

*This is a testimony of a beneficiary of Agape's program that we work for the last few years. A "regular" in the prison circle where that was his first home... Today he has been given a entry into the Singapore University Of Social Science (SUSS) to do a degree... How can this be possible... Read his own testimony below....*

I was first incarcerated when I was 12 years old in 1995 for a string of offenses, minor felonies like breaking and entering, and vandalism. I was sent to a Home for young offenders and this was where my future started to take shape.

My mother passed away when I was there, my dad left me and my mum when I was too young to remember, and given I had no siblings, it was during this formative period that I suddenly felt confused about life and truly alone. From here I was sent to the Reformative Training Centre (RTC) for rioting within the Institution. After my mum's passing, I began to lash out at everything as I struggled to come to terms with what was happening to me.

When I came out from RTC, I went to look for one of my relatives, but except for one of my uncles who was in Prison, the rest of them avoided me as they had kids of their own and probably felt, justifiably, that I will be a negative influence to their children. Having nowhere and no one to turn to, I joined a gang and devoted all my time, anger, and purpose to criminal activities. I was released in 1998 and went in again in Feb 1999 for fraudulently possessing stolen property for the purpose of racketeering. I came out the same year in May and went in back again in Dec for drug-related and gang-related offences. I now have graduated to be a full blown Criminal in its highest level. By now I was 17 years old and was sent to the old Changi Prison to serve my sentence.

There, I was involved in another gang-related riot and was caned 12 times for my involvement. All this just hardened me even further. I came out in 2001 May and in 2001 Nov, went in again, I was 19, for drug trafficking. My sentence was 9 years and 5 strokes of the cane.

I had no visits and served my sentence in relative obscurity from what was happening outside. During this period, I thought to myself that if anything should happen to me, no one would even know or care. Loneliness was eating me from the inside, slowly threatening to consume my rationality. Books saved my life and my sanity. I discovered a love for reading and from there, it evolved to wanting to understand myself and why I act and react, the way I do.

I left school when I was in Primary 2 but decided to take up studies in Prison. Slowly I made my way up the ladder throughout that incarceration and finished my O levels, completing the journey from Secondary 1 to 5, in 2 1/2 years.

It was a struggle, all the academic concepts were alien to me, but I was determined, even though I still had no clear idea what I wanted to do in life but what I knew was I cannot fail, must not fail. I was released in 2007 and went to a local Polytechnic to take up a course in Hospitality and Hotel Management but soon found I had made a mistake in choosing to pursue it full-time as I had no support and was still living with friends from my past life.

It was when I had to make payment for my fees and the fear of being thrown out if I did not pay I started to panic and decided to sell drugs again. I thought a few months was all I needed to earn the amount necessary to support me during the 3 years of school but the law was quicker. I was caught for a second trafficking offense and sentenced to 7 years and 8 strokes of the cane

It was during this period I met one of my maternal aunts and she started to visit me when I was in Prison. I was released in 2014 and was caught again in 2015 for drug consumption. This imprisonment was for 8 years and 6 strokes of the cane.

It was during this sentence that something inside my head sparked to life. I looked back at what I had achieved and found nothing I could be proud of. I thought of my mum and if she was alive how she would have felt.

I did all those things because I kept telling myself no one gave a s\*\*\* about me whether I lived or died and nothing I did will make a difference because the only person I cared, loved and who mattered the most to me was no longer with me. The spark that started to take shape started to tell me a different story.

I also reflected long on how my life could have been different if there had been someone who believed in me when I was younger, who could have seen the human potential in me.

### **My first stint with Agape was in 2016 In prison.**

All this while I had no real experience with work-life as my life was an endless series of criminal activities. Agape made me realize that I could do an honest days' work and actually excel in it. For the period I was there from 2016 to 2017, I was constantly the best agent for the Starhub campaign.

Anil had so much trust in my ability that he took me off Starhub's residential campaign and gave me his vote to do its B2B project. Agape allowed me to do it the way I thought fit, providing me with only the guidelines. This was where I discovered many things about myself and my ability. Projects after projects came my way and all of them were a success.

This trust is not easy to come by and Anil gave it to us because he himself went through it the hard way and had belief in us and our potential. I left Agape in 2017 to pursue my A-Levels and this time, I was very clear in what I wanted in life. I did not have much time and opted to complete my studies in 10 months, passing all 4 subjects I took.

I was then offered by Prison School to do a diploma in International Supply Chain Management offered by Ngee Ann poly and completed 9 modules, earning a certification with a GPA of 4.0. When I was released, conditionally, in Aug 2019, I knew without a doubt where I wanted to work and what I wanted to do.

I approached Agape and have been here since. I applied to study Law and Social Work and was offered interviews for both but chose Social Work instead. I could go on and on why Social Work over the more prestigious Law program but would only say one thing: Believe.

If someone had believed in me, had seen the promise we all have as humans, never gave up on me, things would well have been different.

But my past has made me who I am and molded me in the way I see the future, and one thing I want to do is to believe in others who are struggling, who are confused and sense worthlessness in everything.

If Anil and Agape have managed to touch so many lives and transform them, I would like to follow and do the same too.

Thank you.