

Case 2 The Oliveiro Family

Brief Background

Puteri's children, namely Samsudin and Dawood were known to the Centre since early 1994 through a soccer outreach programme. Through soccer, the Centre also came to know their younger sisters, Dahlia and Camellia whom they brought to cheer them.

The Centre's contact with the brothers intensified as they frequented our drop-in facilities regularly. In March 1994, Dawood joined the Language Lab, one of the remedial English classes of the Centre. Shortly later, Samsudin attended Learning Skills, another of our Learning Programmes. At year end, he emerged as the *Best Learner* and boosted by the positive learning experience, Samsudin approached Bee Leng to help reinstate him in school. Samsudin had previously dropped out of Primary 4 some three years ago. This was the start of a working relationship with Samsudin's family. Earlier on in the engagement process with the boys, household visits were mainly social calls to introduce the Centre.

The working relationship with Puteri improved significantly after helping successfully to advocate and facilitate Samsudin's return to school in January 1995. From January to July regular contact was maintained with the family through home visits. The issues discussed usually centred around the boys' progress in the Learning Programme and the Centre as a whole. Occasionally, household necessities were delivered to the family too. Over time Jackson Oliveiro, the father warmed up to the staff and he participated in discussions concerning his children. Through the visits, Bee Leng learned about Jackson's heart ailment and his frequent hospitalisations.

On 5 July 1995, Jackson passed away after an unsuccessful coronary bypass. Bee Leng visited Puteri and the children to offer condolence. She also offered help should the family face any difficulties arising from the death of their main breadwinner.

Two weeks later, Puteri approached the Centre for financial assistance. Since Jackson was rendered unfit for work because of poor health, the family found it hard to make ends meet. They accumulated arrears of \$313.30, \$34.00 and \$80.50 in PUB, HDB and SCC expenses respectively. Puteri was now the sole income earner with a meagre monthly salary of \$600.00 as an office cleaner. Jackson's death left a substantial void in the family; he was the economic provider, the family disciplinarian and nurturer as the children enjoyed good relationships with him. Puteri lost an important source of material and emotional support and the entire family was in grief for weeks to come.

On 4 August 1995, the Oliveiro family was accepted on the Rent and Utilities Assistance Scheme with effect from July 1995. The family was enabled to start financially on a clean slate as arrears with the HDB and SCC were waived and their rental and utility expenses were taken care of for the next 6 months.

Individually, Dawood and Dahlia were helped to talk about their grief over their father's death. Puteri cries whenever the issue of Jackson's death was raised. Samsudin found it hard to articulate about his father's death. When probed, he could only express sadness. Camellia has not manifested any overt signs of being adversely affected by her father's death although she had also been encouraged to talk about it.

In early October 1995, Puteri was very aggrieved by Samsudin's persistent truancy in school. (He was also inconsistent in his attendance at the Learning Skill classes although he continued to drop-in regularly at the Peace Cafe, soccer as well as Lion Dance practices.) Puteri felt pressured and blamed by his school teacher who seemed to attribute Samsudin's high absenteeism in school to Puteri's failure as a parent to discipline her son.

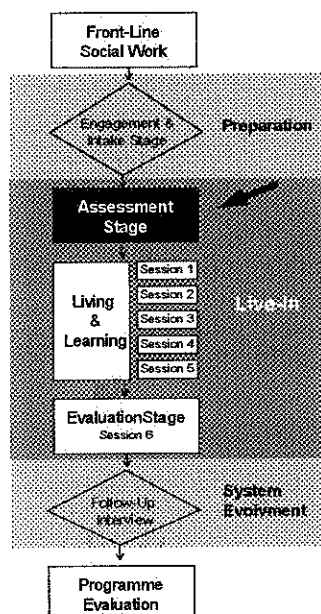
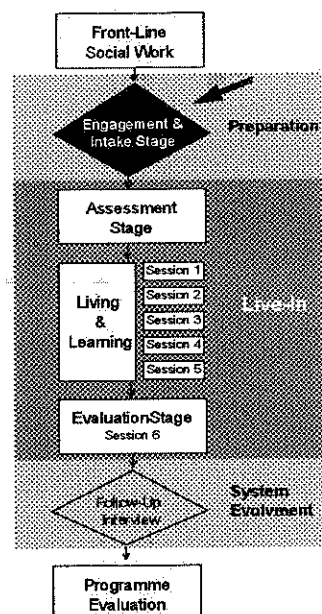
Puteri felt powerless and helpless towards this problem as she had exhausted all the means she knew. She had tried reasoning with him; reminding him that he was different from the other NC boys as he was fatherless and that he was the eldest in the family. She had scolded and nagged at him and had threatened to send him to a Boys' Home if he continued to truant or stays away from home for days on end. She had even threatened to kill herself if he refused to heed her word which was effective, albeit only temporarily, in coaxing the boy back to school. In mid-October, with the concerted efforts of Puteri and Bee Leng, Samsudin went back to school to sit for his Primary 4 streaming examinations before going on his spree of truancy again.

Puteri was on the brink of giving up her efforts with Samsudin when Bee Leng offered intensive therapeutic interventions as a means of dealing with the family's problems. Puteri welcomed the offer and volunteered to take leave from work for the live-in therapy. However, being a contract worker, she was hesitant about taking too many days leave.

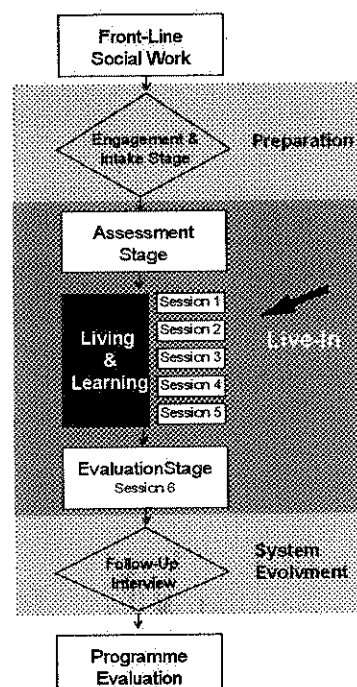
Case 2 At a Glance

No of persons served	5	Language used in Therapy	Malay/English
Type of Housing	2 room rental flat	No. of live-in days	3 days 2 nights
Ethnicity	Eurasian/Malay		

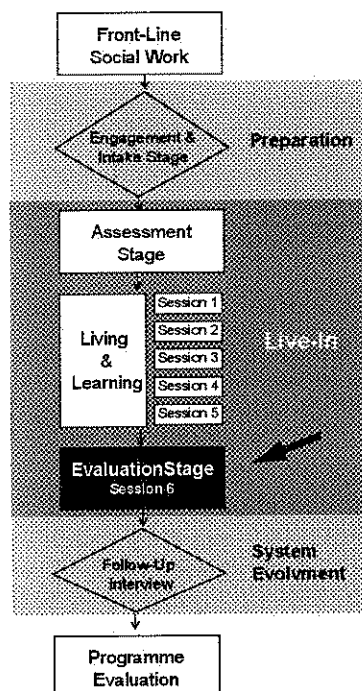
STAGES 1 & 2			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	160895	Pre-intake Assessment	1.5 hr
2.	301195	Intake Interview	1 hr
Sub Total			2.5 hr



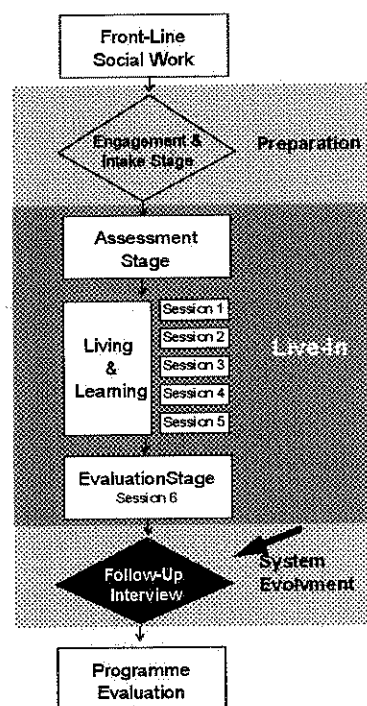
STAGE 3			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	061295	Pre-therapy Assessment	1 hr
Sub Total			1 hr



STAGE 4			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	061295	Session 1	1.5 hr
2.	061295	Session 2	1.5 hr
3.	071295	Session 3	1 hr
4.	061295	Family BBQ	2 hr
5.	081295	Closing Activity	2 hr
Sub Total		Sessions	4 hr
		Others	4 hr



STAGE 5			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	081295	Evaluation Session	0.5 hr
Sub Total			0.5 hr



STAGE 6			
s/no	Date	Activity	Time
1.	101095	Follow-up Interview	0.5hr
2.		Staff Discussion	1 hr
Sub Total			1.5 hr

Programme At A Glance
Wednesday, 6 - Friday, 8 December 1995
Venue: St Patrick's Living

Time	Day	6 December 95	7 December 95	8 December 95
Morning		- Family picked up from flat - Welcome - Check-in - Assessment Stage	- Fishing for children - Family Time	- Session 4 Evaluation 10:00 - 10:30 a.m. - Check-out
Afternoon		- Session 1 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. - Preparation for BBQ	Session 3 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.	Closing activity Trip to Changi Airport
Evening		- Session 2 8:00 - 9:30 p.m. - Family BBQ	Children's Camp-out	

The Key Players

The Family

The Oliveira family comprises 5 members and lives in a 2 room rental flat.

Jackson

A Catholic. Despite religious and family objections, he left his first wife to live with Puteri, a Muslim. He used to be the family's main breadwinner working as a Service Technician with Telecoms until he was rendered unfit for work as a result of his heart disease. He died in June 1995 after an unsuccessful coronary bypass.

Puteri

For many years, she has been working as a cleaner to supplement her husband's income. With Jackson's death, Puteri has to single-handedly support and bring up 4 children and an elderly mother. Being the eldest child in her family of origin, she is also expected to look out for her sister who is a divorcee and a brother who is an ex-drug abuser.

Samsudin

The eldest of 5 children of Puteri and Jackson. A thoughtful and sometimes bashful teenager who has difficulty articulating his thoughts and emotions. He dropped out of school at the age 10 and was reinstated as a Primary 4 student of Keng Seng Primary School when he was 13 years old.

Dawood

The third son of Puteri and Jackson. (Their second son was given away for adoption at birth). He endears himself to his mother. Dawood is a Primary 2 student who enjoys outdoor activities such as soccer, Lion Dance, cycling, roller-blading etc.

Dahlia

Compared to the gentler personalities of Samsudin and Camellia, Dahlia comes across as rugged and aggressive. She is very independent and is capable of taking care of herself and her younger sister despite her young age. Like Dawood, she enjoys outdoor activities and feels at home roaming the streets.

Camellia

Being the youngest, she is the family's pet. She clowns a lot in the family, bringing much laughter and joy to the family. She enjoys a very close relationship with her mother. She is presently a K1 student.

The Staff

The Therapy Team

- Anna Tee
- Gerard Ee

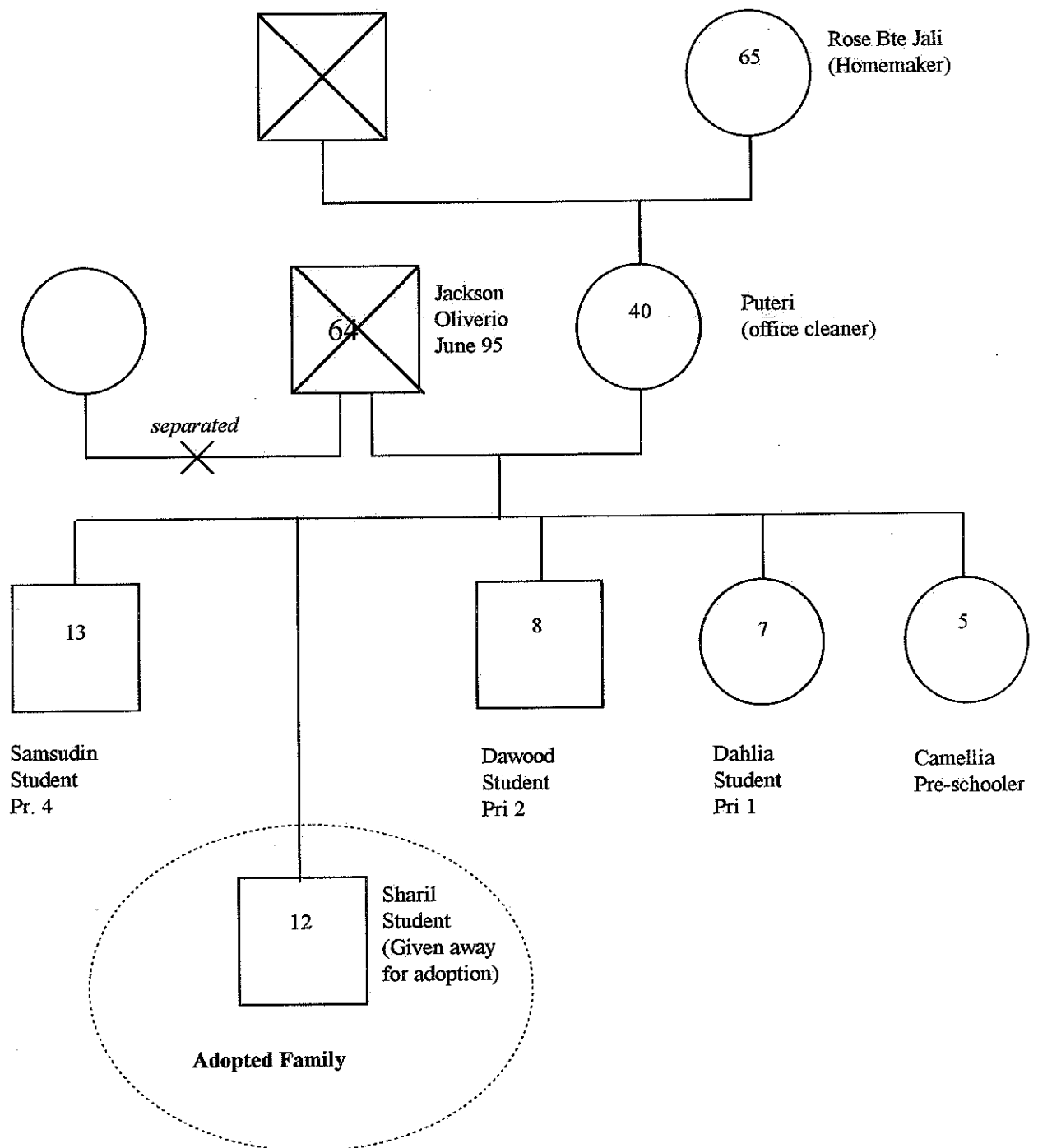
The Discussion Team

- Ng Bee Leng
- Rebecca Tan

The Facilitator

- Juliana Toh

Genogram



Pre-Intake Assessment

Wednesday, 16 August 95, 4.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Present

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Rebecca
- Gerard

The symptom(s)/presenting problem(s)

- Samsudin's persistent truancy from school.
- Samsudin has been keeping late nights and not returning home to sleep for days in a row.
- Dawood and Dahlia are also beginning to absent themselves from school as Puteri begins to relent on her efforts to discipline and prepare them for school.
- Puteri and perhaps her children, are still in grief over Jackson's death. Puteri feels alone and without support from her family.

The client's explanation for the problems

- Puteri feels that Samsudin is taking advantage of her liberal attitude towards her children. She believes that children should be given the space and freedom to make their own friends and have fun but Samsudin has been abusing it.
- Puteri feels that Samsudin is getting beyond control due to negative influence from the people he has been mixing around with. She feels that things would have been different if Jackson, who was the disciplinarian to the children, were to be alive.
- Puteri also suspects that Samsudin may be running away from some pain or sadness but she is unable to communicate with him.

The client's attempted solutions

- Puteri took on a second job with the intention of numbing and distancing herself from the problems of her family (her own explanation).
- Puteri constantly reprimanded Samsudin and threatened to send him to an institution. She even threatened to kill herself if Samsudin did not heed her advice.

The client's observations of consequences

- Puteri is very worried that Samsudin will get into bad company and become involved in drugs or other criminal activities.

- Puteri observes that the family is less happy nowadays.
- Puteri is concerned that she will be accused of being an incompetent mother by the children's paternal and maternal relatives. (Puteri had been severely reprimanded by Aunty Paula, Jackson's sister when Samsudin failed to turn up for his father's funeral.)

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

• Relationship perspective

☞ With Jackson's death, Puteri seems to have higher expectations of Samsudin in terms of his roles in the family. He is expected to shoulder some family responsibilities as the eldest son in the family. On the other hand, Samsudin seems confused or uncertain of the new expectations.

☞ Puteri seems to be sad at the loss of Samsudin as the young, obedient boy that he was; one that followed her wherever she went. She may be struggling with letting him go as Samsudin struggles with the needs and demands of adolescence. Puteri turns to her younger children for comfort and solace. She is most connected with her youngest child, Camellia.

• Family background perspective

☞ The loss of Jackson in the family is a significant family stressor. Puteri has to single-handedly take care of her 4 young children and is over-burdened.

☞ Help from Puteri's family of origin is limited. Her sick and elderly mother helps with the household chores but is unable to supervise her children. She is not on good terms with her brother who was recently released from the DRC. In fact, his presence in their home often hampered her attempts to discipline her children. Puteri is also currently providing refuge to her younger sister, Molly who is facing a divorce with her husband in DRC. Puteri complained that Molly has neglected her own children, leaving them to the care of her mother-in-law while she got herself involved with other men. She is too caught up with her own problems to be able to render help to Puteri. She does not supervise Puteri's children even if she is free.

• Cultural background perspective

☞ Puteri can be seen as being very special (others may consider her deviant) in terms of her cultural background. Her 'marriage' is nothing like the usual. As a Muslim, she got involved with a married Catholic man who was 23 years her senior. Being a Catholic, Jackson was unable to divorce his first wife and so Jackson and Puteri's 'marriage' was never legally solemnised. As the children were all born out of wedlock, they were all registered as 'children of Abdullah'. They were brought up the Muslim way. Defacto, Jackson had left his wife some 17 years ago and considered Puteri and the children as his family. At Jackson's funeral (conducted according to Catholic rituals), Puteri and her children were acknowledged as his next-of-kin.

☞ Generally non-conforming, Puteri may be feeling the stress of being judged or criticised by her family and the community at large.

• Client's background perspective

☞ The school is a constant source of stress that seems to tear Puteri and Samsudin apart.

☞ Running away from school and immersing himself in fun is perhaps Samsudin's way of coping with sadness. He did not attend his father's funeral, choosing instead to play football with his friends. He may be running away from pain. He had said that coming to NC and playing around with his friends made him happy whereas school brought him sadness.

☞ Samsudin is trapped in a dilemma -- he is not enjoying his school experience, yet he does not want to choose the easy way out by quitting school.

☞ Most of his friends at NC are drop-outs from school, it is perhaps peer influence that encourages him to truant from school.

☞ Jackson's death seems to have impacted Puteri in no small way. She may be struggling with intra-personal issues such as loneliness, sadness, a sense of helplessness and incompetence. As a coping strategy, she took on a second job to numb herself from the problems. In her own words, "I am fed-up with the problems, work easier to pass time".

Socio-economic background perspective

☞ The family was quite comfortable with two income-earners when Jackson was able to work. With his death, Puteri is the sole breadwinner and poverty can become a family stressor. Puteri does not like to see her children deprived compared to other children simply because they are fatherless. She tries her best to make sure that her children are materially-comfortable.

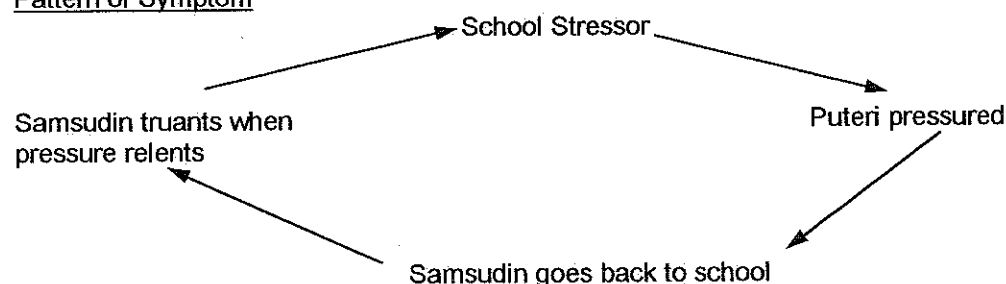
The function of the problem/symptom in the family

- Focusing on Samsudin's truancy problem helps Puteri to divert attention from her intra-personal struggles and her grief over the loss of Jackson.

What maintains the problem/symptom

- Family members are struggling with intra-personal issues each on their own. They are unable to communicate feelings and thoughts with each other. Puteri is seeking for support whilst Samsudin is seeking for understanding but they are not able to meet each other halfway.
- Complaints from the school act as an occasional stressor to the family, nudging them out of their indifference towards the problem.

Pattern of Symptom



The social worker's observations of consequences of the problem

- Mother-son relationship will take a turn for the worse. Family members may lead separate and non-connected lives.
- Family members are not sources of support and comfort for each other.

Reappearance of Symptoms
(act as stressor)



Persistent Failures



Sense of Helplessness



Give up on working through the difficulties



Family members drift further apart

Intake Interview
Thursday, 30 November 95, 8.30 p.m. - 9.30 p.m.
Let's Get to the Way We Were

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Earlier in the day, the children accompanied Bee Leng and Gerard to check out the St Patrick's living quarters. The trip was for both practical and therapeutic reasons. A lego table, carpet, television, flower vases, cushions and some other furniture were brought to the partially furnished quarters in an attempt to create a homely feel. Except for the lego table that the staff thought would help keep the younger children occupied, the rest of the furniture chosen was similar to what the family had at home. Their home was decorated with flowers and they enjoyed lounging on a carpeted floor strewn with cushions.

For the children, the staff team intended the following reasons:

- i. To familiarise them with the 'therapy room' so as to minimise settling in difficulties;
- ii. To help them assume joint responsibility for the live-in experience through the preparation;

and for the staff team, the trip created the opportunity to observe the dynamics between the children.

Goal

- i. To reach mutually agreed objectives for the live-in.

Post-Session Findings

The goals of the live-in were defined as such:

- i. to help Puteri understand her children and the unhappy family situation better and
- ii. to help family members become closer i.e. talk to each other more.

Process Recording

Bee Leng began by informing Puteri that the session was a chance to meet the rest of the staff who will be helping out with the live-in. Mild discomfort filled the room as the younger children sunk into their cushioned chairs obediently. Puteri had Camellia and Dahlia on her left and Dawood and Samsudin on her right. Mom had her children around her and together, they formed a semi-circle facing the staff who made the other half of the circle.

To break the awkwardness, Bee Leng suggested that the children introduce themselves. She started by pointing at Samsudin and instructed him that he could point at someone else when he had finished. The little game helped.

Gerard continued by describing to Puteri his experience with her children earlier in the afternoon. He found the children very co-operative and helpful and commented that Mom must have taught them well. The task of defining the purpose of the live-in followed. Dawood, Dahlia and Camellia cited ball games, cycling, barbecues and going to the beach with Mum. Defining the purpose raised excitement but also apprehension. The children knew that the live-in or camp as in their speech, was not simply about having fun and none of the children knew it better than Samsudin. He shrugged his shoulders, said he was not sure and cautiously waited for the situation to unfold.

The responsibility then felled on Puteri. With a little coaxing from Gerard, she addressed Samsudin in Malay. She said the camp would be a chance for Samsudin to raise problems that he had. Samsudin nodded. 'So what did your mom tell you? You know we can't understand Malay. No need to pai-say (be shy) lah!' Bee Leng teased Samsudin. Samsudin smiled as he remained deep in thought. Then Puteri spoke. She related her disappointment and confusion about her children. They play truant and she has to face the authorities at school. Also, Samsudin stays out late and sometimes does not return home for days. This causes much anxiety. On top of this, her relatives blame her children's misbehaviour on the lack of motherly care.

The exchange between Puteri and Gerard then focused on her expectations. She began by wanting assurance that Samsudin could take care of himself when he does not return home. When asked how she could be assured, she related how Samsudin used to show responsibility by helping out with the housework. Now, he does not appear to care and walks out of the house whenever he pleases without notice. While speaking, Puteri was gathering her thoughts and finally agreed with Gerard when he summed up what transpired, 'Maybe we will not solve anything but this camp is to try and understand why this family is no longer close.' Gerard turned to Samsudin for his expectations 'This

camping is for the family to come together closer like last time.....last time before father passed away. Is this your view? ' Samsudin mumbled something about wanting whatever Mum wanted and Gerard joked that in that case, he should be staying at home as it was obvious Mum wanted him there. The intention was to pressure Samsudin to think through the matter.

Puteri continued reflecting and wondered if she has failed as a mother. She blamed herself for not cooking during weekends and expressed doubt over Samsudin's co-operation. Gerard responded by noting that Samsudin could have chosen not to attend the session but his presence meant that he did share the family's concern.

The next few exchanges centred around Samsudin's activities at the Centre. Puteri half answered the question she asked and appeared to have some understanding of how Samsudin spends his leisure time. Finally, based on the exchanges Gerard put it to Puteri that the camp had two purposes:

- i. to understand her children and the unhappy family situation better and
- ii. to become closer i.e. talk to each other more.

When Puteri nodded in agreement, Gerard turned to Samsudin and asked him to rate on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being very close, the current closeness he experienced with his mother. Samsudin pondered as we posed the same question to the rest. Generally, the other children claimed to be very close to Mum and in relation to Samsudin, Puteri marked 7. Finally Samsudin offered 3 as the current state of the relationship and 9 to describe the past.

Based on the ratings, Samsudin agreed that he would probably have to work harder than his mother as his perception of the emotional distance was worse than his mother. The ratings were of course arbitrary but it was heartening to see Samsudin use it to articulate his commitment to the live-in.

The issues were clearer after the scaling exercise and the energy in the room was upbeat. Gerard asked Puteri if she thought her sister and mother who were currently living with her should be invited to the live-in. She did not think so and felt that it was basically a matter between her and her children. The last few minutes dealt with the practicalities and the amount of allowance that the family will receive.

The Initial Live-in Assessment

Wednesday, 6 December 1995, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 pm

Getting Started

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

Family functioning may be hindered by the breakdown in structures and organisation resulting from their reported conflicts.

Goal

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

Summary of the Session

The visit to the market, the welcome meal and the settling in tasks were used as informal opportunities to observe the family dynamics. Staff also reminded the family of the objectives of the camp by making a pictorial relationship distance scale on a white board.

Post-Session Findings

Everyone in the family appeared to know what was expected of them. The children helped out in little ways while the mother was busy in the kitchen. The lines of authority were clear and the family was capable of maintaining an organised structure. This strength could be highlighted and developed upon as therapy progresses.

Process Recording

*U*pon reaching St. Pat's, Samsudin and his siblings went about organising the place with much ease. Puteri did not feel the need to give any instructions except calling on them once or twice to bring some things into the kitchen. The kitchen was her domain and she appeared very much at home.

Within minutes, everyone was ready to leave for the market. Puteri was passed the allowance and the staff suggested that Samsudin showed his mother the way as he and his siblings had visited the place a week ago. At the market, Samsudin helped the staff pick out some flowers while his mother

shopped for groceries with his siblings. He chatted with the staff in a soft spoken manner as expected of a well-mannered son in an Asian family demonstrating respect for guests and making his mother proud. His disposition was certainly different from the boisterous and mischievous young man the staff were accustomed to.

The family met up at the food stalls and Samsudin organised his siblings as Puteri had to pick up a few more things. It was an unceremonious welcome lunch. The younger children could not decide what to eat and when they finally ordered had difficulty finishing their food. Samsudin chided them occasionally as expected of him while Puteri observed him, making sure he was not too harsh.

When they returned to the apartment, Puteri proceeded to the kitchen. The staff gathered everyone else and got them to draw the family on the white board. They started by asking them to draw their mother. Camellia volunteered for the task and after she was done, they got the rest to draw themselves on the left of their mother. Connecting them to their mother with a line, they created a pictorial relationship distance scale. Finally, they reminded everyone especially Samsudin of how they felt about their relationship with their mother during the intake interview. Samsudin understood what the pictures were all about and placed his mark on the scale.

When the exercise was over, Gerard asked them if they wanted to put up some tents on the grass below. The idea appealed and the children left with him for the activity.

**Father's Funeral -
Samsudin Seeks Understanding**
Wednesday, 6 December, 1995, 2.00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Rebecca
- Juliana

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

The existing strain between Samsudin and Puteri is affected by the underlying grief the family experiences over Jackson's death. Family members have learnt to cope in different ways but have yet the opportunity to openly grieve together. Thus, although everyone shared a common pain over Jackson's death, their coping methods have stressed their relationships and have drawn them apart.

Goals

- To help family members explore the impact of Jackson's death on them.
- To create a channel of communication between Puteri and Samsudin

Summary of the Session

The session centred around the tension and conflict between Puteri and Samsudin. Puteri voiced her displeasure and frustrations while Samsudin presented his side of the story. Through the exchange it was established that they and the rest of the family shared much pain over Jackson's demise. This realisation helped open a channel of communication between Puteri and Samsudin enabling them to hear each other out. This was an experience they have not had since Jackson's death.

Post-Session Findings

Both Samsudin and Puteri were earnestly trying to heal their rift. The underlying grieving issue is apparent but has yet to surface completely. The family felt more at ease dealing with their conflicts rather than their pain over Jackson's death.

Process Recording

This morning I noticed your children were very well organised and co-operative. Even you appeared very relaxed and the family appeared to be getting along. So I was wondering if it was like that before father passed away?' The question put Puteri in a contemplative mood. She nodded silently, kept her arms around Dawood who was half leaning into her and gazed at Anna. 'Is there any difference before and after father died?' Gerard added to Anna's opening question. Puteri was unsure. She said no and then replied that the children were more co-operative after their father's death.

As the therapists sought clarification, Puteri explained that perhaps the children now realise that they have no father and need to take responsibility. The same question was then posed to the children. Dahlia claimed that she was more helpful to Mummy before the father died but Puteri brushed aside her claim by commenting on her laziness. Samsudin's answer was similar to his sister. He explained that the children used to clean the house when his father was around. Gerard verified this with Puteri and learnt that Samsudin was actually in-charge when both parents went to work.

Puteri down played Samsudin's position in the family and continued to express her frustration over his current indifference to the family. Gerard then asked Samsudin if he no longer cleaned the house because he had to attend to friends waiting for him. Samsudin shook his head and when pressed said that he lacked the confidence to do the housework. Gerard focused on the word 'confidence' and urged Samsudin to express himself in Malay when Puteri could make no sense of what he was saying.

Then Samsudin explained himself in Malay. He said that he did not have the 'semangat'(family spirit/commitment) to work. Immediately, Puteri quipped that Samsudin had 'semangat' to eat. She continued by blaming his friends and his late night activities adding that her late husband would not have put up with Samsudin's current behaviour or friends. Puteri's opinion was that Samsudin is misbehaving because he no longer has his father to fear.

Samsudin only agreed partially. He admitted to the late nights but disagreed that he stayed home previously only because he feared his father. Jackson was then discussed and it was established that while he was the disciplinarian, the children found him very loving too. Using the information, the therapists re-focused on the impact of Jackson's death by asking Puteri to describe Samsudin's behaviour before and after her spouse's death. Puteri observed that Samsudin is more quiet and appears embarrassed to ask her for money. Samsudin did not offer any observation when asked to comment on his mother.

Samsudin's reluctance to offer information was then interpreted as respect by the therapists. Gerard told Puteri that so far, he has observed Samsudin to be willing to state his disagreements but always stopping short of commenting on his mother. He added that it appears Samsudin wants to share his side of the story but is moving at a cautious and respectful pace.

Puteri held back momentarily as Gerard asked Samsudin if he was sad over his father's death. However, Puteri met Samsudin's affirmative reply with mock incredulity. She went on lamenting about Samsudin's absence at his father's funeral. The issue touched a raw nerve in both of them. The exchange that followed revealed Samsudin did attend the funeral but arrived late as he misunderstood the 2.00 p.m. cremation time to be the time the casket would leave the church. He

also clarified that he was at school returning his report book and not on the football field as his mother believed on the day of the funeral.

Despite the explanation, Puteri sought further reassurance that her son was not indifferent to his father. She questioned Samsudin on his failure to visit him in hospital. This time Samsudin explained that family members told him father was well and would be returning home. At this point, the staff shared their observation that Samsudin was troubled by his father's illness but handled his sadness by believing father was fine and behaving as normally as possible. Keeping cool and appearing untroubled was the best way he knew how to handle his worries. Not convinced, Puteri said 'After what he did he will suffer forever.' Samsudin accepted his mother's statement stoically. 'Forever means it will never end. Who must give you permission not to suffer?' Gerard asked but characteristically Samsudin kept quiet.

'Who is most sad?' a response was sought from the children. 'Mummy and me' Camellia offered explaining that they cried a lot. It was beginning to sound as though Samsudin was the least sad until he acclaimed that he was the saddest person in the family. The acclamation caught Puteri's attention. Trying to make sense for herself, she responded with examples of how Samsudin's would keep quiet, look disinterested and leave the house while everyone else was crying. Upon probing, Samsudin revealed that he left the house so as to forget his pain. Enjoying himself with his friends seemed to make things better.

The atmosphere in the room lightened. Puteri seemed to identify with what Samsudin was saying. She acknowledged that staying alone at home was depressing and she would rather work. Often, she could feel her husband's presence and this caused her much pain. Puteri was more relaxed and as she talked, Samsudin listened intently. At this point, the staff discovered that it was exactly six months since Jackson's death. They were struck by the discovery and pointed out that they were conducting therapy on the date of Jackson's death. In response, Puteri fondly recalled how the family used to sit around just like they were doing now when Jackson was alive. She told us how much the family would enjoy her cooking and how she and Jackson enjoyed their children's company. For her, those were happy times.

The staff summed up by reiterating that everyone was indeed affected by Jackson's death but felt that perhaps Samsudin is currently hurting the most because 'he feels that he must suffer forever.' They added that they were not sure why he is willing to suffer forever but they hoped that he and everyone else in the family will find a way to ease their pain.

The Family Grieves

Wednesday, 6 December 1995, 8.00 p.m. - 9.30 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

The family perceives Samsudin as being indifferent to Jackson's death. The rift between Samsudin and the rest of the family could be bridged if a sense of 'connectedness' regarding Jackson's death can be facilitated.

Goals

- To facilitate a family response to Samsudin's grief.
- To help the family experience a sense of 'connectedness' over Jackson's death.

Summary of the Session

It was basically a grieving session for the family. The children's keen grasp of the family situation and their openness mutually encouraged family members to share their grief openly. The sharing drew family members closer and the family was relieved of the need to blame Samsudin for not attending his father's funeral.

Post-Session Findings

- Puteri expects Samsudin to assume adult responsibilities in the household. Samsudin may not comply with her expectations and this may become a source of conflict for their relationship.
- Despite the presenting conflicts, Puteri has been comfortable enough to share her concerns with Samsudin after Jackson's demise. As Puteri is able to confide in Samsudin, she does not feel too emotionally distant from him.
- The children, especially Dawood and Camellia had much difficulty articulating, understanding or acknowledging the emotional turmoil they were experiencing. There is a need to validate their grief as a natural phenomenon.

Process Recording

*A*t the previous session Puteri and her children switched to Malay whenever they spoke to each other. It was obvious they were more comfortable with Malay. Thus, to ensure the family understood their message exactly, the staff started the session in Malay.

'So far, we understand that the whole family is very sad over the death of Jackson. We also understand that Samsudin is the saddest. He is the saddest because he missed his father's funeral and he did not see his father for the last time. For him it is very painful and very hard. It is very hard because family members seem to think that he is not sad and that he was quite happy to miss the funeral.' As Anna paced her words, everyone looked at her silently concentrating on what was being said.

'Samsudin is sad because nobody believes him and so it is easier to leave the house. Maybe he is angry with everyone for not believing him but also loves everyone and does not want to argue with them. So for him, the best solution is to play or leave the house. This solution is very similar to mother's solution of going to work everyday. But now we know while this solution is good for mother and Samsudin, it is confusing for everyone in the family. The whole family observes that Samsudin and mother are no longer as close as before.' Anna paused allowing time for the family to digest. 'But we are very sure that while the whole family is aware of the situation, they may not know what to do.' Thus, ended Anna's painting of the family scenario.

The family looked at the staff knowingly and it felt as though everyone was finally on the same frequency. 'Now we think it is important for the family to hear the sadness and pain of Dawood, Dahlia and Camellia.' Looking at Dawood, Anna continued 'Do you think your brother is sad over your father's death?' Dawood met her glance momentarily and as his eyes began to tear, he looked down without reply. Dawood's silence seemed to resonate to the rest of the family. 'I am very sad but I want to keep quiet' Dahlia was clear and concise as she stood her ground.

Camellia was more vocal. Speaking in a child-like halting manner, she said she was very sad at the funeral and is still sad. Also she did not think that Samsudin was sad because unlike everyone else, he did not cry. Camellia was a keen observer and described how Dawood kept nudging her father's corpse to wake up. She also told us about her grandmother's grief and it became clear to the therapists that in her mind, everyone except Samsudin had in some way demonstrated sadness. As for her, she reportedly cried a little at the funeral but cried a lot when she went home. When Camellia finished, Samsudin signalled her to share his seat. She moved towards him hesitantly and when she was at arm's length, turned and moved away from everyone. Puteri sat still enraptured by

the observations of her youngest child. It must have struck her that her children had a grasp of the happenings in the family. She was all ears when Anna asked Dahlia to tell everyone the situation at the hospital on the day Jackson died. As Dahlia insisted that she did not want to talk, Puteri started tearing quietly.

'When you hear your children speak, what are you thinking?' Puteri responded by telling the therapists about the drawings Dahlia had done at home. In Dahlia's drawings, Mum is always sad and Dad is always in hospital. The drawings do change but somehow they are always about Dad. Puteri offered information flowingly as if every word she spoke relieved an iota of pain within her.

'I know my children have been having dreams about Jackson, they told me.' Dahlia gave her mother a quizzical look as she heard this. It was learnt that Dahlia often dreams of her father taking her and the rest of the family out('jalan-jalan'). Also, Dahlia reported that her father often spoke to her in her dreams but she could not recall the topics. From Camellia who had rejoined the group, it was heard that Jackson always played with her in her dreams. Both Camellia and Dahlia were familiar with each other's dreams and it was obvious they had spoken about it at length before.

Puteri then turned to Samsudin and enquired if he too had dreams about his father. 'Yes. Father gave me a telephone call and asked me where I was. I replied Bukit Ho Swee and that was all.' Then, Dawood joined in and contributed that Jackson took him shopping at Marina Square. At this point, Camellia poignantly summed up the general feeling among the siblings 'Everyday same, I sleep, I dream, wake up, sleep again.' Camellia was describing how everyone was feeling stuck in the deep grief they were experiencing.

'Sometimes I dream too' Puteri confided. 'Father(Jackson) seems to be visiting us because things are not in order. The children and I have promised him to make things well and I suppose when the promise is fulfilled, Jackson will rest in peace.' Puteri continued by explaining that as Jackson would be very concerned with the children's well-being, she was constantly scolding them. She was confident that the children, especially Samsudin understood her predicament. As such, Samsudin can help fulfil the promise by assuming his role as the man of the house. Puteri also expressed that she was bearing with the difficulties and only cried a little when terribly frustrated.

'Do your children know why you cry?' asked Anna. 'Only Samsudin really knows. He knows that I have promised not to remarry and to take good care of the children. Every time I look at our photographs, there is sadness. So, I like to work, at least I forget.' Puteri also added that she suspected her children were not pleased with her long working hours. She was right. Dahlia rubbed her eyes and pleaded 'stay at home' when Anna asked her to comment on Puteri's working hours. Her siblings too echoed similar sentiments.

Then Puteri added to the complexity of her situation. She said that the children always compared her with her husband. When Jackson was alive, she did not agree with some of the ways he treated the children but simply trusted his judgement to maintain harmony. Now, she has even been advised by Jackson's younger sister to recall how Jackson would have handled a particular situation if she was stuck.

The goals of the session had been achieved and the staff did not want to pursue the new issue of child management. So they wrapped up as such. 'You are trying to follow father's way of controlling the children.' Puteri nodded. 'Are the children happy with you?' 'Happy also lah!' Puteri replied without thinking for too long.

Jack Will be Remembered and The Family Moves On

Thursday, 7 December, 1995, 2.00 p.m. - 3.00 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

The family is experiencing a tension they are unable to deal with. Relatives and friends urge them to forget Jackson and get on with their lives. This advice is confusing and discomforting because forgetting Jackson would mean being disloyal to him. Also, Jackson is very much 'alive' as they feel his lingering presence. Thus, unable to accept the advice at an emotional level, the family acquires a resistance toward it. The family's current experience needs to be affirmed before they can acquire a readiness to explore other experiences.

Goals

- To explore the family's belief system regarding Jackson's presence in their lives.
- To facilitate the family's decision making processes based on their beliefs.

Summary Session

The staff began by developing the 'hairan'(strange) theme. The family's linkage to Catholicism was highlighted to acknowledge Jackson's presence. They noted that Jackson's presence was omnipresent and it was quite unnatural to ignore it by trying to forget him altogether.

Then they explored Jackson's hopes for the family and discovered that he had hoped for family peace and closeness. As such they focused on how the family could fulfil Jackson's hopes. This led to a negotiation between Samsudin and Puteri regarding the times he should stay at home. With mother and son speaking directly to each other, the atmosphere became hopeful and Puteri did not take up the issue of truancy when it was raised. She expressed hopefulness and confidence that it would not be a problem in the new year.

The staff ended the session by directing the family to spent their remaining time at the live-in in a manner that Jackson would appreciate adding that they were confident the family would know how.

Post-Session Findings

The family became a lot more comfortable making decisions when Jackson was included in the decision-making process. It showed that a person need not be physically around to influence family dynamics.

Process Recording

We were supposed to go to Changi but the flats were booked out so we got this place. At first, Bee Leng and I thought you may not want to come because this is a Christian or rather a Catholic place but you said no problem - jalan(let's go).' Puteri looked intently at Gerard wondering what he was driving at. 'Bee Leng and I also found it hairan(strange) that although you are Muslim you have a strong connection with Catholics. This is a Catholic place and even Bee Leng, Anna and myself are Catholic. For us it's hairan but what would you say?'

'Nothing - I don't think anything. I also go to church' Puteri obliged hesitantly. 'Father(Jackson) was also a Catholic. Somehow or other there is still a connection. He is not here but yet he is. Everything is happening in such a way that we cannot forget the man. Even at this place some things remind you of him.' The family appeared in thought as Gerard continued. Urging them to ponder further, Gerard intermittently asked 'Is it necessary to forget? Do you think people say you must forget? Can you forget? Cannot right?'

Turning to the children, Gerard asked if they must forget their father. They responded with confusion alternating between yes and no answers. Leaving them to mull over the matter, he turned to Puteri and said 'You had a very happy marriage so it is only right for you to remember your husband. This is sometimes sad because you miss him but do not forget the good times.' There was a look of relief on Puteri's face. It was the first time since Jackson's death that someone actually did not ask her to forget him.

'What do you think your father hopes?' Samsudin, Dawood and Dahlia remained silent as Gerard looked at them inviting their response. When his gaze caught Camellia, she started hopping toward him making a 'twoink,twoink' sound for effect. Everyone simply watched bewildered until Samsudin shouted 'Not that hop bodoh (silly)! Hope! Hope!' Hearty laughter followed and as the laughter died, everyone was smiling comfortably at each other as though a bond had been strengthened.

'I think he wants us to be happy. When I brought the children to visit the columbarium I couldn't help feeling Jackson was happy. I knew he was very pleased to see all his children there.' In Malay, Anna repeated the question 'What do you think Jackson hopes for the future?' Puteri responded but not directly to the question. She simply continued thinking aloud 'I am scared the children will run wild and Jackson will be very sad. He is already cremated but he is still very much alive in the family.'

At this point, Anna updated Gerard on what was being said in Malay. It was also a chance for Puteri to gather her thoughts. Deciding to build on Jackson's hope for happiness, Gerard asked 'What would be happiness for you Puteri? What would make you happy?' Puteri replied 'When all my children follow what their father wants and not do things that will make him sick' In the same breath she continued 'If the children make trouble again, I will not call them my own. Jackson does not want the children to be beaten or scolded. He never scolds them. Samsudin always goes home late. He is not properly behaved.' Without doubt Puteri had much to say, so much that the content of the question was irrelevant. Puteri's sentiments were mixed, she missed Jackson badly in more ways than one. She missed the loving husband and father but at this point she missed the peace the family had when he was alive. Jackson is a tough act to follow and she is frustrated with inheriting his goodness. Maybe she blames him for making her feel like an incompetent parent but then how could she; she loves him and always will.

Anna tried again to focus 'Are you saying you are unhappy about Jackson ?' Puteri was not done and needed to finish her story 'Jackson wants us not to fight each other. Every time there is a fight, Jackson always leaves for work angry. He does not like it and worries. But when Jackson is not working, there is peace at home. Everybody listens and all is well. The children like to play with him when he is not working.'

'I seem to hear that the family wants to come together but everyone is staying apart' Gerard offered. 'Samsudin leaves the house in the morning and comes back late at night. Sunday, when I stay home no one's around.' Urged by the therapist, Samsudin explained to his mother he was occupied with Lion Dance training on weekdays and Kompang (Malay drums) training on Sundays. Puteri was pleased Samsudin spoke to her. Trying to keep mother and son talking, Gerard sought clarification 'Do you want Samsudin at home or do you just want to know where he goes?' Puteri offered much understanding and said that it was unfair to keep a young man locked at home.

'Samsudin must care' Puteri added. 'How can Samsudin show you that he cares?' Slowly, we were tuning into Puteri's concerns; she was beginning to respond to our questions directly 'At least, he must look after his brother and sisters when I am at work. When I tell him I go to work, he looks like he doesn't believe.'

'You accept that Samsudin needs to go out but you also need to know where. Sometimes, you need him to stay at home.' Puteri nodded and Gerard threw the ball into Samsudin's court. '2 to 3 days I stay at home; Monday, Tuesday and Friday.' Samsudin proposed. 'Tell mom why you need to go out the other days' Gerard urged Samsudin. Samsudin then kept Puteri abreast of the Lion Dance drumming competition he was training for and his busy training schedule.

'This type of thing never mind. I am scared he carries drugs without knowing' Puteri's concern was greeted with Samsudin's spontaneous response 'I am not so stupid. I will open all packages and if it is chewing gum I'll take, if not I'll run.' Puteri appeared to enjoy her son's sense of humour as she feigned disgust at his brashness.

The tension between mother and son appeared to ease as both of them reassured the therapists that school in the following year would not be an issue. Samsudin will be in the morning session and Puteri was confident she could watch over him. Mother and son were on a high and the everyone in the family felt a sense of celebration within. Hence, speaking about problems seemed inappropriate. So the therapists closed the session by openly sharing their thoughts in front of the family.

'For the first time in 2 days, I see the family talking to each other. I suppose they understand what Jackson expects of them. From what we heard before the session, Samsudin tells mother that he is very happy with the food she has cooked. Mother too, is happy to cook. If they are happy, I suppose Jackson would be happy. We should leave them alone to choose how they want to be happy. They would know how.'

Life After FLC - The Family Hopes
Friday, 8 December 1995, 10.00 a.m. - 10.30 a.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

The live-in experience has turned out reasonably positive for the family and they may be having unrealistic expectations for the future. While it is important and satisfying to end positively, it is also important to end realistically. This will prepare the family to deal with future problems and to discourage complacency.

Goals

- i. To help the family gain a realistic perspective toward their problems.
- ii. To congratulate the family on their success and to compliment their effort and resilience.

Summary Session

It was a short session to evaluate the impact of the live-in for the family. The family was in high spirits and the tension between Puteri and Samsudin evident on Day 1 was absent. They spoke of the peace and family togetherness that evolved during the live-in and were optimistic about family relationships. They were confident that they were over their problems.

The therapists ended the session with a paradoxical message. They complimented the family for their optimism but at the same time predicted problems with Samsudin's schooling the following year.

Post-Session Findings

- i. The live-in had enabled Puteri to regain authority and inherent resourcefulness. She displayed composure when interacting with her children and did not seem to be burdened by other pre-occupations.

Family members appeared more affectionate towards each other and a sense of family togetherness and identity seems to have been restored. On the white board, the children put the phrase 'Family - Love & Concern' and below that 'Our family will go home after lunch.' Perhaps, it has been a while since the children looked forward to being at home.

Process Recording

*I*t was after breakfast and the place was bustling with the children's energy. They were playfully entertaining the staff with their antics and jibes at each other when Puteri called for order. It was time for the 'meeting' and the children took their places around the dining table. This morning the meeting place was different, the previous sessions were at the lounge area, perhaps the family was feeling different.

Puteri with 2 children on each side of her looked radiant and relaxed. Samsudin seated on her right appeared just as comfortable. 'This morning we want to find out how has the situation been?' In a calm voice, Puteri replied 'For me, happy.' She smiled and the question was put to Dahlia 'What do you like about these few days?' Dahlia after some prompting revealed that she liked the bar-be-que and putting up the tents in the backyard. Then she added 'I don't like talk talk.' She nodded when asked if all the talking made her sad.

Puteri then elaborated as she responded to the question we asked Dahlia, 'We felt like a family over the last 2 days. I was happy, feeling calm, peaceful and family togetherness.' It was beginning to sound like a fairy tale ending but the therapists felt that it was also beneficial for Puteri to be prepared for reality. 'Everything here appears fine but when you go home things may not be so.' Puteri agreed.

The children were being themselves as their mother spoke with the therapists, chattering and sharing giggles. As such when Samsudin was asked if he shared his mother's sentiments, he gave an angelic smile hiding his embarrassment. This gave the therapists the chance to facilitate family interaction 'Puteri, why don't you find out from Samsudin how he felt about the last few days and tell him what we just spoke about.' After Samsudin acknowledged that he was feeling happy about the live-in, Puteri shared her concerns about the future. Samsudin listened without responding but with understanding.

Quite naturally, Puteri moved on to Dawood 'Do you like this place, Dawood?' Dawood offered 'Yes' but was unable to articulate further. His shoulders sunk in and his eyes looked away as though he was in the classroom trying to ward off a question the teacher had posed. Anna helped 'I heard Dawood telling his mother that he did not miss his friends here and the family was very important.' Dawood nodded modestly as Gerard clarified Anna's statement with him. He was pleased he impressed Gerard and the rest.

Gerard then asked Dahlia if she was happy too. Dahlia did not reply and actually pouted. Suddenly, it struck Gerard how close and important Puteri was to her children. 'I see you don't want to answer because you want mummy to ask you just like she's asking everyone else!' Eventually Puteri got to her daughters and they too expressed happiness.

'From what I see Puteri, you look very comfortable with your children. They all want to talk to you and I see they feel very close to you.' Puteri did a great job collecting her children's opinions. She made the therapists' job easier and she was glad they noticed. It was time to close 'We hear from everyone that they are very happy and we are happy too. One more thing, yesterday you said that next year, no problem. It is good to hope but we think there will be problems with school. It is good to be hopeful but we should also be prepared.' Puteri nodded.

Post-session

As the session ended, the children made plans to visit the airport later. About an hour later, lunch was served. Just before starting on the food, Gerard drew the family's attention to the scale on the board. He briefly reminded them of the pre-live in scaling of family relationships and asked them to update the scale. Samsudin was first up, went to the board and marked a score of 7 from 3. A round of applause followed from everyone but Puteri looked a little dazed. Perhaps she was hoping for more. The other children wanted their turn and they all marked 10. Finally, after much thought Puteri marked a 9.9 on the scale; a jump from 7. The therapy team congratulated the family for their hard work and success and presented them with a cake for the celebration.

We Have Problems But We Have Family
Wednesday, 10 January 1996, 8.00 p.m. - 8.30 p.m.

Synopsis

Family

- Puteri
- Samsudin
- Dawood
- Dahlia
- Camellia

Staff

- Anna
- Bee Leng
- Gerard
- Juliana
- Rebecca

Pre-Session Information

Hypotheses

The positive effect of the live-in would have worn off and the family could be having difficulties dealing with the realities of daily living.

Goals

- i. To review the impact of the live-in.
- ii. To explore the possibility of a 2nd live-in.

Summary of the Session

A large part of the session was devoted to Puteri's updating of family happenings since the live-in. Although phrased as complaints, Puteri made it quite clear that she did not need any further intervention on the part of the staff team.

Post-Session Findings

- i. Samsudin's poor school performance was a source of tension for Puteri because of the interference and pressure from school authorities and relatives. Schooling itself was not an issue and Puteri would have accepted Samsudin leaving school. Thus, the session affirmed that the family participated in the live-in because they had difficulty dealing with Jackson's death. The tension between Puteri and Samsudin was the result of the lack of understanding and misconceptions they had of each other over Jackson's death. Thus, having had that addressed, the family did not feel the need for further therapy.
- ii. This is a case where the family was unable to clearly articulate what was troubling them. Instead they were able to identify problematic behaviours to draw attention to the problem e.g. Samsudin's late nights and truancy. These behaviours, although still present has become less troubling in the light of improved family relationships. Thus, constant redefinition of the problems and the family's intentions are important.

Process Recording

*P*uteri smiled contentedly as she reported that all was well since the live-in. She sat back comfortably and Gerard decided to speak with the children. The children smiled and nodded bashfully and the closest Gerard came to a direct answer was when Samsudin said 'I don't know. Only Mummy knows.'

Thoughtfully, Puteri elaborated 'Okay, very happy. We are more together now.' Samsudin nodded in agreement when Gerard asked him to confirm his mother's observations. Anna then decided to reconfirm the situation by asking everyone in Malay if they actually understood what Gerard was asking. Immediately the children reassured her.

'The children are okay. Sometimes they are naughty and they use bad words.' In a timely fashion, she emphasised her point by telling Dawood and Samsudin to stop fooling around with each other and listen up as it was meeting time. Puteri went on to lament about Samsudin's indecisiveness about school. Although time and again he would reassure her of his intent to stay in school, his attendance was far from regular.

Gerard then enquired if school was an issue the family would like to address at a subsequent live-in. Politely but clearly, Puteri declined. However, Puteri continued telling the therapists about her frustrations. She was disturbed by the frequent calls and visits from the school authorities and criticism from relatives about Samsudin's school performance. She was also disappointed with Samsudin's lethargy whenever he followed her to work as a cleaner.

As Puteri spoke it became evident that she was not really complaining but rather keeping everyone up to date with the family. The tone of voice was soft and occasionally there was a twinkle in her eyes as she commented on Samsudin. Despite all that was happening, she gave the impression that everything was under control and there was no need for further therapy. Thus, the therapists thanked the family for participating in the programme and presented a video tape highlighting the lighter moments of the live-in.