A Commemoration of Samaritans of Singapore's 50th Anniversary



Listening since 1969

Acknowledgements and Image Credits

Irene Jacob

Maureen Fung

Past and present Samaritans

Editorial Research Team

Lee Yoke Yin Lynn Chiang Ryan Tan Wong Lai Chun

Designed by

Lee Xiu Mei

Listening Since 1969

A Commemoration of Samaritans of Singapore's 50th Anniversary



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Foreword

Life is full of ups and downs. At our lowest points, an adequate support system and knowing that people care, will be the difference.

Suicide is an issue that we cannot take lightly. To effectively prevent suicides, we must take an "all hands on deck" approach, with everyone playing their part and taking responsibility.

Providing greater access to help and strengthening support networks are necessary safety nets to support efforts to prevent suicides. But more crucially, we need to change societal mindsets. We need to create an open, safe and nurturing environment for individuals to talk about their emotional pain, and we must also look out for and catch potential signs of distress amongst our friends and family members. We cannot allow the stigma surrounding the topic of suicide to continue to be one of the biggest barriers to suicide prevention in Singapore.

In this regard, the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) has played a pivotal role in suicide prevention over the past 50 years, and continues to do so today – as the only suicide prevention centre in Singapore.

SOS was first set up in 1969 as a hotline service, and today, it has expanded its capabilities and offers a holistic range of services focusing on prevention, intervention and postvention – reaching out to many more at-risk individuals, as well as raising the awareness of suicides and starting more meaningful conversations on this important matter.

bV

24 hours a day, 365 days a year – the SOS team of staff and volunteers works tirelessly to lend a listening ear to everyone in distress, and provide emotional support for individuals who are on the brink of suicide. They are a lifeline for individuals in crisis, and we owe a big debt of gratitude to the SOS team for the many lives they have saved.

Having served as Patron to SOS for some time, it has been my privilege to be part of such a unique and valuable organisation. I am truly heartened by the growth and achievements of SOS, and and am also encouraged by the growing support of the wider community in supporting suicide prevention efforts.

All of us can and must do more to prevent suicides. I am confident that if we all work together, we can make a greater impact and difference, and reduce the incidents of suicide.

My heartiest congratulations to SOS on its Golden Jubilee!

I way

Lawrence Wong

Patron of Samaritans of Singapore Minister for National Development Second Minister for Finance

Patron



The year 2019 is a milestone for the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS), as we commemorate 50 years of crisis intervention, suicide prevention and postvention work.

The pioneers who started the association had a simple wish: that those in distress are able to find an avenue to share their concerns without worrying about the consequences. The stigma of suicide was strong and people who had suicidal thoughts were seen as "weak", "selfish" or "crazy". Against such a backdrop of fear rose the belief that more can be done.

On 1st December 1969, SOS began its hotline operations in a humble office at the YWCA Centre. With the telephone number 96544, we received close to 2,000 calls in the first year of operations. Today, our trained volunteers handle more than 30,000 calls with our professional team making more than 8,000 follow ups through outcalls, text messages and emails.

This half-century mark is a time of reflection. Having been at this organization for more than a decade, I feel a great sense of gratitude whenever I reflect on how far we have come: from ground zero with one phone line manned by a small group of volunteers to the range of services we offer today – supported by a professional team with the common goal of being available to those in distress. For an organization to take on such a taboo and sensitive cause, for a group finding its voice in society – we have indeed journeyed far.

by

Even as we look back at the last 50 years, we look forward to the next 50 years, constantly advancing our mission to provide emotional support in crisis intervention, suicide prevention and postvention in Singapore. There is still much to do to improve the lives of those burdened by the stressors of society.

For all those who have played a part in contributing to SOS to where it stands today, I express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation. Your contributions will always be cherished. Let us all celebrate this eventful milestone together - Happy 50th anniversary SOS!

Mah

Lee Sook Fung Chairman

Chairman

Message

It gives me a great sense of pride and gratitude to celebrate and commemorate Samaritans of Singapore's (SOS) 50th year. We are continuously encouraged by the importance and impact of our work on individual lives, especially those in crisis.

As we look back at the achievements we had, we also look forward to the next 50 years. SOS has always been a pioneer in suicide prevention work in Singapore and there is much more we can do to support those in distress. There are plans to expand the professional team and improve the organizational infrastructure, encourage suicide-related research in Singapore and further improve on our services to meet unmet demands from the community.

In a fast-paced society like Singapore, the level of stress we face is on the increase day by day.

It is my hope that SOS will continue to play an essential part in providing a listening ear and care for those who are in crisis and facing life's tribulations. However, we cannot do it alone. The onus once again lies in each and every one to fight the stigma attached to suicide.

On behalf of SOS, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to Community Chest and National Council of Social Service for their continual support of our work. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge



our dedicated leaders and colleagues, past and present, who have given nothing but their utmost to SOS. Last but not least, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our partners, friends, donors and advisors for their contribution to where we are right now.

This commemorative book, though by no means exhaustive, serves to encapsulate our journey thus far. It also provides a trip down memory lane for all who have witnessed and participated in the growth of SOS over the past 50 years. I am hopeful that this publication will give you a glimpse of our journey.

As what Mike Rowe said, "I'm looking forward to the future and feeling grateful for the past". I am confident that in the years to come, all of us at SOS can build on our foundation and soar to greater heights, hand in hand with the our partners and the community, and make a contribution to suicide prevention.

A

Gasper Tan
Chief Executive

Chief Executive

Development

over the years

SOS Logo, **Hotline Number** and Office Location

The first SOS logo.



The hotline number started with the number 96544.

The very first SOS office opened on 1 December 1969 at YWCA Centre, 254 Outram Road.

The hotline number was changed to 914444.

1976

The hotline number was changed to 2214444.

SOS moved to 110 New Bridge Road on 15 February 1976.

We moved to 18 Outram Park on 21 April 1990.

1991

The current hotline number is 1800-221 4444 since 1991.

2002

SOS moved to 10 Cantonment Close on 12 January 2002.

Revised SOS logo in 2006.



The latest logo for SOS since 2018.

13



Our / Chairman /

Mrs Margaret Jeyaretnam

1969 - 1973

Mr Michael Hwang

1973 – 1974 1977 – 1978

Mr Thai Chee Ken

1975 – 1977 1982 – 1984

Dr Tay Eng Soon

1979 – 1980

Mr Chng Beng Guan

1980 – 1982

Dr Elizabeth Nair

1984 – 1986

Mrs Irene Jacob

1986 – 1987

Dr Tan Chue Tin

1988 – 1989 1992 – 1994

Dr Kok Lee Peng

1990 – 1991

Ms Sheila Lim Siok Keng

1994 – 1996

Mr S Siranesan

1996 – 1998

Mr Tan Hye San

1998 – 2000

Mr Anthony Yeo

2000 - 2002 2004 - 2006 2008 - 2009

Ms Joyce Tan Swee Yee

2002 – 2004

Ms Jessie Quek Lee Ngoh

2006 – 2008 2013 – 2015

Mr Robert Lim Hui Beng

2009 - 2013

Ms Lim Suu Kuan

2015 - 2017

Ms Lee Sook Fung

2017 – Present

Dr Gunnar J. Teilmann

1969 – 1970 1971 – 1975

Rev. Keith Keidel

1970 - 1971

Mrs Irene Jacob

1975 – 1983

Ms Ginny Heng

1984 – 1985

Ms Ng Eng Kiok

1985 – 1988

Ms Maureen Fung

1988 – 1993

Ms Mary E K Matthew

1993 – 2006

Ms Lee Yoke Yin

2006 - 2008

Ms Christine Wong

2008 – 2018

Ms Judy Lim

2018 – 2019

Mr Gasper Tan

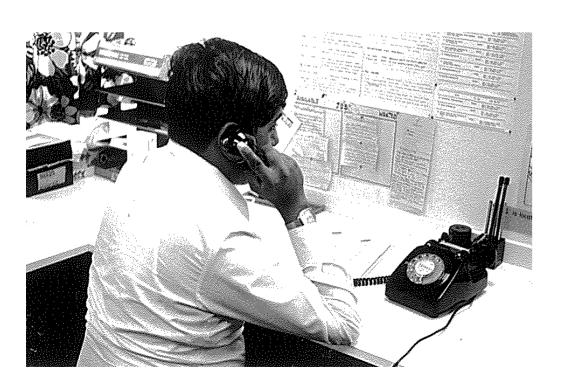
2019 - Present

Our Leaders



24-hour Hotline

In 1969, SOS was established solely as a telephone service for the despairing and suicidal. While the organization has evolved and grown over the last 5 decades, the core focus of our work has never deviated from being an available lifeline to those in crisis. Through the 24-hour Hotline, we provide an empathetic listening ear to those in crisis, thinking of or affected by suicide. The hotline is manned by a group of dedicated and trained volunteers who came from all walks of life but united by a common desire to help those who may have no one else to turn to.



In
1969
when SOS first begun, it received close to
2,000 calls

FY 2018/2019 the hotline received 30,896 calls

-

Over **1,300,000**

calls were received over the last 50 years with over

100,000

follow up calls/emails/SMSes made by professional staff.

Email Befriending

Recognizing that the new generation of communicators are more conversant and comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings via writing through an online platform, the SOS Email Befriending service was established in 2003 to supplement the traditional telephone hotline. Individuals can write in to pat@sos.org.sg for emotional support and receive a response within 48 hours, excluding weekends and public holidays.

2003when Email Befriending first started, it received1,569 emails.

FY 2018/2019
Email Befriending received
12,132 emails from
2,568 clients.



Over
63,000
emails were received over the last 16 years.



The SOS Email Befriending service project was officially launched on 6 September 2003 by our previous patron, Mr Mah Bow Tan, then Minister for National Development at our Suicide Prevention Week 2003.

Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS)

Bereavement following a suicide is usually different from bereavement following death by natural causes, both in kind and intensity, and there is much greater trauma.

Recognizing that there is a need to support those left behind by suicide, the LOSS programme was a first-of-its-kind in Singapore. LOSS is a specialized and all-rounded service adapted from the model of Baton Rogue Crisis Intervention Centre in Louisiana, USA.

Having consulted with Dr Frank Campbell, LOSS was officially launched on 1 July 2006. The LOSS programme, developed in close co-operation with the Singapore Police Force, is an active outreach service where Samaritans will attend to family members and friends bereaved by a suicide death.

Specialist Counselling

As we progressed into offering quality service for the community, SOS established its specialist counselling in 2011 for professional staff to offer long-term intervention support and help clients navigate through their suicide crises.

Since 2011.

a total of 2,554 counselling sessions

were conducted.

Since its launch,

a total of 978 activations

were made to provide immediate emotional support to those who lost a loved one to suicide.





International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day 2014



A sharing by SOS staff about LOSS programme to officers from Ang Mo Kio Police Division.

Healing Bridge

It is estimated that for every suicide death, at least 6 others are affected by the aftermath. Suicide grief is one of the most difficult bereavement crises for any family or individuals to face. For these suicide loss survivors, having the opportunity to talk about their grief and knowing that they are not alone is important in their healing process.

Healing Bridge is a suicide bereavement support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. The support group is co-facilitated by professional staff and volunteers, who are survivors themselves. Being in the presence of others who may have gone through similar experiences, members are better able to speak openly about feelings which may not be possible elsewhere and find solace from one another.

Since 2003,

a total of 277

sessions of Healing Bridge were conducted.



International Survivors of Suicide (ISOS) Loss Day, an initiative by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), is the one day a year when people affected by suicide loss gather around the world at events in their local communities for support and resources. Since 2014, SOS has been organizing an annual event in conjunction with ISOS Loss Day for its suicide survivors to come together and build a network of support.

How conversations were started

Educating the Community

Believing in the importance of upstream preventive work, SOS has been conducting talks and workshops throughout the years to increase awareness of suicide prevention and equip the community with the necessary knowledge and skills. To further enhance our outreach efforts, SOS launched Suicide Prevention Week (SPW) in 1993 where workshops and talks were conducted every day during SPW to emphasize the importance of suicide prevention. Through the collaborative efforts with partners, SOS was able to engage and carry out ongoing education through conferences, seminars and community roadshows.

Over **1,800** talks and workshops were conducted, reaching out to more than

210,000



Commemorating SOS' 20th Anniversary with a 2-day Conference titled "People in Crisis: Challenge & Response".



Address by Ms Mary Matthew at a 1-day workshop on "Establishing a Network for Hotline Services" in July 1995 that brought together professionals and volunteers from various agencies providing hotline services.



SPW 1999 focused on the elderly with the slogan "OLD: Older, Livelier, Dynamic".



SPW 2003 - "Youth@Risk" Forum

Publicity

1985



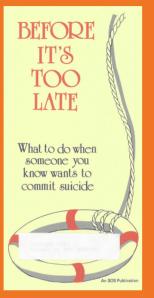
Let's Talk About Feelings

1991



Posters

1990



Before it's Too Late

1991



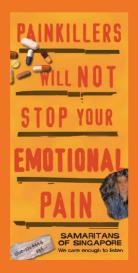
First publication of SOS Bulletin – SAMARITANS

1993



Publicity on SBS Buses

2001



Painkillers will not stop your pain

World Suicide Prevention Day

The first step to preventing suicides is to get conversations started around this stigmatized topic. Since 2015, SOS has been working closely with TBWA\ Singapore in launching nationwide campaigns with a vast focus of reaching out to the community.



2015 & 2016 – The inaugural #howru campaign started important conversations aimed at breaking the silence surrounding suicide.



Policy Spring Space A much needed message in these Springs Springs Space A much needed message in these Springs Spring

#ThroughTheNight
aimed to gather
Singaporeans from
all walks of life to
create messages of
hope to help troubled
teens to get through
their darkest hours.



2017 – "It's Time to Take Suicide Seriously, Seriously" campaign launched a series of artworks highlighting insensitive references to suicide in our daily conversations.



2019 – We built on 2018's repository of art and stories with a rebranded hope bank #HopeThroughTheNight to let troubled youths know that hope and light is always within reach.

International **Outreach**

Suicide is a serious global health concern that led to the establishment of many suicide prevention agencies around the world and there is much that we can learn from our peers and counterparts. International conferences and visits provided opportunities for staff and volunteers to listen to different points of views and sharpen our saws to see how we can better serve the community in Singapore.



1988: Staff of SOS in Association of Psychological & Educational Counsellors of Asia Conference held in Bangkok



1980: Visit from overseas Befrienders



2016: Visit from Macau Youth Community and School Counselling Service



2019: Samaritans of Thailand 40th **Anniversary International Conference** in Ayutthaya



2019: Facebook APAC Safety Summit in Bangkok, Thailand



2019: American Association of Suicidology 52nd Annual Conference in Denver

"In 2006, SOS was appointed as the first Befrienders' Worldwide (BW) regional co-ordinator in East Asia for 3 years. I had the privilege to represent SOS in the BW Steering Group. It was an eye opening experience for me to see the work of the Samaritans and Befrienders centres overseas, understand and appreciate the challenges they faced. The involvement of SOS in the BW Steering Group took us to another level as a global partner in crisis intervention and suicide prevention."

Ms Lee Yoke Yin Acting Executive Director (2006 - 2008)

Media **Mentions**





1984: Ginny Heng as new Head of Agency

Article: SOS for the

anti-suicide telephone





Free X-rays

2 Dec 1969: Samaritans' distress service off to a busy start

SOS for the antisuicide telephone service

SINGAPORE, Sun. — The Samaritans of Singapore (S.O.S.), who will be launching an anti-suicide service next month, will hold their inaugural meeting on Oct.
25 at the International Planned Parenthood Federa-tion Hall in Gilstead The head of the Outram Road General Hospital Medical Unit II. Profes-sor Khoo Oon Telk, will speak at the meeting which is open to the public at 4 p.m.

Training

The Milestones



Humble Beginnings

The meaningful cause started as a telephone help service launched in the United Kingdom in 1953 by the Rev Chad Varah, a young vicar who worked in a London parish. He launched it as a confidential emergency service for people in distress and who felt suicidal but was unable to talk to anyone about it without worrying about the consequences.

In Singapore, the Churches Counselling Centre (later renamed Counselling and Care Centre) was launched by the Methodist and Anglican Churches in 1966. In 1967, the Churches' Counselling Centre (CCC) planned to start a suicide prevention telephone service, and a Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) planning committee was formed in 1968 as a separate body from the CCC. SOS was subsequently established by the CCC and the founding director was the Rev Dr Gunnar J. Teilmann Jr, an American Methodist missionary pastor. SOS has, since 1984, been supported by Community Chest, and is a Social Service Agency (SSA) and member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

"On behalf of the Counselling and Care Centre (CCC), I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) on their 50th anniversary of service.

A sister organization and sharing the same roots from the Churches Counselling Service since its inception in Singapore in 1966, SOS has been one of the most valuable and outstanding relationships CCC has had.

As they move forward after a half-a-century-long incredible journey, SOS is at its cutting-edge for quality support and professional service in lending a listening ear and comfort to a multitude of people at crucial and vulnerable points in their lives, find meaning and value in their existence. The unsung heroes – volunteers and staff of SOS - and their indispensable service to their fellow beings around the clock, 24 hours a day, is extraordinary and heart-warming!

May SOS be blessed with good people and resources as it continues to play a significant role in enhancing mental health and protecting lives in our community. As you mark another major milestone in your unceasing pursuit of being an available lifeline to anyone in crisis, I once again congratulate you and wish you all the best for the journey ahead. Thank you, for your labour of love and care."

Ruth Chua

Executive Director

Counselling and Care Centre

1969 - 1979

1969

SOS began its hotline operations in a temporary office in Fort Canning. The telephone line number was 96544.

The line first rang at 8am on 1 December 1969. In the next 12 hours, 40 calls for help were received. A total of 384 calls were received in the first month.



SOS' inaugural meeting in 1969



One SOS call every five minutes, 1 December 1969

SOS depended solely on donations from the Singapore community to equip and maintain the service.

1970

From a temporary office in Fort Canning, the move to the first official office at YWCA Centre was on 31 January 1970. The facilities included a telephone room, 3 small interviewing rooms, a general office and a kitchen.



lst office in YWCA Centre

1971

Along with Ecumenical Community Service in Toa Payoh, SOS helped develop a new service called HELP (Help Every Lone Parent).

Samaritans visited the Opium Treatment Centre in St John's Island on 26 January. However, only those with valid vaccination certificates were allowed on to the island.

1973

Installation of second emergency line.

SOS hotline number changed from 96544 to 914444

1974

Rev Chad Varah, who founded the Samaritans in the United Kingdom in 1953, visited and spent 5 days with SOS. The local newspapers and media carried the news of his visit.

The publicity brought an almost immediate increase in the number of calls received.

A TV series "The Befrienders", produced by Rev Chad Varah, was aired on Singapore and West Malaysia stations. This series, based on the work of the London Samaritans, helped both public and volunteers understand more deeply about the work of befriending and helping persons in need.

1976

SOS moved its office from YWCA Centre to 110 New Bridge Road. The hotline number changed to 2214444.



News coverage of our relocation

1977

Installation of third emergency line

SOS started to utilize newspapers and display panels in buses for publicity.

Our then Deputy Director, Mrs Janice
Tan, represented SOS at a conference on
"Suicide and Thanatology" organized by the
Tokyo Lifeline.

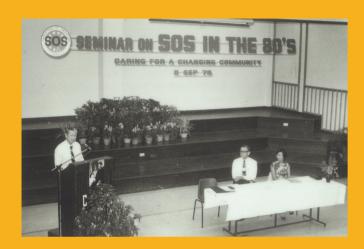
1978

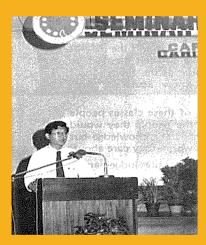
SOS became one of the six members of the newly-formed Suicide Prevention Committee

1979

OS was represented at the International congress on Suicide held in Reims, France by the International Federation of Telephonic mergency Services (IFOTES).

Organized by a group of SOS volunteers, a seminar was organized to commemorate SOS' 10th Anniversary. The seminar "SOS in the 80s – Caring for a Changing Community" brought together over a hundred participants to think about the needs of our community.





Dr Tay Eng Soon, then Chairman of SOS, at the "SOS in the 80s – Caring for a Changing Community" Seminar.

"My years here as a volunteer have given me a sense of purpose. Listening to callers has been challenging but rewarding. The experience that I've had in SOS has helped to build on my own character.

As an organization, SOS has gone through many changes. But our mission and the core values that we as Samaritans hold have not changed. There are stalwarts amongst us who have guided and trained the volunteers to be what we are.

May we continue on to better serve the community!"

Volunteer since 1985

1982

A project for adolescents commenced where a 6-week period was set aside specifically to conduct talks and trainings in schools, vocational institutions and youth groups.

SOS received an award by the United Nations Association of Singapore in recognition of the outstanding service that is provided to the community.

1983

A handbook entitled "Before It's Too Late" was published and designed to assist people-helpers in recognizing and helping those who are suicidal.

A paper by SOS was presented in May 1983 at a seminar organized by the Singapore Armed Forces' Counselling Centre.



Mr Ong Teng Cheong, stopped by SOS Office on 24 July 1983 during his tour of the Tiong Bahru Constituency.

1980 -1989

1984

SOS joined Community Chest of Singapore. As a result, time spent on fund-raising activities became minimal and focus is put on delivering quality service to clients.

A special project targeted at young adults was designed to provide a better understanding of the self and stimulate thinking in areas of values and priorities in life.

A support group consisting of women in their 20s was formed to discuss their crises and to help one another learn skills for living and coping.

1985

Encouraged by the results of the first support group in 1984, a second support group of young adults was formed.

To meet the increasing demands for a greater range of services, additional full-time and part-time staff were recruited as SOS developed a new organizational structure with complete job specifications and salary scales.

An economic recession resulted to the rise in the number of retrenched and jobless individuals calling in to seek emotional support.

The collapse of Hotel New World in March 1986 was a tragedy that moved our volunteers into putting additional time and energy into comforting the bereaved loved ones on site, at the mortuary and at families' home. A total of 9 families were attended to and followed up with.



As SOS was interested in launching a service for rape victims, volunteers were trained by Dr Colleen Ward and Mrs Fathiah Inserto on helping victims of sexual assault. The service was then crystallized as part of SOS' services.



Grieving loved ones affected by the Hotel New World collapse.

1987

SOS number was featured alongside other emergency numbers on the inside covers of telephone directories.

Consultancy services were also provided to Sarawak Women for Women Society in Kuching to help them set up their hotline service for women.

1988

The introduction of regular case conferences to enhance volunteers' competency in handling current difficult client cases. The 1st case conference on clients with marital problems were conducted by Anthony Yeo, Director of Counselling and Care Centre.

SOS Mentor System was introduced where senior volunteers will guide and provide support to new volunteers they were matched with.

1989

SOS moved to 18 Outram Park #03-21, which offered more room for operations and training.



New office space in Outram Park



Saying Goodbye to New Bridge Road Office

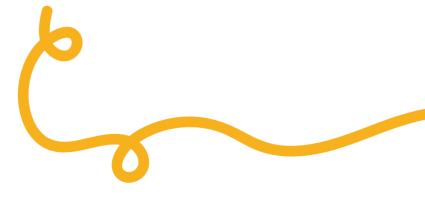


Packing New Bridge Road Office



A 2-day conference entitled "People in Crisis: Challenge & Response" was organized with Professor Robert E. Litman, an eminent US psychiatrist, providing the keynote address. A total of 273 people from the Asia-Pacific region and Singapore attended the conference.

The conference was preceded by a half-day workshop entitled "Update on Assessment and Management of Suicide".



1980 –

"Congratulations SOS on its 50th
Anniversary! It has been a privilege for me to be part of SOS' history and to work alongside staff and volunteers during my tenure there.

It is wonderful to know that over the years SOS has grown and initiated several new services to attend to the suicidal and those in crisis. Kudos to SOS for reaching out to suicide survivors too.

I wish all staff and volunteers continued fulfilment in the work they do at SOS! "

Ms Maureen Fung
SOS Executive Director (1988 - 1993)



1990

SOS pioneered a support service for victims of sexual assault due to the lack of precedence in this area in the 1990s. More than 10,000 pamphlets were distributed in schools.

An Indian Task Force was formed due to the disconcerting high numbers of suicide and attempted suicides among the Indian population. The Committee's key objective was to look into garnering support in the ethnic community to help those in need.

1991

A training seminar organized by the SOS Indian Task Force was held in March for Indian para-counsellors.

There was an increase in the number of sexual assault clients turning to SOS for help, with an increase from 69 victims of sexual assault in 1990 to 135 in 1991.

SOS started support services such as Befriending and hospital/home visits to reach out to those who need more than follow-up calls on the hotline.

Short-term support groups were also organized to support clients beyond crisis. Those who shared similar concerns were brought together to share about their struggles.

Ms Maureen Fung, Executive Director of SOS, presented at 3rd IAVE Asia Pacific Regional Volunteer Conference, Counselling and Care Centre 25th Anniversary Conference and KL Befrienders' Conference.

Due to the Telecoms' introduction of time-based charging for telephone calls, SOS applied for toll-free lines for its hotline service.

1992

A support group for battered spouses was started. Those who joined grew in confidence and self-esteem and found strength from one another in coping and handling their respective violent spouses.

In line with its suicide prevention work, SOS and NCSS jointly organized a 2-day Suicide Intervention Workshop for local helping professionals.

Professor Kok Lee Peng, SOS Consultant, presented a paper at the Silver Anniversary Conference of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) in Chicago, Illinois

SOS also conducted two Suicide
Intervention Workshops at the Association of
Psychological and Educational Counsellors
of Asia (APECA) 9th Biennial Conference
in Indonesia and a 1-day workshop on
"Counselling Strategies: Working with
Suicidal and Sexually Abused Women" at the
Women Crisis Centre (Pusat Krisis Anita) in
Penang, Malaysia.

SOS Indian Task Force conducted two workshops: "Training in Pre-marital Counselling" and "Helping Multi-Problem Families". The taskforce ended its 2-year term in September 1992 after achieving its objectives.

SOS won the Life Insurance Association (LIA) Award – an annual award to recognize the 'hidden' and untiring service which the volunteers gave to those in distress.

1993

SOS organized its first public education and outreach programme, Suicide Prevention Week, in conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day. Three talks and four workshops were organized and responses were overwhelming and encouraging.



SOS published The Wish to Die: Suicidal Behaviour in Singapore by Kok Lee Peng, Tsoi Wing-Foo, and Maureen Fung.



Dr Tay Eng Soon at the launch of the book with the Dr Kok Lee Peng and Ms Maureen Fung.

Consultative services were offered to Singapore Council of Women's Organization's (SCWO) 'Rape Study Group'. Regular meetings held with SCWO and the Police ensured that guidelines were drawn up on how to handle and help rape victims.

SOS was invited to present a paper on "Handling National Crisis" at Befrienders of Malaysia Conference in Penang and a "Stress Management Workshop" at a volunteers' retreat for Befrienders Ipoh.

A film festival was organized for its second Suicide Prevention Week. Three films that focused on relationship problems, teen suicides and suicide in general were screened. The screening was following by a panel discussion on the issues raised.

As part of 25th Anniversary celebrations, SOS invited Dr John Hipple, a consultant and trainer in the areas of suicide prevention, to do a public talk on "Listening to Grief" and a workshop "Help in Crisis".

1995

For Suicide Prevention Week, a play entitled "I have a friend' was commissioned by SOS for performance at various schools to publicize SOS' services and provide information on ways to deal with suicidal behaviour. It was scripted and performed by the Necessary Stage and sponsored by Rotary Club of Singapore. The play had 24 performances in 1995.

A support group was started for young suicide attempters to receive support from one another and learn vicariously how to cope with difficult situations.

Together with NCSS, a 1-day workshop on "Establishing a Network for Hotline Services" was conducted in July 1995. The workshop identified common problems faced by hotline services, suggested areas for improvement and stimulated discussions on the need for guidelines and standards for current and future hotlines.





Our past Executive Director, Mrs Irene Jacob

1996

Together with Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Department of Psychological Medicine, a symposium cum workshop on "Counselling the Suicidal" was organized at the department's 4th Annual Scientific Meeting.

1997

SOS introduced the 'Suicide Question' policy, where volunteers are encouraged to ask all callers if they have suicidal thoughts or plans so as to assess the level of suicide risk. As a result. SOS saw a 87% increase in the number of calls with suicide risk, where more callers are willing to voice their suicidal thoughts.

A group of SOS volunteers was sent out to attend to the bereaved relatives of the passengers who perished in the SilkAir Flight MI 185 Crash on December 1997.

A new workshop entitled "When Life Stinks", which addresses difficulties young people face, was introduced to schools. It encouraged youths to acknowledge their feelings and to find ways to cope with their problems.

One staff member was part of a panel discussion during a seminar organized by the Gerontological Society while another staff delivered a paper on "Telephone Counselling Techniques" during a seminar entitled "Teenage Suicide Prevention", organized by the Department of Psychological Medicine, National University Hospital.

Suicide Prevention Week 1997 was jointly organized with SAGE Counselling Centre where the focus shifted from teenagers to elderly at risk in response to the rise in attempted and completed suicides among the elderly.



SPW 1997

1998

Recognizing the Internet as an important tool for reaching out to the public, SOS set up a website to provide more information and for the recruitment of potential volunteers.

1999

To commemorate 1999's International Year of the Older Persons, a 12-minute short film titled "Bridging the Gap" was produced, highlighting the needs and difficulties faced by the elderly. The film was screened at the launch of Suicide Prevention Week and was followed by a panel discussion.



1990-1999

2000 -2009

2000

Held on 29 and 30 September, SOS organized a one and a half day conference titled "When Living Hurts". Dr Chee Kuan Tsee, previously the Senior Consultant and Professor of Psychiatry at Woodbridge Hospital/Institute of Mental Health, gave the keynote address "When Dying Seems Better than Living".







Our Guest of Honour for the conference, Mr Mah Bow Tan, then Minister of National Development, launched the SOS 30th Anniversary Commemorative Book, "We Hear You" at the conference.

2001

A volunteer recruitment film, produced and sponsored by Leo Burnett Pte Ltd and Prudential Assurance Company Singapore Pte Ltd, was aired on cable television and in selected cinemas.

On 9 June 2001, SOS moved the premise at Outram Park, which SOS had occupied since 1990, to Cantonment Close.



SOS office back in Outram Park



Moving to Cantonment Close

"A significant milestone for me was the 4th move to the new premise in 2001. In eager anticipation, we looked forward to the move as it signified a 'new beginning'. But we also felt a tinge of sadness because we had to say good-byes to the residents and to our favourite food.

From planning to moving, many volunteers were involved in the move. SOS hotline was disrupted for only 30 minutes when the lines were switched over from the former office to the new premise. When the first call came through, we were truly excited and thrilled. The first caller was a regular caller, and he got a hearty welcome on the phone."

Lee Yoke Yin
Senior Assistant Director, 2001

Our then patron, Mr Mah Bow Tan, officially opened the new SOS premises at 10 Cantonment Close on 12 January 2002.



On that day, SOS also celebrated Samaritans Day, and we were honoured to have then President of the Republic of Singapore, Mr S R Nathan, as our special Guest-of-Honour. President Nathan thanked and affirmed our volunteers for their selfless dedication to helping people in distress.



(Left to right) Mr Anthony Yeo, President Nathan, Mr Mah Bow Tan, and Dr Tan Chue Tin



2003

On July 2003, SOS began operations for its Email Befriending service. The service was officially launched by our patron Mr Mah Bow Tan in conjunction with Suicide Prevention Week.

SOS started its Healing Bridge programme on 16 July 2003, the first suicide bereavement support group in Singapore.

For Suicide Prevention Week 2003, SOS commissioned The Necessary Stage to dramatize the theme of resilience in difficult times. The play entitled "Staying Alive!" featured members of a family going through a challenging period, the impact the family's retrenchment had on the family and how they coped. It was staged over three evenings in September 2003 at Marine Parade Community Club.



Staying Alive! by The Necessary Stage

SOS incorporated information technology and computers into administrative and telephone operations. The change was necessary to update work procedures to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the organization.

2004

SOS expanded its community training programmes with the introduction of "Community Gatekeepers Training Workshop".

As part of our volunteer recruitment drive, SOS teamed up with David Lock and Stuart Gardiner from Samaritans Waltham Forest, UK, and participated in the Singapore Marathon. A team from SOS walked alongside David in his 15kg cake costume to celebrate SOS and Samaritans UK 35th and 50th Anniversary respectively. With encouragement from the members of the public, runners, and commentators, the SOS team completed 42.195km in 8 hours and 50 minutes.





David specially airflown this birthday cake costume from the United Kingdom.

2005

For Suicide Prevention Week 2005, Dr Frank Campbell, Executive Director of the Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Centre in the United States, conducted a series of workshops and training sessions.

2000 -

SOS was nominated as a beneficiary of the President's Star Charity Show.

On 1 July 2006, the Local Outreach to Suicide Survivor (LOSS) programme was launched island-wide after a pilot phase in 2005.

A public forum titled "A Suicide A Day -The Roles of SOS. Coroner, Police and Media after a Suicide" was held to discuss on how various parties could work together to help suicide survivors.

2007

The annual SOS Suicide Awareness Week commenced with a forum "Suicide is Everybody's Business" at York Hotel on 22 September that focused on suicide trends in Singapore, and the relationship between suicide and mental health.

On 29 September 2007, SOS organized a public forum on "Surviving and Beyond" for suicide survivors. The panellists spoke about their journey of grief and the mutual support they received at the Healing Bridge sessions.

A new workshop "Working with Survivors on Suicide Grief" is a 3-hour workshop for counsellors and social workers, with the aim of equipping them with the knowledge on suicide grief and skills for attending to suicide survivors.

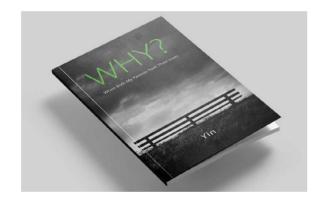
To acknowledge and recognize our volunteers, a tea reception at the Istana was hosted by President S R Nathan and Mrs Nathan on 12 May 2007 for 128 Samaritans.

2008

SOS received the Non-Profit Organization Award for Volunteer Management during the National Volunteerism & Philanthropy Awards 2008.

A generous donation of \$200,000 from Lee Foundation enabled SOS to upgrade the telephone system.

SOS published "Why? When Both My Parents Took their Lives". This was the first book in Singapore to tell the story of a suicide survivor in the local context.



At the international level, the Befrienders Worldwide Steering Group (BWSG) was set up in 2006 to network with partners all over the world. SOS was appointed the first BW regional co-ordinator in East Asia in 2008. The involvement of SOS in the BWSG took us to another level as a global partner in crisis intervention and suicide prevention

A public forum "No Goodbye...The Impact of Suicide on Survivors" was held on 13 September at York Hotel. An SOS-produced short film highlighting the reactions of different family members in the aftermath of a suicide was screened and was followed by a panel discussion.

Healing Bridge started being conducted in both English and Mandarin.

2009

The "Life's Caring Moments" photography contest and exhibition was organized by SOS to raise public awareness of suicide and to remind the community of how a moment of empathy, understanding and care can make a difference to the people around us. The community was invited to participate in this awareness campaign by sending in photographs that captured the quintessence of a caring moment. SOS received 500 entries for this contest. The winning entries as well as selected photograph submissions were showcased at VivoCity Level 1 from 7 to 13 September '09.





2010 - Present

"I congratulate Samaritans Of Singapore (SOS) on her 50th year anniversary. SOS has touched the lives of many who have sought a listening ear based on principles of empathy and sensitivity in a non-judgemental way.

SOS expanded the hotline service to being a prevention, intervention and postvention centre during the last 10 years to fill the gaps in service. I thank the dedicated professional staff who worked with the passion and heart of service to those facing a crisis, thinking of suicide and suicide survivors.

My hope is that the half century work of providing such an important service will continue even in the midst of evolving challenges in the future. Suicide prevention requires not only just trained professionals but individuals in the community with the heart to care and look out for one another."

Christine Wong

SOS Executive Director (2008 - 2018)

2010

SOS organized a 2-day conference in conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day in celebration of her 40th anniversary. Professor Graham Martin, National advisor on suicide prevention to the Australian Government, was presided as the keynote speaker.

On 18 September, SOS held its 4th run of the "Surviving and Beyond" closed-door forum, organized exclusively for suicide survivors. Three survivors (who were involved in the Healing Bridge support group as group facilitators) formed the panel of speakers at the forum. They shared their personal grief journey with the participants, all of whom had experienced losing their loved ones through suicide. The forum was held in two sessions – English and Mandarin, which were conducted concurrently.

SOS did a revamp of its corporate website and collaterals in order to enhance its communication and outreach to the general public. The revamped website saw an improvement in its navigation, with more information on suicide prevention and postvention being included on the site. Information on SOS and its services were also more prominently displayed, as compared to the previous website.

2011

SOS expanded professional counselling service to meet growing demands.

A new training programme, called "Youth Support Youth (YSY)", was developed in collaboration with the Health Promotion Board (HPB), the Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT), and Silver Ribbon (Singapore).

Open to students from educational institutions or youth leaders from community organizations, the YSY Programme offers synergized training in the area of mental health to youths between 17 and 25 years old. Participants learned to identify early warning signs and encourage help-seeking behaviours, de-stigmatise mental health and promote early treatment, develop peer support skills and establish a supportive environment for themselves and their peers. SOS conducted a four-hour component within this 3-day workshop.

SOS acceded to the Public Utility Board's (PUB) request to install signs at Bedok Reservoir displaying the SOS hotline.



SOS was invited by Mr Chua Seng Lee to contribute in his book 'My Voice: Overcoming Journey of Hope', which sheds some light on the real-life experiences of people living with depression. The chapter 'Let's Give Hope' featured the author's visit to the SOS office at Cantonment Close and recalls his conversation with the Executive Director, Ms Christine Wong. It also dedicates a section to Healing Bridge, SOS's support group for suicide survivors.

SOS produced and launched a 2-minute video on YouTube, featuring the re-enactment of two volunteers handling calls on the SOS hotline.

2012

In collaboration with Google, SOS has expanded its efforts online. When an individual runs a search for suicide-related topics on Google, the SOS hotline number will appear at the top of Google search results.

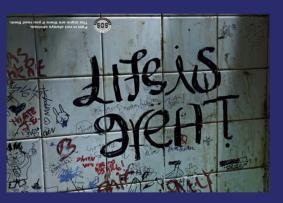
SOS in partnership with StarHub and its creative agency DDB Group Singapore on a brand new technological initiative called Donate-A-Tone. StarHub mobile subscribers could choose to change their connecting tone to up to three tones bearing a message from SOS. Connecting tones are the sounds, either tones or music, that a caller hears when he or she places a call. This is one of the three tones designed for SOS:

"The person you are calling wants you to hear this important message. The Samaritans of Singapore needs volunteers and donations. Help spread their message at donateatone.sg".

2013

SOS published "Letters to Aly: Surviving my BFF's Suicide" in conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day. This was the first time a local teenage suicide survivor shared the wound of losing her best friend to suicide in a book.





'Hidden Pain' campaign

In conjunction with World Suicide Prevention Day 2013, SOS launched the "Hidden Pain" campaign in partnership with Publicis Singapore. Through the use of three ambigrams, SOS sought to raise awareness that the signs of pain are ever present if one cared to read them and to encourage the public to look out for one another.

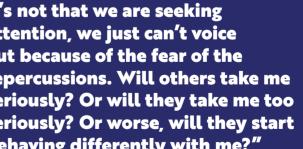


An exhibition was held at VivoCity from 10 to 16 September where letters written by preteens and youths aged between 10 and 30 were shared with the public on their hidden struggles and how they had been coping. To inaugurate the exhibition, a special private event was organized where SOS Patron, Mr Lawrence Wong, was present to launch the book Letters to Aly: Surviving my BFF's Suicide.

> "It's not that we don't need help, it's not that we are seeking attention, we just can't voice out because of the fear of the repercussions. Will others take me seriously? Or will they take me too seriously? Or worse, will they start behaving differently with me?"

Becky

An extract from one of the letter submissions to the "Hidden Pain" exhibition.



SOS was selected to be a part of the Care and Share Movement. Through this fund-raising initiative, the government matched dollar-fordollar every donation made from December 2013 to March 2016.

On 25 June 2013, SOS staff presented at the "7th International Conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health" held in Los Angeles, California, USA. The conference was organized by the University of Southern California School of Social Work and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. The title of SOS's presentation was 'Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention in an Asian Society - The Singapore Experience'.

2014

SOS was transferred from the National Council of Social Service's Children, Youth & Family Service department to the newly set-up Mental Health department. NCSS now describes SOS as an organization focusing on suicide intervention and management.

The Singapore Association for Social Workers (SASW) and Singapore Association for Counsellors (SAC) recognized 3 professional training programmes by SOS as continuing professional education (CPE) courses. As of June 2014, the Suicide Intervention Skills Workshop (SISW), Suicide Postvention Skills Workshop (SPSW) and Clinical Skills in Suicide Work (CSSW) were accepted for the renewal of accreditation and membership status at 1 CPE credit per hour.

SOS organized its first International Survivors of Suicide (ISOS) LOSS day event for suicide survivors.

To further strengthen its evidence-based practice, SOS set up its own research arm to look into ways to help suicide prevention.

SOS embarked on an island-wide outreach project to raise awareness of the warning signs of suicide and to encourage young people to reach out for help when they have difficulties coping. Over 203,000 postcards were distributed to various educational institutions. The postcards showed an award winning ambigram. Two other ambigrams were produced as part of our 'Hidden Pain' campaign in 2013.

SOS revamped its website to enhance user experience and to provide more information to the public. The new website included features such as a guiz, enhanced enguiry and feedback forms, a news feed, and a subscription option for the public to receive regular updates from SOS.

SOS was invited to speak at the South Asia Regional Training Workshop in October 2014. The event was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and organized by the Sri Lanka Sumithrayo to commemorate their 40 years of service. SOS shared about its work in Singapore, with a particular focus on its postvention work. Apart from SOS, other invited speakers included Samaritans UK, Befrienders Serbia, and Befrienders India. The conference was attended by about 90 Befrienders from different parts of Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh.

SOS also presented on its work in suicide prevention to a group of 20 delegates from various organizations in Hong Kong. The study tour was organized by the Hong Kong Social Workers Association and the Singapore Association of Social Workers.

2015

SOS launched its first online digital campaign, #howru, to spread its message for World Suicide Prevention Day 2015. The campaign generated close to 4.5 million online impressions in Singapore over eight days. #howru became a top trending topic on Twitter during the campaign period.

Local celebrities and influencers showed their support and even former President S R Nathan took part by fronting our print advertisement in the TODAY papers. We also created a digital plaster for members of public to upload to their social media avatars. 50,000 plasters were distributed at various locations in Singapore on 10 September 2015.

SOS had the pleasure of receiving Director Chu Kai-Yu of Taipei Lifeline Association in February 2016. Director Chu has helmed the Taipei Lifeline Assocation for over 12 years and both organizations have shared a similar history — allowed an exchange of knowledge and best practices between the respective leaders.

SOS was named as one of five key beneficiaries by local marathon runners, Ong Yu Phing and Ong Sze Boon, as they raised funds through the 'Run With Your Heart' campaign by participating in the World Marathon Challenge and North Pole Marathon.

The World Marathon Challenge is the only event in which athletes run seven marathons in seven continents over seven days.

SOS was also appointed as the adopted charity for Sir Stamford Raffles Lodge (SSRL) for one year. Through regular fundraising events conducted within the Lodge, SSRL will continue to support our cause through to September 2016.



2010 -

SOS and the Next Age Institute (NAI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) formalized the Project on Suicide in Singapore. This research project aims for greater understanding of the underlying causes of suicide in the local context and represents the first local research on suicide in over a decade.

From its success in 2015, the #howru campaign continued into its second year. Continuing efforts from the previous year, SOS expanded its reach by involving more partners in the community and doubling up on outreach platforms. Patron of SOS, Mr Lawrence Wong, along with local celebrities and other influencers pledged their support for the campaign. Out-of-home placements popped up at selected bus stops and more than 80,000 physical plasters were distributed at various locations across the island.

SOS was also invited to present at a 3-day regional seminar on suicide prevention strategies from 7 to 10 July 2016, held in Thailand, and organized by the Khon Kaen Psychiatric Hospital for over 50 mental health professionals.

The V.Sellapan Family Fund was set up through the generous donation of \$150,000 by the family of the late President S R Nathan. Contributions to this fund will go towards spreading awareness on suicide prevention and encourage those at risk of suicide to seek the support they need.



2017

In collaboration with the NAI at the National University of Singapore (NUS), SOS completed its first research paper titled Dying in a Foreign Land — A Study of Completed Suicides Among Non-residents in 2011 – 2014 in Singapore. Data from the Coroner's Court was collated for the paper, which is currently being reviewed for publication by an international journal.

For World Suicide Prevention Day 2017, SOS released a video featuring the perspectives of suicide attempters and suicide survivors, and a series of artworks highlighting insensitive references to suicide in daily conversation. Titled "Time To Take Suicide Seriously, Seriously", the campaign focused on encouraging the community to be aware of the flippant phrases we use that may undermine the feelings of those who may be suicidal.



2018

SOS rebranded its corporate identity with a new logo and revamped website which includes useful information and content plus a blog section.



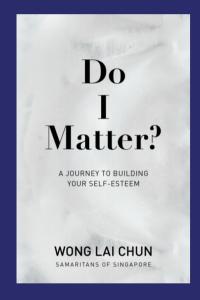
The official SOS logo launch was held on 6 February at the Lifelong Learning Institute. SOS took this opportunity to express our appreciation to all partners for their support. #ThroughTheNight was a campaign launched in conjunction with National Suicide
Prevention Week 2018 that aimed at gathering Singaporeans from different walks of life to create messages of hope for those that need a little support or comfort. Even when the world around them is asleep; we created a hope repository on social media, with the aim to bring hope and inspiration to troubled youths in the dark, late hours of the night from 12am to 3am.

A first of its kind collaboration between SOS and The Mindful Company, "How are you today?" aims to encourage life-changing conversations and raise awareness about the importance of checking in with the people around us. The collection consisted four bracelets, each featuring a pendant with the words "How are you today?" crafted into a delicate circle.



Through our collaboration with Twitter, a notification service called #thereishelp was launched in Singapore that aims to encourage users to reach out for help should they be searching for suicide-related content on their platform.

To commemorate 50 years of service, SOS published "Do I Matter? A Journey to Building Your Self-Esteem" written by our Senior Assistant Director, Ms Wong Lai Chun.



SOS was awarded the Singapore Prestige Brand Award (SPBA) - Special Merit. This Award Category honours government agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

In partnership with Blue3Asia Pte Ltd, SOS embarked on a 45-minute film project about teenage suicide titled "Another Day with Tim".

SOS also hosted a private film screening at EagleWings Cinematics at King Albert Park Mall in conjunction with World Mental Health Day 2019.



Our patron, Mr Lawrence Wong, giving an opening speech at our 50th Anniversary Conference.

SOS organized her 50th anniversary conference titled 'Unifying Communities; Strengthening Hope' in conjunction with suicide prevention awareness month in September. This conference saw more than 300 local and foreign delegates discuss matters related to suicide and its prevention. The conference, themed 'Suicide prevention - A collaborative effort' served as a platform to foster inter-agency partnerships toward a common goal of preventing suicides.

At this conference, multifaceted topics related to suicide prevention including that of safety policy on social media, workplace mental health, challenges faced by minority groups were discussed.



SOS once again partnered with The Mindful Company and Stroke Support Station (S3) to launch a limited edition charity bracelet collection in support of World Mental Health Day. Four bracelets were designed to represent the themes that are synonymous with SOS and S3. They are Cactus (Resilience), Hug (Friendship), Seashell (a celebration of an individual's uniqueness), and Shooting Star (Hope).



32 local cafes and establishments showed their support for 2019's World Suicide Prevention Day campaign, #HopeThroughTheNight, allowing the campaign to expand its reach to 1.7 million unique users during Suicide Prevention Week. The SOS website also experienced a spike of 16,000 site visits during the campaign period.

"Maybe after 200 years we won't be needed. But for as long as we are, we know that our befriending is preventing suicide. We also know that amongst the lives we have saved from being wasted are our own."

Rev Chad Varad, 1980 **Founder of Samaritans**



60

2010 -