

Open House

The WE Foundation's Centre for Addiction, Recovery and Education, or C.A.R.E, helps recovering addicts realise that they are not alone. TAN HWEE HWEE drops in for an inspiring visit.

The English poet John Donne famously wrote "No man is an Island, entire of itself" to convey the message that all of us are part of a larger whole. In a similar way, the WE Foundation – which devotes itself to helping recovering addicts – decided upon its name on the basis that "We" represents community. "We" suggests that an individual addict cannot recover on his own, however, a group of recovering persons can recover together. For that reason, "We" is also the first word in all its 12-step recovery programmes.

The WE Foundation's C.A.R.E. (Centre for Addiction, Recovery and Education) programme was only started in May 2005, but already, it has seen encouraging success. Executive Director Harry M Fullett remembers one addict (or 'drop-in', as patients are called) was a former gang member who had been helped by the centre. His former gang mates was so impressed by his recovery, "they said, 'You look so good, what have you done, can you help me out?' so the former gang member became a spokesperson for the WE Foundation to his former gang mates."

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Another recovering alcoholic quit his high-flying job to volunteer for the Foundation.

C.A.R.E. is unique in that it is open seven days a week for its users "Our uniqueness is that we're here all day long throughout the week and we can provide immediate intervention," says Fullett. "We don't charge anybody for our services."



In fact, C.A.R.E offers extensive aftercare services for people who have undergone detoxification and rehabilitation programmes. In addition, the Foundation's board members and C.A.R.E volunteers meet regularly over lunch, an example of how a non-profit can engage different volunteers within a organisation.

C.A.R.E is also unique in that it covers a wide range of addictions including gambling, drugs and eating disorders. Says Fullett, "One of the programmes that we started, which is tremendously unique, is what we call 'All Addictions Anonymous' in which people with all different types of addictions are welcome to join in. We have people with gambling, alcohol, drug addictions and they sit around and use the twelve-step recovery programme. In addition, they go to 'Singleness of Purpose' programmes which are like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous."

C.A.R.E. is run mainly by volunteers – there are only two full-time staff and 40 registered volunteers. "The volunteers do administrative work for us," says Fullett. "They answer the phones, they work on our website, they clean the place up, they train other volunteers to get more infor-

mation about addictions. We have programmes where we teach them about various forms of addictions and teach them how to do general counseling as well as some intervention work. Our volunteers who stay clean and sober have been our greatest testimonials as we have a lot of interest from the media to interview these people and talk about their recovery."

The advantage of having people in recovery work as volunteers in the centre is that they, in turn, become mentors to other recovering drop-ins. "If you have somebody who is six months in recovery and you have someone who comes off the street who is just struggling with getting through one day at a time, they can see and identify with this mentor who has had some success through work at the Centre," explains Fullett.

Certainly, there are many challenges in running a centre like C.A.R.E. "Addictions are still quite misunderstood in Singapore," says Fullett. "There's a moral issue in that there's still some kind of guilt associated with it and it's all got to do with guilt and shame. Like people will say, 'You've got great parents. How come you can't stay sober? You've got a great wife and your kids are beautiful. How come you can't stay clean? But when you realise that addiction is a disease, not a moral issue, when you get to the medical core of the issue that the addict is not responsible for the addiction but he is responsible for the recovery, that's when we can step in and help them recover.' ☆