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ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Ms Veronica Chua (right) with her maid, Ms Uswatun Khasana. Ms Chua paid for Ms Uswatun's courses to enable her to upgrade her skills.

Her ma'am pays for her education

Melissa Sim

Ms Uswatun Khasana, 28, went for English lessons, took a diploma in culinary arts and is even learning to drive.

All these courses were paid for by her employer, Ms Veronica Chua.

"She did so much for my mum, so it's time to pay her back," said Ms Chua, 45, director of an engineering company. She lives with her two sisters and father in Hougang.

She estimates she has spent at least \$10,000 on course fees.

Ms Chua hired Ms Uswatun, an Indonesian, in 2002 to take care of her ailing mother who had diabetes and renal failure.

For three years, the maid did that, on top of doing housework and cooking for the family.

In the fourth year, her mother became bed-ridden. Ms Uswatun had to clean her bed-sores, help her when she soiled herself, and carry her from the car to the dialysis centre three times a week.

At night, Ms Chua tried to take care of her mother but Ms Uswatun would often wake up to help out.

"She never complained and was very diligent," said Ms Chua.

She said her mother's hospital bills once came up to \$100,000. "When Watun saw the bill, she told me she didn't want her salary so she could help pay. It was the most touching incident," she said. "Of course, we told her that we would settle it."

But this was a slowly cultivated relationship.

Ms Chua said her family members sat down together and worked out a table of duties for Ms Uswatun. "We can't expect our helper to know what we want, so we must lay down the expectations," she said.

Ms Chua said she first decided to send Ms Uswatun for an English course to improve her proficiency. She realised that the maid was hard-working and interested in her studies.

Ms Chua looked for a course that would help her acquire a new skill. She decided on the diploma in food preparation and culinary arts offered by Dimensions International College.

Classes were from Monday to Friday, at least three hours a day. Asked if she minded that Ms Uswatun spent so much of the day away, Ms Chua said: "I don't want her to be a maid all the time. This is her chance to learn something."

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