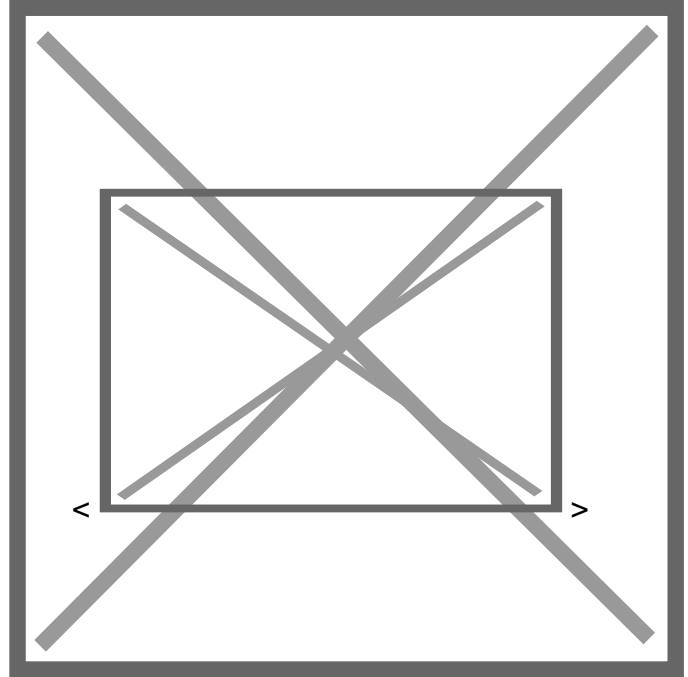


Singapore's Peacehaven Home

“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind” – Jeremiah 17:10

by IAN ROBINSON, CAPTAIN –



RESIDENTS OF THE Peacehaven home gather in front of The Salvation Army flag prior to chapel service.

It was one of those moments that was very funny and at the same time quite sad. The speaker at our Sunday afternoon chapel service had just finished her presentation of the gospel. She called on the congregation to raise their hands if they wanted to receive Christ into their hearts and about 15 responded. As I looked at them I began to laugh, and turned to Isobel. “Didn’t we enroll some of them as adherents last Sunday?” I whispered. “Yes,” she replied, gently admonishing, “Remember, they have dementia!”

When we first arrived at Peacehaven it did not take long for us to realize the scope of the task to which God had called us. The nursing home has 339 beds and no more than six or seven are empty at any given time. Most of the residents have multiple diagnoses, including combinations of dementia, schizophrenia, depression and physical disability. Originally established as a nursing home for the aged, now more than 25% of our residents are less than 65 years of age. Our youngest is not even two years old. Peacehaven, opened only four years ago, is the largest nursing home in Singapore.

The Home is separated into twelve distinct Resident Living Areas (RLAs) covering three floors. Each has the name of a bird; Heron, Raven, Sparrow, Flamingo, etc. Category IV residents, the most severe cases, live in the three “Ps”; Peacock, Partridge and Parakeet. Each RLA is self-contained with its own bathroom, pantry, television and nurse’s station. The fourth floor houses the

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administrative offices, staff living area and officer's quarters.

During last year's outbreak of SARS, Peacehaven became a war zone. Visitors were severely restricted and had to submit to temperature checks. Staff had to wear special clothing, masks and gloves for their entire shift—very uncomfortable in the 90+ degree heat. The slightest cough or fever became a serious concern. The management and staff of the Home did such an amazing job that the Ministry of Health commended Peacehaven as a "role model" for others in preventing the potential spread of SARS and a certificate was presented by the President of Singapore.

Our residents naturally come from low and very low income families. Several have been abandoned or disowned completely by spouse and children, or have no family members left alive to support them. In fact, about 27%, or 89 residents, are on public assistance, and 90% receive some form of government subsidy. Program fees paid by residents and their families account for less than one third of our total income. The most recent financial report shows that it cost The Salvation Army \$897 per month to care for each resident last year. The average received from each resident was \$694 per month. You do not have to be Albert Einstein to figure that the Army subsidizes each resident by an average of \$203 every month. In other words, for one full year, with 332 residents, the Singapore, Malaysia and Myanmar Command must come up with an additional \$808,517 to keep the doors open.

Perhaps our most tragic resident is "Adam." The name card above his bed said "Unknown." Found on the streets about three years ago, completely unable to care for himself, he was taken to the hospital and eventually referred to Peacehaven for long-term care. He cannot move, speak or hear. No one knows who he is or where he came from. Despite our best efforts we cannot find any family or friends. We don't even know his nationality or his age, but doctors estimate that he is Chinese and in his sixties. We are Adam's family until God calls him home.

One of Peacehaven's key staff members is the chaplain, Jimi Tan. An Anglican with a degree in Theology, Chaplain Jimi is The Salvation Army's top recruiting sergeant. He has led more than 120 residents to Christ in the last three years, and you can find him every day roaming the Resident Living Areas, his irrepressible sense of humor shining brightly over everyone. He jokes that he doesn't mind God calling home the believers, but he asks him to hold off on the unbelievers because "their passports are not ready—they have been held up in immigration!" Chaplain Jimi runs chapel services on Sunday and midweek. Different speakers take part on Sunday with Jimi acting as translator into the Chinese dialects of Cantonese and Hokkien. The Tuesday chapel is faithfully and energetically conducted by retired Commissioners Lim, whose daughter is a resident. Jimi tirelessly encourages residents to attend the chapel services, and conducts regular adherents' classes for anyone who is interested. On a recent Sunday afternoon I had the privilege of enrolling 12 residents as adherents of The Salvation Army's Changi Corps.

Which brings me back to last Sunday's chapel service. In laughing I had forgotten a very basic biblical truth; "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). My amusement was based on how things appeared to me. But Chaplain Jimi has told me that many times God graciously grants our dementia patients a few moments of absolute clarity while he is witnessing to them, and it is during this time of lucidity that they invite Christ into their hearts as their Lord and

Savior. Again I am reminded from scripture that “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). And today I rejoice with our new adherents that he is mine.

Captains Ian and Isobel Robinson were recently appointed administrators at Singapore’s Peacehaven Home.