



Sikh Welfare Council, Singapore

SIWEC Insight

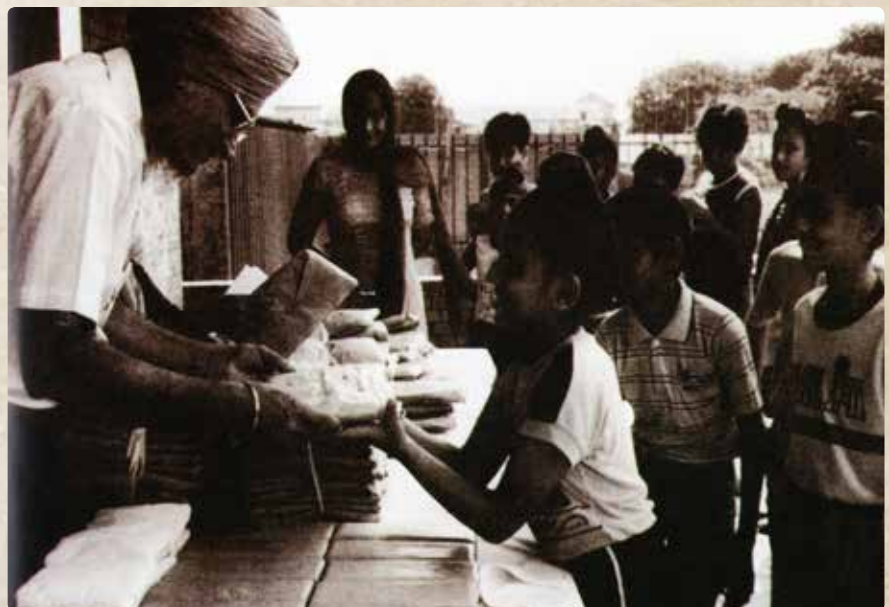
Quarter 2, 2015

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SIWEC **BACK IN TIME..**



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Sarjit Kaur Gill

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Kartar Kaur
Jasminder Kaur

SIWEC Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Date: Saturday, 27 June 2015

Time: 2.00pm

Venue: Central Sikh Temple (Level 7)

Agenda:

- 1. Annual Report**
- 2. Financial Statements**
- 3. Election of Management Committee
(1 Jul 2015 – 30 June 2017)**

History of SIWEC

Then ...

Before 1995 welfare needs in the Sikh Community were addressed by Gurdwaras, and other institutions, from time to time depending on the inclination of the committees in charge. The number of areas in which Sikh Gurdwaras contributed to the Sikh community welfare, were namely:

- a) Housing of Sikh destitutes at the old Queen Street Sikh Temple (before the 1970s)
- b) Organising Punjabi language classes (before 1990s)
- c) Providing “*Granthis*” (Sikh religious workers) for the religious component of cremation of deceased Sikhs and the final religious rites
- d) Visits to prisons and Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC). These visits were mainly with Singapore Anti Narcotics Association (SANA) Sikh Counselling Services

However, there was no central coordination of these activities leading to a great deal of duplication and overlap. The team then comprised different members of the

respective committees. They gathered their information through word of mouth. The community was aware that Sikh institutions had funds and resources. However, many needy individuals seemed to be reluctant to ask for help.

The team that set up the Sikh Welfare Council in 1995 comprised two groups. The first group was a loosely structured group of Sikh professionals, entitled the Singapore Sikh Resource Panel (SSRP). Inaugurated in 1990, this included the following individuals (current designations):

- Dr Sorinder Singh, general physician, Drs Singh & Partners. He had first-hand knowledge of the socio-economic situation of many Sikh families and youth through his many interactions.
- Dr Kanwaljit Soin, consultant orthopaedic and surgeon at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, and a founding member of AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research)



Students of a Punjabi language class held in a Gurdwara

- Late Dr. Amar Kaur, ENT specialist
- Associate Professor Kirpal Singh, English Literature and Director of Wee Kim Wee Centre, Singapore Management University,
- Mr Kaka Singh, Chairman and Senior Partner, RSM Chio Lim
- Mr Balbeer Singh Mangat, CEO, FTMS Global
- Darshan Singh, Founding Manager and Partner, Darshan & Teo LLP
- Mr Surjan Singh (a retired teacher and a dedicated social worker and volunteer with SANA Sikh Counselling Services) and
- Mr Harmit Singh Gandhi (a retired engineer and businessman).

The aim of this first group was to think of ways to uplift the Sikh youth in particular and the Sikh Community in general (Straits Times 1998).

The second group comprised members of the Sikh Advisory Board (SAB), which included representatives from the Sikh Gurdwaras in Singapore. The members of the Board had by then had the experience of setting up the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation (SSEF) in 1990, a

central body for the entire Sikh community to promote the study of Punjabi as a Mother Tongue Language for Sikh students studying in Singapore schools. Occasionally, matters pertaining to the welfare of the community were discussed at the SAB meetings.



Some education leaders in the community

When it all started

The idea of setting up of Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) did not belong to any single individual. The two groups highlighted earlier in this newsletter, and all other Sikh institutions, should get the credit for it. The setting up and the success of the SSEF provided the community with a model, which could be adapted for welfare, as they had strong concerns about welfare matters in the community.

Another factor that accelerated the setting up of SIWEC was the establishment of the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) as a result of the support of the government in 1991. Mr Bhajan Singh was the Sikh Representative on the Indian task force, which studied the problems of Indians in Singapore, and was part of the team that eventually established SINDA in 1991. As a member of the SINDA Action Committee on Indian Education problems, he was involved in the structuring of the Family Service Centre, the welfare wing of SINDA. However, between 1991 and 1994, it became evident that needy Sikh families required a

customised mechanism to address their social needs, to accommodate their customary needs.

Furthermore, with the start of the SSEF's Punjabi programme, the children who came to the centres every Saturday, began to mirror the social reality within the Sikh community. This was manifested in the number of children not being able to pay tuition fees for Punjabi school and to buy books for their lessons. Members of SAB, who were initially the Liaison Officers for the regional-based Punjabi Centres, experienced this socio-economic reality at first-hand. Thus by the beginning of 1995, the SAB invited all the heads of the Sikh institutions and shared with them the core welfare concerns facing the community and a possible community-based model for addressing these concerns. The community gave its blessings to the concept and Mr Amarjit Singh, a lawyer from the government's Attorney-General's Chambers, took on the task (sewa) of preparing a draft constitution for the proposed community-based welfare mechanism.



Sikh Heritage Tour

Awareness of a Sikh Welfare Organisation

There were really no issues regarding creating awareness and getting support for the concept of setting up an organization to cater for the welfare needs of the community. There were a number of reasons for this positive situation. First of all, there was at this point of time a heightened awareness in the community about the erosion of Sikh values in the community and the resultant socio-economic and cultural consequences that were highlighted at high profile events organized by the SAB and SSEF, with the support and cooperation of Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions which included:

- a) A day-long **Seminar on Sikh Youth and Nation Building** in March 1989 where the perceptions and concerns of school-going Sikh youth, based on research, were shared with the Sikh Community leaders and 300 members of the community at large;
- b) The Launch of the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation in December 1990, in the presence of the 1200 Sikhs at the Singapore Conference Hall;

- c) The organization of the 3-day International Exhibition Cum Conference on Sikh and Punjabi Heritage on 4th, 5th and 6th June 1992; and
- d) The organization of Sikh Heritage and Excellence Award Ceremonies from 2003 onwards

Secondly, there were intermittent but powerful tales about needy Sikh families turning to other communities for material and financial aid, stories of Sikh inmates in Drug Centres and prisons needing help and Sikhs leaving their faith as a result of disillusionment with their own community.

However the success of the setting up and achievements of SSEF, created an atmosphere of positivity and a vision of pragmatism in the community. All of the above led to an all-round support for the community level public launch of the Sikh Welfare Council in 1995.



4th Sikh Heritage & Award Excellence dinner

The official launch

This led to the formal launch of SIWEC on 14 October 1995, at a Sikh community dinner attended by 1,350 members of the community, officially by the Guest of Honour, Mr Teo Chee Hean, Minister of Defence (present Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore). All Sikh institutions pledged financial support for the new community institution.

Philanthropists like Mr. Kartar Singh Thakral and other trustees, came forward with generous pledges of donations. On the night of the launch of SIWEC itself the organizers managed to get pledges of \$1.75 million.

Following its inauguration, the new SIWEC management, with its first office on the 3rd Floor of the Central Sikh Temple, employed two Sikh Welfare Officers – Mr. Jasbir Singh and Mdm. Inderjit Kaur. Both of them were sent for training with the Family Service Centre at SINDA.

The first Management Committee of SIWEC had a mix of representatives from the Sikh institutions and the Singapore Sikh Resource Panel. Dr Sorinder Singh Toor, was appointed as Chairman, with Mr. Nirmal Singh as the Secretary and Mr Balbeer Singh Mangat as the Treasurer.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm in the community about the new common welfare institution. Following the launch, with the help of SINDA, 33 Sikh volunteers were trained.

The programmes and services offered at the onset:

- a) Hospital Visits Programme (for social, emotional and spiritual support for Sikh patients in hospitals)
- b) Bereavement Support Programme
- c) Medical Screening Programme
- d) Students' education mentoring programme
- e) Prisons and DRC Visits Programme



- f) Ration and Financial Assistance Scheme
- g) Operating a 24 Hours hotline
- h) Value Inculcation, Social Awareness and Nation Building programmes (e.g. Flag Days, Charity Cycling Expeditions, Overnight Around The Island Harmony Runs etc.)

The community was very supportive and responsive to programmes at the time of the launch. The programmes certainly evolved and changed over years, depending on the changing needs of funding and volunteers. Like

any organization, the number of volunteers tended to fluctuate over the years. However there were always core volunteers who continued to help in the areas that were close to their hearts.

Collective community wisdom and the dedication and commitment of many wonderful people have helped this organization to grow from strength to strength. Tribute must be paid to the dedication of many for their selfless service in striving according to the inspiration of *Bhai Khanaiya Ji* (the Father of Sikh Welfare) and our moto of *Jan Ki Sewa Utam Kama* from Gurbani (service to humanity is the highest endeavour).



2005 Overnight Run



4th Sarbat Bhalla



7th Racial Harmony Run

SIWEC signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hamony on Wheels (HoW) to strengthen ties

Both SIWEC and Harmony on Wheels (HoW) agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) this April to further strengthen ties.

Under the MoU, SIWEC has once again been appointed as the main beneficiary for the Ride for Charity 2014, organised by HoW.

Besides Ride for Charity 2014, HoW will be organising a few more charity events this year.

The MoU was signed in April this year between HoW, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB), SIWEC and Sunlove Abode for Intellectually-Infirm Ltd.

Ride for Charity 2014 was officially launched during the Vesakhi celebrations. More than 50 people registered to join the event for a good cause.

“Ride for Charity 2014 took off to a bright start over Vesakhi at the Central Sikh Temple. The response from past participants and new participants is very encouraging. Having heard of last year’s event, many more have come forward to register, either as riders or event marshals.

The support and words of encouragement received will probably lead to a bigger event this year”.

“Ride for Charity 2014 saw participants of various backgrounds and races coming together to support our cause. Besides active and morale support, there were pledges and donations from a good cross section of the larger Singapore society. As we embark on this year’s event, there have been suggestions that we reach out to other charitable institutions too. We identified Sunlove Abode as our second beneficiary this year due to the outstanding work it is doing for those intellectually-infirm, regardless of race and religion,” said Mr. Manjit Singh Randhawa, founder of HoW.



Manjit Singh Rhandawa delivering his speech at the Appreciation Dinner for participants of RFC 2014



MoU signing. From left: Gurcharan Singh (CSGB), Amarjit Singh Wasan (SIWEC), Manjit Singh Sevea (HoW) and Sasidharan Nair (Sunlove Abode)

Singapore Sikhs pay tribute to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew

The Sikh community in Singapore joined other Singaporeans to pay tribute to Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and mourn the loss of our nations' first Prime Minister.

Leading the tribute was Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC, Mr. Inderjit Singh who explained that as minorities, the Sikhs here had much to be grateful to Mr. Lee for, "His emphasis on maintaining racial harmony, meritocracy and advocating minority rights have benefitted the Sikhs, just as it had for other minority groups and Singapore, in general.

Among other things, he oversaw the establishment of the 5 non-Tamil Indian Minority Languages, including Punjabi, as recognised second languages in schools here. That gave the community a huge boost, as did the move of the Central Sikh Temple from its older and more worn-out premises in Queen Street to its suburban location in Towner Road. These were just a couple of things that Mr. Lee had done for the Sikh community and we're indebted to his visionary and just leadership".

All gurdwaras in Singapore held prayer sessions in their respective premises to show gratitude to our founding father.



Sikhs at Silat Road Sikh Temple



SIWEC's Sunehri Sahelian receives overwhelming response

Sunehri Sahelian was an initiative of SIWEC in 2014, a program led by a volunteer, Mrs. Gurcharan Kaur. This program was targeted at ladies aged 70 and above to adopt a positive ageing experience and better understanding of healthy living.

Every Tuesday, at 3pm these ladies congregate at Central Sikh Temple Level 4 for their weekly activity.

Some of the activities include talks on Oral Care, Diabetes and Kidney Failure, Nutritional Eating, Pioneer Generation Package and MediShield Life. Some exercise routines from Yoga and Taichi are also practised.

Overall the ladies in this group enjoy the activities and have a sense of camaraderie. Madam Joginder Kaur, a member of the program says, "Ever since this program started, I look forward to attending every Tuesday. Each time we get to learn new things. I can impart these to my other friends who are not on the programme to come and join us on this learning platform."



Leading healthy and happy years

According to a local study, Singapore's life expectancy has increased by ten years over the last few decades: from 72 years in 1980 to 82 years in 2010. Our life expectancy is one of the highest in the world.

Staying physically healthy reduces the overall risks of chronic conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and mental well being, just to name a few.



Be part of the Sunehri Sahelian family today!!!

To date there are about 50 ladies enjoying this program. SIWEC welcomes more ladies will join the programme.

Below are some of the activities lined up for the rest of the year.

Lined up activities

23.06.2015	1. Exercises / Yoga session
	2. Nurture Your Mind By Health Promotion Board Part 2
30.06.2015	1. Exercises / Yoga session
	2. Nurture Your Mind By Health Promotion Board Part 3
07.07.2015	1 Exercises / Yoga session
	2. Nurture Your Mind By Health Promotion Board Part 4
14.07.2015	Ladies Outing

Update on some other programs

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE PROGRAM (AEP)

This year, SIWEC has a new academic professional on board. As an educationalist and having 14 years of experience with the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ms Amrit Kaur will be leading the brand new Academic Excellence Program. Under this program, she will be looking into the issue of improving academic performance of Sikh students who are not doing well in Primary 1, 2 and 3. The aim of this program is to holistically review reasons for student's underperformance. Customized support / coaching / mentoring / counselling will be provided in order for the child to improve his/her performance better academically. To date, SIWEC has approached 18 pupils targeted for the AEP. All 18 pupils are agreeable and are now on the program. Students progress is being monitored and tutors are all getting the support from SIWEC.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PUNJABI EDUCATION

SIWEC is at present supporting about 108 needy students with their school fees, books and uniforms. Each student is given financial support of up to \$400. SIWEC is now taking a holistic approach to determine if these families need any other assistance.

YUVA

The YUVA mentoring project has been rekindled with a new batch of five mentees who are being mentored by older youths. These youths have gone through a four-day mentoring course (with assessment) and have been certified. The aim of this program is to empower youths/children in our community to make positive life choices that enable them to maximize their potential.

BE A BEFRIENDER!

The Befriending Program 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 program is to encourage greater involvement from members of the community, specifically the various ethnic groups. As the community realizes the importance of their involvement in the reintegration of ex-offenders, program 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 program, call us.

Health Screening by NKF

This Vesakhi, SIWEC organised a health screening programme with National Kidney Foundation (NKF).

The health screening programme took place on Monday, 12 April 2015 at the foyer of Central Sikh Gurdwara.

There were about five stations set up this time. Some of the tests/ checkups that were setup include BMI (body mass index) for height and weight measurement, glucose level check, blood pressure check, urine test.

A special station was also setup to provide customised healthcare education. The sangat was given an opportunity to speak with the healthcare professional on how to manage and maintain a healthy lifestyle with their given tests.

Special thanks to our volunteers who came by to assist some of the elderly for their free check ups and translation of the tests and advice for the medical professional.



Donation for the Nepal earthquake

SIWEC was honoured to coordinate the raising of funds for the victims of the recent Nepal earthquake at the request of Coordination Council of Sikh Institutions (CCSI)

A total of \$50,000 was raised and two cheques were presented to Mercy Relief on two different occasions.

Handing over the cheque was member of CCSI, Mr. Jagjit Singh Sekhon, Mr. Harmit Singh (member of SIWEC), and Mr. Ranjit Singh (manager at SIWEC).

According to the Vice Chairman of the Mercy Relief, Mr. Ong Bon Chai, the Sikhs are the first organisation to provide the donation to Mercy Relief for the disaster.



Flanking the Director of Mercy Relief are (from left to right): Ranjit Singh (SIWEC), Harmit Singh (SIWEC), Jagjit Singh (CCSI), Ong Boon Chai (Mercy Relief), Satwant Singh, Manmohan Singh (CSGB), Rajeshpal Singh (CST), Terence Kek (Mercy Relief), & Faridah Hassan (Mercy Relief)

DID YOU KNOW?

From April to June 2015:

- ❖ SIWEC and its volunteers have conducted about **120 counseling sessions** Sikh inmates in the Prisons.
- ❖ We assisted **20 families** in bereavements
- ❖ **41 individuals** have been assisted either through counseling or by referrals to other government agencies
- ❖ **54 families** were assisted with food rations/financial assistance
- ❖ **60 individuals** in homes/hospitals have been visited by our Health Care Ambassadors

How you can help:

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 programs. We are presently assisting more than 20 deserving families on a regular basis so that they can tide over difficult times; we also do a host of other programs. Visit our website to find out more. Obviously, this requires a great deal of resource 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. online via PayPal, cheque, bank draft, 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>.

Sikh Welfare Council

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Sikh Welfare Council is a registered charity (UEL S98SS0018L) with IPC status (IPC No. IPC000683, IPC Period: 05/11/2013 - 30/09/2015)