

26th Annual
Exemplary
MOTHER
AWARD

MOTHER

Unlike any other

ABOUT EXEMPLARY MOTHER



In 1993, the former President of Singapore, the late Mr Wee Kim Wee, presented Jamiyah Singapore with a Presidential Shield. Entrusted with such a prestigious mission, Jamiyah Singapore inaugurated the Exemplary Mother Award to honour exceptional mothers with the shield. The shield has been awarded to outstanding mothers who have gone through various challenges while raising their children and families.

In 2005, former President of Singapore, Mr S R Nathan, presented Jamiyah Singapore with the second shield and initiated an additional criterion - the nominees should also have contributed their time and effort to the community. Jamiyah Singapore has included this criterion in its current selection of nominees. This year also introduces a new fresh category - The Exemplary Young Mother Award, showcasing our young mothers' entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, determination and contributions to the society.

The second shield ended its round in 2016. Former President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam presented the third shield in 2017, making this year the second time current President of Singapore, Dr Halimah Yacob, presents it to our winning mother.



03 About Exemplary Mother Award

05 Messages

10 About Women & Family Department

12 Special Message from the President
of the Republic of Singapore,
Her Excellency Dr Halimah Yacob

14 Our Exemplary Mother Award Top 5 Finalists

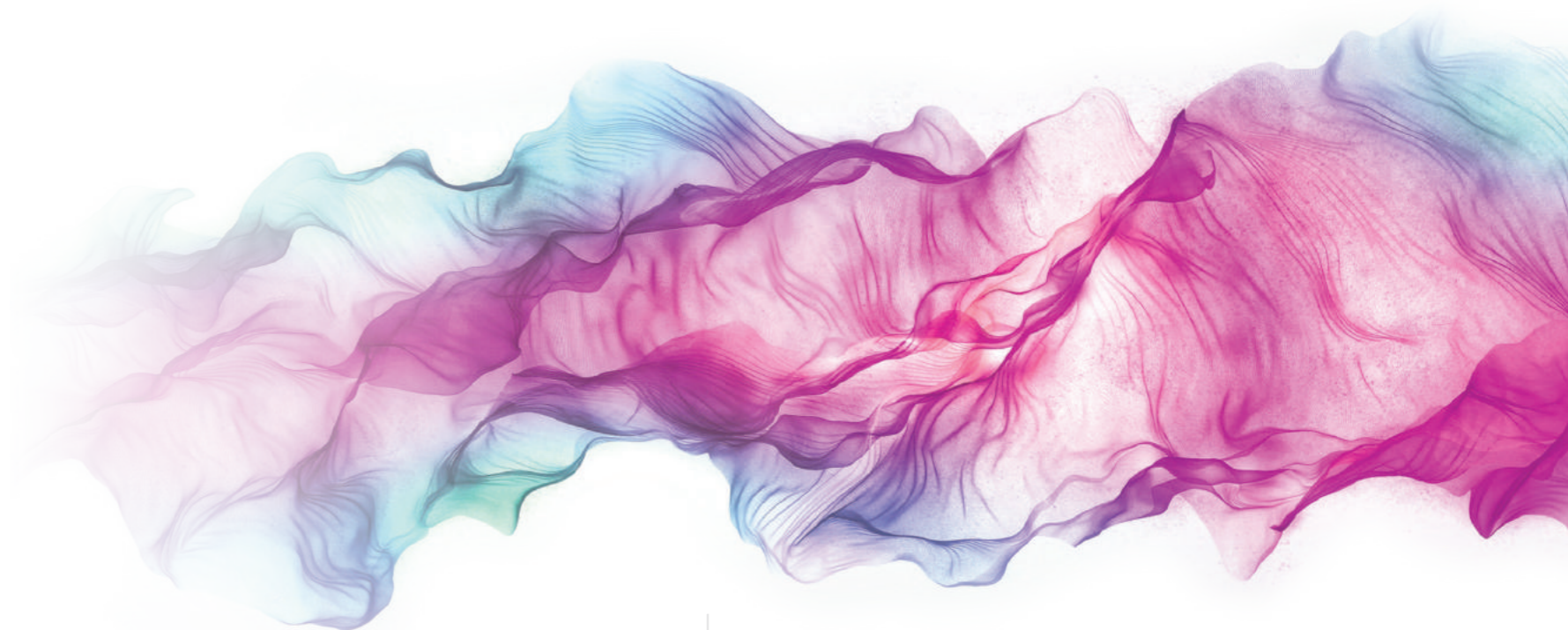
26 Our Exemplary Young Mother Award Top 3 Finalists

34 Special Recognition Award

40 Judges

42 Acknowledgements

M E S S A G E S



- President of Jamiyah Singapore
- Ms Sim Ann (Adviser to the Panel of Judges)
- Ms Claire Chiang (Chairperson for Judges)
- Mdm Nora Rustham (Chairperson for W&F Dept)
- President of Singapore Dr Halimah Yaacob



“A mother’s love is unconditional; like a circle, it has no beginning and no end. Her relentless care and love will always stay close and dear in our hearts.”

A mother’s love is unconditional; like a circle, it has no beginning and no end. Her relentless care and love will always stay close and dear in our hearts. This distinguished award in honouring committed and deserving mothers allows these women to help their comrades in motherhood, as well as serve as role models and inspiration to them.

This year’s Exemplary Mother Awards marks the 26th year of the Annual Exemplary Mother Award and the introduction of a special category, the ‘Exemplary Young Mother Award’, showcasing our young mothers’ entrepreneurial spirit, hard work and determination. It is a fresh platform this year to see mothers of all ages and hear their different stories.

We are, again, honoured to have been granted a third shield, to be awarded to the deserving mother by President Halimah Yacob, an exemplary personality herself and a staunch supporter of services for empowering women. I commend the dedication of all the judges and Ms Claire Chiang, Chairperson of the Panel of Judges, in making the 26th Exemplary Mother Award a success.

My appreciation to the People’s Association, MESRA, Women Integration Network (WIN), NTUC Women and Family (WAF) Unit and the donors for their continuous contributions and support. And finally, to the Exemplary Mother, Exemplary Young Mother and the nominees, may you continue to inspire others with your dedication and tenacity.

There is no yardstick to measure the sacrifices and struggles that a mother undergoes for her child. In fact, a mother’s care continues even after her child has grown up - a mother’s love lasts a lifetime.

It is my great pleasure to advise the panel of judges for the 26th Exemplary Mother Award. This year, we introduced a new category - The Exemplary Young Mother Award - to recognise young mothers who find ways to manage their family, career and community commitments.

I would like to commend Jamiyah Singapore, especially its Women and Family Department, for organising this event. My sincere appreciation to my fellow judges for your enthusiasm in celebrating what it takes to be an Exemplary Mother. To the mothers receiving the award, thank you for inspiring all of us with your boundless love for your children.

“A mother’s care continues even after her child has grown up - a mother’s love lasts a lifetime.”





A Mother is, 'She who can take the place of all others, but whose place no one else can take'.

The Exemplary Mother Award is a uniquely landmark event and Jamiyah has been honouring deserving mothers for the last 25 years. This 26th year sees the introduction of a new category, The Exemplary Young Mother Award. It is a great privilege to honour mothers of all ages this year. Some young mothers have faced down challenges others may not know even in a lifetime; these young working mothers all have inspiring stories to share.

Every year, the panel of judges faces the daunting task of selecting a winner, and the new category simply ups the ante. It has never been easy singling out one woman because we feel that all the nominees are deserving, and, we now identify different criteria for the new category. Undeniably, every mother is a winner in her own way. I laud the keen commitment of all the judges and staff of Jamiyah Singapore in making this event possible every year, for the past 25 years. This 26th EMA stands on the firm foundation of a quarter of a century's ardent search for and recognition of exemplary mothers. We respect the hard work of mothers whom we seek to highlight and honour.

From here on, the Exemplary Mother's Award will shine even brighter as we continue to celebrate our mothers' contributions in creating and nurturing resilient families.

“A Mother is, She who can take the place of all others, but whose place no one else can take.”

The Exemplary Mother Award organised annually by Jamiyah Singapore is one event my colleagues and I, from the Women and Family Department, hold dear to our hearts. It is a testament to the steadfastness we uphold as a nation, whilst embracing our multiracial diversity. The Award is a platform which assembles family and friends to highlight and honour mothers who invariably make an impact on their families and the larger society.

This year, the 26th Exemplary Mother Award presents a new category - The Exemplary Young Mother Award. It features mothers below 40 years old, showcasing how they persevere amidst adversity, and while being a working mother with young children to tend to.

I would like to give my endless thanks to the People's Association, MESRA, Women Integration Network (WIN), NTUC Women and Family (WAF) Unit and the donors for their unceasing patronage and contributions.

To the panel of judges, Mrs Laura Hwang and Ms Claire Chiang, I must say, "The 26th Exemplary Mother Award would not succeed without the hard work and dedication from each and every one of you! Thank you."

“The Exemplary Mother Award organised annually by Jamiyah Singapore is one event my colleagues and I, from the Women and Family Department, hold dear to our hearts.”





WOMEN & FAMILY DEPARTMENT OF JAMIYAH

Women have an inherent and innate strength that serves to hold their families together. When used for the greater good, this special quality can also buttress and bring communities together.

Recognising that exceptional trait in women, Jamiyah established a Women and Family Department in the 1970s. By having a strong team of women to rally other women, Jamiyah would become much more relevant and be able to play an increasingly significant role.

The Department's beginnings were modest, but in keeping with the trends of the time; cooking, baking and sewing classes for women to gain skills and expand their repertoire at home. The women came from all walks and neither age nor profession or education was a barrier - there were teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, as well as, housewives and general workers. They did not just apply their newfound skills on the home front but also stepped forward to contribute during Jamiyah's activities and events, cooking for the large gatherings or helping needy families.

Over the years, the Department has shaped its programmes according to the changing needs and demands. One of its recent initiatives was 'Diva Wellness Connect'. This series of classes on beauty and health was launched in March 2016 to empower women in terms of catering to their well-being and self-image. The Department is building on its strong foundation and the equally strong women who have made it what it is today to create a better tomorrow for the larger community that Jamiyah is committed to serve.



Her Excellency Dr Halimah Yacob

President of The
Republic of Singapore



A mother's bond with her child is unbreakable and her unconditional love remains through the ages. Jamiyah Singapore has awarded 25 mothers with the Exemplary Mother Award since 1993. The mother singled out to win each year had her name engraved on the Presidential Shields presented to Jamiyah by former Presidents, namely President Wee Kim Wee in 1992, President SR Nathan in 2005 and President Tony Tan in 2017. I am pleased to witness the award presentation for the second year running - this time to the 26th Exemplary Mother.

Not only are we honouring deserving mothers, I am glad to be able to honour mothers of all ages with the newly introduced category - The Exemplary Young Mother Award. This allows us to feature young working mothers who tirelessly provide for their children financially, emotionally and academically, while upholding values their children can emulate. They display entrepreneurial skills, which the Organising Committee has included as a criterion, as well as tenacity, determination and dedication not just to their children, but also their jobs and community.

I am pleased that organisations like Jamiyah continue to value the effort of mothers of all ages, races and faiths by commemorating their milestones with initiatives like the Exemplary Mother Award. Indeed, there are more mothers who deserve to be recognised, as every mother has a story of her own; the adversities that they overcome, the love for their children and family, as well as their selflessness in serving the community even in the midst of grappling with personal challenges.

I celebrate mothers of all ages for contributing to the nation in the many ways that they can. I wish Jamiyah Singapore every success in their mission of serving fellow Singaporeans of all races and faiths.

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26TH
EXEMPLARY
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T O P 5 F I N A L I S T S

“Grandpa, please tell Grandma not to work so hard. She works so hard for the family. I want her to rest.” Bibi touchingly recalls these words her young grandson said to her husband. It is a strong testimony to her enduring efforts for her family.

Bibi’s spirit was put to the test immediately after her marriage. She moved into her husband’s HDB home to live with his relatives, which totalled 11 people. She plunged into juggling a job, raising her children and looking after both her parents-in-law who were sickly. Challenges escalated when her husband stopped working due to illness. “When he fell ill, I felt there was no hope. It was a sudden event and I fell into depression,” Bibi recalls.

Bibi could not afford to wallow in misery and pulled herself out of sadness, becoming the sole breadwinner and her husband’s main caregiver. By learning to type, she was able to upgrade to be a clerk in Singapore Post. All the while, she encouraged her children to better themselves, monitored their schoolwork and was gratified when two of them graduated with university degrees and one with a polytechnic diploma. She is grateful for aid received from the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), “I must not forget AMP; they helped when my children were younger,” Bibi asserts.

Bibi gives back to the community, now that her children are grown. But, she is indefatigable in her love and care for her family. She is now a mother-in-law and grandmother. After her older daughter-in-law, a doctor, gave birth to Bibi’s grandchild, Bibi cared for the infant while its mother worked and completed her postgraduate course. “One of my daughters-in-law recently shared that after marriage, my son told her, ‘You must not hurt my mother, she is like heaven to me’. I then informed my daughter-in-law that I had instructed my son before his marriage, ‘Don’t hurt your wife – if you do, that’s like hurting me,’” Bibi related.

Her selflessness for her family and others is not lost on them. It has motivated seven people – her husband, four sons and two daughters-in-law – to nominate Bibi for the EMA. It proves that her words to her children, “Do not neglect your family, know your priorities,” have not fallen on deaf ears. They will not neglect their beloved mother.

“Do not neglect your family, know your priorities.”



BIBI FATIMAH SHEIKH MD.

Age: 55, With 4 Children

When her divorce patently left a psychological scar on her elder daughter, Alice Soh Geok Kwee knew that she had to act quickly and decisively. The single mother and her two children were adrift, without a proper home. Alice was also without a job as she did not want to neglect her children while at work.

“During the divorce, my older child was emotionally affected. If I were to work, I must have her beside me all the time,” Alice explains. As such, she could not continue with her job as a secretary.

The only way that Alice could be around her daughter while working was to run a Child Care Centre. Alice had been a Child Care Assistant Teacher once before and was familiar with the job. To brush up, she enrolled in courses and acquired a diploma and a university degree. “As I was taking courses, I made sure my elder daughter was always within sight. She would either sit in the canteen or at the back of the classroom when it’s late at night,” Alice recalls.

Her efforts paid off. “I was happy to see that she changed. She had a bad temper and couldn’t take the break-up. She’s a fine lady now - I call her my ‘Princess’. Initially, I almost gave in to her unhappiness but my best friend told me to make a good decision and reminded me how I had to work extra hard to pay off my ex-husband’s gambling debts.”

Alice had struggled to start her Child Care Centre, setting up the premises on her own as she could not afford extra help, while working to obtain the licence. The irony was that she could not qualify to rent an HDB flat as she was the designated owner of the Centre, even though it was not making much money when she started.

The worst is behind her now. Her elder daughter has graduated from university while her younger daughter is an undergraduate. Her elder daughter chips in for the younger one’s education. “I am very happy to see the older sister supporting the younger. I want them to be useful citizens who give back to society,” Alice enthuses. Alice herself does her part by cooking at home, together with her daughters, and cycling around the estate providing free meals for the needy. “I am glad to be able to help, I used to need help, now I can help others”.

“*I am glad to be able to help, I used to need help, now I can help others.*”

A portrait of Alice Soh Geok Kwee, a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue and white striped shirt under a black vest. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings.

ALICE SOH GEOK KWEE

Age: 54, With 2 Children

As the youngest among nine children, Sarimah Amat was mothered by her whole family. Having received so much, she is reflecting all that love back – going beyond her family to be a ‘universal mother’ for she says, “Mother is the pillar of strength”.

For most people, three children would already be a handful. Sarimah did not stop at three. In 2007, when she found that her niece’s three children were living on the streets of Singapore, abandoned, Sarimah adopted them. “We can’t change everything but we can change something,” she says. She ended their days of sleeping in HDB carparks, bathing at public toilets and petty stealing to feed themselves. They were all below 10 years of age. She taught both sets of children - her own and her niece’s - to love and care for one another. “What children see, children do, and when they do, they understand better. I show my children to have more kindness, so they know there is still hope.”

Sarimah did not stop there. When they matured, she embraced complete strangers, under the Ministry of Social and Family Development’s child fostering scheme. “Fostering was a family decision; I explained that we must not only have a place in our home but also in our hearts for them. I said to my children, ‘Put yourself in their place,’ and that hit them. Now, no one can tell the difference between the fostered children and my own”. She has fostered five children since 2012, including a special needs child who passed on in 2015. Sarimah’s family

helped to conduct his funeral. Fostering the children of strangers proved a valuable lesson for her own brood. “They have learnt not to be judgemental and are concerned about others who are not their blood. I also hope the foster children will carry this back to their own families. They are a Godsend to me.”

Ingeniously, Sarimah actively initiates projects which keep her brood occupied and teaches them to contribute to others. In 2013, she started Project Pencil to collect unwanted stationery for needy children in nearby countries. Project Kampung, started in 2018, has former gangsters distributing food to needy families in their previous neighbourhoods.

It takes indefatigable spirit to sustain this cycle of ‘giving and receiving’ that Sarimah is perpetuating. If five years of debilitating illness did not break her, it has definitely made her stronger. “Anything you want to change it must start with the heart,” says the lady with the strong and big heart.

“We can’t change everything but we can change something.”



SARIMAH AMAT

Age: 51, With 6 Children

Food seller at a construction site in the early morning, server in a coffee shop at noon, office cleaning lady in the evening and seamstress at night. Those were the four jobs Lim Kah Geck juggled after her husband's fatal accident in 1981, while playing both father and mother to her children. She had 5 children – all under 10 years old – to raise and her mother-in-law to care for.

Kah Geck was 38 when widowed and pregnant with her fifth child. She was shocked to find that her late husband had left behind only \$30 in cash but plenty of debt. "The children kept me going. I had already lost my husband so my children were important. If I didn't have them, I would have followed my husband to the grave by committing suicide," she confesses. Her plight was pressing and she considered giving up the unborn child for adoption. "But my brother said, 'If you give her up, you won't know how she turns out. Foster her out to me instead.' She lived with him until she entered Primary One," Kah Geck recalls, adding, "She still calls he and his wife, 'Father and Mother'".

With finances being tight, she took a bold decision of doing hard labour on a construction site to earn more, learning to operate the Tile Remover machine. Her sole aim was to ensure that her children would lead a better life. "After working hard all day, when I reached home and saw all my children, I felt happy," Kah Geck admits.

Hardship has not hardened Kah Geck's heart. "I teach my children to have a forgiving heart, be humble and be compassionate, to help others; even if they can't do it financially, they can do it with their strength." She walks her talk. At 72, Kah Geck is a regular volunteer at her temple, cooking for the needy. She selflessly plunges into the various chores; marketing, food preparation, cooking and packing. She does this despite all the aches and pains she now suffers from her days of punishing labour at the construction site. "Even if it's tiring, I find it fulfilling. I feel happy cooking for these people. And they are worse off than me because they have no children to feed them or fend for them. I feel fortunate to be able to do this for them," Kah Geck asserts.

“I teach my children to have a forgiving heart, be humble and be compassionate, to help others.”

A portrait of Lim Kah Geck, a middle-aged woman with short dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black top with a vibrant pink and blue floral pattern. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings.

**LIM KAH
GECK**

Age: 72, With 5 Children

Almost everyone would aspire to a well-paid job and high-flying career to provide the best for their families. Faraliza Zainal thinks differently. She gave all that up for her children, particularly her eldest child, 18-year-old Ashraf, when he diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome (AS).

“Being a mother is a learning journey. My husband and I were very comfortable, I was at the peak of my career in corporate training at Dow Jones. We made a sacrifice and I resigned. I researched about AS for one year to help my son. As a mother, I had to take action and not wait for others to help,” Faraliza reveals.

She decided that the most positive thing to do was to set up her own school specifically for children with special needs. Thus, she established ‘My Inspiring Journey (MIJ) Special Education Hub’ in 2011, after acquiring the qualifications to run the school. They sold their three-storey terrace home to fund it and moved into an HDB flat. As the school premises were hard to come by, she began classes in the storeroom of Sultan Mosque, with Ashraf as the sole student. “My son is the inspiration. If we are no longer around, what will happen to him?” says Faraliza.

It was gratifying to guide her son through his journey. Other children eventually joined and the numbers swelled. But financial viability remains a challenge.

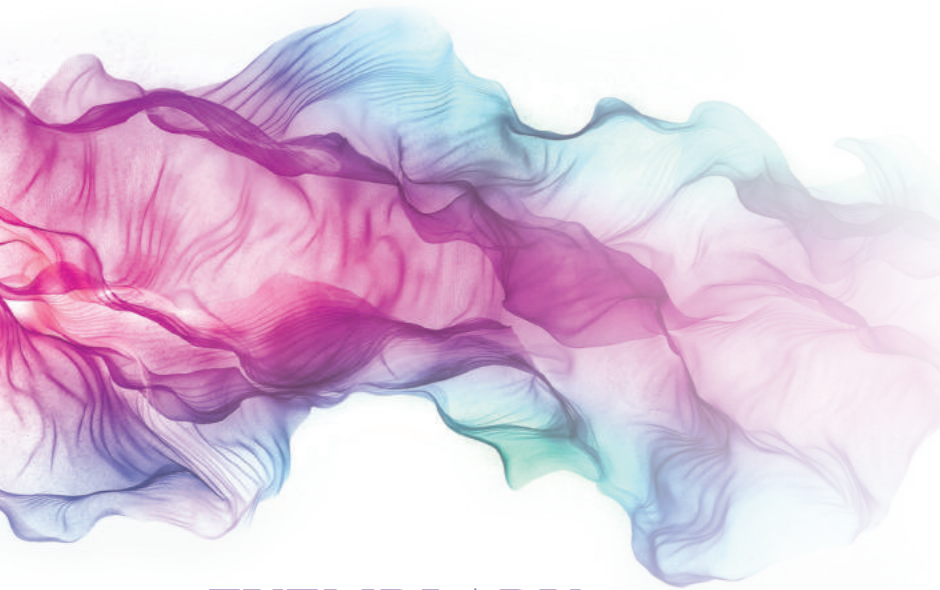
“We never thought that this would make money. Yet I cannot say, ‘No,’ to the families who come to us. We get sponsors for each child and send them reports on the child’s performance,” she explains. MIJ now caters to 250 students. “When you see improvement in every student, I’m happy.” she says. Her students range from those with Autism to Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy.

Her other children are involved in MIJ. “Children today have high IQ and low EQ – inclusivity starts from the home. No matter how high you study, you need the values of compassion and empathy. My 17-year-old daughter teaches in the school every weekend and my 12-year-old son helps out in our café,” Faraliza refers to Ashraf’s Café, which she recently opened to create employment for MIJ’s students. So long as they come, she will continue to be there for the children who need her.

“*Being a mother is a learning journey.*”

**FARALIZA
ZAINAL**

Age: 47, With 3 Children



EXEMPLARY
YOUNG MOTHER
AWARD



TOP 3 FINALISTS

Within the same year, Nur Farhan Mohd Alami's life changed from the lowest point of a difficult divorce to the heights of being a household name and face on television. It happened thanks to her positive outlook and resilience.

In 2017, Nur Farhan's divorce was finalised and the mother of three children aged nine, six and three was at a loss. "I was struggling to cope; my mood was low and I just didn't know how to do it as a single mother," she reveals. The situation was worsened as her eldest child was dyslexic and performing poorly in school, causing her to have low self-esteem. Nur Farhan enrolled her in an International School but it drained their finances. The problems piled on when her second child was also found to be dyslexic.

Then fate took a twist during a consultation in Nur Farhan's medical practice. "The turnaround was when I met a patient who specifically asked for a female doctor. She was 13 years old, educationally sub-normal and had been exposed to prolonged sexual abuse when her mother left her with relatives while she went to work. She grew to be afraid of men," Nur Farhan shares.

That encounter was an epiphany for her. "I realised that life is not just about my raising my children. It's about giving back to the community, and being passionate. If you look after the community, they

will look after your children. If you give to somebody else, you may get more in return. If you give your time, you will get more time." Nur Farhan's advice for young professionals who feel pressed for time is that they should not fear trading their time to be a mentor because they will reap the rewards. Since then, she has been channelling avenues to provide volunteer services.

Thus, when she was approached to create content for a health-themed television programme, 'Check-Up Minggu Ini' ('This Week's Check Up'), Nur Farhan plunged into it, despite her stifling schedule. The eight episodes she presented as the 'in-house doctor' on the programme has been an enriching journey towards fulfilling her passion.

Thus, Nur Farhan concentrates on positive thought and action because she says, "Money can be earned, but peace of mind can't be bought".

“Money can be earned, but peace of mind can't be bought.”

A portrait of Nur Farhan Mohd Alami, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a dark blue top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings.

NUR FARHAN MOHD ALAMI

Age: 36, With 3 Children

Live life like a mirror; if you are polite, people will be polite to you. A mirror reflects." That is Alverna's Cher's constant advice to her daughters.

At the mere age of 36, she has experienced two marriages which ended inauspiciously, having a daughter from each marriage and raising both as a single mother. She runs a funeral parlour and a recruitment agency in a partnership, she volunteers with the elderly, and is sometimes an agony aunt to other mothers who need a listening ear. This is also a lady full of ideas; instead of providing only funeral services, she has been innovative in pioneering a complete suite of services, including advice on will planning, estate planning, CPF nominations and Power of Attorney.

Her mantra is, "Turn failure into fuel that keeps my dreams burning".

At the worst stage of her life, she had only \$400 and a \$5000 bill to pay in 20 days. She worked to pay off all debts and today, is debt free. She is not stopping there and wants to see all other women in that position, "Women have to work hard and believe there is light at the end of the tunnel."

She is certainly ensuring that her daughters take after her. "My children are learning from me to be strong and to protect themselves. They see my

determination and I see that in them too; I can see that my eldest is determined to complete whatever she wants to do."

She is also teaching her girls to help others. "I go door to door every Sunday to provide breakfast for the elderly in rental flats. My daughters join me and they look forward to it," Alverna relates with pride. This is not all. Her funeral parlour has provided pro-bono services for those who die destitute without anyone to conduct their final rites.

She has a FaceBook group with whom she shares advice on being a single parent and attracts a large following. She also works with a strong and extensive network of mothers at her church who support each other. These are all values they can share with the next generation. Alverna's reminder is, "Don't keep things to yourself and take on the full load alone, get help from others."

“Turn failure into fuel that keeps my dreams burning.”

A portrait of Alverna Cher, a woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a maroon top and a necklace with black and white beads. The background is a blurred cityscape.

ALVERNA CHER

Age: 36, With 2 Children

Ju Ann Thong loves to hear and share stories, because she believes there is a power in them. "Sharing is important, to open one's eyes in a predicament is important; listening to different stories makes you realise that there are a lot of blessings in our daily life".

Considering what Ju Ann's days are like, it is remarkable that she constantly smiles and laughs. Her husband of three years is undergoing treatment for a rare form of cancer and Ju Ann is the lynchpin holding it all together for the family - including two young children from her current marriage and her 12-year-old son from her previous marriage. She has taken on three jobs to support the family and her husband's treatment, while still continuing to do the chores, errands and fulfill her children's needs. Even in the midst of it all, Ju Ann finds the time to connect with her parents and parents-in-law, as a filial daughter.

To manage her duties better, Ju Ann has wisely roped in her older son to help with some of the chores, while he concurrently prepares for his Primary School Leaving Examinations. She feels there is no better way to teach him time management, responsibility and independence.

"Motherhood means 'Love'; there is nothing outside love," Ju Ann affirms. "Anything not loving goes out of the house, that is what I tell my son." Love has been Ju Ann's driving force and she instils that in

her children. "Love is free, and it just takes a simple nice sentence to keep it going."

As Ju Ann injects love into her interactions, she has converted strangers into friends. It started when she gave advice online to other mothers. "First it was a small group, then it expanded. Things started happening; we received a staycation and a meal voucher for our wedding anniversary, people came forward with cancer solutions," Ju Ann relates. She taps into the resources available even as she is being a resource to others, "One's strength is limited, so there is no shame in asking for help. Ask for help, not handouts - just ask for support," Ju Ann says.

Each day is a new challenge for this busy mother, and she gains confidence from the highest power, "At the end of the day, I ask God to heal me so I can have more strength for tomorrow".

“Love is free,
and it just takes
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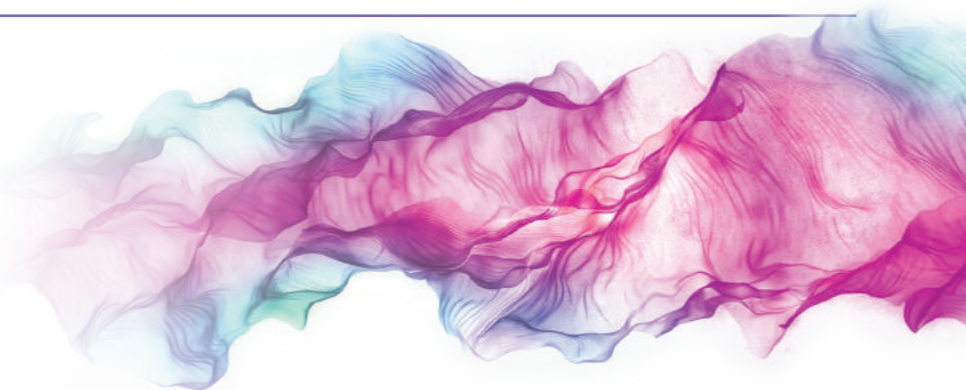
A portrait of Ju Ann Thong, a young woman with long dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a colorful, patterned sleeveless top and small floral earrings. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings.

JU ANN
THONG

Age: 35, With 3 Children



SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD



Her three sons hold her in high esteem for her grit and perseverance, overcoming life's many hurdles while remaining a steadfast mother to them. Jocelyn Chng ascribes her capabilities to her grandmother who raised her. "I was inspired by her," Jocelyn revealed about her role model, "She said, 'It is a blessing to bless others, you must learn to share; when we share, it makes us happy.' I teach those values to my sons." Her grandmother's ethic of hard work helped Jocelyn cope with her father's death as she kept his business running to support the family. Another setback followed when her husband, who had helped her through those harrowing days, succumbed to cancer, leaving her with three boys to raise.

"I am a steward whom God has entrusted with three very important pillars. They will go out into society to add value to others, not just their family. I must guide them so they can help nurture better future generations. Whatever I do, my sons and my nephews are watching; nothing beats our actions." Her efforts have not been in vain. Her two older sons have been on mission trips to the Philippines and Cambodia. She tells them it is a privilege to serve others. With her family and through her business, Jocelyn distributes meals to needy families during festive days. "I teach my sons to love others regardless of their actions towards them. This will enable them to make a difference in the lives of others."



JOCELYN CHNG
Age 51, With 3 Children



WAN KAMARIAH HARIS
Age 49, With 7 Children

She has a degree from the National University of Singapore and could have had an outstanding career. But Wan Kamariah Haris chooses to be a full-time mother as she sees her children as her main priority. "We wanted only four but we have seven; God has given you a gift, so accept it. Being a mother has been a journey of discovery about myself and that I am capable of taking care of so many children." Kamariah gives tuition to supplement the family's income. In 2012, her husband was discovered to have a tumour in his spine which paralysed him, leaving her to care for their young children. Kamariah rallied her family and kept them going while scrambling to get treatment for him. Looking back at that dark period, she now sees it as one filled with blessings. "There were so many people around to give support, I had good friends. I realised there is so much to be happy about." Her happiness was augmented when her family's prayers were answered and her husband recovered. "It's a miracle!" she says.

She found herself tapping into her strengths again in 2016 when her eldest child was diagnosed with depression and schizophrenia. Kamariah handled the situation with her usual steadfastness, guided by her past experiences in overcoming adversity. Kamariah shares her strategy to avoid caregiver fatigue and burnout. It has obviously worked to buoy her up, "Just find joy in whatever you do. Children give so much joy - being a mother is a blessing".



SEETHA DEVI SIVARAJASINGAM
Age 83, With 3 Children

When Seeta Devi Rajasingam’s husband died in 1985, she faced a huge debt because of his medical bills battling mental illness. She was 50 then, with two sons in their early 20s and a 12-year-old daughter. Her sons postponed their dreams of further studies to fund their sister’s schooling and pay their debts. “One son took on a job while pursuing a part-time law degree, and the other son joined teaching to help finance their sister’s education,” Seeta proclaims with love and pride. She took on two jobs to settle their debts. She worked in a factory in the day and as a part-time librarian at night, making between \$700 and \$1000 in total each month. Education was paramount in their family. Her husband had said, “You must educate our children - even if you have to borrow money.”

To keep her mind off her challenges, Seeta wrote stories as an outlet and to keep going. She also volunteered in several activities. Today, at the age of 83, Seeta still helps out during the cooking activities in her temple. Money is no longer an issue; one son has provided her with a flat and all her children have paid for her holidays around the world. Her greatest satisfaction is that she has kept her promise to her late husband; her two younger children both hold Masters Degrees while her eldest son has a PhD.

FAIL sums up your ‘First Attempt In Learning’. ‘NO’ simply means ‘Next Opportunity’. Lee Siew Choon lives by that. Her belief had kept her going after her first two marriages ended. She felt that she was simply “not lucky to find love” and focused on providing her children with the best she could as a single parent. Her brood of five children includes her adopted daughters and a pair of twins who are her brother’s daughters. The twins were born in Thailand (their mother is a Thai) and she feared they might end up in the streets when her brother was incarcerated in Thailand. She feared it was hard to bring them into Singapore due to red tape.

In Singapore, she had to fight to get Singapore citizenship for the two girls. “I had to go through immigration every few months and get their passports stamped to keep the girls in Singapore. I struggled with immigration issues for 13 years, even my Member of Parliament could not help, so I went all the way to write and fight”. Her resolve was rewarded when the twins were awarded Singapore citizenship. Love clearly underlines every stride Siew Choon takes. “I am blessed because I do a lot of good deeds. Life is full of challenges but I never cry over spilt milk. Whenever I fail, I just climb up again; life will give you the answers,” she beams between her tears of gratitude for God’s grace.



LEE SIEW CHOON
Age 63, With 5 Children

In 2005, Zarena Sani was going a traumatic divorce and immersed herself in community work to overcome her problems. “I was involved in the RCs and CCs; by helping others, I was helping myself,” she explains.

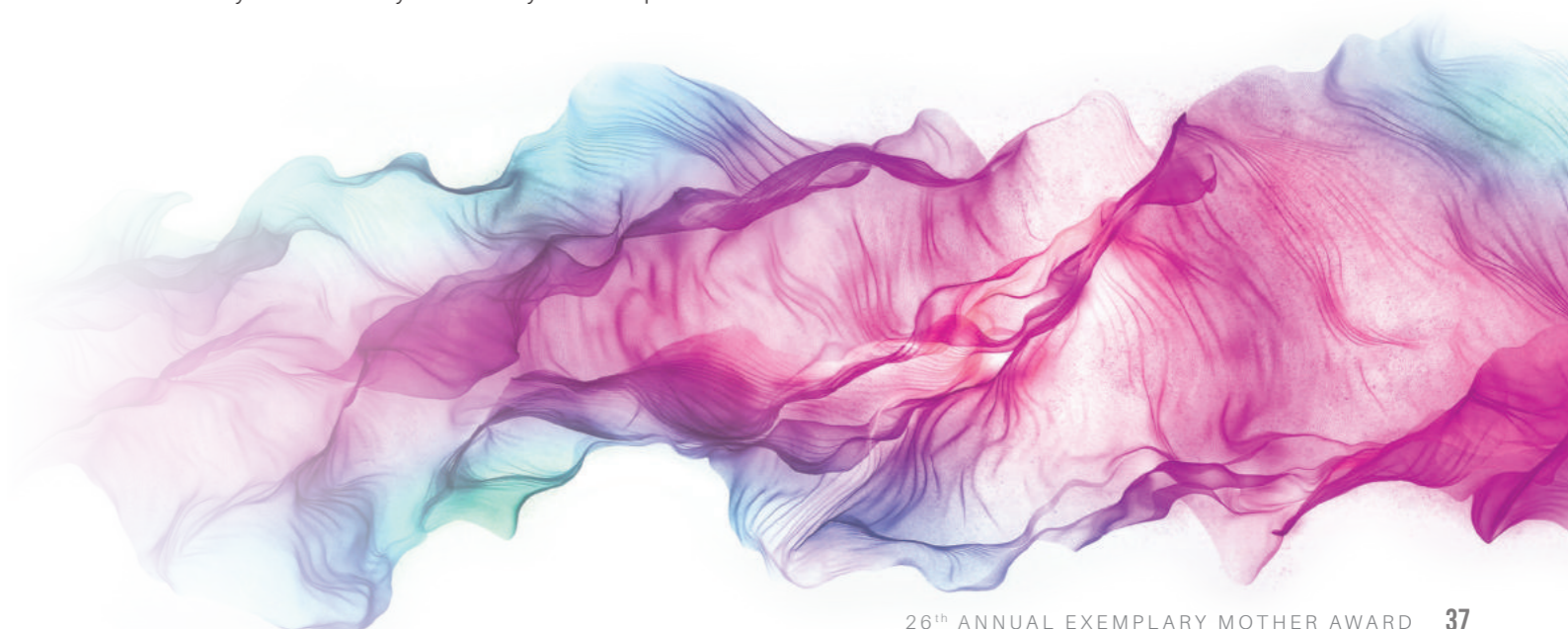
However, she was unable to formalise her contributions due to her ex-husband’s debts for which she was the guarantor. “I couldn’t hold any post in the Malay Activities Executive Committee because I was a bankrupt.” It took her 10 years to pay off the debts and be discharged from bankruptcy, with help from her employer of 34 years, and relatives.

She paid for her children’s education and ensured that her third child, who is dyslexic and in the Institute of Technical Education, received special tuition even though it is costly. He is now making her proud with his creations in art, animation and cartoons which are sold to the public. Her other children have received tertiary education. “I am happy with what the children are now, because I couldn’t get them anything before.” said Zarena.

Despite the challenges, Zarena took night classes to obtain the GCE ‘O’ level certificate and continues to take regular courses. She is also proud of her children and tells them, “Whatever you do, just let me know and I’ll give my blessings; Mama is already proud of you!” Her fierce love is reciprocated by her children who encouraged her to participate in the EMA, saying, “It doesn’t matter to us if you win or not - you’re already our Champion!”



ZARENA SANI
Age 51, With 4 Children



Our Finalists



From Left to right:

Faraliza Zainal, Wan Kamariah Haris, Lim Kah Gek, Alice Seoh Geok Kwee, Lee Siew Choon, Sarimah Amat, Bibi Fatimah Binte Sheikh Muhammad J, Zarena Sani, Nur Farhan Mohd Alami, Alverna Cher and Ju Ann Thong

Missing in photo:

Jocelyn Chng
Seetha Devi Sivarajasingam

Our Judges



Ms Sim Ann

- Senior Minister of State
Ministry of Culture,
Community and Youth
Ministry of
Communications and
Information
- Adviser to the EMA Panel
of Judges



Ms Claire Chiang

- Senior Vice President,
Banyan Tree Holdings
Limited
- Chairperson of
The Panel of Judges



Mdm Sadiyah Shahal

- Council Representative
of Friends of the
Museums Singapore



Ms Lim Kar Yee

- Senior Director,
People's Association



Mrs Laura Hwang, PBM

- Managing Director,
Memories of the East
Pte Ltd



Ms Joanna Portilla, PBM

- Chairman, Women's
Integration Network
People's Association



**Mdm Shesikala
d/o Tukaram
Durgude**

- Director, Modern
Montessori International
Pte Ltd



Dr June Goh

- President of Singapore
Council of Women's
Organisation



**Dr Bibi Jan
Mohamed Ayyub, BBM**

- Board Member of AMP



**Mrs Sarojini
Padmanathan**

- Director of Professional
Board Administration
& Cell Therapy Facility,
Health Sciences Authority



Mr Ong Chu Poh, PBM, BBM

- Founder, Group
Executive Chairman
ECON Healthcare
Group

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Mdm Bhavana Rao

Mdm Chelvi Rajahkan

Mdm Nurzakiah Jumathi

Ms Nurul Jannah Ismail

Ms Raudhah Osman

Mdm Samsina Hairon

Mdm Yasotha Veerappa@Nurull Syaahidah

Mdm Zahara Mahmood

Mdm Zuraida Haji Mohd Din

and the rest of Jamiyah Singapore's staff and volunteers that have contributed to the success of the event

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