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Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs Amrin Amin, flanked by Commissioner of Prisons Desmond Chin (foreground) and Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society board chairman Daniel Too, speaking to Singapore Prison Service Cluster B Superintendent Faisal Mustaffa (on screen) at iCosy Hub's televisiting room. PHOTO: INDUSTRIAL & SERVICES CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY



## New televisiting facility caters to inmates' families

Shabana Begum

During his roughly 30 years spent in and out of prison, one of the biggest regrets former offender Selvarajan Isaac Shadrak had was the effect his imprisonment had on his mother.

Without technology like teleconferencing, she had to make the physical journey to see him. It took her hours to travel by public transport from Pasir Panjang to Changi Prison in the 1980s and, while waiting to see her son in prison, Madam

Viola Shadrak would also often get emotional as she listened to the stories of other family members with incarcerated relatives.

Teleconferencing facilities, allowing families of inmates to chat with them from remote locations via video conferencing, were introduced in Singapore only in 1999.

Over the years, eight televisiting facilities have sprouted in prison link centres, family centres and community centres. The ninth televisiting facility was opened last Friday at the Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society (Iscos) in

Alexandra Road to cater to families living in the area.

"Televisiting rooms are very helpful because they offer privacy," said Mr Selvarajan, 67, who works as a programme coordinator and volunteers at Iscos. He was released from prison in 2001.

At Iscos' newly opened iCosy Hub, which has a televisiting room among other features, the goal is to offer stronger support to former offenders and families of inmates.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs Amrin Amin, the guest of honour at the launch, said the facility "performs a very useful function, where (former offenders) can come together in a cosy place and eat, talk and get help for various issues - from appointments to speaking to each other to bonding".

The local convicted inmate population as of 2017 numbered over 10,200, comprising 8,885 penal inmates and 1,360 Drug Rehabilitation Centre inmates. All are eligible to meet their family members. Visits

are capped at twice a month, and family members can choose to have either one face-to-face visit and one televisit, or two televisits.

For former offender Subin, 35, who declined to give his full name, the chance to see his parents and loved ones while serving his sentence at Changi Prison from 2009 to 2010 was critical to his well-being. His then girlfriend Vita, now his wife, travelled from her workplace in Toa Payoh to Changi to visit him every month. She would skip lunch and work till late to make up for the time away. She also used the televisiting service at the former Toa Payoh Prison Link Centre.

To pass the time, Subin, who is now a freelance commercial diver and logistics driver, would read widely in prison to the delight of his family. "It gave them the confidence that I was not behaving badly any more, but I was reforming inside, and it gave them hope."

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Text:

## **New televisiting facility caters to inmates' families**



*Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs Amrin Amin, flanked by Commissioner of Prisons Desmond Chin (foreground) and Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society board chairman Daniel Teo, speaking to Singapore Prison Service Cluster B Superintendent Faisal Mustaffa (on screen) at iCoty Hub's televisiting room. PHOTO: INDUSTRIAL & SERVICES CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY*

By Shabana Begum

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