

Second Chances

By **Patricia Chiang**

“Useless!” “Hopeless!” “Good for nothing!” This was all Adam* could think of whenever he looked at himself. Things looked terribly bleak and nothing close to positive less than a year ago when I first met Adam at the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) of the Singapore Prison Service.

I had met him through an aftercare program that Care Community Services Society (CCSS) conducts in partnership with the Singapore Prison Service. The program helps ex-offenders re-integrate into their families and society to start life afresh.

Adam is part of the worrying trend mentioned by a recent Straits Times article dated Jan 30, 2013 where the number of those admitted into DRCs has more than doubled from 688 in 2010 to 1384 in 2012.

Although it was the second time Adam was incarcerated, he has been in a self-imposed “prison” since his first encounter with heroin at 14. Young, ignorant and impulsive, all he cared about were his friends who, incidentally, were a

bad influence. Unable to get through to him, his parents and siblings slowly distanced themselves from him and eventually gave up on him.

Then he met Dorothy*, who was two years younger than him, at a party and after a three-year courtship, got married. Dorothy was determined to help Adam break free from his drug addiction. With her dedication and support, Adam went cold turkey and was drug free for a few years.

Then in 2010, after eight years of marriage and with two young children, Adam was accused of sexually harassing Dorothy’s younger sister when he was drunk. Distraught by this incident, Adam went back to drugs. He was caught, convicted and jailed for 15 months.

When I first began to work with Adam, he was very reserved and felt very inferior. He couldn’t face his wife and children for fear of what they might think of him. I worked with him to help him change the negative perceptions of himself and encouraged him to focus on his strengths instead of his weaknesses. Over time, Adam started



recognizing what he had, instead of what he lacked. He began appreciating his wife and became much more positive and cheerful.

Through this process, Dorothy also stood by Adam and didn't give up on him. Times were tough as the sole breadwinner with two young children, but with the encouragement and support, she was confident that things would get better.

In this program, CCSS works not only with the inmate but also closely with the family. As case managers, our role is to support and provide casework management over a period of eight to 20 months. This close working relationship between CCSS and the family or significant others provides the synergy that is much needed in bringing about the positive change and successful reintegration of ex-offenders back into society.

When Adam was released on a 'home tagging system' to serve out the remaining six months of his sentence, his other family members also began visiting him, talking with him on the phone and having family meals together. Dorothy also made it a point to meet him after his work so that they could have some quality time as a couple as they made their way home.

The way Adam looks at his future is more positive now. He has learnt to treasure his family. It is gratifying to hear him declare that his long term goal is to work his way back to a cleaning supervisor's position and to buy a HDB flat where he and his family can call home.

Time at home for Adam is time spent with the children watching TV, reading books and even singing songs together. He also tells me that he looks forward to the day when he will be able to fulfill his children's wishes of wanting to spend time showing him different places like the new mall near where they stay. I can only imagine how wonderful it will be to see them spend time as a family at the zoo or cycling at the park.

As I close this case and put away the case file, I am hopeful that their future as a family will indeed be positive. **T**

"The love of a family is life's greatest blessing." – unknown

**Names have been changed to protect the identity of the persons involved*

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In partnership with the Singapore Prison Service, CCSS' team of social workers and caseworkers from Prison Care Services help ex-offenders re-integrate into their families and society to start life afresh. This project is an after-care program and includes case management support and counseling for inmates from Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) and their families.

