

## **Case 3 The Gopal Family**

### **Brief Background**

**I**n early 1994, an 11 year old girl who attended the Centre's children's programmes brought Jasmine to seek help. When a social worker attended to her, Jasmine confided that whenever her mother was drunk, she would get beaten. Jasmine was very emotional and urged the social worker to follow her home. The worker accompanied Jasmine home and transferred the case to the Centre's Family Services after making an initial assessment.

Around then, Sumi (Jasmine's mother) had heard about the Centre from a neighbour who was a client receiving help regarding a runaway son. When the neighbour learned about Sumi's parenting woes, she suggested that Sumi seek help at the Centre. So when Anna followed up with the case, Sumi was forthcoming with information. She complained that Jasmine was mixing with wrong company, came home late and generally beyond parental control.

Then, Sumi's intention was to send Jasmine into institutional care. However, she decided reluctantly to allow Jasmine to attend a learning programme at the Centre. Sumi was worried that Jasmine may be negatively influenced by the youths who frequented the Centre. Jasmine dropped out of the programme shortly and was reportedly mixing with a group of friends, most of whom were not in school.

Sumi started to call more often seeking advice on her daughter's problems. She also shared about her financial difficulties. She was dismissed from her production operator job because of the frequent leave she had to take to deal with her family problems. She reported that with help from Evan and her neighbours, she conducted searches for Jasmine who frequently did not return home. Also, at that time, her ex-husband was six months behind in child support payments.

Often, Sumi found Jasmine in the company of adults at the park late in the night. In August 1994, she filed a complaint at the Subordinate Courts when Jasmine did not return home for six days. Acting on a tip-off from a friend of Jasmine, Sumi arranged for the police to pick up Jasmine when she returned home one night for some clothes. Thus, began Jasmine's escapades at various institutions.

While awaiting the court hearing, Jasmine was placed in Toa Payoh Girls' Home for one month. After which, she was sent to Grave Haven for one year under the Child Protection Act on 30 October 1994.

At Grave Haven, she ran away twice. On the second occasion, it took the police three months to find her. After her arrest, she was sentenced to remain at the Toa Payoh Girl's Home for 9 months. Barring any misbehaviour, her date of release was scheduled for 29 June 1996.

In April 1996, Sumi informed Anna that her lover Rina had beat her up. She described Rina as a violent person who had abuse her for the past two years. This time, she called the police as Rina threatened to kill her with a knife. Thus, she decided to end the relationship and asked Rina to leave her house.

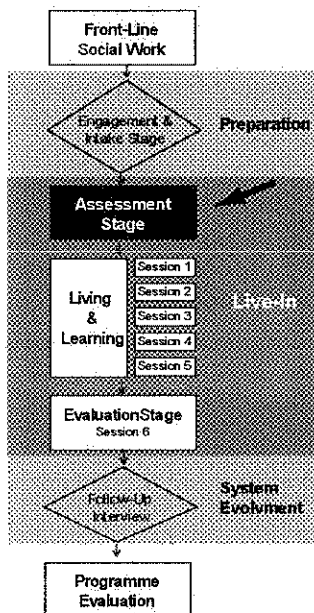
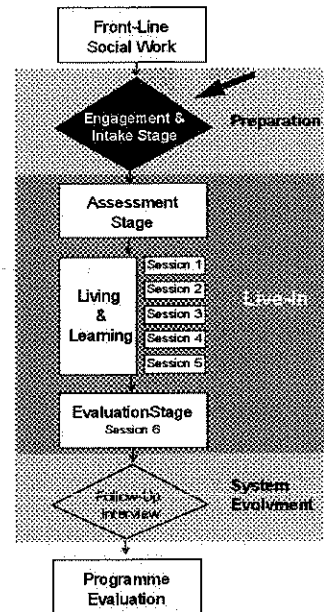
Although she was very sad to end the relationship, Sumi felt that it was timely to leave Rina since Jasmine would be returning home soon. She acknowledged that Rina had alleviated her loneliness during the past two years. However, she looked forward to Jasmine's company upon her return. In May 1996, Sumi informed Anna that she had reconciled with Rina but they were living apart. During Jasmine's detention, the Centre was a constant source of support for Sumi. She was placed on the Rent and Utilities Assistance Scheme in August 1994 and as trust developed, she kept Anna abreast of her lovers, her unresolved grief from a bitter divorce and the various emotional difficulties she experienced.

In January 1996, Sumi began sharing her anxieties about Jasmine's impending return. She was worried that Jasmine would go back to her old ways and problems would resurface. Also, their relationship was strained and Jasmine did not approve of her relationship with Rina. When Sumi expressed a desire for a more fulfilling family life the staff suggested the Family Learning Centre as a place to deal with the issues relating to Jasmine's re-entry into the family. Sumi accepted and Anna visited Jasmine twice to gain her views on the matter.

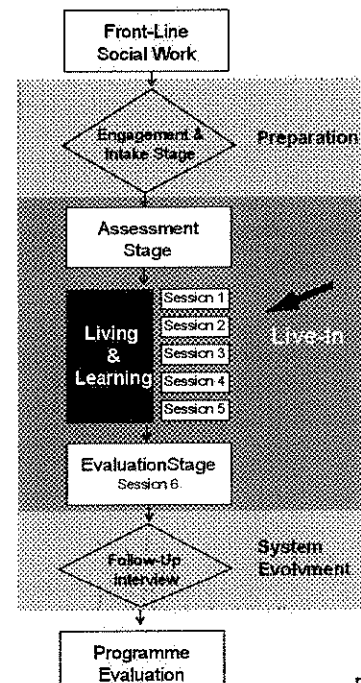
## Case 1 at a Glance

No of persons served	4	Language used in Therapy	English
Type of Housing	1 room rental flat	No. of live-in days	4 days 3 nights
Ethnicity	Indian/Chinese		

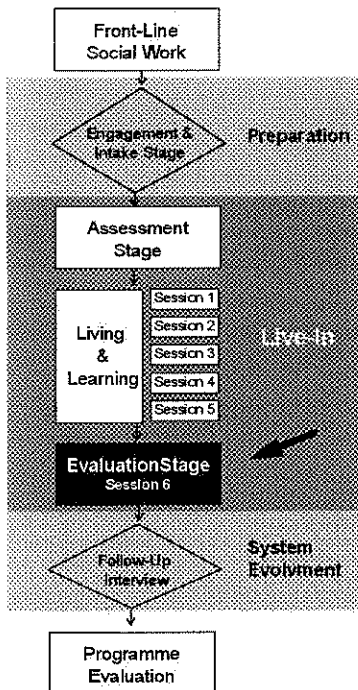
STAGES 1 & 2			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	200696	Pre-intake Assessment	1 hr
2.	010796	Intake Interview	1 hr
<b>Sub Total</b>			<b>2 hr</b>



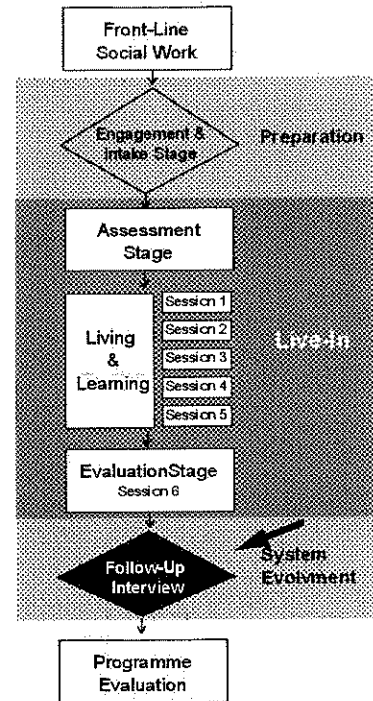
STAGE 3			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	020796	Pre-Therapy Assessment	3.5 hr
<b>Sub Total</b>			<b>3.5 hr</b>



STAGE 4			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	030796	Session 1	1.5 hr
2.	030796	Session 2	1.5 hr
3.	030796	Session 3	0.75 hr
4.	040796	Session 4	1 hr
5.	040796	Incidental Session 1	2 hr
6.	040796	Incidental Session 2	0.75hr
7.	030796	Family Outing to P Ubin	2 hr
8.	040796	Closing Activity	1 hr
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>Sessions</b>	<b>7.5 hr</b>
		<b>Others</b>	<b>3 hr</b>



STAGE 5			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	040796	Evaluation Session	2 hr
<b>Sub Total</b>			<b>2 hr</b>



STAGE 6			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	080896	Follow-up Interview	1 hr
2.	080896	Staff Discussion	1 hr
<b>Sub Total</b>			<b>1.5 hr</b>

**Programme at a Glance**  
**Date: Tuesday, 2 July - 4 July**  
**Venue: NTUC Changi Holiday Flat**

Time	Day	2 July 96	3 July 96	4 July 96	5 July 96
Morning			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Session 1 10:30 - 12:00 pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Session 4 11:30 - 12:30 pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check-out</li> </ul>
Afternoon		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family picked up from flat</li> <li>Welcome</li> <li>Check-in</li> <li>Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Session 2 5:00 - 6:30 pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BBQ Preparation</li> <li>Beach</li> <li>Session 5 5:30 - 7:30 pm</li> </ul>	
Evening			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pulau Ubin</li> <li>Session 3 9:40 - 10:25 pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BBQ</li> </ul>	

## The Key Players

### The Family

The Gopal family comprises a divorced mother and 3 children. They lived in a 1 room rental flat.

#### Sumi

Sumi was born and brought up in Kuala Lumpur. During her teenage years, she was very rebellious and ran away from home. Her mother sent her to a Girls' Home run by Catholic nuns and she stayed there for six months. At 19 years old, Sumi came to Singapore to work. Sumi said that an unplanned pregnancy forced her into a marriage for which she was not prepared. The marriage ended after 15 years, when she could no longer tolerate her husband's womanising. After the divorce Sumi had short relationships with two men. She met Rina four years ago, and a lesbian relationship began 2 years after. A capable and resourceful woman, Sumi knows how to get to the right channels to get things done. She does not trust people easily and is very careful about releasing information.

#### Evan

Evan is a quiet and shy person. Sumi describes him as a very obedient boy, who does not give her problems. He was born with defects on his right hand and is very conscious about his disability. However, Evan is adept at basketball and musical instruments and has worked part-time as a disc-jockey. At present he is with the church band. Sumi is very happy about his involvement with the church, and wants him to involve his sister too. Although not actively involved in family matters, Evan is aware and concerned about what is happening at home. He feels very awkward whenever Rina visits and would leave the house to play basketball.

#### Jasmine

Jasmine is a gentle, soft spoken and likeable girl. She is bright, attractive, speaks very well and wins people over easily. She is very close to her brothers Evan and Ethan but her relationship with Sumi was very bad even prior to her detention.

Jasmine claims that she has benefited a lot from counselling during her detention. She is not very keen on the idea of live-in therapy and has tried to convince her mother to let go of the idea. She told her mother that they should both forget the past and start afresh.

#### Ethan

Ethan is very small for his age. He was born premature, and has always been a weak child. He suffers from severe asthma, and has constant attacks which resulted in many hospitalisations. Ethan is very close to Evan and Jasmine. Sumi describes him as not a very bright child.

## The Staff

#### The Therapy Team

- Anna Tee
- Gerard Ee

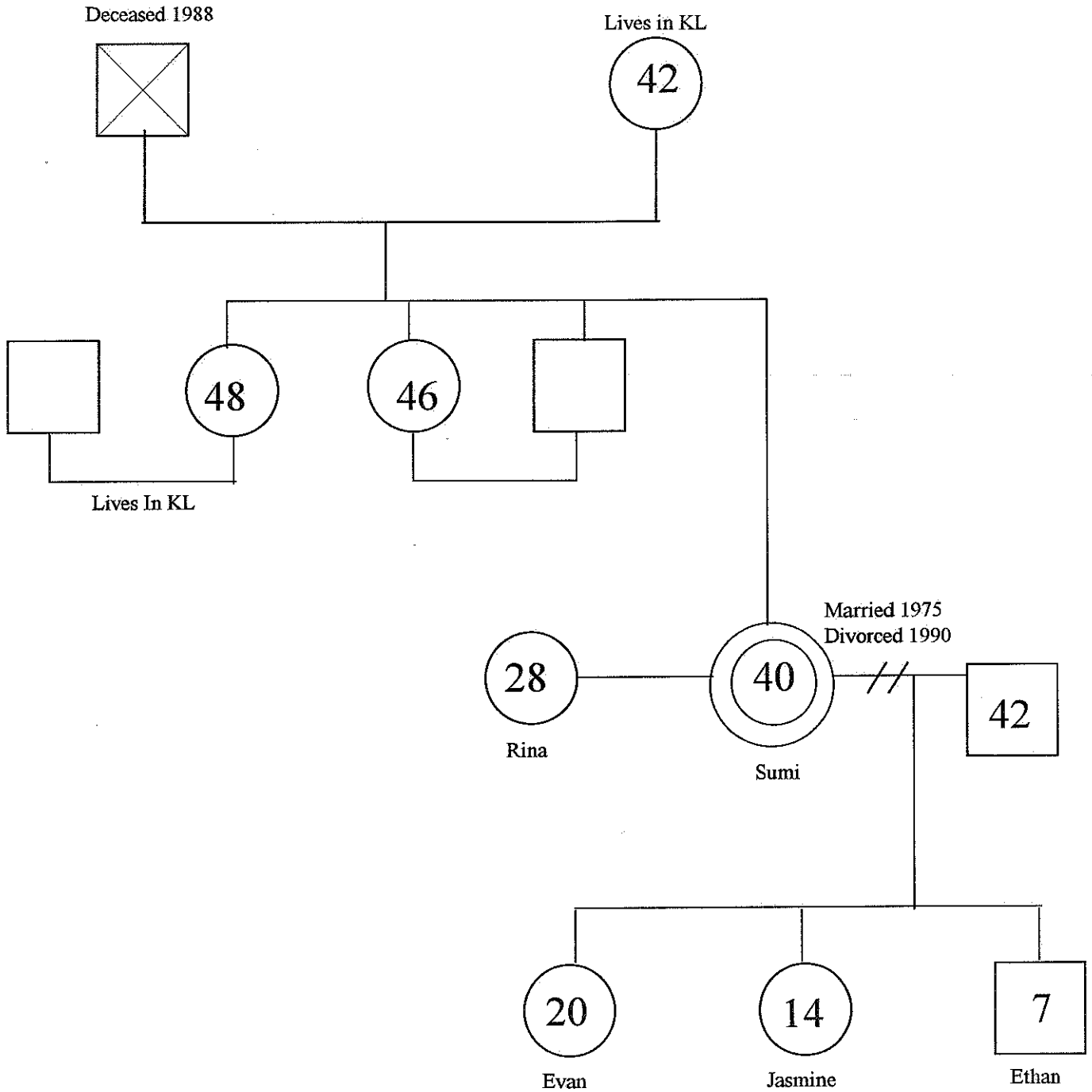
#### The Discussion Team

- Ng Bee Leng

#### The Facilitators

- Juliana Toh
- Tan Boon Huat

Genogram



## **Pre-Intake Assessment**

**20 June 96 12.45 pm - 1.45 pm**

### **Present**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Boon Huat
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca.

### **The symptom(s)/presenting problem(s)**

- Sumi has a high level of anxiety regarding Jasmine's impending return after 2 years away in an institution for troubled girls. She is worried about the adjustments the family has to make and the problems that may arise.
- Sumi's anxiety is also due to her troubled relationship with Jasmine. Prior to Jasmine's institutionalisation, there was much mistrust and hurt between mother and daughter.
- Many of Jasmine's peers have recently been released from institutional care and they live nearby. Sumi is worried that Jasmine will go back to her peers, and create problems again.
- There are unclear roles and boundaries within the family. Sumi finds it difficult to assume the parenting role and Jasmine is often entrusted with too much adult information and responsibilities. Also, Sumi expects Evan to take on the role of the co-parent but he is disengaged from the family and does not give apparent support to Sumi.

### **The client's explanation for the problem**

- The relationship between mother and daughter had always been fraught with tension and characterised by many power struggles. This was because Sumi had treated Jasmine like a friend and confidant and Jasmine valued her freedom. Thus, when Sumi tried to exert some parental control, she had much difficulty because Jasmine did not acknowledge that authority.
- Sumi recognised that her drinking and subsequent abusive behaviour towards her children also strained the mother-children relationship.
- Jasmine mixed with the 'wrong crowd' and they were a bad influence. She is also rebellious and refuses to listen to her mother.

### **The client's attempted solutions**

- Sumi introduced Jasmine to some church members, hoping that their influence and friendship can change and help her when she returns home.

Sumi visited Jasmine at the Home and made efforts to talk to her and improve their relationship. She even held a surprise barbecue for Jasmine when she was on home leave recently.

## **The client's observation of consequences**

- Jasmine may run away again and get into trouble with the police.
- Sumi may not be able to maintain her new-found permanent job as a security officer if family problems and tensions depress and distract her. The family would then continue to suffer economically.

## **The social worker's explanation for the problem(s) :**

- ***Relationship perspective***

☞ The relationship between mother and daughter has always been very tensed. There is little trust. Jasmine could still be very sore and fearful from the previous conflicts and her only defence could be to continually challenge and hurt her mother.

☞ Jasmine's delinquency had been seen as the cause of the bad relationship in the past. Only recently, had Sumi assumed ownership of the problem, admitting that her drinking and abuse had contributed to the tension and conflict between them.

☞ Sumi expects Evan to become a co-parent but he is not ready because he has his own interests, and is enjoying his teenage life to the fullest.

☞ Sumi's relationships with men after her divorce and her current lesbian relationship are a source of tension between her and her children. Jasmine was very close to her father and resented the other men that Sumi had relationships with.

☞ Sumi treats Jasmine like a friend and confides in her about her personal problems and her relationships with men. There is conflict when she tries to assume the parental role and controls Jasmine's movements and behaviour. The enmeshment and open boundaries have contributed to power struggles between mother and daughter.

- ***Family background perspective***

☞ The divorce between Sumi and her ex-husband was a very bitter one. Sumi had difficulty coping with it and took to drink to deal with her loneliness and difficulties. Her reliance on alcohol led to abuse of her children. Thus they became very fearful and resentful of her.

☞ Jasmine reminds Sumi very much of her ex-husband. Sumi admits that she does transfer a lot of her anger unto the child as a result.

- ***Cultural background perspective***

☞ Sumi's ex-husband is Chinese and the children are very proud of their surname 'Lee' and Sumi resents this.

☞ Jasmine dislikes the Tamil music that her mother listens to and this is one area where there is much tension because Jasmine does not allow her mother to listen to the music when she is around.

Sumi also challenges her mother's sexual orientation. She does not approve of her mother's lesbian relationship and challenges her by also having a lesbian relationship at the Home. Sumi does not approve of her daughter having a lesbian relationship.

- **Client's background perspective**

Sumi was very rebellious as a teenager and ran away from home. She was sent to a convent and she felt rehabilitated after that. As a result, she expects that Jasmine would also be rehabilitated after being in the Home.

There is very weak extended support for this family. As a result, they are very isolated when they have problems and need support.

- **Socio-economic perspective**

Sumi's ex-husband is irregular in his maintenance payments. Therefore, Sumi experiences much stress and frustration because she has to go to court very often to recover the defaulted payments.

After 10 years working as an operator, Sumi wanted a change in occupation. She had many problems trying to find a permanent and suitable night-shift job.

Sumi works the night-shift and needs quiet rest and closed windows during the day. Her work and resulting rest schedule put a strain on family relationship as Jasmine and her other children were uncomfortable in a dark and quiet house during the day.

### **The function of the problem/symptom in the family**

- The enmeshed relationship between Sumi and Jasmine meets Sumi's needs. She is very stressed and lonely and in treating Jasmine as her confidant, she receives comfort. This also allows Jasmine to feel needed and this elevates Jasmine's position in the family to that of an equal or a partner.
- The tension, conflict and power struggles provide opportunities for Jasmine to gain some form of control over her mother.

### **What maintains the problem/symptom**

- Sumi is extremely lonely and she needs an adult-like Jasmine to fill the emptiness in her life.
- The continual challenges that Jasmine exact upon her mother maintains the tension and conflict and keeps the power struggle alive in their relationship. Both of them refuse to give in to the other and therefore the tension is maintained.

### **The social worker's observations of consequences of the problem**

- Jasmine leaves home again and/or gets into trouble with the law.
  - Sumi may have to end her relationship with Rina.
  - Sumi's employment may be disrupted should family problems distract and disturb her.
  - Evan may get fed-up and become even more disengaged from the family.
- Sumi's expectation that the church would help to change Jasmine may mean that Sumi may not be as involved in dealing with the problems.

## **Other observations of the social worker**

- Sumi is currently receptive and open to therapy because she wants a fresh start where her relationship with Jasmine is concerned. She is also very concerned about how Jasmine's return would affect her relationship with Rina.
- Sumi has been receiving strong spiritual support from her church members. She feels guilty that she has not done enough to be a good and responsible mother. She is also guilty about her relationship with Rina as her church does not approve of lesbianism. As a result, Sumi feels that coming for therapy would be a positive step toward being a good mother.

**Intake Interview**  
Monday, 1 July 1996, 3.30 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.  
**A Better Tomorrow - Hopefully But Not Likely**

## Synopsis

### Family

- Sumi
- Jasmine

### Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

## Pre-Session Information

### Goals

- To define the goals of the live-in.
- To establish rapport with the family especially Jasmine.

### Post-Session Findings

- The goal of the live-in was defined as to strengthen family relationships especially between Sumi and Jasmine.
- Jasmine appeared to be sufficiently comfortable with the therapists and willing to address issues during therapy.

## Process Recording

*P*izza left over from a birthday celebration held a little while earlier was on the table and the family was invited to help themselves. Jasmine politely declined while Sumi took a piece. While munching on pizza, Gerard began 'So you have explained to her already?' When Sumi nodded, he turned to Jasmine 'What did she tell you?'. The question appeared to hit Jasmine a tad too early so Gerard immediately asked Sumi if it was all right to go on a first name basis. Although Gerard and Sumi had exchanged the proverbial greeting before, this was the first time they were having a conversation.

G: 'What does she call you?'(referring to Jasmine)

S: 'She can't call me by name'

G: 'So her name for you is mum'

Spontaneously, Anna joined in and asked if it was mummy or mum. Jasmine joked that it depended on whether there was enough time to use the longer version. So far, the mood in the room was light and the conversation was interspersed with laughter. Gerard then repeated the question to Jasmine.

**J:** *'About therapy isn't?'*

**G:** *'Sounds so frightening therapy, does it?'*

**J:** *'No, not really but it is something new.'*

Then, the staff explained and clarified what the FLC was about. Jasmine listened intently as the staff stated the expectations of the programme as well as the practical aspects such as accommodation and so forth. At one point, when the staff said that it was also important for the family to be by themselves during the live-in, Jasmine asked Sumi if Evan would be participating in the live-in as well. Sumi replied that he may drop by if it is convenient for him to get back to camp. Immediately, Jasmine was asked if she wanted Evan to be present. 'Not really but I heard that family therapy required everyone to be around' Jasmine replied. Gerard joked that sometimes therapists used cardboard images to represent absent family members and then he complimented Jasmine for being so well informed.

Sumi then expressed that since Evan had not been deeply involved in family matters, he would feel out of place. However, Bee Leng asked if Evan had an opinion despite his non-involvement. She added that perhaps it would be important to hear him out. Sumi replied that Evan would join them on the last day because he need not work the following day and the matter was left at that.

Gerard moved on and enquired about the family's intention for agreeing to the live-in. He informed he had learned that Sumi wanted to strengthen relationships and urged them to elaborate. Hesitantly, Jasmine expressed that the relationship was weak in the past but she would not say so now. Gerard probed and asked Sumi if she knew what Jasmine was talking about.

**S:** *'There were certain issues. She doesn't like my drinking problem. You see drink is something that you just cannot quit. I used to go out a lot. She was always out.'*

As Sumi spoke freely, Jasmine started crying quietly reaching for the tissue box to contain herself.

**S:** *'She doesn't want to be shared with someone else. I had a life of my own.'*

**G:** *'Jasmine had a life of her own too?'*

**S:** *'Yes. Everybody'*

**G:** *'So what was it like for 4 different people with 4 different lives staying under one roof as one family?'*

**J:** *'Terrible'*

**G:** *'Terrible. Do you agree Sumi?'*

When Sumi nodded, Gerard asked her for Evan's views and she said he would agree. Jasmine then complained that Evan often left the house as though he did not care. Jasmine continued speaking and it sounded that Evan left the house as a way of dealing with the unpleasant situation at home. After hearing herself, Jasmine acknowledged that Evan 'must be really hurt deep down.' Following which, Gerard enquired if Ethan knew what was going on. Very quickly Sumi shook her head and said no but Jasmine thought he did at times.

**G:** *'So if I said that everyone agrees there is a lot of anger and bitterness in this family, would I be right?'*

As both Sumi and Jasmine nodded, Gerard continued

**G:** *'As everyone agrees that they are angry and hurt, they would want to do something about it. This I am not sure. Sumi, you organised everything so I guess you want to do something about it.'*

**S:** *'Whether therapy will help or not I don't know. But firstly, it is getting out of the house, a different atmosphere where we don't think of work and maybe for 3 days we can get to know each other better. If there is anything, just talk and share, maybe we will feel better.'*

**G:** *'So you are motivated for those reasons. You want to get away from work and try to get to know each other better.'*

Sumi voiced some reservations about whether therapy would have a lasting effect after the live-in. Gerard briefly acknowledged that the achievements of the live-in may not last and proceeded. He asked the family to point out on a scale of 1 to 10 their willingness to participate in the live-in. Sumi gave a 10 and Jasmine a 4.

**G:** *'So while everyone agrees that it was terrible, not everyone agrees that coming for the programme will help but at least we start somewhere. We all can agree that those years before were terrible.'*

The family laughed along at Gerard's observation and summary. At this point, the staff commented that Jasmine was very honest about her feelings regarding therapy. It was obvious but understandable that she had many reservations. After all she had been away a long time and had only been out of institutional care for about 2 days. So it is no wonder that therapy appears to be an overwhelming proposal.

Over the next few minutes, the family sorted out the amount of subsidy and other practical issues. After agreeing on \$160 and the transport arrangements, Sumi enquired if it was all right to have friends over at the live-in premises. The staff reassured her that after the therapy sessions, the family was free to do as they wish.

As Sumi was leaving the staff asked if she would allow Jasmine to stay back a little longer just to chat. The therapists explained that they would like to speak a little more with Jasmine if she was comfortable. Jasmine indicated that she wanted to stay and Sumi left after asking what time she would be home.

Bee Leng left the room with Sumi citing that there were too many staff in the room. Anna & Gerard started chatting with Jasmine casually. They learned that Sumi had Jasmine cut her hair immediately upon her release on Saturday. Jasmine explained that it was something about having a 'new look'. Gerard then complimented Jasmine on being brave enough to stay back to speak although it was obvious Sumi preferred her to go home.

Jasmine revealed that she was starting to feel differently about therapy after the last half an hour. Before the session started, her motivation was rated 1 and not 4. Jasmine explained that she was not sure if therapy was worth the effort. In reply, Gerard told her that it was not for any of the therapists to decide if the family should enter therapy because therapy was strictly a family decision. However, from what he had heard he would like to help the family 'get a little happier and if that's not possible, at least become less miserable' if he was given the chance. Jasmine chuckled and Gerard asked if there was anything she wanted to say but could not because Sumi was around. Jasmine put her elbows on her knees, closed her eyes and brought her clasped hands to her face. Casually, Gerard mentioned that it was the first time he had actually spoken to Sumi at such length or sat so close to her. 'Really, ah?' was Jasmine's spontaneous reaction and Gerard elaborated that it was because Anna was the family's caseworker.

After a moment of silence, Jasmine blurted out in tears.

**J: *'She said I didn't want her to be involved with other guys but then she has been involved with so many people and I don't want to see her crying and crying again.'***

Jasmine then described her mother's troubled relationships as a cycle that kept repeating itself and it hurt her to observe this. When Gerard enquired if she had ever told Sumi about her thoughts, Jasmine said that it was 'no point' because her mother considered her 'too small to understand anything.'

**G:** *'How old are you now?'*

**J:** *'Fourteen.'*

**G:** *'Not so small, not so big.'*

**J:** *'In her eyes I am still a little girl. But can't blame her for that.'*

**G:** *'But you understand right?'*

**J:** *'I understand.'*

**G:** *'So it is her relationships with men that you wanted me to know. You thought it might be important to let us know. Could it be one of the issues?'*

**J:** *'Uh-um. She also needs someone by her side. It is not that I am being selfish or what. She also wants someone to be by her side and all that stuff but her friends come one after another and they don't stay. In the end she's always losing out and always suffering. So what's the point in actually going on like that?'*

**G:** *'You sound very close to your mother.'*

**J:** *'Don't know, sometimes I feel like she's not my mum.'*

**G:** *'When are those times?'*

**J:** *'When she makes me embarrassed in front of her friends, when she brings people back to the house and starts drinking.'*

It was obvious that the memories were not pleasant and Jasmine took the opportunity to state her reservations about the past being raised in therapy. The next section of the session was spent allaying and understanding Jasmine's fear about the past. The therapists reassured Jasmine that the past would only be brought up if it would be helpful to do so. They also expressed that they could not guarantee such occasions would not hurt. Jasmine impressed by showing much interest to learn. She clarified whenever she needed to and seemed to comprehend the complexities presented by therapy, the past and the situation on the whole.

Finally, she accepted Gerard's reassurance that 'we are not here to fix people but to provide a chance to sort out certain things.' She also came to terms with the possibility of the past being raised in therapy and agreed with Gerard when he said 'If your mum is always thinking about the past, then the past is in the present. And if the past bugs you, then presently you will be troubled.'

**G:** *'Go back and think about what are the most important things you want us to help you change. We only have 3 days to change 14 years of family problems - a big miracle.'*

**J:** *'I have already thought about it.'*

Jasmine went on to state her mother's drinking problem and her lesbian relationship with Auntie Rina as two issues she wanted to address. After making it clear that things may not change even if the

issues are addressed, Gerard summed up 'All we can promise is respect, we are not going intentionally to make anyone feel stupid, wrong or guilty.'

The therapists also established that Sumi generally maintained a closet lesbian relationship but was very open about it within the family. Jasmine stated that she did not disapprove of her mother's sexual preference but was bothered by the overt display of sexual behaviour in her presence. When asked if she would be willing to bring up these issues during therapy, Jasmine agreed.

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**The Initial Live-in Assessment**  
**Monday, 4 September 1995, 12.30 pm - 4.00 pm.**  
**Kids-In-Charge**

**Synopsis**

**Family**

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan

**Staff**

- Anna
- Gerard

**Pre-session Information**

**Hypotheses**

Having just come together again as a family, they would be making the effort to be pleasant with each other. Hence, contentious issues may be avoided.

**Goal**

- i. To assess family functioning and to seek possible entry points for therapy.

**Summary of the Session**

The session provided a glimpse of the communication pattern between Sumi and Jasmine as well as the manner in which the Gopal household was organised.

**Post-Session Findings**

- i. Sumi and Jasmine appear to have difficulty communicating without getting into an argument. The brief argument between them may be reflective of their communication pattern prior to Jasmine's institutionalisation.
- ii. Jasmine and Ethan appear fairly independent and responsible and possess adequate household skills for their age.
- iii. Sumi's role in the family may be more of a provider rather than a caregiver. This reduces the opportunities for her children to experience their mother as a nurturing person.

**Process Recording**

*S*umi was a little disappointed as Anna & Gerard arrived at their flat in a saloon car to pick them up. The previous day, Gerard had asked her if she minded being fetched in a pick-up truck. Thus, she was looking forward to 'cruising with the wind blowing in the hair.' Gerard explained that the truck was used for a work project that the Centre's youths were involved in and he had to borrow the car from a volunteer.

With mock reluctance, Sumi got into the car with her children and immediately complimented the staff on the car. Sumi was in a holiday mood, cheerful and chatty. Her disposition was everything Jasmine was not. Jasmine appeared tired and was dragging herself to greet the staff. She was also struggling to load the family's stuff into the car. Ethan smiled sheepishly and was probably looking forward to a few days away from school.

After the car was on its way and the exchange of pleasantries had quietened down, Anna tried making conversation with Jasmine. Jasmine answered Anna's questions obligingly and politely but did not offer more. Soon Sumi and Jasmine started arguing about Jasmine's schooling. Sumi wanted Jasmine to return to school as soon as possible but Jasmine protested. Jasmine felt that she would not be able to catch up with the lessons or be ready for the examinations that were round the corner. The argument ended abruptly and Jasmine remained silent throughout the rest of the journey.

At the destination, the family was invited for a welcome drink. Jasmine accompanied Gerard to get the keys while Sumi and Ethan remained at the coffee shop. Upon entering the flat, the family moved around comfortably. After stocking up the refrigerator, Ethan checked out the toiletries and the air-conditioners as Jasmine handled the inventory list. The children were so organised that Sumi had little to do.

After half an hour, the flat was organised and the staff indicated their intentions to leave. They told the family that it may be timely for them to spend time together as Jasmine had only been home for about 3 days. As they were leaving, Jasmine enquired if they would return in the evening. She wanted to know if staff would be with the family outside therapy time. She explained that meeting only during therapy would be 'so official.' Not quite comprehending Jasmine's queries, the staff simply said they would see the family again later in the evening.

At 9.45 p.m. Sumi paged for Gerard. Jasmine answered the call and informed that Sumi was at the hawker centre getting some food. She wanted to know when the staff would get there. The staff left

the Centre for Changi soon after. On their way there, they received another page but they did not reply.

The staff discovered that Rina was visiting when they arrived. When asked how things were, Sumi complained about the price of household sundries and such at Changi. The staff chatted a little while and decided to leave because it was already 11.15 p.m. and rather late. As they were leaving, Sumi, Rina and Ethan prepared themselves to go for a walk. They tried persuading Jasmine to follow but she preferred to stay in alone. Rina persuaded her further by cracking a few jokes but Jasmine was apparently not amused. What was apparent though was that Jasmine was very pleased to see the staff.

The staff finally left after negotiating with Sumi the starting time for the therapy session the next day. The session was pushed back from 10.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. as Sumi felt that anytime earlier than that would be too early.

## About Last Night

Wednesday, 3 July 1996, 10.30 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.

### Synopsis

#### Family

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan

#### Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Boon Huat
- Gerard

### Pre-session Information

#### Hypotheses

Sumi had subverted the family and the therapeutic team by bringing Rina to stay overnight at the flat. The earlier agreement was that Rina is not part of the family system until the family had worked through issues related to Rina's place in the family. She is out of the family sessions and will be on 'stand-by' depending on the need to involve her. Thus, there is a need to re-establish the meaning of the live-in for Sumi and Jasmine and prioritise the issues to work on.

#### Goals

- To re-establish the meaning of the live-in for Sumi and Jasmine.
- To identify and prioritise issues the family would like to address.

### Summary of the Session

The session was organised by the events that occurred the night before. Jasmine and Ethan were affected by a disagreement between Sumi and Rina and this became the pressing issue to work on. The exchange between Sumi and Jasmine were at times highly charged and the therapists spent much effort neutralising the blaming overtones so as to encourage members to keep the issues in focus.

### Post Session Findings

- Rina impacts the family system in more ways than one:
  - Sumi's decision to disallow her from staying over may fail if she disagrees;
  - her friendliness towards Jasmine may aggravate the hostility between mother and daughter;
  - her disagreements with Sumi affect the well-being of the children.

Thus, there is a need to involve Rina in family decision making without over emphasising her presence in a manner that will undermine the relationship between Sumi and her children.

- Sumi's alcohol consumption was an issue that kept surfacing. However, a mandate from her on this issue was not forthcoming. It appeared that Sumi was only comfortable addressing issues concerning Jasmine and was reluctant to proceed when her contribution to problematic situations was touched on.
- The indiscreet sharing of information between mother and daughter diffuse the hierarchical boundaries between mother and daughter.

## Process Recording

**S**umi and Rina were at the corridor discussing matters in hush tones as the staff arrived. They paused momentarily, greeted the staff and continued their discussion. In the flat, Jasmine's teary eyes looked dejectedly at the staff as they wished her good morning. 'You better ask her what happened' was Jasmine's immediate response when the staff expressed their concern. However, Jasmine's composure did not hold. In tears, she recounted how she was kept awake all night as she was roped into a disagreement between Rina and Sumi.

Sumi and Rina had confronted Jasmine about something she confided in a counsellor at the Toa Payoh Girls' Home. Sumi was tipsy and created a scene while Rina kept going into Jasmine's room. Jasmine slept on the floor near the door monitoring her mother's movements after locking Ethan and herself in.

Sumi was chirpy as she joined the rest who were already seated. It was as if she did not have a care in the world and was looking forward to a fruitful session. 'So how were all of you last night' Gerard began. 'Oh we tried going for a walk, there were....' Gerard stopped her 'Actually, what I meant was did something happen that troubled you?' As the question hit Sumi, she tensed up, looked at the staff quizzically and asked 'Trouble?'

Within moments, Jasmine blurted out 'Why do you think I didn't go for the walk last night? To show her(Rina) directly I didn't like her!' Sumi looked directly at Gerard and asked 'Don't you think I have a right to be with my friends?' As Gerard reassured her that he had nothing against her friendships, Jasmine cried out again 'You always drag me in every time you quarrel!'

Jasmine reached for the tissues and turned away with her back facing her mother. 'I want to be what I am and I won't change certain things' Sumi exerted her authority. A shouting match had begun and Gerard tried to help them discover a mutuality in their differences. He praised Sumi for scaling her motivation for the live-in as 10 and explained that Jasmine's score of 4 did not mean she was any less motivated. He elaborated that Jasmine had informed him that her low score was because she was afraid of the hurt therapy may bring about. With regard to improving the family relationships, she was just as motivated as her mother. In a sense they were so close to each other, they end up 'stepping on each other's toes.'

Sumi toned down as Gerard spoke and did not protest when Gerard summed up by saying 'Let's agree that last night was terrible and both of you are very close to each other.' Although Sumi did not

disagree, she felt a strong need to protect her relationship with Rina. After reiterating her right as a mother and an adult to befriend whomever she wants, Sumi added 'Jasmine has been away 3 years

and during this time we took care of each other. Now that Jasmine is back, we just can't break up like that. I have already laid my rules and conditions with her(Rina).' All this while, Gerard had been continually reassuring Sumi that he had nothing against her lesbian relationship and it was not for him to ask her to end it but Sumi still felt threatened.

Gerard then stated his intentions to help the family agree on what's mutually acceptable for everyone to live together. So he asked the family to list the things they did not like or bothered them. Jasmine related how her mother would not appreciate her honest sharing or views on family and personal matters. Often too Sumi would use the information shared 'as a weapon against' Jasmine.

Again, the irony of the situation was highlighted. Gerard stated that both mother and daughter share information like friends but this seems to draw them apart. Sumi felt that Jasmine intrudes into her life and Jasmine was often burdened by her mother's troubles.

**S:** *'The whole problem is I am sharing a lot of things and certain things she should not know, I am sharing with her. From now on what she should know she will but not .....but as a daughter I don't think....'*

Sumi stated her stand strongly but ended ambiguously giving the impression that the clear boundaries would be difficult to adhere.

**J:** *'I think it is better that way.'*

**G:** *'What happened to you?'*

**J:** *'I became very burdened and I kept thinking and thinking; it affected me a lot - those troubles.'*

A clearer picture of the problematic aspects of the mother-daughter relationship emerged as Jasmine related how mother in a tipsy state had sought her opinion about reuniting with her father. Jasmine did not find the discussion helpful as she was certain her parents would never get back together. Trying to utilise the closeness between Sumi and Jasmine positively, Gerard commented that Sumi was a very open mother. Sumi was pleased with the comment and pinning his hopes on Sumi's

## **You Oughta Know!**

**Wednesday, 3 July 1996, 5.00 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.**

### **Synopsis**

#### **Family**

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan

#### **Staff**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

### **Pre-Session Information**

#### **Hypotheses**

The parent-child boundaries were redefined to enable Sumi to sort out her relationship with Rina separate from Jasmine. Thus, the family would focus on issues within the parent-child sub-system. However, as observed during the assessment stage, issues may be diffused by the intense emotional reactions within the parent-child sub-system.

#### **Goals**

- To identify problematic issues and clarify expectations within the parent-child sub-system.
- To facilitate the problem solving process between Sumi and Jasmine.

### **Summary of the Session**

Problem solving was the focus of the session. However, the differing readiness to raise issues dragged the process. Many issues were touched upon and it took a while before the therapists could help the family reach certain agreements on the issue of trust between Sumi and Jasmine.

### **Post-Session Findings**

- The family had difficulty working through issues in detail preferring to move on by simply putting issues aside before the situation becomes emotionally explosive. However, this coping style often leaves many expectations unclear and deprives parent and child of constructive discussion that strengthens family relationships.
- It appears that Jasmine had agreed to the conditions set so as to placate her mother and because her options are limited. In addition to Sumi's reported abusive behaviour, the situation appears terribly stressful for Jasmine.

## Process Recording

*Jasmine* placed a box of tissues on the coffee table as everyone took their places. She wore a look of anticipation as she waited for the small talk between the staff and her mother to end. Sumi spoke politely but appeared guarded. She placed herself on the settee but her body looked stiff as if she was ready to pounce at an impending intrusion.

Gerard asked if there was a particular issue they wanted to address and Jasmine jumped at the chance. She thought that it would be helpful if her mother could clarify the 'dos and don'ts' expected of her at home, her friends and her life in general. Sumi did not seem interested to pursue the suggestion. In fact, she was rather reluctant. She stated that Jasmine after being in an institution 'should know what is expected of her.'

Sumi's reluctance was puzzling. 'Wasn't setting the house rules in her interest?' the staff wondered to themselves. Soon the puzzle unfolded. 'If we bring up the issues (past problematic situations), there will be no end to it.' Sumi concluded. Problem solving was threatening as dirty linen had to be washed and perhaps Sumi realised that she will lose control of the situation. Mother and daughter had a battle strategy and the staff had to move cautiously to remain therapeutically effective.

'My only reason for talking about the past is to try to get an idea how it could be different' Gerard offered. However, Sumi preferred to maintain her position. In a clear authoritative voice, she insisted that all Jasmine had to do was to 'put back the trust (in Sumi), the trust she lost takes some time.' Jasmine turned away, her back facing her mother and her head down as her mother spoke. She tried disguising her awkward posture by running her fingers through her hair.

Sumi was ready when she was asked how could Jasmine regain her trust. Jasmine's movements will only be restricted to Church activities and she will have to meet all her friends. Jasmine reached for the tissues and continued crying quietly. 'Even if I don't like it, I have to accept it.' Jasmine resigned herself to the situation. 'How long can you accept this?' Gerard pursued. There was not to be an answer as Sumi continued elaborating her ordeals whenever Jasmine did not return home. She recounted the numerous searches she conducted, the advertisement in the newspapers and the high stress level that prevented her from concentrating on her job.

'Mummy do you know what happened that I had to leave home?' Jasmine burst out suddenly. 'I don't know why other people are so important. Why is it friends are priority?' Sumi responded. 'Do you know why? There is no family love!' Jasmine exploded angrily. The issues that were deflected at the beginning of the session were resurfacing. Jasmine recounted how she would find her mother drunk

and abusive whenever she returned home. Plates would be thrown in anger and she was also disappointed that her mother often lied about going to work.

Sumi stared blankly into space as her daughter splurged information she would rather put behind. The atmosphere was tensed and Sumi retaliated by expressing how overloaded she was with the immense responsibilities she had since the divorce. Jasmine then spoke about the neighbours' reaction to her mother's lesbian relationship which invited Sumi to respond 'I don't live my life for others!' Quickly, Gerard interpreted Jasmine's outburst as her discomfort with the situation rather than an attempt to interfere in her mother's life. He further suggested that Jasmine sensed Sumi got drunk to cope with problems and was concerned. Also, he reminded the family to focus only on the mother-daughter relationship as in the previous session, it was agreed that Jasmine should not be interfering in Sumi's personal life.

Sumi got up, lighted a cigarette and walked to the kitchen. Gerard instructed Jasmine to wait for her mother to return before proceeding. 2 minutes later, the family regained composure and Sumi reiterated that Jasmine needed to be at church. Gerard then enquired about the activities of the church and Sumi provided the information freely. Soon she appeared more relaxed and even laughed when Gerard observed that she may be in the wrong church since most of the activities were geared for teenagers. Gerard then complimented Sumi for introducing her children to positive influences within the church.

Jasmine's views on church were sought. She expressed that she did not mind going to church if that would help her gain her mother's trust. Then Gerard asked Sumi if church was her way of keeping Jasmine away from drugs, crime, sex and other negative influences. When Sumi confirmed that she expected her daughter to stay clear of negative influences as described, Jasmine replied that they were fair hesitantly. Trying to look at the situation realistically, Gerard noted that Jasmine was hesitant because she was probably afraid she could not meet her mother's expectations.

Finally, Gerard summed up by listing the points of agreement reached. Jasmine would need to earn her mother's trust by keeping to the conditions spelt out and Sumi should not be abusive towards her daughter. He concluded that the family 'was here for the future, the past hurts but what can be better is in the future.'

Just before the family dispersed, Bee Leng complimented them for being very honest in their communication. Although they were angry, they were still listening to each other and this she felt represented a form of closeness.

**Love Her If You Love Me But Not Too Much**

**Wednesday, 3 July 1996, 9.40 p.m. - 10.25 p.m.**

**Synopsis**

**Family**

- Sumi
- Rina

**Staff**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard

**Pre-Session Information**

**Hypotheses**

Despite Sumi's reassurance that her relationship with Rina will be kept out of the house, it is felt that Rina's co-operation is vital to the success of the proposed solution. Hence, the need to establish Rina's position in the issue to pre-empt possible disagreements in the future.

**Goals**

- i To provide the opportunity for Rina to support Sumi in her family responsibilities.
- ii To help Rina and Sumi explore and agree upon possible ways to maintain the relationship without imposing on Sumi's children.

**Summary of the Session**

A relatively short session that focused on the impact of Jasmine's return on the relationship between Sumi and Rina. The couple had addressed the issue on their own before and the staff's intervention simply served as a catalyst to sort out their difficulties. The session was helpful in providing staff a perspective of the nature of the lesbian relationship.

**Post-Session Findings**

- i Rina hinted at Sumi's vulnerability without their relationship and the quality of their relationship will have an impact on Sumi's relationship with her children. Also, the relationship between Sumi and Rina will be badly stressed if they cannot find a solution to the lack of a meeting place. Hence, it is likely Sumi's children will encounter difficulties with her in the near future.
- ii There is a jealousy triad between Sumi, Rina and Jasmine and Jasmine may be blamed for the constraints on the lesbian relationship.
- iii Rina appears reasonably supportive of efforts to ensure the well being of Sumi's family.

## Process Recording

*A* vivacious Sumi welcomed the staff. There was a lively ring in her voice and it was obvious she was in a good mood. A few steps away Rina observed quietly. Dressed in a checked shirt and denim jeans, she smiled politely and yet uncomfortably. Sumi led the way. Soon all the adults were in Sumi's bedroom and the children were left watching television.

Sumi sat on the bed and Rina was on her right sitting on a chair. The staff sat opposite them and the bed served as the conference table. Sumi comfortably poised on the 'conference table' carried herself confidently. She looked reassuringly at Rina and told her to relax. She chuckled when Rina expressed reservations about running the video camera and shook her head as she giggled in disbelief. It appeared like good-natured ribbing but the staff decided to forgo the taping of the session.

Rina gulped a glass of water as she noticed that Gerard was going to begin. She told everyone that she was very nervous and even showed her sweaty palms to emphasise her point. Then, the staff learned that Rina was aware of Sumi's decision to disallow her from staying over at her house now that Jasmine is home. It appeared that both of them had discussed the matter before.

Gerard then commented that Sumi's request must be a difficult one to meet as it basically infringed on their relationship. 'It should be okay.' Rina elaborated by explaining she had to look after her ill mother daily and would at most be able to meet Sumi once a week. The issue was definitely being played down but Gerard continued exploring the possibility of Sumi staying over with Rina.

Rina's household was open to the nature of their relationship but at the moment Rina had some unresolved disagreements within the household. Thus, it was not timely for Sumi to stay over. 'Rina needs me, she has family problems and she needs my listening ear' Sumi helped out. Perhaps, the implications of her decision were beginning to sink in and the inconveniences imposed on their relationship began to unveil. Sumi and Rina were unprepared and could not come up with a feasible solution. In resignation, they both expressed that they had 'no choice' and just had to stomach the 'stay away' condition.

It did not appear like a satisfactory conclusion to the matter and the staff decided to address the issue from a different perspective. 'Jasmine has said that she is very uncomfortable with the open intimacy' Gerard ventured. 'Headache lah!' Rina began as she provided a twist to the situation. 'Sumi wants

me to be close to her(Jasmine) but becomes jealous.' Rina added that Jasmine was also probably jealous of the intimacy between Sumi and her.

Sumi laughed awkwardly at Rina's suggestion that a love triangle was existent but she gleaned at the hint of Rina's desirability. Soon both Rina and Sumi acknowledged that adhering to the 'stay away' condition was going to be difficult. 'Can't turn left, can't turn right - no place to move' Sumi lamented as Rina looked at her sympathetically in agreement.

Then Sumi and Rina assured the staff that they have sort of adjusted to the 'stay away' condition. Over the past 2 months, Rina was working and would only visit during off days without staying over. As Rina and Sumi continued discussing the arrangement, they inadvertently touched on how they would be affected. Sumi felt that Rina will be lonely while Rina told Anna 'to keep an eye' on Sumi. According to Rina, Sumi was frequently depressed whenever she was lonely and drank heavily. However, the staff felt that the information was meant for the couple themselves and decided not to take it up. Instead, they summed up by reiterating on the agreements reached i.e. no staying over at Sumi's for Rina and no explicit intimacy in front of Jasmine or any of the children.

Rina and Sumi nodded and Sumi mumbled that even Evan will be pleased with the decision.

## **Is That Our Family You're Talking About?**

**Thursday, July 1996, 11.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.**

### **Synopsis**

#### **Family**

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan

#### **Staff**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Julie

### **Pre-Session Information**

#### **Hypotheses**

So far, the sessions focused mainly on Jasmine and Sumi. Efforts to introduce Evan have not been successful as the family found the questions contrived and irrelevant to the intense emotional content that dominated. Hence, the involvement of Ethan may create a dimension that would be helpful for the family as a whole. Also, as Sumi had demonstrated her unwillingness to talk about the past, the therapists should focus on the future.

#### **Goals**

- To help the family appreciate Ethan's presence and contribution to the live-in.
- To help the family address the issue of living together in the future.

### **Summary of the Session**

The effort to involve Ethan had a tremendous impact. He articulated on behalf of his siblings their displeasure with Sumi's drinking. This time, Sumi did not brush away the criticism nonchalantly or rebut with anger. The therapists then tried to inject optimism by helping the family identify shared positive experiences and strengths they can draw upon in the future.

### **Post-Session Findings**

- Sumi and Jasmine have an awareness of family problems and share many experiences but their perspectives frequently differ. Hence, while they are connected in a sense, positive bonding is not apparent.
- Sumi was not ready to address personal issues. She avoided the issue about her drinking and was afraid of appearing vulnerable; presenting instead a strong-collected front as a mother.
- Sumi was not emotionally present for more therapy. She appeared to be upset and distracted by news that Rina will not be attending the family's bar-be-que later in the evening.
- The unhelpful pattern of communication between Jasmine and Sumi continued to be dominated by too little listening and too much finger-pointing.

## Process Recording

*S*umi and Jasmine took their usual places. This was their 3rd session together and it was as if they stuck to their familiar places to provide a kind of continuity to the therapy sessions. Or perhaps, mother and daughter were more at ease being nearer to the staff whom they were more familiar with. Anna and Gerard too, did not change places during the different sessions. Anna was on the sofa next to Sumi and Gerard sat on the floor oblique to Jasmine. One could actually wonder if Jasmine's choice of chair which placed her nearer to her room and the passage way meant that she was preparing to make a quick exit if things got intolerable.

'Perhaps Jasmine is wondering about what was discussed between the adults last night' Gerard began. Sumi appeared to be unprepared for the opening comment and told Gerard to provide Jasmine the update. Refusing, Gerard explained that it would be more appropriate for mother to keep daughter informed of decisions affecting their household. Sumi was not sure where to begin and only after some prompting did she repeat the agreement that Rina will not stay over when she visits.

Then the staff decided to call for a short break to enable Ethan to wash up so that he could join the session. Ethan came by obediently when he had freshened up. Immediately, he squeezed himself into Jasmine's chair and snuggled up comfortably. Ethan's presence brought a smile to Jasmine's face and amidst this joyful rendezvous Sumi maintained a stern and serious look.

Going with the flow of things, Gerard seized the opportunity to ask Ethan if he was closer to his sister or mother. After assuring him that his thoughts and feelings would be helpful to the family, Gerard asked Ethan if he was aware where Jasmine was during the time she was away. Ethan shook his head and timidly said 'don't know.' Sumi helped by reminding him that they had visited Jasmine but he simply replied 'forget.'

'Are you closer to 'girl girl'(Jasmine) or to Mummy?' This was a question Ethan tried avoiding. He stared blankly like he did not comprehend. Affectionately, Jasmine put her arm around his shoulder and spoke to him softly. Looking at her children, Sumi rubbed her eyes as she waited for Ethan's answer. When Ethan finally acknowledged that he was closer to Jasmine, Sumi joined in and said that Ethan was liked by everyone in the family and was probably closer to Evan.

- G:** 'Are you close to Mummy?'  
**E:** *Silence(shaking his head)* 'Don't like Mummy, sometimes she drunk'  
**S:** 'You don't love Mummy? '  
**E:** 'Sometimes.' (after a few moments of silence.  
**S:** 'Okay, I'll take back the ball.'

Despite the threat and Sumi repeating the question again, Ethan was firm about his reply. There was a brief hint of disappointment on Sumi's face but her usual brave and strong front held up. Gerard then commented that the children were very close and immediately Sumi responded 'They have to be close to each other.' Cautiously, Gerard continued trying to offer an olive's branch 'They sound like very mature children, more mature than other kids their age.' Sumi caught on and explained that because she was always busy trying to make ends meet, she taught her children to be independent early in life.

'I see a very different style of parenting. Sumi is an independent person and this may have rubbed off on her children.' Gerard elaborated by highlighting the positives side of Sumi's parenting style observing that her children are very co-operative and enjoy taking care of each other. This face-saving effort was intended to keep Sumi engaged but for Jasmine, it brought out cynicism and she mumbled that her mother has repeated her unfortunate circumstances so often that she can almost memorise the lines.

Intending to minimise the pessimism felt by the family, Gerard enquired about the good times they shared in the past. Jasmine spoke of the family outings they had when Dad was still around but for Sumi, this must have hit a sore spot within as she countered that there were no good times then. Reminiscing about the past was awkward but Jasmine persevered and said that she enjoyed the times Mummy, Ethan and herself spent together.

While Sumi and Jasmine always seemed to know what each other were talking about when discussing the bad times, they differed frequently when it came to the good times. Jasmine looked at her mother incredulously when she recounted bringing her children to the parks when they were younger. This led Sumi to describe Jasmine as the 'shopping centre' type of girl whose interests were difficult to figure out.

Despite the different perspectives, the topic was apparently not threatening and the mood in the room lightened up. Ethan joined in as the family discussed the trip to Pulau Ubin the evening before. Although the family went to the beach and the playground with him, he was adamant that it was 'no fun' and he was 'not happy.' Sumi put this down to the fact that he was frightened by some stray dogs at the beach. Jasmine enjoyed the outing because 'Mum was there and there hasn't been a family outing for so long.' As for Sumi, she thought that 'the boat ride was good and the place was something new.'

The difference between Jasmine and Sumi was that one valued the company while the other the activity. This observation was reinforced when Sumi recounted the best time the family ever had was a trip to Kuala Lumpur organised by her ex-husband. Then, they took a flight and even stayed at a deluxe hotel. Jasmine was less enthusiastic and only remembered spending a lot of time with Evan in the evenings when her parents were out on their own.

The family moved on to comment on their time together since Jasmine's return. According to Jasmine, things were better because there were less quarrels and no one has walked out yet. In the past, she would leave the moment 'there was a spark.' Jasmine also commented that 'Mum was back to being her real person.' She added that her mother was very understanding and fun to be with when she was not drunk. In those times, they would share about themselves openly.

However, this was also a dilemma because an intoxicated Sumi would often use the information shared against her. The staff also learned that Evan too kept Sumi informed about his army life and church activities. Both Sumi and Jasmine seemed to appreciate the fact that sometimes they should not have told each other certain things about themselves. While they enjoyed speaking with each other like 'friends', they were after all mother and daughter. Finally, Gerard closed by commenting that in some ways, the family was very close-knit and this provided him some hope that the family had the ability to get along in the future. He cautioned though that it did not mean the end of their problems. The session ended and the staff noticed among themselves that it was the first therapy session Jasmine did not shed tears.

**Other Incidental Purposeful Discussions****Synopsis**

s/no	Date	Time	# hours	Client/Worker	Issues
1.	4 July 96	2.30 - 4.00 p.m.	2	Sumi/Anna	Personal history & relationships
2.	4 July	8.15 - 9.00 p.m.	0.75	Jasmine/BLeng	Relationship with mum

**Discussion 1****Dad Was My Pal**

When Jasmine, Ethan, Bee Leng and Gerard were at the beach, I stayed in the flat with Sumi. After the morning's session, I felt that Sumi might be very disappointed especially after hearing that Ethan did not love her. So, I asked her how she found the sessions so far. She said that the night before, Jasmine told her that it was good they were able to say what was inside them during therapy. I sensed that Sumi had achieved what she wanted to achieve during the first day i.e. Rina issue. She had drawn the boundary clearly with Jasmine. It was also confirmed that she will continue the relationship with Rina and expressed that it will not affect her role as a mother.

I accompanied Sumi when she decided to shop for spices to marinate the chicken. On the way to the shop, we spoke about her childhood. She said that her father was an alcoholic and she was very close to him. She was the only one in the family who would 'entertain' him when he was drunk. Her mother and father often argued.

Sumi did not like school and she played truant. At 10 years old, she stayed away from home and was not close to any of her siblings. When her father got posted to work in Singapore, she missed him so much and later joined him when she was 15 years old. Sumi was so close to her father that she even held his salary and her mother had to go through her for money.

At this point, I was thinking how Sumi's childhood was similar to Jasmine's. Sumi was sent to a Girl's Home for 6 months by her mother. But the question that kept coming back was 'What kind of a relationship did she really have with her father?' To me it sounded like she took over the role of a wife from her mother and her mother hated her for that. Sumi claimed that her mother could not understand her father and was not understanding towards his drinking behaviour. Perhaps, since she was able to be 'very understanding' towards her father's drinking, she probably expects her children to do the same for her.

Sumi also said that both Rina and herself are very close. She said they cannot live without each other. Sumi gets jealous when other girls talk to Rina and Rina feels likewise when men express interest in Sumi. Sumi said that her supervisor, a married man with kids likes her and she enjoys the attention from him.

### **Post-Session Findings**

Sumi's interaction with her children appear to be affected by her own trans-generational experiences and this shapes her expectations of her children. As such, in her opinion her drinking may not be a problem for her children since she put up with her alcoholic father.

### **Discussion 2**

## **The Past Will Prevail**

Impromptu individual session with Jasmine during the bar-be-que.

### **Preamble**

Jasmine is very good at connecting with people. She has an extensive social network. Many friends were calling her in anticipation of her return from the institution. During the Ubin trip, she was attempting to connect with me. She told me that 1 year ago on 3 July 96, she was on the run and was with some friends at Yishun jetty. She remembered the date well because she learnt to roller-blade for the first time. She would have shared more if not for mother's intrusion into our conversation.

I was struck by her honesty and openness which is perhaps sparked by her desperate need to connect with people outside the family. Since Day 1, she had been asking if the therapy team will stay back at the flat after therapy.

### **Issues Discussed**

Jasmine would have felt happier if Evan was at the FLC. After her institutionalisation, they became very close to each other. He is very fun to be with. Perhaps the children are in alliance because of a common problem - mum. She said that Evan had changed a lot- now so involved in church. In the past, Evan was in street gangs and she knew some of his gang friends but they did not openly acknowledge as siblings. Mum does not know of Evan's previous gang activities and thinks he is a 'goody two shoes' who likes to keep to himself.

Jasmine is very unhappy and has many reservations about mum's expectations and rules. She resents having to behave herself for mum's sake. She feels it is a no-win situation; past experiences tell her that it is hard to win her mum's trust and she does not like manipulating her behaviour to please mum. She is also afraid that once her mum gives her permission to go out, she will run-away with friends for days. Being out of the house, she resents returning home because of the unpleasant

and hurtful memories associated with home. Then, the whole cycle of conflict will repeat itself. Mum will accuse her of abusing her freedom, breaching mum's trust and will exercise tight control over her, leading to quarrels and fights all over again.

Jasmine is also fearful of the 'world outside.' She is afraid of repeating her previous lifestyle all over again - smoking, drinking, sleeping at parks/5-foot ways, running from mum etc. I think she may not dislike these so called 'wayward' activities as much as fear the hurt/pain associated with these activities. She is actually apprehensive about being released and would have preferred staying at the institution as life is more structured, stable and she did not have to worry too much.

Jasmine agreed to be ruled by mum's expectations even when given the chance to negotiate. She had to give mum a 100% assurance even though she knew she would falter because giving mum any doubt will put mum on her guard and control will be tightened.

Regarding improving family relationships, Sumi said that 'she will work on it.' Jasmine interprets this as mum preparing her to accept that the rules about Rina will be broken at times.

Church friends - it was not realistic for mum to expect her to spend 4 times a week in church. She enjoys the company of these friends but they are of a different social class background. They frequent expensive eating joints and pay for meals Jasmine cannot afford. She resents eating on charity all the time and feels small. Whenever she asked Sumi for money, Sumi would tell her that it was all right for her friends to pay without showing any understanding for her discomfort. Mum has told her not to mind what others think about her family but Jasmine minds deeply.

**Learning To Trust Again****Thursday, 4 July 1996, 5.30 p.m. - 7.30 p.m.****Synopsis****Family**

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan
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**Staff**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Julie

**Pre-Session Information****Hypotheses**

Not much can be achieved as Sumi was observed to be emotionally absent. Hence, this should be the last session and it should be aimed at helping the family end the live-in on a hopeful but cautionary note.

**Goals**

- i To close therapy on a cautious but hopeful note.
- ii To seek feedback from the family regarding the experience.

**Summary of the Session**

The therapists tried identifying commonalities between Sumi and Jasmine in the hope of drawing them closer. However, Jasmine did not really appreciate the highlighting of similarities and appeared to prefer distancing herself from her mother. Again Ethan's contribution proved helpful in helping the family focus on Sumi's drinking problem. Also his affectionate close proximity to Sumi had a calming effect on her and the session benefited as Sumi became more in tune with the proceedings.

**Post-Session Findings**

- i Therapy was characterised by the superficiality of issues dealt with. Issues were touched on but not dealt in depth as there was no mandate from Sumi to dwell deeper.
- ii Sumi was not emotionally present at the live-in despite indicating her level of commitment as 10/10.
- iii There is a high level of distrust within the dynamics between Sumi and Jasmine.
- iv Sumi appears to have an addictive personality's psyche i.e. 'Drinking is a small problem so why harp on it?'

## Process Recording

**W**e are all a little tired. According to Jasmine, what was talked about during these few days might have taken 2 to 3 months.' The family's effort and contribution were further acknowledged as Gerard noted how both Jasmine and Sumi 'squeezed so many things into a few hours.' Addressing Sumi, he complimented her on the energetic and efficient manner she had organised the family for therapy. 'You are very concerned and I suppose this is your style of parenting - work at things before they get worse. How much do you agree?'

'Whatever you say is true' Sumi responded after a short pause. Gerard then told her that even her goal of strengthening family relationships was a fair request because Jasmine had been away for 2 years. Sumi latched on to the comment and expressed that it will take time for Jasmine to adjust to the family. She added that her time in the institution must have been difficult and she should now be given a chance to come home.

Sumi claimed to have a good insight into Jasmine's life at the institution as Jasmine corresponded with her. In her letters, Jasmine informed Sumi about her learning and sought a chance for reconciliation. Sumi never expected to receive those letters and found them rather honest and touching. Jasmine joined in and commented that Mum never replied to the letters. At which Sumi answered that Evan replied on behalf of the family.

Honestly, Jasmine admitted that her letters to Evan were different from those to Sumi. She was afraid 'Mum would blow her top' if letters to her were not 'censored.' 'So you write R(A) letters to Evan and PG ones to Mum.' Gerard's reference to the current film classification practices drew a few chuckles.

'Are you sure that Mum doesn't know the censored contents?' As Jasmine paused to unearth the seed of doubt Gerard planted, Sumi expressed that Jasmine's letters brought back memories for her. Gerard then commented that mother and daughter had very similar experiences during the same phase of their lives. Sumi accepted the observation and added that Jasmine can now cook and bake just like her.

Jasmine did not find the comparison flattering. She squirmed at the similarities and pointed out various examples of why her mother's experience was different. Gerard then asked Sumi if she had an idea of the things Jasmine did not write her. Sumi guessed that it must have been the fights, gangs and maybe the lesbian relationships between inmates. She then said she would not hold it against Jasmine if she had been involved in any negative experiences. But almost in the same

breath, she asked Jasmine if she was actually involved in fights and Jasmine denied in reflex action. Jasmine was surprised that her mother would absolve her of any blame for her past. Gerard delved on the matter and commented 'Things you have not told her are things she can use against you.' Irritated, Sumi retorted 'What is it you think that I will judge you?' 'When you are drunk!' was Jasmine immediate reply.

Sumi defended herself and argued that her children were always focusing on her drinking without realising the hard work she puts in to keep the family alive. She lamented that her children only sought her when they needed food and entertainment. When it came to 'major problems', she was on her own. She challenged 'How do my children help out?' 'By being very independent' Gerard answered quickly.

Gerard then reflected to Sumi that it sounded as if she would work very hard for 6 days, accumulate the stresses of the week and let all out on her off-day. Her once a week drinking fling seemed to be the only thing that stays on her children's mind. 'Do you think it's something wrong?' Sumi stood her ground. As Gerard tried to see Sumi's point of view by empathising with her long work hours, Jasmine cut him short. Agitated, she remembers her mother coming home drunk more than once a week. Thus, she suspects that mother was probably not working as hard as she claimed. Also, if Sumi needed the children's support, she could have approached them when she was sober.

**S:** *'You can't do anything.'*

**J:** *'So it is not that we don't ask!'*

Recalling the agreement at a previous session, Sumi clarified that she was not expecting her children to share her personal problems. Gerard then put Sumi's drinking habits as a pattern that will not have an immediate solution. 'That's the way she has been and the way she will be for a while.' He looked at Jasmine hoping that perhaps the family could seek ways of minimising an unpleasant situation rather than expecting Sumi to change immediately. It was clear that Sumi and the rest of the family had a very different perception of her drinking habits.

Ethan was watching his sister and mother argue intently. When asked to comment, his replies left no doubt that he was fully aware of the situation despite his tender age.

**G:** *'Are you angry when mummy drinks?'*

**E:** *'Very angry.'*

**G:** *'Why?'*

**E:** *'Shout here, shout there...'*

G: *'Mummy shouts at you or what?'*

E: *'No.'*

G: *'Do you feel anything else?'*

E: *'I cry.'*

G: *'Why do you cry?'*

E: *'Mummy scolds me.'*

G: *'So what do you do?'*

E: *'I go to sleep.'*

G: *'Really go to sleep?'*

E: *'No, bluff bluff go to sleep.'*

G: *'Do you think mummy knows?'*

E: *'No.'*

Jasmine smiled affectionately at Ethan as he spoke while Sumi crossed her legs and covered her mouth with her right hand. This time Sumi listened quietly without retort and appeared a little saddened. Ethan then said he usually did not get to sleep when Sumi was drunk and had to 'lie down' when he went to school the following day.

G: *'When mummy is not drunk, do you like her?'*

E: *'Yes.'*

G: *'Say louder, I can't hear you.'*

E: *'Yes.'*

'It must be hard for you to hear all this.' Gerard offered his understanding but Sumi shook her head 'No not really, I have heard this before.' Sumi explained that Ethan would always remind her 'in a nice way' if she had been drinking the night before. Spontaneously, Jasmine mimicked the way Ethan would do it. The consequences of her drinking habits had been sufficiently brought to Sumi's awareness so Gerard moved on. He asked Sumi if there was any time that she felt appreciated by her children. Sumi lightened up and she informed how proud she would be whenever her children finished the food she cooked. It was more work cooking but because her children were 'such good eaters', it was worth the effort every time.

Then with a hint of resentment, Jasmine said that it never occurred to her that there were similarities between Sumi and herself. Sumi responded by sharing that she too hated her own mother when she was around Jasmine's age. However, she gradually understood her after the institutional experience. So she felt that Jasmine should be able to manage the difficulties ahead because she had been there before and at that time, without therapy.

It was the first time her mother had shared such information and unconsciously, both mother and daughter crossed their legs in similar fashion. To reiterate his point, Gerard commented on their sitting positions. Immediately both mother and daughter uncrossed their legs mirroring each other again. It was hilarious and Sumi laughed along with the staff but Jasmine appeared a little dazed.

After this, Sumi was visibly more relaxed and was even willing to accede to Gerard's request to keep quiet when Jasmine related an embarrassing situation. When Sumi visited the institution, she was drunk and kicked a fuss when she was prohibited from leaving snacks for Jasmine. Gerard had insisted that they practise keeping quiet while the other spoke because otherwise they often had a heated argument. He further suggested the 'odd and even days' communication exercise for them to do at home but Jasmine doubted its efficacy and the suggestion was aborted.

Sumi was in a bubbly mood and Ethan moved physically close to her. The staff decided to close and sought feedback on the live-in. Sumi felt that many unexpected issues were raised but she acknowledged that it is preferable they surfaced. She also said that Jasmine's expectations of her were too high but she will work at them. For Jasmine, she felt that Sumi's 'rules' were not what she would want for herself but was resigned to the fact that it would be the only way to re-establish her mother's trust. Ethan and Jasmine both reported they enjoyed each other's company and having a room for themselves.

When asked if she felt family relationships had been strengthened, Sumi circumvented the issue by saying that at least she had heard Jasmine speak her mind. Also, Sumi still found it difficult to trust Jasmine but agreed to set a time-frame of 1 month to review her feelings. She stated that Jasmine would get more leeway when there is more trust.

**You're Big Enough To Know But Too Small To Decide****Thursday, 8 August 1996, 5.30 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.****Synopsis****Family**

- Sumi
- Jasmine
- Ethan

**Staff**

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Julie

**Pre-Session Information****Hypotheses**

Sumi and Jasmine would simply complete their obligation to finish the entire FLC process. No contentious issues will be raised by Sumi but Jasmine may have had difficulty meeting her mother's expectations during the last month. It is uncertain though if Jasmine would view further therapy as a viable way of addressing her difficulties.

**Goal**

- i To assess the impact of the live-in and to explore the possibility of engaging the family in further therapy.

**Summary of the Session**

The session provided a glimpse into the unpredictable nature of Sumi's parenting. Sumi appeared to parent in extremes; appearing very liberal in matters regarding Sumi's romantic interest but dogmatic concerning education. As the issue of Jasmine's education became an unresolved issue, the family decided to continue with therapy outside the FLC Programme.

**Post-Session Findings**

- i Jasmine was uncertain about committing to future therapy because she was experiencing too many uncertainties beyond her control e.g. the unpredictable nature of her mother's parenting and tight rein over Jasmine's participation in individual counselling and programmes at the Centre.
- ii Jasmine may have had the impression that she had a say over her education as her mother approved of her romantic endeavours lifting her earlier restriction of only mixing with church friends.
- iii Sumi is diffusing the parent-child boundaries defined at the FLC by treating Jasmine as a peer. The manner in which Sumi shares, discusses and empathises with Jasmine's romantic interest indicates this observation.
- iv Sumi has various intra-personal needs which can be better filled by Jasmine being a 'peer' rather than a daughter.
- v Sumi tends to overwhelm Jasmine with an overt display of authority and control. In considering Evan be included in future sessions, the team should be careful that he is not subjected to Sumi's authority lest Jasmine may feel further undermined. Perhaps, Evan should only be included upon Jasmine's request.
- vi Live-in therapy has helped the family highlight various areas of concerns which otherwise would have been ignored. The family will not be willing to address all issues but probably because of the live-in experience now view therapy as a possible problem-solving alternative.

## Process Recording

**D**ressed in her office clothes, Jasmine appeared way beyond her 14 years of age. Sumi had arranged for her to leave her workplace earlier so that they could make the session. Ethan occupied himself with the toys in the room while Sumi and Jasmine took their places.

'Things have been different' Sumi reported. She appeared very relaxed and laughed frequently as she chatted casually with the staff. She added that Jasmine and her were on better terms since the live-in and they conversed frequently about Jasmine's work life. After the live-in, Sumi arranged with a friend to employ Jasmine in his office on a temporary basis. Since then, Jasmine had been occupied moving between work and church leaving her little time for Ethan. Occasionally though she would speak with Evan, her elder brother.

Jasmine sat quietly as her mother did most of the talking maintaining a demure but cautious presence. She nodded and answered politely whenever her mother glanced at her seeking affirmation, sometimes even offering a smile. Sumi seemed particularly pleased with her daughter. Reportedly, mother and daughter were communicating and enjoying each other's company and from how things were going it appeared so. It was as if they had discovered in each other a soul-mate to share intimate secrets.

Checking with Jasmine, Sumi enquired if it was all right to keep the staff informed of the latest incident in their lives. Although Jasmine agreed, she looked gloomy as Sumi agitatedly related how their Pastor had objected to Jasmine's friendship with a male colleague from the office. The family was leaving for an 'evangelist night' later in the evening and the Pastor had disapproved of Jasmine bringing her new boyfriend along.

Sumi made it clear she was not pleased with her Pastor for interfering in the private matters of the family. She felt that Jasmine was 'big enough to think for herself' and moreover, Jasmine had gone through 'a lot of effort' to convince her friend, a non-Christian, to attend a church function. For all this effort, 'this thing she gets from the Pastor is not nice,' Sumi concluded. Sumi was so put off, she instructed Evan who gets along well with the Pastor, to express her displeasure on her behalf. However, after speaking to the Pastor, Evan was of the opinion 'he only meant well.' To emphasise her point, Sumi threatened to quit the church if her Pastor continues to interfere in family matters.

It was baffling for the staff and Gerard reminded Sumi that just a month ago, she was adamant that her daughter should not have friends other than those from church. Sumi replied that her daughter had already tasted working life and she would trust her having colleagues as friends, 'He is an adult

and takes good care of her.' Apparently, this time Sumi trusted her daughter's choice of friend and this was in spite of the fact that she had not met the person in question yet.

Sumi drew Jasmine into the conversation by stating she would not be able to meet her boyfriend unless she brought him home. In a reticent manner, Jasmine expressed hope that her mother would continue to be supportive of her friendships. At the moment, including this newly found boyfriend, she only had two close friends.

Jasmine then agreed with her mother that their relationship had improved since the live-in and it had been more or less the same with Evan but it had not been quite as rosy with Ethan. Ethan had been 'spying' for Sumi and kept mother posted of Jasmine's incoming telephone calls despite Jasmine's efforts at bribing him with sweets and chocolates. It was an opportune time to involve Ethan and he left the toys obediently when he was called. He too claimed to be happier after the live-in but felt that he had not been quite as close to Jasmine. Ethan was not resentful of the staff but preferred not to divulge too much information. After Gerard joked that perhaps the staff were not paying him enough, Ethan exited gracefully by claiming to be feeling cold. Sumi pulled him over to her seat and cuddled him signalling that the boy had done his part and it was time to leave him alone.

'Are there other aspects of life that trouble you?' The question Gerard posed sounded like a party popper and both Sumi and Jasmine sat back blankly. To speed things up, Anna raised a contentious issue that seemed to have been swept under the carpet. Anna asked if Jasmine would still want to go back to school now that she had tasted working life. Jasmine then informed that her boss was considering sending her to the Institute for Technical Education (ITE) to complete her studies on a part-time basis. The proposed arrangement appealed to Jasmine as she had lost interest in school since she started work.

The information jolted Sumi and she exclaimed that Jasmine's boss had no right to interfere with her intention to send Jasmine back to school. In the same breath, she decided that Jasmine would have to change jobs immediately if such was the case. Sumi was forceful and definitive. Trying to provide a voice for Jasmine, Gerard commented that Sumi was her usual efficient self in addressing issues but perhaps it would be helpful to hear Jasmine out.

Composing herself, Sumi tried persuading Jasmine to return to school by highlighting that she will meet new friends and have a new life. Jasmine listened in obligation but finally spurted half in tears 'Can't I do what I enjoy?' 'On school, I will stand firm on my decision' was the reply Jasmine received.

The room was silent except for Jasmine's quiet sobbing. Sumi was unfazed by the situation and reiterated 'I will not be soft with her on school.' Gerard expressed his concern 'I don't know Jasmine very well and maybe I am not used to seeing her cry so perhaps you could help me understand why she is crying.' Sumi simply put it down to Jasmine being a very sensitive person that cried easily and the solution would be just to leave her alone. Jasmine acknowledged that she had expected her mother's firm stand on school but was disappointed that Sumi put across her expectations 'so firmly.' 'I have no say over my life' she expressed succinctly. 'Why ask me why I lost interest in school since you have already made plans for me?' she challenged her mother.

'I don't want to talk about it' Sumi restrained herself. She then elaborated to Gerard that it was best they both kept quiet because any more dialogue will escalate the conflict. She reassured Gerard that keeping quiet was a proven solution the family often adopted.

The staff then commented that they have observed Jasmine to be in a sense more mature than other girls her age and this difference may make it difficult for her to adapt to the formal school system. They then checked with Sumi if she would consider allowing Jasmine to pursue her education outside the school system. Sumi was reluctant but agreed to allow Anna to explore alternatives with the relevant authorities. Finally, she expressed that she would like to handle the matter at a later date as there were still some months before the next school year stressing that she wanted a free hand in the matter.

Towards the end, Gerard invited the family to return in a month's time to sort out the matter of Jasmine's schooling. He clarified that his role will be to enable mother and daughter to hear each other out and perhaps this will assist decision making. He added that during the month, it might be helpful for Jasmine to receive individual counselling to help her clarify her education plans. Sumi agreed to allow Jasmine to visit if she so desired and gave an affirmative okay for a further session in a month. The session ended leaving Jasmine in a state of ambivalence about her future.