

The Circle of Care programme for disadvantaged children to be expanded



Receptionist Rachel Hong and her daughter Faith, who received help from the Circle of Care programme, at their Lengkok Bahru rental flat. Ms Hong says she has seen the 10-year-old improve by leaps and bounds. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

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More pre-schools, primary schools will join programme that gives a leg-up to these kids



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The Circle of Care (CoC) programme, piloted seven years ago at two pre-schools, has shown how building strong support systems around children from disadvantaged backgrounds can change the outcomes for them.

Piloted by philanthropic group Lien Foundation and welfare organisation Care Corner, the programme brings together pre-school teachers, education therapists, social workers and health professionals to support underprivileged children and their families. It has been shown to improve school attendance and raise literacy and numeracy skills for the children.

It has been extended to 16 pre-schools, including those run by the PAP Community Foundation and PPIS (Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura or Singapore Muslim Women's Association).

With pre-schoolers moving on to mainstream schools, two primary schools have also joined the programme.

Next year, another five pre-schools, including a Ministry of Education kindergarten in Woodlands, and three primary schools will join the programme.

The target is that by 2023, 1,800 children in 30 pre-schools and seven primary schools will be helped through the programme.

The pre-schools and primary schools will be grouped into three clusters - Queenstown, Taman Jurong and Woodlands - identified based on the number of rental flats and low-income families in the area.

Since last year, the scheme has also been beefed up to include training for the CoC pre-school staff and parents on how to nurture essential life skills in children.

SUSTAINED HELP

What was especially useful was the CoC social worker following up from pre-school right until Primary 3 and getting various kinds of help for Faith.

MS RACHEL HONG, on how the scheme has helped her 10-year-old daughter.

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Drawn from child development expert Ellen Galinsky's work, called Mind In The Making, the sessions on how to nurture skills such as focus, self-control and self-directed learning in children have been attended by more than 140 pre-school staff and parents to date.

Lien Foundation, Care Corner and their new partner Quantedge Foundation, a philanthropic foundation established by Quantedge Capital, have also brought in experts to look at how the programme can be improved to better the outcomes for children and their families.

At Lakeside Primary School and Gan Eng Seng Primary School, which are part of the scheme, social workers collaborate with the schools' counsellors, teachers and allied educators to follow the child until Primary 3.

Ms Rachel Hong, 32, a receptionist whose 10-year-old daughter Faith was helped by the programme over five years in pre-school and then primary school, said she has seen her daughter improve by leaps and bounds.

Ms Hong, who lives with her two children and delivery driver husband in a rental flat in Lengkok Bahru, said of her daughter: "She started off being unable to pay attention and with poor language and maths skills. But now, in school, she speaks up and asks her teachers questions when she doesn't understand something.

"What was especially useful was the CoC social worker following up from pre-school right until Primary 3 and getting various kinds of help for Faith."

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A single parent who wanted to be known only as Ms Rose said the workshop for parents on how to help their children focus and gain self-control has helped her.

Ms Rose, 36, who works part-time as a supervisor in a cafe and has two children aged six and three in the programme, said: "I learnt how to play simple games and organise some learning activities, and it has helped me to manage them better. Their attention and focus have improved a lot and that is so important for learning."

Mr Ong Lye Whatt, principal of Gan Eng Seng Primary School, said that being part of the scheme has enabled his pupils to have a smoother transition to Primary 1.

"It has allowed the school to identify pupils who may need some intervention early, and work with the parents and CoC to monitor their attendance and learning progress," he said.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah said CoC is now poised to support more children and families in a more comprehensive and cohesive manner.

He said: "Over the years, we have nurtured an ecosystem of believers and doers, and forged a coalition of partners driven by a shared conviction to change the game for disadvantaged children."



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