

# Transient Workers Count Too

## 2014 Annual General Meeting

### Committee Report for 2013

#### Executive Committee 2013-2015 (elected 23 Mar 2013)

Russell Heng	President
Alex Au	Vice-President
Bashir Basalamah	Secretary
Noorashikin Abdul Rahman	Treasurer
Yew Kong Leong	Member
Debbie Fordyce	Member
Shelley Thio	Member
Jill Ratnam	Member
Rob Teo	Member

#### Subcommittee Heads

Research	John Gee
Direct Services	Debbie Fordyce
Communications	Alex Au
Fundraising	Russell Heng
Human Resource	Russell Heng

#### Staff

Kenneth Soh	Social Worker
Raymond Ang	Social Worker (until 7 Aug 2013)
Mohd Nor Karno	Social Worker (from 20 Sep 2013)
Christine Scully	Admin Officer
Christina Chng	Accounts Officer

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The mission of TWC2 is:

- 1) through ground research and engagement with policy makers and employers, to advocate a more enlightened policy framework for migrant labour in Singapore;
- 2) to extend assistance to workers in need to ensure that they have fair resolution of their cases, dignity in work and living conditions, access to medical care, and protection of their rightful autonomy; and
- 3) through public education, to promote the social conditions in which exploitation, abuse and injustice become history.

This committee report, covering the calendar year 2013, provides an overview of our main activities in support of this mission. The report is divided into two main sections: activities in and around our core areas of direct services and research and advocacy; and supporting activities such as engagement with partners, fundraising, human resource, and communications.

## **PART I: CORE AREAS**

### ***Direct Services***

Direct assistance for migrant workers in difficulties continues to be one of our main areas of activity in 2013. Our direct services consist of:

- the Cuff Road Project, which provides free meals for out-of-work male workers, mainly from the Indian Sub-Continent
- CARE Fund, which provides financial assistance for medical and emergency needs
- Case Work services, which involve advice and guidance for the worker in difficulty as well as liaison with MOM, hospitals, the police, the courts, and employers
- Helpline, a dedicated phone channel for migrant workers to raise grievances and seek advice and guidance

#### **1.1 The Cuff Road Project (TCRP)**

The Cuff Road Project, our central platform of direct services, is not simply a free meals programme. By attracting migrant workers in difficulties, TCRP allows us to better understand the nature of their problems, and provides a convenient catchment for a host of other activities like surveys, outings, medical screenings, and outreach and educational programmes. Isthana and Alankar Restaurants in Little India continued to be our two operating outlets in 2013.

A temporary cut in meal numbers was imposed in Aug 2013, arising from budget concerns. But we were fortunate to receive a donation from Lee Foundation soon after, allowing meal numbers to be restored subject to a weekly quota based on an annual budget.

A milestone will be celebrated in April 2014 when we expect to reach Half a Million Meals since the project began in 2008.

The table below shows some highlights of 2013, with 2012 figures for comparison. For a more detailed analysis of these figures, look forward to the Direct Services Report 2013, expected to be out later this year.

### TCRP Highlights 2013

	2013	2012
Number of meals served	105,544	101,819
Cost for the year	\$228,220	\$211,408
Average cost per month	\$19,018	\$17,617
Average number of meals per month	8,795	8,484
Average number of clients per month	550	543
Average meals per client per month	15.99	15.62
New clients added during the year:	2,202	1,934
– new injury cases	1,791	1,523
– new salary cases	293	522
– new overstay cases	77	84
– new miscellaneous cases	41	36

### 1.2 CARE Fund

The CARE (Compassion and Relief for Emergencies) Fund offers a lifeline for migrant workers in dire need, in the form of:

- payment for urgent and essential medical and surgical treatment, where no other help is available to the worker;
- phone cards so that workers in difficulty can stay in contact with a support network and, for their psychological well-being, with their families back home.
- EZ-link cards for public transportation to hospital;
- help with alternative accommodation when employers fail to provide it.

In 2013, we disbursed a total of \$52,211. Below are some highlights:

Category of assistance	No. of Recipients	Amount
Medical & Dental	80	\$11,641
Miscellaneous (Food, accommodation, clothing, etc)	20	\$3,958
EZ-Link cards	748	\$36,612
TOTAL		\$52,211

### 1.3 Case Work & Helpline

Case work is at the heart of our mission to assist migrant workers in difficulties. Due to the specialised knowledge required, this task is handled by our staff Social Workers, who also handled Helpline, a dedicated phone number for migrant workers to raise grievances and seek advice.

Figures show our two Social Workers Kenneth and Karno handled a case load involving 428 men and 21 women in 2013, plus another 273 men and 103 women through the Helpline. By Nationality, the cases continued to be dominated by Bangladeshi, Chinese and Indian males, and Filipino, Chinese and Indonesian females. By category, Salary and WICA cases formed the bulk.

### SW Case Work by Nationality

Nationality	Case Work			Helpline		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
China	137	11	148	204	10	214
Bangladesh	219	0	219	24	0	24
India	68	1	69	11	1	12
Indonesia	0	3	3	0	13	13
Myanmar	3	2	5	3	2	5
Philippines	0	4	4	7	46	53
Malaysia	1	0	1	5	0	5
Singapore	0	0	0	18	25	43
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	2	2
Unknown	0	0	0	1	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>376</b>

### SW Case Work by Case Category

Category	Case Work			Helpline		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Resignation	18	2	20	27	4	31
Agency dispute	6	0	6	4	4	8
Employer dispute	5	4	9	7	12	19
Salary	118	10	128	50	10	60
WICA	224	0	224	53	1	54
Repatriation	6	1	7	43	9	52
Work Permit	7	0	7	15	2	17
Illegal Deployment	0	1	1	3	2	5
Day off	0	1	1	0	7	7
Abuse	0	2	2	3	3	6
Transfer of employers	2	0	2	1	16	17
Lawyer discharge	4	0	4	1	0	1
Miscellaneous	38	0	38	66	33	99
<b>Total</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>376</b>

Note: Case work is also done by a small group of experienced volunteers in the Cuff Road Project. However, TCRP case work figures are not reported here as the nature of their cases is less clearly-defined and hard to quantify.

### 1.5 New Services

In 2013, we opened the opportunity for new volunteer-led programmes, to cater to the interests of a sharply higher number of new volunteers, as well as to expand our direct services. Two notable projects that got off the ground in 2013 are Discover Singapore and Road-to-Recovery (R2R).

Started in May 2013 by volunteers Irene Ong and Terence Kek, Discover Singapore (আবিষ্কার Singapore) aims to bring cheer to Special Pass holders by taking them to different places of interest every fortnight. Almost 20 outings had been conducted by end-2013, benefitting 200-300 TCRP clients. Costs are kept down by soliciting donations and sponsorships, and going to places that do not require admission fees. Discover Singapore was proud to be featured in ChannelNews Asia's "On the Red Dot" program in Oct 2013 and in The Sunday Times' Causes Week on 29th Dec 2013.

Road-to-Recovery (R2R) was started by volunteers Daniel and Chong Cheng Tuan to provide chaperons for injured workers on their hospital visits. We have found this a good arrangement, as chaperons help clients understand prognoses and instructions better, and doctors gain a better understanding of their non-clinical concerns. The programme is now under review by our new Volunteer Management, and we hope to have it launched again soon with a new team.

### ***Research & Advocacy***

While direct services provide much needed immediate assistance to migrant workers in trouble, longer term issues inherent to their plight also need to be tackled. Indeed, TWC2 was born almost 10 years ago with a research and advocacy mission, aiming to raise and address deeper issues of migration and trafficking, whether through public educational campaigns or direct contact with government agencies, towards effecting change in national laws or processes.

The select list of events below shows a busy calendar in Research and Advocacy:

8 Jan	Launch of "Troubled Waters", report on trafficking of Filipino men into fishing industry (Sallie Yea with input from Shelley Thio)
10 Jan	TWC2 proposals on amendment of the Employment Act submitted
11 Jan	Anti-Trafficking Task Force consultation with NGOs (JG)
7 Jul	TWC2 poll of TCRP clients on short MCs reported by Sunday Times
9 Jul	MOM consultation on trafficking case referral process (DF, JG attended)
12 Aug	ARI Asia Trends 2013 "Here Today and tomorrow: transnational domestic workers and the decent work agenda in Asia" (NAR)
16 Oct	TWC2 position paper: Housing workers who are on Special Passes
24 Sep	TWC2 Report on Housing needs of TCRP clients published
31 Oct	TWC2 proposals for Phase 2 review of Employment Act and Employment of Foreign Manpower Act submitted
11 Nov	ARI closed door discussion on Indonesian domestic worker report (JG)
19 Nov	Meeting to discuss trafficking and sex workers at AWARE (JG)
19 Nov	TWC2 Media statement on mandatory itemised payslips

(JG = John Gee; DF = Debbie Fordyce)

## **PART II: ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT**

While peripheral to the core areas, organisational support through human resource, communications and fund-raising is essential for our existence.

### ***Engagement with Partners and the Public***

As part of our mission, TWC2 EXCO members, staff and volunteers interact regularly with a wide variety of people. These include embassy officials, journalists, researchers, and students. We collaborate on research projects, give interviews to the media, solicit help from donors, and speak at lectures, seminars and conferences.

The so-called “Little India Riot” of 8 Dec 2013 led to a flurry of activities at the TWC2 office as the media descended on us for opinions and comments. Several EXCO members, in particular President Russell and VP Alex, as well as Social Worker Kenneth, were interviewed by both print and broadcast media, and President Russell responded to an invitation by The Straits Times to write an opinion piece. Immediately following the riot, our website experienced a 3-fold jump in page visits, from about 691 in the first 8 days of Dec to 2,383 on 9 Dec. Early 2014, we filed our submission to the Committee of Inquiry on the incident, and President Russell gave oral evidence on the larger issues that may have to do with the Riot.

For the first time, we also prepared a submission on Singapore’s Budget 2014. Head of Research John Gee led a team working through end-2013 to prepare the document, which was sent to all Members of Parliament.

### ***Human Resource***

2013 witnessed major staff changes. Raymond Ang Qishun, the Social Work Associate who joined the organization in March 2012, left in August 2013 to pursue a social work-related career in the medical field. A recruitment exercise found a replacement Muhammad Nor Karno bin Mohamed (Karno for short) who began work on 20 September. Karno has grown in his job very well with training and supervision by Kenneth, and was duly confirmed after his 3-months’ probation. Kenneth was promoted to Senior Social Worker by year-end.

The EXCO approved Admin Officer Christine Scully’s application to convert her part-time position to full-time, commencing in July. The availability of an Admin Officer five days a week rather than three was opportune as TWC2 expanded its activities. For the second half of the year, TWC2 total staff strength was three full-timers (two Social Workers and one Admin Officer) and one part-timer (Accounts Officer working 3 days/week).

In appreciation of their hard work and dedication, TWC2 EXCO approved a full 13<sup>th</sup> month salary for the three staff that had completed a full year in service. For

Karno who had worked only three months, the EXCO agreed to double his pro-rated one-quarter 13<sup>th</sup> month salary to half a month. This is in recognition of his promising performance.

Similarly for the three staff who had worked a full year, the EXCO approved a salary increment based on their individual performance instead of handing out a one-off bonus. In addition, another 2.4% increment was awarded to adjust salary to cover for annual inflation. Although Karno who had put in three months of service would have been entitled to a pro-rated increment of 0.6%, the EXCO raised that to 1.2% because of his good performance.

### ***Volunteers***

The monthly Heartbeat is a gateway for people looking for volunteer opportunities in TWC2. In 2013, a total of 207 people attended 12 Heartbeat sessions (2 in May and none in Dec). While there seemed to be a decline in numbers with more than 20 per session in the first quarter of the year and less than 20 per session in the last quarter, overall 2013 saw a surge in volunteer numbers particularly in Cuff Road Project.

Most Heartbeat participants opted for TCRP as it had a ready-made daily structure to involve volunteers. Communications and Research were two other areas that provided induction for newcomers.

During the year, we also revamped the audio-visual presentation for Heartbeat, replacing the old corporate video with an animated slide presentation. A DHL team came to study Heartbeat as part of the company's CSR project with a view to making recommendations on the volunteer take-up rate of activities after attending a Heartbeat session. Their report would be ready in early 2014.

### ***Fund Raising***

For the second time running, TWC2 organized a fund-raising event of food and games patterned on Dinner With Heart in July 2012. Lunch With Heart was held on 15 December 2013 at Banana Leaf Apollo in Little India. Billed as an event jointly to celebrate International Migrants Day, the fundraising lunch killed two birds with one stone and saved on cost. It raised around \$24,000, which was considerably more than the \$14,000 or so raised by Dinner With Heart in 2012.

Fundraising in 2013 was also successful in getting sponsorship for a screening of Anthony Chen's award-winning film *Ilo Ilo* at GV Tiong Bahru on Sunday 25 August. The cinema hall had 349 seats and free tickets were distributed to foreign domestic workers and TWC2 volunteers.

A healthier financial situation allowed TWC2 to rent a bigger office on the 9<sup>th</sup> level of Golden Mile Complex in September after the landlord of the old office on the 6<sup>th</sup> level served notice that he needed his property back. TWC2 also gave up

its supplementary space on the 7<sup>th</sup> level in December when the lease ran out. The latter had been used as a store room and also by Indonesian Family Network (IFN) and Filipino Family Network (FFN) for their Sunday self-enrichment courses. All these activities/usage can now be accommodated within the new premises. The larger space available was also timely as TWC2 experienced a surge in activities, e.g., more workers are coming to the office for help; more students are asking for internship and more volunteers want to attend the monthly orientation programme.

Total donation receipts from donors big and small for 2013 increased by about \$100,000 over 2012. Major donors who continued to support TWC2's key projects were:

- Lee Foundation for TCRP (The Cuff Road Project)
- JC Trust for SWAT (Social Workers Always There) Fund
- Stefanie Yuen & Thio Shen Yi for SWAT Fund
- Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple for CARE Fund
- Chen Su Lan Trust for TCRP and CARE Fund

### ***Communications***

Public communications is an essential part of TWC2's work. It is important that the public is kept abreast of the situation faced by foreign workers in Singapore, so that they can join us in supporting our advocacy for improvements to the social and regulatory system. We believe that we are making progress on this front. The number of press and volunteering enquiries has steadily increased over the years.

Our website carries a lot of content touching on different aspects of work migration, not least human interest stories that tell of the real difficulties and injustices faced by workers here. It has interested other media and through 2013 and early 2014. We have been mentioned in stories carried not only on local newspapers and local blogs, but also on foreign media such as the *New York Times*, *El Pais Semanal* (weekly) and *Sankei Shimbun*. This collaborative extension of our communications work aids our advocacy mission.

It has also attracted a lot of student projects. Proposals come in all the time, but it is not wise for us to take on too many lest we divert precious volunteer resources away from our core mission of helping workers. In 2013 we made our stand crystal clear to the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre: NGOs like TWC2 should not be expected to take on the job of educating school children for free.

The website remained stable through 2013, with only small technical tweaks behind the scenes. We strengthened security against hacking and made small modifications to the layout. Increasingly however, internet users in Singapore are accessing the web through mobile and tablet platforms, for which our website was not designed. Users may find it user-unfriendly. This is going to present new challenges which we will take up in 2014 and 2015.



## ***Outreach***

Outreach to workers expanded considerably in 2013 and early 2014. We have instituted a monthly Outreach Sunday wherein teams of volunteers led by our social workers go out to areas frequented by workers on their day off, to distribute TWC2 flyers.

We have printed flyers in the following languages: Chinese, Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi, Telugu, Sinhala, Filipino, Burmese, Malayalam, with Vietnamese, Hindi, Thai and Indonesian in the pipeline.

In parallel, a salary survey is also conducted on Outreach Sundays. This survey exercise commenced in October 2013 and is continuing.

During 2013, Senior Social Worker Kenneth Soh gave a number of talks to Chinese workers at two churches – in one church, over 1,000 workers were in attendance.

A managing director of a commercial dormitory invited us to give talks to its residents mid-2013, but at the last minute, he was overruled by his Board of Directors and we were disinvited.

However, in late 2014, a hospital invited us to give a talk to their foreign staff. Two talks were conducted by Social Worker Nor Karno in early 2014 at their premises.

## **CONCLUSION**

2013 has been a busy and eventful year for TWC2. Aside from internal personnel changes and the move to new premises, we also found ourselves in the limelight as the media look to your organisation for considered opinions on several migrant worker concerns that cropped up during the year. We see this as a positive development as it has given TWC2 a higher profile in the public eye and, we confidently believe, greater credibility in the eyes of public agencies including MOM. The many media interviews given by different personalities in your organisation over the Little India Riot of Dec 2013 were testimony to this.

Undoubtedly, this is all due to the immense work done on the ground that has directly benefitted countless migrant workers in Little India, Geylang and elsewhere, as well as in-depth research on many different aspects of migrant worker issues that have informed our opinions and positions.

For that, we salute our staff, the many volunteers of TWC2, and let's not forget our many well-wishers and generous benefactors and donors.