

Moved by the Vincentian Spirituality

Kenneth Sum, 25, joined SSVF Ltd as a Social Work Associate in 2021 when he decided his calling was in the social service sector helping others, rather than his original plan of joining the military.

Kenneth shares his personal account of a recent encounter which has affirmed his calling:

The Vincentian spirituality of visiting Friends-in-Need (FINs) in their homes is something that resonates well and deep within me.

I feel that we can only know so much about a person or a family from a social report or case notes. Only by meeting the FINs face-to-face, talking to them and spending time with them, will we truly get to know them. To me, meeting people where they are helps me understand their needs, hopes and dreams better — and that is in their homes.

Recently, during the course of a conversation with my colleague and supervisor Meera Ramachandran, I heard of a single parent family whose home looked shabby. Refurbishing this family's home was outside my job requirements as a Social Work Associate with SSVF Ltd's Community Services Office but I thought of doing something with the help of my friends from the parish of St Anne's.

The single parent family consisted of Madam X and her son "M" and daughter "R" aged 10 and 9 respectively. Madam X, works as a cleaner and Vincentians from the Conference of St Bernadette have been journeying with her and her

children for the past six years. The family has been receiving various forms of aid from SSVF. Madam X had been

through a difficult time, having had to endure an abusive marriage and ill treatment from her in-laws. She has no family support in Singapore as her family is in India. Despite all the curve balls that have been thrown her way, Madam X has remained hopeful, and is determined to make a better life in Singapore for the sake of her children.

The family has been living in a rental flat for the last seven years. The flat and its furnishings appeared shabby from wear and tear. Their walls, covered from top to bottom with crayon and marker pen "graffiti", courtesy of the children, added to the mess. Now that the children are older, Madam X wished to create an environment that is more conducive for the children to study. She wanted to encourage her children to study harder and shared her aspirations with Meera who in turn shared this with me.

I was inspired by the Holy Spirit to help this young family but I knew I couldn't do it alone. Friends Samantha Fuentes, Vanna Olsen, Justin Toh and Bradley Santa Maria, all from my parish, were quick to volunteer. Donors stepped in to sponsor the furniture and items needed for the refurbishment.



Kenneth Sum (back row, extreme right) with his friends and the two FIN children.

To minimise disruption for the family, we wanted to finish the project in a day. On 8 January, we worked tirelessly from 9am to 6pm to give the flat a new lease of life. Being colour blind myself, selecting the correct paint was not an easy task as well and I had to get Meera to verify the paint was of the correct shade. We applied three coats of paint (sealer and two layers of Rose paint) to mask the graffiti and roped in the children to help. I believe that it is important that the children feel they are part of the improvement which they can "see" daily. It was the right thing to do as both kids were helpful and really enjoyed painting their own home.

When their study desks were being assembled, we could see their excitement and happiness in getting a study space of their own.

Said M, the older kid: "We did not have a table to do our school work. We had to sit on the floor and do our school work. We are very happy to receive the tables and we promise to study hard. We also needed a bigger cupboard for our clothes and a good mattress to sleep on. Now, my sister and I take turns to sleep on the new bed and our clothes are kept neatly in the cupboard." 