

**A WORTHY CAUSE**

# Seeing a KidzSHinE child shine

Salman Abdul Khalid, 18, found a safe place to grow and develop at the Children Service Centre

**SINGAPORE** – Ann Hui Peng, 36, is director of the Singapore Children's Society's Children Service Centre in Bedok North Street. It was established in 2008 and now services about 800 children each year, with a team of about nine staff. In her own words, Ms Ann tells the story of how Salman Abdul Khalid, 18, was nurtured and put on the right path.

As the head of a centre overseeing a team of staff that helps children, we sometimes feel discouraged when we do not see immediate returns for our hard work. The younger members of the team may even question if the work we are doing is really helping the children.

To this, I have always asked the staff to be patient. I tell them to see each child as a seedling that we are nurturing in the time that they are with us. Over time, when the seedling is ready, it will grow into a big, strong plant. We just have to shower it with care and concern, providing support and fertiliser.

Salman is one of those seedlings who is on his way to becoming a strong tree.

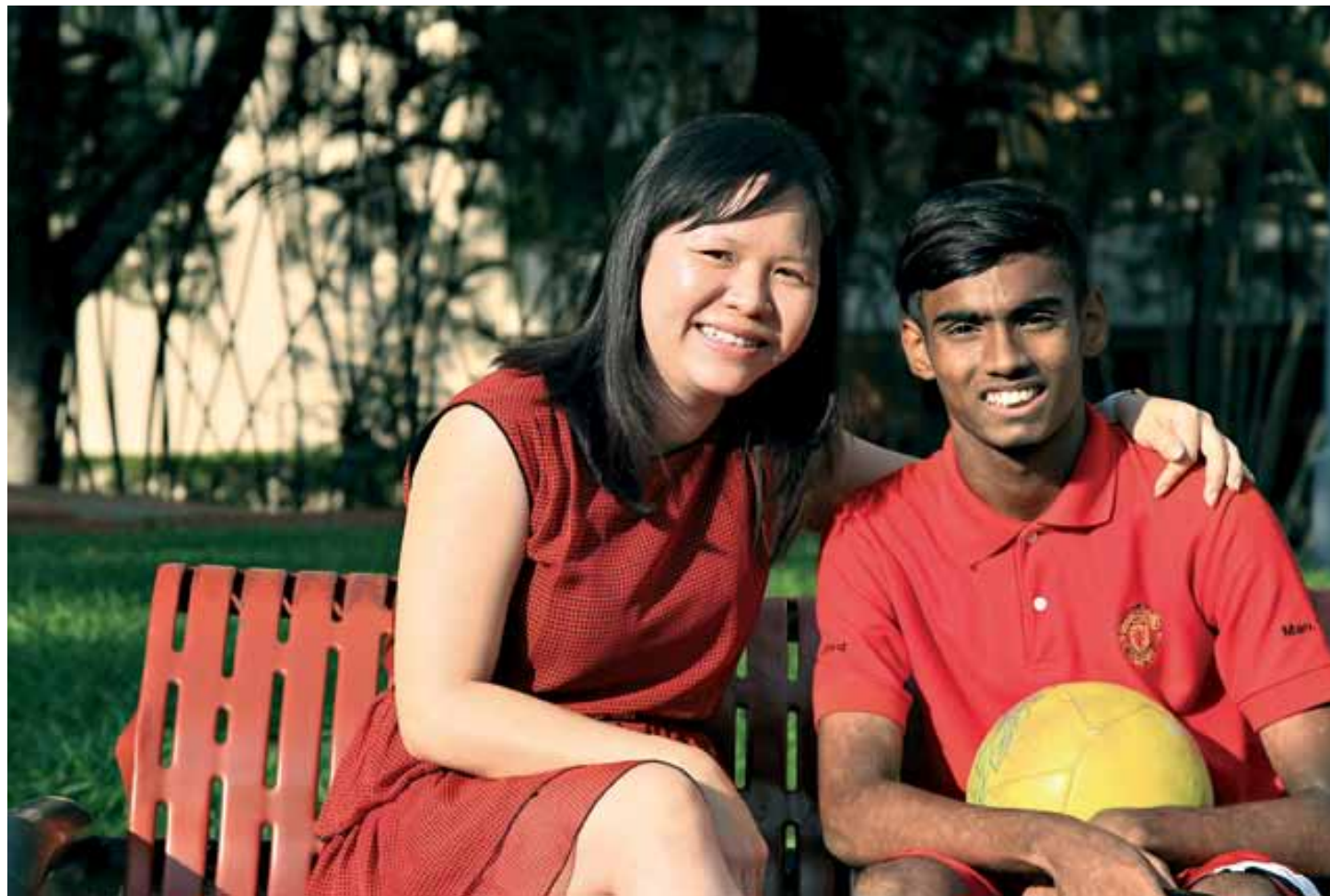
**A TROUBLED BOY**

When Salman first joined Singapore Children's Society Children Service Centre in 2009, he was repeating his PSLE. He was worried about his studies and did not feel that he could achieve good academic results. He had also been in the EM3 stream since Primary 4. School life was grey and gloomy.

He lives in a 3-room flat with his parents and three sisters. He is the second child. His father is the sole breadwinner, previously working as a mechanic to fix bus wheels (he is now a stacker in a supermarket). Money was tight and the family received financial aid from the schools and self-help groups.

Salman lives in the Kaki Bukit ward, an area populated with predominantly lower-income families. The centre was placed there to serve the lower-income groups in 2008. At that point in time, it also had the highest rate of social assistance applications from the Community Development Councils.

I remember Salman as a skinny boy who would spend all his time playing



From left: Ann Hui Peng and Salman Abdul Khalid. PHOTO: KOH MUI FONG

soccer and getting into fights with other kids. He also used unkind language occasionally. Whenever we talked to him about school, he projected a despondent outlook about his future. He was not confident about clearing the PSLE at his second attempt.

**LEARNING THE RIGHT VALUES**

We recruited Salman for KidzSHinE-Seeing Hope in Every Kid, an afternoon drop-in programme for disadvantaged children. Participants come from families with a combined income of less than S\$3,500. While there is a homework clinic supervised by staff and volunteers, the key focus of the programme is character development and teaching the right values. So there is also a support group for the children, as well as play time, art therapy and even movie sessions.

We could have focused on helping Salman clear his PSLE and doing plenty of revision. But we chose to work on Salman's sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

The counsellors and volunteers encouraged Salman and reframed the way he viewed and dealt with failures.

He took part in our camps and Children's Day celebrations, and from the combined experiences of our various programmes, Salman came to recognise that he had other talents and skills. Intelligence comes in many forms and Salman started to feel better about himself.

It was at KidzSHinE that Salman found the care and concern that he felt he did not have in school. He recalled: "The teachers in my primary school were too fierce. That is what made me feeling like giving up studying. But the teachers here care, and that is what motivated me."

That year, Salman passed the PSLE and got into the Normal (Academic) stream. We were happy for him. He officially graduated from our programmes and his two younger sisters are still attending programmes at the centre.

**“**Standing before me was a confident and happy teenager. I am humbled that he came specially to share the good news with me.**”**

**Ms Ann Hui Peng**  
CHILDREN SERVICE CENTRE DIRECTOR, ON LEARNING THAT SALMAN HAD BEEN PROMOTED TO THE EXPRESS STREAM

**SHINING BRIGHT**

Three years later, Salman came to look for me and greeted me with the biggest smile. He exclaimed to me excitedly: "Ms Ann, I got promoted to the Express Stream!". I congratulated the beaming boy and asked what else he was busy with. Salman then flashed me another radiant smile and told me that he had represented his school's cricket team and gone for a 10-day learning trip to India.

Standing before me was a confident and happy teenager. I am humbled that he came specially to share the good news with me. This is the best kind of report card a social worker could ask for.

Mdm Hafizah, Salman's mother, also told me that Salman managed to retain and practise the things that we instilled in him, staying away from vices such as smoking

"He uses the values you taught him to teach his younger sister Syahirah, telling her to come home on time and be responsible," said Mdm Hafizah. "He really learnt a lot of good things here. He is such a good boy and I am so proud of him."

Mdm Hafizah added that Salman has been studying hard and that he recently received a bursary of S\$1,000.

But he asked her for just S\$5 to buy a hat for himself. He allowed his mother to manage the rest of money for his education expenses and the family's needs.

Salman has also shown his sensible and considerate side. For example, when Mdm Hafizah cooks seven pieces of chicken for the family, he waits till everyone has gotten a piece each before helping himself.

**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.

He even asks Mdm Hafizah for permission to eat the last piece should no one want it.

**LOOKING BACK**

Today, Salman is still a skinny lad, but his roots are strong. He is a first-year student at the Institute of Technical Education Simei, majoring in mechanical engineering and technology. Salman says he wants to be a policeman, or perhaps a footballer. He still visits the centre regularly to play soccer, chat with friends and help at events.

In Secondary 4, he made the decision to go back to the Normal (Academic) stream because he wasn't able to cope with Mathematics. To others, this might be a setback, but Salman did not allow himself to be demoralised by it. He knows that if he continues to work hard, he will eventually go to a polytechnic and earn a diploma.

This boy learnt the value of resilience. What really struck me about Salman is his resilience and determination. This is something that he cultivated with us. We motivated him to never give up, and he picked that up and applied it to every aspect of his life.

We may not be able to solve a problem for them, but what I want the children to know is, if they fall, they can come back here and we will be there for them.

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