



# SIWEC INSIGHT

Sikh Welfare Council, Singapore

June 2013

Welcome to yet another issue of our SIWEC newsletter!

The primary goal of our newsletter is to **Engage and Share with You** SIWEC's recent & forthcoming events. We also look forward to hearing from you on how you may want to volunteer and get involved in our activities. Besides the Food on the Table program, other SIWEC activities include Prison Visits, Counselling, Bereavement and Financial Assistance. SIWEC was awarded IPC status by the Commissioner of Charities on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2009. In keeping with our IPC status, about 10% of our needy clients are non-Sikhs.

## Vesakhi Prison Visit



## Vesakhi Mela



## Welfare Day @CST



## HEB-Ashram Walk A Jog



### MANAGEMENT COMITTEE

**Jagjit Singh Sekhon**  
Chairman

**Amarjit Singh Wasan**  
Vice Chairman

**Inderpal Singh**  
Secretary

**Amritpal Singh**  
Asst Secretary

**Gurmit Singh Grewal**  
Treasurer

**Jaspreet Singh Chhabra**  
Asst Treasurer

### Committee Members

Manmohan Singh

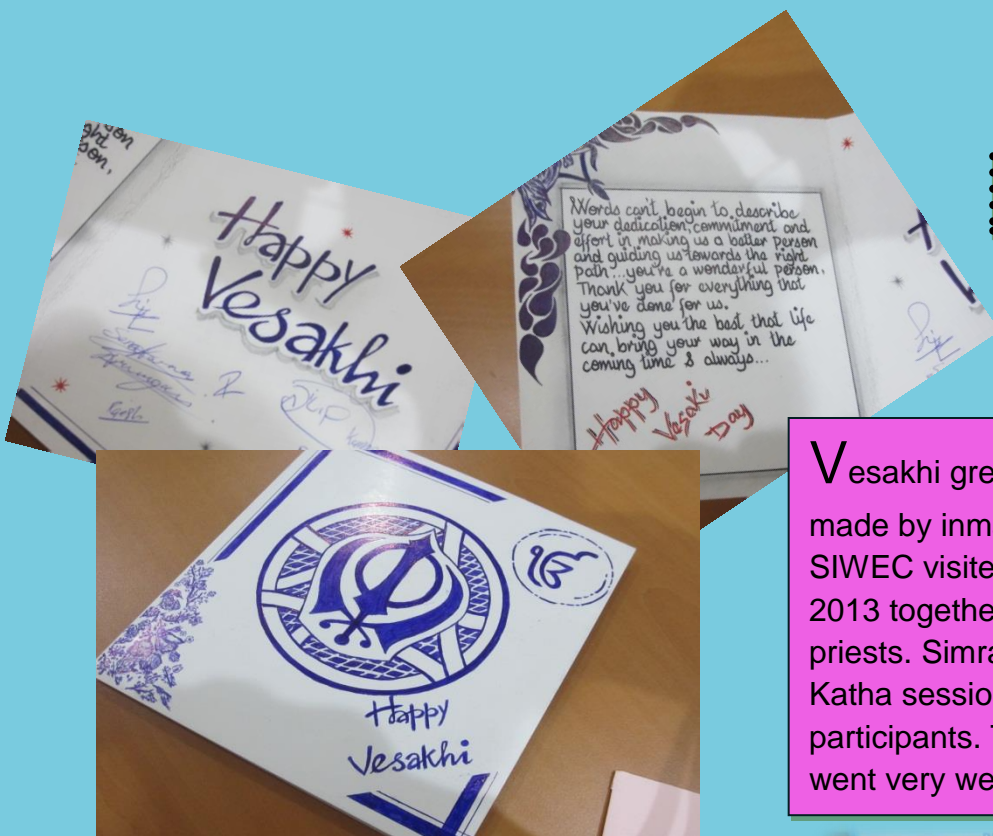
Dinesh Singh

Sarjit Kaur Gill

Gurmit Kaur Sroya

**What We Do:** *The Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) is a charitable organisation with an IPC status ("Institutions of Public Character"), which formulates overall policies in respect of welfare services in Singapore. A comprehensive detail of SIWEC's functions and activities can be found on our website at [www.siwec.org](http://www.siwec.org).*

## Vesakhi Prison Visit



Vesakhi greeting cards, beautifully hand made by inmates to celebrate the occasion. SIWEC visited the inmates on 05 & 08 April 2013 together with the counsellors and priests. Simran was followed by a Kirtan and Katha session and ended with Ardass by all participants. The celebration on both dates went very well.

## Vesakhi Mela @SKA



Vesakhi Mela celebrations were held at Singapore Khalsa Association on 28 April 2013. SIWEC, in collaboration with the Diabetic Society of Singapore, conducted health screening for about 140 individuals. The health screening covered checks on Body Mass Index (BMI), blood pressure and blood sugar level. Based on test results, some individuals were advised to seek medical advice.

Also, for the first time, the HEB-Ashram set up a booth to promote their activities and provided logistics assistance.



# HIGHLIGHTS

## Vesakhi Celebration at CST

SIWEC participated in the Vesakhi Celebrations at the Central Sikh Temple on 12 April 2013 by setting up a booth to promote its activities. SIWEC received generous contributions from well-wishers and positive feedback on its activities. We thank all the members of the community who donated generously to SIWEC.



## Vesakhi Goodies for families



As part of the Vesakhi celebrations, SIWEC facilitated the distribution of goodies to the needy families which were donated and delivered by KATONG Gurdwara sangat. Each family also received a token and sweetmeats. Families were very appreciative of the token and goodies received and were thankful for the visits made.

## Outreach to the Sikh Institutions

SIWEC has embarked on an awareness programme to update all Sikh institutions on its current and new programmes and challenges faced by the community. As part of this programme, SIWEC met up with the Singapore Khalsa Association Ladies Wing Committee on 14 May 2013. The Ladies Wing Committee has been very supportive towards SIWEC.



## Council Review Meeting 2013



**S**IWEC Council Review Meeting was held on 16 February 2013 at Central Sikh Temple. During the meeting, the members discussed the work plan for 2013 that was presented by SIWEC. The members were also updated on the challenges facing SIWEC, new programmes and outreach to the society. The members noted that the awareness of SIWEC activities has gradually increased. The Chairman thanked the Committee and Council members for their participation in this important meeting.

## HEB – Ashram Walk A Jog



**T**he HEB-Ashram Awareness Day (Open House) cum Walk-A-Jog was held on 17 March 2013 at the HEB-Ashram Halfway House.

Upon the invitation by HEB-Ashram, SIWEC set up a booth to promote its activities and we benefited as it gave us an opportunity to network with other participating agencies such as SANA, SCORE and SINDA. The AHSRAM residents were very helpful throughout the event. They will also be visiting the Central Sikh Gurdwara on a weekly basis to do 'Sewa'. The residents will be briefed on the importance of 'Sewa' in the Sikh traditions and how through 'Sewa', they may contribute back to society.



## YUVA Mentoring Programme

**To be a youth mentor**, you don't need special skills, just an ability to listen and to offer friendship; guidance and encouragement to a young person...and you'll be amazed by how much you'll get out of the experience.

One of the greatest ways to affect a child's life positively is by becoming a mentor. Studies show that mentoring someone can benefit both the mentee and the mentor. Mentoring is a shared opportunity for learning and growth.

If you have a sincere desire to help children, are an active listener and a flexible and empathetic person, who looks for solutions and opportunities in life, you have all the qualities a good mentor has. It will not take up much time as well. All it will take is a telephone communication with your mentee once a week and a face-to-face meeting once a month.

You can take steps to create a bond and positively influence a teen or a child by checking out SIWEC's website for information on becoming a mentor.



**If you are between 16 and 25 years of age,**

**Join us!!! Call 6299 9234**

**We Need You!**

**Be a Youth Mentor!!!**

## Hospital Visits

**O**ne of the services provided by SIWEC is to visit patients in the hospitals. The purpose of the visit is to provide comfort and care, and assistance, if required.

SIWEC makes about 8 to 10 monthly visits to various hospitals in Singapore. Each visit lasts between 30 to 40 minutes. Currently, we have about 21 active healthcare ambassadors; they are registered nurses providing this service on behalf of SIWEC. We hope the Sikh Community would continue to inform SIWEC at <tel:62999234> if any loved one has been hospitalised and requires a visit.



## SIWEC Programmes....

Thanks to your support and guidance. SIWEC is now evolving from being a provider of food and finance to the needy to becoming an enabler, supporter and a motivator through holistic care. New programs are being introduced to supplement the traditional ones, which we will continue to administer more effectively and efficiently (support for the needy, handling bereavements, counselling, etc).

### The programmes are

- Family support
- Education Support
- Youth Mentoring
- Hospital Visits
- Prisons Through Care
- Bereavement
- Fund raising
- Outreach



## Be a Befriender!

The Befriending Programme is a service undertaken by trained volunteers to give offenders the necessary support and guidance before and after their release. This service is meant to give additional emotional support to participating inmates and is open to those who lack positive peers and emotional support from family and friends.

The aim of this programme is to encourage greater involvement from members of the community, specifically the various ethnic groups. As the community realises the importance of their involvement in the reintegration of ex-offenders, programmes such as this can be an important platform to inspire, empower, educate and equip both the ex-offender and society at large. **To know more about the programme, call us at 6299-9234**



**“We all need support and friendship, regardless of circumstances. But where do people turn when friends and family are simply no longer there, or can't help us through a difficult time, or need all our care and attention and can't give us any in return? Thank goodness for befriending projects, who help fill the empty spaces where care, support and a listening ear need to be.”** by Nicola Sturgeon

## "A Helping Hand Goes a Long Way"

### An ex-inmate shares his journey of reform.....

Turning over a new leaf is easier said than done. It is as much a matter of will as it is in being presented with the opportunity to correct one's wrongs. After all, as the saying goes, opportunity seldom knocks twice, and so it is important to grab the proverbial bull by its horns when it faces you. And that is why we celebrate those who do, for they are able to inspire others that there is hope yet.

Mr Guruka Singh (not his real name) is one such shining example. An ex-offender, Mr Singh now spends his time volunteering with the Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) counselling Sikh inmates on weekends as he believes that with the right support and guidance, they too can reform. He feels that his own experience as a former inmate helps him connect and identify with the prisoners and by sharing his journey of reform, it helps them feel that there is hope for them too.

"They (the inmates) need to feel comfortable. Then they will open up and share their feelings and thoughts with me. Some of them are my friends and so they trust me," the quiet Mr Singh said.

The deep and cold expressions on his face – resemblance of a man who has gone through the school of hard knocks – makes way for an unmistakable glint of gratitude and emotion when I ask him what helped him change.

"It is all Waheguru," he said in a quivering tone. "It is all by the grace of God that I am here today." Mr Singh elaborated on how he had previously met with a SIWEC counsellor who used to teach him Gurbani Paath and encouraged him to take a step closer towards God. And, so he did.



Mr Singh now keeps a full head of unshorn hair and a beard and he also spends time doing his daily prayers. That is the catalyst and foundation, he feels, that helped him stay out of trouble and maintain his discipline. And he believes this will best help the inmates he counsels too.

"I teach them some basic ways to remember God, like Mool Mantar, Waheguru Jaap and some breathing techniques. I encourage them to do it every day and most of them say they do. It helps them keep calm and focused while in there. "

Mr Singh adds that since the prison environment is unique in that it is volatile and highly-charged, the inmates have also shared that when they are faced with high-pressured situations; turning towards Gurbani Paath has helped them remain cool and rationale and stay out of trouble while in there.

Indeed, being in prison is a difficult experience for anyone and Mr Singh shares from his personal experience that it is a trying time. "You wonder what life is like outside and I missed my mother the most. She was my pillar of support." Strong family support can play an instrumental role in getting inmates to reform and ensuring that the offenders do not get back into trouble and for Mr Singh's case, his mother played a tragic role in his path to reform. Teary-eyed, he describes how his mother never stopped supporting him and even visited him regularly while he was in prison.



Unfortunately, it was her sudden passing away that made him realize that he had not been able to give her the happiness she deserved and it was then that he realized that he had to change his life.

He had been incarcerated on a few occasions for drug-related offences but Mr Singh knew then that he had to change his path and his first stop was to find some solace and salvation at the Gurdwara. He started spending a lot of time in the Gurdwara and eventually took up a job there. While he is grateful that the Gurdwara gave him a second chance, he makes no mistake that the community needs to address its acceptance of and support for ex-offenders as that is the single most critical element in ensuring that they reform.

For one, he says that employment is essential. Even though there may be national-level programs in place to help former prisoners find employment, Mr Singh says that employers within the community must also come forward to provide work for ex-inmates. “Without work, they will very easily go back into trouble again,” he warned.



But central to that is the problem of perception. He believes that the community generally still has a problem in trusting ex-offenders and is all too happy to shun them instead of embracing them and not only recognizing their mistakes but also their intentions to reform and thus give them a chance to. Without a place in society, a vicious circle is created. “They (former inmates) will then very easily go back to their previous circle of friends, the bad company that they should stay away from.”

His advice to the community is to be less critical and judgemental of ex-offenders and anyone who is looking to a fresh lease of life.

Looking down on someone, he believes, will only bury the person deeper in societal pressure and instead what he or she needs is a helping hand to be pulled out of this rut.

Fundamentally, Mr Singh says the community lacks a structured platform for ex-offenders to leverage on. Besides the opportunities for work, family and community support, he says that there must be a system whereby the offender is not left alone when he is released from prison.

“The counselling must continue through a close buddy or mentor system, even if it means getting together once a week to do Naam Simran or any positive activity.” But he acknowledges that for this to work effectively would require a lot more resources, particularly volunteers, and so he urges more people to come forward to make a difference in someone’s life and help that person turn over a new leaf.



Now 54 years of age, Mr Singh is content to play that role in his new lease of life and help others reform as he has done. With a sheepish smile though, he admits that if someone suitable were to come along, he would like to settle down and start his own family. I hope that is an opportunity that comes by soon for Mr Singh, for we all love happy endings. And we can all play a part, no matter in what proportions, to help steer the lives of many more like Mr Singh to happier endings.

Article by: Malminderjit Singh



## How You Can Help....

**DONATE NOW**  
*easy, fast, secure*

The Sikh Welfare Council is a Volunteer Welfare Organization (VWO) that depends on the community for volunteers as well as the funds necessary to carry out its various assistance programmes. We are presently assisting more than 20 deserving families on a regular basis so that they can tide over difficult times. Obviously, this requires a great deal of resources on the part of SIWEC. We would therefore like to appeal to the community at large to help us support the less fortunate. You can do this in various ways, including:

- Giving a one-off donation (e.g. on-line via PayPal, cheques, bank drafts, Give asia etc).
- Making a GIRO application to provide a monthly (recurring) donation. Please contact us for the GIRO Form.
- Making a Bequest (Will).
- Giving a Memorial Donation - a thoughtful way to remember a loved one while giving support to others.
- Volunteering your time and participating in other activities, such as ferrying elderly/disabled Sikhs to and from Gurdwaras.

To donate online please visit us at <http://www.siwec.org/donate/support-our-work/how-you-can-donate>.

**Know someone who can benefit from this newsletter?**

***Please pass the word around!!!***