

**A WORTHY CAUSE**

# Building it up

**KidzREACH gives children the ability to deal with problems beyond their control**

**SINGAPORE** – Children from low-income families are at higher risk of developing behavioural problems.

That said, research has shown that a significant number of children who grew up in adverse environments have gone on to do well in life. One of the core factors that enables them to do so is their resilience, explained Mr Chee Thow Wei Liat, a counsellor with Singapore Children's Society (SCS), Children Service Centre.

He said: "Some children have the ability to cope with what the environment throws at them and overcome them to become successful in life. This resilience comes naturally for some kids, but not for others."

To build resilience through character building and the teaching of life skills is the guiding principle behind the Children Service Centre's KidzREACH@Siglap programme, and is one of those supported by the OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund.

Twice a week, primary school children attend a one-and-a-half hour session at Siglap Community Centre: Lower-primary students on Monday and upper-primary students on Wednesday. These children are largely from families staying in Interim Rental Housing (IRH) flats in the area.

When new families move in, the South East Community Development Council (CDC) and Housing & Development Board (HDB) funnel the information to KidzREACH workers, who then make home visits to recruit the children for the programme.

Generally, the families they see are dealing with multiple stresses that range from financial issues to caregiving arrangements, said Mr Chee Thow. Some of the children do not get much attention from their parents who are busy working or taking care of younger siblings, and end up loitering. There had also been gang recruitment problems in the past.

"Through this programme, we're hoping to pass on some life skills and be positive role models for the kids," explained Mr Chee Thow.

## MEANINGFUL PLAY

In each session, the children go through 45 minutes of interaction and simple games that are designed to impart life skills that help to "buffer against the impact



The children play interactive games designed to help them build up resilience. PHOTOS: KOH MUI FONG

## \* LEND A HELPING HAND

The OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund was set up to help children from distressed families who have suffered the effects of neglect or even abuse. 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 helps ensure that other charities, especially smaller outfits, also have the chance to benefit from the generosity of donors.

Visit [www.ocbctodayfund.sg](http://www.ocbctodayfund.sg) or call the SCS fundraising department at 6273 2010.

of their environment" and to strengthen their resilience. These skills include dealing with peer pressure, learning to say no to drugs or smoking, anger management and decision-making skills.

The following 45 minutes are then spent on free play and the children can proceed outdoors for ball games. Those who have accumulated 10 stamps can use them to "redeem" a turn on the XBOX during this time. The stamps are awarded to the children for good attendance, behaviour and active participation during the group session.

Those with good attendance are also eligible for special outings to places like the zoo or aquarium. The idea is to reinforce good conduct in the children.

The temporary nature of IRH housing means that the families don't stay put for long, from as short as two months to a year. The children also do not attend every session. This affects attendance rates, which could be anything from two to 11 participants per session. To counter this, Mr Chee Thow has put together an intensive programme.

Mr Chee Thow said: "We do resilience work every week. We're just hoping to do as much as we can before they leave."

## A SAFE HAVEN

Malihah Mashhood Dar, 11, and Haney Shafiqah, 11, are friends who have been attending KidzREACH since 2012. Malihah said: "I learnt how to make friends and not bully one another."

Having fun was another important factor. Haney said: "During the support group, they teach us how to overcome our fears and find solutions to our problems. Then, we have free play and at the end, we wash our hands and eat biscuits. We can use stamps to redeem outings, stationery or use the XBOX. It's fun."

For Dani Dwi Negara, 12, activities such as playing soccer with his friends were what he enjoyed most. Of the group sessions, he said: "I learnt about rules important to us for the future."

Dani's mother, Ms Ririn, 26, said that he has been attending KidzREACH for about two years, and has since changed a lot. He is now a student counsellor and does well in his studies.

Her husband is the sole breadwinner and works in maintenance on Jurong Island, while she takes care of their three children. Dani's sister is 18 and his brother is 17. The family is still waiting to buy a HDB flat because they do not have sufficient funds in their Central Provident Fund.

Ms Ririn frequently described the family's circumstances as difficult, but is proud of her children and adamant about the importance of their studies.

Before they moved to an IRH flat, they stayed in a flat illegally rented out to four families. With 16 people sharing the unit, Ms Ririn had to wake Dani up at 4.30am in order to get him ready in time for school. Ms Ririn also had to ask him to do his homework at the void deck because the flat was too cramped and noisy.

These days, Dani does his school work at the community centre, which runs



Malihah Mashhood Dar and Haney Shafiqah have been attending KidzREACH since 2012.



Ms Ririn and her son, Dani Dwi Negara, who has been attending KidzREACH for two years.

a Homework Cafe programme every evening, and attends KidzREACH regularly.

Ms Ririn said: "KidzREACH is a very good idea. It has many activities and as a parent, I won't be scared (that he's mixing with the wrong crowd). The children learn to share and make many friends."

I have also gone for KidzREACH outings like barbecues with Dani. The children were happy to be playing and swimming. The parents can also make friends with one another. For a while, I can forget my problems."

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