

**THE STORY OF THE SINGAPORE
PRISON SERVICE**

**FROM CUSTODIANS OF PRISONERS
TO CAPTAINS OF LIFE**

A CASE STUDY

Key Topics Discussed:

SOCIETAL RESULTS AND COLLECTIVE EFFORT

LENA LEONG, SENIOR RESEARCHER
Centre for Governance and Leadership
Singapore Civil Service College¹

INTRODUCTION

The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) transformed itself from an agency focused on protecting society through the safe custody of criminals to a leader in rehabilitation. Between 1998 and 2009, the recidivism rate dropped significantly from 44.4 percent to 26.5 percent.² The SPS is also one of the most cost-effective prison institutions in the world, with an average cost of incarceration of S\$75 per day and an inmate-to-staff ratio of 7.6:1. Yet, security and discipline have not been compromised: there have been no escapes or major riots, and the assault rate has been kept low. Staff morale has also been high, with about 81 percent of officers indicating their satisfaction with work in the organization.³

This case chronicles the change journey of the SPS: how a traditional command-control agency faced with challenges of an increasing prison population, high staff turnover and poor public perception, engaged its staff, stakeholders and eventually the community to create outcomes that changed the lives of inmates and their families. It illustrates a change that started within the organization and cascaded outwards to the rest of the community.

The case also explores the following elements of the New Synthesis Framework:⁴

- The roles of government as a law enforcer and custodian, as well as a facilitator and an enabler of change;
- The possibilities that open when the focus on results is shifted beyond the agency to the societal level; and
- The possible impact when government includes other stakeholders rather than acting alone.

CHANGING FROM WITHIN

CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

In 1998, the SPS was confronted by two pressing issues—an overcrowded prison that was straining existing

infrastructure and resources, and a shortage of staff due to difficulties in recruitment and retention.⁵ Prison staff members were overworked and morale was low. Poor public perception of the organization and its work did not help.

Even though rehabilitation had always been articulated as a component of SPS work, rehabilitation efforts were fragmented, ad hoc and considered to be the responsibility of specialists, like counsellors. The role of prison officers remained mainly custodial. Rehabilitation programs for offenders (limited to work, education and religious counselling) were not systematically monitored and assessed for effectiveness.

Taken together, these obstacles were hindering the SPS's ability to deliver on its mission.

NEW LEADERSHIP

In late 1998, the SPS had a change in top leadership (see Figure 1 for a timescale of change at the SPS). Chua Chin Kiat, who had held several key positions at the Singapore Police Force, took over as Director of Prisons. He felt that a mere increase in staff headcount would not address the SPS's problems, nor would an increase be sustainable in the long term. Chua also realized that he alone could not bring about change; he had first to convince his senior management team of the need. On behalf of the team, Chua visited a number of prisons overseas, most of which had progressive rehabilitative programs in place. The visits gave the senior team fresh perspectives on how prisons in Singapore could be managed.

RE-THINKING THE PRISON'S REASON FOR EXISTENCE

NEW VISION

Chua realized that the SPS's focus had been on maintaining security and safety within the prisons: it did not have an articulated, overarching vision of its role in society. In 1999, more than 800 staff members and strategic partners from the Ministry of Home Affairs (SPS's parent ministry) and voluntary welfare organizations were invited to share their vision for the SPS. A variety of

platforms (retreats, facilitated dialogues and online intranet forums) were employed. The exercise challenged the way SPS staff saw their role and their impact. The visioning exercise was not all smooth sailing: there were pockets of resistance and scepticism at the ground level. While some prison officers wanted to do more to help inmates under their charge become contributing members of society, not everyone was receptive. It took about a year to confirm the new vision: “We aspire to be captains in the lives of offenders committed to our custody. We will be instrumental in steering them towards being responsible citizens with the help of their families and the community. We will thus build a secure and exemplary prison system.” That vision was instrumental in giving shape and direction to many SPS strategies that would follow. The fundamental change was the shift beyond security and safety to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society.

Cascading from the vision, SPS also developed a set of core values to articulate what it wanted to preserve and how it would operate as it pursued its goals. These values

are: honour our vision by placing it above self-interest and inspiring others to our cause; excel in our work because we care enough to want to be the best; be agile by being innovative and open to new possibilities, overcoming adversity through continuous learning; respect our fellow colleagues and the community we come into contact with; and foster teamwork by coaching, guiding and inspiring one another in our workplace. In the process of articulating its vision, SPS also re-crafted its mission.⁶

CHANGING THE WAY THE PRISON THINKS

NEW MINDSET

While a compelling vision may be a powerful driving force, old ways of thinking often hinder its translation into practice. From the outset, Chua was mindful that without significantly increasing staff numbers, he had to find new ways of freeing up staff time for the real work

YEAR	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
EVENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chua Chin Kiat appointed as Director, SPS. Re-organization of prisons and setting up of Research and Planning Branch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of new vision and revision of mission statement. Housing Unit Management System conceptualized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Framework introduced (FY 2000–02). Prisons Rehabilitation Framework launched. Kaki Bukit Centre Prison School established. Prison Management System launched. Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network established. Home detention scheme introduced. Ethics structure launched. Women deployed in male institutions. Level of Service Inventory-Revised tool introduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singapore Quality Class awarded. A new set of departmental values promulgated. Balance scorecard tool adopted. Tele-visits introduced. Public awareness campaign “Rehab, Renew, Re-start” launched. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Friendly Firm Award won. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Framework introduced (FY 2003–05). Community Involvement Framework launched. ISO 9001:2000 achieved for the Intake Rehabilitation Classification. Public Service Award won.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cluster A construction completed. Awarded Singapore Innovation Class Award. Operations philosophy revised. First Yellow Ribbon Project launched. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded Singapore Service Class Award. Director of Prisons received Public Administration Medal (gold). Awarded Distinguished Public Service Award. Government amended the Criminal Registration Act to strike out ex-offenders’ criminal records for minor offences provided ex-offenders remained crime-free for a specified period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prisons’ Leadership Competency Model launched. Awarded Singapore Quality Award. Awarded Top Public Service Award for Organisational Excellence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Named Hewitt top ten best employers. Ng Joo Hee appointed as the new Director, SPS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful combined re-certification of three Business Excellence Niche Standards: People Developer, Innovation Class and Service Class. Yellow Ribbon Project concept exported to Fiji. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inaugural Prisons-NUS Research Seminar launched. New Prisons Business Framework unveiled. Named Hewitt top ten Best Employers. Cluster B construction completed.

FIGURE 1: Milestones in the SPS Transformation Journey

of reforming the prison system. His habit of challenging assumptions and getting staff to critically re-examine old ways of doing made many uneasy, but it also forced them to re-think, explore new possibilities, develop new solutions and achieve breakthroughs. Consequently, many redundant processes were discarded. The SPS was one of the pioneers in the Singapore public service to outsource non-core functions, such as medical services, kitchen management and escorting lower-risk prisoners to attend court and medical appointments.

NEW ROLES

In the past, prison officers were rotated periodically to avoid compromising security, but as a result, most officers did not know the inmates well. Chua's challenge to tell him everything they knew about the inmates under their charge stumped many, but it also caused staff members to realize they could not help offenders change if they did not understand them.

In 1999, the Housing Unit Management System helped close that gap (see Box 1). The system emphasized engaging inmates in a meaningful and purposeful manner. A dedicated team of prison officers was assigned to manage all matters relating to inmates in a particular housing unit. Officers were no longer just custodians of prisoners; they had to take on roles as disciplinarians, mentors and para-counsellors. They were empowered to make decisions as long as their decisions helped inmates change for the better.

To address ground concerns of security lapses and manipulation by inmates, the SPS subsequently also instituted an ethics structure, a team-based approach and a coaching framework.

Officers soon discovered the value of the Housing Unit Management System. Besides rehabilitating inmates, it helped officers gather intelligence, therefore augmenting the level of security, discipline and control in the prisons. They experienced the power of teamwork: working and learning together indeed enhanced the quality of decisions and outcomes.

The SPS leadership team anticipated that not all SPS officers might be ready for change. Inevitably, some would still hold to the lock-and-bolt mindset. Many were likely to find balancing the multiple and seemingly conflicting roles of disciplinarian and rehabilitation officer overwhelming. New skills were also needed before transitioning to the new roles. Hence, instead of a full-scale roll-out, volunteers were invited to test the system. Six of the 14 SPS institutions responded. In the end, the Housing Unit team leaders' commitment and hands-on approach to improving the system were pivotal to the success of the year-long pilot.

BOX 1: Implementing the Housing Unit Management System

RE-DESIGNING SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

NEW STRUCTURE

In 1998, a restructuring exercise was conducted. Chua believed that an organization's long-term success hinges on its preparedness for the future, which in turn depends on its current ability to anticipate and learn. A Research and Planning Branch was set up to conduct research, network with external research institutes and co-ordinate the planning and implementation of key organization-wide initiatives. One of the outcomes was the adoption of the LSI-R (Level of Service Inventory—Revised) tool in 2000. The SPS sent a team to Canada to learn from that country's experience with the tool. The tool enabled the SPS to allocate resources by assessing, categorizing and matching inmates to different rehabilitation programs based on their risk of re-offending and their rehabilitation needs. New learning resulting from the Branch's activities challenged SPS staff's established ways of thinking and doing. Establishing the Branch was instrumental in helping staff embrace change and create a culture of learning and innovation within the SPS.

A Program Branch was also subsequently set up to give greater focus to rehabilitation. Inmates were encouraged to help with simple duties, including peer-support counselling and tutoring. Some participated as members of work improvement teams, an initiative under

the PS21 (Public Service for the 21st Century) movement that empowers officers on the ground to seek improvements. These initiatives relieved the officers' workload, improved the inmate-staff relationship and also became an essential part of the rehabilitation process.

NEW BEHAVIOURS

Internal systems and structures were put in place to encourage behaviour to support the operational strategies. For example, twice-a-week, informal “agendaless” breakfast meetings among senior management, heads of staff units and superintendents were started to encourage dialogue, exchange ideas, and strengthen the quality of relationships and trust within the leadership team. The leaders took turns to meet with recruits at induction programs, walk the floors and connect with ground staff to seek out diverse and fresh perspectives.

At the staff level, cozy coffee corners were created to encourage informal interaction and exchange of ideas. A learning centre with a resource library, broadband Internet access and training/meeting rooms was set up to provide an environment conducive for sharing and brainstorming. Online platforms were developed to facilitate sharing among officers across departments. Notes of senior management meetings were posted on the intranet so that all officers could follow the thinking behind decisions. To encourage ideas from the ground, a system was developed to capture and track all suggestions generated. With these new supporting systems and structures in place, prison officers picked up new behaviour, new ways of learning and new capabilities over time.

These internal changes opened the way for more effective rehabilitative programs, such as the establishment of Kaki Bukit Centre Home Detention Scheme Prison School. Other initiatives included the Home Detention Scheme, deployment of female officers in male institutions, tele-visits (see Box 2) and virtual court sessions for remand inmates—all of which fundamentally changed the way the SPS operated. These initiatives freed SPS resources for other areas of need and gave SPS staff the confidence to explore new solutions beyond the prison walls.

The SPS observed that chances of rehabilitation were higher if inmates had the support of their families, yet divorces were common in the prisons. Family Resource Centres were set up to help inmates' families cope with incarceration. Subsequently, the SPS also introduced family visits during Father's Days and Mother's Days, other family celebrations within the prisons and televisits to enhance family bonding.

BOX 2: New Learning, New Solutions

HARNESSING COLLECTIVE EFFORTS OF SOCIETY

THE NEXT PHASE OF CHANGE

The SPS realized that even if rehabilitation efforts within the prisons were successful, chances of recidivism would still be high if after-care support for ex-offenders were weak. The transition from the controlled incarcerated environment into a society not quite ready to receive them could generate a culture shock. The inability to cope with the stigma and stress could turn ex-offenders back to crime. The realization that internal resources would not be enough to meet inmates' after-care needs forced the SPS to venture beyond the confines of the prisons to engage the wider community—a new move for the SPS.⁷ Its vision consisted of a system of well established rehabilitation and reintegration programs with a strong emphasis on family and societal support.

In 2000, the SPS mapped out its primary functions (secure custody of offenders; rehabilitation, prevention and after-care) and its most important stakeholders (staff, families of offenders, the community and the Board of Visiting Justices).⁸ Through a series of dialogues at the ground level, 96 strategies organized along four focal areas were developed: enhanced operational capabilities, staff development structure, integrated in-system care for inmates, and co-ordinated after-care for ex-offenders. Of these strategies, 15 projects were prioritized over three years. The levers for change in each area were identified as technology, knowledge management and community resources (see Figure 2).

In 2003, these focal areas were further refined. This

time, input was sought not only from prison officers but also from inmates and community partners. It became clear from the strategic conversations that in-system care and after-care should not be implemented separately. These two elements were merged into Maximizing Inmates' Reintegration Potential, acknowledging that reintegration really begins on the first day of incarceration. A key thrust under this focal area was to "improve public perception of ex-offenders," where mass media were identified as key enablers in shaping the population's mindset. A new focal area, Preventing Offending and Re-offending, with the goal of significantly reducing the incarceration rate, also surfaced. To achieve that goal, the SPS realized that it needed to work more closely with family members and community partners like the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE),⁹ the Singapore After-Care Association, and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association.

BRANDING: CAPTAINS OF LIVES

NEW PARTNERS (THE MEDIA)

A public perception survey in 2000 revealed that the public had little knowledge of the SPS's work. Poor public image led to difficulties in recruitment and threatened growth. The SPS Public Affairs Branch was charged with revamping the organization's image. A series of advertisements aimed at changing public perception was launched in 2001. The media campaign, Captains of Lives, Rehab, Renew, Restart, followed in 2002, in

which the SPS opened its doors to the public and reporters were given prison tours. Success stories of reformed prisoners reinforced the key messages behind SPS rehabilitation efforts that were then carried over into print media, local radio and television stations, as well as billboards. SPS television advertisements became the talking point in public places and radically changed the public's understanding of prison officers' work. In 2002, the SPS won the Creative Circle Awards (bronze) in the Television and Cinema category and the "TV Campaign of the Year" awarded by the Institute of Advertising Singapore. The success of the campaigns led the SPS to adopt an even more ambitious media strategy in 2003, which aimed at educating and garnering the support of the community for rehabilitation work and generating acceptance of ex-offenders into the community.

With its public image boosted, the SPS staff's sense of pride in their work grew. The positive experience helped reinforce the desired changes in mindset and strengthen commitment to the vision. The SPS' staff shortage problem also gradually eased as more qualified officers and volunteers were recruited to serve with the organization. Additional resources could therefore be released to look at other areas of need, such as efforts to reintegrate ex-offenders into the community.

NETWORKING WITHIN GOVERNMENT AND BEYOND

To strengthen after-care support for ex-offenders, the SPS adopted four sub-strategies: development of struc-

FOCAL AREAS

2000-02

1. Enhanced operational capabilities
2. Staff development structure
3. Integrated In-system care for inmates
4. Co-ordinated after-care for ex-offenders

2003-05

1. Enhancing inmate management capability
2. Developing staff to make a difference
3. Maximizing inmates' reintegration potential
4. Preventing offending and re-offending

ENABLERS

- Technology,
- Knowledge management,
- Community resources, and
- Mass media (added in 2003)

FIGURE 2: Prison Service Reform, Focal Areas

tured and co-ordinated after-care programs; development of a networked governance structure to oversee the co-ordination of aftercare services; investment in family education to help family members cope with problems arising from incarceration and prepare them to receive ex-offenders upon release; and the building of community acceptance and non-rejection.

NEW PARTNERS (THE CARE NETWORK)

The Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network was one of the 15 projects identified for implementation in 2000-02. In 2000, the SPS brought together eight major community and government organizations responsible for rehabilitating ex-offenders to form the CARE Network to promote seamless in-system care and after-care support for ex-offenders. Co-chaired by the SPS and SCORE, its other six members comprised representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs; the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports; the Industrial and Services Co-operative Society Ltd; the National Council of Social Service; the Singapore After-Care Association; and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association. A government-initiated informal network, the CARE Network held annual retreats and met quarterly to set direction and co-ordinate the strategies and efforts of all eight agencies as well as others in the after-care sector. Their focus: to maximize resources and results through alignment and collaboration.

One of the CARE Network's first initiatives was the Case Management Framework Program established in 2000. Under the framework, case managers from the Singapore After-Care Association and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association met inmates one to two months before their release to go over their after-care needs with them and then follow up to ensure that they received the support up to six months after release. This work was co-funded by the SPS, SCORE, the National Council of Social Service and the respective after-care agencies. Another project, Singapore's first community movie, "Twilight Kitchen" in 2003, featured an exoffender seeking a second chance in life. A private movie company that supported the cause funded the publicity efforts for the movie.

One of the CARE Network's most successful initiatives

was the annual "Yellow Ribbon Project" (YRP), a series of public education efforts started in 2004 aimed at creating awareness of giving second chances to ex-offenders, generating acceptance of ex-offenders and their families into the community and inspiring community action to support rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders (see Box 3).¹⁰ Inspiration for the name originated from the 1970s pop song, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree," that told the story of an offender's request to his wife to forgive and accept him. A yellow ribbon was picked as the symbol for its simplicity and because it embodied the message of acceptance and forgiveness and resonated with the community.

- Every offender encounters two prisons: physical prison and psychological/social prison.
- Who holds the key? Offenders' families, friends, neighbours, employers, colleagues, the community?
- Help unlock the second prison!

BOX 3: The Message Behind the Yellow Ribbon

The YRP organizational structure consisted of a steering committee led by SPS and SCORE senior officers, a secretariat anchored by a SCORE team, and chairpersons of the various sub-committees. Attempts have been made over the years to encourage volunteers, community partners and other members of the CARE Network to take up more leadership roles.

The YRP's activities were fully government-funded in the initial years, with growing corporate support more recently. Once the CARE Network had endorsed the theme and overall concept plan for the YRP, events were managed autonomously by the chairpersons of the various sub-committees. Only issues that affected other sub-committees or the entire campaign would be raised at the steering committee. Support functions that required co-ordination across sub-committees (such as finance, publicity, sponsorships, invitation of guests of honour) would be centrally managed by the steering committee. The secretariat periodically monitored progress to ensure consistency of themes and objectives.

A Yellow Ribbon Fund was separately set up with its own management committee to provide financial support specifically for rehabilitative and after-care services, other programs aimed at raising public awareness of the needs of ex-offenders and inspiring community involvement, and support services for family members of inmates (see Figure 3). To ensure good governance, two sub-committees were formed to advise the Yellow Ribbon Fund Committee on the disbursement and fund-raising activities.

FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY

Every year, September is set aside for intensive YRP activities. The initial focus was on organizations more open to the message of giving second chances to ex-offenders, such as religious groups and schools. Gradually, the work extended to the rest of the community. Activities in the first two years (2004-05) aimed at creating awareness. The next two years (2006-07) focused on deepening the community's understanding of the rehabilitation journey and profiling the contribution of reformed ex-offenders. Serving inmates and ex-offenders were also mobilized to contribute to society through community service. In 2008-09, the themes shifted from raising awareness to generating acceptance and

inspiring action.

NEW PARTNERS (THE COMMUNITY)

At the inaugural launch of the YRP in 2004, the SPS invited targeted groups such as volunteer groups, employers, policy makers and students to tour various prison institutions to deepen their understanding of life in prisons and their role in the rehabilitation journey (see Box 4). Talks held in schools and open house events heightened awareness of the needs of ex-offenders and their families and sparked new ideas of action that groups could take to support the reintegration process. The Singapore National Employers Federation and National Trades Unions Congress Income supported the skills competition and talent showcase launched in 2004. About 200 employers were invited to visit prison training facilities and witness the inmates' IT, multi-media and cooking skills, and encouraged to hire them. Subsequently, job fairs, employers' networking sessions and forums to discuss the reintegration of ex-offenders into the workplace were also organized. Corporate organizations were appointed as rehabilitation ambassadors and encouraged to contribute to YRP publicity efforts. Awards were given annually to recognize exemplary employers and corporate donors.



FIGURE 3: The Many Helping Hands Approach to Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Inmates and Ex-offenders

Source: Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises

In 2003, the SPS developed a Community Involvement Framework. A stakeholder analysis was conducted and community resources were segmented and mapped to needs. Emphasis was placed on volunteer management, including recruitment, screening, placement, orientation, training, recognition and exit. Groups with high leverage were identified. The framework required shifting the mindset from seeing volunteers as “outsiders” to seeing them as “partners” and critical resources to be tapped.

The Community Involvement Section was set up to bring more focus to the work. Regular dialogues with volunteers were instituted to better understand challenges on the ground, seek feedback to improve processes and identify new avenues for community contribution. Critical issues were escalated for discussion at the annual SPS and SCORE joint work plan seminars attended by all staff and community partners. These interactions between the SPS, SCORE and their partners greatly enhanced understanding between the groups and enabled them jointly to find new solutions to old problems and spot new issues.

BOX 4: Community Involvement Framework

The “Wear-A-Yellow-Ribbon” campaign was a key event in the YRP’s annual calendar to engage the community at large. Inmates’ hand-made yellow ribbons were distributed on the streets by ex-offenders and inmates from halfway houses (for an optional donation), encouraging members of the public to support ex-offenders and their families. In subsequent years, fairs and road shows were held at major city and heartland malls throughout the country to reach out to different segments of the population. To attract all ages and interests, a range of activities was organized, including performances by artists and ex-offenders, testimonies by ex-offenders and interactive games (see Box 5). Various volunteer groups hosted booths aimed at educating the community on the rehabilitation process and selling products and crafts made by inmates. Art exhibitions showcasing the talent of inmates were also held at public places.

The National Library Board (NLB) wanted to bring reading programs into the prisons. The YRP team seized the opportunity to organize a poetry competition for inmates in 2007. The NLB appointed the judges and sponsored the event. The collection of poems from the competition was later compiled and published, and is now available in all national libraries in Singapore.

BOX 5: Poetry Competition

Songwriting competitions, open to inmates, ex-offenders and after-care agencies, were organized with local songwriters and musicians invited as judges. Winning entries were showcased at annual YRP charity concerts, another key event where local and overseas artists perform alongside inmates and ex-offenders to raise funds for the Yellow Ribbon Fund. The President and the First Lady graced the inaugural concert. Mass walks led by ministers, community leaders and celebrities were also organized. In 2009, Deputy Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean, led the first public run that cut through the prisons compound.

The inaugural YRP conference was held in 2005 to align and inspire community action through the sharing of case studies, best practices and research. Participants included foreign delegates, ex-offenders and community partners, such as employers, volunteer groups and grassroots organizations. With their plenary sessions and concurrent workshops led by local and foreign practitioners and academics, the YRP conferences became important events for groups involved in rehabilitation and reintegration work to come together to share experiences, tap into collective wisdom and develop more integrated approaches. In 2006, ex-offenders from the Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society Ltd youth wing played a key role in organizing the conference.

The YRP team was surprised how the project grew over the years. What started as branding and public education efforts had gained momentum and, with support of the media, corporate organizations and individuals from all levels of society, seemed to have taken on a life of its own. Most recent was the community service project with the Singapore Lions Club. The club, which also works with the elderly, approached the YRP team to host a joint lunch for the elderly in 2009. On that day,

inmates cooked the meal while ex-offenders served it. Funding came from the Singapore Lions Club and the National Arts Council, which sponsored the entertainment program. The event was covered by the media and helped further reinforce the YRP's message to the rest of the community.

NEW PARTNERS (INMATES/EX-OFFENDERS)

Besides changing the community's perception of ex-offenders, it was equally important to educate inmates and ex-offenders about the need to seize the second chances given to them (see boxes 6 and 7). In 2003, the inmates (as part of their work routine with SCORE) contributed to the nation's efforts to fight SARS by washing hospitals' laundry. In 2009, inmates volunteered to fill the fun packs for the National Day parade. The same year, Hannel Chong, a reformed drug addict, teamed with a prison officer and SCORE officer to take part in an Ironman race to raise S\$10,000 for the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

The owner of GiGATT International Marketing Private Ltd acquired the distribution rights for a type of laser machine that could also be used to remove tattoos. The organization called the YRP hotline to see if the YRP could use these machines. Tattoo removal then became a means for inmates to pledge their commitment to change. As of 2010, 174 inmates had benefited from the pilot.

BOX 6: Tattoo Removal

Nicodemus was a finalist in the YRP's songwriting competition in 2004. On release from prison, he formed a band to take part in a national music competition, "Super-band" (similar to "American Idol"), and won. Nicodemus has since continued to volunteer at YRP events.

BOX 7: Nicodemus

Although the events and stories may change, the YRP's message of acceptance and renewal remains the same

each year. The YRP receives tremendous recognition and support from the media, and an increasing number of individuals, communities and corporate organizations come forward to volunteer, donate and employ ex-offenders. A nationwide public perception survey in 2007 revealed that 94 percent of respondents expressed awareness of the YRP and 70 percent were willing to accept ex-offenders as either a friend or colleague. Between 2004 and 2008, about 300,000 Singaporeans had participated in YRP events, 690 new employers were added to SCORE's database, 720 new volunteers were recruited, more than 400 inmates and ex-offenders were mobilized and S\$3.9 million was raised for the Yellow Ribbon Fund's work. In support of the YRP, the government amended the Registration of Criminals Act in late 2005 to strike out ex-offenders' criminal records for minor offences provided they remained crime-free for a specified period.

ORGANIZATIONAL, PUBLIC, AND SOCIETAL OUTCOMES

Over the years, the SPS transformed itself from a custodian of prisoners to a leading rehabilitation agency without losing its key focus on security.¹¹ Today, more than 1,800 employers have come forward to offer employment to ex-offenders and about 1,400 volunteers serve alongside prison staff in counselling and various personal development activities for inmates. The recidivism rate has also steadily declined from 44.4 percent for the cohort released in 1998 to 26.5 percent for the cohort released in 2007. The SPS is one of the most cost-effective prison institutions in the world—without compromising security or discipline.

In 2006, SPS won the top Public Service Award for Organisational Excellence and the Singapore Quality Award.¹² In 2007 and 2009, it was voted one of the top ten best employers in Singapore by the global human resource consultancy, Hewitt Resources, and now has little difficulty recruiting the talent it needs.

KEY LESSONS

THE NEW SYNTHESIS FRAMEWORK

The case illustrates a government agency stepping beyond its traditional role of guardian to that of facilitator and enabler of change, first by clarifying a shared vision and purpose, then by creating channels and empowering and equipping its staff, other members of society and even its beneficiaries to contribute. The case illustrates the possibilities that open up when a government agency begins to frame desired outcomes beyond the organizational level to the societal level and also to help other members of society do likewise. Government was able to leverage its unique position and expertise to harness the collective efforts of society towards a common purpose. Finally, the case illustrates the impact that can result when a government agency moves beyond acting alone to involving other stakeholders and members of society, tapping into their aspirations to co-create the change agenda, building collective wisdom and designing interventions so that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.

As SPS work attracted new believers, first internally and then externally, more resources were made available to deepen its mission. Positive results attracted more believers and resources—a reinforcing loop. The quality of relationships within the organization and with partners enabled collective thinking and improved planning and actions, which led to higher quality outcomes that improved relationships and deepened trust—further improving outcomes; another reinforcing loop. The process began with “Think big, start small”: a shared desire to see the lives of those whom they serve change. The circle of influence started with individuals, then the organization and cascaded to the rest of the community.

COMPELLING MISSION AND VISION

Although the change was triggered by the need to address a problem, it was driven by a compelling vision and sense of mission. These were pivotal in shaping strategies and aligning organizational plans, priorities, systems, processes, resources and people. Ownership of the vision and mission at all levels of the organization also energized its officers to contribute more creatively to its desired outcomes, making transitions more natural

and intuitive and enabling the vision to grow beyond the SPS to the inmates, their families, after-care agencies and finally the community at large. Change was facilitated by building shared goals and perspectives.

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Chua Chin Kiat galvanized the organization and his staff through an inclusive approach. He did so by listening and learning from the ground level, creating safe environments for open and deep conversations. He developed a strong leadership team and built trust by empowering others, sharing ownership, and taking risks. Together, management helped the officers see new meaning in their work and a new future with stakeholders and inmates. Their influence rippled beyond the prisons’ four walls to the after-care agencies. Their essence of leadership was one of stewardship of the organizational goals they served and the people they led.¹³

THE POWER OF MENTAL MODELS¹⁴

New ways of perceiving their work, role and relationships with inmates and stakeholders helped prison officers see new possibilities and solutions, form new structures, networks and relationships, build new capabilities and create outcomes that they had never before imagined. Applying the same principle, prison officers realized that when inmates acquire new ways of perceiving the world and thinking and are equipped with new skills, they too can learn to make different choices and contribute to society. Likewise, the community began to respond differently when it understood more of prisons and rehabilitation work, which changed its perception of inmates and ex-offenders. Results were sustained because of changes in thinking and therefore choices, actions and outcomes.

ENDNOTES

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3. Singapore Prison Service, *Organisational Health Survey*.
4. Bourgon with Milley, *The New Frontiers of Public Administration*, 36-38.
5. The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) dates from the penal settlements established in 1825 to house convicts transported from British India; between 1841 and 1936, the British Colonial Government built four prisons in all. The prevalent philosophy of deterrence through punitive measures rather than rehabilitation led to an extremely high rate of recidivism which, in turn, led to prison crowding. In 1946, SPS was institutionalized as a department and today plays an important role in Singapore's Criminal Justice System, working closely with the Judiciary and other partner agencies under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Its mission is to "protect society through the safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders, co-operating in prevention and aftercare." SPS operates a total of 14 Penal Institutions and Drug Rehabilitation Centres; and three maximum, five medium and six low-medium security institutions. Total inmate population is about 13,400, of which 51 percent are drug addicts. About 3.4 percent serve the tail-end of their sentence in community-based programs outside the prisons. SPS staff strength stands at 2,300, of which 23 percent are Senior Officers; 67 percent, junior ranks; and 10 percent, civilian. The inmate-to-staff ratio is about 7.6 inmates to 1 staff (Singapore Prison Service, www.prisons.gov.sg).
6. Singapore Prison Service, "Mission & Vision of Singapore Prison Service."
7. Lapses in the post-war years created concern that opening doors to volunteers would put security at risk and subject prisons staff to accusations of favouritism and corruption. This thinking was reinforced in the design of SPS' internal systems, rules and processes. The public hence lacked understanding of SPS activities and prisoners, resulting in fear and reluctance to associate with them in any way.
8. The Board of Visiting Justice comprised prominent members of society with the influence to rally public support and action towards the reintegration of ex-offenders.
9. SCORE was established in 1975 as a statutory board under the MHA to manage inmate-run enterprises within SPS. A key partner of SPS, its scope was expanded in 1987 to include rehabilitation and aftercare services to facilitate transition into the community. Today SCORE has four core functions: Work, Training, Employment Assistance, and Community Engagement. In 2009, SCORE provided work programs for 3,500 inmates, trained 2,980 inmates in market-relevant skills, assisted 2,517 ex-offenders and inmates to find jobs and maintained a total of 1,853 employers in its job databank. SCORE has about 130 staff members, of which about 24 percent are ex-offenders. It is a self-funding entity and does not receive any direct funding from the government (Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises, www.score.gov.sg).
10. Singapore Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-Offenders (CARE) Network, "Yellow Ribbon Project."
11. Chung, *Making a Difference as Captains of Lives*.

12. Singapore Prison Service, *Singapore Prison Service's Singapore Quality Award*.
13. Senge, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," 10-13.
14. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, 235-237.

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FROM NS6 TO NS WORLD

THE NEW SYNTHESIS PROJECT

The New Synthesis Project is an international partnership of institutions and individuals who are dedicated to advancing the study and practice of public administration. While they hail from different countries, different political systems and different historical, economic and cultural contexts, all share the view that public administration as a practice and discipline is not yet aligned with the challenges of serving in the 21st century.

THE NEW SYNTHESIS 6 NETWORK

In 2009, Madame Jocelyne Bourgon invited six countries to join the New Synthesis Network (NS6), composed of officials, scholars and experts from Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Committed to supporting practitioners whose work is becoming increasingly difficult, this network has engaged close to 200 people from more than 24 organizations. Their efforts have resulted in five international roundtables, five post-roundtable reports, and 17 case studies. Collectively, this work has generated significant insights into preparing governments to serve in the 21st century.

The Network's findings have been captured in the publication of a new book entitled *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, and is available in print and electronic formats from McGill-Queen's University Press. Its signature contribution is the presentation of an enabling governance framework that brings together the role of government, society and people to address some of the most complex and intractable problems of our time.

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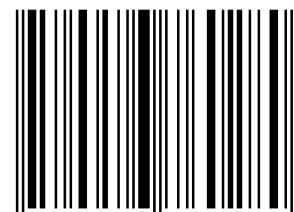
TOWARDS NS WORLD

So where to from here? Reconfiguring and building the capacities of government for the future cannot be accomplished through the publication of a single book. It is a continuous journey which requires the ongoing sharing and synthesis of ideas, as well as the feedback, learning and course adjustments that can only be derived by testing ideas in action.

And so the journey continues and the conversation expands. Our goal is to build upon the rich partnership of the original six participating countries by opening up this exchange with others—wherever they may be located. We seek to create an international community that connects all leaders—from government, the private sector and civil society—committed to helping prepare governments for the challenges ahead.

Next stages of this work will include virtual exchanges supported by web 2.0 technologies, as well as possible thematic and regionally-based networks and events. But no matter the vehicles, success can only be achieved through the active participation and collaboration of those passionate about making a difference.

We encourage you to stay tuned to nsworld.org for more information about how to get engaged.



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