

# **Building Thriving Supportive Communities:**

## **A Collective Perspective**

**A project by the Learning Community**

**Participating Agencies:**

**Agents of Change (AOC)**

**Family and Inmates Through-care Assistance Haven (FITRAH)**

**Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society Limited (ISCOS)**

**Prison Fellowship Singapore (PFS)**

**Singapore After-Care Association (SACA)**

**Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA)**

**Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA)**

**The Salvation Army (TSA)**

## **Contents**

<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>Introduction: Setting up a Learning Community</b>	<b>Pages 3 - 9</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>Building a Thriving Supportive Community/Group (Agencies' Perspectives)</b>	<b>Pages 10 - 34</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>Insights from Persons In Recovery (PIE's) Experiences in Supportive Communities/ Groups</b>	<b>Pages 34 - 40</b>
	<b>Focus group discussion (FGD)</b>	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>Working with Partners</b>	<b>Page 41 – 48</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Page 49 – 50</b>
<b>References</b>		<b>Page 51</b>
<b>Annexes A – D</b>		<b>Pages 52 - 60</b>

# Chapter One

## Introduction: Setting up a Learning Community

### Background

1. As part of the Desistor Network's strategies to strengthen social support for ex-offenders, a Learning Community (LC) was mooted to promote knowledge and practice in building supportive communities, such as support groups. Agencies volunteered during one of the DN sessions. The LC's first meeting was held in October 2023.

### Why is a strong ecosystem important for People with Incarcerated Experiences (PIEs)?

2. Corrections in Singapore have progressed tremendously in the last two decades in its efforts to prevent reoffending of its offenders. The nation has witnessed a steady decline of its two-year recidivism<sup>1</sup> rate from its 40% in the late 1990s to 22% in 2021, the lowest since the cohort of inmates released in 1990 (Singapore Prison Service, 2023). This progress has been attributed to the country's deliberate and sustained efforts to strengthen its rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated offenders.

3. Despite the progress, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. The five-year recidivism rate has been stubbornly hovering around 40% from 2011 to 2015 (Shanmugam, 2021). In 2018, the recidivism rate dropped to 36.8% (Singapore Prison Service, 2023). Although the drop is encouraging as it signals the efforts that are in place are helpful, there is still a need to have more varied interventions and supports to mitigate the reoffending risk beyond the existing supervision, reintegration, and rehabilitation efforts for a considerable segment of the released inmates. The question is, beyond the existing emphasis on providing formal interventions to address reintegration needs and addressing specific offending behaviours (Chin & Iyer, 2018; Keong, 2020), what else needs to happen to promote desistance<sup>2</sup> beyond the first two years? What is helpful for the person when he or she is released from SPS to stay in the community longer and engage in rehabilitation.

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<sup>1</sup> Recidivism is the tendency for the individual to relapse and return to the criminal justice system i.e. SPS.

<sup>2</sup> Desistance is generally defined as the stopping of offending or other criminal behaviour including drug use in the Singapore context.

4. To promote a longer-term rehabilitation journey, there is a need to strengthen “the eco-system of support available to ex-offenders and their families within the community,” particularly to build thriving and sustainable community support (Josephine, 2022, para. 14). What does this mean for us, and what does it look like?

*“After the initial progress, many former inmates will also face setbacks and disappointments, as we all do in life. These are things that we ourselves experience, and we all know how difficult it is even without a checkered past, to find new ways to continue. Therefore, we should not underestimate the challenges that ex-offenders face in finding the motivation to course-correct and press on.*

*We should therefore work closely together to **strengthen the ecosystem of support** available to ex-offenders and their families within the community, so as to extend and entrench their rehabilitation.”*

***Speech by Mrs. Josephine Teo***

*Minister for Communications and Information and Second Minister for Home Affairs*

*Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-Offenders (CARE) Network Summit 2022*

What does existing research say about how Supportive Community and Groups strengthen the ecosystem?

5. What does it mean to build up a supportive eco-system for PIEs (People with incarcerated experiences), This idea is aligned to McNeil’s (2009) proposition that the community is obliged to help offenders from reoffending because the offenders are part of the community and there is a collective interest. McNeil emphasised that the community’s involvement is necessary and is part of the solutions to creating a safer community. There has been rapid growth in the number of supportive communities and groups in the correctional and aftercare sector to support the journey of rehabilitation of PIEs. Based on existing research, there are four purposes of having a supportive community/ group for PIEs:

- a. Provide guidance and practical support to help navigate daily struggles
- b. Open to new networks and resources
- c. Create a constraining effect and promote conformity to societal norms

d. Promote acceptance and trust, which reinforce prosocial identities

6. To achieve the purposes, the following are key features that would enhance the effectiveness of a supportive community/group:

Key Features of a Supportive Community/ Group	Details
Build <b>support</b> and <b>accountability</b>	Meet regularly (proposed 1-2 times a month) to relate and share views, experiences, and knowledge about resources on a voluntary basis. The relationships in the group are bonded by shared aspirations, interests, and/or goals. To build stronger support, the community/group needs to link up with the larger community.
Facilitate members to <b>meet fundamental needs</b> based on Good Lives model	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>The Good Lives model</i><sup>3</sup> is about meeting the fundamental needs of humans in a way that is prosocial and adaptive.</li> <li>ii. These needs are known as primary goods. They are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Life (including healthy living and functioning)</li> <li>· Knowledge (how well informed one feels about things that are important to them)</li> <li>· Excellence in play (hobbies and recreational pursuits)</li> <li>· Excellence in work (including mastery experiences)</li> <li>· Excellence in agency (autonomy, power, and self-directedness)</li> <li>· Inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

<sup>3</sup> (Source: [The Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation - Information](#))

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Relatedness (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships)</li> <li>· Community (connection to wider social groups)</li> <li>· Spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life)</li> <li>· Pleasure (feeling good in the here and now)</li> <li>· Creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms).</li> </ul> <p>iii. A supportive community/group can be a platform where such needs can be met.</p> <p>iv. Focusing on Good Lives supports and sustains PIEs' hope for change and empowers them to work towards their change.</p>
<p>Have a <b>dual focus</b></p>	<p>A supportive Community/Group does not just focus on resolving problems faced by members in the areas of reintegration or criminal/drug use behaviours; it should also focus on supporting PIEs to meet their aspirations and lead prosocial and meaningful lives.</p>
<p>Led or supported by <b>community members</b> (i.e. peer/ desistor and members of public)</p>	<p>A supportive community/group need not be run by professionals. In fact, it is beneficial for the community/group to be developed by non-professionals in an organic way. The people running it can be PIEs who have successfully turned over a new leaf after a period of time in the community or a person without any past criminal/drug conviction.</p> <p>For a PIE to be fully reintegrated into society, it will be useful for him/her to interact with people of diverse backgrounds. For instance, other than interacting with PIEs who have successfully changed, it may be useful to have members without incarcerated experiences in the community/group.</p>

### How is the Learning Community (LC) set up?

7. Several community agencies volunteered to be part of the LC. The LC had initially targeted six sessions, to be reviewed based on the progress. The LC members would meet up once a month, starting in Oct 2023. (Note: There was a break in Dec 2023). The LC was extended for another two months as the LC had embarked on a focus group discussion (FGD) to better understand the needs of Persons in Recovery (PIEs).

### What has been discussed in the LC sessions?

8. One of the key highlights of the LC was that every agency took turns to share about one's efforts in providing support through support groups and other initiatives. The specifics and rationale for the efforts of every agency were shared over three sessions. During these sharing sessions, there were numerous discussions about common practice and challenges.

9. A secretariat team was contracted to take notes for every LC session and disseminate them to LC members after each session.

10. The following is a list of the main topics that were discussed at LC sessions.

- a. Importance of Support Groups & Communities of Support
- b. Key ingredients for Desistance/ Principles of effective communities
- c. Types of Programmes and activities by LC members
- d. Navigating challenges, barriers, and ethical situations
- e. Diversifying Programmes and Services for evolving needs as a person recovers<sup>4</sup>
- f. Conduct Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with PIEs to learn about their experiences in a supportive community/group.
- g. Possible areas of collaboration among agencies to collectively strengthen our ecosystem and work efficiently

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<sup>4</sup> Consists of:

- Building support together by engaging the family and extended family
- Supporting the family through client slips
- Supporting new prosocial identity
- Emphasising the importance of first contact and continued contact

- Infrastructures, resources and co-organise events/activities
- Cross-learn and deepen practice
- Access to agency events and initiatives
- Build up peer leaders<sup>5</sup>

11. In addition, there was a FGD conducted to learn from PIEs' perspectives. The FGD was facilitated by members of the LC. Please refer to Chapter Three for details.

## **Purpose of this document**

### How to use this document?

12. In the correctional and aftercare sectors, there has been a proliferation of community organisations and informal groups offering prosocial support, especially for PIEs who are newly released from correctional institutions. Much practice wisdom has been accumulated from such practices over the years. To consolidate the vast practice wisdom, this LC is an attempt to kickstart the discussions, consolidation, and documentation of the experiences among the participating agencies.

13. This document will provide readers with a basic understanding of:

- a. What is a supportive community/group and how is it important in supporting Singapore's rehabilitative efforts?
- b. What are the considerations in building up and running a supportive community/group?

14. This is NOT a manual that provides the specific know-how in setting up and running a supportive community/group. Rather, this is **a collection of experiences that aim to inspire and provide some useful ideas** in setting up and running a supportive community/group, particularly for people who have a keen interest but are new and less familiar in this subject matter.

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<sup>5</sup> A list of areas to look at: Collective orientation and training, recognition for volunteers and leaders, peer leadership certification, accessibility of resources and Initiatives across agencies, building connection among the leaders, and self-care



### What is covered in this document?

The content from Chapter Two and subsequent ones are generated during the LC sessions, as well as written reflective pieces by the participating agencies. The following highlights the scope of each chapter:

- a. **Chapter Two** explains the need for a supportive community/group and what are the useful considerations when setting up one. Related to setting up a supportive community, group, this chapter also covers the recruitment, training, and recognition of volunteers, as well as how to monitor how well a community/group is run.
- b. **Chapter Three** presents the views of PIEs who have experienced supportive community/group. Their views will expand and enrich the views consolidated in this document.
- c. **Chapter Four** discusses utility and ways of partnering with other agencies and supportive community/group. This will help strengthen one's supportive community/group, as well as ensuring continuity of care and support for PIEs.
- d. **Chapter Five** is a conclusion that integrates the views of the earlier chapters and suggests the way going forward for the LC.

## Chapter Two

### Building a Thriving Supportive Community/Group (Agencies' Perspectives)

16. The focus in this chapter is the collective views of the LC members on the purposes of supportive community/group and concrete ideas on how they set up and ran communities/groups. Selected agencies shared their related experiences in running a supportive community/group, including how they carried out recruitment and training of their volunteers and how they monitored the running of their communities/groups.

#### Setting up a supportive community/group

##### Why set up a supportive community/group?

17. Chapter One briefly shared the role of supportive communities/groups in strengthening an ecosystem that supports long-term change among PIEs. The following are benefits, identified by LC members, of having a supportive community/group. They are displayed in the following table. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Benefits	Details
Provide a space where PIEs are cared for and listened to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The community is a space for PIEs to be heard and listened to. This is a place where views are shared without being judged. Challenges in recovery can be heard and supported.</li> </ul>
Access to new prosocial network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PIEs can make new friends outside their social circle, mixing with new people and familiarising themselves with different lifestyles that are pro-social.</li> </ul>

Instil and sustain hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive communities have a crucial role in instilling hope as members would share their journey of recovery while seeing others make that journey a reality. Hope is essential to building capabilities and resilience among PIEs. The sharing allowed them and others to envision a positive future beyond their past experiences.</li> </ul>
Promote acceptance and a sense of belonging within the society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a sense of belonging within a community is important for recovery (from drugs or other criminal behaviours).</li> <li>• A supportive community/ group is a micro representation of the larger community. Its promotion of acceptance and a sense of belonging can help bridge members' reintegration with the larger community and society.</li> </ul>

What are the ways to build a good supportive community/ group?

18. Chapter One has introduced four characteristics of a good supportive community/group based on the existing research. The following are ways and methods reported by LC members on how their agencies have built a good supportive community/group based on LC members' inputs on their tried and tested methods. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

<b>Ways to build a good supportive community/group</b>	<b>Details</b>
Promote cohesion and togetherness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIEs value "brotherhood" which can be leveraged by encouraging participation in programs and engagement activities together. Supportive communities/groups can be such a platform that welcomes and accepts PIEs of different backgrounds (sexual orientation, those with tattoos, struggle</li> </ul>

	<p>with alcohol and other substance use, and not being able to find a safe group of friends etc.).</p>
<p>Involve family and friends in the recovery journey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Family members and friends are interested in supporting the PIEs. Grandparents, parents, cousins, and friends provided valuable support, and they can be included in initiatives and activities to build the community.</li> <li>● Chapter Four has a discussion on the extent of involving family members in supportive community/group</li> </ul>
<p>Do things “informally”</p>	<p><u>Organise informal events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PIEs feel welcomed at such informal events (e.g. having a meal, outings) and they are able to foster bonds. The bonds were developed in a more ‘organic’ and natural setting rather than from programmes that were too "professional". Some agencies conduct fortnightly sports and games sessions for community engagement, while others organise activities that include serving the community by handing out food donations or cleaning activities.</li> </ul>
	<p><u>Promote informal interactions such as casual check in</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagements at community events where clients were invited to participate can also be opportunities for casual check-ins with clients. These were in a relaxed atmosphere. Low-intensity engagement can be valuable, building connections and trust between the agency and the client. This approach allowed for a more comfortable interaction, fostering a sense of connection and support.</li> <li>● However, it was important to have both regular and low-intensity engagement strategies. It was important to tailor</li> </ul>

	<p>interactions to the comfort and needs of the PIEs. (e.g. to meet up yearly or quarterly at the organisation events to check in on their journey). PIEs can be at various stages of their recovery and it can be good to offer a variety of support strategies and initiatives.</p>
<p>Explore collaboration between Professional and PIEs:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping professionals and PIEs may contribute to the running of the community/group differently. Hence, there is a need to have clarity of the role of professionally run support groups. These groups could also explore the options of professionals and PIEs co-facilitating or eventually run by PIEs alone with professionals providing support on a need to basis.</li> </ul>
<p>Provide opportunities for the PIEs to be involved in volunteering work within the community/group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving back through volunteering or other ways is one of the characteristics of a PIE on his/her path of change. This is part of their efforts to become a contributing citizen. Hence, it will be useful to have such opportunities via the supportive community/ group.</li> <li>• This also provides PIEs an opportunity to take up leadership or a leading role in the community/group. Having more responsibility may help to reinforce the person's commitment towards the community/ group.</li> </ul>

19. The following are shared by two agencies – SANA and AOC – on why and how they set up and run a supportive community/group.

## AGENCY SHARING

### Why and How to Set up Support Groups

#### Sharing by Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA)

SANA currently runs three ongoing support groups – for men, women, and families. All support groups have a theoretical basis through the programme design and are facilitated by trained and professional staff and PIE. The male and female support groups use SAMHSA's 8 dimensions of wellness (SAMHSA, 2016), while the family support groups use Velleman's Stress-Strain-Coping support model (2009). Members are individuals who have struggled or are struggling with drug addiction; they need not be previously incarcerated, though those who are currently undergoing rehabilitation programmes or programmes as designated by SPS or CNB are welcome to attend.

#### Why:

Despite the array of different modalities and orientations of support groups, multiple studies have shown that participation in support groups of any kind are highly effective in providing positive outcomes to wellbeing and recovery (Worrall, et al., 2018). Outcomes include:

- Reduction in symptoms and use of substances
- Reductions in "revolving door" issues in utilisation of services, hospitalisations and incarcerations
- Improved social competence and social networks,
- Improved self-efficacy and perception of self

Support group participants across modalities also report many of the same benefits from participation (Vickery, 2022):

- Fostering hope;
- Learning about the issue that brings them to the support group;
- Learning coping strategies;
- Overcoming isolation;
- Building social and support networks;
- Learning from successful role models (Galdas, et al., 2015);
- Feeling more in control over the situation;
- Overcoming stigma;
- Learning about the services available and being able to advocate more effectively.

How: Broadly, there are 5 main considerations in forming a support group:

<b>Key Considerations</b>	<b>Using Sana as an example to illustrate the considerations</b>
<p><u>Focus:</u> Support group should have a focus, e.g. recovery, fathering, wellness), The focus will guide the programme topics.</p> <p>At the core of a support group, there should be a common theme or specific topic, wherein we the clients will know what to expect from the group. This will also help to anticipate the needs of potential participants that may fall into the topical group as well as help align the goals and achievements you hope to derive from the formation of the group.</p>	<p>In SANA's case, our focus for the gendered support groups would be to improve their overall wellness in order to foster a balanced life for the individual who struggled with substance abuse. Thus, in every session, members discuss their experience and thoughts with regards to a specific wellness domain to improve their personal well-being.</p> <p>The family support group sessions focus on ending the cyclical nature of unhealthy stress coping mechanisms to alleviate caregiver stress. Thus, group members will likely be individuals who experience said stress, and the nature of the group would be to equip members with the necessary skills.</p>
<p><u>Participants:</u> Aside from topical commonalities, it is important to consider the sub-groups that you may wish to target. The group could be open to anyone or be gender specific. The age range of participants may be an important consideration as well. Each sub-group may provide a unique and different perspective to the topic.</p> <p><u>Facilitators:</u> Support groups should always be led by someone who is equipped with the skills necessary for facilitation, due to the dynamic nature of support groups. This may not necessarily be limited to a clinical professional; peer-led groups are also possible with adequate training.</p>	<p>SANA has the privilege of having trained facilitators to oversee the group sessions. Since the basis for the support groups are theoretical in nature and deals with sensitive topics, it is important to have facilitators to understand the given material and “prescribe” it accordingly, while dealing with the unpredictability of group dynamics.</p> <p>The facilitators are often clinical professionals themselves who have already been equipped with the basic clinical skills needed to attend to a group and its members; facilitators often go through several sessions as “observers” before beginning to facilitate a session on their own. Clinical supervision sessions are also compulsory for all facilitators – these supervisors also sit in these support groups to support growth in their skills. SANA also encourages opportunities for external training when relevant.</p>

<p><u>Meeting Structure:</u> Some meetings may also include time for informal socialising. Some meetings may also benefit from structured sessions, while others may thrive on a free-flowing orientation.</p>	<p>All SANA's support groups begin with 30 minutes of informal socialising over a meal. The actual session takes 1h 30m; the style of the support group is dependent on the members and their needs (As assessed in the first session); some members may prefer a more structured session with activities, while others benefit from an open-ended, thematic conversational approach.</p>
<p><u>Location &amp; Timing:</u> Keeping in mind the participants and their needs, it's important to consider their convenience and limitations. For example, some support groups can be fully virtual, while others may benefit from a face-to-face session, after office hours. The frequency of these sessions will also depend on the nature of the group. Some groups also run indefinitely as an open group, while others may have a set number of sessions, depending on the nature of the group.</p>	<p>Since SANA has one main branch and two other satellite offices, we can host support groups across locations. We also note that most members are only able to attend these sessions in the evenings or on the weekends, which is when our support groups are held as well. The groups are kept in a semi-open format – meaning that new members may join on a case-by-case basis; otherwise, new memberships are often held till the subsequent run.</p> <p>SANA previously experimented with virtual support groups as well as virtual attendance but found that members often preferred face to face meetings, even if it meant missing some sessions due to their personal schedules.</p> <p>The gendered support groups have a total of 9 sessions as we follow SAMHSA's 8 domains of wellness guide, while the family support group have a total of 3 sessions, following Velleman's model.</p>
<p>Assessing whether the support community/group is beneficial and useful</p> <p>- This is an area that should be thought about at the onset – because this will give clarity on Focus and how do we know if the Focus is met</p>	<p>Specifically for the gendered support groups, SANA uses the SURE (Substance Use Recovery Evaluator) as an evaluation tool. A pre-test is done in the first session. The scores are later compared to the post-test on the same questionnaire, done on the final support group session.</p> <p>Aside from the above, the group is being constantly through feedback from the</p>



- Some ways of assessing – getting feedback from beneficiaries and family members, staff/volunteers, using survey, observation of the engagement sessions, etc

members themselves, as well as through observers or clinical supervisors. A debrief form is also done at the end of every support group, highlighting the topics covered and the group's reception towards it, as well as some issues that may arise from the current sessions.

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## AGENCY SHARING

### Why and How to Set up Support Groups

#### Sharing by Agents of Change (AOC)

#### AOC: Empowering Ex-Offenders and Their Families in Singapore

AOC (short for *Agents of Change*) is a grassroots organisation in Singapore that takes a unique and holistic approach to supporting ex-offenders on their recovery journey. What sets AOC apart is its focus on involving family members in the rehabilitation process, providing a support network that extends beyond the ex-offenders themselves. Founded by a group of individuals who have successfully overcome their own struggles with crime and addiction, AOC is driven by a vision to create a safe and nurturing environment for ex-offenders and their families, ensuring sustainable reintegration into society.

#### Origins of AOC

AOC was founded by a group of ex-offenders who have turned their lives around. Having personally experienced the challenges of reintegrating into society, they understood how difficult it can be to rebuild a life after incarceration. These founders realised that while individual support systems are crucial, the role of family is often overlooked in recovery. They saw an opportunity to involve family members in the process of rehabilitation, turning them into active participants and pillars of support for their loved ones.

This vision was born out of a shared understanding of the isolation, stigma, and lack of trust that often follows ex-offenders even after they've served their sentences. By involving both ex-offenders and their families in the recovery process, AOC aims to break this cycle and create a support structure that fosters accountability, trust, and emotional well-being.

#### A Holistic Approach to Recovery

AOC's approach to rehabilitation is holistic, focusing on the mental, emotional, and social well-being of both the ex-offenders and their family members. The organisation's programs are built around three core principles:

1. **Peer Support:** The foundation of AOC lies in peer-to-peer support. The founders, having gone through the rehabilitation journey themselves, are able to offer unique insights and emotional support to those just starting out. This peer-led approach fosters trust and connection, as participants know they are being guided by individuals who have walked in their shoes.
2. **Family-Centred Support:** AOC's most distinctive feature is its inclusion of family members in the recovery process. Families often experience a range of emotions, including shame, anger, and confusion, when a loved one becomes incarcerated. AOC helps families understand the recovery process, providing them with counselling and support to heal together. Workshops, therapy sessions, and group discussions are organised specifically for families to equip them with the tools to support their loved ones while managing their own emotional journey.
3. **Community Engagement:** AOC understands that successful reintegration requires a shift in societal attitudes towards ex-offenders. The organisation works to build partnerships with local businesses, community organisations, and social services to

provide employment opportunities and reduce stigma. AOC also organises outreach programs that aim to educate the public on the challenges faced by ex-offenders and the importance of providing second chances.

### **Programs and Services**

AOC offers a range of services designed to meet the needs of both ex-offenders and their families, ensuring that the support is well-rounded and effective:

**Mentorship Programs:** AOC pairs ex-offenders with mentors who are further along in their recovery journey. These mentors offer guidance, advice, and emotional support, helping mentees stay focused on their goals while navigating the challenges of reintegration.

- **Family Workshops:** AOC holds regular workshops and seminars for family members, covering topics such as emotional resilience, understanding addiction, and effective communication. These sessions allow families to learn from one another and share their experiences, creating a strong community of support.
- **Counselling Services:** Both individual and family counselling is offered to help participants address underlying trauma, rebuild trust, and process the emotions associated with recovery. The goal is to strengthen family bonds and create a stable home environment that fosters long-term success.
- **Employment Assistance:** Recognizing the critical importance of financial stability, AOC works with various companies and vocational training institutes to provide job placements and skills development for ex-offenders. They advocate for fair employment opportunities and help build the confidence of participants through mock interviews, resume-building workshops, and career coaching.

### **The Impact of AOC's Work**

Since its inception, AOC has had a significant impact on the lives of both ex-offenders and their families. By creating a network of support that extends beyond the individual, AOC has been able to reduce recidivism rates among participants and foster a sense of community that strengthens the recovery process. Many ex-offenders have reported feeling empowered by the organisation's peer support model, which has helped them regain their self-worth and rebuild their lives with dignity.

For families, AOC's involvement has been transformative. Many family members, once unsure of how to navigate the emotional challenges of supporting an ex-offender, now feel equipped with the knowledge and emotional tools to play an active role in their loved ones' recovery. The family-centred approach has also helped mend fractured relationships and build stronger, healthier family dynamics.

### **Looking Ahead**

AOC continues to grow as a beacon of hope for ex-offenders and their families in Singapore. As the organisation expands, it hopes to collaborate further with government agencies, businesses, and the public to create more inclusive opportunities for reintegration. By spreading awareness and creating a culture of understanding, AOC aims to not only support individual recovery but also contribute to a more compassionate and rehabilitative society.

Through its innovative, family-inclusive approach, AOC is proving that true rehabilitation is possible when ex-offenders are given the right support — not just from peers, but from those who know them best: their families.

### **The Importance of Understanding What is Needed Now in the Recovery of an Ex-Offender**

Recovery for ex-offenders is a complex and highly individualised journey. A crucial part of facilitating this process lies in understanding what the ex-offender needs *now*, rather than focusing on the strategies or approaches that may have worked for them or others in the past. This real-time understanding is essential to providing effective support that adapts to the evolving challenges they face. Through continuous learning, trial and error, and the customization of recovery programs, we can help ex-offenders reintegrate successfully into society.

#### **Why “Now” Matters in Recovery?**

**Evolving Needs and Circumstances:** The recovery journey is not static. Ex-offenders face different challenges at various stages—early recovery may involve overcoming withdrawal or mental health crises, while later stages might centre on finding stable employment or repairing broken relationships. What worked for them in the past, or what worked for others, may no longer be relevant as their situation, mindset, and needs evolve. Staying attuned to their current circumstances ensures that support is always aligned with what is most beneficial *now*.

E.g. The older ex-offenders felt that they are not needed in any part of the family plans. AOC will gather resources to address the issues accordingly looking at the ready help that other organisations are providing. Internally, the peer support will ready the individual to open up other branches in their recovery going through it together.

#### **Why Giving Back to the Community Makes Ex-Offenders Feel Belonged**

For ex-offenders, reintegrating into society can be a difficult process, often marked by feelings of isolation, shame, and a lack of belonging. One powerful way for them to regain a sense of purpose and connection is through giving back to the community. When ex-offenders contribute positively to society, it can transform their identity, foster a sense of belonging, and help them rebuild trust with the community. Here are several key reasons why giving back can be such a meaningful experience for ex-offenders:

##### **1. Restoring a Positive Identity**

Many ex-offenders struggle with feelings of guilt and shame over their past actions. Society often labels them by their criminal record, which can create a negative identity that’s hard to escape. However, when ex-offenders engage in community service or mentorship, they redefine how others—and how they themselves—view them.

Giving back allows them to be seen as contributors, not just as former offenders. It empowers them to adopt a positive identity as someone who is helpful, responsible, and making a difference. This shift in self-perception is crucial for fostering self-worth and breaking free from the stigma associated with their past.

##### **2. Building a Sense of Purpose**

Ex-offenders often feel disconnected from society after their release, unsure of how they fit in or what they can offer. Contributing to the community gives them a renewed sense of purpose. By becoming active participants in society—whether through volunteering, mentoring, or leading outreach efforts—they feel that their actions have value. Having a meaningful role provides a reason to stay on a positive path. It motivates them to continue their recovery because they see themselves as agents of change, both for others and for themselves. This sense of purpose acts as a powerful force in maintaining long-term rehabilitation and preventing recidivism.

### **3. Rebuilding Trust with the Community**

One of the biggest challenges ex-offenders faces is rebuilding trust with society. Many feel judged or rejected by their communities, which can make reintegration difficult. Giving back through community service or volunteerism offers a tangible way to rebuild that trust. When ex-offenders contribute to the well-being of others, they demonstrate that they have changed and are committed to living lawfully and responsibly.

This process of actively giving back fosters understanding and can help change public perceptions of ex-offenders. The more they contribute, the more the community is likely to embrace them, reducing feelings of alienation and reinforcing that they are valued members of society.

### **4. Creating Positive Social Connections**

Ex-offenders often lose touch with positive social networks during their incarceration. Engaging in community service or other charitable work creates opportunities to form healthy, constructive relationships. These new social connections, based on shared goals and mutual support, are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging.

Being part of a team or group where they are respected and appreciated gives ex-offenders a chance to bond with others, develop friendships, and find mentors. This new social environment helps replace negative influences from their past with positive role models and supportive peers who reinforce their efforts to stay on the right path.

### **5. Promoting Empathy and Healing**

Many ex-offenders carry emotional scars from their past, whether due to addiction, trauma, or life circumstances that led to criminal behaviour. Giving back to others, especially those who are struggling or vulnerable, can promote empathy and healing. Helping others in need allows ex-offenders to see the impact of their actions in a positive light and understand the value of compassion.

Through this process, they not only heal others but also begin to heal themselves. The act of giving back becomes a way to reconcile with their past, make amends for their wrongdoings, and move forward in a positive, constructive direction. This emotional healing is a critical part of reintegration and personal growth.

### **6. Breaking the Cycle of Marginalisation**

Ex-offenders are often marginalised by society, facing barriers to employment, education, and even housing. This marginalisation can perpetuate feelings of being an outsider and can push individuals back into criminal behaviour. By giving back to the community, ex-offenders reclaim a sense of agency and counteract the social exclusion they experience. Being able to actively contribute helps ex-offenders see themselves as equals, not as outsiders, within their community. It reinforces the idea that they can be valued for their skills, experience, and contributions, rather than being solely defined by their past mistakes.

This helps break the cycle of marginalisation and empowers them to integrate fully into society.

## **7. Empowerment Through Leadership**

For ex-offenders who take on mentorship roles, especially those guiding others in their recovery journey, giving back can be particularly empowering. Mentorship allows them to lead by example, showing that change is possible. As they help others, they reinforce their own commitment to recovery and solidify their new role as a leader within the community. This leadership not only boosts their confidence but also amplifies their impact on others. By sharing their own experiences and providing support to others who are struggling, ex-offenders help create a positive ripple effect, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps and break the cycle of crime and incarceration.

## **Conclusion**

Giving back to the community plays a transformative role in the lives of ex-offenders, offering them a path to rebuild their sense of belonging, self-worth, and identity. It provides an opportunity for ex-offenders to redefine themselves as positive contributors, regain trust, and form meaningful social connections. Through acts of service, they foster empathy, heal from past wounds, and develop a sense of purpose and leadership. Ultimately, giving back allows ex-offenders to reintegrate into society in a way that benefits both them and the communities they serve, creating a mutual cycle of healing and growth.

## What are the challenges encountered when running a supportive community/group?

20. The following are some of the challenges highlighted by the LC members when running a supportive community/group:

- a. Lack of motivation and readiness among PIEs
  - Some PIEs perceive that a support group is not relevant in their recovery journey, but rather just an additional activity. Hence, they are not motivated to participate. This highlights the importance of helping PIEs understand and experience the benefits of support groups in their recovery. This is important because long term participation requires PIEs' willingness and motivation.
- b. Unwilling to be associated with support group
  - PIEs may not consider attending support groups, as it may suggest to them that they are not doing well, and as such may find it "embarrassing" to attend.
  - Some may feel stigmatised, particularly those with multiple incarceration experiences. The challenge is how to deal with their perceived societal judgement and create a more supportive and accepting environment
  - Another reason could be some PIEs are unwilling to "embrace their backgrounds". (i.e. acknowledging one's criminal history and past identity as an offender). They wanted to move away from their past and not associate with recovery groups. However, this may not be helpful for a person to foster self-acceptance, which is a crucial aspect in one's reintegration and recovery.

- c. Challenge of creating a positive environment within the support group
  - Agencies need to create an environment where PIEs feel comfortable to join, share and journey together. This is not only important in recruiting and retaining PIEs, but also help them to participate fully so as to reap the benefits of a support group.
  
- d. Some PIEs may need more extensive support from a wider range of activities across agencies and supportive communities/groups, regardless of if they are secular or religious. What matters is that the PIEs receive pro-social support, better able to cope healthily, and able to learn from other individuals.
  - This implies that agencies and supportive communities/groups need to collaborate to facilitate PIEs to better tap on the many resources in the community.

#### How to recruit, manage, and train volunteers?

21. Many of the supportive communities and groups are self-run, relying solely or mainly on volunteers. The ability of a community/ group to recruit, manage, and train volunteers is important then.

22. The following are shared by two agencies – PFS and ISCOS – of their related experiences in this matter.

## AGENCY SHARING

### Recruitment and Volunteering

#### Sharing by Prison Fellowship Singapore (PFS)

Volunteers are the backbone of support groups, offering emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of community that is indispensable. Their contributions enhance the accessibility, diversity, and sustainability of support groups, making them more effective in helping individuals navigate challenging times. The selfless dedication of volunteers not only benefits the group members but also enriches the volunteers' lives, creating a positive and impactful cycle of support and compassion. As we recognize the importance of volunteers, it is crucial to support and appreciate their efforts, ensuring that support groups continue to thrive and provide essential services to those in need.

To maintain and grow these vital networks of volunteers, it is crucial to have effective strategies for recruiting and training volunteers. Successful recruitment and training ensure that volunteers are well-prepared to support members, enhance the group's effectiveness, and sustain its operations over the long term.

#### Recruitment Strategies

##### 1. Targeted Outreach

Effective volunteer recruitment begins with targeted outreach. Identify the demographics most likely to have an interest in your cause, such as individuals who have personal experience with the issues the support group addresses. Use social media, local community boards, newsletters, and partnerships with related organisations to reach these potential volunteers. Tailor your messaging to highlight the personal and societal impact of volunteering, appealing to both altruistic motives and personal growth.

##### 2. Leverage Current Volunteers

Current volunteers can be your best advocates. Encourage them to share their positive experiences with their networks and refer potential volunteers. Word-of-mouth recommendations are powerful because they come from trusted sources and provide a personal touch. Consider implementing a referral program that rewards current volunteers for bringing in new recruits.

##### 3. Engage with Local Communities

Building relationships within local communities can significantly enhance recruitment efforts. Attend local events, participate in community fairs, and collaborate with schools, churches, and businesses to promote your support group. Offering informational sessions or workshops can also attract individuals interested in learning more about your cause and how they can help.



#### **4. Social Media**

Utilise online platforms and volunteer matching services to reach a broader audience. Social media can connect you with individuals actively seeking volunteer opportunities. Ensure your postings are clear, engaging, and highlight the benefits and impact of volunteering with your support group.

### **Training Programs**

#### **1. Comprehensive Orientation**

A thorough orientation is the foundation of effective volunteer training. This initial session should introduce new volunteers to the mission, values, and goals of the support group. Provide an overview of the group's structure, the specific roles volunteers will play, and the expectations for their involvement. This orientation helps volunteers understand their importance to the group's success and sets the stage for their ongoing engagement.

#### **2. Skill Development Workshops**

Offer workshops that focus on developing the specific skills volunteers need to be effective. These workshops might include training in active listening, crisis intervention, empathy, communication techniques, and confidentiality protocols. Tailor these sessions to address the unique challenges and needs of your support group. Interactive role-playing exercises can be particularly effective in helping volunteers practise and internalise these skills.

#### **3. Ongoing Education and Support**

Training should not end after the initial orientation. Provide ongoing education opportunities to keep volunteers informed about new developments, best practices, and emerging issues related to your support group's focus. Regular check-ins, support meetings, and additional training sessions help volunteers stay engaged, improve their skills, and address any challenges they encounter.

#### **4. Mentorship Programs**

Pair new volunteers with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, support, and feedback. Mentorship programs help new volunteers acclimate to their roles more quickly and create a sense of community within the volunteer team. Mentors can share their experiences, offer practical advice, and serve as a source of encouragement.

### **Retention and Recognition**

#### **1. Recognize and Appreciate Volunteers**

Recognition is key to retaining volunteers. Regularly acknowledge and celebrate their contributions through thank-you notes, shout-outs in meetings, and recognition events. Highlight their impact on the support group and the difference they make in members' lives. Consider implementing formal recognition programs, such as volunteer of the month awards or service milestones.

## **2. Provide Growth Opportunities**

Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged if they feel they are growing and learning. Offer opportunities for volunteers to take on new roles, lead projects, or participate in advanced training. Providing a clear path for personal and professional development within the support group keeps volunteers motivated and committed.

## **3. Foster a Supportive Environment**

Create a supportive and inclusive environment where volunteers feel valued and connected. Encourage open communication, provide regular feedback, and offer support when volunteers face challenges. Building a strong sense of community among volunteers enhances their commitment and satisfaction.

## **Conclusion**

Recruiting and training volunteers are critical components of sustaining effective support groups. By employing targeted recruitment strategies, offering comprehensive training programs, and fostering a supportive environment, support groups can attract and retain dedicated volunteers. These efforts ensure that volunteers are well-prepared to provide essential support, contribute meaningfully to the group's mission, and enhance the overall wellbeing of group members. Investing in the recruitment and training of volunteers ultimately strengthens the support group, enabling it to continue making a positive impact in the community.

## AGENCY SHARING

### Role of Peer Leaders

#### Sharing by Industrial and Services Cooperative Society Ltd (ISCOS)

The ISCOS Titans (Peer Leaders) play a crucial role in helping the organisation achieve its mission of supporting incarcerated offenders, ex-offenders, their families, and the wider community. To ensure they are fully equipped for this important role, we provide them with skills training that prepares them to be effective leaders.

In recognition of their dedication and the positive impact they make, we nominate our Titans for various awards. This not only celebrates their hard work but also encourages them to become beacons of hope and inspiration for others in society.

To carry out their duties, Titans may need to take time off from their regular jobs. As a gesture of appreciation, we provide them with a monetary honorarium to compensate for their efforts and time.

Through their work, these Titans undergo a profound transformation, shifting from being recipients of help to becoming providers of help. This process, known as the "helper-therapy principle," benefits both the peer leaders and those they serve. By helping others, the peer leaders reinforce their own pro-social identity and boost their self-efficacy, empowering them as agents of positive change in their communities.

*Key focal areas of engaging and developing Titans are as follows*

- To advance organisational goals in reaching out to incarcerated offenders, ex-offenders, families, and communities
  - Training & Upskilling
    - Learning activities to build key competencies such as
      - Basic public speaking and facilitation skills to provide effective motivational sharing and facilitation of support groups
      - Understudy with a senior peer leader to build familiarity and confidence
      - Specialised courses by the Singapore Prison Service under its Development Framework for Offender Rehabilitation Personnel (DORP) for enhanced and specific skills sets to handle targeted offending profiles
        - E.g. Working with violent offenders, Engaging families of incarcerated individuals etc.
      - Attending Local seminars/ symposiums on rehabilitation and reintegration to gain insights and further exposure to practices in the corrections and reintegration sector

- To strengthen pro-social identity and be a source of inspiration to others who are on the path of turning over a new leaf.
  - Recognitions
    - Nominations of peer leaders for awards
      - Yellow Ribbon Awards
      - Prison Volunteers Awards
      - ISCOS Appreciation Awards
      - Other national awards
  
- To show appreciation through monetary compensation and access to opportunities to participate in pro-social activities.
  - Incentives
    - Monetary honorarium
    - Complementary tickets/ admissions to community events such as exhibitions, concerts, performances
  
- To strengthen pro-social identity by switching the role from being recipient of help to that of dispenser of help (helper-therapy principle)
  - Meaningful Engagements
    - Incare – Motivational Engagement & Structured recurring programmes with Inmates
      - E.g. Gang Desistors programmes; Desistance Project (4 sessions recurring runs), Project Resolute (Monthly sessions)
    - Aftercare – Reintegration support to peers/desistors & Involvement in Give-Back Activities
      - E.g. Project Reconnect (Support Immediate needs for newly released inmates), Support group Facilitation, Food Distribution etc.
    - Prevention Work – Outreach to youth through School and Community Talks
      - E.g. Collaboration with YRCE (Yellow Ribbon Community Engagement) to schools, Sharing in Roadshows/Conferences

## How to monitor and review the quality of a supportive community/group?

23. Much time, efforts, and resources are invested into setting up and building a supportive community/group. Hence, it is important to have some methods of looking at how well the key programmes and activities are run and whether they are benefiting the community/group members. The following is an example of how an agency – SACA -- monitors and reviews the quality of social support programmes, for example a support group.

### **AGENCY SHARING**

#### **Strengthening Social Support Activities and Programmes:**

#### **Through Monitoring and Reviewing**

#### **Sharing by Singapore After-Care Association**

##### **1. Why the need to monitor and review?**

- Social support plays a crucial role in desistors' (otherwise known as a PIE) journey of change. In response, many agencies and groups run many types of activities and programmes to build up and reinforce desistors' social support
- Considering the fact that resources and efforts have been invested to build up the activity or programme, it will be in our interest to monitor and review them
- Monitoring and reviewing the activities and programmes help strengthen our social support activities and programmes. Ultimately, our beneficiaries and clients will benefit and feel better supported
- As we grow in knowledge and experience in how to run a beneficial activity and programme, we can share our good practice with other agencies and groups, thus helping to improve our collective support efforts in the sector

##### **2. Scope of this sharing**

At Singapore After-Care Association (SACA), an aftercare agency providing welfare and rehabilitation programmes/services for ex-offenders and their families, we periodically review our programmes/services to ensure:

- o How well the programmes and services are designed and implemented, and

- o Whether the programmes and services achieve their objectives, ultimately benefiting the targeted beneficiaries and clients

We will be sharing some basic ideas on how to monitor and review our social support activities and programmes

#### 4. Types of Review

There are two types of review:

Process	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Focus on how well a programme is implemented according to its plan. This to ensure that the key areas of the activities and programmes are conducted according to the plan.</li> <li>o It may be useful if there is write-up to document the plan, so that everyone is on the same page</li> <li>o When an activity or programme is well-implemented and is found to be beneficial, it can be replicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Focus on whether the activities or programmes are able to achieve the objectives that were planned in the first place</li> </ul>

#### 4. Three things to ensure an activity or programme is beneficial and effective

The following table summarises three things that need to be done “right” to ensure that our activity and programme is beneficial and effective

- o Firstly, there is a need to ensure that whatever activity or programme that we want to run is well-thought through. Part of this is for the activity and programme developer to be clear of its objectives and what are the exact outcomes that the developer wants to see. This is what it means by “Designed right”.
  - When people design and plan their activity and programme, they can seek advice from experts, books/research papers, and existing good practice by others running same or similar activity and programme
  - For activities and programmes that are complicated, it will be useful to come up with a logic model
  - Logic model is a way to diagrammatically depict or map out the shared relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact of a programme. Please see Annex B for a sample of logic model
- o Secondly, there is a need to “Implemented right”. A well-thought-through plan is useless if the people running the activity or programme do not follow and do as they wish.
  - For example, there is an agreed plan on what topics and the ways befrienders engage beneficiaries. But if every befriender chooses not to follow and just do what one prefers, there will be a problem

later on when we are reviewing the outcome. Because even if befriending is later found to be beneficial, it will be more difficult to determine what are the specific areas in befriending that have made the befriending programme a success

- This will then make it difficult for others to replicate and implement for other beneficiaries and clients
- Considering the importance of implementation, it is important then to have a way to monitor whether the plan is being followed by people running the activity or programme.
  - For example, in a one-on-one befriending, it will be challenging to find out how a befriender conducts a befriending session. Hence, there is a need to identify some ways to check whether a plan is being followed or not. This will be discussed in the next section
- o When an activity or programme is both well-designed/planned and well-run, then reviewing its outcomes will be appropriate and useful. This is known as “Measured right”

**Designed right**

To what extent does the programme address the identified needs?

**Implemented right**

How well was the programme implemented (fidelity to model, quality of delivery etc.)?

**Measured right**

Did the programme produce or contributed to the intended outcomes?  
For whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?  
Are there unintended effects?

(Referenced from *CARE Network Summit 2021: The Next Horizon* by Programme Development and Evaluation Branch, Spore Prison Service)

## 5. Steps in Conducting a Review

The following table provides an overview on how to conduct a review of an activity or programme:

Step		Details
1	Planning for Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Identify internal stakeholders (e.g. Agency/group head and key members, programme manager/leader, volunteers, beneficiaries) (and external if necessary, e.g. funders, other supporting agencies)</li> <li>· Solicit their views and expectation of the review</li> <li>· Review logic model</li> <li>· Decide the purpose of review and related scope (i.e. programme design and planning, process/implementation review, and outcome review), in reference to the logic model</li> </ul>
2	Designing a review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Identify suitable ways to monitor and determine the best way to implement</li> </ul>
3	Collecting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Identify data collection method that is both efficient and do not compromise validity (i.e. accuracy) of data</li> <li>· Some of the methods are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Feedback form by programme deliverers (e.g. volunteers) and beneficiaries (&amp; their families if necessary). Feedback form can be designed and aligned to the programme logic model. For greater validity, it is useful to use tested measurements used by others.                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please see Annex C for a feedback form. Do note that this feedback form is aligned to the logic model presented in Annex B.</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Live observation of how a programme session is conducted. This may include inviting an expert (e.g. seasoned practitioner familiar with befriending engagement) to observe and assess</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4	Analysing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Analyse the data in consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. agency/group head, programme manager/ leader and his/her team)</li> </ul>



5	Taking action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Decide who and how to disseminate the review findings</li> <li>· Decide who and how to follow up on the review recommendations, including the ways to monitor future implementation</li> <li>· Decide when the next review period is</li> </ul>
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(Do note that in this diagram, “evaluation” is used instead of “review”)

Some people may view activity and programme monitoring and reviewing as a daunting process as the steps may seem complicated. For a start, it will be good to focus on having a well-thought-through programme/activity plan and importantly be clear of its objectives. One can also start with gathering feedback periodically, either informally or through formal feedback, to find out about the implementation and improve on the implementation process.

A more formal review is known as *Evaluation*. For more information about evaluation, please refer to [ncss-self-guide full-guide.pdf](#) In addition to the guide, NCSS has been supporting agencies who require support in evaluation. [Unlocking Impact - NCSS Sector Evaluation Framework Explained | National Council of Social Service](#)

24. Setting up and running a supportive community/group, as seen from this chapter, involves multiple aspects. One of the key areas highlighted here is the recruitment, training, and management of volunteers.

25. This chapter is based on the collective experience of the LC members. The next chapter is the views of several PIEs with experiences in supportive community/group.

## Chapter Three

### Insights from PIEs' Experiences in Supportive Communities/ Groups

#### Focus group discussion (FGD)

##### Introduction

26. Based on the discussion in the LC, the members decided that it would be useful to seek inputs from PIEs regarding their experience in support groups. Hence, a focus group discussion (FGD) was arranged.

27. The FGD was guided by the following aims:

a. Deepen understanding of PIEs' view of social support and its relevance to their (a) reintegration into community and (b) change (i.e. stay away from crimes/drugs)

i. To understand how social support help PIEs to meet their  
motivation/aspirations, needs, and overcome challenges

b. Identify what are the factors (a) within and (b) beyond the supportive community/group that has contributing to one's sustained involvement

28. Please refer to Annex D for details of the methodology.

##### Findings, Analysis, and Discussion

29. Based on the findings generated from the FGD, an analysis was done to identify the main themes. A total of 5 themes have been generated; among these five themes, there were three sub-themes. The themes are incorporated into two headings, in alignment with the FGD's aims.

##### Features of a thriving support group

30. One of the FGD's aims is to identify the characteristics of a thriving support group that can attract and retain members.

31. Few features of a thriving support group have been identified based on findings' analysis.

Group culture

32. A consensus from the FGD is the importance of having a positive environment in the support group, where there is a climate of acceptance and accountability. This "acceptance" is experienced as unconditional by the visitor or new member and are not pressured to remain in the group.

*"Inclusive. A sense of belonging, the love that they share, makes me stay. They don't force." (Participant 1)*

33. Having a group of people with experiences in criminality including drug use and incarceration may have contributed to a climate of acceptance.

*"It's easier to connect with people who come from the same background, speak the same language, share similar experiences, and have the same goals for change" (Participant 2)*

34. The findings are consistent with group work literature which emphasise the need to promote a climate of safety for members to be willing to participate in a social group and contribute positively.

35. In addition, what may have contributed to this positive environment is not just what happens within the group session, but it is the bonding among the members that happens beyond the formal activities.

36. This is contrasted to what the participants had found unhelpful in support groups – the facilitators taking too directive a stance in the support groups may be perceived as unhelpful.

*"Some support groups just focus on telling me what to do and people go away" (Participant 3)*

Provide opportunities to give back

37. One way to promote greater involvement of members in the supportive community is the provision of volunteering opportunities. This is consistent with the idea of "giving back", also known as generativity in the desistance literature. Giving back has many benefits for PIEs, such as the following examples.

*“...doing this voluntary work is good—it motivates me, makes me feel good.”*  
(Participant 3)

*“Able to contribute and be volunteers; can give back, gain acceptance”* (Participant 4)

#### Group topics and activities

38. One of the expected topics in a support group meeting is the discussion of drug recovery (or dealing with re-offending of other crimes).

*“We need more support groups to talk about recovery.”* (Participant 3)

*“When attending the meetings, it helps. The main point is recovery. The journey in the meetings is not the same, but the conclusion is the same: recovery.”* (Participant 5)

39. The group meetings are not merely psycho-educational but are a platform for members to share their stories, such as drug use and recovery.

*“I am privileged to hear a lot of life stories, both clinical and in support groups. It is important to explore these stories.”* (Participant 6)

40. Supportive communities and groups are not limited to the typical group sessions where people engage in conversations. Consistent with what has been shared at the Learning Community meetings, the members also participate in activities such as outings, sports, or charity work.

*“The activities help us connect, which is important, they help me change and forget about negative things. Contributing to the group is also important. We can also become volunteers”* (Participant 4)

#### Expectation of new members

41. People need to join supportive communities and groups willingly. Participants of the FGD collectively agreed that the PIEs themselves need to have a certain degree of motivation, willingness, and readiness to seek help, including joining support groups.

*“Singapore offers a lot of support, but you have to make the first move, otherwise, nobody will know. You need to know what you want”* (Participant 7)

*“Not all inmates have that self-motivation to go to different organisations, they may not have the hope.” (Participant 8)*

#### Role of family in support groups

42. The role of the family in the support group was raised in the FGD session. FGD participants who have or were attending support groups involving family members reported benefits.

*“But when family members are there, it is very transparent. The facilitator will ask family members if it's true. You can't lie. Whatever I say, my wife will respond. That helps. It allows my family members to understand how hard it is for me to change. It allows for understanding between me and my family.” (Participant 5)*

43. Other benefits of having families attend support groups is that the family members may find support from families of other PIEs.

*“Got support from the family members of other members. We became friends” (Participant 5)*

44. However, there was no consensus of this arrangement among the FGD participants. They were those who would prefer not to involve their family members. One reason is the quality of the relationship – it would be difficult to get family members to participate if the relationship was distant or conflictual. Another reason was that PIEs may view that recovery is a personal issue, and families should not be implicated or inconvenienced.

*“I separate my family from my support groups. I don't want to involve them when I went to negative places, but I also don't want to involve them when I move towards change” (Participant 7)*

*“The truth is for me to have family support, mine was not that strong during that period of time” (Participant 8)*

45. The population of PIEs is heterogeneous; hence their needs are expected to be diverse. Moreover, a PIE's needs will evolve overtime; considering a person who is newly released into the community and having been in the community for at least two years.

46. Similarly, this applies to familial situations too, which can be vastly different. Although conceptually families had a critical role to play in a person's recovery, not all would be suitable for support groups. One consideration is the readiness of families to be a support to clients

and their willingness to participate in the support group. The degree of support is often contingent on the quality of relationship between client and his/her family. If there is a negative relationship between the PIE and his/her family, it may even affect the dynamics in the support group. The following is an example of the need for the family to be ready before there can be a meaningful dialogue between the PIE and his/her family.

*“We put on this hat which we don’t get to wear everyday. We wear different hats and masks. Not necessarily something our family wants to tune into. When we reach the stage where there can be dialogue, involving the family can also be healing. Addiction is a family business. When you can come into the space to talk about it, it facilitates deep healing.” (Participant 3)*

47. On the other hand, it depends on PIEs’ views about family’s role in one’s recovery. For instance, a participant pointed out that it was the family that needed support, not the other way round.

*“My family needs my support, not the other way around.” (Participant 7)*

#### Support beyond the supportive community and group

48. To increase participation of support groups, more can be done to facilitate PIEs’ access to resources in the community by sharing relevant information to them while they are still serving incarcerations.

*“In-care is very important, while we are inside, we are not sure what kind of support there is outside. We should have access to information about what support is available when we are inside.” (sharing of information during in-care) (Participant 5)*

*“During in-care, they (befriending agency) came to us but didn’t follow through afterward. How do organisations filter inmates to the right organisation?” (Participant 8)*

49. Particularly for participants who were recovering from addiction, the need for support is long-term. However, some prosocial support services are time limited. Hence, there is a need to ensure transition of one programme to another to ensure that the person continues to receive help.

*“Recovery is forever and is long-term, it is important to have some continuous support. I still come (support groups), it doesn’t stop” (Participant 8)*

*“During that time, she just listened. It helps. She (befriender) didn’t say anything or give advice. But after six months, she just said, “Thanks, I think you are coping well. Our relationship will end here” (Participant 7)*

50. This implies that there is a need for closer collaboration between agencies to ensure that PIEs can transit from one programme to another. Furthermore, it was interestingly highlighted in this FGD that it will be useful for agencies to collaborate in terms of running events, which has been persistently mentioned by various agencies during the Learning Community meetings.

*“We aimed to involve families by creating a recreational event. My hope is for these to not be isolated, single-organisation events, but rather events that involve multiple organisations, even if it's just one event” (Participant 8)*

## **Discussion and Summary**

51. The findings from the FGD are insightful and they should be deeply considered as the FGD participants have first-hand accounts of experiencing a supportive community/group. It is observed that their experiences are similar to that of the LC members. For instance, the culture in a supportive community/group is definitely a vital element that needs to be built up, because it promotes a sense of belonging among community/group members which strengthens their commitment to remain and even contribute to the community/group. Another similarity is the idea of giving back and using the community/group as a platform to do so.

52. There are three noteworthy highlights from the FGD findings:

- a. The process of engagement with community/group members should be collaborative and empowering and not top-down and directive (e.g. “some support groups just telling me what to do). This is related to the idea that joining a community/group is voluntary and cannot be coerced or pressured. Moreover, the supportive community/group should be conducted in a way where the members experience a sense of safety and acceptance, which would help them to be willing to participate and share their stories and personal struggles. This is linked to an earlier idea of building a positive culture that promotes a sense of safety and ownership. This is crucial not only in retaining existing members but attracting new ones.

- b. The degree of family involvement in the PIE's recovery and change varies as it is dependent on family circumstances. Hence, the inclusion of family members into a supportive community/group may not be applicable for every PIE. This needs to be considered on a case-to-case basis.
- c. To build a thriving supportive community/group requires external support. Firstly, there can be better coordination to recruit and prepare inmates in correctional institutions to participate in support groups in the community. Secondly, the needs of a PIE will evolve, and some social support programmes may be time-limited, hence there is a need for the community agencies and partners to coordinate their services so that there will be continuity of care and support for the PIE.

53. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has yielded valuable insights, garnering diverse perspectives from our participants (PIEs). The objective was not to devise a definitive approach to establishing a thriving supportive community, but rather to enrich our understanding of the issue through collective feedback. This enables readers to develop their own strategies and solutions.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Working with Partners**

What are the collective efforts across agencies to strengthen the ecosystem of social support?

54. The idea of collaborative efforts across agencies was periodically raised in the meetings. It was clear that there is no single agency that can effectively cater to multiple needs of PIEs. Moreover, to optimise limited manpower and other resources, collaboration is necessary.

55. One of the LC sessions discussed the topic of collaboration among agencies. Please refer to Annex A for the LC's breakout group discussion on this topic. The discussions have been rich, churning out ideas on how to collectively promote best practice and specific ways of how agencies can collaborate with one another.

56. In addition, there was an agreement among the LC members that it is important to strengthen peer leadership since PIEs have increasingly taken up leadership roles and other key responsibilities in running a supportive community/group, not to mention that they strive to be aspiring role models for new members in the community/group.

57. The following are sharing by TSA and FITRAH about their experience of collaborating with other agencies to strengthen social support of PIEs.

## AGENCY SHARING

### **The Salvation Army's Collaboration Journey with other Agencies (CREST – TSA Programme)**

#### **Sharing by The Salvation Army (TSA)**

The Community Re-Entry Support for Transition (CREST) programme was designed to meet the practical needs of newly released prisoners. During their initial release, ex-offenders face many practical challenges: lack of employment opportunities, low savings, potential homelessness, adjustment to a modern technology-focussed society and many other practical issues.

If these practical challenges are not addressed early and adequately, there is a high potential that newly released ex-offenders might go back and seek help from their negative-influencing friends. This could increase their probability of re-offending.

The Salvation Army Prison Support Services (TSA-PSS) designed the CREST programme with emphasis on:

- (1) Mobilisation and Training of volunteers to befriend ex-offenders just before their release and to walk alongside the ex-offenders after their release.
- (2) Collaborations with existing community partners/agencies to bring existing community resources to help ex-offenders.

TSA-PSS would not duplicate and create a similar service if there are already community partners/agencies doing good work in that space. Instead, TSA-PSS would collaborate with these agencies and establish processes whereby its befrienders could smoothly bring ex-offenders to access help. The following are some examples of collaboration between TSA-PSS and its community partners/agencies in the CREST programme:

#### **Homelessness Issue:**

To help newly released ex-offenders who do not have a home to go back to, TSA-PSS collaborates with HCSA Highpoint which is an established transitional shelter agency. TSA-PSS identifies these prisoners early during its CREST intake assessment. TSA-PSS then works with HCSA Highpoint to arrange for shelter interviews *before their release* so that they would have a roof over their heads from the day that they are released.

**Employment Issue:**

Most prisoners generally have a job upon release with the help of YRSG. However, sometimes due to unforeseen circumstances or job-misfit, some newly released ex-offenders fall through the gap and do not have a job.

TSA-PSS works with employment agencies (such as Findjobs) and inclusive employers (such as Agape Services and Eng Leng Contractors etc). Befrienders would help newly released ex-offenders to fill up a brief standardised Candidate Employment Profile. This “mini-resume” is then sent to potential employers to find suitable jobs for newly released employees at the quickest possible time.

Some newly released ex-offenders are not ready and need to be “prepared” for work. TSA-PSS would refer some of them to Agape Connecting-People’s ATP programme to acquire some basic skills to prepare them. TSA-PSS also works with different social service agencies (such as Cornerstone Community Services) to organise Life-Skills workshops that can help them.

**Simple yet essential Practical Needs**

Especially for those who have been incarcerated for a long time, ex-offenders often face difficulties even with daily practical needs that we take for granted. They may lack toiletries for their personal hygiene and clothings/shoes needed for new-found jobs. Some would also need help with Ezlink cards to take public transport to work. TSA-PSS provides some of these items free to those in the TSA programme. For those who need more, TSA-PSS also works with its sister social enterprise Red Shield Industries (Thrift shops) to provide household appliances and additional clothing at a hugely discounted price.

**Low Savings**

Many ex-offenders have such low savings that they do not have enough money to reach their next payday even if they have a job. TSA-PSS works with Lakeside Community Services so that the disbursement of Yellow Ribbon Enablement/Emergency Fund can be a smooth process. Timely help to provide emergency funds is very important to prevent ex-offenders from going back to their old friends for help.

TSA-PSS also works with Food from the Heart who donated food items such as canned food and instant noodles. These items will be distributed to ex-offenders who need them.

**Mobile Phones**

We are in the digital era, and it is almost impossible to access government services without the SingPass. Befrienders will help ex-offenders to get their SingPass set up at Community

Centres. Mobile phones are often needed for service authentication and are now an essential item.

ISCOS has “Give a Line, Change a Live” (GALCAL) programme that helps ex-offenders to obtain a mobile phone and plan if they do not have one. TSA-PSS would help those in the CREST programme to apply to ISCOS while they are still in prison. If approved, they could arrange to collect their phone once they are released. This initiative cuts the waiting time for ex-offenders to obtain a phone, reduces their initial mobile expenses and improves the timeliness of their access to government resources that helps their reintegration to society.

The above are some examples of how TSA-PSS collaborates with existing community partners and agencies to bring available resources to help newly released ex-offenders. We are bound to meet someone who needs practical help in our support groups. Having a workable plan to address this need is essential for the ultimate success and sustainability of the support group. TSA-PSS has chosen the collaborative approach which utilises the existing strength of various agencies/stakeholders and provides timely resources to the ex-offenders whom we want to help.

### **Considerations when initiating and strengthening collaboration with other agencies**

- 1. Avoiding Resource Duplication.** TSA-PSS would not duplicate and create a similar service if there are already community partners/agencies doing good work in that area.
- 2. Being Beneficiary-focussed.** TSA-PSS looks to work with agencies that truly embrace the principle of putting the beneficiaries first. We usually gain insights into this aspect by looking at how partnering agencies made their decisions in their other projects. Partnering agencies collaborate better when their values are more in line.
- 3. Value-adding through Collaboration.** For us, the collaboration that truly adds value-adds is one that leverages on every collaborating partner’s strength and that collaboration ultimately leads to the improvement of service that the beneficiaries receive. The improvement could be qualitative (e.g. Timeliness of service) or quantitative (e.g. Greater amount of help etc). We should not collaborate for the sake of collaboration.
- 4. Participating actively in Sector-related Events.** We learn best practices and gain from others’ experiences. We could also identify potential new collaboration partners during these events. Set aside time to meet and follow up with potential partners after the event.
- 5. Working Together.** Buy-in from leaders of all partnering agencies is important. In addition, partnering agencies should at least work out the overall support each agency expects from one another, preferably in a written form so that all can have a common understanding. For detailed execution, try to find the operating and communication process that is compatible with the internal processes of all participating agencies.

## AGENCY SHARING

### **FITRAH's Supporting Community Partners**

#### **Sharing by Family and Inmates Through-care Assistance Haven (FITRAH)**

FITRAH's programmes and services are specially curated to meet our desired outcomes.

#### **FITRAH's Desired Outcomes**

- Strengthen inmates' values via faith-based learning,
- Enhance support for families impacted by incarceration,
- Enhance ex-offenders' prosocial capital and
- Connecting ex-offenders and their families with community resources.

### **Overview of FITRAH's programmes and services**

#### **1. Enhancing prison chaplaincy work catered to Muslim inmates**

Improve religious support services tailored to Muslim inmates' spiritual needs, strengthening guidance within prisons to foster rehabilitation.

- **Back-to-FITRAH (BTF) Curriculum**

The Back-to-FITRAH curriculum is designed for in-care inmates with the aim of instilling mercy embodied by Islamic philosophy. The curriculum includes:

- Ø Friday and Eid Prayers
- Ø Weekly Religious Classes
- Ø Individual Religious Counselling sessions

- **Insan Mukmin (IM) Programme**

Co-developed with PERGAS (Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association), Insan Mukmin is a 20-week programme that has three phases. The first two, which are conducted in the pre-release phase before the supervisees start their community-based programme and the third phase once they are in the community. The programme aims to guide them with positive values and pro-social habits that are aligned to Islamic values and principles as they reintegrate back to society. In addition, during the

start of the third phase, participants are assigned a befriender from Fitrah to initiate the first steps towards pro-social and positive support networks.

- **Other In -care Events**

- Ø Quarterly Motivational engagement sessions by prominent speakers
- Ø Annual Mufti Talk

## 2. **Strengthen the support system for ex-offenders and their families**

- **FITRAH Case Management (FCM)**

FITRAH offers case management services for inmates emplaced on the participating in Community-Based Programmes (CBP). The approach is family-centred, providing 18 months of support to both offenders and their immediate family members. This targeted intervention aims to maintain the integrity of the family unit throughout the process.

- **Befriending Support**

FITRAH has a pool of volunteer bendifenders that provide befriending support to both ex - offenders and their families. The bendifenders provide them with social and emotional support and connect them with the community to expand their pro -social network.

- **Referral Services**

FITRAH will refer those in need, the various support systems available in the community. The referrals include:

- Ø Financial assistance
- Ø Islamic learning
- Ø Employment
- Ø Children's Education

- **Support Group Mentoring**

FITRAH partners and provides mentoring to various Malay -Muslim (MM) support groups (AOC, GA, HUFU, Nisa Hope Network) to organise support group sessions and community activities to help expand ex-offenders' pro-social networks in order to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

Ultimately, the two primary aims of partnering and mentoring support groups are to:

1. Facilitate ex-offenders' integration into the community
2. Expand pro-social networks for participants

The following are the various support provided to support groups:

**Regular Support Sessions: Provide the necessary amenities for support groups to run**

- Weekly and monthly group meetings conducted at mosques and partnering organisations
- Safe and accessible venues provided for engagement sessions
- Dedicated spaces for ongoing support activities

**Wellness & Development Programs: Provide wellness and development programme beyond support group sessions**

- Personal development through training to enhance confidence in sharing rehabilitation journeys
- Life skills development such as basic sewing classes for female participants
- Sports activities such as futsal and netball programs to promote team work and healthy lifestyle

**Community Distribution Programs: Provide community service opportunities for support groups to participate year-round**

- Monthly distribution activities to support beneficiaries
- Seasonal support through Pre-Ramadan food ration distribution
- Korban meat distribution through the Malay/Muslim Organization Rehabilitation Network and the participating mosques

**Awareness & Outreach: Provide support groups opportunities to outreach and enhance awareness among the communities and public about desistance and second chance**

- Support group members share rehabilitation experiences through various community engagement platforms
- Collaboration with various organizations to expand service reach
- Public education initiatives to increase understanding of rehabilitation and reintegration

**3. Strengthen community partnerships for social impact**

Foster collaborations with stakeholders across sectors to strengthen the holistic support fabric for the beneficiaries towards building a robust community capital and uplift lives. FITRAH collaborates with the following agencies:

- Ø Malay/Muslim Organization Rehabilitation Network
- Ø One Mosque Sector under MUIS
- Ø Desistor Network
- Ø CARE Network
- Ø Yellow Ribbon SG
- Ø Recovery Support Groups



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

58. Based on the sharing by agencies and PIEs, there is no one size fits all approach. A supportive community/group has different philosophies, objectives, and strategies that may cater to different segments of the PIEs' population. For instance, some PIEs may prefer to involve families in the supportive community/group while others prefer not to. Some may focus on facilitating PIEs to achieve their prosocial aspirations, while the others want to focus on drug recovery (or managing other behaviours). The reality is that the PIEs have diverse needs, and they will likely evolve overtime as they continue to desist in the community. However, what is common among all these supportive communities and groups are the continual informal support and accountability that one can get as s/he navigates life, not only to abstain from crimes and drugs, but to lead a purposeful and meaningful life.

#### **Going forward**

59. What has been clear from this project is that to build an eco-system of support for PIEs, agencies need to have consistent and effective ways to share good practice and collaborate.

60. This Learning Community is a demonstration of how agencies have come together to collaborate and build each other's practice, initiatives, and ideas, while supporting one another in varied ways.

61. Going forward, a mutual learning approach was suggested, where members from different agencies can observe each other's support groups and programs, focusing on the processes rather than just the content. This hands-on observation could lead to a better appreciation of the practice beyond theoretical discussions.

62. Agencies could also come together and collaborate on strategies in a coordinated way, such as equipping and supporting peer leaders. For instance, they could collectively address potential issues like burnout, neglect of personal responsibilities, or complacency in their recovery journey. They could for example come together to develop a curriculum that can be used by agencies working with PIEs.

63. Finding the time to work together would always be a struggle yet the opportunities to work together would be gains in resources and a means to sharpen each other.

Participating Agencies	Representative
Agents of Change (AOC)	Izwan Jalil Mohammed Suffian Bin Mohd Noor ( <i>also representing ISCOS</i> )
Family and Inmates Through-care Assistance Haven (FITRAH)	Mohamed Farik Omar Malikie Kasmawi
Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society Limited (ISCOS)	Ravan Kumar Teo Chuan Ann
Prison Fellowship Singapore (PFS)	Kelvin Chew
Singapore After-Care Association (SACA)	William Soh Tee Peng * Preshela Palanyandy
Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA)	Devanand Isabel Tan Cherie Sim
Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA)	Charlotte Stephen * Priyanka Awasthi
The Salvation Army (TSA)	Jason Wong Ting Wee Ming

(\* Editors for the document)

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## Small Group Discussions

### Questions:

How can we collectively strengthen our community and support?

How can we work together to think about ways to do our work more efficiently?

Is the agency prepared to collaborate on specific fields?

### **Group 1**

#### Enhancing Best Practices:

- A mutual learning approach is suggested, where members from different agencies can observe each other's support groups and programs, focusing on the processes rather than just the content. This hands-on observation could lead to deeper practical understanding beyond theoretical discussions.
- It's recommended to directly ask desistors about their needs and preferences instead of assuming what they want. This could involve inviting them to share their insights at Learning Circles (LC) or participating in project development, ensuring their voices shape the services provided.
- The group discusses strategies for engaging clients who are busy or show a preference for non-face-to-face communication methods, such as through electronic messaging, to maintain connection and support.
- There's an emphasis on developing strategies to support peer leaders continuously, addressing potential issues like burnout, neglect of personal responsibilities, or complacency in their recovery journey.

#### Collaborative Efforts:

- The group explores possibilities for inter-agency collaboration to provide seamless support for clients:
  - Coordinating ongoing support by connecting services from different agencies, such as transitioning clients from SACA's befriending programs to SANA's kaki programs, or referring ISCOS support group members to SACA/SANA for individual case management.
  - Encouraging agencies to open their events to clients from other agencies, recognizing that desistors are drawn to certain events (e.g., SANA's futsal games). This approach fosters a culture of inclusivity and utilises the power of networks and word-of-mouth to attract clients to various programs and events.

The group suggests exposing clients to a variety of programs, activities, and support groups offered by different agencies. This exposure aims to cater to the evolving needs of clients and encourage them to take ownership of their transformation process, enhancing their journey towards reintegration and personal growth.

## **Group 2**

- The group discussed a proposal for Greenlane to offer ISCOS members up to an 80% subsidy for driving licences. They also suggested that ISCOS could facilitate connections with SANA for individuals dealing with drug-related issues, or with the Salvation Army for its services. ISCOS's ability to attract and engage clients was highlighted as a model for other agencies, illustrating this with initiatives like organised bus trips to the Tam Hub, including stops at the Salvation Army thrift shop for clothing.
- Another idea presented was offering offenders a day out of the S2 facility as a reward, with possibilities for them to visit other agencies or participate in their activities. It was proposed to coordinate activities across agencies on different days of the week (e.g., ISCOS on Wednesday, SANA on Thursday, and Fitrah on Friday, with children's activities at TSA on Saturday).
- For clients showing leadership potential, the group considered the possibility of centralising some training programs across various agencies. This approach would leverage each agency's strengths, avoid duplication of efforts, and enhance support through shared training initiatives. The agencies represented in the group planned to discuss these collaborative ideas and potential support areas further with their management teams

### Group 3

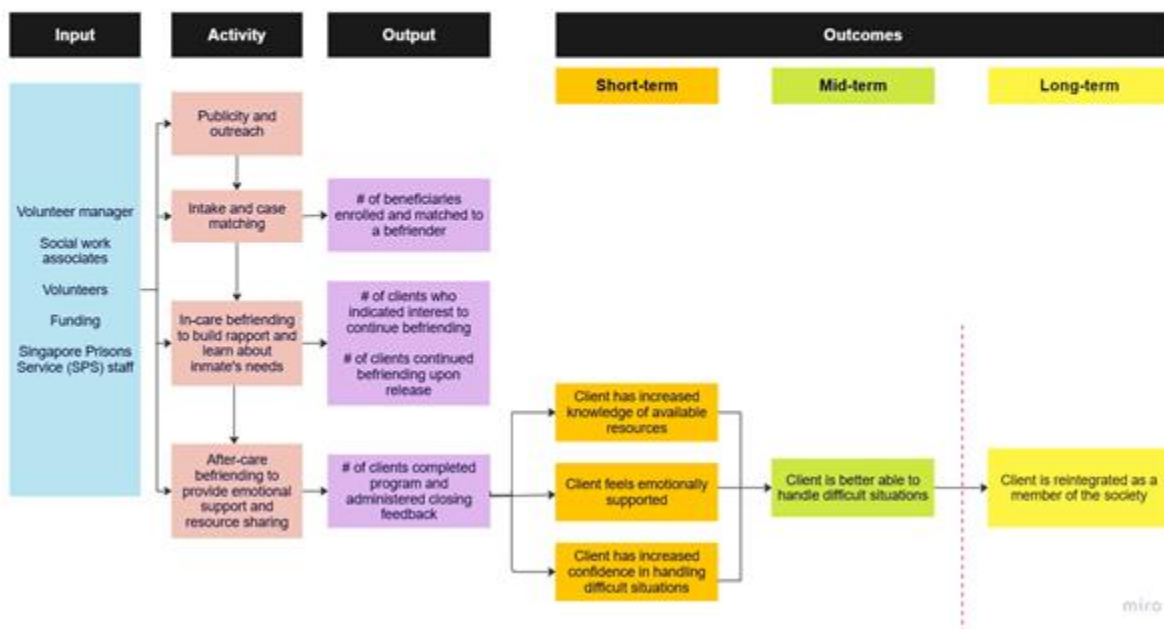
- Peer leadership plays a crucial role in supporting others, with SANA considering adopting ISCOS's Titan model to boost confidence among their own leaders. Similarly, SACA's intense befriending program and PFS's initiatives, along with pre-sentencing support from Sinda for clients awaiting prison, highlight areas ripe for mutual learning and mentorship.
- Sinda's interest in observing PFS's support groups to make informed recommendations to their clients underscores the importance of understanding the nuances of different support programs. This is crucial for enhancing throughcare, particularly in addressing family needs through initiatives like the Neugen programme.
- A key question raised is the possibility of visiting other agencies' support groups to learn from each other's practices. Sharing insights and best practices can significantly benefit all involved, as it allows for the adoption of effective methods across different organisations.
- Knowing the details of various programs enables better referrals, as agencies become more familiar with the offerings of others. Personal sponsorship models, such as those by NA, are highlighted for their potential to deeply engage and support individuals.
- Collaborative efforts, like the monthly give-back project involving desistors in activities such as delivering dry rations with Food from the Heart at Geylang Bahru CC, demonstrate the power of community engagement and sustainable, long-term projects. These initiatives not only involve the desistors but also their families, fostering a sense of empowerment and contribution to society. Fitrah's role in providing facilities for these activities shows how resources and platforms can be utilised for positive community impact without relying on monetary exchanges.
- The discussion also touches on the importance of referrals to offer alternatives and support through non-monetary avenues like training services, highlighting the potential for collaboration in skill facilitation and community support. There's a growing recognition of the need to more actively involve families in the rehabilitation process, acknowledging that more agencies are now targeting family support as an essential component of comprehensive care.
- Lastly, the conversation raises questions about measuring success and understanding the dynamics of program participation—whether there's a diversity in client engagement or a recurring pattern of the same individuals returning. Sharing data among agencies could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of programs and reveal areas for improvement, emphasising the need for collaboration and shared objectives to enhance the support ecosystem for clients and their families.

Logic Model

Having a logic model to describe the programme is vital. Developing it will facilitate programme developers to acquire greater clarity of its objective, the key activities and expected outcomes, and in some versions, the underlying theories informing the activities.

## BEFRIENDING

**Problem Statement:** Inmates and ex-offenders may have difficulties navigating re-entry and reintegration due to a lack of social support.



**CONFIDENTIAL**

**(Name of Org/Group)**

**Befriending Programme**

**End Of Programme Evaluation Form**

Client Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Befriender Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Case Ref No: \_\_\_\_\_

***Dear Client***

Thank you for participating in the Befriending Programme. We would be most grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this feedback form.

We value your feedback and this will be kept confidential.

*Please circle the answer you find most appropriate.*



**1. I feel supported by my Befriender.**

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**2. I have more knowledge about available community resources to address practical needs after this programme.**

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**3. I am more confident about handling difficult situations after this programme.**

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**4. I will recommend the Befriending programme to others.**

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**5. What was helpful about the befriending programme or befriender?**

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**6. How can the befriending programme be improved to better support your reintegration?**

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***Thank you for your feedback!***

## Focus Group Discussion Methodology

### Background

There has been much empirical support for the efficacy of social support in mitigating offenders' risk of reoffending (Bonta and Andrew, 2016; Cullen, 1994; Sampson and Laub, 2003, 2011). Support group is a prosocial support programme that is commonly run in overseas institutions and communities. In Singapore, there has been an increasing use of support groups in the community.

2. Based on the discussion in the support group learning community, the team decided that it would be useful to seek inputs from PIEs regarding their experience in support groups. This is a useful set of information to complement the ongoing discussion among the members in the learning community.

3. The FGD was guided by the following aims:

a. Deepen understanding of PIEs' view of social support and its relevance to their (a) reintegration into community and (b) change (i.e. stay away from crimes/drugs)

i. To understand how social support help PIEs to meet their motivation/aspirations, needs, and overcome challenges

b. Identify what are the factors (a) within and (b) beyond the supportive community/group that has contributing to one's sustained involvement

### Methodology

4. Nine adult PIEs (8 males, 1 female) were invited for a FGD session. They were invited by members of the Learning Community. All the PIEs are male except one female. Everyone has experience being involved in at least one support group.

5. The FGD was facilitated by two members of the Learning Community, using a semi-structured interview guide to solicit members' opinions and experiences in a supportive community or group. The interview took about two hours with a 15-minute break in-between. During the session, everyone has some airtime to share about their thoughts.

6. The session was recorded, with permission given by every PIE. There was a secretariat team deployed at the FGD to audio and hand record the session. The session was then transcribed.

7. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes arising from PIEs' sharing. After the session, in the subsequent Learning Community meeting, the members split into pairs to code different segments of the transcript. The secretariat team then organised the codes and relevant quotes. Two members of the Learning Community confirmed the final set of codes and presented them to the Learning Community at a meeting.