

"Auntie Dora is the most important person in my life"

3. "My mum passed away from cancer when I was 11. Two years prior, my parents got divorced, so I lost contact with my dad. I wasn't very close to any of my relatives, so I was put up in AG Home, a place for troubled girls and girls at risk.

When my mum passed away, I felt very lonely. That was the darkest period of my life. When my mum passed away, it was too much for me to handle. Was I able to make it through life without her?

I thought life in a home would be tough, but the "older sisters" at Beautiful People really gave me a lot

Karen Lee, 21, has been living on her own since her mum's death 10 years ago. But she has since found solace and support from "older sister" Dora Yeo from Beautiful People

of love. Someone told me that even though my mum was gone, there were more sources of love coming my way. That's how I moved on: with the encouragement from Auntie Dora and the other "big sisters".

A solid rock

It's great having an older female figure to look up to. It's comforting to know that someone cares, and that I'm not alone. It makes me want to move on and go further in life because you know that there's someone cheering you on, and whom you don't want to disappoint.

Auntie Dora is the most important person in my life. She started out as a volunteer and visited the home every week. Over the years, our relationship grew stronger. I see her as my everything – she's a mother, sister and friend. She's also met all my boyfriends and friends – she'd even allow my friends to come over to her house. My aunt wouldn't even allow that. Auntie Dora and I have this trust between us, and we set boundaries so I know what I can do or cannot do when I'm in her house.

I'm thankful for the advice Auntie Dora has given me, and I will always remember her words about how we have the power to turn negatives into positives – it's how we deal with it. That's how I started to look at life a lot more positively.

Because Auntie Dora is older than me, she knows the routes in life.



Dora and Karen celebrating Karen's 18th birthday.

Hearing from Dora

The title "mother" is very scary. It comes with a lot of responsibilities. I'm very free-spirited so I prefer being a "big sister" to Karen.

I started out as a volunteer about eight years ago with Beautiful People. AG Home was close to where I stayed, so that's how I started volunteering and being an "older sister" to Karen.

Some of the things I tell Karen can be considered "motherly", but I prefer to let her choose her options in life and give her a place where she can feel at home. That's why when she got older, I allowed her to come over to stay on weekends. And we'd do stuff together, simple activities like watching TV, cooking or shopping. I'd bring her along to some of my outings as well. She'd spend time with me during big holidays like Christmas – that's how she knows my friends too.

When it comes to disciplining Karen, there are no beatings or scoldings. But I am firm – I will tell her the consequences of certain things, and she has to learn to make decisions and certain choices. And even if she makes a wrong choice, it's OK, because I'll still be there for her. She suffers, she comes back, she learns from the wrong choices.

You know how you can't really tell everything to your parents? Mothers can take on a more protective, top-down approach, but it's a lot easier with an older sibling. You are able to share your innermost thoughts with them more freely. It's important to have that kind of role model to guide you.

If I was unsure about my life at any point, I'm sure Auntie Dora would have encountered the same doubts once – just that she has the answers this time." **C**



Dora and Karen at her graduation ceremony in 2013.