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## Man gives back to society after escaping death penalty

Michelle Ng

Mr Jabez Koh calls his escape from the gallows 21 years ago a miracle. In 1997, he was caught trafficking 2.5kg of heroin, but it turned out that the purity of the drug was 1.85g short of the 15g that would have seen him hanged. He was sentenced to 24 years' jail and ordered to be given 20 strokes of the cane instead.

"It was a miracle and I was given a second life to live. When I came out, I was determined to change my life and make the most of every moment," said the 43-year-old, who was released on remission in February 2013. He was speaking to the media at the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run yesterday. About 6,500 people took part in the event that supports the reintegration of former offenders into society.

Mr Koh now runs his own transport and logistics company, Infinite Transports, fulfilling his lifelong

dream of becoming a businessman. He said most of his employees are former offenders, adding that giving them a job is his way of giving back and helping others find their footing in life. "I have to set an example for my staff because they look up to me. I also try to groom a few leaders to take my position and to learn duty and responsibility."

Yesterday, he took part in a 5.6km run for the sixth year running. His wife Sarina Aw Yong, 41, who is pregnant with their second child, and daughter Janess Shane Koh, who is almost two years old, cheered on the sidelines.

Now in its 10th year, the event has attracted more than 79,200 runners in both its 10km competitive run and 5.6km fun walk categories.

This year, there was also a special four-member 5.6km team "Run for Second Chances" that was open to the public.

The runs took participants through historic sites such as the

Johore Battery, Changi Chapel Museum and through the gates of the iconic Old Changi Prison Wall, which opens once a year for the run. The end point was in the Changi Prison Complex.

The annual event has raised about \$1,056,975 since 2009, when the run first took place. The money goes to programmes run by the Yellow Ribbon Project to help former offenders reintegrate into society. The project is in its 15th year.

After the run, the public was treated to a live rendition of Robbie Williams' Better Man by Jack and Rai and current inmates from the Performing Arts Training Centre.

Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing, who flagged off the 10km competitive run and joined the 5.6km fun walk, said: "In life, it's not just about how rich we have become (as a country) or how well the most able are able to do.

"The strength and character of a country are defined by how we are able to take care of the little, those with the least, those who may be lame and those who might be lost."

It is a sentiment echoed by Mr Roslan B. Hashim, who joined this year's run to mark the 10th year of his release from prison.

"In the past, the stigma against ex-offenders was quite obvious. Society is more accepting now but I still want to prove myself that I'm worth the second chance," said the 44-year-old, who works as a workplace safety and health officer in the construction industry. "I believe change comes from within and it must be for yourself, not for others."

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Top: Mr Jabez Koh managed to avoid the death penalty when the purity of the heroin he was caught trafficking fell short of the amount that would have seen him hanged. He now runs his own transport and logistics company, with most of his employees former offenders - his way of giving back and helping others. Above: Participants of the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run nearing the finish line, which is within the fences of Changi Prison Complex. ST PHOTOS: SYAMIL SAPARI

### A SECOND CHANCE

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### CHARACTER OF A COUNTRY

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By Michelle Ng

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