



# AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO



10 Years of Changing Lives Through Sport



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“

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.

”

Nelson Mandela





“  
**Ten years on,  
 SportCares remains  
 a uniquely spirited initiative.**  
 ”

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam**

Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies

## FOREWORD

This book tells us why. The accounts of the people who created the programme and were determined to make it succeed, together with the community partners who found common cause in wanting to help kids and youth at risk. The coaches, mentors, and volunteers who brought not only their skills but a sense that they could contribute to changing lives through sport. And the stories of the players themselves, who found something they enjoyed, grew in self-belief, and often became mentors in their own right.

I was instantly attracted to the idea when SportCares approached me in 2012. I knew something about the potential of sport, because it had shaped so much of my own life. I was also able to watch how young people in Taman Jurong were discovering their own flair and gaining confidence, through a football programme started by volunteers led by two ex-inmates made good. Beacon of Life Academy, or BOLA for short, became SportCares' first community partner when it launched

Saturday Night Lights a decade ago, and has kept up a fruitful partnership even as both have expanded greatly through the years.

It was never just about football. What we have been trying to do is help young people find their feet and build their character.

The boys and girls often start without any serious football skills. They learn that you can build skill, but it only comes through practice, and putting real effort into it, week in, week out.

They find that they are capable of more than they thought possible.

They learn that everyone brings value to the team – those who make the defence rock-solid, the ones with the knack for the long pass or deceptive corner kick, the strikers with the instinct for a goal, and those in reserve who come in when the team needs fresh energy.

And they find that the discipline they develop through sport helps them in school, and stays with them as they grow through life.



But there is more to SportCares than the way it uplifts boys and girls from disadvantaged or difficult backgrounds.

It is uplifting for all of us. Everyone who spends time organising, coaching, mentoring, or providing resources in other ways, ends up with greater appreciation of the potential in every young individual. And recognition of how there is so much we can achieve by pulling our energies together to help them gain guts, overcome disadvantages and eventually contribute in their own right to the community.

I commend SportCares, its community partners and the many volunteers involved in this very special part of our mosaic of efforts to build an uplifting society. The journey continues.



“

**Our hope was that the youth who joined us would experience and accept genuine care and develop a worldview that would be more positive, uplifting and learn from what they were experiencing at that time.**

”



**Lim Teck Yin**  
CEO, SportCares Singapore

When we came up with Vision 2030, which was all about how Singapore can use sport as a strategy, SportCares was the first of many recommendations that we initiated in 2012. The strategy, in this case, was to uplift vulnerable segments in the community.

We started with a football programme for at-risk youth called Saturday Night Lights. Our approach was based on the principle that the programme had to be intentionally designed to achieve intended outcomes, and that it had to be accessible and affordable.

Our hope was that the youth who joined us would experience and accept genuine care and develop a worldview that would be more positive and uplifting and learn from what they were experiencing at that time.

From the start, it was our intention to go beyond running our own programmes to supporting the programmes of others and introducing sport as a strategy for others to use.

Why sport? It's not hard to find parallels between your journey in sport and your journey in life. Personally, sport has helped me in different facets of my life.

Recently, I got my motorcycle license. Recognising that riding is a skill, and having developed skills from sport, I knew that practice makes perfect. So in the run-up to the test, I was at the centre every night practising.

I knew it was as much about the technical skill of handling the bike as it was about developing muscle memory. In my practice, I created different scenarios in order to master the skills required. I approached the whole process with the same mental and behavioural skills I learnt through sport.

And yes, I passed.

Similarly, SportCares designs programmes that enable youth to learn important things about themselves. This self-awareness and acquired skills can then be applied to other facets of their lives.





When it comes to who can benefit from SportCares, I would say there are no boundaries. While we started working with at-risk youth, as we matured and acquired greater knowledge and experience, it was natural and necessary for us to extend to different communities.

Over the years, we have increased our touchpoints with partners, enabling them to deploy sport in the same way that we have. Such community partnerships enable us to establish our footprint across the island, so that we're closer to the beneficiaries and accessible to them.

In the coming years, I see our outreach to seniors increasing because that's an area of need in Singapore. Our outreach to the special needs communities will also increase.

The \$1,000 ActiveSG credit scheme for social service organisations announced in Parliament recently will enable the special needs community to enjoy our facilities and join our programmes. While our facilities today are better designed to cater to their needs, we want them to also enjoy the uplift from sport in their lives.

And through the Communities of Care framework, which allows us to provide funding to partners to run their programmes, I think we'll see an expansion of the partners that SportCares will work with.

Hence, this book is timely because we're in an important phase of expanding through the Communities of Care – where we are equipping our partners with the right tools, harnessing their collective energies and channelling these forces for good.

It will thus enable our potential partners to understand better what we do and why we do it this way, so that our work can benefit more and more people.

So in a nutshell, this book is an invitation to work together.



**Laura Reid**

Founding Director, SportCares (2012 to 2017)

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

The SportCares Movement and Foundation was grown from Vision 2030, the first long-term strategy for sport in Singapore that asked the question, “what can sport do for the nation?” and on a personal level, “how can sport help you live better?”

It was not intuitive to policy makers, government funders and population-at-large when it came to the tangible benefits that sport brings. In the past, it may have come across as a nice-to-have but now it is a critical contributor to the social compact of the nation.

Helming this transition was Lim Teck Yin, who had joined us as CEO in April 2011. He assembled a massive taskforce with representatives from government, community, philanthropy and volunteer networks to investigate what people wanted from the sport infrastructure.

Backed by research comprising interviews, community surveys and town halls, the feedback revealed two recurring themes: sport needed to be more accessible and inclusive.

This meant that sport should be made available to more people at a lower cost and more opportunities should be provided for non-elite athletes, people with disabilities, and those marginalised.

Of the 20 subsequent proposals that arose from Vision 2030, the first to be put into development was SportCares.

As the Founding Director of SportCares, I had no team or committed funding back then. I also had no formal education in strategy. But I worked closely with Lenard Pattiselanno, the operational head for the Vision 2030 Secretariat, and we touched base frequently with Mr Lim.

I’m a communicator by nature. Growing up in a working-class family in small-town Canada, education was the road out of poverty, and sport was one of the foundations of community life. That was the zeitgeist I brought to Saturday Night Lights [SNL].

My blueprint for SNL – which to me, was old-fashioned common sense – was that we had to have a programme rooted in the country's favourite sport – football.

So, we began with football. I needed a community partner who already had ties to marginalised and at-risk youth. To me, the logical place to start was a political office holder.

I'd had a brief interaction with then-DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the Member of Parliament representing Taman Jurong and an advisor to the Jurong GRC grassroots organisation.

As I began conceptualising SNL, I impulsively sent him an email. I told him I'd been tasked with launching SportCares and I had no idea how to run a football programme for low-income youth. Might he be interested in such a programme?

To my absolute amazement and delight, he replied within minutes. He said that he would have someone from his precinct team contact me.

And that was how I met Kim Whye Kee and Darren Tan, founders of Tasek Jurong and Beacon of Life Academy (BOLA), an outreach initiative to help at-risk youth in Taman Jurong.

Whye Kee and Darren are ex-offenders, but now an artist and lawyer respectively. What an oddball trio we were at SNL! And yet, somehow, we formed a strong partnership – and several years later, we remain good friends.







“

**I told him I'd been tasked with launching SportCares and I had no idea how to run a football programme for low-income youth. Might he be interested in such a programme?**

**To my absolute amazement and delight, he replied within minutes.**

”

Our programme was different from other youth football programmes for a few key reasons:

**01.** It was held from 6pm to 11pm on a Saturday night at a proper stadium football pitch. Research shows that more crimes are committed on a Friday and Saturday than any other day of the week, so we felt it was important to engage at-risk youth at this critical time.

**02.** Our programme supplied nutritionally balanced meals [protein, vegetables and carbs, with fruit for dessert] to the youth. To be allowed on the pitch, they had to eat a banana first. Why? Because some kids would faint during training as they hadn't eaten all day!

**03.** Our training sessions begin with fitness conditioning, as the boys were good at football but in poor physical conditions – underweight, overweight, smokers. If they came late, they would be allowed to train but not play in the friendly matches at the end of the session!

**04.** We made it clear to them there was a social contract: we would provide them with professional coaches, a safe place to play, paramedics pitch-side, and a full football kit. In exchange, they would respect all their coaches, teammates and everyone here at SportCares.

Our first meeting was in January 2013. In June that same year, we officially launched SNL. In addition to the youth from Taman Jurong, we had kids bused in from Henderson and Jurong West.

Looking back, my definition of success has always been about impact. We are not just running sports programmes to occupy the youths' time and keep them out of trouble.

We are developing people, civic-minded young people, with a greater awareness of what they can achieve for society and for themselves. We are teaching them about values and good citizenry. We are changing lives through sport.

But we also know that while sport can provide opportunities to reach people, we in sport, do not have the skill sets or experience to provide everything our constituents need.

This is why partnerships work.  
We are all made stronger, together.

## TASEK JURONG: BEACON OF LIFE ACADEMY

The Beacon of Life Academy [BOLA] – a programme run by Tasek Jurong Limited, a non-profit organisation that caters to at-risk youth and needy children living in Taman Jurong.

Tasek Jurong provides tuition, mentoring and development programmes [e.g. personal and career development] to the youth while BOLA focuses on football training sessions to build up their physical and mental resilience, and their leadership skills.

In partnership with SportCares, BOLA ensures that mentors are present at the weekly SNL training sessions to support the youth and keep track of their progress.

The organisation was founded by two ex-inmates: Kim Whye Kee, an accomplished artist who established Qi Pottery, and Darren Tan, who is the first ex-convict to graduate from NUS Law. BOLA was SportCares' first community partner when it launched SNL in 2013.

“

Growing up, I was not an athletic kid. I had poor ball sense, so I was always the last to be chosen for football or basketball. It didn't feel good when nobody chose me, but I still wanted to play!

”

## WHY THIS BOOK

While there were friends who encouraged me, there were also those who would blame me for losing the ball. So I slowly withdrew from sport because I was always either insulted or left out.

But when I was 16, I discovered Air Rifle. It didn't require ball sense but entailed concentration, discipline and accuracy. I was good at it, and I represented my school in competitions. However, I left the sport in Junior College when the training became purely for result. I then pivoted to canoeing.

Even though our canoeing team was training for competition, we had fun together and what kept me going were the friendships. On hindsight, what I learnt from those years was the importance of fun in sport.

So when I joined SportCares, I was convinced that nobody should be deprived of a sporting experience,



**Kerk Kim Por**  
Director, SportCares  
(2017 to 2021)

but we need to create the right conditions so that people don't get put off.

A second lesson I drew from my own experience was that one's background can affect self-esteem and opportunity. I didn't grow up in a well-to-do family. I remember playing games in old canvas shoes, sometimes even slippers!

I remember my mother saving up and buying me my first pair of so-called sport shoes. They were unbranded but I wore them proudly and felt that I could play better! But I also remember how I felt not having proper shoes and attire – I didn't feel like I fit in with the rest.

When I joined SportCares, I met youth who were disadvantaged in both ability and background. What we do is provide everyone with free jerseys, gear and equipment to level the playing field.





Also, if we can't change their background or external environment, can we shape their internal environment and how they view the world? I believe that's one thing sport can do effectively.

Our aim is to democratise sport, so that everyone can participate. It's also what we are doing with Play Inclusive, an initiative where we pair athletes with intellectual disabilities with persons without disabilities. We modify the rules and use improvised devices so that all can play together!

A third lesson I learnt from my military career is that with proper guidance, overcoming hardship builds character. There is a Chinese saying that goes something like this: "Out of the hottest fire comes the strongest steel."

So beyond what we can create in the field of play, SportCares has other programmes that stretch our youth – like they go on challenging missions and practise goal setting, volunteer or carry out community service projects overseas.

What we have learnt from this phase of our journey – from 2012 to today – we are sharing in this book. We are aware that circumstances will keep changing and we must constantly adapt and learn. So this will probably not be the only book!

But for now, I hope that it will trigger your thoughts and pique your interest. And if you'd like to find out more or if you have your own experiences to share, let's start a conversation! Let's build this knowledge of using sport for good together.

SportCares has been harnessing sport for social good for a decade. If you are holding this book, chances are you are a tad curious about how a sport programme can make a difference to your community.

Perhaps you already run a sport programme or maybe the idea of introducing one has never crossed your mind. Whatever your starting point, this book provides possibilities. It explores not just what sports can do for you, but also how you can harness it better.

This book consolidates our lessons gleaned from a decade of experience.



## HOW WAS SPORTCARES' HEARTS FRAMEWORK CREATED?

Our guiding model for using sport to build character and community is called the **SportCares' Hearts Framework**. This framework is based on SportCares' experience, as well as global best practices in community sport and social development.

A key influence for us at the start was Daniel Kim's Core Theory of Success. It explains how the quality of relationships leads to the quality of thinking, leading to the quality of actions and then results, which then loops back to improving relationships – creating a reinforcing engine of success.

Based on Kim's theory, we developed the Framework to better reflect SportCares' philosophy of using sport for social good. Our framework comprises five components and is presented as a flow chart.

We will explore each of the five components in the following chapters: [1] Build a sticky pad, [2] Build relationships, [3] Develop skills, shape character, [4] Lead self, [5] Lead team, lead community.

These components were derived from our 10 years of experience running sports-based programmes like Saturday Night Lights [SNL] and CareRunners for youth-at-risk and underserved youth.

In each chapter, we will be sharing simple concepts and ideas you can apply, as well as real-life stories of how they have been lived out and experienced by our youth, coaches, and volunteers. We hope that these perspectives will help you in your own planning of a sport programme that serves your community.



# SPORTCARES' HEARTS FRAMEWORK



## BUILD A STICKY PAD

Sport as a platform to **attract and draw** participants into SportCares' programmes and allow us the time and space to develop and care for them.



## DEVELOP SKILLS, SHAPE CHARACTER

Participants are put through common experiences, rigours of sport training, competitions, character and leadership development & volunteering opportunities.



## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are built between coaches, teammates & SportCares to form a new "family" for participants.



## LEAD SELF

Participants are encouraged to **take charge of their own life**, gain an awareness of where they want to go and start to steer their own journey in life.



## LEAD TEAM, LEAD COMMUNITY

Participants are nurtured into **socially responsible & productive individuals** who will contribute to society and be leaders in the community.





## WHO DOES IT TARGET?

Does the SportCares' Hearts Framework apply to all demographics, across the board? Well, yes and no.

Originally, this framework was based on lessons drawn from our programmes, which were largely targeted at youth aged 13 to 21, and who were considered at-risk. In the last six years, we have worked with other segments of the community and found that values such as fair play and teamwork do apply. However, intended outcomes and expectations had to be tweaked based on the target audience.

More recently, we have also worked with seniors and persons with disabilities (PwDs) to see if we can replicate the same success. We found that the power of sport also applies to these segments of our population – the key is to understand their needs and motivations.

For seniors, intended outcomes must be relevant to their life-stage. While the focus for teenagers is self-belief, leadership and giving back, for isolated seniors, the focus is to first feed the spirit, and enable active participation in the community.

For PwDs – where the broad spectrum of disabilities includes physical, intellectual, sensory, and developmental – the theory can still be applied by adapting game play, equipment, or rules for different abilities.

So, while the original framework was centred on youth, it has been and can be tweaked for different demographics. The key is to be clear about their specific needs before you design a suitable sport programme.

## HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO ME?

Sport is a catalyst for change and a powerful unifying tool. It has the potential to transform any community! Besides improving health and fitness, it empowers people, strengthens values and deepens relationships.

If you already run a sport programme, you will know this. For you, this book will serve to make you think deeper and to guide you in strengthening your programmes.

If you have not considered sport before, and you're asking, "how do I start thinking about it?", this book will help you create a path forward in a guided and structured way.

We have done it and we know it works.

By sharing our road map, we hope to bring more like-minded partners onboard and replicate this success into a national movement.



“  
Sport is a catalyst  
for change and  
a powerful unifying tool.  
”





# BUILD A STICKY PAD

## CHAPTER 1





*Effendy, Fadhil, Mervin, Shahirah, Siti and Thaslim – who are all profiled in this book – were teenagers when they first joined Saturday Night Lights [SNL], a free football programme to engage youth-at-risk and keep them off the streets.*

Today, they are in their 20s and still actively involved. Some have taken on roles as team captains, community coaches and camp leaders for our futsal or athletics programmes for children. Some of them are pursuing full-time or part-time coaching and are taking the necessary courses to become qualified.

What keeps them coming week after week, year after year? In SportCares, we call this the “sticky pad” and building one is the starting point of the SportCares’ Hearts Framework.

## WHEN WE SAY “STICKY PAD”, WHAT COMES TO MIND?

Perhaps an adhesive surface that holds on to things, or perhaps that little square notepad we scribble reminders on to stick on books, files or noticeboards.

In SportCares, when we say “build a sticky pad”, we mean to first create a platform that is attractive and engaging. If youths’ interest and curiosity are piqued, they will come. Our aim is to then create an environment that is welcoming and engaging, so that they will stay on.

A common challenge of non-compulsory programmes is that these youth tend to drop out along the way. Organisers often grapple with how to keep them interested in what they have to offer.

But for many of our SNL players who train every Saturday night (6pm to 9pm, various venues), having a session rained out or cancelled is a disappointment!

This is because SNL has become a place where they feel they belong, where they can make mistakes and grow. It is a home away from home. This does not happen overnight. It happens when their regular participation reinforces again and again – like a “reminder note” – the value of sport and community.

In other words, we have built a sticky pad for these youth.

However, this was tested during Covid-19, when gathering in groups was restricted, and the players could not play or train as a team due to the ever-changing Covid-19 situation.

But when the safe management measures were eased after almost two years, the youth returned in full force! Not just in SNL, but also other programmes like CareRunners [athletics], basketball, swimming, rugby and futsal.

So, how do such diverse programmes sustain the interest of the youth?





## WHAT MAKES IT STICKY?

Over the years, we have discovered a common thread: more than just loving the activity and being with friends, the youth know that we genuinely care for them on and off the field.

But it is not just “feel good” vibes that make them stay on. They know that we believe in them and so, we set the bar high for them. Our coaches set boundaries and standards for behavioural discipline. We stretch them, empower them, and have them give back. It’s tough love!

By going through the tough workouts together, they learn to work with each other, support each other, resolve conflicts, and work towards common goals.

Even for non-competitive activities like outdoor adventures, which we organise outside of the core sport programmes, bonds are forged through activities like hiking, camping or structural experiences. It’s about overcoming these challenges together.

If your sport programme is purely voluntary, the first requirement must be to build a sticky pad. Without their presence and commitment, it will be very hard for you to achieve anything else.

## HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN STICKY PAD

There are no hard and fast rules to building a sticky pad. Here are some tips to start you off:

Know who you’re reaching out to and know what they like. When we work with a new community partner, we make it a point to first ask them what sport their youth like to play.

Understanding this base knowledge is important because building your own programme begins with proper planning: What is the programme for? What are its objectives? What are the intended outcomes?



Planning a programme for youth-at-risk is very different from designing a community futsal programme for children. The former may focus on addressing antisocial or violent personal behaviours, while the latter, on building teamwork or a community for the children.

Some programmes are preventive, while others are for intervention. Without planning, it's like playing football without goal posts!

If you're working with persons with disabilities (PwDs), the objective of your programme could be to introduce them to a sport, enable them to maintain a healthy lifestyle, or to train for competition. Being clear about your objective and intended outcomes helps create a stronger sticky pad.



## COLLEGE HAWKS

*How a hodgepodge team became a sticky pad.*

The youth who first joined SNL's College Hawks team came from varied socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, with varied skill levels, and in varied shapes and sizes. They could well be described as a "hodgepodge team" [or in Singlish, a "rojak" team]. Sport was the common denominator and acceptance for who they were was the reason they kept coming back, again and again.







Coached by Muhammad Herman Zailani, the team originated from ITE West in 2017 before evolving into College Hawks in late 2019. Its evolution was due in part to Coach Herman, who actively invited youth in the Clementi neighbourhood to join. Some were playing street soccer, some were friends of players, and some had seen the team training while running around the track and wanted to join.

Regardless of what attracted them to join, many decided to stay on. Perhaps it was the team coach and captains making them feel welcome, taking the time to explain to them what it meant to be a SportCares youth. Perhaps it was the value they found in sport and community.

Sport and community are intricately interwoven into the SNL programme, which goes beyond just playing a sport. The youth can look forward to competitions, activities, SportCares value-added programmes and volunteering.

What probably sustains the youths' commitment to the programme is team norms – that all-encompassing culture and sense of pride they feel because they are part of a team that upholds high standards on and off the field, from what they wear to how they behave.

Conceivably, youth stick to the programme because their coach speaks their language, forms a connection with them, and establishes a mutual trust that is nurtured.

From the perspective of Coach Herman, who is also a Singapore Premier League coach and coach developer in Singapore, this was the approach he adopted to keep the youth coming back.

In the sporting world, coaches often say that 10 years down the road, the athletes won't remember what the score was, but they will remember how they felt. Coach Herman shares that sentiment and believes that this feeling is largely determined by how a coach builds his or her sticky pad.

That sticky pad is often characterised by team members knowing that they are important and a feeling that they are accepted as equals, regardless of their differences.





“

**Once the trust is built  
the group can come  
together easily.**

”

So to build one, where do you start? According to Coach Herman, the first step is to connect with the youth. Then it's bearing in mind that while you're building that relationship, you also need to maintain a certain level of professionalism and not cross the line.

“The emotions and connection are important – it is what makes a person resilient,” he adds.

It also helps when planning a programme, to know who you have onboard. This is an assessment of your resources – that all-important network of coaches, parents, donors and volunteers – that can be tapped on to make the programme work. This should be considered in the planning stage.

The key is ensuring that your team is invested and have the heart to do this. Selecting the right coaches, for example, is of paramount importance because they must have the ability to wear multiple hats. They must also know how to tailor the programme to meet specific and evolving needs.

To ensure the sustainability of your sticky pad, it also helps to put in place a system for feedback: how do you know where you are, where you need to go, and how you are doing?

Capturing such data greatly helps you evaluate the programme and identify areas you need to tweak. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, under Measuring Outcomes.

Of course, by all means, make it fun and make it cool!





## PITFALLS & TIPS



1. Sometimes, youth will leave and it's beyond your control [e.g. National Service, financial situation]. Let them go but keep in touch and let them know you still care.
2. Let them know that your support extends beyond the field. If they're not turning up, find out why. If they're struggling academically, you can extend support to them in the form of tuition or study programmes. This helps keep them in the community, and this is the key. It allows them to feel supported even if they cannot attend the programme for a period of time.
3. Pay attention to the quiet ones and find ways to engage the sidelined. When they decide to leave, it's usually too late.

## WHEN IT TAKES OFF

A heart-warming story we'd like to share involves a group of youth from CareRunners, our athletics programme for youth-at-risk and children from low-income families.

Although athletics is not considered an organised team sport like football or basketball, the youth in CareRunners do train together in teams.

When Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed, a small group came together to start a running club. They met up on their own to run every Friday. Their goal is to participate in competitions and road races.

This is not part of the programme, but an extension of the relationships forged in CareRunners. They formed a support network where they train together, eat together, and are there for each other.

Almost all of them attended our coaching courses, and their group chats are always active! They are constantly communicating with each other and holding each other accountable.

You can say this running club is a natural phenomenon rather than an intentional outcome of the CareRunners programme. It is the result of a sticky pad that has enabled roots and grown wings.





## WE CAN HELP YOU BUILD IT

We have shared with you some simple steps to building your own sticky pad. If you need more guidance or advice, we are here to support you through free consultation.

And just in case you're not aware, many organisations work with SportCares to co-create their sport programmes through Communities of Care [CoC], an initiative to harness collective resources of like-minded partners to scale up efforts in promoting sport as a force for good. You can also partner with us. We have the expertise, experience, and facilities to support.

In fact, most of the youth in SportCares come through community partnerships. These include family service centres, student care centres, special schools, social service agencies, children's homes and referrals from Community Link [ComLink] office.

Sport Singapore [SportSG] also runs regular workshops on community coaching and safe sport. You can find out more here:



Whether you build your own sticky pad or partner with us to co-create one, understand that even with the best intentions and efforts, youth may still decide that it's not for them – and it's fine.

To better prepare you, here are some pitfalls to watch out for. Remember: as long as you are aware and are making an effort, you will see the number of dropouts falling. Gambate!

4. Remember, the focus of a sport development programme is participation, enhanced resilience, stabilised emotional and social well-being and acquisition of new skills and abilities rather than excellence. So involve everyone as much as possible. Excellence will be a natural outcome with stronger participation.
5. Watch out for safety issues – not just physical safety, but also psychological safety. Is anyone being harassed or bullied or treated in a way that lowers their self-esteem? Sometimes this can be subtle, like being picked on because one is smaller or weaker. Be vigilant. Coaches and/or programme staff need to step in immediately to address the issue. Do not let the issue fester among the team members.



# PROFILES

## MUHAMMAD ANSAR BIN MUHAMMAD [Coach, Enfuego United]

*How one SNL coach built a sticky pad for youth-at-risk.*





“

**I always remind them:  
On the field, I am your coach.  
Outside, I'm your father,  
your brother, your friend.**

”

When the players of Enfuego [“on fire” in Spanish] United arrive at Serangoon Stadium, they would go up to Muhammad Ansar bin Muhammad Tahir – or Coach Ansar – and press his hand to their foreheads in a Malay greeting of respect [Salam]. It's a little gesture but it reveals so much about their relationship.

Coach Ansar has been a coach with SNL since 2015. He was a firefighter and Hazmat Specialist with the Singapore Civil Defence Force for 14 years before his current job as a Safety Officer. He was in his 30s when he got his polytechnic diploma. So, when he says, “never give up!”, the boys believe him.

As a coach, he sets boundaries for his players and holds the bar high when it comes to discipline. He emphasises punctuality and does not tolerate the use of vulgarities, smoking or fighting.

“The consequences are not worth it,” he says, challenging them to think far. “And I do see the change in them – many have stopped smoking and mixing with the wrong crowd.”



These boys whom he has helped are then roped in to support others on the team. “I always get my stronger players to help the weaker ones. Our motto is all for one, one for all.”

At the end of each session, he gathers them for a group cheer. “I always end on a positive note because I want them to know that everyone is gifted and valued. There should be no status or discrimination on this team. We are all equal, and we will win together.”

For the first two years, Enfuego United was beaten by the other teams in the Ace League tournament. But in the following three years, they won the 5-a-side twice, and the 9- and 11-a-sides.

It's a great achievement and a testament to their teamwork. Coach Ansar shares every victory, on and off the field, on their Instagram account – @enfuegounited2020 – to inspire others.



And to reward his players, he started an annual ritual in 2018. At the end of each training year, he organises a party and a special lucky draw.

“I’m not well-to-do, but when I go for coaches’ courses, they often give me branded boots, jerseys, socks, duffel bags and equipment. I keep them all aside for the year-end lucky draw,” reveals Coach Ansar, who scribbles numbers on scraps of paper for the boys to pick. Because there are often more players than presents, he buys little extra gifts like mugs so that everyone gets something. “Seeing the smiles on their faces makes it all worthwhile!”

The father of four spends at least four hours every Saturday away from his family to coach with SNL. Even when his late wife [who passed away in 2020] was suffering from cancer and a brain tumour from 2014 to 2019, he did not stop coaching.

“These boys are my second family,” he says, adding that some of them also come from disadvantaged families, so SNL is their home away from home.

# PROFILES

## FERLIN KOH HWEE ENG

*A grassroots leader who helped co-create sticky pads.*



It's not hard to understand why people call her an energiser bunny. Ferlin Koh Hwee Eng, an early childhood educator and grassroots leader, exudes a bubbly enthusiasm that's quite infectious.

An active volunteer in the community, Ferlin was the Chairperson of the Kaki Bukit Ville Resident Committee [RC] from 2016 to 2020. In 2018, she started working with SportCares after hearing about its programmes from Morning Star Community Services, a collaborator in her grassroots work.

Using sport to build character and community resonated with her. "Their framework is about empowerment – this is also a core value I embrace," she says, adding that she felt a community futsal programme would engage the youth in her constituency.



“

**I'm a strong believer that the best way to connect is through play!**

”



It started with 10 kids and quickly grew to 40 – the result of her door-to-door efforts. “You have to prepare the parents for what to expect. Will their children fall down? Of course!” she laughs. “But when they feel your zeal and sense that you know what you’re doing, they’ll entrust their kids to you.”

Co-creating a sticky pad in the neighbourhood comes with challenges. “If parents think it’s a waste of time,

that’s it. Nobody will come. So, you must know how to work with the parents.”

As a community partner, her RC worked closely with SportCares. “It’s like cooking a dish together – we create it along the way,” she explains. “I bring the kids in, coaches teach them, and we mentor them together.”



She elaborates, "When the children lose matches, they do sometimes blame each other. So, I must pull them aside and talk to them. I tell them: since you're all in this together, it means everybody is feeling the same way, so don't put each other down."

Over time, she has seen not only improvement in the children's behaviour but also growth in their self-belief and leadership.

On why the programme has become a sticky pad for the kids, she says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It's sad when people label children. I want them to know this: I don't care how people label you. We want you and you'll be embraced here."

Ferlin's outreach has inadvertently extended to others. "Because some parents wait around for their children, I got the opportunity to interact with them. That's how I found out about families that needed assistance in certain areas."

A simple futsal programme has thus become an important platform for her to connect with her residents – and in a fun way! "It is many things in one! I use this one platform and multiply it for many purposes. It's very powerful if you know how to make full use of it."

From futsal, her collaboration with SportCares grew to include swimming and basketball. "People these days are too attached to their digital devices," she says. "So, at least for two hours a week, they're interacting with *humans*."





# BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

## CHAPTER 2



*Sport get them to come.  
Relationships get them to return repeatedly.*

This is one of the key realisations we had after running sport programmes for a decade.

Relationship-building is the second step in the SportCares' Hearts Framework. In this chapter, we will explore the role of coaches and the kind of relationship that makes a positive and lasting impact on youth.

We will also provide some tips on how you can foster such relationships and some pitfalls to watch out for. This is especially important when you're working with vulnerable youth.



## THE ROLE OF COACHES

A coach is not just a coach in SportCares. He or she must wear multiple hats. This may include being a teacher, parent, brother or sister, and counsellor.

This is because our youth come from a variety of backgrounds that render them at risk. Some come from broken or blended families, others have absent parents, yet others have a disability or disorder, and struggle socially or academically. Some have brushes with the law.

As such, one of the roles our coaches play is that of a parental figure. Through sport, they are able to set rules and expectations, and to provide guidance and mentorship. While they hold authority, they must also be able to wear the hat of a friend from time to time.

In SportCares, we hire highly qualified coaches. But having expertise and experience is not everything. Coaches also have different coaching styles. While no style is superior to others, what is key for us is that they practise empathy and genuinely care for their charges.

From the field of education, we borrow the concepts of “sage on the stage” and “guide by the side”. The former is a top-down approach of imparting knowledge and is largely one-directional. The latter, on the other hand, engages the student in learning and provides guidance in the process.

Because our sport programmes are developmental in nature, and our intended outcomes go beyond mastery of technical skills to include character-building, we need nurturing coaches. So, even if coaches have an impressive track record of grooming elite athletes, they still may not be able to provide the outcomes we want. Hiring coaches who can foster relationships is key to success.

You'll need to bear this in mind when selecting coaches for your programme because they will play an influential role in the lives of the youth.



## CONSISTENCY COUNTS

For a coach to make a positive and lasting impact, he or she must first be a consistent figure in the child's life. If coaches are being constantly rotated, no meaningful relationships can be forged.

Consistency also refers to how the coach treats everyone. If you're a parent or teacher, you'll know how quickly kids sniff out favouritism or special treatment!

But while coaches are expected to be consistent in their treatment of players, they must also understand that every child is different.

SNL's Coach Ansar says that he views every incident as a unique challenge. “What I do is to first understand them as individuals. While most of them need to be uplifted, for some, I need to use sarcasm or reverse psychology – only then will they stop and reflect.”

He adds, “I have to bring myself to their level and think: If someone talks to me this way, will I listen? Can I accept what he is sharing? So I always put myself in their shoes.”

While consistent treatment is important across situations and individuals, we need to bear in mind that sometimes, coaches need to make judgement calls based on facts.

If a relationship has already been established between the coach and players, such judgement calls will be accepted by the team because there is a foundation of trust.

## PITFALLS & TIPS

1. Inconsistent treatment is often perceived as unfairness, and trust will be its casualty. Be vigilant because youth quickly learn to adapt their behaviour to elicit special treatment.
2. If youth see different coaches and volunteers every week, it's hard to forge a relationship with them. Having at least one consistent adult figure is the minimum requirement. If not the coach, the programme leader, volunteer or social worker must assume that role.
3. It's tempting to help underserved youth by giving in to their requests. In the long run, this may not empower them to be independent. Equip them with skills and options instead.
4. You can be a friend to them but be clear about where the boundaries are. Do not cross the line. The good news is that practising Safe Sport is teachable! Check out our workshops.



## HOW YOU CAN BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Firstly, the youth must feel that you care for them beyond the sport. They must know that they can rely on you in times of need, and that you are invested in them.

Secondly, relationships are built on a foundation of rules and expectations. This applies not only during training, but also outside of it. There must be consistency across situations.

We believe it's very important to discuss these rules and expectations from day one, so that the youth know where you're coming from. The next step is to follow through on what you say.

Playing by rules sets them up for the future. In everything else they do in life – in society and in the workplace – there will be norms and expectations, so this is an important life skill.

Thirdly, preserve their dignity at all costs. A relationship must be based on mutual trust and respect. As a coach or volunteer, sharing your youth work with others must not be at their expense.

We sometimes see volunteers taking photos with the children and compromising their identity and background. These children and youth have dignity, and we must be mindful and protective of it.

Also, because they are in a vulnerable position, you will at times want to “rescue” them. But ask yourself if your action is empowering them or enabling an undesirable behaviour.

Finally, as any relationship grows, safety can become an issue of concern. As a coach or volunteer, you may wear multiple hats, but you must always maintain professionalism. Create a safe environment for them to make mistakes and grow.







## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

If you're developing a sport programme, it is beneficial to partner others in the community because you can leverage on each other's strengths.

For instance, a community partner may have counselling or educational guidance expertise, while another may have the resources needed, such as a sport facility.

Therefore, building relationships with partners is just as important. For all the programmes we run, we adopt a co-creation process.

In SportCares, we see ourselves as an enabler of positive change through sport. We can support with our knowledge base, but we need our partners on the ground to co-drive the initiative. They must take co-ownership.

So, as you build your community partnerships, treat each other as equals and think win-win. When everyone brings their talents and resources to the table, we can better serve the participants in a more synergetic and holistic way.

# PROFILES

## MUHD EFFENDY BIN SUYUDI

*How a coach and team became his second family.*



He is the eldest of eight children. The family of 10 live in a small flat, and his father works as a boatman. "He works so hard, but his income is very low. Sometimes he doesn't even come home. So when I was studying, I had to take on part-time jobs to help out," shares Muhd Effendy Bin Suyudi.

His mother, who is not working, would occasionally make kuih [bite-sized snacks] to sell at the night market and he would help her. He also worked as a cleaner in his school. In ITE, he chose to do automotive engineering as he felt he could find a decent job as a mechanic.

But Effendy always loved football. When he joined Enfuego United in 2016, he was a shy 16-year-old. His younger brother had roped him in when they were students at Assumption Pathway School.

"I enjoyed coming to SNL every week because I could meet my friends and coach. After training, we would eat together and sometimes hang out before going home," he says of their relationship.

But the person who made the greatest impact on his life was Coach Ansar. "When I'm going through tough times, I talk to him. No one else. I do have a best friend but it's different. Coach Ansar listens to my story and always tries to help."

After serving National Service, Effendy felt lost. "I didn't know where to go, so I shared my situation with my coach. I was a firefighter during NS, so he connected me with the Airport Emergency Service [AES]," he recounts. "It was a huge opportunity for me! I went for the interview and got accepted."

In June 2020, Effendy completed his training and is now working full-time with AES. "I'm very happy that I have a good job as a firefighter. If I never met Coach Ansar, I don't know where I'll be now. He helped me a lot."

He says Coach Ansar is like the big brother he never had. "I've learnt a lot from him, like respecting everyone on and off the field and taking responsibility as a team captain."

His team won their first trophy when Effendy was still in ITE. Looking back, he says, "There were so many strong opponents in the tournament. We had to work together – there was no other way to win. It was all teamwork."

Looking back, Effendy is grateful that SNL kept him and his teammates off the streets and on the right path. "Because of SportCares, those who always hang out outside can have fun inside. Here, we learn to plan for our lives," he says.



“  
To me, these guys  
are my second family.  
We're all brothers.

”



# PROFILES

## LIM SENG KEE

*A volunteer's take on building relationships.*



Lim Seng Kee remembers the first time he turned up at Serangoon Stadium, wearing his Changi Foundation volunteer T-shirt. That was in 2016, a year after he joined Changi Airport Group [CAG], which supports Saturday Night Lights [SNL] through the Changi Foundation.

His ex-colleague had told him about SNL after learning that he liked football. His initial reason for joining was to maintain a healthy lifestyle, so he had planned to leave after the first hour of strength conditioning.

That first night, he sat at the back of the stands, observing from afar. But a simple act he witnessed became the turning point. He saw how the boys greeted their coaches with a Malay hand gesture [Salam] symbolising respect and humility, and he knew he had to change his attitude.

He knew that if he didn't humble himself and approach them first, no one would approach him, and he'd always remain a bystander. He also resolved to get to know three boys by name every week.

His commitment to be present every week, from start to end, and to join them for all the exercises, matches, briefings, and even punishment, gradually earned him their trust and respect.

But building a relationship with the boys was not always easy. Before training, they would usually play games in their cliques.

"I really had a lot of difficulty penetrating their circle – it took me quite a while! But it's not an unsolvable problem, it's just how much effort you're willing to put in."

While he started out as a CAG volunteer, his role gradually became that of a mentor. "I care for them like I care for my teenage son," says the father of two. "So when I see some behavioural issues and the coach scolds them, I'll step in to complement the coach."

He's amused that everyone calls him "Coach Seng Kee". When they noticed him clearing up after training every week, they decided to stay on and help him. "It has become a collective effort!"

Seng Kee is keenly aware of his role as an ambassador for CAG and SportCares, and is careful to draw boundaries between himself and the youth. He does not exchange contact details with them and limits his interaction to only official training times.



In 2019, he was presented the Youth Inspiration Award by SportCares at the Istana. Awards aside, he will tell you that what has been most rewarding are the friendships he's fostered. "When one of the coaches got married, I was on his wedding invitation list," he shares. "That meant a lot."

Regarding his philosophy for volunteering, Seng Kee cites a poster he saw at a vegetarian restaurant that really spoke to him. "If you translate the 10 Chinese characters into English, it means: For whatever services you render, don't expect anything in return. And don't regret your actions."

He has this advice for potential volunteers, "You can have this kind of spirit, and a belief that you can make a difference through your little actions."

“

**Anybody can be a volunteer.**

”



# DEVELOP SKILLS, SHAPE CHARACTER

## CHAPTER 3





“  
Sport made me,  
”

claims Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies. He admits it was the only serious thing he did throughout his teenage years, playing a variety of sports and representing his school in athletics, football, cricket, and hockey. Hockey eventually trumped the rest, as he played for Combined Schools and later in the Singapore Premier League.

In the book *Game for Life* [Sport Singapore, 2013], SM Tharman shared, “I didn’t play sport because I thought it was a way to imbibe values. I did it because it was challenging, we pushed each other and we enjoyed being together, practising, playing matches, and talking about it after.”

Like him, the youth in our programmes probably do not come every week with character development in mind. But as SM Tharman says on hindsight, “Although I didn’t know it at the time, there was a quiet way in which sport actually made me.”

In this chapter, we focus on how sport can be used to develop skills and shape character in youth. This is the third step in the SportCares’ Hearts Framework.



## THE POWER OF SPORT

Sport is many things to many people, but it comprises three basic elements: play, rules, and competition. Play is the fun element that draws you in. To play fair, you need to abide by rules. And with competition, the goal is to win – this inspires you to train harder and to be better!

In SportCares, we inject competition or some form of challenges into all our programmes. It's a big part of our DNA because we believe it pushes youth into what we call "the stretch zone".

The stretch zone is where much learning happens. M.J. Ryan and D. Markova [2006] identified three zones we operate in – comfort, panic, and stretch.

In the comfort zone, we feel at ease because we are operating from existing habit. In the panic zone, we are overwhelmed because what is required of us is far beyond our knowledge or experience.

Between these two states lies the stretch zone. It is in this zone that true change occurs. We feel challenged, but our senses are alive and we are positively engaged. It is a zone of potential growth.

Although you don't have to play sport to be in this zone, sport is particularly effective due to its sheer physicality.



If an activity is physically demanding, it triggers physiological changes in your body – like pain or fatigue – which you have to garner internal mental strength to overcome.

Also, when you are pushed physically, it's much harder to mask your values and intentions. When these are expressed on the field, they can be opportunities for self-awareness and learning.

In many ways, sport mirrors life. You need to work with others to achieve common goals. You win some, you lose some; so how do you respond to losing or to unfairness on the field? How do you resolve conflicts? What sort of attitude do you bring to these different experiences?

Through sport, youth are exposed to the dynamics of life in a safe environment. Coaches can use these teaching moments as stepping stones for character development.

## WHAT SKILLS ARE DEVELOPED?

When youth attend our programmes, they are equipped with more than just technical skills to play a sport. For example, abiding by our house rules teaches them commitment, discipline, and respect.

While these values are critical, we have found that good technical skills have also opened career options for them as professional players, coaches or referees. It empowers them.

In addition to the core sport programmes held weekly, we also equip them with career-related skills like English language, resume writing and public speaking. We call these first-order skills or bread-and-butter skills.

# THE PLAYBOOK PROJECT

*How this Project built skills and shaped character.*



In 2016, Youth Corp Singapore (YCS) youth led SportCares youth through The Playbook Project. This initiative provided English language curriculum and self-confidence through sport and activities.

The Project included using proper English in professional settings, building relationships, playing sport, and inviting youth from two different sectors to better understand each other's lives.

SportCares youth learnt what their world could be, where they could go, and how they have the power to break the cycle of their current circumstances. In return, YCS youth learned a new form of empathy, human condition and how hard life is for youth their age in Singapore.

This win-win project benefitted youth from various backgrounds.

These sessions are held as part of the SportCares Champions programme, where we identify additional

support and development for the youth. They are usually conducted on Saturday afternoons, before SNL training, at certain times of the year.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our most basic need is survival. If they are equipped with skills to find a job, they can move on to bigger aspirations.

SportCares also provides opportunities for youth to volunteer and give back. This opens their eyes to a world beyond their own and makes them aware of people different from themselves.

There are also opportunities for them to attend major sporting events like the AFF Suzuki Cup, HSBC Sevens or WTA Finals. In their usual circumstances, they may not have access to such exclusive, high-profile events or to meet sporting stars.

Exposure to new experiences broadens their worldview and contributes to their holistic growth.



## CHARACTER THROUGH CHALLENGES

It's been said that there is no growth without change. While the activities we expose them to have an element of fun, we also put them through unique challenges outside of their weekly sessions.

Planned with outcomes in mind, these new and challenging experiences – such as outdoor camps or expedition walks – pull them out of their comfort zones and teach them skills like goal setting or working with people different from themselves. It builds character and forges bonds.

The youth selected for SportCares Champions, a youth leadership training programme [more details in Chapter 5] get the chance to go on an overseas community service trip. While they are often very excited about this, they also know that these trips are not easy.

They must take on roles and responsibilities, be a leader for the day, take care of each other, and pull their resources together to carry out community service projects for underprivileged children.

Though tough, these challenges teach them how to handle stress and problem solve. They learn that they can overcome if they don't give up. In other words, they learn to be gritty.



## GROWING GRIT

Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance to pursue long term goals. Passion can be fostered when one actively discovers, develops, and deepens one's interests. But it also involves working long and hard in pursuit of a higher purpose.

In her book titled Grit [2016], psychologist Angela Duckworth shows – through a series of experiments and case studies – that passion and perseverance are predictors of success across a variety of fields, from education and business to sport and the arts.

One of the key findings of her investigation is that grit can grow. What this means is that everyone can become grittier! Grit can be developed from the inside-out or from the outside-in.

Growing grit from the inside-out comes from a self-directed process of finding one's interest, practising deliberately, knowing one's purpose, and having hope.

Growing grit from the outside-in shifts the focus to environments that value effort, discipline, growth, and learning. They involve parents, coaches, and members of the community. These external forces play a part in developing character in individuals and building culture in the community.

Duckworth writes, "Whether we realise it or not, the culture in which we live, and with which we identify, powerfully shapes just about every aspect of our being. At its core, a culture is defined by the shared norms and values of a group of people."

In other words, if youth are part of a culture where certain values like discipline, resilience and empathy are emphasised day in and day out, these values become ingrained as character. In the work that SportCares does, this has important implications.







## CUSTOMISING YOUR PROGRAMME

Now that you know the transformational power of sport, how do you design a programme to develop the desired skills and values in your youth?

For any programme to be effective, it must first be intentional. Know your intended outcomes, then work backwards to plan the steps and strategies to get you there.

A useful resource for you is the Game for Life (GFL) Framework, which is a guide to developing character and leadership through sport. We believe it complements this book well.

While this book explains the key components and concepts behind the SportCares' Hearts Framework, the GFL guidebook will provide you with actual lesson plans and templates to support you in customising your programme.

For example, if you're developing resilience, your lesson plan can involve tweaking the game rules or changing the physical set-up to stretch the players. The field can be doubled or halved, or the game time extended, so that they need to push through physical and psychological barriers to complete the task.

Coaches must, of course, guide the process. They must sit down with the players before and after the session to process their thoughts and feelings, and together, reflect on what they have learnt.

Ultimately, Game for Life makes your programme intentional.



Download the GFL Lesson  
[Brochure] here



## MEASURING OUTCOMES

If you have targeted specific values to be worked on using the GFL Framework, you will want to track how effective your programme is in effecting change.

A validated tool for measuring outcome is the ACT! SG Framework. This instrument provides a programme evaluation framework and tools, that are validated and contextualised for use by the youth-at-risk sector.

According to this framework, youth are best positioned to succeed in school and life when they have mastery over 13 core skills to:

**A**chieve tasks and complete work

**C**onnect to others

**T**hrive as a person

- hence, the acronym **ACT!**

These 13 skills or outcomes are tracked before and after the programme (at least six months apart), through a self-reported questionnaire on a five-point scale. The survey results give us an indication of the effectiveness of the programme in facilitating positive youth development.

In SportCares, some areas we found our youth lacking in were “cultural competence” and “goal-setting,” two areas the ACT! SG Framework measures. To improve their cultural competence [the knowledge of religious and cultural differences], we introduced the celebration of festivals in 2021.

During Chinese New Year, for example, the SNL youth had the opportunity to experience first-hand the Chinese custom of lohei (coming together to “toss up a good fortune”), which was insightful for the non-Chinese youth.

Other opportunities the youth were involved in to learn about cultural difference was serving the isolated seniors living in rental blocks and partnering with PwDs for a camp.



The youth provided “spring cleaning” services to seniors who were hoarders or had messy homes in need of cleaning. SportCares youth also participated in the pilot CareVentures Programme, designed to enable youth of all abilities to build friendship through better understanding of each other’s strengths and differences.

To address “goal-setting”, we organised expedition walks and SportCares Challenge Camps, where the youth got to identify their own milestones or checkpoints during the land expeditions and redeem incentives if these short-term goals were met.

Having a tool for measuring outcomes generates insights for programme design and enables us to target areas of weaknesses. It also provides empirical data to show that our programmes do work!



ACT! User Guide



ACT! SG Tool



## PITFALLS & TIPS

1. It's easy to run sessions every week without a clear intention of what values need to be worked on. Make a habit of creating/using lesson plans and look out for teachable moments to capitalise on.
2. If youth are not carefully guided through these challenges, it can backfire. The last thing you want is for them to feel discouraged, defeated, or to drop out. So, be conscientious in planning your sessions and in debriefing the youth.
3. While most programmes are designed to benefit the group-at-large, sometimes we need to focus on a select few. To ensure that we give them the depth of attention needed, plan for enough coaches on the team, so that the rest are not neglected.
4. Sometimes, a set of separate activities tailored to the few who require the additional attention is necessary. Tapping on CoC partners to assist with this is the most practical.

# PROFILES



## NUR SHAHIRAH BINTE MD HISHAM

*A journey from shy teen  
to courageous leader.*

When Shahirah Binte Md Hisham joined SNL back in 2014, she was so shy that having to speak up in public made her cry!

But a one-year programme initiated by SportCares' former Director, Laura Reid, served to be life-changing for her. The PlayBook programme [organised outside of weekly training sessions] focused on equipping youth with English language and presentation skills.

In 2015, Shahirah and four others were selected to perform slam poetry at the Istana for a post-SEA Games and Para Games appreciation event for national athletes and former President, Mr Tony Tan.

"I didn't even know what slam poetry was!" she admits with a laugh. "But Ms Laura trained us at her house. She made me stand outside the door and said, 'Make sure I can hear you from inside!' – that was how I improved."

Looking back, Shahirah says her eight-year journey with SportCares has been life-changing. "I've learnt to manage my time – I'm always punctual now – and I've become more disciplined and matured."

Discipline is a big part of being in SNL. "It's not just proper attire, but also the right behaviour and mindset," she says, adding that she counts Chris Yap-Au – a national footballer and District West United Girls' coach – as her role model.



## “ Coach Chris brings out the best in me, ”

she says. “I used to say, ‘I cannot, they’re too good’, but she always believes in me. She expects us to give of our best – not only at training, but also outside.”

In fact, it was because of Coach Chris that she got to play for the National U19 team for a year and to travel to Japan to compete. From her, Shahirah learnt about sportsmanship and how to deal with losing. “When we lose, we can learn from our mistakes and get better. We grow from losing.”

At 22, Shahirah is now a senior on the team. When she was asked to help with coaching, her initial reaction was, “I cannot do it – no one will listen to me!” But she figured that if she didn’t try, she would never know. And so far, she has found the experience tough but enjoyable.

Coaching has made her more responsible and accountable. She has also started coaching kids in athletics at a children’s home every Friday. This programme is under CareRunners, a SportCares programme she was a part of for over a year.

Volunteering has also broadened her worldview. From door-to-door visits to distribute goodie bags to seniors, she recalls, “Their flats were very cramped and some of them had no one to take care of them. That experience made me realise how lucky I was because my mum cooks for me every day.”

While Shahirah is still shy and introverted, she now has the skills to overcome her fears. Before a presentation or match, she prepares herself thoroughly by rehearsing and being very familiar with what she has to do. Preparedness makes her less nervous, she says. “I’m a lot more confident now.”





# PROFILES



## LIONEL LI

*Why a philanthropist-marathoner gives to sport.*



In 2018, Lionel Li - a businessman, philanthropist, and marathoner - participated in the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon, the highest and most adventurous marathon in the world. However, at 4,400 metres above sea level, he suffered severe altitude sickness and had to withdraw.

"That was the first race I'd ever quit in my life," says Lionel, who has completed 60 full marathons around the world.

"But we must learn to muster the courage to withdraw if we cannot push further, and we should not be afraid to take on the task and start over again."

While he believes that we should always plan before every challenge and be meticulous in executing every detail, he says assessing the situation and being ready to pivot is also important.



This is just one of the many lessons Lionel has taken away from sport. He has since gone on to complete more challenging races, and has applied the lessons learnt to his work and philanthropy activities. What matters is not how fast we finish, he says, but the takeaways from the experience.

The 54-year-old who originally hails from China, says, "Sport has changed my life entirely. Apart from building stamina, confidence and resilience, it has made me a better person. I've also gained many friends and we support one another to achieve our dreams."

A successful investor and capital markets veteran, Lionel has been passionate about philanthropic activities for the past 16 years. When he relocated to Singapore a few years ago, one of his first considerations was how to continue his philanthropic journey in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

"When Credit Suisse Singapore's charity arm, SymAsia Foundation, found out that I'm an avid marathoner and that I like sport, they introduced me to SportCares," says Lionel, Founder of the Li Foundation, donor to the SportCares-Li Foundation MultiSport Programme.

He felt that SportCares' values aligned with his Foundation's mission of inspiring and impacting lives by maximising everyone's potential. "They help youth realise their potential, some even become instructors and give back to the community. This creates a multiplier effect and magnifies impact."

The father of two teenage boys does not see his support as wealth transfer but as multi-generational gifting. "It's about imparting values and passing on legacy to future generations," he says. "I believe that sport can change lives, and I also trust that we can influence the lives of one another."

Lionel explains, "I believe that there is a tiny flame in every person's heart. If every inspiring story is a piece of firewood, they can ignite our tiny flames to burn a little more brightly to illuminate more hearts. This is what it means to influence the lives of one another."

He hopes more organisations and individuals will jump on the bandwagon and combine resources to boost impact on society.







# LEAD SELF

## CHAPTER 4



Printed on the back of our SportCares T-shirts are these words in caps: **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**. This is how central self-belief is to our developmental philosophy. The letters 'BE' and 'YOU' are also in bold because we believe that each individual should be free to be himself or herself.

Having self-belief and a positive worldview is the essence of the HEART Framework's fourth step – Lead Self. In many ways, this is a pivotal point in the process of youth empowerment.

In this chapter, we will explore what it means to empower youth to lead themselves. We will also share how SportCares has used sport as a tool to achieve this in our programmes.



## WHAT IS LEAD SELF?

When you can lead yourself, you are no longer in the passenger seat. You are behind the wheel and taking charge of your life. You get to steer it where you want it to go.

Many of our youth come from disadvantaged backgrounds. While it's easy to succumb to the thinking that "I can't do much in this world", they are challenged to not let their circumstances determine who they are or how far they can go in life.

In other words, our programme is designed to change a self-defeatist personal narrative.

When youth see that their actions have consequences, they begin to understand that what they do now impacts their future – and they have a choice.



## SUPPORTING CONDITIONS

To progress to this stage, the youth already possess certain values and skills that enable them to see themselves differently. This mindset is built upon the foundation of the earlier stages.

A key component of this stage is the recognition of their self-worth. This is when they realise that – despite the ups and downs in life – they have value, and they can add value to this world.

It's often hard to realise this on your own. But when your coach and peers believe in you, and when you realise others on the team depend on you, you start to see your own value through their eyes.

Another component is accountability. In SportCares, youth learn to abide by rules, and this can be as basic as being punctual: if you know you'll be late, inform your coach beforehand.

Being responsible for your actions also means that when you make a mistake, you own it. It's okay to make mistakes (we all do!), but growing in maturity means you stop making excuses for yourself. You accept that your actions have consequences and you face them.

This is definitely not easy to do. But it helps if your environment is safe and supportive, and if you know everyone is held to the same standards.





## WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

*When PwDs take ownership of their sporting aspirations.*



A 2015 study found that only one in three persons with disabilities (PwDs) in Singapore participated in sport on a regular basis, and of these, 80 percent wanted to play recreationally. The objectives of the Disability Sports Master Plan included teaching PwDs to play a sport and providing them with recreational opportunities.

These objectives were met in late 2016 when a small group of PwDs expressed interest in wheelchair rugby and approached the Singapore Disability Sports Council to introduce the sport here. The programme has since transitioned to the SportCares Disability & Inclusion Team and was officially launched in 2017.

Some of the players have spina bifida or muscular dystrophy, while others come in from the Amputee Support Group at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. They were attracted to wheelchair rugby – also called “murderball” – because of the adrenaline rush and the opportunity to meet new friends.

Building and growing this team entailed understanding their needs and aspirations, and then enabling them to achieve their self-defined goals. For example, as their competence and commitment in the sport grew, so did their desire to take their involvement to the next level.

While some players were happy to continue playing recreationally, a handful aspired to play competitively. SportCares then guided them to chart their own sport development plans. The first step was to set up the Wheelchair Rugby Association Singapore [WRAS].

WRAS has since taken ownership of public outreaches to bring in new PwDs, to teach able-bodied participants how to play the sport, as well as to give back to the community.

What this experience has reinforced for us is the importance of keeping the objectives of engagement clear.

In the case of wheelchair rugby, the PwDs' needs and aspirations evolved organically. Our role then was to consult them and enable them to take ownership of their development.

As with any other group, personal differences did exist, and clashes did happen on and off the court. What made the players stay on was a sense of achievement when they worked through tough times, learnt to accept each other, and put team before self-interest. They came together, stayed together, and over time, became a strong team that drew others in.





## GROWING AWARENESS

In leadership theories, it is said that we must be able to lead self before we lead teams and then organisations. To lead self, or to have self-mastery, we must first know and understand ourselves.

In SportCares, we believe that this needs to be intentionally designed into the programme. However, it does not mean that we need to sit in a circle and share about ourselves!

The strength of a sport programme is that such awareness is created in a more natural way, through purpose-driven activities or interactions. Feedback is usually contextual and immediate.

For example, youth are made aware of their attitudes, triggers and responses on the field. If they lose a match, do they blame others? When they are stretched, do they immediately give up? SportCares coaches debrief an individual or the team when they observe teaching moments at every session. There was an instance when a team picked on a new player from another team in a match causing the player to pull out from the programme.

The coaches helped both parties to see the problem and be aware of their own biases and subsequently mediated a reconciliation. Not only did the player re-join the programme, but he was also accepted.

When they are more aware of their own attitudes and behaviours, they can work on managing them and on acquiring skills to improve them.

This requires patience. Many will take one step forward, two steps back. But as long as they keep focused on improving, they will grow to better control their impulses.

For youth-at-risk, positive role models matter. Many of our coaches come from similar backgrounds but have made something of themselves in their careers and as leaders in the community.

If the youth can see what's possible – through the example of these role models – they can believe that it is possible for themselves too.



“

In other words,  
the starting point  
of leading self  
is self-awareness.

”



## ENABLING EMPOWERMENT

To design a programme for empowerment, it's important to provide lots of opportunities for youth to take ownership of their goals and actions.

One such avenue is through volunteer work. In SportCares, we offer a variety of opportunities so that they can volunteer based on their interests or inclinations. If nothing offered resonates with them, they can propose their own volunteer projects to meet identified needs in the community.

This process is guided by the coaches, and the youth learn to work together for common goals off the field. On the field, empowerment also happens at weekly training sessions, where they are sometimes assigned roles and responsibilities. This gives them the agency to act and serve.

Empowerment doesn't happen overnight. It is a process of transformation that happens gradually as youth are given opportunities to prove themselves, to experience success and learn from failure.

With practice comes confidence and independence – like riding a bicycle with training wheels off!







## THE QUIET POWER

In our work with youth, what we realise is that they often discover they have become more capable or more independent on hindsight.

For those who have gone on overseas community service projects, it is only when they write their post-trip self-reflections that they realise they've become more resilient, outspoken, or more competent. They seldom notice these changes because they grow through small adjustments.

Like most youth, they initially learn through coaches who help them be aware of their behaviours or attitudes when they are called out after an incident on or off the field.

The coaches would sit down with them to process what happened and determine how they might choose to act differently in the future. But gradually, they learn to make their own decisions and to be accountable for them.

When they are able lead themselves in this way, they move from the passenger seat to grabbing the steering wheel with both hands!

## PITFALLS & TIPS



1. Self-discovery is a “by-product” in many sport programmes. But for youth to manage and improve themselves, self-awareness must be intentionally designed into the programme, and coaches must facilitate the learning moments.
2. Coaches have to be mindful and first build self-worth and confidence to youth with low self-esteem. Breaking them down to build them up might be detrimental to them.
3. However, coaches can't just reinforce positive behaviours. They must also address the consequences of bad actions, so that youth learn to be responsible.
4. “You can do anything!” can backfire. Instead of being overwhelmingly positive, encourage them realistically. Youth must learn to set realistic goals, plan, and take steps forward.



# PROFILES

## FADHIL ISHAK

*From a youth feeling lost to taking ownership.*



My dad was never around when I was growing up. My mum worked as a parking attendant, tailor, and kindergarten teacher to put my brother and I through school," shares Fadhil Ishak, 27, his voice wavering with emotion.

"When I joined SportCares around 2013, I wasn't very stable," he admits. "I was just playing around, hanging out with friends, and going home late."

His life took a different trajectory in SNL, when he found a group of friends who guided him and held him accountable. The support he's received over the years

has propelled him to achieve things he never thought he could – like, more recently, completing the Standard Chartered 10km run.

When Fadhil found out they were running in groups of five, he told his coach he wouldn't be able to keep pace with the rest. His coach's reply, "You don't have to follow their pace. You run at your own pace, and they will follow you."

With encouragement from his coach and friends, he completed the run in over an hour. "In SportCares, we get to train with experienced and professional coaches who





push us to give our best. They never give up on us and are always disciplined. They are my role models.”

Fadhil recalls a period when he was burdened with problems. “I had nothing in my life. I only had SportCares, so I approached them for help. They happened to be launching a community futsal programme then and were looking for youth coaches, so they asked me to apply.”

Although he studied fitness training in ITE and had done a module on coaching, Fadhil never felt it was for him because he was very shy. But with proper guidance, he started coaching the children at Morning Star’s after-school programme. He now plans his own training sessions.

As an assistant coach, he can focus on coaching while also receive mentoring from his coach and the staff in SportCares. He has since indicated to SportCares his interest in being certified as a full-fledged coach.

As a senior in District West United, he’s now guiding the juniors. When one of the younger players confided in him about his family problems and mentioned he’d never had a birthday party, Fadhil responded by planning one for him after training, plus getting a cake to appreciate the coaches!

Fadhil looks back on his SportCares journey with gratitude. From feeling lost and alone, he has come a long way to take ownership of his life and to support those around him, including his family.

When his father passed away two years ago and left the family some money, he asked for permission to buy a motorcycle so that he could supplement the family income as a delivery rider.

“I told my mum she can stop paying the bills. She can retire and rest. My brother and I will take over,” he beams. “I believe that if you work hard in your life, good things will come your way.”





# PROFILES

## MERVIN KHOO

*From Tasek Jurong to NUS,  
an SNL youth shares his journey.*





Mervin Khoo, from Beacon of Life Academy (BOLA) under Tasek Jurong, remembers storming off the football field midway through training. "In that heated moment, I thought I was done with the training, done with the programme," he recalls his "impulsive and immature" days.

Fighting and using violence to settle issues was a norm when he started with BOLA at SportCares, adds the 23-year-old who joined SNL in 2015, when he was still studying at Yuan Ching Secondary School. He was roped in by neighbourhood friends he played street soccer with.

The boys did grow past the fighting though. Mervin attributes this to the guidance of SportCares' Coach Herman, and along with his mentors, Bernice Wong and Kim Whye Kee, co-founder of BOLA, an initiative for youth-at-risk. "They helped me see the bigger picture and how my actions have consequences."

Mervin's family of four [he has a younger brother] lives in Jurong with his grandparents, who are retired hawkers. His father, a maintenance operator, is the sole breadwinner.

During his O-Level year, he did badly in the prelim exams. But after being "nagged at" by Whye Kee, Bernice and his mathematics teacher, he ended up scoring five distinctions in his GCE O-Level exams. This secured him a place in chemical engineering at Singapore Polytechnic.

Mervin considers this a turning point. "It made me realise that if I put my mind to it, I can achieve what I want," he says. "I strongly believe that putting in effort today reaps rewards tomorrow."

Mervin was part of the Beacon of Life Academy (BOLA) in Taman Jurong. BOLA participated in a pilot run of the SNL football programme in 2013. The team's involvement was a result of ongoing partnerships between SportCares and grassroots organisations.



He went on to serve National Service in the Naval Diving Unit, and did well enough in Poly to gain admission to the National University of Singapore (NUS) to study chemical engineering. He believes this is due in part to his track record in football and a recommendation letter by SportCares.

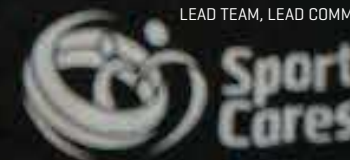
"The Tasek coach gave me a chance to train with a professional club, and in SportCares, Coach Herman helped me secure a spot with the U19 team at Hougang," he explains.

He now gives back by assisting Coach Herman with the younger players. "When they get into fights, it's now my turn to pull them apart," he says with a chuckle. "I tell them there's really no point in it. Just like how I was guided back then, I am guiding the kids now on the field."

While he does harbour dreams of playing football professionally, he feels it will be tough to support his family financially. Also, he embarked on his university education in August 2021. He is currently giving tuition to children at Tasek Jurong and saving up for his undergraduate studies.

Mervin does have another dream though, and it is just as important to him. "I want to do well in NUS and move on to work in the chemical industry," he reveals. "Hopefully, I will earn enough to start a similar programme and help other kids."





# LEAD TEAM, LEAD COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER 5





## ABDUL THASLIM HAJANAJUBUDEEN

*24 years old, played street soccer under HDB blocks before joining SNL.*

Someone thought the then-teenager might do better in athletics and introduced him to the CareRunners, an athletics programme in SportCares for youth-at-risk.

He ended up training with national coach, G Elangovan, and performed well at the National School Games (NSG) Track & Field Championships.

He was also giving back to the community through SportCares, and in recognition, was selected for the Southeast Asia Youth Sport Leaders Camp.

His other accolades include the Outward Bound School Leadership Service Award and the prestigious Michael Johnson Young Leaders Award.

Thaslim is but one example of a life that was changed. While his leadership qualities were recognised on national and international platforms, there are others in SportCares whose leadership qualities are shining just as bright.

This is not an unplanned outcome. Leading team and community is the fifth and final step in the SportCares' Hearts Framework. Our programmes are designed to nurture socially responsible individuals who will contribute to society and be leaders in the community.

In this chapter, we will explore three components in nurturing youth leaders: giving back, being mindful of inclusivity, and responding to real needs in the community.





**Most of us live in a bubble and care little for the world beyond our family and close friends.**



## WHY GIVING BACK IS INTEGRAL

Giving back to the community is a core component of all our sport programmes. There are many different ways our youth can contribute. For example, we recently paired them with a group of volunteers who go door-to-door in HDB blocks, distributing items and helping residents with chores.

Every Sunday, these volunteers collect donated items like mattresses and pass them on to low-income families. Our youth have been volunteering with them every fortnight since 2020.

Some youth also volunteered with the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, where they brought visually impaired seniors to Pulau Ubin and contributed to creating a rare and wonderful experience for the seniors!

Being involved in volunteering opens our eyes to the needs of others beyond our circles. Such exposure can seed empathy and compassion.



## MAKE VOLUNTEERING MEANINGFUL

That being said, anyone who has tried getting youth to volunteer for events will tell you that it is not always the simplest of tasks!

There are times when they may not be interested in an event and participating feels more like a chore. If they do not find meaning in what they're doing, they may even end up having a wrong idea of what it means to give back.

What we need to do is to prepare them well, so that they understand their role in the bigger scheme of things. A clarity of purpose makes the volunteer experience more meaningful.

Also, it helps to remember that everyone has a natural affinity for something – it could be working with young children, seniors or persons with disabilities, or to protect animals or the environment.

Whenever possible, have them pick causes that resonate with them. Giving them options will provide them with some autonomy to make their own decisions.



In SportCares, we encourage the youth to identify causes or projects they are keen on, and then to design service projects to meet those needs. And in cases where they are prepared to lead, they are empowered to do so.

But volunteering for events they would normally not choose to is also good exposure for them. They get to experience something outside of their comfort zone and this broadens their worldview.

In SportCares, we can always tell when youth find a volunteer experience meaningful – they talk about it for days! We see them absolutely exhausted and famished at the end of it, but they feel gratified that they're able to give something of themselves to help others.







**There is equal opportunity for everyone - regardless of age, race, gender or abilities.**



## LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Building an inclusive society means leaving no one behind. There is equal opportunity for everyone – regardless of age, race, gender or abilities.

In SportCares, we use sport as a platform to promote inclusivity and our youth are involved in a variety of ways – as assistant coaches for community futsal or athletics programmes for children or as facilitators in sport-related events we organise for seniors and persons with disabilities [PwDs].

When we ran the Inclusive Sports Festival [a sport festival for PwDs] from 2017 to 2019, our youth facilitated many sport stations, where people with and without disabilities played and had fun together.

Such events fostered empathy in the youth and sensitised them to the fact that there are many others who have different challenges in life and are facing them bravely.



Our youth are also involved in CareVentures, an inclusive outdoor adventure programme that pairs them with other youth from special education schools. Together, they go through all the modules – outdoor cooking, knot-tying, kayaking, rock-climbing – and this culminates in a 3D2N camp.

This partnership enables them to foster a relationship over an extended period of time. And we have found that the intended outcomes are magnified when they are paired together.

Besides working with PwDs, some youth opt to help in the training sessions we conduct for seniors. Just prior to COVID-19, we were training them to do adaptive sport for seniors in nursing homes.

Volunteering for such programmes not only enables them to pay it forward, but also to help build a more inclusive society through sport. The transition from being beneficiaries to contributors can be very empowering for youth-at-risk.





## NURTURING LEADERS

This fifth step in the SportCares' Hearts Framework focuses on grooming leaders for the community. From being receivers of support, they pick up the baton and pay it forward as givers.

When youth are able to lead themselves, they are ready to lead others. At the start of each year, our coaches select a handful of youth for a leadership programme called SportCares Champions. This is an opt-in programme so anyone can apply.

Youth who opt in are required to attend an orientation programme, sign a social contract with SportCares, and complete an assessment form before the year-long programme commences.

This programme gives them an opportunity to be properly trained as leaders. It was adapted from the Positive Youth Development Framework – a tool kit developed by the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] – and simplified, so that it's usable and replicable for the local context.

Positive Youth Development is a way of thinking about and working with youth [USAID, 2016]. The approach rests on the premise that youth with more developmental assets are more likely to enjoy academic success, are more civically engaged in the long term, and have greater economic prospects.



USAID, 2016

To achieve this, we organise regular engagement sessions where the youth participate in sport activities, life skills workshops, leadership development camps, and more. These serve as platforms for them to Act, Build, and Contribute – the three components of our Champions programme.



The full year of training culminates in an overseas community service trip, where the youth must plan a project for the local children and put up a performance. The trip itself is part of their training and development, and they will tell you it's by no means easy!

For example, the youth who went to Chiang Mai were living in winter conditions without hot water. On some nights, temperatures fell to below 10 degrees Celsius! They had to roll up their sleeves and work, and there were planning meetings and debriefing sessions that often ended late.

What they were challenged to do – even when they're back in Singapore – was to respond to needs in the community. These skills and mindset are the building blocks of socially responsible citizenry.

At the end of the day, if we are able to guide youth successfully through these five steps, they are likely to emerge as self-led individuals who will take the lead to invigorate and galvanise the community. It is a long and challenging journey, but definitely one that is meaningful and rewarding.



## PITFALLS & TIPS

1. Volunteer projects must be carefully curated or youth may get the wrong impression of volunteerism [e.g. cheap labour]. Make the experience meaningful by providing information and context before the event and debriefing them after.
2. Youth have interests and natural inclinations, [e.g., working with young children]. Give them more autonomy to decide how they want to give back.
3. Many programmes include a volunteer component, but few incorporate an intentional approach to sensitise youth to real needs in the community. Guide them in the process of being observant and practising empathy.





# PROFILES

## SITI NURHALIYANA BINTE MOHD KASSIM

*How giving back opened a path forward for this youth leader.*



Many children in orphanages here love to play football but do not have access to training. This was something Siti Nurhaliyana Bte Mohd Kassim, [22 years old], found out when she contacted several children's homes around the island. In response, she decided to organise training sessions for them.

This was just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit Singapore. In the end, only Pertapis Children's Home opened their doors. So Siti, together with other SportCares youth leaders she roped in, conducted a full-day session for the children.

Looking back, she is proud of the team's achievement. As chairperson, she shouldered the responsibility of contacting the homes, planning, organising, and managing the team. "Seeing that it went well was very satisfying for me," she says.

Bubbly, confident and articulate – and armed with a Higher Nitec in Service Management from ITE – Siti seems all set for a possible career in the service industry.

"But because of financial issues, I've decided to stop my studies right here and work full-time," says Siti, who comes from a family of five and is the youngest of three children. Her father is retired, and her mother had a wedding planning business that was sorely impacted by the pandemic.

“

**After years of training with SNL, I want to be the one who cares and shares my knowledge with others.**

”

So even while studying, she was working part-time at a coffee shop near her home. When her final-year internship started, she resorted to working overnight, doing Grab deliveries.

Whether working at a coffee shop or playing football with District West United Girls, her charisma and leadership qualities have not gone unnoticed.

In 2019, Siti was selected for SportCares Champions, a youth leadership training programme that presented her with the opportunity to go on a community service trip to Chiang Mai for 10 days. There, the youth planned daily activities for the local Thai children.

She was also approached to be an assistant coach for a community futsal programme at Marine Parade and has been coaching the Marine Warriors for about three years. It was a steep learning curve for her, but she is thankful that the lead coach there is developing her to be a better coach.



“The kids can be very playful, but I’m learning how to manage them and the situations better,” says Siti, who appreciates the leadership opportunities SportCares has given her in the past seven years.

“After years of training with SNL, I want to be the one who cares and shares my knowledge with others,” she says, adding that she feels drawn to pursuing a full-time career as a certified coach. “So any opportunity SportCares gives me, like attending courses, I will go and make the most of it.”

While some of her friends have moved on to other football clubs and have tried to drag her over, Siti has decided to stay in SportCares saying, “because I feel it’s not just about football skills. SportCares has really taught me about what it means to be part of a community.”



# PROFILES

## DIPNA LIM-PRASAD

*A retired national athlete shares why she still gives back.*

Dipna Lim-Prasad remembers being mind-blown when the girls she was coaching at a Girls' Home turned up for track training every week in their school shoes. They did not own running shoes.

"To me, track is a very accessible sport – you only need shoes! But I realised now how ignorant and privileged I was," she says. It was her first time committing to a one-year journey with youth-at-risk.

Unsure whether this was an issue for more youth-at-risk, Dipna did some fact-finding and research. "I wanted to understand the problem, to find the gaps and plug them," says the national hurdler and sprinter, who won four SEA Games medals before hanging up her spikes in 2018.

She also looked out for organisations that provided shoes for underprivileged kids here, with the hope of collaborating with them, but she could find none. It was at this point that she co-founded In My Shoes, a movement to provide shoes for youth-at-risk in Singapore.



Why this name? She explains, "When we first started, the shoes came from national athletes. It's like, we wore these shoes and won these medals, now they're yours. What will you do with them?"

They only opened it up to public donations upon realising they were limited by shoe sizes. "So it grew very organically – through a problem-solving approach," shares Dipna, who has also volunteered with the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) Athletes' Commission since 2013.

This journey has taught her many lessons, like being accountable to donors and requesting for donations in kind rather than cash, because the latter will require accreditation for tax deductions. There were a lot of frustrations and figuring-it-out along the way, "but I think that's how you grow!"

She also started collaborating with community partners, like schools to provide Values-in-Action opportunities for students. Students from Dunman High School jumped onboard to help clean the donated shoes, which was “a huge logistic relief because in the past, we’d be cleaning shoes after training or work till late at night!” To make the experience more meaningful for all the students, she plans to tie-up with other partners to give them opportunities to interact with the beneficiaries through sport programmes. “This exposes them to a different demographic and there’s positive role modelling for the kids too.”

Making volunteer work meaningful is important, she says. “I want them to know that their actions can have a positive impact on someone else’s life – either directly through interactions or indirectly by helping with the backend logistics. It’s about letting them stay to see the big picture.”



Dipna has been an advocate of SportCares since 2016. She was an ambassador for SportCares-partnered ‘Play Like a Girl, Break the Silence Against Family Violence’ which reached out to 130 girls from low-income families and young women from various community groups. Together with James Dalton, co-founder of In My Shoes, she has worked with SportCares and other educational institutions to provide sport shoes to those in need.

Looking back, she recalls a heart-warming moment when she was doing outreach at a run and a handful of SportCares youth scampered up to the booth, gushing, “We got our shoes from you!” – and they were running in the event.

It felt like coming full circle from the spark at the Girls’ Home. On giving back, Dipna says, “Sport has opened so many doors for me over 17 years. Even though I’ve retired as an athlete, it’s not the end. It’s just redefining my role and using the platform sport has given me to help others.”







# THE ROAD AHEAD

## EPILOGUE





**Shawn Lim**  
Director, SportCares (2021 to present)

About the third month into my time as Head of SportCares, I found myself sitting in a café with two other colleagues, chatting with a young man who had gotten himself into some trouble at work.

Beyond the small talk, our mission was to deliver an “intervention” plan that might prevent him from being dismissed by his employer. This was his first full-time job.

When we brought up the issues raised by his employer, he vehemently objected to the way [he perceived] he was being treated at work. “I don’t see why he has to treat me this way,” he argued as his voice raised.

We ended the evening giving him honest feedback and advice on how to make right with his employer.

This young man joined SportCares as a youth-at-risk and grew up in our sport programme. He had his fair share of mischief through the years, testing the boundaries from time to time.

Despite some serious transgressions, we never gave up on him, although there were times when we felt like it. We always managed to pull him back.

This story illustrates critical lessons for anyone who wants to use sport to make a difference in our community – particularly among the vulnerable groups, be it youth-at-risk or persons with disabilities.

The framework espoused in this book – and based on our experiences – comprises five components presented as a flow. However, in life, it is never a simple case of progressing smoothly from one stage to another.

And as the story above [as well as the pitfalls in the preceding chapters] illustrates, it is about never giving up on the people we are serving and trying to help.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this book. It marks a waypoint in our understanding of using sport for development. If you have thought, at any point, “this is something that I or my organisation can start doing” or “we can do better”, then the book would have served its purpose.

We have shared a road map of how SportCares does it, but if you feel you need more information, support or help, please contact us for a conversation. It is our hope to bring more like-minded partners onboard, to form a community of care that uses sport as a force for good.

The work is far from complete. Many who came before us have paved the way, and with you coming alongside us, I know we can do it.



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