



Committee Report on 2022

Executive Committee 2021 to 2023

President	Debbie Fordyce
Vice President	Alex Au
Secretary	Beverly Shaddick
Treasurer	Russell Heng
Member	Yew Kong Leong
Member	Christine Pelly
Member	Mizue Sauco
Member	Sharon Tan
Member	Stephanie Chok

Sub Committee Chairs

Research	Alex Au
Direct Services	Debbie Fordyce
Communications	Alex Au
Fund Raising	Russell Heng
Human Resource	Russell Heng
Public Engagement	Christine Pelly

Project Chairs

Cuff Road Project	Debbie Fordyce
Dayspace	Ethan Guo
Discover Singapore	Irene Ong and Marcel Bandur
Outreach	Ethan Guo
Project Farego	Alex Au
Project Roof and Lifeline	Ethan Guo
Legal Group	Mizue Sauco

Audit Committee

Audit Committee 2020 to 2022 (from 20 Sept 2020 to present)	Gurbinder Singh
	Varun Iyer Mani

Staff

General Manager	Ethan Guo
Social Work Associate	Alfiyan Mohamed Sadali
Social Work Associate	David Kalimuthu
Admin Officer	Christine Scully
Accounts Officer	Christina Chng
Accounts Assistant	Annie Ong

Introduction

The Committee Report is an overview of TWC2 activities in the preceding year in pursuit of its mission:

1. through ground research and engagement with policy makers and employers, to advocate a more enlightened policy framework for migrant labour in Singapore;
2. to extend assistance to workers in need to ensure that they have fair resolution of their cases, dignity in work and living conditions, access to medical care, and protection of their rightful autonomy; and
3. through public education, to promote the social conditions in which exploitation, abuse and injustice become history.

The Report is in three Parts: Advocacy, Direct Services, and Organisational Support.

Part 1 – Advocacy

1.1 Research

Through the first half of 2022, migrant workers were still largely confined to dormitories. Related to that, the number of workers coming to the Cuff Road Project was also much less than pre-Covid. That being the case, it was not feasible to do the kind of research we would like to do, namely interview-based. In the second half of the year however, movement restrictions were lifted and we decided to do a study of how the Covid-induced change in bargaining power of low-wage migrant workers improved their situation with respect to recruitment costs. Their bargaining power was positively impacted by the border closures of 2020 and 2021, and the shortage of workers that resulted. This study was published in October 2022 on our website.

In response to a Channel NewsAsia (CNA) Talking Point enquiry about work fatigue, we also replicated a 2016 study on long working hours and lack of rest, leading to heightened risk in workplace safety. The updated stats, obtained through an online survey, were utilised by CNA to show that 1 in 4 workers surveyed by us in 2022 worked more than 12 hours a day - no improvement from our previous study.

1.2 Communications

TWC2's main vehicles for communication with the general public are our website and Facebook pages.

Our website serves as a primary advocacy medium. Through human-interest stories and analyses, it spotlights the key issues affecting labour migration in Singapore. Over the years, it has become a major resource for anyone, local or abroad, wanting to know more of the situation for low-wage migrant workers.



Transient Workers Count Too

In 2022, as Singapore emerged from Covid-19, we published a six-part summary of the two-year-long confinement of workers in dormitories before memory fades. We also wrote about the temporary schemes for transferring workers into new jobs without them going home (the SCAL scheme), documenting the real experiences (not great ones) of workers waiting for transfer. We continued to focus on the experiences of workers looking – and paying for new jobs, and even some who had to pay for their own quarantine, even though this was against the rules. We also had a detailed account of one worker's experience trying to raise the matter of unprofessional conduct on the part of a lawyer he engaged, to the attention of the Law Society.

TWC2's public-facing Facebook page provided incremental updates on the organisation's activities throughout the year. It proved particularly useful in rallying the public on fundraising campaigns. For the first time in 2022, this was done jointly on Instagram as well, which targeted a younger audience. It led to the successful conclusion of the fundraiser, which exceeded its target. The top posts of the year were related to the fundraising campaign, as well as highlights of TWC2's annual International Migrants Day event - Lunch with Heart. A highlight reel from the event was posted for the first time, attracting many views and positive engagement from the public.

1.3 Public Engagement

TWC2 through the Public Engagement (PE) team responds and reaches out to various members of the community as part of our advocacy. The surge of interest in the welfare of migrant workers has somewhat abated after the extreme measures to confine male low wage workers and the high infection rates, but many groups continue to show concern for this group of foreigners working in Singapore due to systematic practices of disempowerment. In addition to requests from teachers, researchers, media, and special interest groups, migrant workers continue to be a popular topic with students for their project work.

Our engagement with students in particular allows us to challenge common assumptions, such as the relevance of financial literacy, social inclusion, fluency in English, safety at the worksite and understanding legal rights. Some of these assumptions arise from the mistaken belief that migrant workers are free to negotiate the terms of employment, to choose and switch jobs, and to spend their free time as they wish. The media's focus on workplace safety and transport vehicles has inspired many students to choose projects that investigate and propose solutions to these problems. Less well-covered by local media are issues of recruitment fees, long-term indebtedness, low wages, job precarity, and power imbalance between worker and employer.

The PE group responded to more than 100 requests for interviews and talks in person, zoom meetings, interviews, and written questions in 2022. Most requests are from local and international secondary schools, JCs and universities. We also engaged with medical institutions, churches, media, foreign NGOs and embassies.



We welcome the chance to talk to individuals and groups to share our research, experience and advocacy stance, and to understand their perspectives. Students who contact TWC2 for information are encouraged to research the topic and peruse our website before contacting us. We advise students to keep an open mind, and look beyond issues relating to xenophobia, segregation or human rights. We would like the general public to take an active role in being agents of and for improving conditions for migrant workers.

Our recorded interactions include such diverse groups as those listed below. Others within TWC2 have been contacted personally by individuals and other organisations.

Singapore schools and universities

UWCSEA, Millennia Institute, Raffles Institution, NTU, NJC, NUS, Nanyang Girls High, NLCS (Singapore), ACJC, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Paya Lebar Methodist, Dulwich College, Dunman High, ARI NUS, NUS LKYSPP, Southview Primary School and Westwood Primary School, SMU

Foreign universities

Curtin University, Princeton University

Other groups

Singapore Jain Religious Society, 3M, St Ignatius, IMH, Globe Media Asia, Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, NUH

1.4 Engagement with Policy Makers and Advocacy partnerships

As with the year before, TWC2 had one case conference meeting with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in 2022. Outside of such formal meetings, we also continued to engage MOM on critical issues via the established backchannel. In 2022, we put forward questions pertaining to the in-principle approval (IPA) application process, the Change Of Employer eligibility of workers with salary claims, as well as problems observed with the implementation of the new Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA) 2019 regulatory regime.

In 2022, we had an intensive engagement with a philanthropy group and a consultancy to think through how to operationalise a recruitment system that does not make workers pay exorbitant recruitment costs. We came away confident that, operationally, it can be done but will require political will and support from the government, which currently are lacking, before it can truly succeed.

We also maintained our strong relationships with partner organisations abroad, including Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) and the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW). These relationships not only deepen our understanding of labour migration and give us access to the United Nations system, they also aid in providing the necessary support to some workers being repatriated while ill or in distress.

In August 2022, we hosted a large group of fellows from China Medical Board's Equity Initiative programme. Comprising medical, nursing and related professionals



Transient Workers Count Too

from around Southeast Asia, we took the opportunity to deepen their appreciation of labour migration issues in Singapore and their impact on health outcomes.

Part 2 – Direct Services

Direct Services allow us to attend to the immediate, tangible needs of destitute migrant workers while supporting advocacy to address the deeper issues.

2.1 Casework and Helpline

There was a total of 747 new registration of workers in 2022 but workers seen by TWC2 previously also returned to seek help for fresh problems, resulting in a total of 959 new problems registered for the year. A total of 797 cases were taken up for case work, which involves consultation, follow up and case management.

Case handling stats in 2021 and 2022

Type of problem	New problems registered	New problems registered	Cases handled	Cases handled
	2021	2022	2021	2022
Injury at work	257	347	108	252
Salary claim	173	149	112	120
Investigation	31	52	15	46
Recruitment scam	10	12	8	12
Premature termination	21	37	7	32
Injury outside work	9	9	6	9
Illness	34	23	25	22
Work pass revoked by MOM	6	2	5	2
Kickbacks	1	2	1	1
Resignation / Change of employer	148	150	X	139
Repatriation	41	24	X	24
Other classifications	372	152	276	138
Total	914	959	563	797
Nationality				
Bangladesh	724	797	412	658
China	3	13	1	13
India	157	111	127	93
Indonesia	8	13	8	12
Malaysia	8	9	7	9
Myanmar	2	1	2	1
Philippines	5	1	4	1
Sri Lanka	3	9	1	5
Other	4	5	1	5
Total	914	959	563	797



Transient Workers Count Too

Gender				
Male	898	940	549	778
Female	16	19	14	19
Total	914	959	563	797

Included under the “other classifications” are 32 cases of Premature Termination, 11 cases of Wrongful dismissal, 8 cases of Contract Dispute and 6 workers facing Denial of Medical Treatment. There were also a number of workers reaching out from source countries because they had problems with their In-Principle Approval or were banned from seeking employment in Singapore and wanted help to know why.

The statistics presented above from our case management system represent the official casework numbers registered and handled.

There are however further insights that can be gleaned from the omni-channel communications platform that TWC2’s casework team uses to chat with clients via our Facebook properties (TWC2 Bangla, TWC2 Tamil and TWC2 Main), WhatsApp, Voice calls and Instagram.

Each conversation denotes a unique client that has reached out to us but some clients may contact us via more than one channel (e.g. voice call and WhatsApp).

TWC2 hotline statistics in 2022

Number of conversations by channel	
FB Bangla	1,134
FB Tamil	596
FB Main	172
Voice call	1,409
WhatsApp	3,602
Instagram	3
Total conversations	6,916
Total number of messages across all conversations	51,373 inbound 42,391 outbound

Breakdown of selected conversations by labels*	
Transfer	1,066
IPA issues	434
Salary	396
Resignation	372
Injury	326
Repatriation	184
Illness	152
Coming to Singapore / Going on home leave	49
General Enquiries	188

The system allows for labels to be tagged to conversations.

Transfers remained the top issue for a second consecutive year. Much of it however involved only a simple dispensation of advice on the new rulings and no casework was needed.

Case outcomes in 2022

How and how many cases are ultimately resolved are notable but difficult statistics to track. The reasons for this include clients becoming out of reach, not responding, or having left the country. The nature of most casework is also such that there may not be a need for follow-up or further communication once the issues are resolved.

Where possible, however, the case work team tracks and logs case outcomes when such information is available.

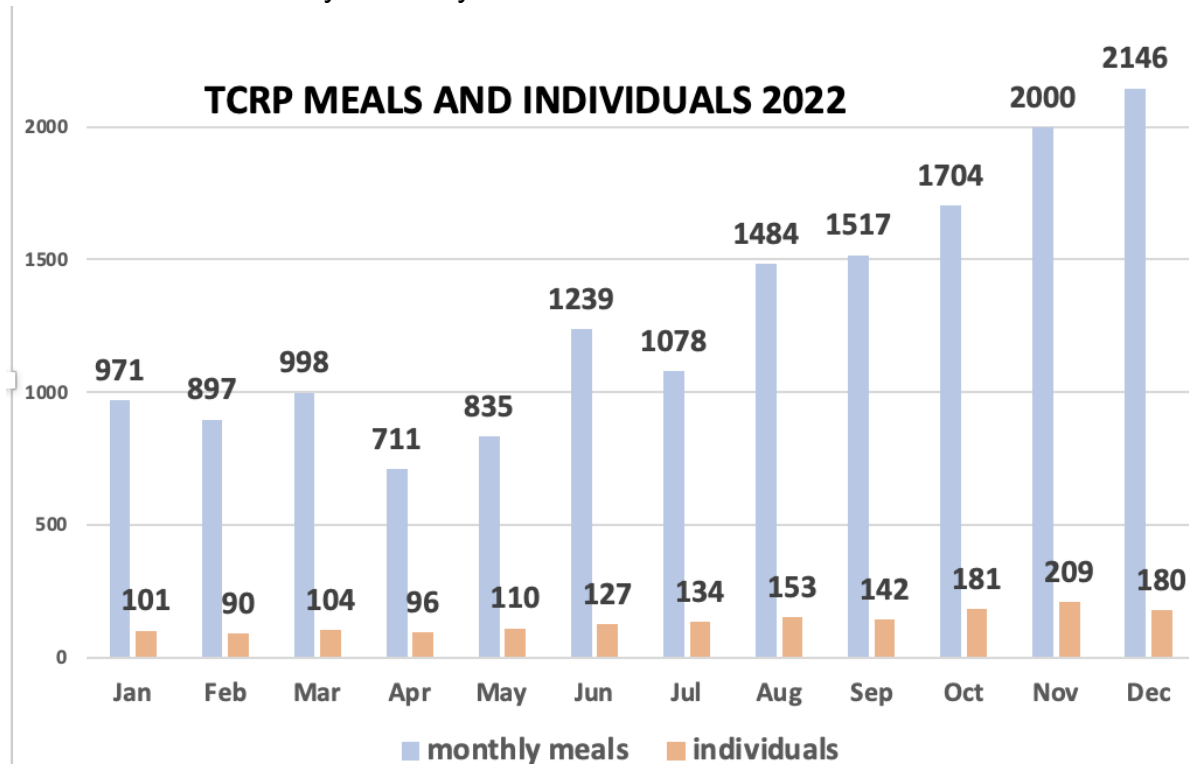
Non-criminal case milestones
70 such cases were logged in 2022 with successful conclusions, compared with 38 in 2021. Over 20 clients had their owed salary paid via a Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) settlement or Employment Claims Tribunals (ECT) order, with one case victorious in claiming over \$11,000. A handful saw successful Workplace Injury Compensation claims concluded and being paid following the final Notice of Assessment issued. One received his owed medical leave wages following our intervention. A few however had their claims (salary or injury) dismissed and were repatriated.
Criminal case milestones
4 such cases were logged in 2022. 3 cases involved clients being released from prison. 1 client was repatriated after receiving a formal warning.



Transient Workers Count Too

2.2 The Cuff Road Project (TCRP)

The Cuff Road Project (TCRP) continues since 2008 to provide free meals, assistance and advice to destitute migrant workers who are not permitted to work, yet must remain in Singapore. The number of beneficiaries has risen somewhat since last year, although exiting dormitories to access our services near Farrer Park is still difficult and costly for many workers.



Prior to Covid 19 restrictions, TCRP was our primary point of contact with South Asian male migrant workers. We received over 2,000 unique beneficiaries each year up to 2019. The numbers reaching us in person during 2020 and 2021 was greatly reduced, but rose to 595 unique individuals in 2022. The most common reasons for seeking assistance from TCRP were workplace injury, salary non-payment or deductions, premature termination, MOM or Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) investigations and recruitment scams or failure. Such problems are similar to those received through digital means. In addition to beneficiaries whose information is recorded in our case management system, we also provide advice to workers who drop by for information relating to themselves or their friends and relatives.

Our volunteers are deployed daily at the meal sessions to attend to workers, offer information, advice and assistance. This allows the workers to have ample time to converse with us in person, and for our volunteers to establish an understanding of the types of issues that arise among this group of low-wage workers. Volunteers are also tasked with collecting information to add to our database of case histories and to update the client's information when necessary. This allows our volunteers and staff to understand the nature of the worker's problem and the impact on the worker of spending long periods of time without work or income.

Our case officers are present several times a week to provide additional casework, transportation funds and phone top-ups.

We are pleased that workers now have greater access to the community and to this program than in the previous two years. Now that more workers are housed in distant dormitories, however, makes TCRP a less convenient avenue for in-person advice and assistance.

2.3 Legal Group

Our goal is to help level the playing field for migrant workers by increasing their access to justice so that they can participate meaningfully in legal processes and procedures and counter the challenging complexity and cost of the legal system.

We help workers navigate the injury and salary claims system by providing legal and non-legal resources. Partnering with teams in TWC2, we advocate positive change in the development of laws and policies affecting low-wage migrant workers. Occasionally, we assist workers facing criminal charges.

Caseload

In 2022, TWC2 assisted a total of 15 legal cases involving migrant workers in various areas pertaining to salary claims (2), work injury claims (2), criminal charges (2), complaints against lawyers (6), civil lawsuits (3) and others (2).

Collaboration with lawyers

Pro bono and low bono lawyers from 10 law firms provided ad hoc advice or helped take cases to court. They provided migrant workers legal services free of charge (14) or at low charges (1).

Legal case stories

- Rana takes Law Society to court¹
- Acquitted, yet punished – Rahman's story²

Carefund (Legal) pays for this service. It spent about \$30,800 in 2022.

2.4 Roof and Lifeline

Project Roof seeks to provide shelter to a handful of most needy clients. As employers are required by law to provide housing for the foreign employees until repatriation, we step in only under extraordinary circumstances (e.g. serious injury or major surgery that makes it difficult for workers to use employer accommodation).

The fact that these migrant workers receive no assistance from the state whatsoever deserves mention. And organisations that provide temporary housing for destitutes only accept Singaporeans. Therefore, they truly have no one else to turn to.

¹ <https://twc2.org.sg/2022/10/16/rana-takes-law-society-to-court/>

² <https://twc2.org.sg/2022/12/21/acquitted-yet-punished-rahmans-story>

Transient Workers Count Too

For 2022, Project Roof spent \$20,650, slightly less than the \$24,900 spent in 2021. The average \$300/month subsidy was not sufficient as inflation took root in 2022. In the third quarter of the year, the subsidy had to be raised to \$400/month for some cases. Project Roof benefitted 16 workers in 2022.

Lifeline is currently dormant. It will be activated as and when necessary.

2.5 Outreach

Outreach is aimed at informing the wider migrant-worker community of our mission.

In the first three quarters of the year, with the movements of dormitory residents still restricted, we continued to engage workers at the Recreation Centres (RCs). We utilised our social media reach to alert residents in the vicinity of the respective RCs to our impending visit so anyone with problems could make a trip down to consult our case workers in-person. This proved very successful.

Once the restrictions were lifted, we similarly returned to popular places frequented by migrant workers. One of the first events we organised was an outdoor Deepavali celebration along the pedestrian walkway of the Indian Heritage Centre. This attracted a massive crowd, which came by to see magic and dance performances, as well as hear testimonials from clients who had been helped by TWC2.



The large turnout at our Deepavali outreach “street party” event in Little India

Despite the resumption of full-scale physical outreach, however, we did not let up on digital efforts.



Transient Workers Count Too

One of the top Facebook posts of the year was a video teaching workers how to resign from their jobs properly. This was done in response to the large number of messages we were receiving from workers citing problems they had in this respect. The videos, crafted for both the Bengali and Tamil audience, elicited a combined reach of 75,000 and almost 5,000 reactions (likes, comments and shares).

2022 also saw us utilising Facebook to obtain signups for TWC2's Discover Singapore outings. These used to be limited to just workers visiting us at the free meals programme in Little India. Offering these outings online has broadened the pool of workers exponentially, ensuring that each outing is almost always oversubscribed.

2.6 TWC2 Carefund

The overall CareFund budget covers the following services:

Carefund (Medical) helps workers with their medical bills. In 2022, it spent close to \$61,800 which is almost twice as much as the \$30,900 spent in 2021. The fund assisted 30 workers.

The FareGo programme provides workers who qualify (e.g., those with regular appointments at hospital or MOM) \$40 every two months to help cover their transport cost. In 2022, FareGo expenditure rose to about \$13,900 from \$9,800 in the previous year. This benefitted 195 workers.

Financial relief of \$20,502 was extended to 11 workers in 2022. The amount spent in 2021 was \$34,500.

Details of Carefund (Legal) and Project Roof can be found in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this report respectively.

All the above plus general expenses amounted to a total of about \$202,800 which is twice the cost of providing free meals for workers under The Cuff Road Project. It indicates that the foreign workers who seek help from us have critical needs other than food.

2.7 Filipino Family Network (FFN), Indonesian Family Network (IFN) and Overseas Foreign Workers in Singapore (OFWS)

FFN, IFN and OFWS are independent support groups of Indonesian and Filipino domestic workers as well as male workers from the CMP (Construction, Marine and Process sectors) affiliated to TWC2, many of whom are also our members. We support them by providing the space and some funding for their activities. They in turn contribute to our work in many areas, including public and media engagement, research, outreach and case referrals.

2022 largely marked a return to regular activities for all three groups post-Covid.



Transient Workers Count **Too**



OFWS members enjoying a meal together at the volleyball event

One of OFWS' core strengths was in organising volleyball tournaments. They were able to resume this, in addition to the following:

- Packing and distributing care packages to workers staying in dormitories
- Distribution of electrical appliances, bicycles, old clothing to those in need
- Collaborating with The Story Behind Smile to give out secondhand books
- Organised various fundraisers and a story writing contest
- Held long-awaited gathering of members and ambassadors at Sembawang Park



The beautiful floral arrangements from IFN's handicraft workshop

Transient Workers Count Too

IFN had a busy year. They lost no time in resuming workshops that had to be suspended during the pandemic, such as in handicraft and counselling. Other highlights include:

- Packing and distributing care packs to domestic workers
- Attending blood donation drives every 3 months
- Organising a volunteer day at Willing Hearts
- Fundraising for sick domestic workers



Collage of FFN activities for the year

FFN also caught up with various workshops, equipping their members with skills in areas like dressmaking, guitar, photography and even reflexology. In addition, they also were actively involved in:

- Outreach via care packs at various malls across Singapore
- Collaborating with Migrant Workers of Singapore and participating in their photography competition, book fair and workshops
- Organising a get-together at Sembawang Park, which including gifting of pre-loved clothes

Talented members of both FFN and IFN also lent their skills by performing at external festivals.

All three affiliates attended TWC2's 2022 Lunch With Heart event, in celebration of International Migrants Day.

Part 3 – Organisational Support

Organisational support through Human Resource, Heartbeat, Fund-Raising, and IT Support is essential for us to pursue our core activities.

3.1 Human Resource

In March 2022, Communications Specialist Eliza Thomas resigned. She joined TWC2 in January 2021. The position was not promptly replaced because TWC2's management was busy for most part of the year on two counts: first, tracking and adjusting to the new conditions facing migrant workers as Singapore moves out of the pandemic; secondly, searching for new office premises because the building it was in had been sold en bloc. An officer to handle communications will be recruited in 2023.

Early in the year, TWC2 upgraded the job title of the two staff members handling case work from Social Work Associate to Case Officer.

Eliza's departure brought TWC2's establishment down to six: four full-timers (General Manager, Administrative Officer and two Case Officers) and two part-timers (Accounts Officer and Accounts Assistant).

Long Service awards were given to the following staff members: Administrative Officer Christine Scully and Accounts Officer Christina Chng (10 years), General Manager Ethan Guo (5 years) and Case Officer David Kalimuthu (3 years).

TWC2 hosted five interns in 2022. Two were Singaporeans. The others were two Australians and one Indian.

Beginning in May 2022, TWC2 tweaked its Work From Home (WFH) policy. From reporting for work in the office one day per week in 2021, full time staff had to come in 2 days/week. The two part time staff members continued on 1 day/week. Tuesday was assigned the anchor day when all staff came to the office. In addition, the entire staff takes part in a Zoom meeting every Friday morning. This WFH policy is on a trial basis. Depending on how the arrangement affects productivity, service levels and efficiency, it will be adjusted as and when necessary. Singapore law allows for a full return to the workplace.

With effect from 19 November 2022, the TWC2 Exco approved the raising of retirement age internally to 66 and the internal re-employment age to 71. That means staff can ask to work part-time when they reach retirement age at 66 and will be employed part-time till 71. This is in keeping with national policy to promote active employment for senior citizens who wish to continue working.

3.2 Heartbeat - Volunteer Recruitment

Having a small staff, TWC2 continues to rely on teams of volunteers, and Heartbeat is our main volunteer recruitment point.

Until the later part of the year, our ability to absorb new volunteers continued to be limited, as certain teams - such as Discover Singapore - were impacted by the migrant worker movement and gathering restrictions. Once these restrictions were lifted, we also immediately resumed in-person Heartbeat sessions in November, and were able to expand the roles we were recruiting for.

We held five Heartbeats in 2022, and on-boarded 86 new volunteers.

3.3 Fundraising

Total funds raised for 2022 was \$763,862, less than the \$919,749 raised in 2021. Of the 2022 total, \$220,000 (28.8%) were the regular annual grants from three philanthropic organisations. Given our current large surplus, this is a healthy level of donation to maintain. Unless expenditure increases substantially, TWC2 should not try and raise funds above this level.

3.4 IT Support

We began the year with a serious problem. The vendor who was supposed to deliver us an updated case management system was obviously failing to do so, despite the project being at least a year behind schedule. We decided to terminate the contract. Fortunately we very quickly found an alternative vendor. The new completion date would be in early-to-mid 2023.

The silver lining from this experience was that, whereas the original contract was for a system built through customisation of an open-source CRM system, we had the opportunity to re-specify it as a wholly custom-built system instead. We had learnt from trying to work with the first vendor through 2020 and 2021 that the customisation route had significant limitations entailing having to make several unhappy compromises to functionalities.

Meanwhile, our existing case management and volunteer management systems remained robust and continued to serve us well. That said, the existing case management system was gradually being overtaken by the changing nature of cases – thus the need for a new system. Our call centre system and website also functioned well throughout 2022.

We experienced no significant downtime in 2022.

3.5 Executive Committee

The TWC2 Executive Committee (See listing on page 1) meets every alternate month during the year. In 2022, the 2021-2023 Exco held 6 meetings. All our meetings were well-attended especially since they were all online.

Contributors

Filipino Family Network (FFN), Indonesian Family Network (IFN), Overseas Foreign Workers in Singapore (OFWS), Debbie Fordyce, Alex Au, Russell Heng, Christine Pelly, Ethan Guo, Mizue Sauco, Sharon Tan and Beverly Shaddick.