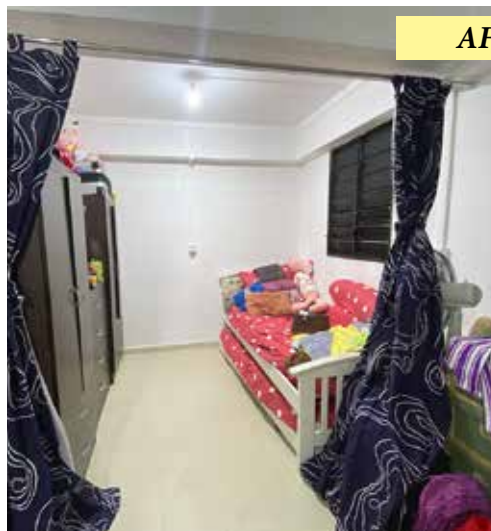


A Home to Call their Own

SSVP helps single mother and her daughter escape abuse from family member, gets them a rental flat and furnishes it into a home



BEFORE



AFTER



Life has never been easy for Angela*, 37. Her father walked out on the family in 1991, never to be seen or heard from again and her mother passed away in 2008. She lived in the family's three-room HDB flat along with her brother and her daughter Mia, now 16.

Mia was diagnosed with kidney issues at birth. Even after surgery, her kidney functions are below normal. The girl also suffers from asthma, incontinence and a gynaecological condition. Her medication often leaves her feeling fatigued. Since Mia has special needs, she attends a special school. Despite her medical condition, she is like her mother, fiercely independent and full of life.

Things were fine at home until Angela's brother got married in

2014. The family dynamics changed. Her brother became abusive and expected Angela and Mia to do all the household chores. When a son, Ryan was born to Angela's brother and his wife, the mother and daughter were expected to care for the child too.

Angela did all the cooking, laundry and paid for the utilities and groceries, yet her brother resented her presence. Angela felt he did this because he wanted the flat for himself.

His behaviour towards her and her daughter became worse when his relationship with his wife became rocky. His wife left him in 2018 and he became depressed and the abuse towards Angela and Mia escalated. Around this time Angela was introduced to the SSVP Community Services Office and she

A month after moving in, home sweet home. Almost all household items were donated or purchased with SSVP aid as well as from kind donors.

started receiving counselling from Community Services Manager Ms Meera Ramachandran.

The use of coarse and vulgar language became the norm at home and the young Ryan also started to mimic his father, often shouting when displeased with Angela and Mia, threatening them saying: "This is my father's house, you should get out!"

As a part-time security guard, Angela had a small but steady income. Never in the best of health herself, Angela who is diabetic, started to experience severe migraines daily. Repeated visits to

Continued on Page 2...

... Continued from Page 1

the doctor brought no relief.

One day in February 2020, she had a seizure and collapsed at home. Angela was found to have excessive amounts of fluid in her brain and was hospitalised for six weeks for treatment and recovery.

This was when Mia's torture at home increased. Her uncle did not allow her to visit her mother in the hospital. Her every movement was monitored and she was expected to call her Uncle multiple times a day to check-in. This became a constant source of stress as she wasn't allowed to use a mobile phone in school but her uncle insisted that she must call him before and after school, during recess, lunch and CCAs. She was also expected to take over all the chores at home including cooking and caring for the six-year old Ryan.

Mia would be pulled out of bed late at night by her uncle and put to work, even though she was fatigued after a long day at school and also experiencing the side-effects of her medication.

He would accuse her of "pretending to sleep" to dodge her chores and made to bathe Ryan as late as 10pm! Bathing Ryan was a huge safety concern because there was no water heater and Mia would have to boil and transfer the hot water to the bathroom.

Often Mia would break down, calling Angela in tears after finishing her chores. When Angela tried to intervene, her brother insisted that she produce a letter from Mia's doctor stating that the 15-year old cannot take care of his son.

This was the last straw, Angela knew she had to move out for her daughter's sake. "I was scared because my brother is a violent person," she said. When she told her

brother of her decision, he taunted her, not believing she would do it, but she did and moved to a shelter in May 2020.

Staying at the shelter during the Covid-19 pandemic was a challenge. Angela had to quit her job because she had to abide by the strict time schedules of the shelter which were incompatible with her work shifts. Moreover, she suffered another seizure while at the shelter. Mia too fell sick. In October, she was hospitalised for three weeks due to a gynaecological condition.

Although Ministry of Social and Family Development's Social Service Office started providing assistance for their daily living needs from June, mother and daughter continued to be overwhelmed by the fear of being made homeless as Angela's small savings were dwindling.

Meanwhile, Vincentians from St Francis Xavier (SFX) Conference, worked with Ms Meera to apply for an HDB rental flat for the mother and daughter. Getting the flat was a challenging process but the SSVP team never gave up. Finally, Angela got the keys to the rental flat in January.

SFX Conference helped smoothen the path with financial

assistance for the expenses incurred for the flat's deposit and rental, conservancy charges as well as funds to purchase basic items for the new home.

Looking at the flat a month later, it looked and felt like a well-lived in home. Essentials and furniture are a mix of new and preloved; sourced by SSVP. Vincentians from the St Joaquim Conference has since taken charge of caring for Angela and her daughter as the rental flat falls within the boundaries of the Conference.

"It has really been a great blessing for us with all the help we have received from SSVP. Ms Meera has been like a family friend to Mia and me. We are so happy and grateful for all she and SSVP have done," said an appreciative Angela.

The move to a place of their own has boosted the confidence of the mother and daughter. Angela now speaks with a sparkle in her eyes. She shared: "I feel peaceful now... I want to finish my second nursing certificate (to become a Healthcare Assistant)!"

Mia too has plans. She exclaimed: "I have freedom! I'm looking forward to (studying) in F&B."

Meanwhile, relations between Angela and her brother have become better. What started with weekly video calls between Mia and her uncle as well as nephew now includes Angela going back to her old home fortnightly to cook for them as her brother's diabetes has worsened.

"I have great respect for Angela and Mia for their strength and resilience despite their difficult circumstances," said Ms Meera.

Things are definitely looking up for the mother and daughter.



**names have been changed to protect their identity.*

SSVP's Community Services Office (CSO) was set-up to provide information and referral services for families and individuals in need through casework and counselling and provide more holistic assistance to our Friends-In-Need (FINs) in Singapore.

**To contact CSO:
Call 9068 9948 (9am to 6pm,
Mon to Fri) or email
somanager@ssvpsingapore.org**