



IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LIVES

A push in the right direction

With suitable help, life for Mdm Suhana and her family is starting to look up

Mdm Suhana Binte Suparman, 47, lives in a Housing Development Board (HDB) Interim Rental Housing (IRH) flat with her husband, three daughters and two grandchildren.

The family sold their four-room flat in 2010 because they were unable to make the monthly mortgage payments. They received no cash from the sale; the proceeds went towards offsetting their debt.

With the help of the Singapore Children's Society's (SCS) Family Care Centre (FSC) Yishun, the family qualified for an IRH flat. According to Senior Case Worker Ms Catherine S. Maderazo, the family has been trying to complete the purchase of a new three-room flat for more than two years.

However, while the couple's Central Provident Fund balances qualified them for the purchase, they have not been able to make the upfront cash payment of S\$40,000, nor produce a three-month pay slip necessary for the release of the key to the new flat.

To Mdm Suhana, the lack of a home to call their own has become the root of her distress. She described how she used to be able to bake, knit and sew at home for some extra income, but has been unable to do so in the IRH flat because she does not have the space she needs.

HEALTH AND CAREGIVING CHALLENGES

The family also has a slew of health issues. Mdm Suhana has diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and chronic pain in her legs and back. She had to leave her job as a part-time cleaner as she was unable to be on her feet for prolonged periods.

Her second daughter, aged 16, is diabetic, asthmatic and has a stomach ulcer. The youngest daughter is 9 and has diabetes, eczema, dyslexia, learning disabilities and a lazy eye in need of an operation. She is attending a learning support programme at the Dyslexia Association of Singapore.

Mdm Suhana's eight-year-old grandson is also in her care. Her four-



Mdm Suhana (right) with her youngest daughter and eldest grandchild. PHOTO: KOH MUIFONG

year old granddaughter is temporarily staying with Mdm Suhana's mother because the IRH flat has no window grilles. The two children belong to Mdm Suhana's eldest daughter, 24, who is a single mother.

Mdm Suhana's husband worked as a forklift driver with the same company for more than 15 years before he was terminated from his job. He told Ms Maderazo it was because of his absences during the period they were moving out of their home. He worked as a cleaner after that, but had problems holding down a job. As a result, the couple constantly fought over money.

TO HELP AND TO EMPOWER

FSC Yishun focuses on promoting stable family life through services

and programmes like financial aid, counselling and workshops. The centre's assistance to Mdm Suhana and her family covers a few aspects. Up till March, they received between S\$170 and S\$200 monthly from the centre's casework fund for household and transportation expenses. There was aid from other organisations like Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura as well as things like house rental vouchers, grants for the children's education and assistance from KK Women's and Children's Hospital, which covers their medical expenses.

Ms Maderazo, who is also in charge of SCS's Financial Assistance Unit, monitors the aid the family is receiving and is in constant contact with other agencies and organisations involved to ensure that the family's needs are met.

Mdm Suhana is the centre's chief client in this case, but Ms Maderazo works with the entire family. For instance, she has had to motivate Mdm Suhana's husband into taking more responsibility for the family in terms of caregiving and financial contributions, and spoke to the second daughter about the importance of finishing her education and helping out at home. She also encouraged Mdm Suhana to upgrade her skills, signing her up for programmes like writing courses.

In March, Ms Maderazo stopped the centre's monthly disbursements to the family to encourage them to do more to help their situation. She said the family has seen a lot of improvement since. Mdm Suhana's husband secured a job as a forklift driver with a new company in October. The children's school attendance and results have also improved.

Ms Maderazo said: "Mdm Suhana wants to settle the house. She wants all the children to finish school and have good jobs and a better life, because she herself has had no formal education and can barely write her own name."

"It's a tough situation but she has been trying her best to make things work and keep the family intact." **PRODUCED BY THE TODAY SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM**



OCBC-TODAY CHILDREN'S FUND

The OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund was set up to help children from distressed families. These are children from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or dysfunctional families who have suffered the effects of neglect or even abuse.

The Fund is unique in two ways. First, it focuses on the children's emotional needs. Donations go towards the Singapore Children's Society and its beneficiaries, supporting the cost of counselling and therapy intervention programmes. A child's emotional landscape has an impact on self-esteem, interpersonal relations, behaviour and learning ability. Counselling, therapy and skills building can improve these children's self-esteem and help them gain a purpose in life.

Secondly, donations will be capped at S\$1.5 million each year — S\$1 million from public contributions and S\$500,000 from OCBC's commitment to give S\$1 for every S\$2 raised. This is to ensure that other charities, especially smaller outfits, also have the chance to benefit from the generosity of donors.

Mr Koh Choon Hui, Chairman of the SCS, said: "Every child deserves to be loved and protected and to be given the opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential."

You, too, can make a difference. Help these children rebuild their lives.

To donate, visit www.ocbctodayfund.sg or call the SCS fundraising department at 6273 2010.