SINGAPORE

Celebrating mothers in the parenting journey



Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo with residents at the Mum's Day Out celebration at Geylang West Community Club on May 10, ahead of Mother's Day.

Organised by the Centre for Fathering and the Mums for Life and Dads for Life movements, the event aimed to celebrate, recognise and encourage mothers for their efforts in the parenting journey. It featured activities such as balloon sculpting and arts and crafts sessions.

On the sidelines of the event, Mrs Teo said she hopes to get the upgrading project of Kim Seng Community Centre in Havelock Road started soon. She said it was an opportunity for her and her team to meet the aspirations of newer generations of residents living in the vicinity. The community centre is in Jalan Besar GRC, where she is an MP.

ST PHOTO: TARYN NG

Charity RLAF seeks $300,000 in donations to help families in need

Elaine Lee

Local charity Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation (RLAF) is embarking on a fund-raising drive from May 9 to Aug 30, with the aim of raising about $300,000.

Up to 5,000 families from different races and religions are expected to benefit from the campaign, which also marks the nation's 60th birthday.

Under this annual initiative, known as Blessings to All, families in need will each receive a $60 supermarket voucher to assist them with essential needs.

The first community initiative by RLAF began in 2020 and was known as SGUnited Buka Puasa, a ground-up effort to provide meals for the breaking of fast to members of the Muslim community during the holy month of Ramadan.

Besides distributing the vouchers, more than 200 volunteers will conduct regular engagement activities, such as games or karaoke sessions with seniors. This ensures continuous support for families while building lasting community connections.

Those who wish to donate via PayNow can key in RLAF's UEN 200910530Z and indicate "BTA2025" in the remarks.

There is also a campaign on charity platform GivePlease at tinyurl.com/RLAFBTA2025

Additionally, bank transfers can be made to RLAF at OCBC current account number 629069154001, or donors can issue a cheque payable to Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation Ltd and state on its back their name and contact number, and indicate "BTA2025".

The cheque should be mailed to RLAF at Yusof Ishak Mosque, 10 Woodlands Drive 17, Level 4, Singapore 737740.

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Mums share past experience with postnatal depression to help peers

New podcast aims to guide those who lack understanding about the condition, which affects 1 in 10 mothers

Christine Tan

Soon after giving birth to her first child, Ms Bernadette Loh threw things around the flat and told her husband: "The next thing I'm going to throw is the baby."

Instead of happily cuddling her daughter, the homemaker found herself constantly frustrated as she struggled with postnatal depression.

Her condition improved with medication and therapy, and she is one of two mothers sharing their stories on a new podcast that was launched by mental health charity Clarity Singapore at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) on April 28.

The Birth Of A Mother podcast consists of four episodes that have been released progressively in May, in conjunction with Mother's Day on May 11. Three episodes are already available on Clarity Singapore's YouTube channel, and the final episode will be released at the end of the month.

The podcast features Ms Loh, 31, who is eight months pregnant with her second child; another mother who wants to be known only as Audrey; and Dr Gillian Lim, chief of central region at IMH and a mother of four.

Clarity Singapore is a Catholic mental health charity that specialises in maternal well-being.

Ms Janice Quek, a clinical psychologist there, started the podcast after she realised that mothers who sought therapy lacked understanding about postnatal depression, which affects about one in 10 mothers in Singapore.

Clarity Singapore saw such cases rise by about 15 per cent in 2024 compared with 2022.

Ms Quek said many affected women feared they would harm their babies accidentally, but were told by family members that these thoughts meant they were incapable mothers.

The psychologist added that the taboo surrounding mental ill health in mothers, who are expected to love their newborns unconditionally, makes it harder to share their feelings openly.



Ms Bernadette Loh (centre), a homemaker who struggled with postnatal depression after the birth of her first child, with Ms Janice Quek (left), a clinical psychologist at mental health charity Clarity Singapore, and Dr Gillian Lim, chief of central region at the Institute of Mental Health. Ms Loh, who is eight months pregnant with her second child, is one of two mothers sharing their stories on the Birth Of A Mother podcast launched by Clarity Singapore. ST PHOTO: HESTER TAN

Ms Quek said: "They often come to (therapy) and ask, 'I feel very alone. Is what I'm going through normal?'"

Dr Theresa Lee, a senior consultant psychiatrist on the board of Clarity Singapore, said many do not understand the tough transition to motherhood.

She said: "Pictures of a smiling mother staring into her baby's face portray motherhood as a blissful period. This may give women the impression that having a baby is a bed of roses. We need to adjust our expectations and acknowledge our struggles."

Ms Loh, who was depressed in her teens, was angry and confused during that first pregnancy in 2021 as she had not planned to be a mother.

After her daughter was born, the former customer service specialist had trouble adjusting to her new role and handling the move to a new home.

Soon, Ms Loh wondered if the family would be better off without her.

Things worsened when they hired a domestic helper.

Ms Loh said: "I felt like, Oh, (the helper) is more present with my kid, she's going to call her 'mum!'"

During her six months of postnatal depression, she had several breakdowns and even impulsively ran out of the home, prompting her husband to call the police.

She was admitted to IMH twice, and got better after taking her medication regularly and attending couples counselling with her husband.

Ms Loh decided to go on the podcast to let other mothers know they are not alone.

NEED TO ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Pictures of a smiling mother staring into her baby's face portray motherhood as a blissful period. This may give women the impression that having a baby is a bed of roses. We need to adjust our expectations and acknowledge our struggles.

DR THERESA LEE, a senior consultant psychiatrist on the board of mental health charity Clarity Singapore, on many people not understanding the tough transition to motherhood.

She said: "When people asked me about mental health when I first got diagnosed, I didn't want to share as it was my secret. But I realised a lot of things are very normal; it's just not talked about a lot."

Representatives of community partners such as hospitals and ground-up movement Mums for Life were present at the launch event.

Dr Lim, who leads the maternal mental health service at IMH, hopes the podcast can help mothers who are stressed but think they are not ill enough to seek assistance. "When you start your intervention early, it becomes something that's a lot more manageable," she said.

She added that although the Government has been active in sharing information about postnatal depression, Singapore lacks peer support for parents.

Hearing relatable stories such as Ms Loh's can encourage parents greatly, she said.

"If someone is willing to talk about all the deepest insecurities and unglamorous side of being a mum, the mummy who watches that will say, 'Hey, actually that's like me'," said Dr Lim.

Married couple Linus and Anne Marie Koh, who had their own brush with postnatal depression, offered to produce the podcast via their company Saint Max Media and absorbed 95 per cent of the costs.

Mrs Koh suffered from the condition after the birth of their fourth child. The couple, who have five children, discussed counselling and made childcare arrangements so that Mrs Koh could rest.

Mr Koh said they wanted to help young parents by supporting more dialogue on this topic. "It's important for more to know that it's not only okay to receive professional help, but sometimes it's crucial before things get regrettable."

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Helplines

MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Institute of Mental Health's Mental Health Helpline: 6389-2222 (24 hours)
- Samaritans of Singapore: 1767 (24 hours)/ 9151-1767 (24-hour CareText via WhatsApp)
- Singapore Association for Mental Health: 1800-283-7019
- Silver Ribbon Singapore: 6386-1928
- Tinkle Friend: 1800-274-4788
- Chat, Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health: 6493-6500/1
- Women's Helpline (Aware): 1800-777-5555 (weekdays, 10am to 6pm)

COUNSELLING

- TOUCHline (Counselling): 1800-377-2252
- TOUCH Care Line (for seniors, caregivers): 6804-6555
- Care Corner Counselling Centre: 6353-1180
- Counselling and Care Centre: 6536-6366
- We Care Community Services: 3165-8017
- Clarity Singapore 6757-7990

ONLINE RESOURCES

- mindline.sg
- eC2.sg
- tinklefriend.sg
- chat.mentalhealth.sg
- carey.carecorner.org.sg (for those aged 13 to 25)
- limitless.sg/talk (for those aged 12 to 25)