

Through The Eyes of A Foster Mother

Since Boys' Town Fostering Services was appointed as one of the fostering agencies in Singapore in 2015, the number of children in foster care has increased from 362 to 540 in 2022. Behind each number lies a vulnerable child, yearning for solace and stability in a safe haven.

Beyond statistics, these cases signal a need for providing children in need with a temporary loving home until it is safe for them to return to their birth families. Boys' Town Fostering Services works closely with the dedicated foster families to support the foster children.

The Journey of Becoming A Foster Parent



Mdm Thila holds her foster child's hand while taking a stroll at a park together.

Mdm Thila, a 42-year-old mother and educational therapist, has been a beacon of hope for children in foster care. Five years ago, the thought of welcoming another child alongside her two biological children ignited a whirlwind of worries. Was there room in her family for one more? Would she be able to navigate the uncharted territory of fostering a child without disrupting her family dynamics?

Despite the doubts, what truly fuelled her to explore the realms of foster care was her compassion and dedication to transforming children's lives. Coupled with her husband's unwavering support, they embraced foster parenting and applied to be foster parents. Till date, their selflessness and unconditional love have given 5 children a second chance to experience the joys of childhood.

Beyond Labels and Blood

To cultivate trust with her foster children, Mdm Thila selectively shares information about their circumstances, disclosing only on a 'need-to-know' basis with those who inquire. She regards her foster children as her own and sees no need for differentiation. She believes that persistently

explaining her family structure in conversations would only erect barriers and create distance between herself and her foster children.

We don't talk like, 'Oh, he's my foster son,' when I go out. I don't introduce my foster son as my foster son. Last year, I had four children, including two foster kids. So when people ask, 'How many kids do you have?' Then some aunties will give you the look like, 'Wow, really, four children?' I'm like, 'Yeah, auntie, I got four children.' That's it. I don't feel the need to tell them that this child is my foster kid. It's not the child I didn't give birth to. I don't see the need for that," explained Mdm Thila.



Mdm Thila biological son Nimalen, daughter Danishka, and foster child discuss what they want to eat for dinner while walking home on Feb 2, 2024. (Photo: Nasrullah Subhan)

The Juggling Act

Acknowledging the concerns voiced by many potential foster parents about the strains on time, finances, and managing the behaviours of foster children, she reflects on her own experiences. "Singaporeans are generally immersed in stressful work environments," she admits, dispelling any notion of an idyllic, stress-free life. However, she emphasizes that with children come responsibilities, and fostering adds to rather than disrupts this framework.

Addressing the time constraints, she acknowledges the challenge of dividing attention among multiple children but highlights the importance of quality over quantity. While it may not always be possible to dedicate individualized time to each child, she stresses the value of shared activities and quality family time. "We do a lot of things together," she shares, emphasizing the significance of identifying and nurturing each child's interests and strengths.

Mdm Thila understands that money worries are real, especially for parents used to giving their kids everything they ask for. When it comes to spending money, she is all about keeping it smart and simple. She focuses on what the kids truly need and finds cool activities in the community that don't

break the bank. With a little help from her foster care worker, she tapped into community resources for even more fun stuff. She also mentioned that the fostering allowance is a big help in keeping things balanced.

Overcoming Past Trauma

Every child arriving at Mdm Thila's doorstep carries an invisible baggage, heavy with deep-seated fears hidden behind their hesitant smiles and wary eyes. For Mdm Thila, the toughest battle was breaking down the walls of one of her first few foster children, Anika*. Haunted by the scars of her past, her wounds manifest in subtle ways. Accustomed to tiptoeing around male figures, Anika's usually composed posture and expression dissipated at the sight of them, including Mdm Thila's husband.

"My husband also got a bit emotionally affected. He asked, 'Is she really scared of me?' But I had to also assure him like, you know, it's not you, she's generally fearful of strangers at this point in time," Mdm Thila said.

For Anika to heal from her trauma, Mdm Thila recognizes that accommodating Anika's emotional needs is of utmost importance.

"I let her cry or if she needs to feel scared about it, I don't stop her from that feeling because I want her to overcome it, right? So I tell her, 'If something pops up in your memory and it's fearful, you can always hug me tight or I can give you a pillow'," Mdm Thila shared.



Mdm Thilak offers biological daughter Danishka a hug on Feb 2, 2024. (Photo: Nasrullah Subhan)

Even after Anika has warmed up to her husband, Mdm Thila remains cautious, avoiding situations that may unsettle her. During outings, Mdm Thila arranges for a female companion to accompany Anika. This meticulous approach, though requiring constant planning, prioritizes Anika's well-being. While these efforts may seem tiresome to some, Mdm Thila holds a different perspective. As she

wholeheartedly embarked on her foster care journey, she discovered that her patience and understanding blossomed into love and protection for the children.

Bittersweet Farewells

From the proverb, "All good things must come to an end", Mdm Thila knew this better than anyone else. Having fostered five children, "goodbyes" are never easier, even when she anticipated that this day would eventually come.

"When my foster child was leaving me to return to his biological family, he hugged me, and we cried for almost two hours. He left, then returned inside, hugged me again, and said, 'Are you going to come and see me? Promise me next week we'll still go for our McDonald's date,'" Mdm Thila recounted.

To cope with the grief and loss of the eventual reunification of her foster child with his or her biological family, she constantly reminds herself that her role as a foster parent is to instil a sense of belonging in the children while their biological parents navigate challenging circumstances.



Mdm Thila reads a comic book to her biological daughter Danishka and foster child* on Feb 2, 2024.
(Photo: Tan Yue Tong)

Ripple Effect

After embarking on her journey as a foster parent, Mdm Thila discovered the profound joy that comes with making a positive impact on a child's life. One of her foster children even expressed a desire to follow in her footsteps.

"I'll always ask him, 'Are you sure?' Then he'll say, 'Yeah, just like how you fostered me because I think that the child must know that this is okay, and I still have a beautiful family'. So I feel that I

have achieved it just by him telling me that he will also foster, right? I think I have somehow achieved something or done something correctly in that sense,” Mdm Thila said, grinning from ear to ear.

Heartwarming moments like these are what make Mdm Thila’s foster journey incredibly rewarding. She also expressed her desire to continue helping more vulnerable children, as she sees this as a “Lifetime Journey Contract”.



Mdm Thila playing with her biological children and foster child on Feb 2, 2024.
(Photo: Nasrullah Subhan)

The Stepping Stone To Foster Care

“Fostering is a commitment. If you're really keen, you can talk to the officers. I think going to the tea sessions and talks by Boys’ Town Fostering Services will give you a better understanding,” Mdm Thila advised.

Mdm Thila's story is a powerful testament to the vital role foster parents play. Although her journey was not paved with roses, she still found immense satisfaction and fulfilment while helping children in need.

Boys’ Town is a charity founded by the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel in 1948. It first began as a residential care for war-torn orphans, imparting education to and providing shelter for them. Over the years, it has expanded to provide a continuum of services for children and youth in-need. Boys’

Town's services now include residential care, fostering, respite care, youth outreach, clinical intervention and adventure therapy.

For further information on foster care, click this link to [download](#) our E-Brochure now or speak with our foster care worker via 9113 7612!

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**The real names of the foster children cannot be disclosed to protect their privacy and identity.*