

# Bringing out children's strengths

*Ms Samantha Lim has been working with children and their families since 2003. It started when she took on a job managing a children's programme and realised that the social service industry suited her. The ability to bring about positive changes to the lives of children has since become a big part of her life. We spoke to her to find out more about her job.*

Ms Lim, 30, joined the Singapore Children's Society six-and-a-half years ago and is currently the Assistant Director and Head of the Student Care Centre (SCC). The centre provides before-and-after school care for primary school children who are mainly from low-income, single-parent or distressed families.

But the centre's role goes beyond just making sure the children have something to eat or do their homework; the objective is to provide a nurturing environment and opportunities for the children to develop their emotional and intellectual well-being through various programmes. Ms Lim oversees the operations of the SCC, the outreach work in the Bukit Merah area where the centre is located, and develops and maintains these programmes.

## Why do you feel so strongly about working with children?

I believe everyone should be respected for their worth and dignity. To achieve that, we sometimes have to be the advocate for vulnerable groups.

Children are often seen as vulnerable and unable to defend themselves. We use different approaches to bring out their strengths. We are the change agents who walk with these children and their families.

## What is a typical day at SCC like?

Most of the children arrive at the centre at 1.45pm. After lunch and their showers, we conduct fun and/or experiential character development-related activities. They then enjoy tea and start their study time. At the same time, we have our outreach team getting ready to proceed to our neighbourhood to run programmes for children within their vicinities.

## Please share with us one of your success stories.

There had been numerous success stories of children from SCC growing up to be professionals, including some who have done very well in life.

One personal encounter was when a boy who was in primary six managed to learn to control his anger. He used to shout at people and get violent, hitting things around him.

After I met him at the centre, I introduced an anger management workshop called Storm Riders for him and some other children. We processed his anger with him whenever opportunities arose. Six months down the road, we



Ms Samantha Lim with two of the children who visit the Student Care Centre . PHOTO: KOH MUI FONG

observed obvious changes in him. He was better able to control his anger and let it out in a safe way.

## Have any children made a lasting impression on you?

There was a case of family violence where all the members showed great resilience and independence. There were three children of tertiary, secondary and primary school ages. The mother, a housewife, sought assistance for child delinquency as she had difficulties managing her children. Not long after she came to us, she reported that her eldest child had hit her.

We found out that the father used to be violent towards the mother and the children had witnessed those incidents. The mother did not want her child to become a perpetrator of violence.

Meanwhile, the husband had initiated divorce proceedings. The second child had walked out to avoid the chaos in the family. The youngest child took on the heavy burden of emotionally supporting the mother. The mother also had to look for a job to support herself and her children.

While trying to salvage her relationship with her two older children, she was diagnosed with cancer. She faced the illness positively and this brought back

the two older children. They even offered to take on more part-time jobs to help support the family.

Through the period of difficulty, the youngest child was there for the family. He also did very well in school and learnt to be more independent to lessen the burden on his mother.

The strong bonds within the family helped them through the difficult situation. Through our assistance and collaborations with various community partners, we managed to bring some relief to the family financially and emotionally.

## How important is it for the parents to be involved?

We are never the ones in charge in the children's lives. We make sure we engage the parents and get their support to implement good behaviours or changes. Where the parents are harder to reach, we make it a point not to give up on them.

Parents have their own problems and issues. We should always empathise with them, show support and help them to help themselves. Only when we have emotionally healthy parents, will we have healthy children.



## 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 his or her self-esteem, interpersonal relations, behaviour and learning ability. Counselling, therapy and skills building can improve their 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](http://www.ocbctodayfund.sg) or call the SCS fundraising department at 6273 2010.

# Taufiq's home away from home

*RoundBox helped change the course of this teen's life*

It's not a big space — a classroom-sized studio with an extension that houses a pool table, some bookshelves and a small office — but for some of the 40 to 50 youths who show up regularly, RoundBox is as good as a second home.

Nineteen-year-old Muhammad Taufiq Bin Rosli is one of those who frequent the place, and has been doing so since 2010. He had just developed an interest in dancing when a friend told him that RoundBox had a dance studio he could use for practice, and other things that could be interesting. There were classes in dance, music and freestyle football conducted by professional trainers or volunteers, activities like weekly movies and like-minded friends to be made. Taufiq soon found himself spending almost all his free time there.

Located at the OnePeople.sg building in Toa Payoh, RoundBox is a drop-in centre set up by the Singapore Children's Society in 2000, originally for a group of youths under the Beyond Parental Control programme.

Through performing arts programmes, young people are encouraged to express their creative energies, pick up new skills and widen their social circle. All the activities at RoundBox are free upon registration.

RoundBox slowly expanded as the youngsters started bringing their friends, who in turn brought their friends along.

These days, anyone between the ages of nine and 19 are welcome to participate in the regular classes or drop-in activities like pool and board games. There are counsellors on standby, but the centre generally functions as a safe, casual environment for anyone to hang out or just to have someone to talk to.

## A GLIMMER OF HOPE

RoundBox was where Taufiq sought solace from his parents' frequent arguments at home. These started when he was 11 years old. He said: "I'd go home after school, see them quarrelling and lock myself in the room. But I could still hear them."

Things changed when he started spending time at RoundBox. "It was my form of escape. The vibe here is homely. You can talk to anyone about anything and no one will judge you. Before I step in, I make sure I leave everything that bothered me outside, so I can have fun here."

It wasn't just play. Taufiq studied for his N Levels at RoundBox because he "couldn't study in peace at home and the library was too quiet".



Taufiq continues to visit RoundBox, taking on more of a 'big brother' role. PHOTO: KOH MUI FONG

When he found out that the centre offered tuition, he jumped at the chance to enrol. Apart from the fact that his science grades leapt from a constant F9 to a B3, he found comfort in talking to his new friends. He said: "I realised that there're other people in my situation, some even worse off. My tutor Edwin also gave me advice and treated me like a close friend. That was when I felt better and started to accept that life is like that."

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Taufiq is now in his first year at Republic Polytechnic, studying mass communications, a course he had been working towards. Since he started practising at RoundBox, he has won a number of competitions, like the SAFRA Dare to Dance and Singapore Best Dance Crew All Styles Battle, and been a finalist in several others.

He has learnt to be more open

about his problems and grown more confident. These days, he's the "big brother" to the younger children, acting as a mentor and helping to choreograph dance steps for them.

When asked about the future, Taufiq readily said that he hoped to represent Singapore overseas and give back to the community through dance. He added: "Since I owe RoundBox so much, I'd like to come back in future to teach dance to the youth. Pass down what I had gained from my time here." **PRODUCED BY THE TODAY SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM**

“RoundBox was my form of escape. The vibe here is homely. You can talk to anyone about anything and no one will judge you. Before I step in, I make sure I leave everything that bothered me outside, so I can have fun here.”

**Muhammad Taufiq Bin Rosli, 19**

# Help these children rebuild their lives

*Not every child grows up in a functional family, or in a stable, loving environment. For some, neglect and abuse are an everyday reality.*

*Unfortunately, many of these children fall between the cracks in society.*

## RAISE THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

*The Singapore Children's Society (SCS) works to help children from all walks of life — especially those who are abused, neglected or from dysfunctional families — reach their full potential.*

*It is important to instil values in children, especially those who come from disadvantaged homes, so that they have a chance to grow up confident and strong.*

*With this in mind, OCBC Bank and TODAY have set up the OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund to help children from disadvantaged homes rebuild their lives through education and character-building programmes.*

*The money raised will be used to fund programmes run by the SCS to help these children build self-esteem and other important life skills.*

*Through counselling, therapy and mentoring sessions, these children will be equipped with vital social, emotional and psychological skills.*

*The long-term goal? To see these children grow into confident individuals with strong self-esteem, character, and discipline with the determination to succeed in life.*

## HELP THEM FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

*You may ask: "Why children?"*

*Children represent our future. It's only right that every child be given the chance to fulfil their potential. No child should be left behind.*

*Help children from broken homes build a better and brighter future. The healing process is long and difficult, but a child's smile makes it all worthwhile.*

*Visit [www.ocbctodayfund.sg](http://www.ocbctodayfund.sg) to do something amazing.*

*Together, we can rebuild these children's lives.*

Sincerely,

**Samuel Tsien**  
Group CEO  
OCBC Bank

Sincerely,

**Chang Long Jong**  
Deputy CEO  
MediaCorp

[www.ocbctodayfund.sg](http://www.ocbctodayfund.sg)

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