yellow Ribbon Community Project volunteers) in the Kebun Baru division. As a Yellow Ribbon Champion, her responsibilities include guiding and mentoring new Yellow Ribbon volunteers, conducting home visits, and ensuring that appropriate support is provided to families of the incarcerated. Volunteering has been a fulfilling experience for Edna, and she considers it a privilege to journey with ex-offenders, witnessing the happy reunions with their family and their successes in life.

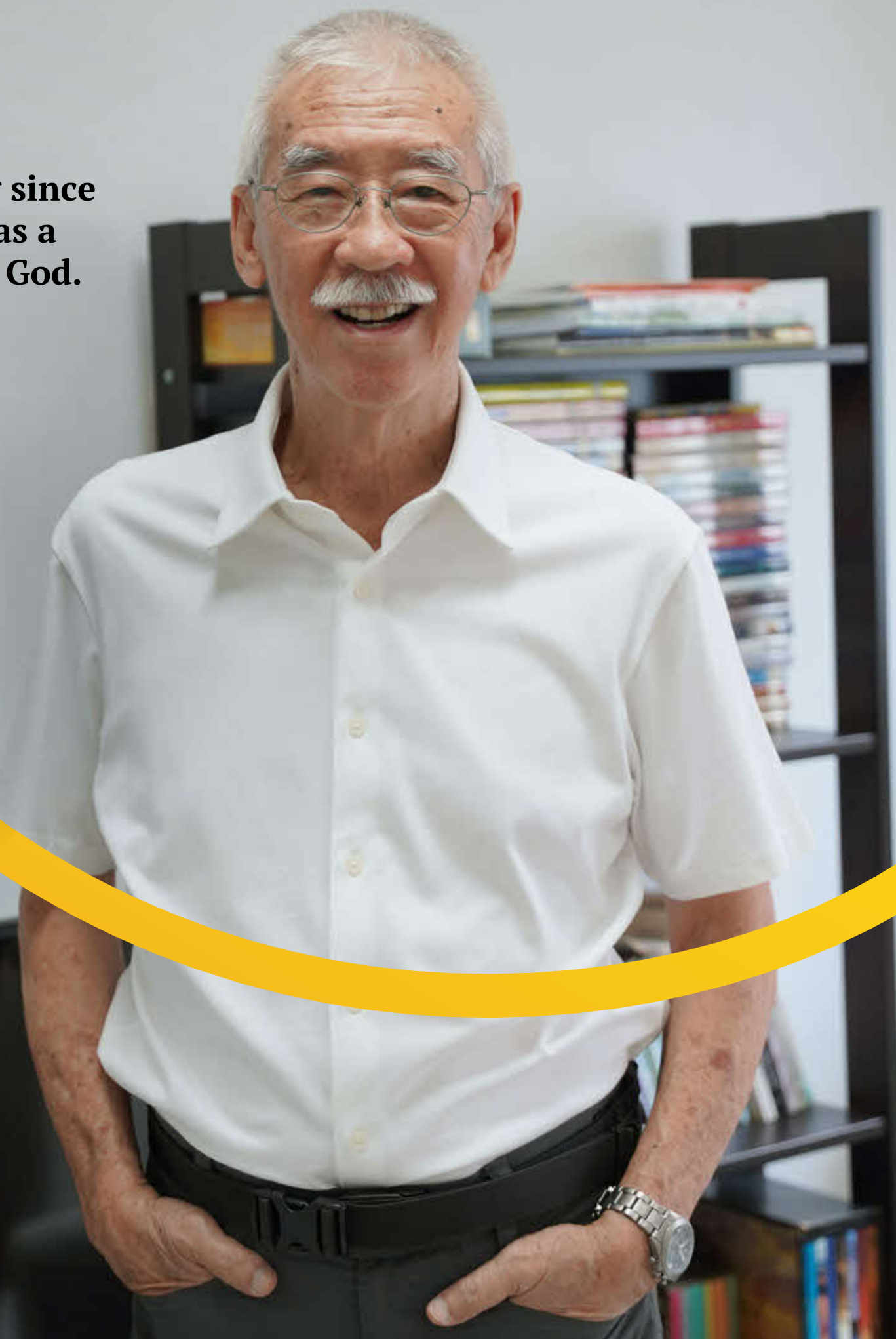
Edna believes the Yellow Ribbon Project has effectively shifted society's biases and stigma towards individuals who have been incarcerated. This also led to employers' increased openness to hiring ex-offenders and providing them with second chances. Families are also more willing to openly discuss the challenges they face.

Her aspiration for ex-offenders is for them to feel more confident in their abilities and contributions, and for the public to set aside their prejudices, treat them equally, and accept them as peers.

“
I have learnt a great deal
about humility, forgiveness,
and love through my
volunteering experiences.
”



“
Volunteering since
1998 - it was a
calling from God.
”



Mr. Jimmy Yuen Yu-Jim

Catholic Prison Ministry Member
Roman Catholic Prison Ministry

Since 1998, Jimmy has been a member of the Roman Catholic Prison Ministry, visiting different prison institutions on various days of the week. He has also been actively engaged in aftercare efforts, providing spiritual and material support to ex-offenders through various ministries and organisations.

In Jimmy's view, the CARE Network has been making significant contributions in assisting inmates, ex-offenders, and their families in diverse ways. This had sparked numerous discussions and public interest, with positive responses from the public in terms of increased acceptance and support. He believes that the CARE Network should continue to lead initiatives with various agencies, not only to sustain public interest but also to motivate them to take further actions to support ex-offenders and their families.

Mr. Mohammed Nazim Bin Rahuma Dulla

Islamic Educator and Counsellor

Family and Inmates ThRoughcare Assistance
Haven (FITRAH)

Nazim is an Islamic educator and counsellor with 20 years of experience teaching Islamic classes in mosques, Islamic organizations and in Changi Prison. His early work as a religious counsellor deeply influenced his approach. Nazim also offers emotional and spiritual support to inmates and helps them understand their faith more clearly.

Nazim noticed a growing sense of optimism among inmates and their families about society's willingness to give second chances since the introduction of the Yellow Ribbon Project. He believes that ex-offenders should not be isolated but instead treated like any other members of the society. In particular, family members will need to stay open and welcoming as ex-offenders reintegrate back into society. He urges the public to avoid judging individuals based solely on their past actions and be more supportive in their reintegration journey.

“
We provide them with
the space and freedom to
feel at ease.
”



“

During my incarceration, the Yellow Ribbon Project had not yet been established, and there were no organized support systems or volunteer programs available.

Today, however, there are various programmes designed to assist ex-offenders in reintegrating into the community, including befriending services and job (employment) assistance.

”



Mr. Aziz Bin Hashim

Recovery Peer Specialist

A Voice To Be Heard

Aziz was previously incarcerated for drug offences and has been substance-free since 1996. Currently, he serves as a recovery peer specialist and befriender at A Voice To Be Heard.

He believes that the public should avoid discrimination and instead offer support and encouragement to ex-offenders. Aziz said that the effectiveness of recovery strategies varies from person to person, and individuals should be encouraged to tap on the support systems that best align with their personal needs, which may come in the form of support groups, or anchoring on their religious beliefs.

Ms. Christine Tan

Founder
Awful Grace

Christine is a psychotherapist, traumatologist and founder of Awful Grace. Established in 2016, Awful Grace provides support to individuals with incarceration experiences, regardless of their faith. Its therapeutic programmes use pottery as a means to facilitate an inward journey of self-expression and discovery. In pottery, the creative process of the Toki and Kinsugi Formation involves creating, breaking, and mending of pottery. This can also symbolize the process of mending broken parts of lives, finding beauty in imperfection, and helps foster self-awareness and emotional healing.

She believes that a charity will only truly achieve its mission when it is no longer needed. Awful Grace aims for initiatives to eventually become self-sustaining as that will mean they have become part of the community. In addition, Awful Grace wants to make a meaningful impact, raise awareness, and inspire young people to get involved and contribute to the community.

“
It's about making a
difference, even if
it's for a small group,
it's fine with us.

”



International Partners

Yellow Ribbon Project Beyond Local Shores

Over the years, the Yellow Ribbon Project has not only garnered much support from many well-meaning individuals and corporate partners, but also gained traction beyond the shores of Singapore. It has gained international attention and been replicated in various forms across the globe. Singapore aspires and is committed to do more in creating a global Yellow Ribbon network.



2008

Launch of Yellow Ribbon project in **Fiji**



2011

Second Chance Day in **Australia**

The Second Chance Day in Perth, organized by Yellow Ribbon Project Australia, drew inspiration from similar initiatives in Singapore and Fiji. It created a greater understanding and empathy towards former female and youth prisoners, helping to break down the stigmas associated with incarceration. It also demonstrated how a supportive community can help former prisoners find new opportunities in the workplace, education, housing, and more. Personal stories of transformation and perseverance, fueled by a desire to give back, highlighted the importance of second chances and lived experiences.

2012

BuCor LOVE Foundation, **Philippines** launched their first Prison Run

2008

Launch of Yellow Ribbon project in **Fiji**

2012

BuCor LOVE Foundation, **Philippines** launched their first Prison Run

2019

Ireland and Northern Ireland jointly held their pilot Yellow Ribbon Run

2011

Second Chance Day in **Australia**

2016

Czech Republic held their first Yellow Ribbon Run

2024

Thailand organised their inaugural Yellow Ribbon Run – “Run For Relife”



2016 Czech Republic held their first Yellow Ribbon Run

In the Czech Republic, the Yellow Ribbon Run aims to raise awareness and generate discussion about the obstacles that ex-offenders might face when returning back to society. From 38 runners in 2016, the number of runners reached 911 in 2024. The run unites different segments of the society such as families, state institutions, companies and nonprofit organisations. In 2023, the Czech Republic also launched the Yellow Ribbon Growing European Together project with the Norwegian Prison Service, with the aim of spreading the Yellow Ribbon movement to other European countries.

The Yellow Ribbon and the Yellow Ribbon Run remind us that every person deserves a second chance. Our society can be safer and more cohesive if we support those who want to overcome their criminal past. I believe that together we can contribute to overcoming prejudice and to help those who want to change their lives for the better. Let's remember that everyone who gets out of prison can become our neighbour...

Karel Dvořák,
Deputy Minister,
Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic

Families and children of convicts are invisible victims of crimes, and cooperation with the family of convicts can significantly and positively affect successful integration into society. For the good integration of people with a criminal past, it is important to apply the principles of restorative justice, which is essential for minimising the impact of crime on victims and reducing recidivism. Yellow Ribbon sport, cultural and community activities are a great start for positive changes.

Gabriela Slovák,
Director of the Criminal Policy Department,
Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic, and
CEO, Yellow Ribbon Czech Republic

In 2016, I had the chance to participate at the Yellow Ribbon (Prison) Run in Singapore. It was an unforgettable experience. I witnessed an event and compact approach with the aims of crushing the prejudices against employment of former inmates and promoting the importance of their reintegration. I wish you (the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run) many successful future runs and persistence in the demanding task of changing the approach of society towards former inmates.

GENMAJ Simon Michailidis,
Director General, Prison Service of the Czech Republic

It might seem surprising that the idea of the Yellow Ribbon (Prison) Run originated in Singapore. At least this was my thinking while on the track of Yellow Ribbon Run 2017 in the hot and humid weather so typical for your country. However, what I saw during my visit to the Singapore Prison Service – the use of technology, the desire for innovation, together with team approach and enthusiasm – perhaps explains why thousands of people are willing to participate in the annual Yellow Ribbon (Prison) Run despite the weather. And us, foreigners from Europe, amongst them. Because prejudices against former inmates exist throughout systems and cultures, it is our joint task to try to overcome them, in the interest of the society as a whole.

Jaroslav Myšička,
Deputy Director General for Economy and Logistics,
Prison Service of the Czech Republic



2019 Ireland and Northern Ireland jointly held their pilot Yellow Ribbon Run



2024 Thailand organised their inaugural Yellow Ribbon Run – “Run For Relife”

Thailand's Department of Corrections adopted the concept of the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run from Singapore. Themed “Run for Relife”, it was held on 24 March 2024 with more than 3,000 participants. The funds raised from the run was allocated to vocational training programmes and provided transportation costs for prison leavers returning homes after their release.



The Yellow Feather Campaign in Japan

Japan's Yellow Feather Campaign (or Campaign to Give Society a Brighter Future) was launched in 1951 to spread awareness about offenders' rehabilitation. During the campaign, participants consisting of mainly community volunteers will sport a yellow feather and engage in all sorts of activities that vary across different regions across Japan. The turnout for the 73rd Campaign held in 2023 was 1.4 million participants.

Like the Yellow Ribbon Project, the Yellow Feather Campaign also uses yellow in its symbol. With the use of social networking sites and mascots in its marketing efforts, the campaign had managed to appeal to members of public from all walks of life. Japan looks forward to exchanging practices and experiences with Singapore to further develop both countries' movements to better support offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration journey back into society.

