

DESISTOR NETWORK – MENTORING COMMUNITY OF PRACTISE 5

THYE HUA KWAN MORAL CHARITY: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

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SUMMARY

At a significant convening at Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre, professionals, family members, and community stakeholders gathered to discuss and learn about the centre's multifaceted approach to supporting families and individuals impacted by incarceration. The centre's comprehensive strategies to support individual and community resilience were showcased, highlighting their commitment to a no-limit support framework.

1. Introduction

The event opened with a detailed introduction to the diverse services offered by Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre, emphasizing their holistic, strengths-based, and client-centric approach. As a pivotal part of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) network, the centre operates with a "no wrong door" policy, ensuring all clients receive directed and significant aid, regardless of their entry point into the service system.



Picture 1: Programs at Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Center

2. Empowering Through Comprehensive Care: Key Support Services

A detailed presentation showcased the array of services offered by Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre:

- **Casework and Counselling:** These services are designed to address the personal, social, and emotional difficulties faced by clients. The Centre's professionals equip clients with essential tools for personal development and effective coping strategies.

- **Information and Referral Services:** This crucial service acts as a bridge, linking beneficiaries with vital community resources and support, ensuring that no individual or family faces their challenges alone.
- **Group Work and Community Work:** The Centre's proactive community work includes door-to-door outreach and grassroots initiatives aimed at engaging the community and building a robust support network.



Picture 2: Sharing on the "OK" Program

3. Program Highlights: OK Groupwork Program and Brotherhood Program

The session shed light on several key initiatives designed to support individuals and families on their journey to recovery.

OK Groupwork Program: The OK Group Work Program at Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre is specifically designed to address the challenges faced by families impacted by drug use or incarceration. This seven-month program focuses on rebuilding connections within the family unit through a structured and supportive framework. The program operates on Saturdays from 2 to 4 pm and employs a multi-faceted approach:

- **Group Therapy Sessions:** Participants are divided into groups

based on their role within the family— male, female, grandparents, youth, and children. Each group addresses specific issues, such as the impact of drug use on family dynamics for males, parenting challenges for mothers, and guilt or past drug use for grandparents. These sessions are crucial for providing targeted support and fostering understanding among family members.

- **Family Systems Therapy:** The therapy addresses how an individual's problems affect the entire family, emphasizing the interconnectedness of family dynamics and the importance of holistic healing.
- **Connector Meetings:** These are individual meetings with assigned staff that provide continuous personal support. They are essential for maintaining the momentum of recovery and ensuring that participants feel supported throughout their journey.
- **Community Service Day:** A key component of the program, this day is designed to give back to the community, enhancing participants' sense of belonging and responsibility. It's also a practical application of the skills and values discussed during therapy sessions.



Picture 3: The Brotherhood Program by Ben

Brotherhood Program: The Brotherhood Program is tailored to meet the specific needs of men, who often lack sufficient support in traditional recovery settings. Recognizing that men face unique challenges in dealing with long-term drug addiction and potential domestic violence, this program offers a comprehensive support system that includes:

- **Hybrid Meeting Format:** The program combines online and face-to-face meetings to accommodate varying schedules and to enhance accessibility. This format allows for a broader reach and can cater to men who may have commitments that prevent them from attending regular in-person sessions.
- **Three-Phase Conversion Approach**
 - Values orientation (Phase 1): This phase focuses on instilling core values and principles that support a life free from addiction.
 - Change and Action (Phase 2): Participants are educated about healthy relationships, managing power imbalances, and other relevant topics that are crucial for personal and relational development.
 - Repair Work (Phase 3): This involves activities like the Kintsugi activity, a symbolic mending exercise representing healing and forgiveness, which helps rebuild trust and mend relationships that were strained or broken due to past behaviours.
- **Additional Support Services:** Beyond the structured program, participants

have access to mentor training, community outreach opportunities (like podcasts, videos, and school talks), and emergency shelter assistance. These services ensure that men have the resources to handle crises and engage in meaningful community activities.



Picture 4: Brother Ganeson sharing his testimony.

4. Testimonial Highlight: The Transformative Journey of Brother Ganeson

- **Background:** Ganeson's life was marred by nearly three decades of incarceration, predominantly for drug offenses and violent behaviour. His descent into a cycle of crime began with a violent outburst triggered by an adultery incident involving his ex-wife and her partner on their wedding anniversary, when their infant son was just three months old. This led to his initial imprisonment, where he was denied access to his child, fuelling a deep-seated anger that further fuelled his destructive path. Despite attempts by prison officers and even interactions with his son, Ganeson remained distrustful and despondent, his emotional barriers seeming insurmountable.
- **Turning Point:** The pivotal moment in Ganeson's journey came with his

mandatory participation in the HERO program. It was during this program that he encountered Madam Rashida, a compassionate counsellor who managed to connect with him on an emotional level. Her support and encouragement inspired Ganeson to take a small but significant step towards change, driven by a desire to honour his mother's unwavering love. This positive experience with the HERO program led to a recommendation for the Brotherhood program, the first time Ganeson had encountered a support initiative specifically tailored to men like himself. Hearing the stories of others in the Brotherhood deeply impacted him, instilling in him a realization of the urgency of change and a newfound sense of purpose: to help others avoid the destructive path he had trodden.

- **Rehabilitation:** The support and guidance Ganeson received from figures like Madam Rashida, Sister Irene, and the Brotherhood program were instrumental in his rehabilitation journey. Their encouragement was not merely lip service; it was a beacon of hope that guided him through the darkest moments of his life. Through their referrals to various services, including job opportunities, Ganeson began to rebuild his life, embracing the concept of becoming a positive "Ex-Offender for Good." Today, as a motivational speaker, he shares his experiences to inspire others, emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and the need to shed the metaphorical mask of ego and pride. Ganeson's journey serves as a testament to the power of support and redemption, demonstrating that

it is never too late to seek forgiveness, learn from past mistakes, and emerge as a better version of oneself. His story and life skills that he learned resonate not only within the confines of prison walls but also on prestigious platforms like Yale-NUS and NIE, where he imparts concrete de-escalation techniques, embodying the transformative potential of resilience and determination.



Picture 5: Brother Ben presenting Brother Ganeson his well-deserved certificate to mark the success in his change journey.

5. Q and A Insights

Engaging with the Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre's mentoring programme can raise numerous questions for prospective participants and their families. Here, we delve into the essential inquiries raised by individuals seeking guidance on the program's referral process, eligibility criteria, and the nuanced dynamics of family reconciliation.

Q: My friend in prison could benefit from this program. How can they be referred?

A: To join the Brotherhood Programme, individuals should express their interest to their Reintegration Officer. The officer can then initiate the referral process, facilitating access to the supportive services provided by the program.

Q: The program seems to target younger people. Is that right?

A: Yes, due to a recent rise in Controlled Drug (CBP) cases, the centre is seeing more participants in the age range of 15 to 16 years old. The organization also works with Prisons to engage the DRC (Drug Rehabilitation Centre) population.

Q: How often is the OK program offered?

A: The OK Programme runs once a year and lasts for 7 months.

Q: What about someone who has relapsed but has not been arrested? Can they join?

A: The programs themselves may not be suitable for those currently using drugs, as the sessions are meant to be drug-free and involve family participation. However, Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre social workers can provide casework support and connect individuals with resources like Narcotics Anonymous Management Service (NAMS).

Q: Can someone interested in the program walk in or call your centre directly?

A: Yes. While referrals are preferred, anyone interested can walk in, call Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre, or request a referral from another source.

Q: The Brotherhood program encourages apologies to families, but what happens if someone apologises, and their family rejects it?

A: The Brotherhood Programme understands that reconciliation isn't always a simple or guaranteed outcome. Here's how they address this challenge:

Before participants even attempt apologies, the program helps them prepare for various responses, including rejection. This helps manage expectations and provides emotional support. The program acknowledges that some relationships may

be too damaged to repair. In these cases, the focus shifts to help participants learn from their past mistakes and develop healthier relationship skills for the future.

Witnessing successful reconciliations within the program can inspire hope and provide a roadmap for building stronger relationships moving forward.

It's important to remember that healing from past trauma is a journey, not a destination. The Brotherhood Programme recognizes that repairing the damage caused by years of destructive behaviour takes time and ongoing support.

Summary of the Q&A Session

The Q&A session sheds light on the intricacies of the programmes offered by the Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre. Through comprehensive responses, prospective participants gain clarity on the referral process, program eligibility, and the nuanced dynamics of family reconciliation. These insights underscore the programs' commitment to inclusivity, rehabilitation, and holistic support for individuals seeking to break free from cycles of addiction and violence. By addressing diverse queries with empathy and expertise, the Programmes continue to serve as a beacon of hope and transformation for those embarking on their journey towards healing and empowerment.

6. Insights from COP Discussion

Q1: What challenges do the volunteers face when engaging with families in the community?

A: The discussion highlighted various challenges encountered by volunteers when engaging with families in the community. These challenges include addressing varying preferences among beneficiaries, avoiding a judgmental attitude, building trust, and navigating cultural barriers and stigma

associated with seeking help. Strategies discussed included effective communication, follow-up visits, providing information through flyers, involving families in the process, and maintaining sufficient staffing and resources to support clients.

Challenges Volunteers Face:

- **Reluctance to Seek Help:** Many beneficiaries want help but are hesitant due to pride, ego, or fear of judgment. This reluctance can stem from a perceived stigma associated with receiving aid.
- **Preference for Assistance Types:** Families often prefer monetary assistance over other forms of aid like food rations or vouchers, complicating the distribution of resources.
- **Perceptions of Entitlement:** There's a challenge in managing expectations about the type of support provided. It's crucial to communicate that assistance is based on available resources, not entitlement.
- **Communication Barriers:** Effective communication is vital. Using the right terminology ("assisting" rather than "helping" – assisting them, but they have to help themselves) helps empower families to take active roles in their own improvement.
- **Building Trust and Engagement:** Volunteers face difficulties in engaging families, with some families avoiding contact or sending children to interact in their place. Establishing trust is a slow process that often begins with small interactions.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Maintaining professional boundaries while providing personal support is essential. This includes managing how much volunteers personally

invest emotionally in the beneficiaries' outcomes.

Q2: Share how my support groups/agency can/has incorporated support for my beneficiaries.

A: The conversation explored ways in which support groups or agencies can incorporate Supportive Psychotherapy (SPT) for their beneficiaries. Key suggestions included providing training and education for staff members, implementing screening tools for identifying beneficiaries who may benefit from SPT, offering individual and group sessions, providing psychoeducation on relevant topics, developing crisis intervention protocols, collaborating with other services, ensuring cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the SPT program through feedback from beneficiaries and staff members.

Strategies for Effective Family Work Integration:

1. **Focus on Individual Change:** Start by supporting the individual; changes in their behavior can encourage family members to engage with support programs out of curiosity and perceived benefits.
2. **Diverse Engagement Strategies:** Adapt to the varied needs of families, such as focusing on reintegration for the ex-offender while supporting the family with financial advice or childcare.
3. **Education and Awareness:** Increase family involvement by educating them about the support available and the benefits of participation, which can change hesitant attitudes towards accepting help.
4. **Creating Safe Spaces:** Provide environments where individuals feel

safe to seek help without fear of stigma or breach of privacy. This may involve discreet support mechanisms.

- 5. Leverage Existing Relationships:** Utilize the positive changes seen in program participants to draw in family members who may initially be skeptical or uninterested in the support offered.

7. Summary

These programs at Thye Kua Kwan Family Service Centre stand as beacons of hope, offering families a pathway to empowerment, healing, and positive change. By breaking the cycle of addiction and violence, they pave the way for brighter futures and stronger communities. At Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre, we believe in the transformative power of support and collaboration. If you or someone you know is seeking to embark on this journey of growth and renewal, we encourage you to reach out to us. Together, we can ignite change, nurture resilience, and create a future filled with promise and possibility.

To learn more about how you can support or benefit from Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre, visit [<https://www.thkmc.org.sg/>].

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Picture 6: Another successful and meaningful engagement at the Mentors Networking Session.