

# Helping the physically challenged to return to society

Catholic News features ABLE in this series on Catholic social service organisations.

**Jared Ng**

Isaac Kalaiselvan was a happy family man. He worked in a shipping company and like everyone else he was looking forward to the future.

Then came one day in November 2006, he was struck with multiple health issues. First, he suffered a heart attack then he had to go through a series of subsequent surgeries including a heart transplant and the amputation of his left leg due to an infection. Isaac also needed treatment for renal failure and memory loss.

After more than four months of hospitalisation, Isaac had to stare at the harsh reality of what lay ahead. He could not return to his job as his company had closed down. With his health condition, finding another job was a challenge. How was he going to provide for his young children and family? He even thought of suicide many times.

Thankfully, there was one person who was always there for him. Isaac gushed over the amazing support of his wife as he recalled how she took three months of unpaid leave to care for him. "She gave me encouragement and strength, never made any demands of me. She showed me the way with her steadfast faith in God's grace. By God's grace and my family's strong support, I am back to life again," he said.

So, began Isaac's hunt to secure a home-based job, and in 2013. With referral from the hospital medical social worker, he joined Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations Limited (ABLE) for the physically challenged.

ABLE is a Catholic charity under Caritas Singapore, dedicated to serving the physically challenged.

There, Isaac underwent the Return-to-Work programme. He excelled in the accounting courses and received the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry certification in book keeping.

In July 2015, Isaac went on to work full time for ABLE Social Enterprise Accounting Services (ABLE SEAS), a social enterprise start-up funded by ABLE. "I feel very blessed – this job gives me a sense of independence and keeps my mind and time fruitfully occupied," he said.

While he endeavours to grow and progress in his job,

he continues with his physical conditioning. Isaac goes for his regular rehabilitation sessions at the ABLE Rehabilitation Centre, in Agape Village at 7A Lor 8 Toa Payoh.

Looking back, he said he feels that God has had a plan for him throughout this journey.

Isaac is just one of the many beneficiaries of ABLE's programmes that seek to enable the physically challenged to live with dignity and to have a productive, meaningful and independent life.

ABLE's Return-to-Work (RTW) programme provides rehabilitation, training and employment assistance to the physically challenged to increase their employability and support their return to the workforce. This is an individualised programme created in consultation with the beneficiaries to address their therapeutic, psychosocial and employability needs.

About half of the beneficiaries in the RTW programme return to work after completing their rehabilitation and training.

"The duration of rehabilitation and training is different for each person and we also take into account the time spent on finding suitable employment for them," said Mr Gene Lee, Executive Director of ABLE.

ABLE also runs a Day Rehabilitation Programme that helps their beneficiaries to care for themselves as best as they can at home, and to move around the community safely. Some of the rehabilitation services include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and Pilates.

These programmes and services are staffed by an experienced multidisciplinary team of healthcare, social service, training and employment support professionals.

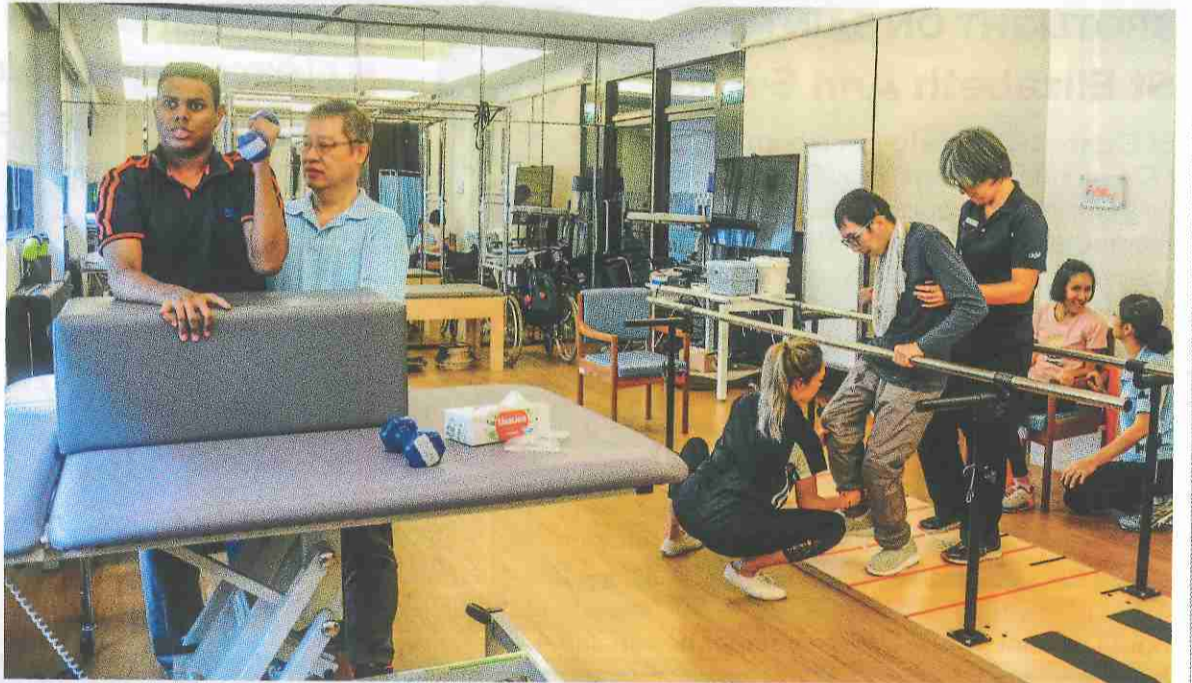
There is another programme, ABLE Respite, to support family caregivers of persons with physical challenges.

In ABLE Respite, "caregivers experience respite through workshops, talks and sharing groups. Doing this helps to empower them on their caregiving journey," said Mr Lee, adding that caregivers also form social networks and support groups when they interact with each other in the programmes. □

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Isaac Kalaiselvan during a rehabilitation session at the ABLE Rehabilitation Centre.



Trained healthcare workers conducting a group therapy session at ABLE.

## Thrills and spills to raise awareness

It was a sunny and beautiful Saturday when the young and old gathered at Sentosa to embark on a day of epic adventure in support of the physically challenged.

In collaboration with ABLE, Mega Adventure, an adventure park operator, organised the charity fundraising event on Nov 24 for the physically challenged.

The aim was to raise funds for the ABLE's programmes and to promote awareness of the various services available.

The theme park offers attractions such as the ever-

popular MegaZip, the heart-pounding MegaJump, the fun MegaBounce and three levels of the exciting MegaClimb, a high ropes adventure course.

Amidst the thrills and spills, adrenaline-filled screams and lots of laughter, there were also fringe activities like balloon sculpting and face painting, and ticket holders were given a goodie bag to commemorate the occasion.

Among the Mega Adventure staff present that day was Amin. In 2017, Amin was involved in a traffic accident that left him with a traumatic brain

injury, extensive nerve damage in his left shoulder and facial fractures. His medical social worker at the National University Hospital referred him to ABLE for rehabilitation, which started his Return-to-Work journey with ABLE.

There, Amin's rehabilitation therapists worked closely with Mega Adventure, making frequent visits to his worksite to gain a better understanding of his job scope and his work environment.

Within a year, Amin was back to full-time work with a new work scope. □