

NOV 2017

We're fast approaching everyone's favourite time of the year!

While we soak in the festivities that come with the season, let us not forget the children, youth and families under our care.

This issue, we focus on *their stories.*



News@MCYC





EDITORIAL

News@MCYC is the newsletter of MCYC Community Services Society.

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The MCYC Community Services Society, a voluntary welfare organisation, helps at-risk children and youths in their educational, social, emotional and moral development.

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CONTENTS

CHILDREN

SOWING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE
iPEAK journeys with children under the STAR Intervention Programme, empowering them to become better thinkers.

p. 03

THEN & NOW: A REFLECTION
Journey with three students as they overcome their shy natures and learn to express their feelings.

p. 06

DISCOVERING OUR LITTLE PARTNERS
A Programme Coordinator at ACS(P) shares her experiences and how far some of the kids under her care have come.

p. 08

HOMESWEETHOME

SCARS OF THE PAST
HomeSweetHome helps children with complex trauma and issues, ensuring that the scars from their past do not dictate their future.

p. 12

FOSTERING

FOSTERING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Hear from Foster parents Desmond and Wendy on how fostering can change a child's life.

p. 14

YOUTH

SLOWLY, BUT SURELY
The road to family reintegration is not always smooth sailing. But we're here to help you get there.

p. 09

LOOKING BEYOND LIMITATIONS
The Youth Grant Programme has helped brothers Ben and James look beyond the limitations of their situation; encouraging them to dream big with a renewed purpose in life.

p. 10

THE FIRST KISS GOODBYE
One simple act of affection sparks the growth of a mother-daughter relationship.

p. 11

RESPONSE

BE A VOLUNTEER WITH US!

p. 16

Mission

To reach out in Christian love, by providing quality programmes and services to all children, youths, parents and their families, of all language, race and religion, and nurturing each family member in body, mind and spirit.

Objectives

To help children, youths and parents of all language, race and religion, especially from dysfunctional, disadvantaged and needy families, to:

- Develop to their fullest potential;
- Enjoy a balanced family life;
- Become responsible and caring family members; and
- Become useful members of society.



SOWING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

By Cassandra Lee, iPEAK

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Romans 5:3-5

“I lost control again.”

“I am so stupid.”

“My teacher called me naughty and made me get out of class.”

“My friends laughed at me and said I am crazy.”

“There is nothing good in my life.”

These are some things said by students in iPEAK’s STAR Programme. Behind their cheerful and chatty personas, we often discover hurts and rejections by their peers, family members and teachers. They suffer from poor self-confidence, low self-esteem, confusion, anxiety and, sometimes, rage. Through the words they say, we catch a glimpse of their struggles. We see how much they long to be accepted by those around them and be “normal” like everyone else.

Many students in the STAR Programme were referred to us because they have social-emotional difficulties, poor attention, hyperactivity and inappropriate social behaviours. They struggle with regulating their emotions and impulses. They see things from a different perspective. Many have also experienced trauma, neglect and dysfunctions in their families. In their feeble attempts to cope with the pain of their negative experiences, they often behave inappropriately.

Instead of treating symptoms and behaviours, the STAR Programme teaches these children strategies and skills to be better thinkers! They are taught how to logically gather, process and respond to information. These skills are essential in social settings, and can be challenging for these students.

Therapists intentionally and meaningfully build the child’s confidence by affirming their efforts; celebrating any successes and improvements made; be it big or small. Eventually, the children are more assured and aware of their strengths. They become willing to try a variety of tasks, as daunting as some may appear to be.



One of my students started off with very low self-confidence and limited problem-solving skills. At the beginning of the programme, he had a limited vocabulary and gave up easily. Once, he burst into tears and hid below the table to avoid the task, despite having done the same task many times before. After gaining his trust, equipping and empowering him, he is now willing to try and gives his best effort to all that he does. As the sessions progressed, he gradually overcame some of his emotional difficulties. His motivation level also improved. Currently, this happy pre-schooler is able to confidently and independently complete tasks that much older children struggle with.

Another student started his first session of the programme saying that he will be defeated in all the games that we will play. He tried to mask his low self-esteem by putting up a "couldn't-care less" attitude. Over time, we built up his confidence. We celebrated his successes whenever he effectively applied the strategies that were taught. By the fourth week, his motivation and perseverance to complete tasks improved tremendously. The taste of success was so impactful and encouraging that he came back the following week confidently asking for more challenging tasks. He now applies principles learnt in the STAR classes at home and in school.

Often, parents who see changes in their children are so amazed that they also start to practise the same strategies for themselves. Parents have shared that they conscientiously affirm their child's effort in preparing for tests and examinations instead of harping on the poor results. When something goes wrong, they take the effort to listen to the child's explanation first instead of scolding or nagging at them immediately. By learning the difference between reacting and responding, parents learnt to manage their own emotions first before addressing their child's behaviour.

While there are successes, there are also struggles and challenges. There are children who resist change, even tearing at the thought of anything new and unexpected. Cases like these require tremendous amount patience and perseverance. We hold onto the hope that their passive participation is still an opportunity for them to come onboard the journey of change. Little comments such as "something nice happened today" or "there was fairness" are worthy of praise and discussion. Any session that consists of smiles and laughter calls for a celebration.

At times, progress may seem painfully slow. But time is needed to win their trust; and, for them to experience love and hope. It is our interactions and relationships that sow the seeds of change and we pray for all the children as they journey through life.



To God be the glory.

STORIES & TESTIMONIES

When my daughter, Lisa, was young, she was bubbly and curious, she enjoyed learning new life skills quickly. However, on the academic front, she kept getting poor results and became disinterested in schoolwork. Fortunately, her school teachers suggested that we seek help instead of deeming her as lazy. She was eventually diagnosed with dyslexia and dyscalculia.

Lisa was first enrolled in MCYC's Literacy Intervention Programme to improve her language and literacy skills; and, later, in the Mathematics Intervention Programme as well. It was a struggle in the beginning - imagine having to attend so many extra classes after a tiring day in a normal mainstream school!

Apart from our sweets, treats and, sometimes, "stick" to keep her going for the extra classes, I strongly believe that the teachers in MCYC played a key role in raising Lisa's confidence in her language skills, Mathematics and other subjects as well.

Today she can manage most of her schoolwork independently. I am grateful to all the dedicated teachers at MCYC.

By Mr Gan (Lisa's Father)



Megan was diagnosed with leukaemia as an infant. She suffered a relapse when she was around 4 years old. She had a bone marrow transplant and went through a difficult journey of recovery; overcoming low immunity and post-transplant effects.

Missing out the pre-school years, we deferred her primary school enrolment by a year. We placed her in MCYC's specialist Literacy and Mathematics Intervention classes at the recommendation of a child development specialist. It is common for young children who have suffered from such major illnesses to require more intervention work on their attention span and critical thinking ability.

Since joining the programmes, Megan has benefited a lot. When she started mainstream kindergarten, she was not well-accepted in the class as the rest of them had grown up together since the nursery year. Megan started confiding in her teachers at iPEAK whenever she was feeling down and insecure. She also shared her happier moments too.

iPEAK provided a safe environment for her to learn at her own pace and not be judged by others. This conduciveness allowed her to slowly build up her self-esteem. In this caring environment, Megan learnt to encourage others too, telling others that it is okay to make mistakes just as she had. She learnt to help others in whatever ways she could. Now, even at only eight years old, Megan does not hesitate to reach out to those who need help; even if it is just to say a word of encouragement.

We are proud of Megan; not just because she grew up in the face of adversity. We are proud of Megan also because she possesses values that any parent would want for their children. We thank MCYC for imparting these to her.

By Priscilla (Megan's Mother)



Megan (above in white) with her lovely iPEAK teachers

THEN & NOW: A REFLECTION

by Sujitha Nair, Student Care Centre@BVPS

Having worked in MCYC's Student Care Centre (SCC) at Bukit View Primary School since March 2017, I have seen many Primary One students come out of their shells and develop their unique personalities. Seeing them achieve their potential gives me a sense of accomplishment and motivates me to continue what I do.

Annika first joined our SCC after transiting from Kindergarten to Primary School. In the beginning, we had to put our ears very close to her to hear and understand what she said. We hardly heard her speaking to anyone. When asked a question, she would simply smile and nod. Through Arts & Crafts and team building activities, we saw her change slowly. Now, when asked about what she had learnt from being in MCYC, she replies with a big smile that through our Character Development Programme, she learnt more about her school values. She is now enthusiastic about spelling and tries her best to get full marks.

Sai Charan joined our SCC in the middle of the school year. He was too shy to make new friends when he first joined. Through our weekly activities, he quickly made close friends. Sai Charan truly appreciated the holiday programmes as he felt that he managed to get to know his classmates better and formed close relationships with them. He learnt many values that he applies in his daily life. Sai Charan also talks passionately about learning new and interesting ways to understand number bonds and sentence structures. He is extremely excited about being promoted to Primary Two. He would like to continue to his journey in school with MCYC next year!

From time to time, parents give us feedback on the improvements they see in their children. Joyce is a sweet girl who was very shy. She had very little to say and would not participate in any of the class activities. Joyce's concerned mother often checked in with us to learn about her social development. After a few months, we started to notice Joyce's love for drawing and colouring. It was during the June holidays that we saw Joyce come out of her cocoon and becoming very sociable! With each Arts & Crafts project, we saw Joyce becoming more comfortable with her classmates and teachers. It warms my heart whenever Joyce comes to the SCC after school dismissal and greets me loudly with her widest grin!

I could go on and on talking about our students. Each one of them is a star in my eyes. Sure, there have been days that have challenged me and made me doubt if my efforts are futile. However, it is the stories of each child's progress, like these three children, that keep me going. Children need a good foundation to grow as individuals. I take immense pride in knowing that I am working together with a team that contributes to the laying of this foundation.



Annika



Sai Charan

STORIES & TESTIMONIES



I am very grateful for being given the chance to work at such a wonderful place.

Although I was only a temporary staff (September 2016 to June 2017) in MCYC's Student Care Center at Bukit View Primary School, I was given many opportunities to plan and execute the lessons for the kids. I received a lot of guidance from my fellow colleagues, Ms Linor and Ms Julie, when I was new. I am truly grateful for all that they did for me.

In my opinion, I could not have asked for a better working environment. It was fun, vibrant and yet, conducive enough for all staff to accomplish our tasks.

Whenever, I faced a problem, I never felt left alone. All the staff including the Supervisors took care of each other, ensuring that no one is left behind struggling. This was important to me as it gave me confidence to deal with many difficult scenarios; assuring me that I was not alone if I encountered problems.

In all, I would like to thank my Supervisors: Ms Julie and Ms Linor, for the constant guidance and for being such good leaders. I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues who made me look forward to work everyday and Ms JC, who always took care of me (usually by making sure I have my lunch!). Lastly, I want to thank the amazing kids; may you all continue to learn and grow.

I left to pursue my career in Pharmacy. But, perhaps, one of the most amazing things I've experienced: children are the ones who teach you the best life lessons.

By Gayathiri d/o Pannirchelvam, Temporary Staff

I am grateful to MCYC teachers for their patience and extra attention given to Joyce through her transition to Primary School life. Joyce needed more time to adapt and make new friends as she is rather shy. Thanks to MCYC's Student Care, I see many changes in her and she is returning to her cheerful self once again.

By Joyce's Mother, Mdm Tan Bee Ching



DISCOVERING OUR LITTLE PARTNERS

by AnaBelle Chua, Student Care Centre@ACS(P)

I am definitely blessed to have the opportunity to work in both Student Care Centres in BVPS and ACS(P). My three-year journey here has been paved with great colleagues, from whom I have learnt so much!

And the boys! Oh my, their energy always keeps me on my toes and their hunger to learn drives me to impart new knowledge to them. There is always something magical about their little faces lighting up with smiles; like a warm blanket on a cold day. Here are three boys, Gavin, Gianluca and Ryan, whose exceptional journeys are what make my work here truly fulfilling.

I can still vividly remember the first day I got transferred to SCC@ACS(P). I met my class of boys, all who came in with their own different and unique personalities. We were all new to the premises. But before I knew it, we hit off well together.

Gavin is an active boy with a great smile. He bagged the role model award in 2016 and is one of the most independent boys that I have seen. He often reads a book or draws in his free time. He is always the eager beaver when learning new things. Now in Primary Two, Gavin displays leadership skills, always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone, helping out in class and very well loved by his peers.

Gianluca was a very shy and quiet boy when he joined our SCC. It was rare to hear his voice and he seldom wanted to join in any activities. Although his favourite subject is Mathematics, he needed constant assurance that he could do better. In the past year, he has made tremendous changes and displays a 'Never Give Up' attitude. Fun lesson plans and rewarding systems help to boost his confidence. Now, Gianluca is one of the most playful students, flashing his cheeky smile for all to see.



Gianluca



Gavin



Ryan

Ryan is always the ever-inquisitive student in class. As curious as a cat when it comes to learning, he strives to do his best on anything he set his heart on. He said that he is happy with MCYC's study time because it helps him exercise self-discipline to finish his work before playtime. Through our Character Development Programme titled 'Empathy', he has become a better person by not looking down on others. He enjoys outdoor playtime and movie days the most. His ambition is to be a banker when he grows up.

The boys aside, I am also thankful to have understanding and appreciative parents who leave their children under our care; trusting that we will look after their welfare. Together, hand in hand, we help the boys become the best versions of their parents!

Looking back at how far we have come, I have truly enjoyed this journey filled with joy and laughter. I would not trade these experiences for anything in the world!

SLOWLY BUT SURELY

by Chew Yin Xi, Youth & Family Welfare Department



Mdm Wee* is a single mother with five young children from two marriages. Mdm Wee had left the children unsupervised for long periods at night while she went out to meet her friends. The eldest, Michelle*, was injured in her attempts to fill her mother's role in caring for her younger siblings. Mdm Wee had also beaten the children and called them names when she was angry and frustrated with them. Two of her children had been adopted by other families. Three of them were removed from her care by Child Protection Services and placed in foster homes.

This case was referred to MCYC in 2015. My role was to supervise the contact between Mdm Wee and her

three children to ensure their safety. I also worked with Mdm Wee to guide her in her parenting skills so that her children can return to her care in the future.

In the first few contact sessions at MCYC, Mdm Wee spent most of her time on her mobile phone while the children played with each other. She was not receptive to my feedback and guidance. It took about two months of supervised weekly contact before she learnt how to attend to her children and discipline them appropriately. Over time, the children seemed to sense the hard work she put in to engage them in conversation and play. They began to be more affectionate towards her. Encouraged by her progress, Mdm Wee grew more determined than ever to have her children back in her care. Improvements were definitely seen, and eventually, Mdm Wee was allowed supervised outings with her children for a few hours each week.

In due course, Mdm Wee showed that she was able to care for her children appropriately; and supervision was eventually reduced. Through continuous help and feedback, Mdm Wee's weekly outings with her children are now supervised for only a couple of hours, before she takes over without supervision for the rest of the day. Currently, plans are made for Michelle to return to Mdm Wee's care by the end of 2017!

**“Then suddenly when their hope was lowest,
a red ray of the sun escaped like a finger
through a rent in the cloud.”**

I remembered many highs and lows during my two years working with Mdm Wee and her children. A lot of patience and skill was needed to deal with Mdm Wee's anger that her children were taken away from her. It took a long time for Mdm Wee to trust me and be receptive to my feedback and guidance. Over time, she did. Seeing Mdm Wee make progress was a great affirmation to my work, and to the work of other social workers, who also have their own fair share of cases. After years of dealing with cases like these, I have learnt something very important: working with clients like Mdm Wee is like a waltz – you take steps forward, and at other times, you take steps backwards, but it is all part of the dance.

And it's definitely not going to be smooth sailing. There will be setbacks, but you'll come to see that with commitment from the clients, and appropriate guidance from us, the result is a beautiful and graceful dance. As I reflect on the cases I have handled, a quote from "The Hobbit" by J. R. R. Tolkien comes to my mind, "Then suddenly when their hope was lowest, a red ray of the sun escaped like a finger through a rent in the cloud." In some small way, I hope I was like that red ray of the sun for Mdm Wee and her children.

LOOKING BEYOND LIMITATIONS

by Luke Yan, Youth Outreach Centre

Since Ben* and his younger brother, James*, first stepped into our Youth Centre in August 2016, they have quickly become two of the most familiar faces we see every week. As members of our Youth Grant programme, they have been active participants in our weekly activities, special events and life skills workshops; enjoying themselves in their journey of growth with us.

However, beneath the external appearances of a normal pair of teenage siblings lies a background that is anything but typical. Along with their older brother, Mark*, Ben and James spent their childhood without the love and guidance of a father, who abandoned the family when James was at the age of one. With minimal external support, their mother, Mdm Sim*, single-handedly raised the three boys - a task made even more daunting by Mark, who suffers from Global Developmental Delay (GDD**).

Taking care of Mark was no easy feat; requiring a lot of time and effort as he was completely dependent on his mother. As a result of this, Mdm Sim was unable to hold down a job, which put great financial strain on the family. The challenges faced by the family were compounded with a lack of meaningful engagement for Ben and James, who spent a large amount of their free time sleeping and playing computer games at home.

The Youth Centre's Youth Grant programme aims to benefit underprivileged youths and their families through financial assistance, meaningful engagement, social support, and character and life skills development. Through this Grant, we were able to work closely with Ben and James, supporting their development; turning them from unconfident, unengaged and aimless youths, to become sociable and active youths with a renewed sense of purpose in life.

We challenged their mindsets to look beyond the limitations of their situations and the patterns of life they have become accustomed to. We encouraged them to dream bigger and aspire higher; prompting them to think deeply while assisting them in discovering and expanding their potential for growth.

The work at the Youth Centre has not always been smooth and can sometimes be filled with unexpected obstacles and heartbreak. However, stories like that of Ben and James fill us with renewed strength, in the hope that through our efforts, the lives of other youths can also be profoundly and positively changed.

**Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*

***GDD is a term used when a child lags behind his or her peers in two or more areas of development, such as in language or motor skills.*



THE FIRST KISS GOODBYE

by Diana Koh, Youth & Family Welfare Department



'This is the first time she kissed me goodbye.' Mdm Noor* said with tears glistening in her eyes. Her three year old daughter, Nani*, bid her goodbye and happily skipped off with her foster mother. Mdm Noor was surprised by the little girl's kiss as Nani was often more than eager to leave at the end of every session without saying goodbye. This small and simple act of affection from Nani gave Mdm Noor assurance and hope in their budding mother-daughter relationship.

Supervised access sessions between Nani and Mdm Noor first started in early 2016. During the initial sessions, Nani would cry when she saw Mdm Noor approaching and refused to be carried by her. Nani did not recognise Mdm Noor as her mother as she was fostered out since she was only a few days old. Mdm Noor had no financial means to provide for Nani. Although Mdm Noor felt helpless and hurt by Nani's rejection, she was driven by her love for her daughter. Her persistent and regular access with Nani paid off when Nani no longer cried at the sight of her mother and even called her 'Umi' ('mum' in Malay).

Fast forward to 2017. In any supervised access session, Mdm Noor and Nani could be observed interacting like any mother and daughter; drawing, playing, singing and talking together. There is no sign of discomfort or rejection. However, this relationship was not built overnight; and took several weekly sessions to flourish. Mdm Noor picked up practical parenting skills to engage Nani, supervise her and address her misbehaviour. Through feedback and practice during her access sessions, Mdm Noor felt empowered and no longer thinks she is unfit to be a mother. She now sees herself as a mother who is able to provide care and love for her child.

**Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*





SCARS OF THE PAST

By Hazel Wong, HomeSweetHome

Raphael* stands proudly on stage in the school auditorium, grinning from ear to ear. His mother, Mdm Renee*, looks on, happily snapping photographs of her son who's the recipient of an Excellence Award from his school. Raphael was the top student in his cohort. For the first time, Mdm Renee felt proud of her son, as they celebrated this remarkable success and milestone. The school Principal and teachers congratulated HomeSweetHome's efforts in transforming Raphael. He had become a role model in school, academic achievement and behaviour.

12 months ago, Raphael showed defiance to his teachers, was involved in fights, theft and truancy. The school was neither confident that Raphael could attend school without getting into trouble nor optimistic of him passing his examinations. When Mdm Renee's advice and reprimanding did not deter him from misbehaving, she resorted to physical punishment. She started with slapping and kicking, which later grew into punching and stepping on him in an effort to manage his misbehaviour. At the same time, Mdm Renee had to deal with financial difficulties, pregnancy and violence from her second marriage. One time, she even grabbed various objects in the house and hit Raphael excessively, resulting in serious wounds for which Raphael was hospitalised. In the hospital, Raphael was constantly angry, throwing tantrums and hurling profanity whenever he felt distressed and perceived to have been wrongly accused for things that he did not do or steal.

An investigation into the multiple scars on Raphael's body revealed that he had gone through harsh physical punishment by all his caregivers - his father, mother and step-father - since birth. He had also been through several care arrangements as each caregiver did not know how to manage his tantrums and anger.

His family could only afford one meal a day and Raphael was frequently left on his own to look for food in the neighbourhood. This led to his kleptomania; where he instinctively stole in order to survive.

The Child Protective Service assessed Raphael to have behavioural difficulties stemming from trauma. His trauma history required him to stay in a Therapeutic Group Home for treatment and safety for a period of 12 months. The Child Protective Service assessed Mdm Renee to be in need of respite care to focus on her financial issues, pregnancy and marriage. HomeSweetHome also guided Mdm Renee on how to help Raphael cope with his trauma, triggers and manage his safety plan.

Raphael took three months to learn to trust the adults in HomeSweetHome. He responded with aggression or self-victimisation when he felt he was treated unfairly, wrongly accused or when he was told "no" without an explanation. When he was in distress, he claimed to experience extreme and overwhelming physical pain on different parts of his body. Raphael only calmed down when HomeSweetHome staff brought him to the hospital to attend to his perceived pain. Most of the time, Raphael returned to HomeSweetHome with no evident medical health issue. With consistent care and attentiveness to address Raphael's anxiety, the visits to the hospital decreased gradually. Eventually, after six months, Raphael stopped requesting for such medical visits. With the staff's help, Raphael learned to keep himself safe and to regulate his emotions through his safety plan.



Raphael learned to trust the HomeSweetHome staff and formed a healthy relationship with them. He could now talk about his stealing behaviour without feeling ashamed or harmed. He learned to ask for things he needed and he trusted that his needs were provided for by the staff. Raphael earned material rewards through positive behaviour, learned to delay his gratification and began to accept 'no' without feeling triggered.

Eventually, Raphael returned for overnight weekend home leave. HomeSweetHome provided food rations for the family. Mdm Renee also received therapy, counselling, medical and financial help. Through the intensive facilitation in family sessions, Mdm Renee learned to focus on Raphael's emotional needs and built a healthier relationship with him. She learned to celebrate Raphael's small successes and acknowledged his strengths. Raphael began to enjoy the family bonding time and abided to the behaviour expectations whenever he was with his mother. Both mother and son soon began sharing their trauma narratives and difficulties with each other.

Over time, Raphael became a happier and calmer boy who could focus and enjoy learning in school. The staff at HomeSweetHome provided his school with recommendations on ways to effectively manage him. He became an eloquent child who shows compassion to the people around him. Now, he still has difficult moments when situations or people trigger him but his new coping skills help him manage such difficult moments.

Raphael is a work-in-progress but has reconciled and returned home to his mother. His physical scars remain; left over from the battles of his past. But they certainly do not dictate his future.

**Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*

FOSTERING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

adapted from Coming Home SG

Desmond and his wife Wendy may not have children, but the couple fostered Tom*, an eight-year-old boy, last year. After just five months under their care, he returned to stay with his birth mother for an extended period of time – as his biological family's home environment had stabilised enough for him to do so. Desmond, a 43-year-old professor in a local Bible college, spoke about their decision to foster, "We've been exploring adoption for some time, and our friends suggested that we consider fostering in the interim".

Tom's Transformation

When Tom first arrived, he needed to be around Wendy or Desmond all the time. He was scared of many things, including the dark, the swimming pool, and being alone. However, after just two months, he learnt to play on his own and no longer feared the dark. He also started to swim, thanks to the swimming lessons the couple sent him for. Tom also used to speak loudly and swear, but amazingly stopped within a week. When asked what they did to help Tom, the couple said that they tried to create stability and security for him. Desmond said: "We set routines in place – for example, he wakes up and eats breakfast at a certain time. We created a stable environment as far as possible, so that he knows exactly what's happening next." "Also, the moment he raises his voice, I turn away from him. Very quickly, he learnt to talk at a normal volume to get my attention. We were surprised," added Wendy, 44, a homemaker.

Desmond and Wendy worked to instill good values in Tom. They took him to museums and signed him up for art lessons. They had conversations with him about the importance of being honest and living a morally upright life. "If he lied, it just took one look from us, and he knew we've seen through it. He thinks we're all-knowing," said Desmond with a chuckle. Under their guidance, they also witnessed Tom becoming more hardworking. "We told him that he has to study so that he can work, travel, and buy the food he likes in future. He really loves eating," said Wendy. "Tom has a healthy sense of respect for us – I can reason with him, there's no need for scolding. Moulding his character was a moment-by-moment thing; there was no fixed formula," said Desmond.

Beliefs about Fostering

From day one, the couple took steps to reintegrate Tom to his natural family. "We were aware that the foster child is never ours," said Desmond. He added: "Tom used to get jealous whenever I talked to my niece. I would then gently remind him that although we love him unconditionally, he's a guest but my niece is my relative." "It may seem cruel, but it's necessary – especially when the child oversteps boundaries. We love him, but there is a distance we need to respect," added Wendy.

Consideration for Tom's Natural Family

Initially, Tom was not keen to visit his natural family, but eventually started to look forward to the weekly visits under the couple's care. "When Tom expressed anger at his parents' supposed wrongdoings, we helped him understand that people make wrong choices at times, using the times he misbehaved as examples. We worked on helping him forgive his parents," said Desmond. The couple also knew that Tom exhibited certain behaviours which could be undesirable to his family. They got him to visualise his parents who would be tired after a long day of work, and therefore not take well to his fussing.



In addition, they got Tom to call them Uncle Desmond and Aunt Wendy. "Some foster children call their foster parents 'Mummy' and 'Daddy', but we think that might lead to a confusion of identity for an eight-year-old," said Desmond. Wendy also opined: "Who would like to hear their own children call someone else 'Mummy' or 'Daddy'?" Finally, the couple also refrained from giving Tom a lifestyle which his natural parents might not be able to sustain. "We don't throw big birthday parties or over-indulge him, although he still gets little gifts," said Wendy.

Advice for Foster Parents

The couple advises prospective foster parents to learn as much as possible about their foster child's background. "You'll instinctively get angry when the child behaves in a certain manner. However, if you're aware of how he came to develop such behaviours, you can get past the emotions and think 'Okay, correction time,' more quickly," said Wendy. Desmond added: "Also, go for all of MSF's induction programmes. They will teach you how to better manage your foster child."

Finally, the couple advises foster parents to look ahead and plan for the child's departure, especially if they know that he or she is not a long-term placement. "Although you'll inevitably want to protect and feel a lot for the child, you're never the foster child's saviour, if I may say so. We can only do our best," said Desmond.

The Road From Here

Desmond and Wendy are taking a break for now, after Tom's return to his natural family. However, they said that they would consider fostering teenagers in future. "Maybe even 16, 17-year-olds? These are the people most families would not want to take," said Desmond. "We foster because we have received unmerited grace and love, which we would like to extend to others. If you have love and resources, why not foster? Just do it with your eyes open," said Wendy.

If you are interested to find out more about Fostering, contact us at 6715 3725 or email us at: fosterconnections@mcyc.sg

**Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*



BE A VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Volunteers play an important role in our programmes and services, many of which could not have been conducted without their involvement. Volunteers can choose to be engaged in ad-hoc, short- or long-term programmes and are matched to programmes according to their time, interest and inclination.

Examples of ways you can help are:

- kidsREAD (reading programme for young kids)
- Student Care
- Community Programmes and Events



Please contact Ms Jessica Soo, Assistant Manager - Volunteer Management and Facilities Management, at 6715 3711 or jessicasoo@mcyc.sg for details on how you can volunteer with MCYC Community Services Society.

THE HELP YOU GIVE CAN CHANGE LIVES

The MCYC Community Services Society (MCYC) has been helping at-risk children and youths from needy and disadvantaged families in their educational, social, emotional and moral development since June 2008. We are a registered charity, a full member of the National Council of Social Service and an Institution of a Public Character.

In the last financial year, our programmes and services reached over 5,000 children, youths and their parents. Through our intervention, we hope that they with their families will be able to better cope with the demands of our fast-paced society.

Our ability to continue helping children, youths and parents from dysfunctional, disadvantaged and needy families is largely dependent on our generous well-wishers who strongly believe in our cause. As a voluntary welfare organisation dependent on goodwill donations, we seek your ongoing support to realise our mission and objectives of developing those most in need to become useful members of society.