

FACES

A newsletter of Filos Community Services

April | 2014

Season of HOPE

Happy Families

Transformed Overcomer

Persevering Youth

Empowered Women



From the ED's desk

*A young child prays with hope that her daddy will return home.
A father perseveres on to provide for his 4 children, even as his wife walks out on him.
An elderly lady with not much means cheerfully shares her food with her neighbours.
A daughter struggles with an abusive father, yet tenderly cares for him in his old age.*

HOPE SHINES in the midst of despair and discouragement .

I recently read about the story of a 31 year old Canadian, called Spencer West. At age 5, he lost both his legs and doctors told him that he would not be able to walk or lead an active life again. But this man defied all odds. With the support of family and friends, Spencer reached out for the impossible : he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro!

Spencer spent 12 months in intensive training, making sure his arms and hands would be strong enough to take the extreme physical pressure. It took him 7 days to make it to the summit, wearing shoes on his hands,

when he had to travel using only his upper limbs for a good 80% of the trek. He raised over \$600,000 for a Children's Charity through his inspirational climb!

HOPE SHINES in seasons of difficulty.

Shel Silverstein, author of ' The Giving Tree' aptly describes HOPE

"Listen to the mustn'ts, child.

Listen to the don'ts.

Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts.

Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me...

Anything can happen, child.

Anything can be."

This issue of our FACES newsletter gives snapshots of those in our community who have soldiered on with HOPE through the obstacles and challenges they had to face. May their stories warm our hearts and prompt us to journey with them to support them and others like them, and perhaps help to turn their hopes and dreams into reality!

Dr. Foo Fung Fong
Executive Director
Filos Community
Service ◆



“YOU CAN DO IT; YES, YOU CAN!”

There was a season of time when these were the words my daughters would chant to their little brother whenever he struggled - whether it was to get up the rungs of a slide or to finish a task. Adapted from the theme song of Bob the Builder, they would sing these words to the tune with great gusto and end with a resounding “Yes you can!” with laughter and giggles.

This picture encapsulates the power of words. Our words can cheer and spur someone on or encourage and lift up a heavy heart. Words can build-up but they can also tear down. If we were to pause and listen to the words that we say to our children, what would we hear?

Would they be more ‘positive’, ‘affirmative’ and ‘encouraging’ or ‘negative’ and ‘a put down’? Dorothy Law-Nolte brings out deep truths about how our children can be impacted in her book, Children Learn What They Live: Parenting to Inspire

Values. Reflect on this extract and see just how many of these attributes are largely communicated through our words.

- “If a child lives with **criticism**, he learns to condemn . . .
- If a child lives with **hostility**, he learns to fight . . .
- If a child lives with **fear**, he learns to be apprehensive . . .
- If a child lives with **pity**, he learns to feel sorry for himself . . .
- If a child lives with **ridicule**, he learns to be shy . . .
- If a child lives with **jealousy**, he learns to feel envy . . .
- If a child lives with **shame**, he learns to feel guilty ...

BUT

- If a child lives with **tolerance**, he learns to be patient . . .
- If a child lives with **encouragement**, he learns to be confident . . .
- If a child lives with **praise**, he learns to be appreciative . . .
- If a child lives with **acceptance**, he learns to love . . .
- If children live with **approval**, they learn to like themselves..
- If a child lives with **honesty**, he learns what truth is . . .
- If a child lives with **fairness**, he learns justice . . .
- If children live with **recognition**, they learn to have a goal.
- If children live with **sharing**, they learn to be generous.
- If a child lives with **security**, he learns to have faith in himself and those about him . . .
- If a child lives with **friendliness**, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live . . .”

*(We put across so much to our children through our words. The attributes that are communicated primarily through words are in **bold**).* ♦



There are of course times when we will need to correct or even discipline our children.

How we do this including our choice of words, will determine whether they stay secure or grow insecure, whether they learn their lesson or become angry and rebellious.

Be firm and assertive when disciplining children but do take the time to explain why something is not

- CHARLES R. SWINDOLL -

‘EACH DAY OF OUR LIVES WE MAKE DEPOSITS IN THE MEMORY BANKS OF OUR CHILDREN.’

Our words can help create good memories or bad ones for our children. Let’s make a conscious decision to use our words carefully and fill our homes with...

- words of appreciation (‘Good work’ ‘Thank you’, ‘I appreciate that’)
- words of affirmation (‘That’s such a good idea’)
- words of acceptance and approval (‘I love you just the way you are’) ♦

WORDS THAT BRING CHANGE, FOR THE BETTER

acceptable first. Speak about the kind of behaviour or action you want to see from them. Avoid the labels that put them down - “I know you can behave better” frames the correction in a positive way as opposed to “What’s wrong with you?” or “Why can’t you behave?”

It is necessary to carry out a punishment if boundaries that have been explained before, are broken. Children do need to learn that there

are consequences. But don’t forget to speak words of restoration to your children after you have disciplined them.

- Use words that assure them of your love and care for them
- Praise them for accepting the punishment and learning from it
- Affirm them when you see your children behaving the right way ♦

- FREDERICK DOUGLASS -

“IT IS EASIER TO BUILD STRONG CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR BROKEN MEN.”

Our children look to us as their parents to nurture and guide them. They look up to us. Our words communicate what we think of them (whether intentionally or not; whether real or perceived). Our words can impact self-esteem either positively or negatively, particularly when we use labels. Words like “You are always so slow” or “Why are you so clumsy?” with the emphasis on “you” are directed at the person. They do nothing to help the child overcome

what they are struggling with. Instead, they put the child down and paint a negative picture of themselves in his or her mind.

There is something about our Asian culture that seems to frown on praises or is not comfortable with receiving affirmation. Unfortunately this translates into a focus on the negative in a person.

Have you come across the

following scenarios?

When someone praises a child with, “Oh what a good boy he is.” A typical response from the parent would be “You don’t know what he is really like at home...”

Or to the praise of “Your daughter did well in school, she is so clever!”, a typical response might be “she is actually weak in...” All this usually said within the earshot of the child. ♦



PRAISE THAT BUILDS UP THE RIGHT WAY

Words of praise in themselves may not always be good for our children. Research has found that too much praise or praising children for the wrong reasons may actually work against them.

Avoid praise that focuses on

- A child’s achievements (“You won, well done!”)
- Their personal qualities (“You are such a good dancer” or “You are brilliant!”)

This can be unhealthy in that it puts pressure on the child to perform. ♦

Gwen De Rozario
Family Life Educator
Filos Community Services

Betty* (not her real name) was the gossip of the neighbourhood. She was unkempt and had a queer and unhygienic habit of spitting everywhere :in the lift, on her hand and even in her own home. Nobody seemed to like her and people hurled insults at her. Sometimes she reacted indifferently, other times she would tremble in agitation, perspiring furiously until her clothes became fully wet. As people avoided her, she also isolated herself in the safety of her small filthy home.

Through befriending, whom Filos staff came to know Betty better, we were sorry to learn that the once attractive lady got into her current state due to some difficult family issue. It was tough to engage her initially as she was very uncomfortable with visitors. As time passed on however, Betty became familiar with Filos staff and began to feel more relaxed. She even opened up to our staff who visits her weekly and engages her with a variety of therapeutic activities. Betty was coached on how to wash her hands and cut her nails properly. After a while, Betty stopped spitting on the floor at home. Our staff's regular visits and loving friendship seem to have helped ease her social discomfort.

With our encouragement, Betty eventually ventured out of her house. We invited her to participate at activities held at the Seniors' Activity Centre below her house, and encouraged other seniors to befriend her. We were very surprised one day when we found that Betty had gone down to the Seniors' Activity Centre all by herself. She even brought some Lunar New Year goodies to share with the elderly there.

We are delighted to see Betty becoming strong enough to step out with confidence and a love to give and share, and having new friendships to carry on in the journey of life. ♦



Emmeline (Filos' Social Service Associate) writes about her journey with a persevering young lady)

As I remember, Emily was one of the oldest youth attending Filos' tuition programme. By virtue of her confidence and demeanor, she was observed to be one whom the younger children and youths gave much respect to. Soon after, because of irregular attendances, I saw the need to understand her more to help her better. As she shared her life with me, I came to know of her family, her past, her struggles, her dreams and began to see her character strengths. A friendship blossomed, peppered with sweat, tears and joy in the ups and downs of a mentoring relationship.

Emily exhibited leadership qualities as she interacted and worked with the other children and youths under our Filos Tuition Programme. During our first overnight camp, she took the initiative to look after the welfare of our two youngest campers whom she was not previously acquainted with. It was heartening to see her patience and responsibility towards them, and she did a commendable job mentoring the two children throughout the camp and helping out with the other older ones too. The sincerity of her care is evident as she continues to inquire about their well-being even till this day. Emily also availed herself to encourage another peer positively in spite of having to balance her studies for her examinations.

Last November, Emily was appointed as one of two group leaders during Filos' second 2D1N camp. She rose to the occasion and led her team well, making sure that the young ones were not left behind nor placed

in a disadvantaged position in group line-ups during games. In the same month, she was awarded the Filos Bursary award, having shown initiative in seeking academic help and making progress in her studies and attitude towards learning.

In December 2013, Emily made it through the selection process for a fully-sponsored trip to Shanghai under the South East Community Development Council's My First Break (MFB) project. This saw her visiting several Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) as well as gaining exposure on carrying out small businesses. The pre-trip preparation pushed her out of her comfort zone. After the trip, she had to commit to local fund-raising projects which her team conceptualized. It was tiring and time-consuming, but with encouragement, she persevered on. Now, Emily has successfully graduated from the MFB programme and is faithfully pursuing her tertiary education. We are very happy for her and very proud of her. ♦



Persevering Youth

FILOS CAMP

From 18th to 19th November 2013, the much awaited Filos 2D1N Camp took place at Costa Sands Resort. We had new beneficiaries on board this time, but through icebreaking games like Whacko, strangers soon became friends.

The theme of the camp was : "Persevere to do good; to do right". The children and youth learnt what

it meant to persevere in different aspects of their lives. Through activities and games, they bonded, learned to work together, cared for one another and barbequed food for one another.

We were blessed with youth volunteers who modeled what it meant to speak well, do good and do right through informal interactions.

During the camp, the children and youth were asked to pin their thanksgiving on a Gratitude board. The move prompted them to share simply about their teachers, families, their time at Filos and the camp itself. The whole experience was, as one camper concluded, "super tiring but super fun." ♦



Bursary and Scholarship Awards and Volunteer Appreciation 2013

On 23rd November 2013, Filos organized a movie treat to celebrate the Bursary and Scholarship award recipients and to appreciate our volunteers and partners. The families of the award recipients and other beneficiaries also came together to enjoy the film "Justin and the Knights of Valour". Everyone was treated with popcorn or hotdog buns and a pepsi drink in hand.

The film was about a young prince's journey towards becoming a Knight to rescue his kingdom. He was far from the average prince, with his scrawny physique and soft heart - nobody believed in his decision to undertake the immense task. But as the story unfolded, it was clear from the audience's reactions that we were all rooting for him as he uncovered and reconciled conflicting family expectations as well as persevering on in trial after trial.

This movie treat was made possible through the International Volunteers Day (IVD) grant. Filos submitted more than 50 My Volunteer Hero stories. These were stories written by beneficiaries, sharing about how volunteers had made a difference in their lives. Through the collection of the stories, we were able to see how volunteers had truly touched the lives of our clients, encouraging each one to persevere on and to try their best. ♦



Empowered Women

STORY OF JANE



Jane* (not her real name) was happy to meet Filos staff at the hawker centre near our office. As we chatted over lunch we could not help but notice how happier and relaxed she has become since we first met her a year ago.

We received a call from her last year to enquire regarding Filos Active Minds programme. She suspected that her dad has been suffering from dementia for over ten years before he was finally diagnosed. It had been a very challenging journey for her family. Her father has a strong character and is a stern man, and Jane was not close to him. He had been behaving inappropriately, for example, urinating into flower pots and laundry baskets, and was always looking for food even

late at night. She and her mother are exasperated and resentful as they could not get him to change his ways. She felt angry and hurt each time he yelled at her.

Jane saw a poster about Filos' Active Minds service, and in desperation called for our assistance. Jane only wished for some respite and for his condition not to deteriorate further, for the strain had proven too challenging for them.

We started activities with Jane's father at their home, to help him maintain his cognitive abilities. It was encouraging for Jane to notice that her dad, who has a very short attention span, was able to focus well on activities we

conducted with him. He really enjoyed playing chess. She was surprised that Filos staff were able to relate lovingly and gently with her father, when even they themselves and other people are usually hostile to him.

As we were finishing up the conversation with Jane, she said she was glad we encouraged her to consider having caregivers' support and training at Alzheimer's Disease Association. She finally realized it was not her father's rudeness but his deteriorated condition which reduced his speech to single-words. Her dad recently fell quite ill and she realized they do not have much more time with him. She has since renewed her love and motivation to care for her dad. ♦

P.L.E.A.S.E. (Parents Learning English and Speaking Excellently) is an English course aimed at Chinese speaking mothers. It is now in its second run as feedback from participants had been excellent. The mothers, including one grandmother, have been marching into class with an enthusiasm that is highly infectious. They have progressed from trying to repeat simple words and sentences by rote, to communicating with people they meet outside at work. One of the participants, Mdm Tan, exclaimed that she was able to speak to the Malay conservancy personnel about her rubbish chute's door being stuck, and the other party was able to converse with her. "I understand her, she understand me. Simple English!" she chirped happily one evening, laughing as she recounted the incident.

Although the initial aim of the class was to equip these mothers to

communicate with their customers at work, their children's school personnel, and non-Chinese acquaintances, the empowerment has taken effect in a domain nearest to home - their own families. At the dinner table where conversations would mostly take place in English, because her university-graduated children would converse with their own children, Mdm Tan would join in only occasionally when they do switch to Chinese. Now, she participates in the conversations through active listening, understanding and sharing her thoughts.

The name of the class "*Parents Learning English And Speaking Excellently*" may have sounded more hilarious than realistic in the beginning. However, it seems that the ladies are moving in the right direction towards that goal, slowly

but surely. Besides learning English, they look forward to each lesson because of the fun and lessons learnt - lessons about communication, understanding the younger generation, parenthood and ageing with purpose and grace. While on a discussion topic about being active, another mother responded that "(they) come here (Filos) to feel young!" What an encouragement to see them being empowered! ◆



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