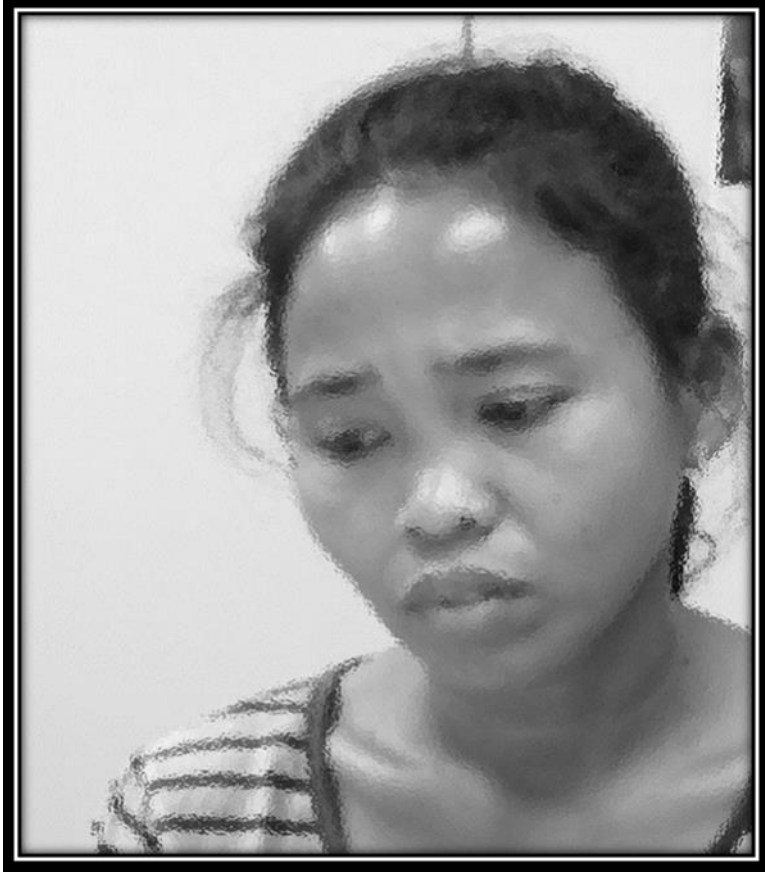
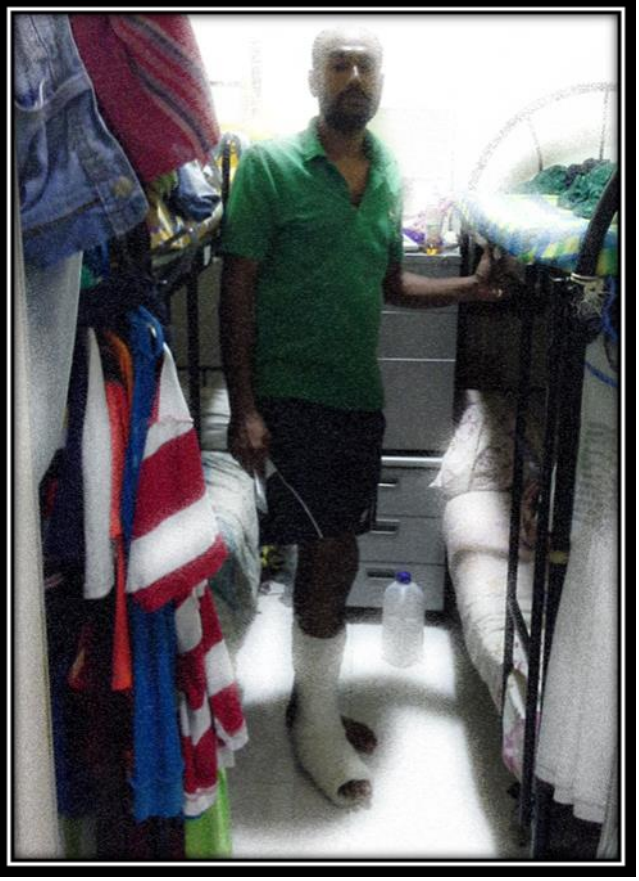
TWC2

transient workers count too

Direct Services Report





Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)
Direct Services Report 2014

TWC2 offers a range of assistance to migrant workers in need of help, including free daily meals for the destitute, help to obtain treatment for medical emergencies, guidance to reclaim owed salaries and rescue from abusive employers. Besides recording the scale of these direct services rendered in 2014, this report provides indications of the complaints and issues raised by migrant workers in Singapore. It summarizes the resources that the organization is able to deploy and identifies future needs.

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)

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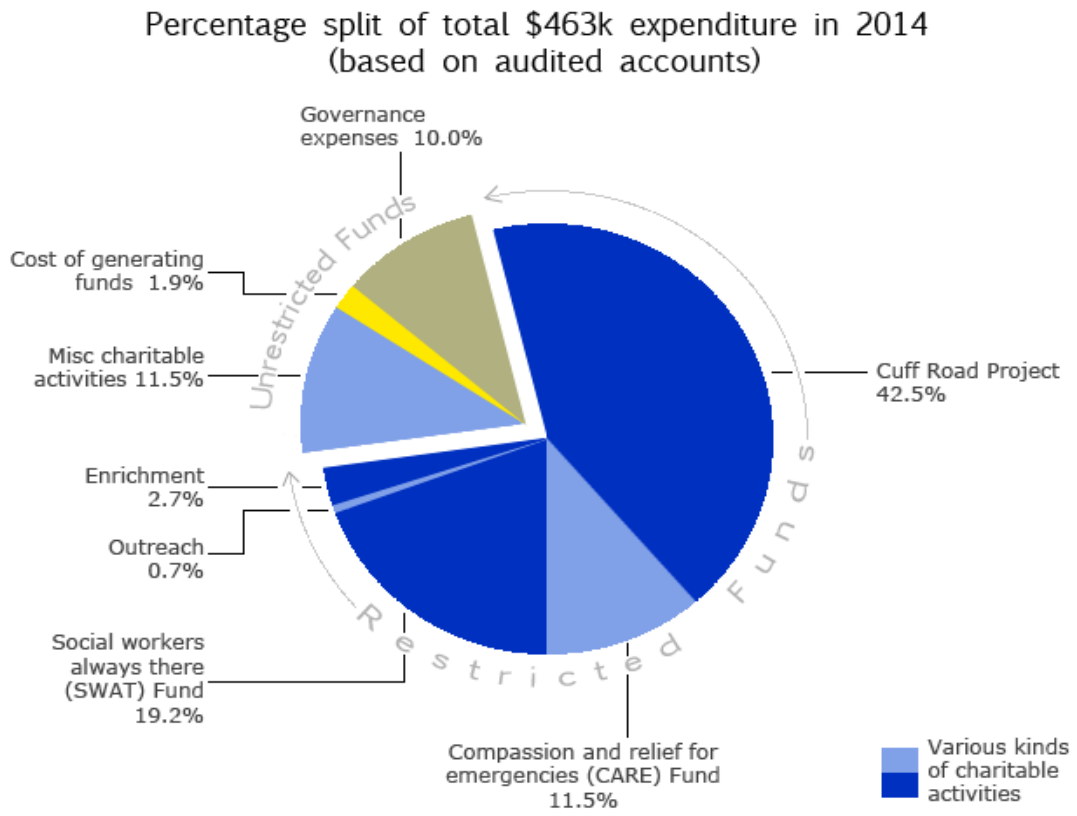
Contents

Mr Ng Kai Zhuan (second from left), manager of JessLlee Shoes Pte Ltd poses with TWC2 President Russell Heng and workers during TWC2's Half A Million Meal Celebration. The company donated shoes for many men on the occasion.



TWC2 spending in 2014 by categories:

Of the $463,000 expended in 2014, we spent only 11.9% on administration.

By contrast, 88.1% of our spending from the restricted funds was on various forms of direct services.

Introduction

On 28th April 2014, TWC2 marked the 500,000th meal served at 'The Cuff Road Project (TCRP) since the project started in March 2008. This was a major landmark in our tenth year of existence as a society. TWC2 became a registered society and charity in 2004, we have remained true to our goal of working for the rights and well-being of migrant workers through advocacy, research, public education and direct services. Vitally important as the other activities are, it is direct services that have taken up most of TWC2's working time and efforts as a society.

In 2014, TWC2 directly assisted a total of at least 2939 workers. This total includes 495 workers we were already assisting at the beginning of the year and 2444 who came to us for the first time in 2014. Thanks to the efforts of the many volunteers who came forward to take part in our work, we were able to achieve this on a relatively small budget and with only three full-time and one part- time staff members in all.

We are grateful to our volunteers, and to the generous donors who provided us with the means to pay our way and to sustain the range of services that the society provides.

Our 2014 report provides an overview of our direct services work in the past year, giving particular attention to new trends and changes as compared to previous years. Our last two reports

(2012 and 2013) are available on our website.

Direct Services

Direct Services is the name TWC2 gives to the practical assistance we provide to migrant workers who turn to us for help.

These services are:

- The Cuff Road Project which serves free meals six days a week to destitute workers waiting for the resolution of salary and workmen's compensation claims.
- Toll-free helpline for migrant workers and members of the public (Tel: 1800-888- 1515).
- Intervention and case management, to ensure that workers have their problems addressed by the relevant authorities.
- Emergency and compassionate assistance for needy cases.
- A range of legal advice and assistance.
- Enrichment programmes offering a selection of Sunday courses for domestic workers.
- Emergency shelter for both male and female workers.
- Road to Recovery (R2R), providing assistance to help workers on their hospital visits.

It should be noted that the figures provided in the report do not reflect the full extent of our direct services work. Our records generally do not catch details such as the provision of basic advice and information by our social workers and volunteers in response to many requests. Volunteer assistance to workers, in particular, is under-recorded. Nor do our figures give a full sense of how much effort can go into assisting individual workers. While most requests for assistance may not take much time or effort individually, there are a lot of them, and a minority can take a great deal of attention and effort over days, weeks or even months.

Of course, our statistics take no account of the benefits deriving from our advocacy and research work, which stand to better the position of tens or even hundreds of thousands of migrant workers.

With the launch of The Cuff Road Project in March 2008, TWC2 gained a ready point of contact with a large number of male South Asian workers. Thus, the great majority of workers we assist are men.

Still, our work with domestic workers continues and grows, after something of a dip in 2009. A key part of it remains advocacy for a weekly day off for all domestic workers, which is still not a reality, in spite of the introduction of a mandatory day off as of 1st January, 2013. This policy has now been in place for over two years, and all contracts, whether new or renewed, should now contain a clause recognizing domestic workers' right to a weekly day off. Yet, to the best

of our knowledge, a substantial proportion of domestic workers still do not receive any days off at all during their employment in Singapore, while many others only have one day off each month.

In April 2014 the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) released the results of a survey of 2000 domestic workers who started working in Singapore during the previous year. That survey indicated that 39 percent had no days off, while 37 per cent had a weekly day off. As we have argued many times in the past, weekly days off ought to be a right enjoyed by all workers. Besides providing a much needed chance to relax and meet friends, a day off can allow those facing problems to seek advice and help – precisely what some 'no day off' employers seem to want to prevent. A weekly day off can be a protection against abusive behavior; it would both enable more domestic workers to seek assistance in asserting their rights and make it less likely that they will need to do so.

The Indonesian Family Network (IFN) and the Filipino Family Network (FFN) operate as informal groups of domestic workers that serve as good contact points for fellow workers. We have maintained a strong level of cooperation with these two groups over the past year. Other Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers regularly approach the IFN and FFM for advice and assistance as they speak the same languages and through their own experience, they are familiar with the issues fellow workers raise. Occasionally, with problems that need professional assistance, the networks refer cases to TWC2's social workers.

In our 2013 Direct Services Report, we mentioned that our lack of a shelter hampered our efforts to assist domestic workers. Shelter was our highest priority in expanding our capabilities. In 2014, we were able to pilot a home-based shelter programme for domestic workers whose circumstances required them to leave their employers. This has allowed us to follow through with domestic workers who appeal to us for urgent help, and in a small way overcome this problem of providing shelter.

Organization

Our Direct Services subcommittee oversees this sector of TWC2's work. It provides a forum for discussing cases and monitoring their progress. It also advises on the management of case work.

The Direct Services subcommittee reports to TWC2's Executive Committee, sometimes making proposals or raising issues for discussion. These include points to raise with the Ministry of Manpower or other appropriate official bodies, as well as matters of broader advocacy work. The subcommittee also asks the Executive Committee to decide on matters that fall beyond its scope, such as ones that might warrant a change in policy or extra expenditure.

Heavily reliant on volunteers to sustain our programmes, we publicize the society's needs through a Facebook page, our website, a weekly members' bulletin, our bi-monthly newsletter,

and other channels. We hold a monthly gathering for potential volunteers called Heartbeat, which introduces our volunteer work to about 20 people at each session. Our new volunteers usually learn basic skills mainly by partnering with long-term volunteers. For this reason, we prefer to have volunteers who are able to make a long-term and regular commitment. At this stage in TWC2's development, we find that our volunteer needs are increasingly for people with specific skills

Project Details

The Cuff Road Project (TCRP)

The Cuff Road Project was launched in March 2008. It served a total of 91,031 meals in 2014, as compared to 105,544 meals in 2013. As of the end of December 2014, this brought the total number of meals served to date to 558,751. 2055 workers registered with the project in the course of 2014. As noted in the Direct Services Report in 2013, TWC2 eliminated lunches on Sundays (when workers are most likely to meet friends and find other sources of food). This small cutback helped us to secure the support needed to sustain TCRP for a further year.

The project continued to provide breakfast and dinner on weekdays, as well as lunch on Saturdays. As in previous years, the number of workers coming for dinner tended to be nearly twice that of those coming for breakfast.

Casework & Helpline

Casework is handled by our social workers and several volunteer caseworkers. When workers approach TWC2 with a problem, an initial assessment is made and action options considered, including alternative channels for seeking help. Following this information and referral step, an intervention may then be undertaken on behalf of a worker, such as accompanying the worker to hospital or police station, providing financial assistance for medical or dental work, or registering the worker in our free meal programme. Case management requires the most far-reaching commitment from our staff. It is undertaken if the worker needs extended assistance, usually resulting from complex issues or having to deal with very stubborn employers.

In 2014, our social workers handled 646 cases as well as 440 calls for assistance on our helpline. The total of 1086 compares with 825 in 2013 – a marked increase.

Our number of helpline calls, from at least 440 individuals, was significantly up in recent years: (376 in 2013, 268 in 2012, 221 in 2011 and 111 in 2010). Much of this increase resulted from our outreach work. 95 of our helpline callers were women, meaning that the majority of women who contacted TWC2 for assistance did so through the helpline.

CAREFund

Our CAREFund (Compassion and Relief for Emergencies Fund) is used when a worker is unable to obtain support in an emergency from his or her employer. Ill or injured workers may be

unable to access medical treatment because the employer failed to buy insurance, declared bankruptcy, or refused responsibility for workers injured outside of work. Although the employer may still have a legal responsibility to provide for the worker's wellbeing, in practice, it can be difficult to enforce such provisions.

We always try to ensure that employers meet their legal obligations to pay for necessary and urgent medical treatment, but we will provide payment rather than leave a worker to suffer if the employer is reluctant or slow in paying.

We disbursed a total of $47,247 from the CAREFund. It was spent as follows:

Project Title	Cost ($)
CareFund	
Medical & Dental	$15,781
Miscellaneous (food, accommodation, clothing, etc)	$3,389
Project Roof (Shelter for Men)	$4,350
FareGo (EZlink Cards)	$23,727
Total	$47,247

Our provision of EZLink cards came about because access to public transportation is essential to workers with no income. These workers need to keep appointments with doctors, the MOM, caseworkers, potential employers, and to come to TCRP for food. Because of limited funds, EZLink cards are given after considering the worker's individual situation and carefully recording his particular.

Outreach

In October 2013, a general outreach programme was launched. On the third Sunday of each month, a team would go to a different area of the country with leaflets in eleven different languages from Mandarin to Sinhalese, distributing them to workers. In 2014, our outreach efforts covered most areas where migrant workers congregate on their off days, including 'Bangla Square' in Little India and Lucky Plaza in Orchard Road, as well as more outlying places.

Trafficking Research/Issues

We have worked on the issue of trafficking since 2006. Our focus has been on advocacy, but we have also assisted a number of workers who we believed to have been trafficked. To date, the statistics in our annual reports have not reflected this. In many cases, workers came to us seeking help with pay issues or other problems, and that is what our statistics reflect: the main

reason for which they approached us. Sometimes, we have dealt directly with trafficking cases as such, but generally not through our social workers, so those cases are not captured in the figures compiled by the social workers or by TCRP. In 2014, we investigated one case in which trafficking was suspected. It involved a male worker and was inconclusive.

In March 2015 a new case recording system was introduced, and we hope this will enable us to record trafficking cases systematically for future reports.

Profile for Complaints and Enquiries 2014

Workers Assisted	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Female Workers	266	56	70	102	143	124	176
Male Workers	118	2386	2117	2018	2686	2631	2268
Total Workers	384	2442	2187	2120	2829	2755	2440
Unrecorded Gender	61	67	29	46	47	43	4
Total Workers Assisted	445	2509	2216	2166	2876	2755	2444

Numbers of workers assisted 2008-2014. Workers already being assisted at the start of each year are counted in the previous year's total only. Cumulative total since 2007: 16,112 workers assisted.

****In our 2013 and 2014 figures, we reassigned workers assisted as a result of calls made by 'others' to the totals for workers assisted, as far as possible: four could not be in 2015.***

The total number of workers turning to TWC2 for assistance was lower as compared to 2013. The number of female workers assisted rose by nearly 40% . It should be noted that most of the calls from 'others' came from Singaporeans or others seeking to assist domestic workers.

Most of the women we assisted were domestic workers, apart from 17 Chinese women employed on skilled passes in restaurant and shops. The number of Myanmar domestic workers approaching TWC2 remained low at 8. For the first time, we assisted Vietnamese workers, who were not domestic workers.

Issues

The main points to note in the table for male workers assisted is the decrease in the number of Indian and Chinese workers and the increase in the numbers of Bangladeshi workers. While we have no explanation for the drop in Indian worker numbers, we believe the decline in Chinese workers may be due in part to the availability of other charity/service/welfare/assistance organisations in the Geylang area.

Another reason for the decline in the number of Chinese workers could be because in recent years we conducted outreach events specifically for Chinese workers, and in 2014 we revamped our outreach effort to cater largely to non-Mandarin speaking migrant workers.

The rise in Bangladeshi numbers seems to be in line with the trend over previous years.

SW Case Work by Case Category, 2014.

Category	Case Work			Helpline		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Medical (Work Accident)	190	1	191	70	0	70
Medical (Non-Work Accident)	24	0	24	20	20	40
Salary	272	18	290	100	23	123
Runaway	0	21	21	0	30	30
Repatriation Matter	45	3	48	20	8	28
Resignation	30	7	37	10	3	13
Work Permit	8	0	8	0	0	0
Dispute with Employer	46	15	61	10	7	17
Dispute with Agent	13	7	20	0	4	4
Lawyer Discharge	8	0	8	1	0	1
Transfer Matter	57	14	71	14	0	14
Illegal Deployment	17	4	21	23	0	23
Abuse	11	6	17	28	0	28
Blacklisted	9	0	9	21	0	21
False Declaration	6	0	6	15	0	15
Change of Employer	92	2	94	8	0	8
Miscellaneous	190	14	204	5	0	5
Total	1018	112	1130	345	95	440

Female workers assisted, by nationality: 2011-2014

Female Workers	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cambodia	0	0	0	6
Philippines	43	61	50	85
China	17	39	21	17
Indonesia	39	36	16	42
Myanmar	1	3	4	8
India	0	1	2	7
Malaysia	0	0	0	5
Singapore	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	2	0
Vietnam	0	0	0	2
USA	0	1	0	0
Unknown	2	2	0	4
Total	102	143	95	176

Male workers assisted, by nationality: 2011-2014

****This includes a few Sri Lankan workers.***

Male Workers	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bangladesh	1427	1990	2047	1722
India	554	616	440*	343
China	42	214	341	172
Sri Lanka	48	1	0	2
Malaysia	0	1	6	7
Myanmar	0	1	6	6
Philippines	0	0	7	10
Singapore	0	1	0	0
Taiwanese	0	0	0	6
Thailand	2	0	0	0
Unknown	0	3	0	0
Total	2073	2827	2407	2268

Most male workers' complaints relate to salary issues or work injury compensation; female workers complaints are more diverse, though salary problems are the most common problem for them as well.

The only significant change in nature of the domestic worker complaints in 2014 compared with previous years was that of 'running away'. 51 'runaways' came to us in 2014, up from a mere handful in previous years.

There are two significant longer-term trends. Several years ago one of the most common complaints among the male workers was "no work, no pay". In 2008 and 2009, hundreds of men from dozens of companies brought this up to the MOM and to TWC2. Having paid up to $10,000 to agents to secure the job in Singapore, they would tell TWC2 that a few months after arriving in Singapore it became clear that their companies were unable to supply them with work or with salary. In many cases the men suspected their companies were profiting from this 'agent' money, though having received no receipts for the money they paid, they were not able to provide proof.

The number of "no work, no pay" cases has decreased considerably over the years as MOM has tightened up on companies that repatriated large numbers of workers within a short time of their arrival. We still see companies that appear to be deliberately paying less than promised and dismissing men after a short time, as before with the possible intention of churning the workers to make money. The numbers however are considerably less that in previous years. Suspension from work without pay is still, however, used as punishment.

The second major trend to note is increase in the number and the percentage of injury cases. Taking the TCRP cases together with those handled by our social workers, the totals from 2009 to 2014 are: 469, 887, 1073, 1727, 2396 and 2055.

We do not think that this reflects a rising injury rate. To some extent, it reflects an increase in awareness of TWC2's services, but another explanation may be that more workers resort to lodging a work injury compensation claim in order to avoid being repatriated after an injury. This inflicts another sort of hardship on the worker when the injury claim may take a year or more to resolve, and when the conditions of the special pass, issued when the work permit is cancelled, prohibit the man from engaging in any form of employment regardless of whether the injury has healed.

One category that we did not include until 2013 was resignation. This covers the problems that a worker may face when his request to leave an employer either to return home early or to take a job with another employer is refused. It may have previously come under the heading of 'transfer issues'. We were not aware of this until our work with Chinese workers expanded in 2012, and we then heard this mentioned more frequently by South Asian workers in 2013. . This seems to be the result of the government tightening its policies on issuing new In Principle Approvals (IPAs) for migrant workers. When employers have difficulty in replacing their workers, they become more reluctant to allow them to leave and may refuse to act on the worker's resignation request. The difficulties that migrant workers face in resigning from their

employers should be dealt with by better enforcement of existing regulations. We also advocate for the right of migrant workers to work in Singapore without the threat of expulsion at the employer's whim and to change jobs to work for employers offering better terms, just as Singapore citizens and residents can.

Salary deductions disguised as 'loans' or 'savings' continue to take place among migrant workers. In 2012, our social workers handled 15 complaints from male workers about such problems at the time of repatriation; in 2013, we handled 60 complaints - 49 from male workers and 11 from female workers. In 2014 the total reached 76, of which 65 were from male workers and 11 from female workers. Some employers make use of these deductions from to pay for the worker's the return journey. Most workers assume that money deducted over the years they've worked will be returned when they return home, only to find out that the work permit regulations only allow a salary claim to cover the previous years, meaning that any amount deducted earlier can legally be retained by the employer. Firm enforcement to eliminate unlawful deductions would help prevent this problem.

In past years, we rarely dealt with female workers who were not domestic workers, and our cases were categorized as 'domestic workers' (for female workers) and 'male workers'. In 2014, we separated the cases of female workers into "Domestic Workers" and "Chinese Female Workers". The latter group consists of Chinese women in service trades, whose main complaint relates to with salary problems, rather than with issues typical of domestic workers such as abuse or no day off.

Last year, we recorded no complaints from female workers about not having a day off simply because the women did not raise it as their main problem. It should be noted that most of the domestic workers we assisted in 2014 and almost all of those listed as 'runaway' were not given any days off. This therefore remains a vital issue that continues to be one of our most important advocacy issues. Whether they have agreed to forego their day off or not, only by having time away from employers are domestic workers able obtain help with their problems such as abuse, non-payment of salary and illegal deployment.

One of the many domestic workers whom TWC2 assisted and sheltered for 2014.

Domestic workers' issues for 2014

Issues for Domestic Workers	Number of Cases
Dispute with Employer	15
Runaway	21
Transfer	30
Repatriation	2
Salary Problems	9
Day Off	10
Resignation	3
Dispute with Agent	5
Abuse	6
Work Permit	0
Illegal Deployment	19
Miscellaneous	10
Total	130

Chinese female workers' issues for 2014.

Issues for Chinese Female Workers	Number of Cases
Salary Problem	9
Resignation	1
Illegal Deployment	0
Premature Termination	3
Dispute with Agent	2
Repatriation	1
WICA	1
Miscellaneous	4
Change of Employer	2
Total	23

Our statistics for male workers assisted are also divided into two groups based on the method of data collection. Our social workers and our meal programme collected and organised data differently. Social workers recorded the main issue and secondary issues each worker brought to us. Because of the time pressure of large numbers of workers at mealtimes, TCRP team assigned worker issues into only four categories.

Category	Case Work	Helpline	
	Male	Female	Total
Medical (Work Accident)	190	70	260
Medical (Non-Work Accident)	24	20	44
Salary	272	100	372
Runaway	0	0	0
Repatriation Matter	45	20	65
Resignation	30	10	40
Work Permit	8	0	8
Dispute with Employer	46	10	56
Dispute with Agent	13	0	13
Lawyer Discharge	8	1	9
Transfer Matter	57	14	71
Illegal Deployment	17	23	40
Abuse	11	28	39
Blacklisted	9	21	30
False Declaration	6	15	21
Change of Employer	92	8	100
Miscellaneous	190	5	195
Total	1018	345	1363

Male workers' issues for 2014

The numbers for both casework and helpline calls by category are higher than those nationality as the workers may present more than one problem. These numbers were also captured while reporting, thus the higher number for case work by category.

'Lawyer Discharge' was a new category introduced in 2013. These are cases in which a worker wishes to proceed with a claim, generally for work injury compensation, and our assistance can only be given if the man discharges his legal representative. Discharging the lawyer for a work injury compensation claim also benefits the man financially as he will not be expected to pay the fees demanded by the lawyer, which is often a percentage of the compensation amount. Both TWC2 and the MOM try to reassure the workers that legal representation is not necessary in the no-fault claim system.

There are a large number of cases under the category of 'Miscellaneous'. Examples are:

- Request by a 'concerned other' for counselling for a worker;
- Request concerning assistance for medical treatment for a foreigner who used to work in Singapore;
- Seeking job placement via TWC2; (we give advice, however, we do not act as an agency)
- Information on MOM or TWC2;
- Sources of legal assistance for a case involving a civil offence.

Issues for Male workers at TCRP: 2014

Issues for Male Workers (TCRP)	Number of Cases
Injury/Work Injury Compensation	1,616
Company Case	345
Overstaying	178
Miscellaneous	112
Total	2251

Evidently, the overwhelming majority of those who came to TCRP were workers who were injured and awaiting settlement of their cases. The time required for case settlement times has been reduced since TCRP was launched in March 2008, but can still stretch beyond one year.

It should be remembered that injured men are not permitted to work. They are entitled to MC (medical certificate) wages for up to a year after their injury. For the first 60 days, this is equivalent to their full monthly average salary, and two thirds of that salary for up to one year after the injury as long as the doctor has issued the medical certificate. Injured workers are not entitled to further salary payments from their employers regardless of how long the case takes to resolve.

In addition, they may not be able to live in the accommodation that their employer is meant to provide for them. "Migrant Worker Housing: A Survey of Men in TWC2's Cuff Road Project" found that of 167 men interviewed, only one was in company-provided accommodation. (This can be accessed through: **http://twc2.org.sg/2013/09/24/study-on-injured-workers-housing-conditions-reveals-widespread-neglect-of-employers-responsibilities/)**

We believe that many of the problems faced by these men can be countered by continuing efforts to shorten the time taken for case settlement. We would also like to see men who have recovered from their injuries being certified as fit to work again and being allowed to seek employment as a matter of course. If they were able to do that, they would be earning money while awaiting settlement of their injury cases, and the skills they developed in Singapore would be deployed usefully.

The 'overstaying' category covers men who were caught by immigration authorities for overstaying the social visit pass and required to remain in Singapore for investigations into illegal deployment or housing an illegal alien. The number of men overstaying and who came to TCRP declined from 2010 to 2013, but rose again in 2014: 322, 240, 297, 85 and 178.

It should be borne in mind that our statistics reflect the main issues that workers bring to TWC2. In the course of our interviews, a host of other problems are often mentioned, but migrant workers tend to put up with a great deal of hardships without complaint: they seek help out of desperation when they are no longer able to tolerate the situation. That normally happens when they are not able to repay loans or earn money to support their families. Issues such crowded and filthy accommodation, inadequate personal protective equipment, withholding of passports by employers, transportation in the back of lorries and unreasonable fines, are often borne without complaint for fear of being terminated from the job.

Project Roof

In June 2014, we opened opportunities for new volunteer-led programmes, to make the most of possibilities presented by an increase in the number of new volunteers, as well as to expand our direct services.

Through Project Roof, we provide housing subsidies averaging from $200 to $250 per month for male workers who are badly injured or destitute, enabling them to rent a hostel bunk in a safe and clean place.

Led by a volunteer management committee, Project Roof allows TWC2 social workers and volunteers to conduct welfare visits to ensure that the worker is recovering from his injury. The figures below show the number of workers Project Roof assisted in 2014.

Project Roof highlights 2014

Nationality of worker assisted	No. of workers assisted
Bangladesh	3
India	3
Total number of workers assisted	6
Total cost	$4,350

Emergency Shelter for FDWS

In January 2014, a small group of TWC2 volunteers, and TWC2 social workers gathered to assess whether more could be done to assist foreign domestic workers (FDWs) who need to escape exploitative and abusive situations and seek external accommodation. Because TWC2 does not currently have a shelter, such calls for housing assistance in the past were referred to partner our NGO, HOME. However TWC2's historical advocacy work in promoting the rights of FDWs in Singapore meant that as an organization, we were keen to explore routes of access to FDWs in crisis, and to be in a position to offer assistance when required.

In brainstorming options for short to medium-term sheltering options, and without a budget to operate a dedicated facility, the shelter committee identified two host families willing to open a spare room in their homes to these women. These host families supported FDWs inneed of shelter, food, emotional and psychological support while TWC2 social workers processed their cases with the MOM, police or relevant government bodies. TWC2 accepted its first case in March 2014 and continues successfully today.

Emergency shelter for FDW highlights 2014

Nationality of workers assisted	No. of workers assisted
Cambodia	1
India	2
Indonesia	7
Myanmar	3
Philippines	5
Total No. of workers	18

Of the 18 women who were sheltered, 17 were FDWs. The remaining woman was a vulnerable migrant worker working as a nursing aide in Singapore who reached out to TWC2 for assistance.

As stated in last year's report, high placement costs are a major underlying problem for the great majority of migrant workers. Efforts have been made to curb charges imposed on workers, and yet we find that many still pay exorbitant sums to middlemen. For example, a Filipina domestic worker should not be charged anything in the Philippines for her placement and should be charged no more than two months' salary in Singapore. Yet we still encounter Filipina domestic workers who pay seven or eight months of salary after arriving in Singapore to cover their placement costs. The situation is even worse for most male workers, who on average have to work a year and a half to clear their placement costs.

TWC2 continued to raise the issue of the high placement costs in 2014. As stated in our 2012 report: "Workers who bear heavy debts at the beginning of their time in Singapore are reluc-

tant to complain about their conditions out of fear of losing their jobs and being sent home, so their discontent with their treatment may fester for some time before they feel driven to act on it. This has allowed some issues such as employers taking workers' passports and other documents, or housing workers in poor accommodation, to persist for far too long now."

For full definitions of the issues mentioned above, please refer to Appendix 1.

Future Directions and Needs

TWC2 welcomes the steps being taken now towards the introduction of itemized pay slips for workers, something we've urged for years, including in our last year's Direct Services Report. It is our view that to further ensure that workers are paid what they are due, their salaries should be paid into bank accounts over which they have sole control.

As we said last year, the pay stated in the In Principle Approval letters given to workers in their home countries should be strictly enforced. Yet we continue to encounter workers who arrive in Singapore only to face demands that they accept salaries substantially less than promised. If workers have come on S-Passes or Employment Passes, accepting those demands makes them party to a breach of Singaporean law, and liable to fines and/or imprisonment. If work permit holders refuse to accept lower pay, they have a justifiable fear that their employers will dismiss them and send them home, still in debt from their placement costs. We believe that the main responsibility for acts of deception in this instance rests firmly with the employers of these workers, and that it is unjust to penalise workers after they have been forced to agree to unjust payment and conditions.

We stand by our calls for a mandatory weekly day off for all domestic workers; otherwise, it is too easy for workers to be coerced into signing away their days off with the threat termination and repatriation.

At the beginning of 2014, we took a big step forward when we were able to find volunteers willing to put up domestic workers in urgent need in their own homes. The numbers are small, but this significantly improves our capacity to support domestic workers in the worst situations.

For male workers, at present, shelter provision is extremely limited given the large number of workers driven from their company accommodations. We believe that thousands of male workers stay in unsatisfactory accommodations. We encounter workers recently discharged from hospital after operations being refused shelter by their employers, or reluctant to stay in accommodation where they fear being harassed or expelled from the country by repatriation companies.

Employers who fail to provide decent and secure accommodation for workers should be penalised. When employers refuse to fulfill their obligations, we call upon the Ministry of Manpower to place the worker in appropriate accommodation and bill the employer for the costs.

This could come out of the employer's security bond.

In the past year, many people have come to our monthly sessions for volunteers. For our direct services we need volunteers with specialized skills or facilities, such as language skills or the ability to make a long-term commitment or to work in a specific area.

Inter NGO Meeting with Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), Healthserve & TWC2.

Conclusion

The number of workers assisted by TWC2's social workers reached a new high in 2014, and our range of programmes to assist workers has grown. This will necessitate the hiring of a new social worker. As ever, our abilities in the coming year depend on the resources that we are able to mobilize.

We wish to conclude by expressing our thanks and appreciation to our social workers, volunteers, donors and supporters who have made it possible for us to sustain our direct services for another year.

We wish to give a special mention to the Lee Foundation for their support for the Cuff Road Project; the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple for their contribution to the CAREFund, the Chen Su Lan Trust, Mr and Mrs Thio Shen Yi, and an anonymous donor whose contributions made possible the employment of our two social workers in 2014.

Volunteers In Action

"Do what you can to show you care about other people, and you will make our world a better place."
-- Rosalynn Carter

TWC2
transient workers count too

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Bad Accommodation	Unsuitable accommodation, such as overcrowding, hygiene and sanitation problems.
Basic Needs	Unacceptable food, lack of adequate accommodation, insufficient rest, privacy, secure space for personal belongings, etc.
Dispute with Employer	A range of issues, such as working with an abusive employer and often including salary problems.
Dispute with or Complaint against Agent	1. Disputes with their agents before job placement.
	2. Workers accuse agents of cheating them.
	3. Workers threatened by their agents.
Forced Overtime	Workers forced to perform overtime beyond the legal limit, or involuntarily. Under the Employment Act (Chapter 91) Part IV Section 38, workers cannot work more than 72 hours per month of overtime on top of the legislated 44.5 hours a week for 4.5 weeks. The Employment Act does **not** at present cover domestic workers.
General Information about TWC2	Calls requesting information on TWC2. For instance, on the kind of assistance TWC2 can offer, what TWC2 does, etc.
Health Issues, Medical Problems or Illnesses	1. Workers denied time-off to seek medical consultation or are asked to pay for the mandatory periodic medical check-ups.
	2. Workers dismissed by their employers due to poor health.
	3. Employers don't utilise their insurance policies to compensate workers for injuries, for fear of a premium increase.
	4. Workers are not covered by any health insurance.
Illegal Deployment	Workers doing work other than they are contracted for or performing work for which they are not contracted.
Information on Transfer Procedures	1. Enquiries pertaining to procedures for transferring from one employer to another.
	2. Workers want to know alternatives when their employers refuse to accede to their requests for transfers.

Information on Work Permit	Includes enquiries pertaining to work permit cancellation procedures and workers' concern about the consequences when their employers have cancelled their work permits.
Lawyer Discharge	Workers wish to proceed with a claim without retaining the services of a lawyer.
Loan Repayment Issues	Workers receive only a small part of their salary or no salary at all for many months in order to pay off loans stipulated by recruiting agents/employment agencies.
Long Wait for Resolution at MOM	A long resolution time compromises the emotional and/or physical well-being of workers, as they wait for the relevant authorities to resolve outstanding matters with their employers or employment agencies.
No Access to Personal Documents	Workers' employers or agents withhold their passports, work permits, bank passbooks, etc. from them.
No Off Day	Workers are not given a full rest day or they would like advice on how to approach their employers to ask for a day off.
No Overtime Pay	Workers have worked overtime but are not given overtime pay.
Others	Includes a wide variety of issues such as sexual harassment, classes for female domestic workers, blacklisting, no work, etc, not covered otherwise.
Overstaying	Workers stayed in Singapore even though their work permits or special passes are no longer valid.
Overwork	Excessive working hours without adequate rest. Usually applies to domestic workers who, not being covered by the Employment Act, lack a resort in law to limit their working hours.
Physical Abuse	1. Includes slapping, striking, punching, kicking and other acts which cause pain and injury that are not tantamount to causing of grievous bodily harm or death.
	2. Deprivation of sleep, adequate food and access to medical help and medication leading to pain and injury which are not tantamount to causing of grievous bodily harm or death.
	3. Also includes threats of abuse.
Premature Termination of Contract	Employment is terminated before workers' contracts expire or before the agreed-upon duration of employment.

Direct Services Report 2014

With inputs from:

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