

YOU WON'T HAVE TO WALK ALONE



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the CARE Network

Hashim's support from his family, relatives and counsellor after his release has made him stronger

HE WAS looking forward to being released after five years in prison. Yet, he was filled with dread. Would his friends and family welcome him home?

But there was one thing he was sure of. Mr Hashim Mohammed (not his real name) was certain that he did not want to return to his old ways, even if the journey ahead was not easy.

Hashim, who was released from the Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School) in 2001, said he felt like a reject who would never find the acceptance he desperately craved.

"I found it difficult to find a job because I had a criminal record. Everywhere I went, I felt like people looked down on me. I was also worried that my family would not be willing to forgive me," recalled Hashim, who is in his 30s.

Supportive family

Thankfully, his fears were unfounded. Instead of shunning him, his relatives rallied around him to offer support and advice. They welcomed him at family gatherings and reassured him that he had another chance at a decent life.

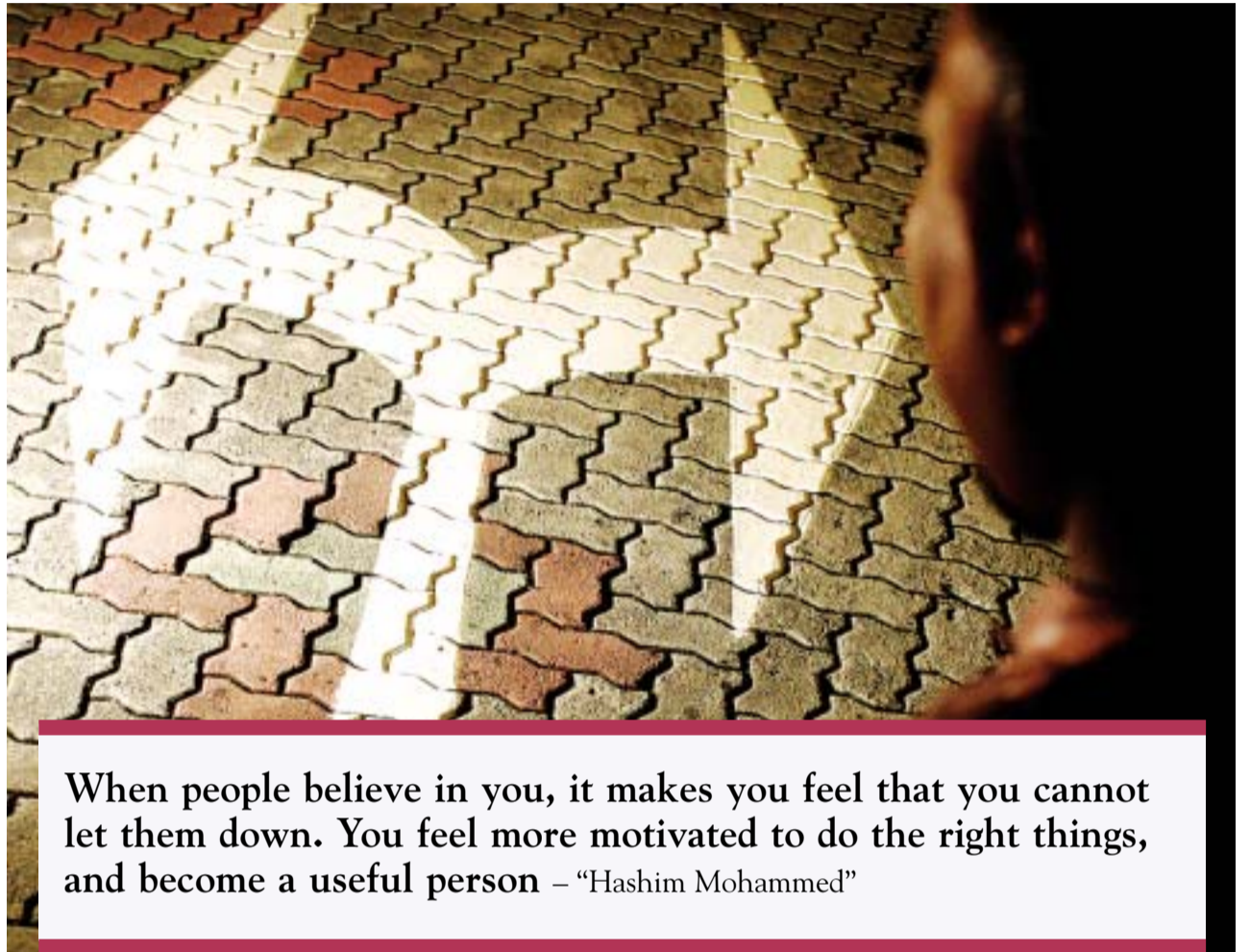
Looking back at the plight of his fellow ex-inmates, Hashim cannot help but feel how lucky he was. He said: "Some of my friends had nowhere to turn to. Their families did not want to have anything to do with them and it was difficult for them to look to the future."

Solace in religion

Aside from his family, Hashim could also turn to his religious counsellor whenever he needed words of comfort. He had gotten to know his counsellor from the religious classes he had attended while in prison.

After his release, his counsellor encouraged ex-inmates like Hashim to get involved in community work. For example, they carried out errands for the mosque, and performed simple cleaning chores whenever they could.

"He taught me about religion and to find strength in God," said Hashim. "In addition, he



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also taught me life skills. I learnt to respect myself, build up my self-confidence and gained important moral values.

"Also, he trusted me. In fact, after my release, he invited me and some other ex-inmates to his home for a gathering. It is hard to find someone so generous," said Hashim, who was convicted for drug-trafficking and served a sentence of five years.

The support he has received from his religious

counsellor has also prompted Hashim to follow in his footsteps. He is currently going through a training programme conducted by the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association so that he can help ex-drug offenders.

Today, Hashim's resolve to turn over a new leaf is stronger than before. He said: "When people believe in you, it makes you feel that you cannot let them down. You feel more motivated to do the right things, and become a useful person."

Show support, wear a yellow ribbon

SHOW your support for former prison inmates eager to mend their ways by wearing a yellow ribbon from Oct 2 to 9. It can offer the much-needed comfort that will help them change for the better.

To help raise awareness for the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP), CARE Network has organised a charity concert that will be hosted by Gurmit Singh and Sharon Au at the Singapore Indoor Stadium at 7.30pm on Oct 2.

CARE Network's members include Singapore Prison Service, Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), National Council of Social Service (NCSS), Industrial and Services Co-operative Society Ltd (ISCOS), Singapore After-Care Association (SACA), Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) and Ministry

of Home Affairs.

There will be appearances by popular stars such as Tension, Anson Hu, B.A.D and Tay Ping Hui.

Local singer Clement Chow, together with Taiwanese composer Mah Zhao Jun, will also perform songs composed by the winners of the YRP Song Writing Competition.

The competition, which was open to all prison inmates and ex-offenders at halfway houses and aftercare agencies, was held in July this year.

Mr Kevin Soh, an ex-drug offender in his 30s, wrote one of the winning compositions, *A Grateful Heart*. He was jubilant at his win. He said: "I only have Primary Six education, with no training in music. I never imagined I would be able to win at something like this."



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Movie premiere: *Coming Home*

HEAD down to the movie premiere of *Coming Home* to show support for ex-offenders who now want to contribute meaningfully to society.

The film portrays three prison inmates who are about to be released and their subsequent difficulties in gaining societal acceptance.

Starring celebrities such as Moses Lim, Irene Ang, Melody Chen and Aaron Aziz, the premiere will take place on Oct 9 at 7 pm in the open field opposite Khatib MRT station (in front of block 838). Admission is free.

If you want to show your support, wear a yellow ribbon, available from the YRP secretariat (Tel: 6214 2816 or 6214 2867) at just \$1 each.

For more information visit www.yellowribbon.org.sg