

The Straits Times, February 26 2012, The Sunday Times

## **“Don’t worry, be happy at this centre”**

Mum’s depression leads woman to set up non-profit ‘wellness clinic’

— Jennani Durai (jennanid@sph.com.sg )

When her mother died last November, Ms Angie Chew Monksfield regretted that she had not done more to make her last days happier.

She vowed then to set up a non-profit centre dedicated to combating depression and helping people become happy — a dream that she has now fulfilled with the setting up of the Brahm Centre, which opens its doors this week.

Ms Monksfield, who is in her 40s, said her mother had been depressed before she died.

“I wish I had kept my mum more engaged with cooking and looking after my kids instead of allocating those tasks to my maid. She felt unneeded subsequently and it affected her mental health, and eventually her physical health,” said the vice-president of a global IT company and mother of two. “Now I feel I need to spread the word.”

The new centre, which is located in the lobby of Ren Ci Hospital in Novena, bills itself as a “wellness clinic”. It is funded by donations from well-wishers and the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation.

It will hold four talks a week and offer free yoga, taiji and meditation classes and counselling.

The talks will centre on the broad theme of increasing people’s happiness, but will also delve into health, financial and social issues, as all these affect happiness, said Ms Monksfield, who is also vice-president of the non-sectarian group, Buddhist Fellowship.

The new centre’s name was inspired by Ms Monksfield’s spiritual teacher, Buddhist monk and writer Ajahn Brahm.

The organisation is modelled on the Women’s Initiative for Ageing Successfully (Wings), which has a three-pronged approach to improving the health, wealth and happiness of women over the age of 40.

Wings president Kanwaljit Soin, a former Nominated Member of Parliament, is a close friend of Ms Monksfield’s and a board member of the Brahm Centre.

Ms Monksfield said she wanted to set up a centre to which men and women of all ages and back-grounds could go if they felt confused or depressed.

“When an individual is happy, he has fewer ailments. Even in pain, you don’t necessarily have to suffer,” she said.

The key is teaching people how to let go of their troubles, as “recycling regrets over and over again in one’s mind is what causes stress, and ultimately depression”, she said.

She said she had also been inspired to set up the centre after feeling alarmed at the rising rates of depression and suicide in Singapore.

The centre will offer free legal counselling, bereavement advice and bedside support.

Ms Monksfield added that the centre’s staff plan to enhance their programmes to include “happiness indicators”: As membership to the centre is free, all who visit it will be encouraged to sign up as members, rate their happiness then, and again after six months of attending the centre’s programmes.

“We’re hoping to help Singapore’s happiness index go up,” she said with a laugh.