

Goal is to see parents stress-free, says SMU graduate

She says that they have supported her tremendously despite financial challenges

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Education Correspondent

While growing up in a Pasir Ris condominium as a child, Ms Farah Abdul Malik had few worries.

Her father was a chief steward with United Airlines and her mother worked as a secretary at an electronics firm.

However, the Sept 11 attacks in the United States in 2001, and the recession that ensued, changed all that.

Her father lost his job, and while her mother continued working as a Tupperware distributor, the business went south after a few years.

They eventually sold their home and had to move in with a relative where a four-month stay turned out to be a four-year wait for their own place.

Today, the 24-year-old is graduating from the Singapore Management University (SMU) with a Bachelor of Social Sciences with majors in psychology and marketing.

She is currently enrolled in a two-year fast-track Master of Philosophy in Psychology programme at SMU.

Together with her brother, she started a social enterprise in 2014, tapping a pool of about 300 under-



Singapore Management University graduate Farah Abdul Malik with her parents, Madam Fatimah Alwi and Mr Abdul Malik Rahman Shah. Ms Farah is currently enrolled in a two-year fast-track Master of Philosophy in Psychology programme at the university. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

PARENTAL PROTECTION

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MS FARAH ABDUL MALIK, on moving in with a relative where a four-month stay turned out to be a four-year wait for the family's own place.

graduate tutors to help students secure more affordable tuition.

Ms Farah, who spoke to The Straits Times yesterday, said her parents have supported her tremendously despite the challenges.

"They sheltered me and my brother from what they were going through. What affected me the most was when we actually had to move out of our home," she said.

While they studied, Ms Farah's parents took up jobs and side gigs - from baking and working at restaurants to selling insurance and conducting temperature screening at the airport.

Ms Farah also gave tuition to sup-

port herself, and her brother worked as a barista while studying in university.

She remembers an incident in Secondary 4 when she decided not to buy a chemistry 10-year-series for \$8.

"I knew I needed it but I didn't want to burden my parents further... It turned out I was the only student in class who didn't get it, and my teacher spoke to me and gave me her copy. She told me that my job as a student was to study as much as I could, and to let the adults handle the adult problems."

Her grades shot up from an LIRS (English and five relevant subjects)

of 30 points in the first term, to an LIRS of six points, graduating as one of Tanjong Katong Girls' School's top O-level students.

Her father Abdul Malik Rahman Shah, 59, who is now with Scoot as a cabin crew supervisor, said: "We grabbed whatever jobs we could find. If I could have gone on more flights to earn more, I would have. And my wife also baked more to get more income."

Her mother, Madam Fatimah Alwi, 58, said it was a tough decision to sell their old home.

"But in a way, it was a blessing in disguise. It made us wiser, and the children were very motivated and

driven to do better."

She retired in February from her retail sales job at the airport, which she held for more than 10 years, although she continues to run a small online business.

The family now owns a four-room flat in Pasir Ris.

Ms Farah, who received financial support from Mendaki which covered about half of her undergraduate fees, said: "We can't afford to spend a lot on things, but we make sure of whatever benefits we have."

"My goal is to see my parents retired and free from stress."

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