



Welcome HOME!

In this issue:

- Foreword
- [Migrant Stories](#)
- [Volunteers/supporters](#)
- [Gallery: Events and celebrations](#)

Foreword

Dear friends of HOME,

Welcome to the first issue of our revamped newsletter! We hope to give you regular updates on what we have been up to at HOME and how you can continue to be involved.

I'd like to say a few words about an important holiday we recently celebrated – Labour Day. May Day is a global celebration of the achievements of workers and has its roots in the labour union movement. At HOME, we continue to celebrate the achievements of the many migrant workers in Singapore and their tremendous contributions to our society. But we also press on with advocating for their rights and welfare, many of whom also face abuses and human rights violations.

HOME is able to do the work we do because of the incredible support we receive from all of you. Your generosity and support energises our organisation and motivates us to carry on, despite the many challenges. Some of the updates you will read about in this issue are possible through our amazing supporters and volunteers like you – running a marathon to raise funds and a cookbook! From all of us at HOME: Thank you and I hope you enjoy this newsletter! ~ *Natalia Goh, President*

Picking Up the Pieces: Two migrant workers share how they found hope again



Fu's story

When Fu Jian Sheng first stepped into HOME Geylang office in May last year, the Chinese construction worker had a rotting apple in his bag of few possessions. HOME's case manager, Luke Tan, found out the heart-breaking truth that Fu hasn't had a proper meal in weeks. Since he got injured (a fellow worker had hit him after a misunderstanding at the work site) he was left to languish in his dormitory without proper food and medical care. His employer had accused him of 'faking injuries' and did not want to take responsibility. Fu was also owed two months' wages. Totally broke and bereft of income, he resorted to picking up fruits and sweets left at prayer altars along shophouse corridors to survive.

Things weren't always this bad. Fu was a chef in a small rural town in Pengzhou, Sichuan and ran his own small eatery for nine years. Then came the deadly Sichuan earthquake in 2008, which wiped out his business, his home, everything. He struggled to rebuild his life, and had to support his 90-year-old mother and wife, who's stricken with a slew of health problems. His teenage son gave up school and went to work at a hotel in the capital, Chengdu. His wife, despite her ill health, continued to farm and harvest onions to support the family but the combined income wasn't enough to pay for her hefty medical bills.

It was around this time a job recruiter recommended him a construction worker job in Singapore. He was told he could earn about S\$2,000 a month, but not without first paying S\$8,000 upfront in agent fees. Fu came to Singapore in November 2014 and started work almost immediately. He worked from 7am to about 10pm daily. There was no overtime pay and no day off (the only holidays he got were over the Lunar New Year). Living conditions in the workers' dormitory was cramped and filthy.

It's been a year since he sought help with his case at HOME. "I was very depressed when I first came to HOME," says the soft-spoken Fu. "I even got used to eating leftover fruits. It took me a few months to get back on my feet, but Mr Chen (Luke) was always there to encourage me. He found out I love cooking and enrolled me in HOME Academy's cooking and baking classes."

Spending time experimenting with recipes is now one of his favourite past times. Fu has dished out everything from cakes (he's even learned how to ice and decorate confections!) to cookies and fried meat patties for staff and volunteers. "I wish to open a small bakery when I go home," smiles Fu. "I've picked up many useful baking techniques from the many Sundays spent at HOME Academy. I now hope my case will be resolved soon so that I can be reunited with my family and start a new business, a new life."



Regielyn's story

"Good morning, HOME" her chirpy voice ringing through the small office space as she attended to the flurry of calls. The phone was ringing off the hook, but she didn't seem the least ruffled. For almost a year, Regielyn Lopez (*centre, front row*) was volunteering at our women's helpdesk, helping out with reception duties and attending to queries.

"Volunteering at the helpdesk gives me something meaningful to do. I've picked up new skills, learned about domestic worker rights and even helped advise domestic workers who came to seek assistance. It feels good helping my fellow domestic workers in small ways," says Regielyn.

Regielyn finally went back to the Philippines last month after her case was settled – one year later. Her bubbly demeanour belies her struggles in life. The 33-year-old single mother of two (her daughter is 10 and son 9) left her children in her mother's care in Cagayan Valley, Luzon (about half a day's travel by bus from Manila) three years ago to work in Singapore as a domestic worker. Before that, she worked as a cashier in Manila, earning S\$200 a month which was barely enough to support her family. Her salary in Singapore was \$500 a month, but she went without income for the first six months as her wages were deducted for her agent fees.

Working hard to support her family was uppermost on her mind, never mind that her former employer was "strict and fussy". "I got scolded sometimes but I didn't let it bother

me. I just felt my ma'am didn't really trust me," she recalls. "I was only allowed to use my handphone on Sundays when I had my day off and after 10pm on weekdays, which would be really late by that time to call my family." Her hours were long (she woke up by 5.30am and went to bed around 10pm) and her daily duties included cleaning and taking care of her employer's two young kids. Things turned sour one day when her employer found out she had bought another mobile for herself. Her employer got livid and started hitting Regielyn with the phone. "I was in a state of shock. I didn't expect her to hit me at all. I remember just crying," she says. "Even my mom has never laid a finger on me."

Regielyn decided she couldn't stay on with her employer any more and ran away to HOME for assistance and shelter. "I was scared and really timid when I first came to HOME. Over time, I learned new things and started to be more confident of myself." Regielyn wants to come back to Singapore again. "I don't have a choice. I need to work hard because of my two children," she says, choking on her tears. "I want them to complete school and get good jobs. All my hopes and dreams are on them."

Volunteers & Supporters

Going the Extra Mile

Rupa Pereira loves running. She relishes the "solitude and creative thinking" it brought. Last year, Rupa turned her love for running into something more – dedicating it to a cause and raising over \$2,500 for HOME. This year, she's slipping into her marathon gear again and aims to raise \$3,000. "It's about running for human rights, for social justice," she quips.

When not busy with strategic planning, forecasting and financial reporting, the finance director who relocated with her family to Singapore from the States, loves to unwind to music and reading. She also enjoys exploring the hidden nooks and crannies, and soaking in the kampong feel of Singapore. She's travelled to 15 countries and plans to visit Rio for the Olympics.



How did you discover your love for running?

Running was a sport I enjoyed since young, but it became serious when I went back to MBA school in my mid-30s and realised that to keep up with the millennials, I needed to stay physically and mentally agile.

You took part in Sundown to raise funds for HOME last year. What made you decide to do this again?

Firstly, I wanted to continue running competitively and I've enjoyed fundraising and running Sundown in 2015 among the other races. In addition, FB Rupa Runs for Home is now an active community and I needed to maintain the focus on HOME and its work.

What made you turn your run into a fund raising effort the first time?

Coming from the U.S, I found Singapore's heat and humidity to be a hindrance to running. I needed more than just a mental will to train with a busy work schedule. That's when it occurred to me to run for a cause and get the support of my friends and well-wishers. If I have their money riding on my back, that will surely get me out of bed and on the running trail!

There are so many causes to choose from. Why HOME?

When I decided to run for a cause, I was just under a year old in Singapore and wasn't familiar with the charity scene here. But something that struck me was the under-represented migrant community which fuels Singapore's economy. I received more than a couple of referrals for HOME through my peer network and paid them a visit on a Sunday. I was touched to see the domestic worker community come alive on their day off, while also saddened to hear about the abuse cases. I'm a firm believer in fairness and treating everyone with dignity and respect, a basic human right. Since HOME shares those same values, their cause became mine.

HOME's mission resonates with migrants throughout the globe, be they documented or undocumented. Everyone's in search of a better life and a brighter future for their families. Being human is the least we can do.

To support [RupaRunsforHOME](https://give.asia/movement/run_for_home), please donate generously at https://give.asia/movement/run_for_home

Visit her FB page at www.facebook.com/RupaRunsForHOME/

Cooking Up a Storm



Blogger/columnist Frog Michaels dishes up a wealth of recipes in *A Helping Hand*, a dual language cookbook in English and Tagalog. It's all about putting the joy and confidence back into cooking for domestic workers.

Putting the 86 recipes together was actually harder than I anticipated. I started out with an ambitious 120 recipes but had to trim it down to under 90 or the book would have been too heavy to lift! But I managed to include my favourite recipes including Victoria sponge cake (p222) and cottage pie (p81).

I needed to get this cookbook out because it's a great idea! When I came up with the

concept of writing a cookbook in English and Tagalog, based around Western family favourites (as well as having a few local dishes) for the Singapore and Hong Kong markets, I did my research and couldn't believe it hadn't been done before.

My domestic worker thinks I'm fanatical about measuring ingredients. We did so many tests and re-tests for all our recipes that for just over two years when I was writing the book we were not cooking with anything that hadn't been very carefully weighed and measured.

You don't know this but I love durians to the extent I miss it when it's not in season! I can also whip up the very labour-intensive dish *kueh pie tee* in about 30 minutes from start to finish. I may look like an *angmoh cha-boh* (woman) but I know how to cook local! I've included the recipe in the 'Singapore Flavours' chapter.

My one wish for domestic workers is that they are treated with compassion and dignity. They have a difficult job far away from home and family. ~ Frog Michaels

Purchase the cookbook at helpinghandseries.com and part of the sales proceeds will go to supporting HOME.

Gallery



Everyday Hero

Congratulations to our executive director, Jolovan Wham, who won the “Everyday Hero”

award at the inaugural HeforShe Impact Awards 2016 held at One Farrer, Hotel and Spa on April 27. Launched by the Singapore Committee for UN WOMEN, the awards recognise men, women and companies in Singapore that have made and continue to make big steps for gender equality at home, in the workplace or in their communities.

"Jolovan Wham is the epitome of the everyday hero. He has committed his time, energy and work to make sure that female migrants are protected under Singapore law. In cases where they can't be, Jolovan has taken it upon himself to ensure they are protected. HOME's advocacy has contributed to the greater protection for Singapore's migrant workers through amendments to policies and laws, such as the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, a legislated weekly day off for migrant domestic workers and the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act," says Pia Bruce, executive director of Singapore Committee for UN Women.



Super Bowl

HOME staff and volunteers threw a small but special Labour Day party for a group of Bangladeshi cleaners on May Day. Inspire Church, an independent congregation hosted the dinner party and organised a bowling session for them. The cleaners bowled us over with their skills the minute they hit the lanes! It was a good break from their everyday work

routine, where they clock in at least 12 hours a day on average and get no day off, not even on Labour Day (yes, the irony).

Bangladeshi cleaners, known also as “conservancy workers”, clear the rubbish (which easily builds up on long weekends and festive occasions), sweep and clean the corridors and keep our housing estates clean. Many also pay high agent fees of around \$10,000 to secure a cleaner’s job here.



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