



*Building a culture of welcome and justice  
where no man, woman, or child is a stranger*

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## Foreword



Dear friends & supporters of HOME,

As we move into the second half of the year, it's a good time to take stock, to celebrate the achievements and to brace ourselves for the challenges that lie ahead. It's been a busy time at the help-desks and at the shelter – we're seeing about 15-20 enquiries a week at the women's help-desk and about 10-12 a week at the men's.

International Domestic Workers' Day has come and gone and served as a reminder to continue advocating for better working and living conditions for domestic workers. The tragic incident of a young Burmese girl who took her own life by jumping from a high floor of a condominium underscores the vulnerability of domestic workers from Myanmar who often face language barriers, low wages and limited social support. The changing demographics of workers at our help-desk and shelter also point to the need to ensure better protection for workers from Myanmar. HOME has begun the process of building networks with organisations in Myanmar in the hope of creating support for Burmese domestic workers.

It is only with the rock-solid support of our volunteers, donors and partners that we are

able to do all that we do and continue to grow to meet the changing needs of our community. HOME has been extremely fortunate to have volunteers who come from such diverse backgrounds and bring so much energy and passion to the team. Volunteers such as Dr. Severine, interviewed for this edition, and Rahman (featured in the May edition), who now volunteers at the men's help-desk even as he recovers from a very serious accident, are two outstanding examples of the support and leadership provided by our volunteers. ~ Sheena Kanwar, Executive Director

*Photo: The Straits Times*

## Features

### The Cry of the Hidden

Every Sunday for six weeks, we shadowed Robina Navato, a 44-year-old Filipino domestic worker who has been volunteering for three years at HOME's help-desk. What began as a final-year project to make a short film about Robina's volunteer experience became, in the end, an eye-opening experience for us. We heard first-hand accounts of the abuse – emotional or verbal, and sometimes physical – that some domestic workers suffer. The stories were both shocking and sad.

We filmed Robina at the help-desk, at her church where she has a close network of friends, and also zoomed in on the



precious pockets of time when she gets to chat with her family, especially her grandchildren. The result was [Offdays](#), a short film that showed us that domestic workers are also humans too, deserving of respect, dignity and rights. Too often, we forget that they make the decision to leave the comfort of their homes in search of better work opportunities to support their families.

The film ends with Robina reciting her moving poem, "The Cry of the Hidden". We are grateful and honoured to have spent time with Robina, and we will continue to spread the word about treating domestic workers with fairness and dignity. ~ Jasmine Koh & Jora Yuan Shai

*Jasmine & Jora are engineering & communications students at Nanyang Technological University. They filmed and directed "Offdays" as part of their documentary-making module in their final-year project.*

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## Sweet Reunion



*Left: Luke (centre) in a sharing session with the Chinese workers; Right: Cui (right) with his family.*

The village is filled with the aroma of a homemade feast, and an animated speaker eagerly anticipates the arrival of familiar faces from out of town – today’s guests are the Singaporean volunteers from HOME and HealthServe who had assisted members of this village when they were migrant workers in Singapore.

We are in a small Chinese village in Feidong county of Anhui province, as Luke Tan, HOME’s Operations Manager, relates a vivid scene from a recent trip. The aim of this trip was to understand the lives of the workers after they return to their homes in Shandong and Anhui in China. Many workers who had sustained work injuries managed to obtain due compensation from their employers in Singapore, but the story often ends there. The team from Singapore were interested to learn how they have been rebuilding their lives back in China, and also to provide financial counselling and advice.

Luke recalled his reunion with one of these workers, Cui Zhi Ming. Cui had suffered speech loss from a work accident, leaving him unfit for physical labour in Singapore. With HOME’s help, Cui obtained the payout due to him from his work injury. He was able to manage his finances wisely, by investing in a plot of land in his village for farming, as well as in a residential property for rental income, to ensure future financial stability. He has also recovered largely from his speech loss, and has a happy family life.

What Cui has accomplished is not within the reach of many migrant workers. When the migrant worker is a husband and a father, years of physical separation take its toll on the family; workers who have suffered debilitating injuries struggle to contribute to the family’s upkeep. For Luke, this means that this trip, and his efforts in HOME are all worthwhile “even if we can only help one person”. ~ Natalie Ng

*Natalie is a second-year political science student at the National University of Singapore. She enjoys existential fiction and political philosophy, and is also interested in issues of social inequality.*

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## Reflections from Geneva



*In front of the famed Palais de Nations, the home of the United Nations in Geneva since 1946.*

In March 2017, HOME and TWC2 submitted a [joint report](#) for the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nation's [Committee on Migrant Workers \(CMW\)](#), where the Bangladeshi government's [state report](#) was to be examined. Our submission examined the Bangladesh government's commitments as a signatory to the United Nations' [Convention on the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#).

Thanks to [Migrant Forum Asia \(MFA\)](#), we were able to present our findings in Geneva in April 2017. Our NGO delegation had just three minutes per speaker, but there were follow-up questions by the Committee, which included one about recruitment practices in Singapore. TWC2's delegate explained how recruitment costs have escalated and its link to training centres in Bangladesh. Members of the CMW appeared shocked at the high recruitment fees.



*Left: In front of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the CMW convened. L–R: Alex Au (TWC2), Jasiya Khaton (WARBE), Nayela Akter*

(HELVETAS), Stephanie Chok (HOME); Right: Sitting in on the GFMD's discussion on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Safe Migration.

The Bangladesh government arrived for their afternoon session with an 11-strong delegation. Their delegation assured the Committee that they had processes in place to protect migrant workers abroad, and that there was a licensing framework in place for recruitment agencies.

This experience brought to life the political realities of how treaty bodies work. Drawing CSOs into the CMW process ensures there is empirical relevance, and exposes the gaps between rhetoric (systems and laws 'on paper') and reality (what actually happens in practice).

Meanwhile, the UN Committee has responded with its [concluding observations](#). The Committee's recommendations to the Bangladesh government include improving their overseas missions' protection of migrant workers abroad and enhancing regulation of the recruitment sector, including punishing recruiters engaged in fraudulent and exploitative practices, among others. These recommendations reflect those raised by CSOs in Bangladesh as well as our joint report. ~ Stephanie Chok

*Stephanie Chok is a case manager and researcher with HOME. Her research interests include labour migration, inequality and research ethics.*

## Volunteers & Supporters

### French Connection



*Dr Severine Grandgeorge (second from left) with staff and volunteers of HOME.*

Dr Severine Grandgeorge has been volunteering with HOME for the last two years. She moved to Singapore with her three children three years ago when her husband found a job here. Having been a general practitioner in France, Dr Severine provided free health care for hundreds of shelter residents through her weekly clinic and has now set up a medical team that can continue to support HOME after she left for Ireland at the end of June. She will be missed by all of us here at HOME.

*L: How did you decide to volunteer with HOME?*

S: When I arrived in Singapore, I realised I couldn't practise here, so I decided that I would look for a humanitarian organisation to support.

*L: So when you arrived there was no medical team here?*

S: No, at least not a regular one. When I came, I had to ask myself "What should I do and how will I start?" I just came with my stethoscope and told the residents that I was a doctor and that they could come to see me if they wanted. I saw about 10 residents a week. We now have volunteer nurses, a physiotherapist and a doctor who has taken over from me.

*L: You had to deal with some severe cases in the shelter. How have those experiences been?*

S: There was a lady whom I spent a long time helping: she fell from the third storey of a building. There was another lady who gave birth alone after running away from her employer. She gave birth prematurely and the baby needed two surgeries. We met her at the hospital but the doctors didn't want to operate at first, they wanted to send them back to Indonesia. I started fundraising back in France and went to meetings at the hospital. We raised quite a lot of money, and we managed to persuade the doctors to operate.

*L: What was it that made you get so involved in helping these people?*

S: I love people and I love my job. I am a volunteer, but this is a real job to me. I come every week, and I give my number to the shelter leaders so they can call me anytime for help.

*L: Finally, now you are moving to Dublin, what are your plans for the future?*

S: I want to be able to start working again so that is why we have decided to move back to Europe. I am registering to work there but I think I would like to work for a charity. I feel like I am doing something very useful in these sorts of organisations and I don't know if I would feel as fulfilled now as a general practitioner. ~ Laura Maull

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**Sneak Preview: Humans of HOME**



In order for us to better understand the domestic workers whom HOME assists, and to gather suitable profiles for our project, Humans of HOME, our team of trainee teachers organised an evening of good food and activities for some domestic workers at East Coast Park recently. Humans of HOME is a project inspired by Humans of Singapore and other related photo exhibitions. The attempt is to showcase the diverse stories of individuals at HOME, with a specific focus on our shared humanity, be it staff, volunteers, or migrant workers.

After some ice-breakers, we played traditional games such as “five stones” and “chaptah”, and also learnt to sculpt balloons. As expected, our friends from HOME had far defter fingers, and they easily beat us at our own games.

After the games, we continued to build friendships over a barbecue. It was a good experience and we learnt a little bit more about one another, including our cultures, families and aspirations. We were also entertained by their dancing. One of the highlights was when some teacher trainees were pulled in to dance and learned a few moves together.

Our team had an excellent time getting to know the shelter residents, and we appreciate the time they and the volunteers spent with us. We have since gone on to interview over 20 different individuals across HOME. ~ Loh Ping Shun

*Loh Ping Shun and his team are trainee teachers at the National Institute of Education. They hope to educate themselves and their students about the challenges faced by migrant workers in Singapore.*

## Gallery



The Kartini group from HOME Family showed up for their Hari Raya Puasa celebrations in bright outfits and with homecooked festive fare.

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Our shelter residents were bursting with artistic flair, working with Dutch artist Jose Sintnicolaas to create a vibrant wall mural for the shelter.

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Together with aidha, AWARE Singapore and Singapore Committee for UN Women, we held two screenings of *Remittance* at the Lido Cinema. The movie is a realistic portrayal of the lives of low-wage migrant workers in Singapore. Bhing Navato represented HOME as a panelist at the second screening.

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