

1. In what ways do you think correctional services could benefit from greater involvement of individuals with lived experience?

Firstly, Individuals with lived experience can enhance correctional services through their unique perspectives and experiences by serving as peer mentors and role models, offering unique insights from their personal journeys of transformation. Their involvement bridges crucial gaps between correctional services, community partners and society, while helping reduce stigma and inform effective rehabilitation initiatives. Secondly, they benefit from the work they do of supporting others as it strengthens their new pro-social identity as a contributing citizen. Thirdly, individuals who participate in the rehabilitation of inmates, in addition to professionals, count as the ‘force multiplier’ as they add to the workforce as the additional ‘boots on the ground’ in the rehabilitation space.

Lastly, by involving desistors and peer supporters in correctional services, it can create a more empathetic and inclusive rehabilitation and reintegration environment. Their involvement not only benefits the correctional system but also provides a pathway for desistors to contribute positively to society, creating a virtuous cycle of support and rehabilitation. For instance, a pilot study examining the involvement of desistors in conducting Psychology-based Correctional Programmes (PCPs) alongside professional staff found a quantitative increase in hope and motivation for the participants of the groups that involved desistors.

Recognising these benefits, the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) launched two initiatives harnessing the potential that people with lived experience bring. First, is the Desistor Network (DN) that was launched in 2023. SPS works with community partners to create a strong support system that harnesses desistors' strengths and collective networks. Through knowledge sharing, training, and access to community resources, DN empowers former offenders to give back to society while reinforcing their own journey of change. Second is the Empathotherapy movement which started in 2022, where inmates who are committed to and have shown good evidence of inner change facilitate peer support programmes for other inmates, co-facilitating alongside our staff. One of the programmes from Empathotherapy is Dads Do Care, a fathering support group by dads for dads, led by inmate fathers and supported by staff.

2. Are you aware of any programs that you would consider ‘best practice’ for supporting the engagement and work of individuals with ‘lived experience’ in your jurisdiction?

SPS involves individuals with lived experience in several areas that benefits inmates, supervisees and other desistors.

- **Befrienders:** Desistors who have been living good lives in the community actively participate in individual befriending to current inmates in prison, offering prosocial support, unique insights and relatable experiences to support their rehabilitation and reintegration journey.
- **Peer Supporters:** Inmates, who have shown commitment to and has shown evidence of inner change, to co-run programmes alongside staff. These peer supporters currently facilitate community-building circles (i.e. Empathotherapy), restorative circles on the topics of fathering, familial relationships, and managing emotions, among others.
- **Peer Supporters’ Academy:** This is a product of the Empathotherapy movement. The Peer Supporters Academy is responsible for the training of new peer supporters. This Academy was an

initiative of and run by both inmates and staff. The Academy is now in the midst of training more peer supporters who can be deployed to other prisons across our correctional system.

- **Motivational Speaking Engagements:** Desistors are invited to share their personal stories of transformation and reintegration, inspiring hope and providing practical guidance to those still in prison.
- **Psychology-based Correctional Programmes (PCP):** SPS works with trained desistors to co-facilitate PCPs in prisons alongside professional staff. Desistors bring unique insights and practical strategies to these sessions, while inspiring current inmates towards positive change through their lived experiences of overcoming similar challenges. Additionally, community partners collaborate with desistors to run specialised programmes for men who wish to exit from their gangs and start anew, leveraging lived experiences to address specific challenges in the rehabilitation process.
- **Desistor Support Groups and Activities:** Community partners work alongside former offenders to facilitate support groups and various activities in the community. These initiatives provide a platform for desistors to connect, share experiences, and support one another. Through regular meetings and engaging events, participants build a supportive environment and strengthen bonds with fellow desistors at different stages of their reintegration journey.

3. Have you made any recent policy or legislative changes to support or expand the engagement of individuals with lived experience (e.g., allowing for the hiring of individuals with a criminal record)?

While there had not been any recent policy or legislative changes to support or expand the engagement of individuals with lived experience, we would like to share the work of Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG) in the areas of inclusive hiring. Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG), a statutory board under the Ministry of Home Affairs, provides employment assistance and career retention support to inmates and ex-offenders to enhance their employment outcomes. As at end 2024, YRSG has more than 6,700 partner employers who support the hiring of ex-offenders.

To encourage more employers to hire ex-offenders, the Uplifting Employment Credit (UEC) was implemented in April 2023. The UEC provides time-limited wage offsets to employers of ex-offenders and is applicable for ex-offenders who earn below \$4,000/month and released within three years prior to employment. In addition to UEC, YRSG has also built a system of support to incentivise and encourage employers to practise inclusive hiring of ex-offenders. For example, Project Beyond Hiring is an initiative that engages, trains, and builds a network of workplace supervisors to equip them with the skillsets to support ex-offenders in the workplace.

Beyond employment, there are also other initiatives to encourage the wider community to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders. Started by the CARE Network in 2004, the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP) is a national movement to foster a more inclusive society by changing mindsets and offering ex-offenders a second chance in life. Through the YRP, SPS and YRSG collaborate with community partners, such as non-profit organisations and educational institutions, to provide platforms to showcase the diverse skills and talents of inmates and ex-offenders, and how they can contribute back to society.

4. Is there anything that you are planning or considering for the future in supporting the deployment or employment of individuals with lived experience?

SPS aims to expand and empower its community of desistors, encouraging them to become community leaders and contribute positively to society. SPS will focus on growing its network of desistors who are keen to contribute within and beyond prison walls. Furthermore, SPS plans to develop the skills of longer-term desistors, by equipping them with relevant knowledge, such as addiction and group facilitation, and support structures to a) facilitate alignment of interests between SPS and desistors, and b) provide avenues for desistors to tap on in the event of transference or encountering triggers. Trained desistors may take on more advanced peer guidance roles, such as collaborating with professionals to deliver in-prison programmes, facilitating peer-led circles, spearheading support communities for other desistors, and supporting supervisees in their reintegration journey as voluntary case officers.

5. Do you believe there is a role for individuals with lived experience to provide feedback on new legislative, policy or program development?

There is a role for desistors to provide feedback on what can be done differently or improved, such as tapping on their lived experiences in the community to refine and ensure relevance in topics like relapse prevention planning in programmes. Importantly, this can be effective when these desistors are aligned to SPS' interest in the rehabilitation approach. There is also value in engaging the views of people with lived experience in the design of rehabilitative programmes. This may be through the use of practice-based evidence where we view their lived experience as “practice” which can offer rich insights beyond what scientific evidence has informed us.

6. Do you see any particular obstacles or concerns that might interfere with the greater involvement of individuals with lived experience (e.g., trust or acceptance from existing staff)?

1. Desistor PCP Co-facilitators

SPS conducted a pilot of involving two desistors in running PCPs. The pilot found the following obstacles and concerns when involving desistors:

- Credibility and acceptance of desistors may be in question if their profile (e.g. lived experience) do not match the inmates they engage. For example, someone with lived experience in overcoming crime but not having struggled with addictions being deployed to populations of men who struggle with addictions.
- Desistors might not have adequate relevant skills to co-facilitate PCPs.
- Staff and desistors have differing views on desistors' degree of involvement in co-facilitating PCP groups.
- Involvement of desistors introduces additional workload challenges for staff, including conducting pre- and post-session debriefs to ensure PCP activities are executed effectively. Moreover, the task requires a limited pool of experienced staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide constructive feedback to desistors and to meaningfully connect their personal narratives to the session objectives.

- Other potential risks such as desistor relapsing, meeting close friends/family members while in prison.

2. Desistor Peer Supporters

- Possible constraint on operational processes: Working with peer supporters would require more coordination with staff on the ground to facilitate the engagements.
- Staff acceptance: Staff may not be ready to accept desistors and work alongside them.

Afternote:

- *In Singapore, persons with lived experience and have been released in the community and living an offence-free lifestyle are known as “desistors”. This is intentional in pointing out the contrast with and in influencing a change from the rather stigmatizing term “ex-offenders”.*
- *Persons with lived experience who are currently serving the sentence and contributing in a peer-support capacity or mentors are referred to as “peer supporters”.*