

With All My Heart and Soul

By **Cheryl Ang**

What drew me to the social work profession was the privilege to work closely with clients through their toughest times and watching them overcome challenges with their inherent strength. Although I enjoyed my work at a Family Service Centre (FSC), I had a strong desire to practise in a setting where I could create stronger bonds with clients. So, in 2021 I started my journey in Good Shepherd Centre (GSC), a crisis shelter.

I remember waiting eagerly for my first day of work at GSC to arrive. I imagined being able to spend 10 hours a day with residents, building rapport and relationships, and using the therapeutic relationships to guide changes. I also imagined being able to cook with them, eat with them, and play with them. Indeed, I still enjoy these close interactions and time spent with the residents till today.

Of course, work is not all sunshine and rainbows. A typical workday comprises a considerable amount of time with clients discussing their problems and finding solutions. We discuss openly about abuse, trauma, marriage equality, homelessness, finances, poverty, grief and loss among other presenting issues. I am surrounded by



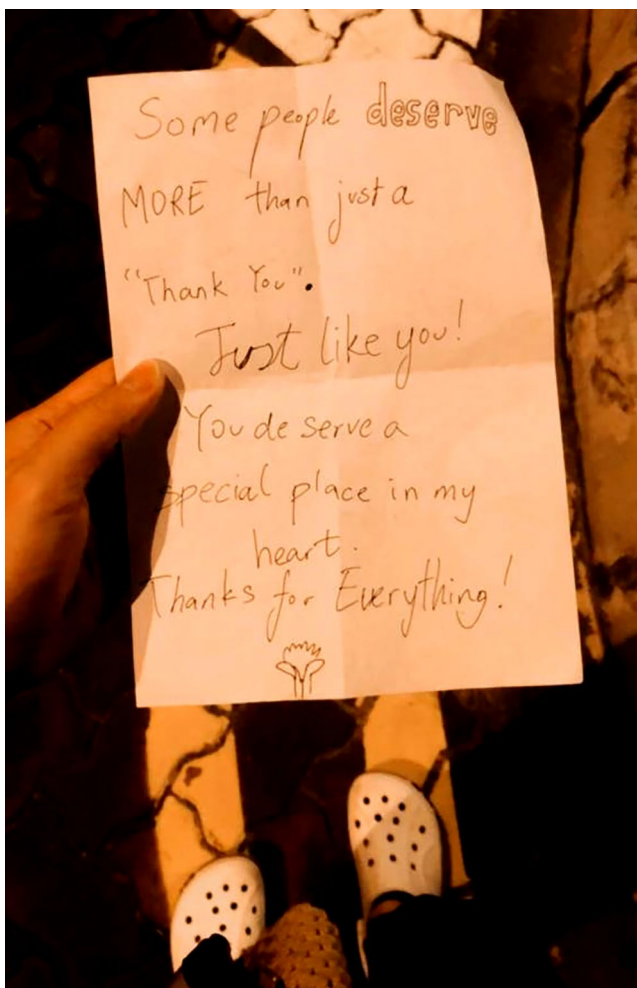
deep sufferings and sorrows. Sometimes, at the end of the day, I find that my shoulders sag under the weight of the struggles they shared. My heart feels heavy when I leave the shelter wondering about whether the residents will be kept awake by their worries.

After a few hard-driving months, I learnt the importance of self-care and healthy boundaries. I do not have to be a miracle worker; some burdens are not meant for me to bear. I learnt that at times, I must acknowledge that many problems have no clear solutions and sometimes, being a social worker is more about sitting next to my clients in their pain and sorrow and standing by them in their journey. Humbling truths.

I often see the residents tap on their resilience and use their wits to overcome the myriad challenges in their bid to start afresh. When they move from GSC to more stable accommodations, they are often quietly proud of their achievement, always with gratitude in their hearts.

It touches me most when the children and adults present me with their handwritten notes, text messages and handmade gifts before leaving.

These are important to me not because of the acknowledgement I receive for helping them, but because these speak of the relationships built between us and the trust that they have so generously given me even in their vulnerable state.



I am grateful to be in a team of the best colleagues anyone could ever ask for. Every staff goes the extra mile for every person who walks through the doors of GSC. They serve quietly, humbly, and without expectation of acknowledgement or appreciation. They are there morning, day and night, and long after most people have gone home to their families.

I have learnt a lot from resilient clients and compassionate colleagues during the past year in GSC. As I continue on this journey, I will serve with all of my heart and soul and hold on to the belief that no matter how dark or desperate a situation appears, there will always be hope.