



A NEW BEGINNING

After the storm

The Student Care Centre (Henderson) is helping this child and his mother slowly rebuild their lives

SINGAPORE – Ms Radhika's* life as a newlywed didn't begin in the way she had hoped for. The 37-year-old had a successful career in India, working as a classical dance teacher for 16 years and even had her own school in Chennai.

She came here in 2006 due to an arranged marriage, but quickly discovered that all was not as it had seemed.

"My father-in-law said that my husband was in the army. But when I came to Singapore, I found out he was a security guard."

Her husband would sometimes return home drunk, and there were nights when he didn't come home at all.

In 2007, their son Ravi* was born. But any hopes she may have had that their newborn would draw the family closer together were quickly dashed.

NEGLECTED AND ALONE

Ms Radhika said that her in-laws didn't want to help look after Ravi. At the time, she had no friends in Singapore and did not know where to get help.

Her husband's indifference gradually evolved into anger. Ms Radhika said that he began to beat them when Ravi was about four years old. One particularly alarming incident occurred when he threatened both her life and Ravi's.

"He attacked me with a knife and threatened to throw Ravi out the window," she said.

Ms Radhika obtained a separation from her husband in 2011. The couple divorced in 2013, bringing the curtains down on a tumultuous marriage. She received some money from their divorce settlement.

But mother and child still faced a host of daunting challenges, like finding a roof over their heads.

SHELTER LIVING

From 2011 to last year, they lived in two shelters that offered refuge to families who needed help. While the shelters offered a reprieve to their housing situation, young Ravi still had to cope with an all-



Ms Radhika is relieved to have support in looking after her son Ravi. PHOTO: KOH MUI FONG

too-familiar problem — violence.

Ravi and his mum shared a room with several residents at their first shelter, and he was often bullied by the other children, who were older than him. Ms Radhika subsequently applied for a transfer to a different shelter.

They moved to their new shelter in 2013, where they lived with a couple and their baby. The other family was also dealing with marital issues and Ravi once again witnessed some distressing scenes.

At the end of 2014, Ravi and his mother were able to move to a rental unit. While mother and son were finally living on their own, they had to contend with other issues.

NEW CHALLENGES

Ravi began his primary school education last year. While he initially looked forward to making new friends, the situation changed when an old issue resurfaced.

"He began to argue with me because he didn't want to go to school," said Ms Radhika.

She found out that he was being bullied in school — one of his classmates would hit Ravi with a shoe. Thankfully the bullying stopped after Ms Radhika spoke to a school counsellor.

In December last year, Ravi began vomiting daily for three months and would sometimes have difficulty seeing. He was found to have heart issues — his heart would sometimes stop beating for one or two seconds, he has since been seeing a specialist.

A HELPING HAND AT HENDERSON

Ravi began attending the Student Care Centre (Henderson) in March last year, which offered Ms Radhika some reprieve from her worries.

“I feel very relieved that people are helping me to look after Raj. He has a lot of friends here.**”**

Ms Radhika

RAVI'S MOTHER, SPEAKING ABOUT HOW THE STUDENT CARE CENTRE (HENDERSON) IS HELPING RAVI

The centre is an after-school care service for primary school children who are mainly from single-parent, low-income, or distressed families. It also helps children who are sometimes left at home without adult supervision.

The centre offers activities and programmes that aim to enhance these children's emotional, intellectual, social and physical development.

The staff at the centre soon began to make a difference in Ravi's life, and also his mother's. Ravi has the opportunity to make friends in a structured, supervised environment.

For his mother, there's the sense that a huge weight has been lifted off her shoulders. "I feel very relieved that people are helping me to look after Ravi. He has a lot of friends here," she said.

Ms Radhika says that Ravi, who's now in Primary 2, is doing well in school and has also been receiving help from the school's counsellor.

She hopes to continue living in Singapore because she says it will be difficult to find treatment for Ravi if they return to India. And because Ravi is a Singapore citizen, he will be ineligible to attend a government school there.

Ms Tan Gek Noi, a counsellor at Student Care Centre (Henderson), says that Ravi is a well-behaved student.

He enjoys many of the typical activities that young children enjoy — like reading books, playing card games and playing with his friends.

* THE LKY MUSICAL

Enjoy a night of high drama at The LKY Musical, an original play that offers insight into the emotional struggle faced by Lee Kuan Yew and his friends at a time when Singapore history was balanced on a knife-edge.

Charity tickets in support of the OCBC-TODAY Children's Fund are available on the following dates:

| AUG 4, 2015 | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 10 tickets at | S\$2,000 |
| 20 tickets at | S\$3,800 |
| 50 tickets at | S\$8,000 |
| AUG 7, 2015 | |
| 10 tickets at | S\$2,500 |
| 20 tickets at | S\$4,800 |
| 50 tickets at | S\$10,000 |

Visit www.ocbctodayfund.sg or call the SCS fundraising department at 6273 2010.

* 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.

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These are activities that many children would take for granted, but have only recently become a reality for Ravi. **PRODUCED BY THE TODAY SPECIAL PROJECTS TEAM**

*MS RADHIKA'S AND RAVI'S NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT THEIR IDENTITIES.