

12 April, 2004

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

## Help for 'sandwiched generation'

**Most who call caregiver centre's helpline are those looking after sick, disabled or frail elderly and their own young kids too**

By Vivi Zainol

IT WAS midnight when Mr C.G. Lim's 72-year-old mother started rolling around on the floor, kicking and screaming, accusing one of her sons of having taken her address book.

Even before this, the elderly woman had been behaving strangely - staring suspiciously at visitors, claiming there were intruders in the house and accusing people of stealing her belongings.

This was in January last year, just two months before Mr Lim's wife was due to give birth to their first child, and the 39-year-old accountant was at his wits' end.

Fortunately, his boss, who's also taking care of an elderly relative, told him about Touch Caregivers Centre in Toa Payoh.

After contacting it, he learnt that his mother was showing symptoms of short-term memory loss, or senile dementia. Regular advice from the centre has helped him to deal with her condition.

'I've learnt how to negotiate. For instance, I tell her that if she wants to stay with me, she will have to see a doctor, take her medicine and go out with us once a week to

### SHOWCASING FAMILY VALUES

IF YOU know a family that has maintained strong bonds despite a major life crisis or challenge, you could nominate it for the Exemplary Family Awards.

The awards, being given out for the first time, seek to make people more aware of family values and issues. The five community development councils (CDCs) and Singapore Press Holdings' Young Parents Magazine are jointly organising the awards.

Winners will take home cash, travel packages, air tickets and dining vouchers.

Nomination forms are available at all community clubs, community centres, CDCs and at [www.swcdc.org.sg](http://www.swcdc.org.sg)

The last day for submissions is May 31.

overcome her fear of strangers.

'Instead of scolding her when she forgets to switch off the stove, I ask her if there was a reason she switched it on. I tell her she's not the only who forgets things, so that she feels better about herself,' he said.

The centre runs a helpline and provides information and referrals to medical and community services for caregivers. Set up in 2002, it is funded by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

Its programme manager, Ms Cristal Chong, said: 'Some caregivers may feel lonely, overwhelmed and unsupported. They may not know where to turn to for help and advice.'

Each month, the centre gets between 40 and 50 calls. About 70 to 80 per cent of these come from those between the ages of 30 and 40.

'They're called the 'sandwiched' generation because they have to care for both the elderly and their young children. The phenomenon is not new, but it's growing,' she said.

One common problem among caregivers is burnout. Mr Lim has learnt to deal with it.

'You're only human. Sometimes you feel like giving up or lose your cool. When I feel upset and angry, I take time out. I read a book or go out with my wife and daughter,' he said.

He reads books on senile dementia in his spare time and intends to join a support group. He also has an arrangement with his siblings where they take turns going out with his mother. If he needs a break, they step in to take care of her for a few weeks.

In 2000, there were about 210,800 caregivers in Singapore who provided care and support for a family member, relative or friend who was sick, frail or had a disability.

The number of caregivers is expected to increase as an estimated 19 per cent of the population will be 60 years or above by 2030 and the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) hopes there will be more support for them.

'Caregivers need information and skills on how to care for elderly or disabled family members. They also need community-based, day-care programmes and residential services,' said the ministry's director of social welfare, Ms Ang Bee Lian.

To create more awareness of the issues involved, Touch

Caregivers Centre is launching a Caregivers' Week tomorrow. For more information, call 1800-352-1622 or visit [www.caregivers.org.sg](http://www.caregivers.org.sg)

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