



TWC2
Transient Workers Count Too
DIGNITY OVERDUE

TWC2

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

Building a Dream Home for You and Them



D I G N I T Y O V E R D U E

Address 50001 Beach Road, #06-27, Golden Mile Complex, Singapore 199588

Hotline 1800 888 1515

Phone 6247 7001

Email info@twc2.org.sg

Introduction

Transient Workers Count Too is a membership-based society. In March every year, we hold an annual general meeting (AGM) at which the elected TWC2 committee reports on the previous year's work and accounts are presented. This is also a time to decide on the main projects and policy directions for the next year. We take this seriously. Members are given plenty of notice of the AGM and we try to make it possible for as many to attend as possible. We hold it on a Sunday, so that there is a fair chance for migrant worker members who have a day off to attend, and this year, we held it at a central venue, so it was more convenient for most people.

This report contains the main documents of the AGM, but some items from the agenda are not included and this should be explained. There were no elections this year, as they are due in 2011. We voted on two constitutional amendments, but don't include them for space reasons: they can be obtained on request from the TWC2 office. One increased the society's monthly spending limit and the other set up a new audit committee and made changes to TWC2's financial governance to bring them up to the best standards for a society of our size.

The AGM concluded with workshop sessions on future work, in which members came up with ideas and proposals about what should be done.

The advocacy workshop thought that the 'Day Off' campaign should move on to a new stage and needed an injection of energy and new ideas. It called for more information materials to be produced in languages other than English and for a greater engagement with the appropriate Singapore authorities at various levels (a call made by the direct services workshop too). The research workshop discussed initiatives proposed for the coming year and came up with the first volunteer participants for a study on the processes workers go through from their recruitment until their return home, which is intended to encourage simplified, lower cost, transparent procedures. One participant volunteered to help collate existing research to make it more accessible. The direct services workshop proposed an initiative on information services for migrant workers, to provide improved advice on employment, safety and rights. It called for official exit interviews to be conducted with all workers returning home to review their experiences and identify areas of concern. It also called for more publications for migrant workers to be produced.

President's Address

Guests, fellow TWC2 members: I'm pleased to welcome you to this meeting.

In past years, our annual meetings decided on the major activities we wanted to carry out in the following months. Our record was pretty good. We didn't do everything, but we did most of it. 2009 was different because of the recession. We thought that there could be more workers turning to us for help and also new issues coming up, such as a growth in negative public attitudes towards migrant workers. We were careful about how much we took on, so that we'd be able to respond to this difficult situation.

It was just as well. We had to speak up and respond to expressions of hostility towards migrant workers, who were all too quickly blamed by some for a lot of the problems brought into focus by the recession. We argued for greater integration of migrant workers, for workers to be treated with the respect and consideration that we ask for ourselves and for the advancement of their rights. We were heartened that others in many walks of life spoke up and also expressed themselves through their deeds.

There was a big increase in our work with individual workers who needed help. The great majority of this was not visible or publicised; quite a lot had to be handled quietly and with respect for workers' needs for confidentiality and security. I know it was often exhausting for those most involved, but I hope that you know that what you have done is appreciated and valued by those you help, by those around you in a position to know what you are doing and by TWC2 as a whole.

Progress has been made in our advocacy and public education. It has been slow, but we have reason to be confident that it will go on. The commitment we make, separately and together, will make a difference to how fast this progress is. The coming year should be one of increased outreach to the public and of a wider constructive engagement with institutions able to bring about change for the better in the status of migrant workers in Singapore. We will continue our efforts to see that the voices of migrant workers themselves gain a hearing.

I want to say 'thank-you' to everyone who has contributed to TWC2's activities in the past year. This isn't the Oscars ceremony, so I'm not going to give an exhaustive list of people to whom we're grateful, ending in my mum and dad, but I'm going to mention some.

There are the team of volunteers who have sustained the Cuff Road Project over the past year. Some - and I'd particularly mention Debbie - have been involved since the project's beginnings; others, such as Jia, who put together the 'littlepinkcamera' exhibition and Asha, who has done much to raise support for the project - made their commitment more recently. What you have done has made a real difference to thousands of lives - and not just of those workers you saw.

I'd like to express appreciation of a couple of initiatives taken by people from outside TWC2 in the past year. One came from staff members at GE, who contributed and put in time volunteering with the Cuff Road Project.

The other came from a group of trainee teachers at the National Institute of Education, who volunteered to use project time to give lessons in English for very practical purposes to a group of migrant workers.

There are people who have to remain nameless whose support should be acknowledged: the domestic workers who contacted TWC2 because they wanted to help a fellow worker; the migrant workers who offered opinions and information that contributed much to our work; those who pitched in to help with translation or getting information out. I should also mention here the concerned citizens who contacted us for help in tackling abusive treatment of workers that they had witnessed.

One of our declared aims at last year's AGM was to overhaul TWC2's operations and we needed people who were not on the committee or staff of the society take a look at what we did and propose changes. We've benefited from the concrete proposals of Jiaying, who worked very thoroughly and conscientiously as an intern with us, as well as from the more recent work on raising our standards of financial oversight by John H and Paul.

TWC2's staff – Sha, Anne, Annie and John – have done a tremendous amount of work not only in sustaining day to day operations, but in playing a vital role in enabling the organisation to cope with the greater challenges it faced and carrying through projects.

I would also like to thank my colleagues on the TWC2 committee for their commitment this year.

Lastly, I'd like to thank all those others who have contributed to our efforts and ask you for your continued support.



COMMITTEE REPORT

Management Committee

John Gee, President

Russell Heng, Vice President

Imran Price, Treasurer

Wang Eng Eng, Secretary

Noorashikin Abdul Rahman, Chair of Helpline Sub-Committee

Caroline Lim

Shelley Thio

Mykel Yee

Yew Kong Leong

Staff

John Devasahayam, Office Manager

Anne Bergen Aurand, Community Worker (2008-2009) Annie Chan, Community Worker (2010)

Sha Najak, Outreach Manager (part time since November 2008)

Advocacy

The regular work of responding to information requests, providing speakers and contact with the media has continued throughout the past year. We have also met with the Ministry of Manpower and with staff from embassies of countries that are home to migrant workers who come to Singapore, as well as maintaining contacts by other channels. Here are some of the highlights of this year:

Formation of Solidarity for Migrant Workers

The aim was to synergize resources in terms of research and advocacy for foreign workers. Membership consists of TWC2, HOME and Migrant Voices. The first project together was for Labour Day, and this took place on the 24th May. A forum was held at the Arts House and attended by both men and women migrant workers. Regular communication and cooperation over International Migrants Day 2010 followed. In the rest of the year, TWC2 and HOME also cooperated in specific research work and other initiatives.

Migrant Forum in Asia Delegation to UN Committee on Migrant Workers (April 2009)

Shelley Thio, one of our committee members represented TWC2 at this meeting. TWC2 is affiliated to MFA and actively supports its work.

International Labour Organisation Domestic Worker Initiative

In June 2010, the International Labour Conference will discuss a proposal for an international convention on domestic work, which would set out basic rights and standards for domestic workers. TWC2 has been discussing the proposal with other bodies and has urged that Singapore should take a supportive stand. Believing it was important that the voices of domestic workers should be heard, TWC2 and HOME, in cooperation with informal networks of domestic workers, held a pre-consultation meeting on July 12th last year which produced a detailed response to the ILO proposals. This was passed to the NTUC, which qualifies to be represented at the ILC.

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)

A regional consultation was held from 31st August to 4th September in Kathmandu, TWC2 was represented by Anne, our community worker in 2009.

TWC2 is affiliated to GAATW. TWC2 has argued for Singapore to adopt the definition of trafficking contained in the UN's anti-trafficking protocol, which would help in countering activities that we believe constitute trafficking to Singapore.

UN Human Development Report 2009

'Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development' was a well balanced report that considered the drawbacks and benefits of increased human mobility. It was launched in Singapore with a panel discussion hosted by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore. Noorashikin took part in the panel as a TWC2 committee member.

International Social Action Film Festival 2009

TWC2 took part in a film cum forum event to discuss migrant worker issues. HOME and Migrant Voices were also invited to be part of the panel together with TWC2. Shelley's films documenting the Tagore Lane incidents which involved over a few hundred migrant workers were shown at the forum. One of them included, *Lights Out*, a documentary of homeless migrant workers. Organized by Sinema SG held on 13th September.

Law Project

A legal group has been undertaking a review of the Employment Agencies Act. Its report will be completed shortly and will contain comprehensive proposals for changes that will tidy up the agencies business, giving employers and workers a better deal.

International Migrants' Day 2009

TWC2, HOME and Migrant Voices collaborated to hold various events to commemorate International Migrants day on the 18th December 09. HOME held a forum, while Migrant Voices put up an exhibition and video project. TWC2 held a picnic for the workers at the Botanical Gardens. There was a relatively good turnout for all the events: we arranged to provide food for 300 workers and it all went. There was also a good turnout in response to the appeal for help on that day.

Some members may wonder about the costs of the overseas events and how worth while they were. The committee thought that it was valuable to participate, but put a ceiling on spending, which meant that the great majority of the costs were met from external sources and by some personal spending of the participants.



Research

Day Off Research

TWC2, HOME and UNIFEM-Singapore launched an educational campaign in favour of a weekly day off for domestic workers in 2008. Last year, TWC2 produced two posters of migrant workers, one of which supported a day off for domestic workers. The three organizations supported a research initiative to sound out employers' views of the day off issue.

'Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore'

A TWC2 report based on interviews with 100 Indonesian domestic workers was published in October. It mainly deals with their experiences in coming to Singapore and returning home, but its findings concerning the increase in the burden of placement costs over the years were reported in 'Straits Times' and seem to have stimulated debate on why this has happened and how it can be remedied. A number of more limited research initiatives were also undertaken, including research relating to the right of workers to retain their passports and protection of workers against unlawful confinement.

Direct Services

TWC2's direct services work has grown a lot in the past two years. This is the main field in which volunteers help and their contributions make a big difference to what we are able to do. The great majority of direct service work takes place through our helpline initiative and through the Cuff Road Project

Helpline

The number of direct calls to the helpline number fell in the past year, but our help services were called upon more than ever. This was chiefly because of contacts made as a result of the Cuff Road Project, but we also had more people hearing about TWC2 through friends, or coming to us by other routes. To reflect this change, the latest report on our help service is titled 'Help Desk Report'

In 2009, we responded to complaints and requests for help from 56 domestic workers, 67 'concerned others' and 2,386 male workers. These are minimum figures. Our community workers and volunteers have put a huge amount of time and effort into providing what help we can. Going forward, we need to find more resources to sustain this work.

Major issues affecting female migrant workers included illegal deployment and transfer matters, both of which stood at about 14% each out of the total number of issues raised by them. Repatriation matters came close, at about 12%. Male migrant workers, on the other hand, included workmen's compensation, illegal deployment and salary problems.

Our help leaflet has been updated again; in the past year, the fourth and fifth English editions, third Bahasa Indonesia edition and second Mandarin edition have been produced. The first Bengali and Tamil editions are about to come out.

The Cuff Road Project

It's been two years since The Cuff Road Project was started, in March 2008. We launched a major initiative with our partner, ONE (Singapore), to provide food to shelterless male migrant workers who stay in the Little India area. They are generally men who are staying in Singapore on special passes and who do not have a reliable source of income. We had no idea how it would grow when it started.

In 2008-2009, at least 1,877 men were provided with meals; between the beginning of this year and mid-March, a further 480 men were served. The number of meals provided is approaching 100,000. Thanks to a sustained improvement in the finances of the project, it was possible to agree as of November that those workers who wished to have both breakfast and dinner could do so: before, it had been necessary to ask them to choose.

The project has benefited from many generous contributions of time and money.

In the course of the year, new partners have come forward to contribute to the project. Volunteers from St Ignatius Church partially staff and fully support financially the Friday evening dinner. Singapore Canaan Community Church sponsors Sunday lunches. Trinity Soup Kitchen recently began to sponsor Saturday lunches.

A brochure to mark the first anniversary of the project was produced and quickly ran out; a second edition had to be printed.

Conclusion

In summary, TWC2 was able to make progress in all areas of its activities in the past year. Looking ahead, our biggest problem is building up larger teams of people who are ready and able to tackle more work in specific areas of activity. The committee is aware that there is more that needs to be done to extend the reach of our public education work and also to summarise and follow up advocacy issues. Our research work needs people who can put the time into planning and organising it, not only carrying it out. We also need more assistance with handling very practical but time consuming work with workers in need of help.

Lastly, we wish to express our appreciation to the members and supporters who have put time and effort into TWC2's work this year: this has made a huge difference to what we have been able to do.

Wang Eng Eng

Secretary



PROPOSALS FOR 2010

1. Advocacy

TWC2 should continue efforts to counter and reverse the rise in the cost of placement to migrant workers. It should seek to ensure that legal measures that exist to protect the rights and wellbeing of migrant workers are consistently made accessible to workers. This includes seeking an expansion of measures to protect workers from sudden dismissal and deportation in order to prevent workers from pursuing complaints or asserting their rights under Singapore law.

An effort to come up with imaginative new initiatives to advance the campaign for a weekly day off for domestic workers should be made.

TWC2 should seek to bring together working groups to handle initiatives in the different languages of Singapore. At a minimum, they should help to translate information between their language and English; collect information appearing in their language, including media reports, and help to provide information to the media; look for volunteers to help workers needing translation assistance. They should be able to undertake their own initiatives as part of TWC2's overall work if they wish.

2. Research

A study should be made of the whole process by which workers are recruited, trained, placed and return to their home countries or seek to continue working in Singapore. The goals will be to prepare summaries of information for each step of the way in order to encourage greater transparency, to identify the main areas of concern at each stage and to lay the basis for year on year work to advance the rights and wellbeing of migrant workers at a regional level.

A study of current practices concerning transfer of workers from one employer to another should be undertaken and concrete proposals on how to make them simpler for employers and workers alike, as well as cheaper for workers, should be drafted.

3. TWC2 Direct Services Sub-Committee

Considering the growth in TWC2's direct services and the increase in the channels by which people come to TWC2 for help and advice, the AGM approves the replacement of the Helpline Sub-committee by a Direct Services Sub-committee.

4. Delegations to Migrant Workers' Countries of Origin

TWC2 should include the organisation of delegations from Singapore to migrant workers' home countries as part of its future activities. The aims should be to help encourage greater public understanding of migrant workers' motivations and experiences, to build people to people friendship and to encourage stronger ties between institutions and organisations concerned with migrant worker issues. An early priority should be a delegation to southern India.



Photo credits

Page 9: SMU Viewfinders

The Altophobia Conqueror

Working 15 metres above hard concrete, with just 5 centimetres of glass under his feet is his specialty. Ignoring the day heat and altophobia, he scrubs on. Who is he?

Page 10: How Hwee Young

Days of Care (series)

A widow, Suparni has two children, aged five and 10, who are being cared for by their grandmother in Jakarta, Indonesia. She has no designated day off, and takes a few hours off work every month to remit money to them. August 2003, Singapore

Design by Isaac Thng

TWC2 welcomes anyone who sympathises with its aims to become a member. You can also use this form to join.



Transient Workers Count Too

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please fill up in BLOCK LETTERS

Name:

Occupation:

Date of birth:

Gender:

Citizenship:

Permanent Resident (if applicable):

Mailing address:

Postal Code:

Telephone:

Mobile phone:

Fax:

E-mail address:

Are you interested to be a volunteer with TWC2?

If Yes, please mark at the relevant areas:

Events

Fundraising

Research

Telephone helpline / outreach

Others

Annual fee: Singaporeans / PRs / Employment and S-Pass holders = \$10.00

Annual fee: Work permit holders = \$2.00. (For cheques, please make these payable to "TRANSIENT WORKERS COUNT TOO". The membership date will start from the date when the receipt is issued.) Please call the office to arrange for membership renewal.

SHE'S NOT JUST YOUR MAID HER NAME IS LITA

SHE WORKS FOR HER
FAMILY,

AS WELL AS
YOURS.



She is committed to looking after your family's needs so that she can help hers back home. It's not every day someone undertakes such a responsibility. Show her your appreciation.

**Give her a day off.
Dignity overdue.**

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) aims to promote respect for migrant workers through education, and secure better treatment of migrant workers through legislation and other means.

