

HOME ALONE

By Yohanna Abdullah

Often, all we need is a listening ear and for someone living alone, a visit from three members of Club Heal proved to be heaven-sent and a cause for jubilation.

Madam Azizah (not her real name), in her 60s welcomed with open arms the President of Club Heal Dr Radiah Salim, its Manager Siti Hamidah Bahashwan and myself a patient and volunteer at the club to her humble 'L' flat at Bukit Merah in July.

"It is as if *lailatulqadar* (Night of Power) has come early for me and my wish for guests to come to my home has come true," exclaimed Azizah excitedly as she talked non-stop from the moment we stepped into her house.

Azizah has schizophrenia and perhaps a touch of obsessive-compulsive disorder as is shown by her habit of buying things such as clothes in sets of seven. Her house is a little disorderly with piles of stuff including a big basket of what appears to be unwashed laundry.

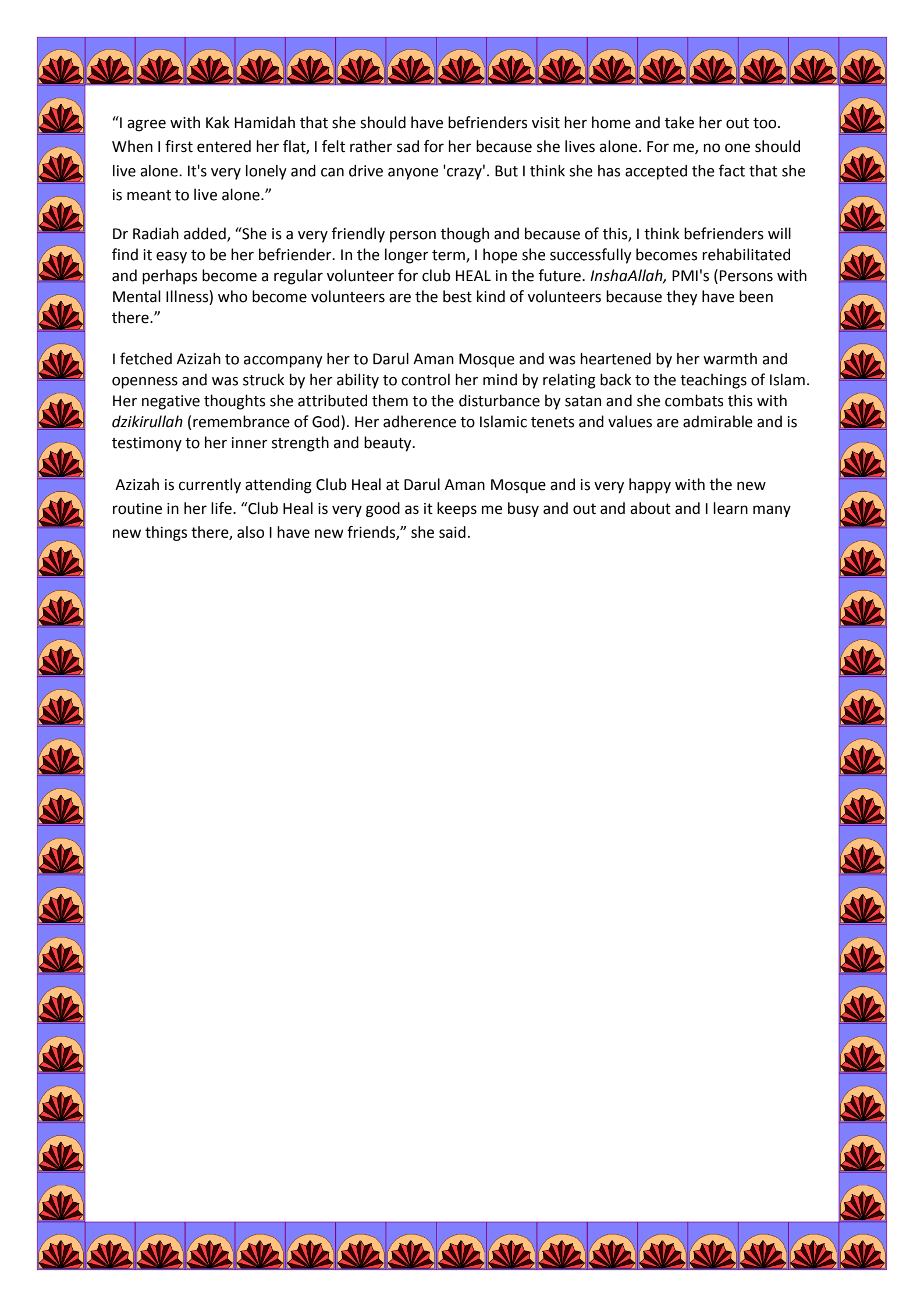
She kept enthusing about her joy at receiving such honoured guests and launched into different stories of her life including the fact that she had problems with her mother whom she used to live with. Hearing voices, one of the things that the voices say to her is to urge her to kill her mother who is strict and vulgar.

"Azizah's case show how important it is for befrienders to come and talk to these mentally-ill patients especially when they live alone. It is important to listen to them and not be judgmental. It doesn't really matter if what they say is really true facts but to acknowledge their reality," said Hamidah.

Azizah is a Hajjah having done her pilgrimage a few years ago and is well-versed in Islam, reading Islamic books a fair bit. She speaks of Islam in almost every sentence. Even though she lives alone, her four siblings keep a lookout for her, visiting her and ensuring she has enough for her daily expenses. Azizah used to work variously as a cleaner and a chambermaid. She was twice married and has a grown-up son.

At the visit, Dr Radiah invited Azizah to attend Club Heal at Darul Aman Mosque so she can spend her free time more fruitfully and not be lonely. "A day rehabilitation centre is just what mental patients who are spending their days at home need. They will meet friends and have activities to do to keep their minds and bodies occupied. They will learn new things and adapt to a social group."

"It is my wish that Azizah grows with Club Heal to learn to take care of herself and eventually care for others as a volunteer. She is lonely at home, I feel no one should live alone, especially a woman and with mental illness at that. It is a pity she no longer lives with her mom as she could not take care of her ill mum. But she needs someone to be with her, to help remind her to take her medicines and so that she is not lonely."



“I agree with Kak Hamidah that she should have befrienders visit her home and take her out too. When I first entered her flat, I felt rather sad for her because she lives alone. For me, no one should live alone. It's very lonely and can drive anyone 'crazy'. But I think she has accepted the fact that she is meant to live alone.”

Dr Radiah added, “She is a very friendly person though and because of this, I think befrienders will find it easy to be her befriender. In the longer term, I hope she successfully becomes rehabilitated and perhaps become a regular volunteer for club HEAL in the future. *InshaAllah*, PMI's (Persons with Mental Illness) who become volunteers are the best kind of volunteers because they have been there.”

I fetched Azizah to accompany her to Darul Aman Mosque and was heartened by her warmth and openness and was struck by her ability to control her mind by relating back to the teachings of Islam. Her negative thoughts she attributed them to the disturbance by satan and she combats this with *dzikirullah* (remembrance of God). Her adherence to Islamic tenets and values are admirable and is testimony to her inner strength and beauty.

Azizah is currently attending Club Heal at Darul Aman Mosque and is very happy with the new routine in her life. “Club Heal is very good as it keeps me busy and out and about and I learn many new things there, also I have new friends,” she said.