

A WORTHY CAUSE

Improving young lives

The Student Care Centre (Henderson) offers children a nurturing place to grow and develop

SINGAPORE – Working with children has always been Ms Vimala Ragavan's passion. It is no wonder the bubbly and friendly senior programme assistant has stayed with the Singapore Children's Society's Student Care Centre (SCC) in Henderson for more than 24 years.

"The children keep me feeling young," said Ms Ragavan. "As I watch them grow up to become more mature, develop resilience and lead a better life, I feel happy for them. Seeing a smile on their faces is my biggest satisfaction."

SCC offers after-school care services for primary school children who are mainly from low-income, single-parent and/or distressed families, or who are sometimes left at home without adult supervision.

Ms Ragavan said: "The centre provides a nurturing environment for the children and gives them the opportunity to enhance their emotional, intellectual, social and physical development through various activities and programmes."

Ms Ragavan's role runs the gamut from planning and implementing programmes, managing volunteers, to looking after the children's welfare. She also helps the counsellors to run the outreach programmes for the children in the neighbourhood.

Throughout her tenure, Ms Ragavan has worked with more children than she can remember.

Although she faces new challenges every day, her passion for helping children and seeing how they have improved during their time at the centre has kept her going all these years.

A PLACE TO REST, STUDY AND PLAY

After school, the children make their way to SCC — a spacious yet cosy centre with colourful illustrations on the walls outside. Despite the simple furnishings, the children are glad that they have somewhere to go to where they don't have to worry about meals or being left at home alone. What's more, they have friends to play with and lots of activities to keep them entertained.

Each afternoon, the children follow a schedule that includes study/tutoring



Ms Vimala Ragavan has worked at the Student Care Centre (Henderson) for more than 24 years and feels a sense of satisfaction when she sees how the children improve and progress during their time at the centre. PHOTO: KOH MUI FONG

LEND A HELPING HAND

The OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund focuses on the emotional needs of children from distressed homes. 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 or call the SCS fundraising department at 6273 2010.

sessions, nap times and enrichment programmes. This schedule is designed to instil discipline and routine in the children.

Ms Ragavan said: "We inculcate positive values through games, activities and being good role models. To enhance our teaching approach, we have a behaviour chart to encourage the children to demonstrate these values daily."

The staff is ready to swoop in and act as mediators when conflict arises.

"We work as a team. The counsellors and I carry out the remediation work with the children and the family to ensure that the family's needs are met holistically," said Ms Ragavan.

The centre divides the children into groups either by age or nature of the activities. In addition, there is a buddy

system in place where the older kids help the younger ones. This system teaches the students responsibility as well as leadership skills.

Ms Ragavan added: "It helps that most of the children are from the same neighbourhood or school so they know one another quite well. To further reinforce team spirit, we run annual bonding camps to help the children know one another better."


GETTING HELP FROM OTHERS

To ensure that the children have nutritious meals, volunteers from ITE College East's School of Applied and Health Science have prepared a six-week menu for SCC. The centre's in-house cook prepares these meals and a cleaner keeps the place tidy.

According to Ms Ragavan, the children love the food at the centre. "Some of them put on weight while others look much healthier after being with us for some time. Some parents also express surprise when they see their kids eating foods like vegetables, which they usually refuse at home."

SCC also gets help from corporate donors to organise and sponsor many of its outings and events for the children, especially during the school holidays. This includes excursions to places such as the Singapore Zoo, Underwater World and Gardens by the Bay.

There are also enrichment camps, parent-related programmes and family

 We feel happy to see the improvements in the children and that is our biggest reward.

Ms Vimala Ragavan
SENIOR PROGRAMME ASSISTANT AT STUDENT CARE CENTRE (HENDERSON)

events. A graduation party is held annually for Primary 6 students.

Ms Ragavan said: "Many of these events are held on weekdays because we want to reserve the weekends for families to spend quality time with their children."

FRIENDSHIPS AND MEMORIES

To monitor the well-being of the children beyond the centre, SCC works hand-in-hand with parents/caregivers, schools and other professionals helping the family.

"We hope that imparting positive life values enables the children to contribute positively to society in the future," said Ms Ragavan.

To keep in touch with the students who have graduated from the programme, SCC has an alumni club called Sunbeam Friends Club, which organises activities for the graduates. It is evident that SCC's efforts have reaped rewards as the graduates come back on their own accord to visit Ms Ragavan and the counsellors.

"They will reminisce about their days with us and their friends," said Ms Ragavan with a smile. **PRODUCED BY THE TODAY SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM**