

# THE SINGAPORE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

*Goh Chin Mien\**

## I. SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE — PART OF THE HOME TEAM

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is responsible for the safety and security of Singapore. The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) is part of the Home Team together with nine other law enforcement agencies and statutory boards: the Singapore Police Force, the Central Narcotics Bureau, the Internal Security Department, the Home Team Academy, the Singapore Civil Defence Force, the Casino Regulation Authority, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority and the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises.

## II. MISSION AND PURPOSE

The mission of SPS is being the key partner in criminal justice, to protect society through the safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders, cooperating in prevention and aftercare. In Singapore, imprisonment serves the purposes of a) punishment, b) deterrence, c) incapacitation and d) reformation.

Imprisonment is punishment; hence Singapore prisons are spartan and the incarceration regimes are strict. Imprisonment also incapacitates by denying offenders the opportunity to reoffend. The strict and stringent regime in Singapore prison should deter those who are incarcerated from reoffending after release, as well as individuals in the community from offending. The SPS aims to be a transformational place to rehabilitate and support offenders in their reintegration into communities to lead crime-free lives. In these ways, SPS executes justice, reduces reoffending and prevents offending.

## III. SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE TODAY

SPS oversees 14 prisons: 13 male institutions and one female institution. Some of the institutions serve as drug rehabilitation centres (DRCs) as well, which are facilities for the treatment of first- and second-time drug offenders. As of 31 December 2011, the total prison population was 11,308, convicted mainly of drug and property-related offences. The DRC population makes up about 11% of the total inmate population. Since peaking at 18,000 in 2002, the prison population has been on a steady decline.

In 2011, 1,376 penal inmates and 431 DRC inmates were placed in the community-based programmes, in which inmates are allowed to work outside prison while residing in their homes, halfway houses, or work-release camps, under supervised conditions. The programmes provide an opportunity for suitable inmates to have a gradual transition from incarceration to complete freedom. In the same year, the CBP completion rate was 93.4%.

Recidivism in Singapore is defined as the percentage of local inmates detained, convicted and imprisoned again for a new offence within two years from their release. The overall recidivism rate for the release cohort of 2009 was 26.7%.

Since the late 1990s, SPS has adopted a “clusterisation” strategy to achieve better resource and offender management, by co-locating all prisons in one location in a super prison-complex. First operationalized in 2004, the Changi Prison Complex currently comprises two clusters of five different prison institutions each. There will be four clusters in total when the complex is fully operational.

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## IV. REHABILITATION FRAMEWORK

The SPS Rehabilitation Framework was developed in 2000 as an operating model to guide offender reformation efforts. It articulates a structured and comprehensive approach for all rehabilitation efforts, and ensures optimization of our limited resources by allocating programmes based on risks and needs of prisoners. The Framework is based on the philosophy that:

- Offenders' reintegration potential is maximized through the building of family and/or social ties and the delivery of programmes targeted at improving prisoners' offending behaviours, attitudes and skills
- Rehabilitation begins from the time an offender first enters the prison system and continues even after release, underlining the importance of aftercare programmes and services for ex-offenders

With the approach of through-care in mind, the Framework comprises three distinct phases: in-care, halfway care and aftercare. SPS collaborates closely with other government organizations and community partners to ensure the seamless transfer of care of offenders and integrated support of offenders in the community.

### A. In-care

In-care refers to the period of an inmate's incarceration or detention that is served out physically in a prison or drug rehabilitation centre of the Singapore Prison Service. In-care comprises the following four phases:

#### 1. Admission

All inmates enter the prison system at the Admission Phase, where they are classified according to their security risks and rehabilitation needs. A customized treatment plan, the Personal Route Map (PRM), will be charted for each inmate according to his or her individual needs and risks. The PRM records the inmate's progress in programmes that he or she requires or has gone through during incarceration.

#### 2. Deterrence

During the Deterrence Phase, minimal programmes are given to inmates, so that they may experience the rigours of incarceration for deterrent effect. It would also allow them time to adapt to their incarceration or detention, reflect on their past actions and prepare for their treatment phase.

#### 3. Treatment

During the Treatment Phase, inmates are allocated programmes according to the needs and risks identified through their PRM. Programme allocation is based on the programme availability and priority.

#### 4. Pre-Release

During the Pre-Release Phase, inmates are given programmes that prepare them for reintegration into the community upon their release.

### B. Halfway Care

The Halfway Care phase refers to the period near the end of inmates' incarceration, where inmates, if found suitable, may be selected to undergo halfway care programmes and serve out their remaining sentences or detention orders in the community. This period provides inmates with opportunities for a gradual reintegration into the community, thereby forming the vital bridge between institutionalization and full freedom.

### C. Aftercare

Aftercare refers to the immediate period subsequent to an inmate's release from the custody of SPS. During this period, ex-inmates will be provided with support to reintegrate into the community.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

SPS aspires to achieve more than punishing and incapacitating offenders. It contributes to the prevention of offending and reduction of reoffending by deterring and reforming offenders. Successful rehabilitation and reintegration involve more than SPS and the offenders, so SPS has always actively engaged offenders' families and the larger community. In this way, SPS truly plays a key role in the criminal justice system.