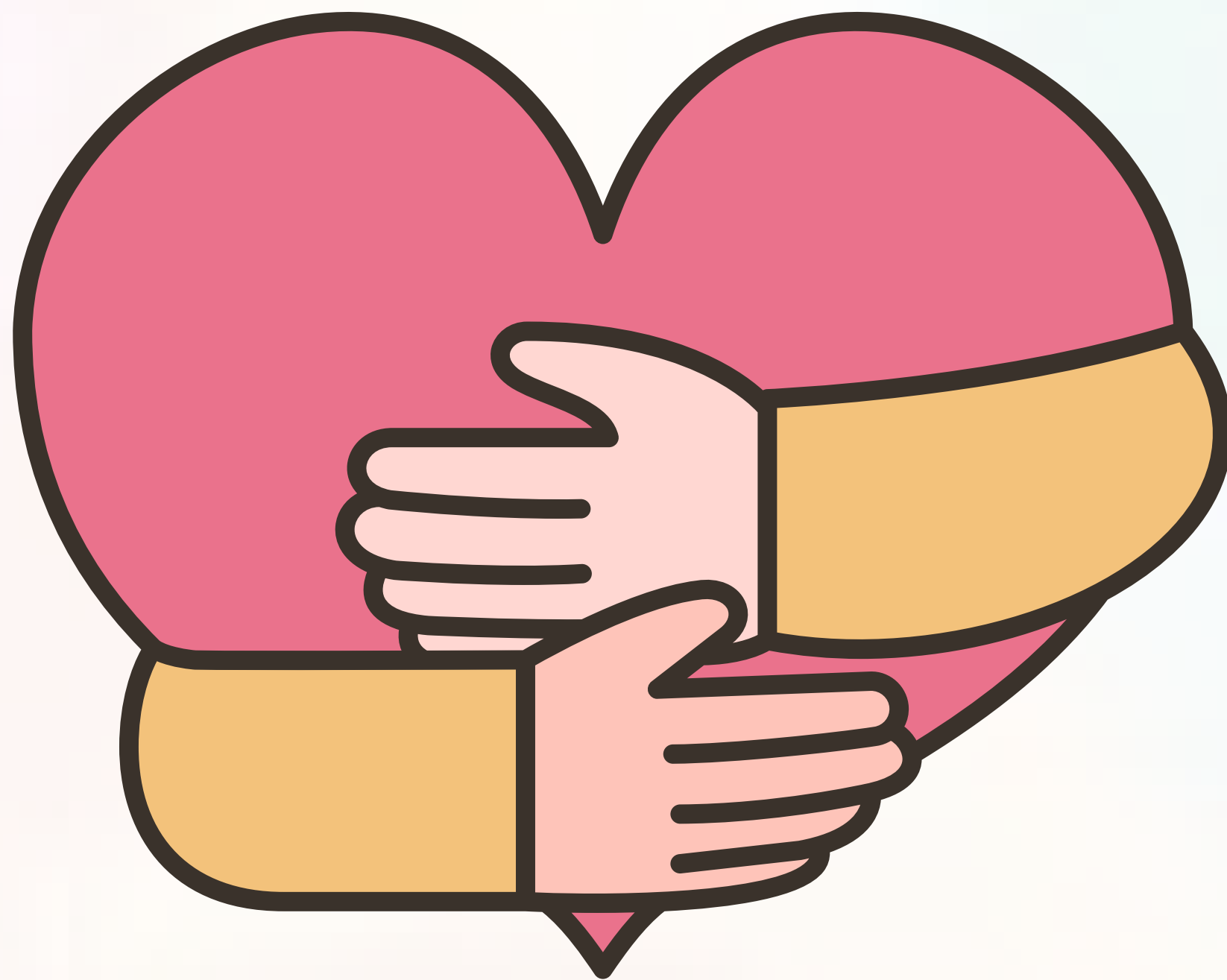


# #Everyone's Column

## Issue 4



#EVERYONE'S COLUMN IS MADE UP OF SUBMISSIONS FROM INMATES, DESISTORS, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS. IT AIMS TO ALLOW YOU A SPACE OF REFLECTION AND PROMOTE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY. WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL INSPIRE AND BE INSPIRED.

# Personal Reflections

*\*This is a submission from a desistor.*

"In this journey of change, I have learnt that it is okay to fall again, as long as you learn to get right back up. Every experience, good or bad, is still a learning experience nevertheless."

A habit is something that is hard to change, and that is what I have been facing for the past 13 years of my drug recovery journey. To change stop doing something for a while easy, but to stay consistent for a long time requires a lot of discipline and focus. The challenges which I faced after my 7th year of recovery process was my own emotions and thoughts. The slips which brought me back to DRC, with negative emotions leading to negative thoughts.

I eventually ended up making bad choices and facing the consequences. After the release of my 2nd DRC, I motivated myself to achieve all my goals by continuing my studies and build up my career again. Now, I am glad to say that I am happy for where and what I am today. But there was still something missing in my recovery journey. There is where I learnt to contribute to the community by doing volunteering work such as sharing sessions, seminar talks, youth empowerment programs and more. It helps me to keep on track and focus to stay drug-free. The encouragement which I give myself is to stay humble, always be hungry for knowledge and to learn new things. Lastly, I remind myself to practice controlling my emotions and thoughts so it will not lead me to wrong choices and consequences again.

## The Only Constant is Change

The only constant is change, and change is painful but necessary.

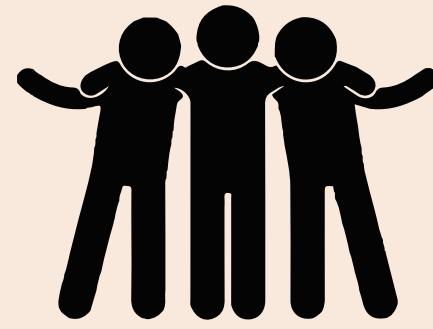
One of the challenges ex-offenders will face upon their release is how much society has changed during their sentence. They may feel they are behind time, and that is the time "self-doubt" will enter their mind. When it happens, they will start to feel uncomfortable, and for them to feel comfortable, they will turn to things that they are familiar with, such as drug consumption and mixing themselves with friends that can give them the "comfortable" feeling. After all, who does not like the feeling of comfort?

What we fail to realise is that for us to grow, we need changes that develop us into a better person. Still remember the day you graduated from your primary school and moved to a secondary school? It was painful that we must leave our friends that we knew for 6 years, but it was necessary for this change to happen for us to move on.

Nobody likes changes, and that includes me as well, but my current sentence made me realise that if I fail to change, I will never be better. I have learnt that the only way for me to grow is to be in an uncomfortable environment because the only constant is change and changes are painful but necessary.



# Treasuring my Second Chance



Before sharing about myself staying offence-free, I need to share about how I got into drugs. As a young kid, I have always been curious and driven to experience the things that I have not yet experienced. This, paired with my negative “friends”, further brought me to where I am today, the DRC. To stay offence-free, I ensured and promised myself to let go and cut-off these “friends” of mine. This is no easy task and I needed the support of my family and my true friends. Without their constant support and motivation, I would not have turned my current situation into something that was positive and that would benefit me in the long run. They reminded me of my role and responsibilities towards my school, family and life and reminded me that this is not a lesson that everyone will get to learn from and that I should be thankful for the second chance that has been given to me.

I may still not have fully regained the trust and confidence of the people around me, but with this challenge, there comes the opportunity of leading a better life and living a better future. The main value that worked well for me was TRUST. TRUST stands for **T**ruthful to myself, my family and friends. **R**esponsible for my own actions and the consequences that follow. **U**plifting myself to ensure I remain motivated towards change. **S**teadfast and determined to achieve the end result. **T**eamwork together with my family and friends to achieve my goals and dreams.

I would like to encourage everyone to follow these values and to chase your goals and dreams to come out and lead a better life and strive for an even better future.

# My Journey towards Change



Achieving recovery did not just mean stopping drugs. It also meant changing my lifestyle for the better. It meant reviewing and filtering my circle of friends, habits, and environment. I had to make sure to not give in to negative thoughts such as “I am only going to use drugs today since it’s my birthday.”

It was very common to be dishonest and to lie to myself, my family, and my friends during addiction. I found that being honest to myself and to the people around me aided me in my recovery greatly. I was also not hesitant to make full use of the help provided to me by the officers and counsellors. Seeking help is not a weakness, rather a sign of courage and determination for change.

Practicing self-care was very crucial in leading a drug free lifestyle as the journey is long, difficult, and full of challenges. This helps me refrain from becoming too exhausted, exploding from stress, and taking drugs to cope with it. It was also important for me to practice self-discipline by not bending my own rules towards my offence-free lifestyle. With this, I check out!

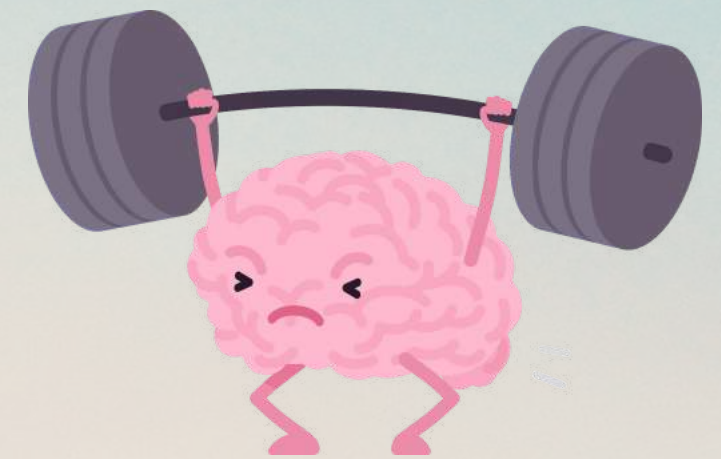
# I'm Determined to End this Cycle

The mind is a powerful thing, as the oft spoken adage is “mind over matter”. What led to my current predicament only after 6 months of my first offence was due to the wrong state of mind, or in layman terms, the wrong mindset.

I've told myself back then that I would not touch drugs as long as I was in Singapore. True to my words I didn't, till I travelled overseas that is. That mindset led to my downfall, as it led me to think that “Hey since I'm overseas just this once is okay, I can stop once I'm back in SG.” Lo and behold, I couldn't. It started with the occasional once a week on my off day to using it every day. In retrospect, the career I've built up, the effort to staying clean, the trust I've rebuilt with my family, all went down the drain, all because of a wrong state of mind. This time however, the state of mind I'm cultivating is “It doesn't matter where I am or where I go, enough is enough, because one try is all it takes to a thousand more.”

It will be hard and the journey ahead won't be all smooth sailings and rainbows, but I think you can do it, after all it's just a simple change in the state of mind to end this repeated cycle. A parting poem:

*Yesterday I was smart,  
So I decided to change the world.  
But today I am wise,  
So I decided to change my thinking.*



## Questions I Ask Myself

1. **WHY** – Why will I even touch drugs? Why will I end up in DRC? Because I want to have fun? Or is it because I am scared to face what I must face in life?
2. **WHAT** – What have I gained? What is so scary? What am I really doing? What did I really solve when I took drugs?
3. **WHO** – Who did I pull down because of my actions?
4. **HOW** – How am I going to stop? How to face life without drugs? How to win back others trust? How am I going to solve all my problems after I'm out?

## Relooking my Priorities

It is very common to encounter ups and downs in one's journey of change. Let me share with you my experience on my journey of change. My experience on my journey of change and staying offence-free was hard, as I'm still very young. At this age, 18, I am still exploring, curious and most importantly wanting to have a lot of fun. As I was trying to change myself there were multiple obstacles that I faced. Some were hard to get over and some were easy. For example, my old group of friends, the kind of activities I'd do with them and the things I loved to do back then.

How I coped with all of this was to get closer with my family, bond more with them and most importantly, love myself. I say all this because back then my main issue was that I loved to please others, make others happy and I prioritized my friend's way too much.

Because of all of these, I tended to do a lot of stupid things. Back to how I coped was to spend more time with family such as doing activities with them like exercising together, going food hunting and more. These were some of the things that went well for me and as time went by, it helped me to distance myself from all the activities that would lead me in trouble.



## I am Not Alone

Even though the fear is real, we tend to exaggerate it. My mom always said to me “Don’t exaggerate your fears. Don’t picture the worst-case scenarios in your mind. But don’t underplay any either.” With all the support and encouragement from the staff team here (volunteers, counsellors, medical team, behind-the-scenes staff, etc.), all who have been part of my rehabilitation journey, I will face the giants in my life and say, “It’s okay, it only makes me human.” I will be faithful in the small things and persevere in rebuilding my life. I am not alone, and I am grateful to have an entire village with me.

Looking forward to a restored me (of course, always in the making).

## Creating my Better Future

I will never forget the day I was arrested by CNB officers. Even though previously I was incarcerated for a few times, this time round it was heart-wrenching. Reason being is that my 9 year-old daughter had witnessed me being handcuffed and dragged away by more than 10 officers. She was traumatized as I witnessed her shivering and crying but there was nothing I could do as I was being surrounded by officers and was handcuffed. Up till now, I still vividly recall how scared and shocked she looked at me with fountains of tears streaming down her sad face. I was devastated. As a father, I should have protected her as she is diagnosed with global developmental delay, simply put she is an extra-ordinary child. Instead, I was being selfish, caught up in my imaginary world.

To be honest, words can't express the way I feel. To use words such as sadness and despair is an understatement to what I'm going through. Therefore, after spending some sleepless nights, I thought hard about how I can change and escape this vicious cycle once and for all.

There are a few things I reckon that is essential to my road to recovery and beyond and I would hope to share. We must have hopes and goals and strive towards it. We must feel that there's a better future that we can create for us all. We need to feel as though we are capable of getting to that future by exercising self-control and we need to find other people who share our goals. With that as a tool to help and guide us all, I pray and hope we will be drug-free and enjoy life with our dearest family who is suffering because of our mistakes.



*A verse from The Greatest Showman:*

***“It’s everything you ever want, it’s everything you ever need,  
and it’s here right in front of you, this is where you wanna be.”***

# Taking that Step

My journey of staying offence-free first started when I decided to let my mom know of my drug abuse. This was important to me because I started to notice how drugs have been affecting my life. I became isolated, my temper became bad, and I started to not remember things. After coming clean to my mom, together we made our way to the police station to surrender myself.

I was then put into DRC for a 6-month rehab journey. I was scared at first, not knowing what to expect in DRC. However, my motivation for a fresh start and rebuilding my relationship with my family gave me the strength to face the different obstacles here. Very quickly, I accepted the fact that I will need to be spending 6 months here, so I decided to keep an open mind and try to make my time worth it.

I realized there was a lot to learn here, be it from the lessons, or even my peers around me. Some of the things I have learnt are:

Firstly, to keep an open mindset in whatever situation we face. This is important because in every situation we are put in, there will be a lesson to learn. Even when we make mistakes, there are lessons to learn from.

Secondly, I have realized that a lot of the problems we have come from a lack of communication, the constant assumption that others know what we want or need. But thoughts are just thoughts, and we cannot expect others to be mind-readers. Only by communicating our thoughts can we reach a mutual understanding.

Lastly and most importantly, the first step to everything you want to do will always be the hardest. Know that it gets easier with every step. Keep a positive mindset and remember what motivated you to make the first step, and you will get to your end goal eventually.

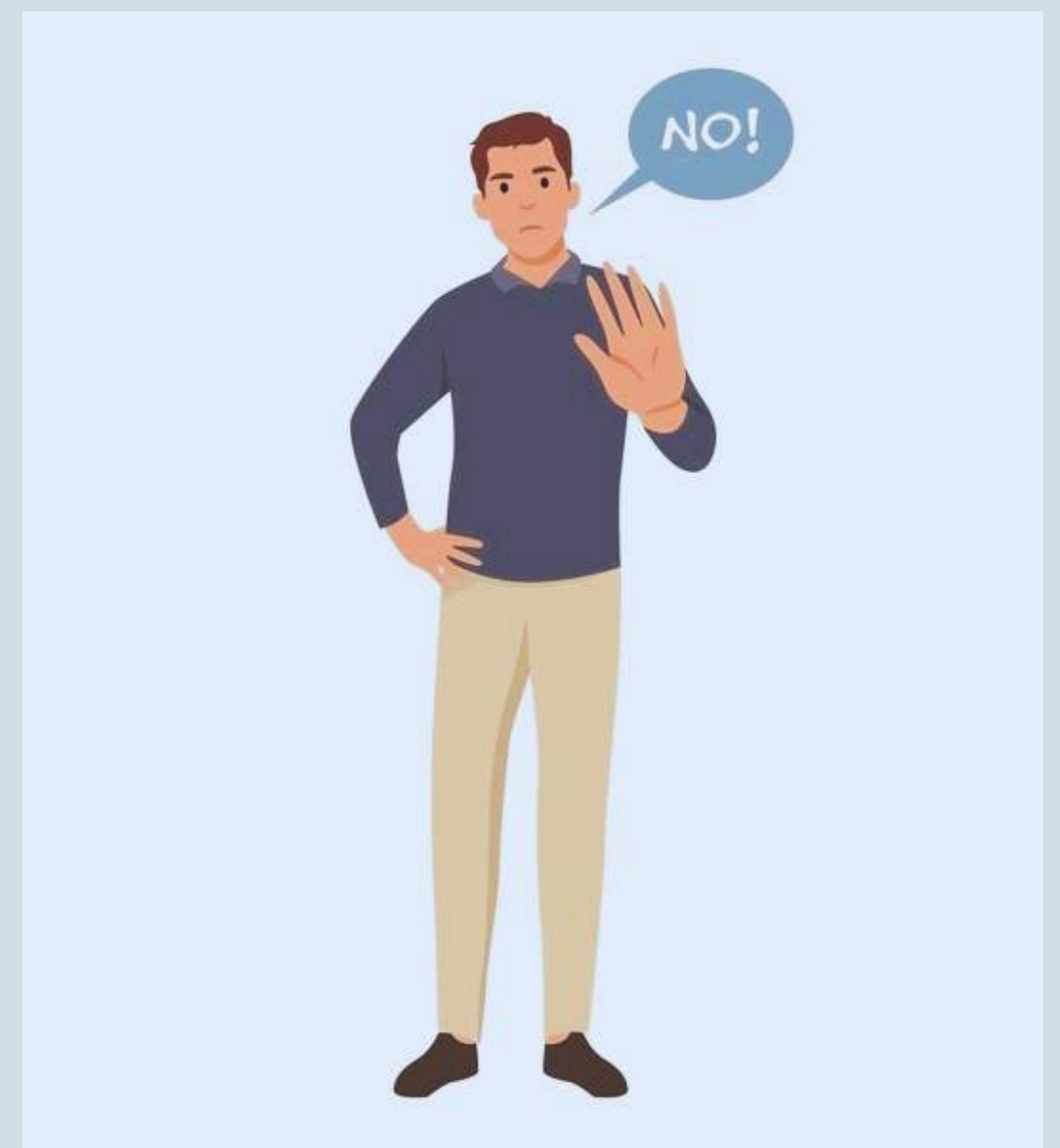


# Moving towards my Offence-Free Life

Getting back on both feet after quite a few falls is very tiring. My understanding of staying offence-free means “obeying the law, rules, and regulations”. In layman terms, “no more causing trouble.” To me, staying offence free is one of my goals in life. As ex-convicts will face many challenges outside, let me share some of my personal experiences.

One of them is to not aim too high on getting a good pay or position at work. We should not pressure ourselves to complete the overload of work just to please our boss. We should understand our own strengths and capabilities. We need to have a healthy work lifestyle balance in order to maintain a positive mindset.

Next is being able to say “No” when your old friends invite you for a gathering. Just a simple acknowledgement of “Hi” and “Bye” is more than enough basic courtesy. Deep down in our hearts, we need to tell ourselves “Enough is enough!” Once we can do that, we will be able to abstain from bad company and avoid all negative things that may lead us back to prison. I hope that we can all can build up our confidence and think positively of the upcoming consequences. These are the lessons I have learnt throughout my journey of change.



On top of that, my main motivation is my supportive wife who is my strength and who has never given up hope on me. She always reminds me that whenever bad things happen in life, good things will always come next. In my belief, obstacles can either be solved positively or be avoided.



## My Takeaways from DRC

Staying offence-free inside of prison is really challenging, without realizing that some of the small aspects such as movement during muster check can be a chargeable offence. Facing difficult inmates can lead to misunderstandings as well, and it is very pressurizing to have other inmates around, especially when we have our own problems that we are unable to solve alone. However, being inside has taught me many beautiful aspects of life.

- Understanding fellow inmates.
- Listening and weighing information before reacting.
- Always work on ourselves first before correcting others.
- Adapting to one's environment is the most important aspect of life.
- Being thankful that being caught now is always better than being caught later.
- Positive self-talk has made me be more positive before making decisions.
- Waking up early to discipline myself.
- Everyday is a learning journey. We will never stop learning.
- Love ourselves before loving others.
- Leave everything outside and concentrate on ourselves first, by doing so we will be aware of our actions and our behaviors that we have to work on.



# The Helper

Initially, I came into DRC in an angered, frustrated, worried manner, and a whole mixture of negative emotions made me very reluctant to change, always feeling classes were redundant and unengaging.

It all started through actions from the officers that made a difference. Through small talk, constant positive reminders and always trying to attend to our needs or concerns made me start to see life in a different light. This was one of the stops that impacted my journey of change. This started a domino effect of throwing away negative emotions I had to make way for change.

It was then that I started to attend my classes with a different attitude, which in turn helped me reap the benefits of the classes.

Eventually, going to classes with a new approach helped me manage and deal with my emotions and problems more effectively.

I am truly grateful to both the officers and teachers/helpers for their undying support and positive words and actions that made a positive effect in my life.

Support from family and friends also contributed greatly to my change which I am thankful for, Thankful for persevering and giving me a second chance. Through one significant difference I felt from these helping professionals in DRC, teachers/helpers/officers, were that they taught me to apply the things I've learnt in not just my relationship but also other areas like approach to life and work.

*Real strength has to do with helping others. - Fred Rogers*

Amongst distorted emotions spending my first few weeks in DRC, it was my PS that brought light to what seemed like an endless downward spiral.

There came a day I was struggling with a barrage of negative thoughts when I decided to reach out to my PS. He readily took up my call for help while he showed professionalism and provided comfort throughout.

With such a reliable team of officers and facilitators to aid me through my recovery process, I feel more at ease and can fully focus on myself and reconnecting with my family.

\*This is a submission from a volunteer. Please note that names in this story have been changed.



This story is about a young ex-offender, Max, who was released in mid-2021. There was much distrust and anger when I first visited Max's mother when the case was referred to me in 2020. During our conversation, she had a lot of resentment towards him and the community. Knowing the situation, I knew that it was going to be a challenge for him to return home where he might not have good support to help him reintegrate into the community. She shared that she needed someone to lend a supporting hand to her son as she could not communicate with her son. After some emails with Max, I accompanied his mother to do a tele-visit with him.

After Max's release, I involved him in a few community volunteer works with seniors. He was well-liked and this boosted his self-confidence greatly. He even helped to take care of a senior with dementia with medication on weekends. He learnt to accept his mother's unforgiving attitude and reduced the conflicts between them. He is now working as Patient Service Associate in a hospital and just got promoted. In Sep 2023, he was awarded an outstanding patient service award and is well-liked by his colleagues and superiors.

“The Helper”. I wonder if there is a better term for those who have helped us thus far in our journey here in DRC. I mean, come on, when we hear “helper” the first thing that comes to mind are our maids, and don’t even think about denying that! But let’s get back to that later, and back on track. My PS is one of the officers that I had the luxury to meet as she is one of the officers who shone some light on certain topics in life.

Thank you ma’am!

The person that I’m most thankful for during my transformation journey here in DRC, is none other than my counsellor from my drug rehabilitation programme. She is more than just a counsellor. To me, she is just like a mother figure. She shows utmost care and concern for those inmates who are under her. She goes the extra mile in class and when she feels that something is not right, she will ask if the person is okay and will respect the decision of said party if they want to talk about it or not.

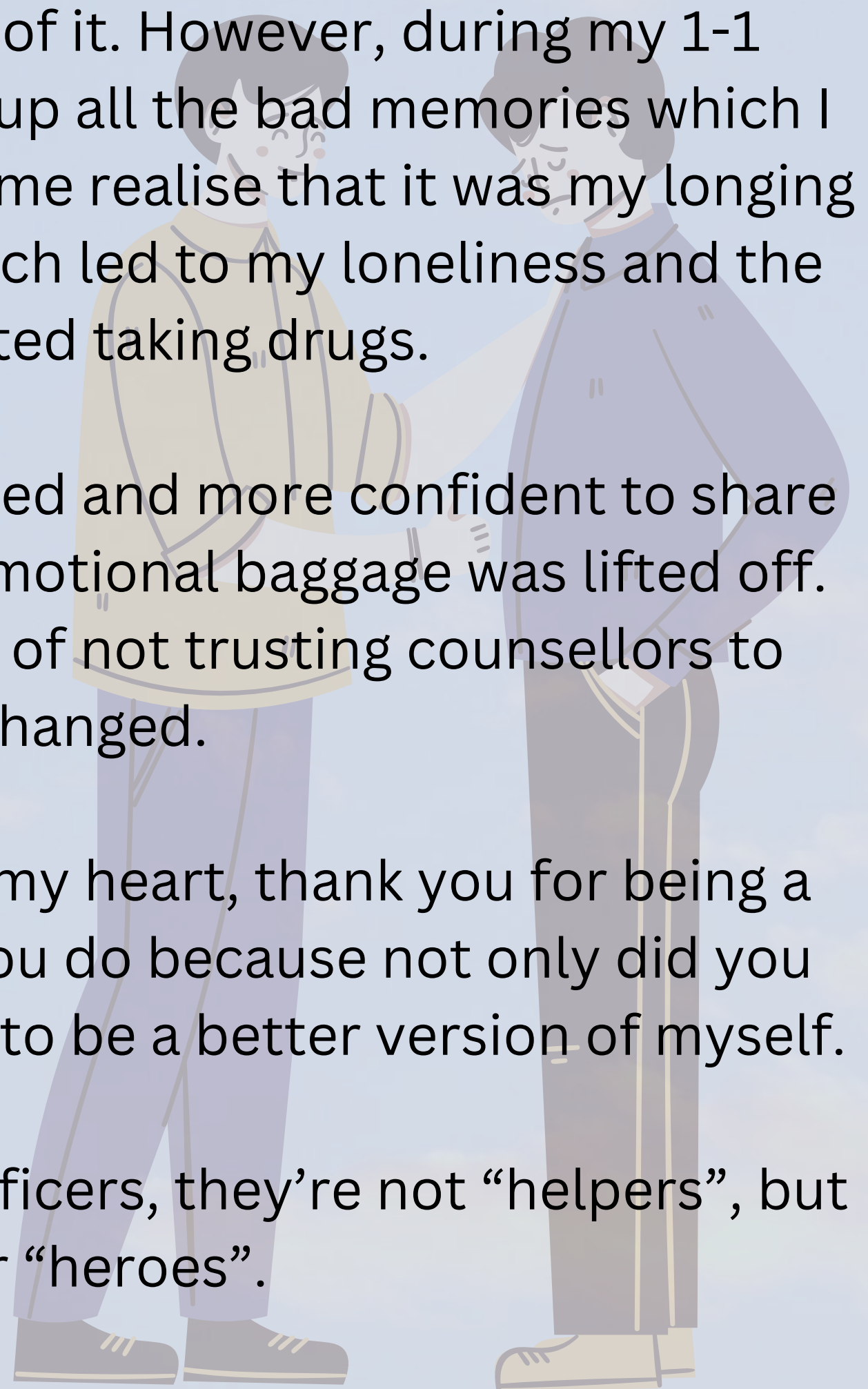
Thanks to her, I realized the actual reason why I started taking drugs in the first place. Initially, just like most of you, I thought I started taking drugs because it was just for the fun of it. However, during my 1-1 interview with her, she managed to dig up all the bad memories which I had locked and buried long ago, making me realise that it was my longing for a father figure while growing up which led to my loneliness and the actual reason why I started taking drugs.

In just that encounter alone, I felt relieved and more confident to share even more because I felt that a lot of emotional baggage was lifted off.

It’s thanks to her that my perspective of not trusting counsellors to confide in has changed.

To my counsellor, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for being a part of my journey. Keep doing what you do because not only did you manage to change, but you inspired me to be a better version of myself.

Before I forget, all the counsellor and officers, they’re not “helpers”, but rather, they’re our “heroes”.



My life became bleak and miserable on the day my father passed away. It was an unbearable and devastating moment for me. I felt helpless and broken, not knowing what to do, yet the officers stood up for me to ease my suffering. They took turns comforting me with their kind words, not rushing in nor making me feel uncomfortable, but with compassion and understanding. In the past, someone like me would not have looked up towards them for help, but when they did help without me even asking, my whole view on them took a totally different turn.

In them, I saw a kind father, a caring mother, a loving sister, and an understanding friend. Above all, stern and disciplined officers, ready to step in to make a difference in someone's life. It is not easy to give the amount of help and support that they have been giving me here. My family members have their own life to think about, and family takes time to forgive your mistakes. But here, the officers taught me to learn from my mistakes and not to repeat them if I really mean that I'm sorry for what I've done.

So, to the officers here, please do not stop what you are doing! Because in me, you brought a change, and to me, you all have given hope which I would have lost if not for each and every one of you supporting me throughout my incarceration. There might be someone out there ready for help or change, and with you all I believe they will change. Thank you very much for choosing this profession.

*"We are not our mistakes. It is what we do about the mistakes that shows who we are."*

### Reflection Corner

What is one small step you can take today on your journey of change?

How has a helping professional ever impacted you?

Thank you to all for your submissions and for reading this issue. You may jot your reflections in your MAP planner.

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