



# SIWEC INSIGHT

MAY 2020

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We admire the devotion of this group of highly dedicated volunteers who make such a great team! They work very hard to keep our seniors engaged and raise their spirits with such an exciting range of diverse activities.



Sikh Welfare Council is thankful to the Ride 2 Serve 2020 organisers, riders and well-wishers for the relentless effort to raise funds for our beneficiaries amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. We are proud to see our riders and marshals continue to stand united for a cause they believe in.

**PATRON**

Kartar Singh Thakral

**TRUSTEES**

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Daljit Singh Gaggarbhana  
Manmohan Singh Thakral  
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# The Coronavirus COVID-19 Pandemic



Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa  
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh

To say that the last few months of 2020 have been “a very trying period” is probably an understatement. We have never experienced anything like this in our lives. The last such pandemic was about 100 years ago when the Spanish Flu hit the world in 1918-1919 and about 50 million people died. COVID-19 has brought almost every country in the world to its knees and about two thirds of the world is in some form of lockdown. Governments all over the world are trying to do all they can to help contain the virus and as they realize that the economic fallout from COVID-19 will be severe, they are providing all kinds of financial support to prevent the pandemic from also turning into an economic disaster. Singapore is no exception.

Unfortunately, in situations like this, the less privileged and vulnerable are affected even more than the average person. To make things worse, the ability of social service organisations like Sikh Welfare Council to provide good service is further curtailed by the circuit breaker and social distancing requirements. We have to be creative in the way we deliver our services to ensure that our beneficiaries’ interest is fully taken care of and they receive all the help they need.

Whilst the government of Singapore has come forward with some assistance for those who are financially disadvantaged due to COVID-19, in the spirit of Chardikala and Sarbat Da Bhalla, SIWEC has tried to go the extra mile to enhance their service delivery modes. This is to ensure that there is no lack of required services to SIWEC beneficiaries and the community at large.

**Bereavement Services – Live Streaming of Funerals**

The circuit breaker and social distancing rules stipulated that only 10 family members are able to attend funerals, Gurdwara prayers and Path Da Bhog thereafter. In order to enable more relatives and friends to attend the funerals, SIWEC has arranged for the funerals to be live-streamed for all to participate from their homes. The cost of this live streaming service

is borne by the Sikh Community in Singapore and not by the bereaved family.

### **Government COVID-19 Financial Assistance Schemes**

Awareness of all the government schemes available as part of the COVID-19 Relief Budgets is a big challenge to the less educated. We have been helping our beneficiaries and any new client who approach us to understand the various government assistance schemes (especially for those who lost their jobs or their income streams due to COVID-19) and to assist them with making the necessary applications for what they are eligible for.

### **Family Support Services**

While we are not able to visit our clients physically, we keep regular contact with them via voice and video calls to ensure their well-being. We have also converted the monthly NTUC food vouchers into cash subsidies during this period. The amount is transferred directly into bank accounts to avoid having beneficiaries travel to collect their vouchers or subsidies. We have been working very closely with Gurdwaras to ensure that families who are unable to cook food at home are being placed on the various Gurdwara Langgar Programs to have meals delivered to their homes.

We have actively used social media to reach out to those who need help, and have joined hands with #SGSewa to try to help out those in need during this difficult time; all with the hope that no one falls through the cracks.

### **Prison Counselling and Aftercare Services**

While the Prison authorities have stopped all counselling visits during this period, we have recorded Shabads for the inmates to listen in lieu of counselling, trying to keep them connected with Guruji in these trying times.

### **Healthcare Services and Senior Citizen Activities**

Our Healthcare Ambassador has been regularly calling and following up on the well-being of all our seniors living alone in their own homes or in Old Folks Homes. We have also arranged for meals to be delivered from Gurdwaras for those that need them during this time.

While the physical activities of our Senior Citizens have been curtailed since February as this is a very vulnerable age group, our volunteers have been sending active ageing and exercise videos to our seniors through social media

chat groups to keep them engaged and busy at home, whilst still keeping fit.

### **Education Support Services**

Most teaching and tuition classes have been switched to home-based learning to ensure lessons do not stop.

### **Administration via Online Services**

To avoid disruption to our operations, all of our meetings, consultations and interviews are now being done remotely using technology apps like Zoom, Google Meet, Video Calls, etc.

We sincerely apologize to the community and any beneficiary if we have fallen short in our services due to these COVID-19 difficulties. We hope that together we will overcome this pandemic and pull through these difficult times. We look forward to the times when we will be able to serve the needs of the community under normal circumstances again.

A big thank you to all Sikh Institutions, service providers, government agencies, our donors, volunteers, staff and committee members for your great support to SIWEC.

Stay Home & Stay Safe

In Guru Ji's Seva

**Gurdip Singh Usma**

Chairman, Sikh Welfare Council

# Eldercare Programme: First Outing in 2020 – Ang Bao Treasure Hunt & Sentosa Trip



Just like every other festival, Sunehri Saheliana members embraced the Chinese New Year spirit in the first week of 2020! On the 4th of February, at 7.30am, 71 seniors excitedly arrived at Central Sikh Temple.

Ang Bao packets hidden at several spots, such as under a rock, behind a tree, etc.

Split into two groups, one group proceeded to East Coast for “The Ang Bao Treasure Hunt” while the second group embarked on an exhilarating day-trip to Sentosa. Mrs Sarjit Kaur Khosa, member of SIWEC’s Management Committee and volunteer leader of SIWEC’s active ageing programme, together with her devoted volunteer team had once again successfully organized a wondrous day for the seniors to enjoy!



## **Ang Bao Treasure Hunt**

Life is a treasure hunt and the gallant seniors made it a hunt of much delight. To honour the Chinese New Year tradition, the treasure hunt was aptly named “Ang Bao Treasure Hunt.” Mrs Sarjit shared, “The Ang Bao Treasure Hunt was inspired by one of our volunteers who had attended another treasure hunt activity.”

Upon reaching the venue, the participants partook in some exercises, such as brisk walking, led by a Health Promotion Board (HPB) instructor. Then, they were divided into groups for the game. Each group had to hunt for 10



The packets consisted of questions regarding lifestyle, which the participants had to answer as a group. The trick to winning the prize was to be the first group to answer all the questions. A great amount of zeal and sportsmanship was observed amongst the participants.



The happy bunch of seniors returned to Central Sikh Temple after the prize-giving ceremony, where light refreshments were served. Thereafter, they made their way to the level 4 conference room, where senior members who did not attend the outing joined them for the next activity.

From the feedbacks requesting another outing to the same venue, Sunehri Saheliana volunteers felt affirmed and overjoyed that they helped revive the seniors' childhood memories.



The day ended on a high note with a laughter yoga session, a sharing of cooking experiences and an engaging quiz.

**Sentosa Day Trip**

Sentosa never fails to make a Singaporean feel like they're away from home without actually leaving the country! This was what the volunteers had hoped when leading the second group of 38 participants, as they left for Sentosa Siloso Point in the early morning.

Upon arriving at the venue, a trainer from HPB led the group with Zumba Gold exercises in the cool breeze.



Our seniors then challenged themselves along the treetop trail at the newly built Fort Siloso Skywalk, towering at 11 storeys high and stretching for 181 metres long. The scorching sun proved no barrier as they happily took it on, enjoying posing for photos midway and taking in the breathtaking views.

The senior members were also in awe of the larger-than-life coastal guns at the end of the walk and the chatter of excitement got much louder when they reached the Madam Tussauds Museum. They were thrilled to pose with wax statues of prominent personalities like Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Mahatma Gandhi, Queen Elizabeth, President Obama, and many famous Bollywood celebrities.

The last activity on the itinerary was the "Spirit of Singapore Boat Ride", where the group rode through a unique and stunning themed tribute to Singapore's rich identity and people. The breathtaking ride was enjoyable although most of the seniors felt it was too short!



Later, while some seniors were fatigued and chose to rest, others were game to watch the “Images of Singapore Live” show where they rediscovered the colourful story of Singapore’s development from a fishing village to a 21st century economic powerhouse. They were walked through a Malay Village, where an actor told them about

the good old days and enlightened them about the story on how Singapore was found. Our seniors truly enjoyed the engaging, interactive show.

Closing the momentous day, they returned to Central Sikh Temple and happily headed home after lunch with a bagful of exciting memories!



### **Effects of COVID-19 Outbreak on the Eldercare Programme**

The very next day, after guidance from MOH stipulating that seniors were best advised to stay home to safeguard their well-being due to COVID-19, Mrs Sarjit and her team made the decision to postpone their weekly programme until the authorities considered it suitable for seniors to leave home safely.

With the imposition of more stringent circuit breaker measures, the committed team of Sunehri Saheliana volunteers continues to keep in contact with their member-participants via phone and video calls.

“They regularly receive videos of simple exercise routines from the volunteers, which can be performed in the comfort of their homes. They are also urged to continue practising various exercises they learnt from attending laughter yoga, Zumba and stretch band exercise classes previously,” said Mrs Jasbir Kaur.

“Our participants fervently exchange recipes with the volunteers and each other in anticipation of the recipe book, which will be unveiled by Sunehri Saheliana this year. They continue to keep in touch virtually but they all impatiently await for the circuit measures to be eased so that their programme can resume, as they would love to meet their friends to chit chat and create more joyous memories together,” said Mdm Sarjit.



# Madam Kartar Kaur – Faithful Sewa with Heart



At 70, when most seniors are happily retired and settling into a slower pace of life, Madam Kartar Kaur's weekly diary is filled with scheduled visits to lonely seniors across the island.

She visits 30 seniors residing in different senior care homes, and another 13 who live in their own homes, mostly alone.

The mother of two and grandmother of four clearly revels in the role of an angel, visiting these 'lonely souls' who crave interaction and conversation with someone from a similar cultural-linguistic background.

Upon switching to a quiet life after retiring in 2010, the former bank staff had been happily volunteering daily with Silat Road Gurdwara preparing langgar in the kitchen. A volunteer with SIWEC who saw Madam Kartar's passion for sewa told her about a job opening at SIWEC, to befriend seniors in senior-care homes.

They met manager Ranjit Singh, where Madam Kartar filled an application form to join SIWEC as a volunteer with the Seniors Befriending Programme.

In 2013, SIWEC suggested she work part-time to visit on a more regular and structured basis, in order to better support the growing group of lonely seniors.

## **Befriending Seniors**

After 3 years serving part-time, Madam Kartar agreed to join SIWEC full-time in 2017 so that she could do even more. "I felt a deep sense of satisfaction when I saw that my presence made a difference in people's lives. It brought a smile to their faces, just by spending time and checking in on them occasionally. They look forward to seeing me at every visit."

Her positive disposition to serving others has reinforced her belief that she can make a difference in people's lives well into her silver years. "This work keeps me mentally stimulated. It gives me a deep sense of purpose and fulfilment in my life."



Madam Kartar prepares for each visit by packing parshad and vegetarian food from the Gurdwara. She goes the extra mile to celebrate every senior's birthday, buying a small present for them, including getting them their preferred snack to brighten up their day and make it special.

When asked what was the most fulfilling aspect of her role, she said, "When I see the residents' happiness and how they open up to me by sometimes holding my hand to share their sorrows, I feel privileged to listen and help ease their pain, to some extent."

## **Bereavement Support**

Madam Kartar's scope of work at SIWEC also involves supporting bereaved families when a loved one has passed on.

"It is always saddening to see a loved one leave their family behind, be it a young or older person. Many a time, it is challenging to deal with family members in their grief and still remain strong and composed to give them moral and emotional support. As the grieving family will feel perplexed when making tough decisions, we are present to assist them through the process."

There are instances when Madam Kartar supported families and individuals through their final weeks and days in hospice-care. She recounted an instance three years back, when she assisted the family with body washing of a lady she used to visit in hospice.

She also recounted two cases of Sikh individuals without any family support, one male and one female, whom she had gotten to know from visits to the Sree Narayana Mission home in Yishun. She used to liaise with social workers and doctors there to gauge the individuals' well-being and health conditions.

In both instances, SIWEC made all the arrangements for their funerals, getting volunteers to assist with body washing, driving the hearse, seeing through the ashes collection and dispersal, as well as coordinating prayers at the Gurdwara. In such cases, SIWEC staff and volunteers attend the 3-day Akhand Path prayers at the Gurdwara on rotation, culminating with a simple yet dignified Bhog ceremony.

Madam Kartar reflects on how her work at SIWEC over the past few years has impacted her outlook on life. "Death is inevitable. Nothing belongs to me. Live every moment, fulfil my dreams and wishes as much as possible within my means, as there may be no time later. Humility is divine. My prayer and faith have become stronger. I thank Waheguru for each new day."

**Befriending in COVID-19 Times**



Before COVID-19 circuit breaker (CB) measures were imposed nation-wide in March, Madam Kartar was still able to schedule visits with home-care residents, with authorisation from each facility's administrators. Visitors were still allowed then after adhering to strict conditions, such as registering contact information, taking temperature, and including donning of protective gloves, masks and disposable medical gowns.

After CB measures were introduced and visits put to a stop, Madam Kartar continued to remotely contact the social

workers or nurses to enquire into her clients' well-being. In some instances, she got the opportunity to speak with them briefly over the phone.



Conversations with the 13 clients living in their own homes were still maintained via mobile phones and landline contact.

During this time and depending on each situation,

if there are any cases requiring specific help, Madam Kartar links them up with the necessary support, such as home care or medicines.

Madam Kartar feels it is important for her to continue to connect regularly as some of her clients have experienced negative emotions after being cooped up at home. Additionally, the lack of social and emotional support takes a toll on some more than others.

To mitigate such situations, Madam Kartar continues to patiently devote more phone time to allow her clients to share their feelings. She recognises, "All human beings need to feel heard. They need to feel their burdens made a bit lighter."

"Some of my clients share a good rapport with their neighbours so I encourage communicating often while practicing social distancing."

Before ending each conversation, she assures clients that she can be reached at any time they feel low. "They do call me on their own accord, when they need a listening ear. Actually, attending to their calls during this time as I work from home is a win-win situation as I too will feel less bored."

When asked on how she has grown and what she cherishes most from this experience through the years with SIWEC, she said, "I have grown wiser and learned that I must always take care of myself first, be it physically or financially. Most importantly, to always stay positive and continue to have faith through all my sad predicaments and good times."

When asked what she would like to share with the community at large, Madam Kartar stated, "It saddens me that in this day and age, where technology allows everyone to be quite easily connected, some seniors remain lonely, depressed and forgotten by their family and friends."

# Ride 2 Serve 2020 – Perseverance to Raise Funds amid COVID-19 Pandemic



Ride 2 Serve 2020 (R2S) is a grassroots-led charity movement formed by a group of cyclists, aiming to raise funds in support of SIWEC's programmes. It was initially established as Ride for Charity (RFC) in 2014.

2020 started with much anticipation as regular riders had commenced training enthusiastically since November 2019 for the next ride scheduled for mid-March.

The 2020 ride was planned to start at Port Dickson, with overnight rest stops at Malacca and Batu Pahat.

Upon completing the 2019 ride last March, a group of riders assembled in April to deliver the first packs of monthly rations to support 30 families under the Sunlove Day Activity Centre at Eunos.

Early publicity to promote the ride and recruit riders, donors, and support crew, started in December 2019.

The momentum picked up in January and February with increased training, even as DORSCON Orange was declared in early February due to early cases of COVID-19

## PROGRAMME

in Singapore. Meanwhile, a team planning the logistics completed a recce-trip in mid-February to confirm the route and finalise accommodation arrangements.



All preparations were in place when the final briefing for participants was held on Sunday, 8 March. On 9 March, after sensing heightened concerns about participants' well-being amidst growing uncertainties of the COVID-19 spread in the region, a decision was made to postpone the event to September 2020.

The organisers met to look at potential windows to schedule the postponed ride. The initial sentiment among riders was that there would be more certainty by June, so they continued training to keep up their fitness and stamina through weekend rides in small groups.

Since early April 2020, when the circuit breaker was announced in Singapore, planning for the fundraiser came to a standstill.

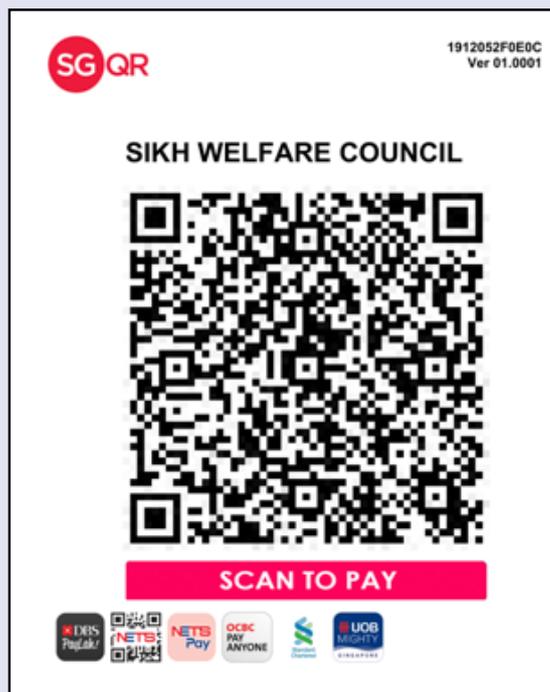
However, the morale and spirit of riders remains high as they continue to train on their own.





Please do your part and make a donation in the following ways:

1. PayPal Donation: <https://www.siwec.org/fundraising/donations/donate-online>
2. Other Online Platforms: <https://www.giving.sg/siwec>
3. Local Donations (SGQR CODE)



Their resolve to serve others remains undaunted and they look forward to completing the quest, remaining hopeful to ride in Malaysia in the second half of 2020.

However, the option of a local ride covering the same distance has also been explored, in the eventuality that COVID-19 travel restrictions remain in place throughout the year.

What is most heartening is that these volunteers are eternal optimists as they see a silver lining among the clouds. As organizer Paul Luvinderpal Singh reflected, “We have more time to train and raise funds, both via online channels and through personal appeals.”

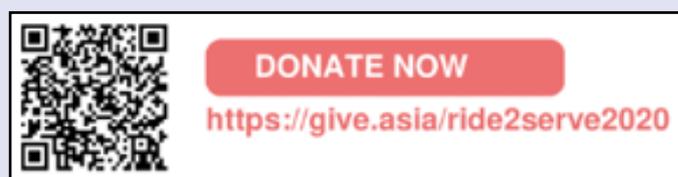
The pledge card this year includes the option of cashless payment transfer via QR code using a smartphone.

Donors can use the NETSBiz app for QR scanning for both Android and iOS devices (also with the camera). On most occasions, one only has to launch the app to instantly scan the QR Code at the touch of a button!

Presently, a total of about \$124,000 has been raised so far. This is far short of the intended target of \$250,000.

SIWEC expects that many more families will be affected by job losses due to COVID-19’s adverse impact on the economy and industry. They will need assistance to tide through these difficult times. Join us to help raise funds for charity.

4. International Donations (give.asia):



# OUR SERVICES

24-Hour Hotline  
**+65 6299-9234**

Financial Assistance &  
Food on the Table  
Programme

Academic Excellence  
& Education Support  
Programme

Hospital / Home Visits  
& Healthcare Ambassador  
Programme

Eldercare & Active  
Aging Activities

Prison Counselling &  
Aftercare Programme

Community Mediation &  
Counselling Programme

Bereavement Service

Community Outreach  
Activities

## YOU CAN HELP AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### Donations

A small contribution from you translates into huge benefits for the less fortunate. You can donate by:

- Making a One-off Donation
- Donating Monthly via GIRO
- A Bequest (Will) - Leave a legacy in support of SIWEC's clients.
- A Memorial Donation - A thoughtful way to remember a loved one while giving support to others.

**Donors will be able to claim tax deduction amounting to 2.5 times the amount donated to SIWEC.**

### Volunteers

Your efforts as a SIWEC volunteer enable us to successfully run our programmes and thus make a difference to the community.

We are looking for volunteers to strengthen our services and contribute to the community at large.

To find out more, kindly contact us at [info@siwec.org](mailto:info@siwec.org) today!

## WHOM WE SERVE

**SIWEC is here to help. We serve everyone!**

If you or someone you know requires assistance or is interested in our services, please call us, e-mail us or come down to meet us at the SIWEC Office.

### Sikh Welfare Council

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**Sikh Welfare Council**