

THERE'S A SUPPORT GROUP TO HELP

SHE wanted a daughter. Instead, she got four sons — born at the same time.

And is Madam Shirlene Barathi grateful — to others who have twins and more.

Madam Barathi, who also has a 5-year-old son, doesn't know what she would have done without Twins Plus.

No, that's not the name of her quadruplets born in September last year.

They have perfectly normal names — Hasif, Hazim, Haziq and Haris.

Twins Plus Singapore is the local support group of parents who have twins or more — and they are a growing band, numbering about 60 families in all.

She got baby clothes, toys, twin strollers and high chairs, all from them.

"I wanted a girl, but I got four more sons and I didn't know how to cope," she said.

"I was told that I could call Twins Plus Singapore to look for moral support and talk to experienced parents of multiple births."

But she received more than that. "Whenever I had any questions, I'd e-mail the group and get valuable advice."

She conceived her quadruplets — who are non-identical — naturally.

With five kids at home, she had to employ a second maid. But she wanted a third helper during the day when she returned to work.

"A member from Twins Plus Singapore introduced me to her churchmate who volunteered to look after my boys.

"She was a great help. They would come to see the boys from 9am to 4pm, twice a week. On other days, my sister and sister-in-law took turns to look after them." Her sister-in-law lives in their four-room HDB flat in Yishun.

Madam Barathi works at a multi-national company. Her husband, Mr Mohd Ali Mohd Maiden, 44, is self-employed. She declined to reveal her household income.

Every month, she spends about \$500 on milk, diapers, clothes and toys for the quads — if they don't fall sick. Otherwise, each visit to a paediatrician costs her \$80 to \$100.

That's not counting the \$1,400 set aside for the two maids monthly.

Each month, the quadruplets consume about six tins of milk powder at 2.5kg each.

"Each tin costs \$20.40 and lasts only five days," said Mr Mohd Ali. "And a pack of 72 diapers lasts only two to four days."

How did Madam Barathi breastfeed them until they were 11 months old? "I'd express the breastmilk in my workplace and store them in the fridge. It's not enough for all four of them, but I'd give it to the one who needs it more that day."

Her maids take turn to bathe the kids. At least they don't cry at the same time and can sleep through the night now.

When Madam Barathi comes home from work every day, the boys, including her eldest son, will clamour for her attention. "So I will sit down on the floor and hug all of them."

"When the gynaecologist told me I was going to have more than one baby, I thought I'd have twins," she said.

But as her stomach grew bigger, she was told that she would have more than twins.

"The numbers did not sink into my mind then," she said. "I didn't discuss it with my husband until much later. I thought the more the merrier since my husband and I love children."

Will she try for a girl again?

"I'm overwhelmed by the boys. I don't think I'll try for a girl anymore."

Her advice to parents of multiple births? "Take one day at a time."



Raising five children in Singapore is not easy. My husband and I have to cut down our expenses. We've scrapped our 10-year-old car.

Madam Barathi (right, with son Hanif, 5, and husband Mohd Ali) about the impact of (above, from left) Hasif, Hazim, Haziq and Haris on the family's finances



Much-needed help and advice

TWINS Plus Singapore, a non-profit organisation, was formed three years ago to provide support and guidance for parents of multiple births in Singapore.

It was founded by Canadian expatriate Ms Susan Hall and her friends.

"There were 30 families in the group made up of mainly expatriates two years ago. Now, there are about 60 families in the group, half of

which are locals," said American Ms Laurie Lande, 34, who became president of Twins Plus Singapore after Ms Hall left early this year.

The group meets on the first Saturday of each month at a member's house.

The New Paper visited the group at its recent meeting on Nov 9 at an East Coast condominium. Children turned up with their parents.

Lawyer Rani Wong, 31, who is expecting identical

boys, was overwhelmed to see so many twins on her first time there.

"It's really good to see how the twins interact. And it's very reassuring to meet people who have gone through multiple pregnancies," she said.

The group has no quintuplets (five babies born at the same time) yet.

It was the first time that Mrs Karen Tan had taken her twins, Samuel and Nathaniel, to the meeting.

The 14-month-old boys were busy playing with toys.

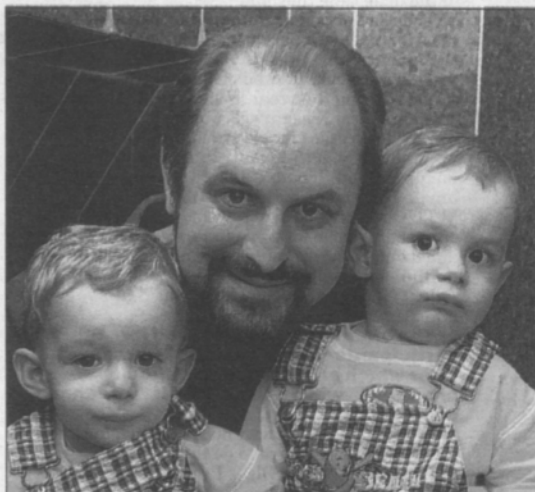
Mrs Tan, 30, said: "My husband works in a hospital and he found out about the group when I was expecting."

"During my pregnancy, some of the members lent me books on pregnancy. Such meetings are good for adults and children to socialise."

Ms Lande's husband, Mr Frank Pizzurro, 39 added: "My wife and I got a lot of advice like which doctor to see and what to buy for our children. Someone also gave us a baby walker. People are always exchanging toys and clothes."

"Meeting up once a month is good for the children. They love to socialise. They love the chaos."

To find out more about the group, check out www.twinsplussingapore.com or call Ms Lande at 6433-4659.



SEEING DOUBLE: Mr Frank Pizzurro with his twin sons.