

## "I might as well die, all will be over..."

This is the true story of Ben, a boy with physical disability who was given another chance to live and break barriers. By opening up his life to us, Ben hopes his story will inspire others like him to press on, but wishes to retain his privacy. At his request, we are not using his real name.

**Ben was born** with Spina Bifida, a condition that affects his spine, leading to paralysis and lack of sensation in the lower body. At 17, an age when most teenagers are hanging out with their friends in malls, movie theatres and game arcades, Ben uses crutches for mobility and has to wear diapers and do self-cauterization daily.

**When Ben was born**, his mother wanted to throw him out of the window but was stopped by his grandmother. During Ben's growing years, he was totally sidelined, receiving no love, care, monetary support or concern from his parents; it was as good as not being born. His parents eventually divorced and both moved on with their own lives and their new families. His grandmother became his sole caregiver and companion.

**Because of his family background**, Ben was passive and reserved with low self esteem and erratic mood swings. In 2002, his school principal referred him to SPD. Ben was nine then and he hated his life. He told our social worker then that he wished he was dead. SPD quickly enrolled Ben into its Education Programme that gives out financial aid and social support. SPD's social worker provided Ben's grandmother with caregiver support and counseling services. As Ben's needs continued to unfold, SPD engaged a tutor to help with his studies, provided intense family counseling and crisis intervention.



**Ben's grandmother always had to scrimp** to put food on the table. Thankfully, his aunt also came forward to help. Though married with three children of her own, she took up part-time work so that she could support Ben and his grandmother financially. Life was difficult but there was some semblance of normalcy for a while with grandmother as the main motivator and aunt as a friend and confidant. This however, did not last.

**They say bad things come in threes** and this indeed happened to Ben. In August 2009, Ben's stepmother threw him and his grandmother out of the house. Soon after, his elderly grandmother suffered a fall which resulted in spinal cord injuries. She was hospitalised for two months, could no longer walk and

had to use a wheelchair. More recently in October this year, his compassionate aunt had to undergo a major operation to remove a tumour. Though it was benign, she is now unable to continue with the part-time work to provide for Ben and his grandmother. Ben on crutches, grandmother on wheelchair... who should be taking care of whom?

**In the past 18 months during Ben's crises**, our social workers have intervened along every step whenever Ben encountered barriers. When Ben and his grandmother were thrown out of their home, SPD made numerous appeals to help Ben and his grandmother rent a HDB flat. Ben was also temporarily placed in a children's home when his grandmother was in the hospital. SPD continued to provide support linking both grandson and grandmother to kind hearted organisations for financial assistance.

**Currently**, Ben feels settled and is happy that he has a home to return to. Even though his grandmother is in a wheelchair and he on crutches, they find encouragement and joy in the support and love they have for one another. Due to his physical disability and his family circumstances, Ben is behind his peers in school by two years. At 17, he is in secondary three. At this tender age too, Ben has experienced abandonment, desperation, resentment and helplessness. Thankfully, there is now renewed hope.

**With SPD's counseling services and holistic support**, Ben has a direction in life now. He is motivated and chatty which is a far cry from the old Ben whom we met eight years ago who wanted to die. His vice-principal wrote that Ben has never failed to discharge his duty as a student and that he was most impressed with Ben's amiable disposition and his ability to attempt to smile despite his family problems. Ben is determined to complete his education so that he can be independent some day and be able to provide for his grandmother. SPD will continue to support Ben's quest. With the help from the support and donations of kind hearted individuals, SPD will be able to provide uninterrupted programmes for people like Ben who need them.

### Take Action! Make a donation now!

So that Ben can continue to benefit from SPD's works and programme. Currently, SPD is helping close to 3,000 clients benefiting in areas such as rehabilitation, groceries deliveries, education bursaries, day care, IT and vocational training, assistive technology and transport.

**Your support is critical in ensuring that people with physical disabilities receive their chances to break barriers and unlock potentials.**