



IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LIVES

A better home and future

At Sunbeam Place, children find their footing and a new life

"Awesome" was the word Dimple Faustina Rabin, 11, and Ross Douglas Rabin, 9, used several times to describe their one-and-a-half years at Sunbeam Place, an approved home for children aged two to 18.

It has a capacity of 72, and takes in children who suffer abuse or neglect, or who need the care and protection that their parents aren't able to provide. For these siblings, their woes started when their father, Mr Douglas Rabin, 39, became indebted to loan sharks.

Mr Rabin said that he had been convinced by two "brothers" to put his name on a more-than-S\$100,000 loan. Within two weeks, his friends had "disappeared" with the money. The single father, who has been divorced for 10 years, had to sell his condominium apartment to help pay off the debt.

Having lost their home and with no alternative caregivers to help, the children's safety became an issue. They also had to contend with loan shark harassment. Mr Rabin eventually sought help from Fei Yue Family Service Centre (Bukit Batok) and was referred to Sunbeam Place.

"It was very painful leaving them here, because they are all I have," said Mr Rabin. "My children are very straightforward. If they see me smile, they will smile. If I cry, both will start crying. So I didn't want to bring my torture into their lives. I can sleep by the road, I can sleep in the park, but that should not happen to the kids."

Last December, the family was reunited when Mr Rabin secured a one-room rental flat in Sengkang. "It's not much, but we're together under one roof again, so it's wonderful," he said. His loan shark troubles are coming to an end, although he still owes the banks and others approximately S\$350,000 (a cumulation of the initial debt and subsequent interest) which he is "working day and night" to pay off. In February, Dimple and Ross were officially discharged back into their father's care.

The family's case worker at Sunbeam Place, Ms Delphanie



Mr Douglas Rabin and his children, Ross and Dimple, at the open play area at Sunbeam Place. PHOTO: KOHMUIFONG

Phua, explained that Mr Rabin had "proven to be a reliable, protective and loving father ... steadfastly clearing his loan shark debts and finding stable employment to support the needs of his family". He had also been proactive and resourceful in looking for a new home and furnishing it.

A SAFE, HAPPY HOME

Dimple explained that they were "happy and sad at the same time" when they left Sunbeam Place. She said: "When we came here, we were sad because we had to leave Dad for a while. But the people were very kind."

Ross recalled that it took him a month to adjust. He said: "I started to make friends on the second day. By

the fourth week, all the boys on the second floor were my friends."

Mr Rabin remained in close contact with the children throughout their stay at Sunbeam Place. He never missed a chance to take the children out during their weekend home leave. Because they didn't have a roof over their heads, he would book a camping spot by the beach and pitch a tent. "It was like an outing. I cooked for them and we spent quality time together," he said.

Initially, the children would cry when they had to return to Sunbeam Place on Sunday nights. Gradually, their goodbyes to their father grew chirpier. "There were times when they would still cry," said Mr Rabin. "No matter how happy they were, they still

felt hurt sometimes. But Sunbeam Place is a positive place for kids."

A LOVING ENVIRONMENT

For Dimple and Ross, Sunbeam Place was a temporary home but for some of the children living there, it is their only sanctuary.

The average length of stay is two-and-a-half years, although 36 of the current 68 residents have been there beyond that and the longest a child has ever stayed was 16 years. Currently, the youngest residents are two boys aged three.

Apart from counselling and therapy, the home has programmes like life skills workshops, bonding activities and community involvement projects designed to help the children learn resilience, responsibility and respect. The home also places great emphasis on strengthening bonds between the children and their parents.

"My children were in safe, good hands. They've learnt a lot of positive things and become more mature," said Mr Rabin. "The caregivers there are real parents to kids who need love. I want to do a lot for this place. At the moment, I can't, but I know my time will come." **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.