



A CIRCLE OF CARE

A LIFETIME OF *Difference*

Investing in an Ecosystem of Support for Intergenerational Impact



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The Tangram

The tangram is a puzzle consisting of seven flat polygons which are put together to create shapes. These different pieces come together to form a picture, just as systems have the power to collaborate to create an equitable environment for children to thrive in. As a symbol in this conference, **the tangram serves to represent the importance of partnerships in leveling the playing field.**



PREFACE

ABOUT CIRCLE OF CARE

The Circle of Care (CoC) was first conceived in 2013 by Care Corner Singapore in partnership with the Lien Foundation. From its inception, CoC was designed as a preventive, preschool-based model that is embedded in the community, with strong inter-disciplinary partnerships amongst social workers, educators and healthcare professionals.

Our aim was to demonstrate how a strong ecosystem of care can be developed to centre around children from underprivileged families – an ecosystem that is responsive, better integrated and more capable to holistically address the unique needs of underprivileged families and their children.

Over the past decade, CoC has had the privilege to work with different partners and families to work towards a common vision through three phases, with each phase informing the next.

In phase 3, which commenced in 2019, Circle of Care had the privilege of having new partners onboard to further our cause and work. This includes additional funding support from Quantedge Foundation, expansion of preschool partnerships to MOE Kindergartens and the opportunity to provide consultancy support for KidSTART Singapore's national scale up.



Developmental Phases of CoC Pilot

Phase 1 (2013-2015): Pilot early childhood social work with two partner preschools, focusing on children identified with learning, emotional, social needs

Phase 2 (2016-2018): Expansion to ten preschools and two primary schools, with enhancements to include health screenings and transition support to Primary One

Phase 3 (2019-2023): Expansion to 22 preschools and six primary schools, with enhancements to include activities to promote executive function-based life skills, transition support to Primary Three, professional development and education with partner preschools



CoC Model: Key Features

READY CHILD | READY PARENT | READY SCHOOL | READY COMMUNITY

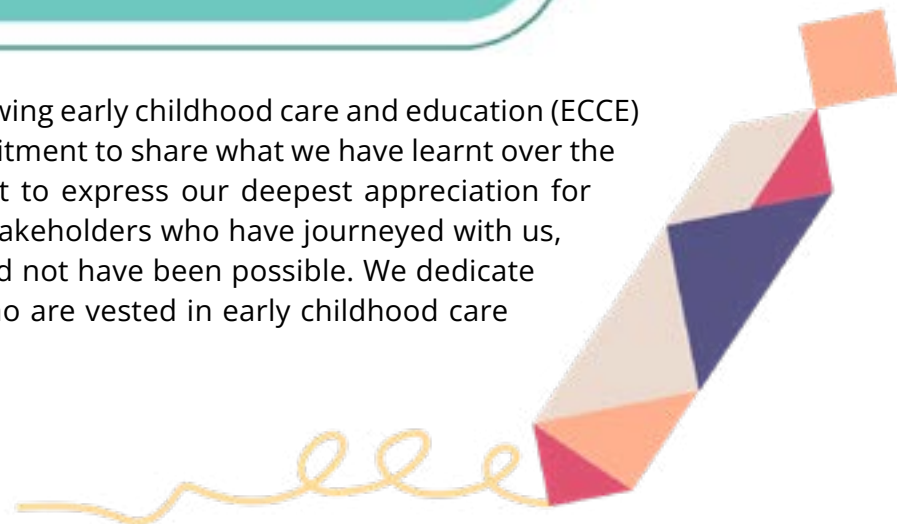


*ECSW: Early Childhood Social Work
ECCE: Early Childhood Care & Education
MITM: 'Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs' by Ellen Galinsky
LSN: Learning and Special Needs

Having gained valuable experiences and learnings together with our partners in the past decade, Circle of Care embarked on an evaluation study with Research for Impact from 2022 to 2023 to consolidate the key findings of our programme. The learnings can be summarised into five broad themes:



As part of an evolving and growing early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector, we feel a strong commitment to share what we have learnt over the past ten years. We also want to express our deepest appreciation for all our partner families and stakeholders who have journeyed with us, without whom our work would not have been possible. We dedicate this booklet to you and all who are vested in early childhood care and education.



1 Investing In The Early Years: Significant Returns Beyond School Into Adulthood

Social inequality and mobility are important and growing areas of focus in our developed nation. Since 1999, the Gini coefficient for Singapore (before accounting for Government transfers and taxes) has remained above 0.4¹, which is the level the UN-Habitat has described as “the international alert line for income inequality”².

President Tharman (then Deputy Prime Minister) had stressed the importance of addressing social mobility by intervening early in life. This is especially pertinent for lower income families because while Singapore ranks highly relative to other countries in terms of per-capita income, it is estimated that around 100,000 to 140,000 households lack the means to pay for their basic human

needs³. A lack of resources and diminished quality of parenting and familial relationships due to the stresses of having less resources have adverse implications on children in their formative years⁴.

Poverty adversely impacts child developmental outcomes in the following ways:

- Chronic and high levels of stress in the home environment that inhibits brain development and results in permanent alterations in a child’s brain architecture^{5,6}
- Lower quality of parenting and parent-child interactions⁵, and
- Impoverished early learning experiences^{4,7,8}

Consequently, children from low-socioeconomic status families have been noted to have poorer language and cognitive skills, poorer academic achievement, poorer physical and mental health, poorer self-regulation skills, and more behavioural issues^{5,8}. The implications of these outcomes are concerning, as cognitive skills, physical and mental health, executive function, self-regulation, socio-emotional skills and sense of self are precisely the skills and mindsets these children require to break out of poverty later in life^{4,5}.

Advancement in neuroscience in the last few decades has also led to increasing emphasis on the importance of early life experiences in shaping development in the later years⁹. As such, intervention in the early years is vital in order to disrupt the negative effects of children living in poverty.

As DPM Lawrence Wong calls for good ideas to minimise social barriers and encourage social mobility¹⁰, we see evidence that the preventive, developmental, place-based approach of CoC can support this effort.

1.1 Who Benefits From Investment In The Early Years?

As a holistic model targeting preschool-aged children from lower income families (defined as families with per capita income of \$750 and below or household income of \$3,000 and below), it is significant to note that families who meet the income criteria in CoC are not homogenous in terms of their assessed needs and capacities. CoC member families are tiered into 4 broad categories, which help inform workers on their approach and priorities.





- 
Primary All
 The child's development is age-appropriate and healthy. Caregivers have the capacity to build capability and are willing to engage and learn new knowledge and skills.
- 
Primary Selected
 There is a presence of needs in the child and/or family. Caregivers have the capacity to build capability and are willing to engage and learn new knowledge and skills.
- 
Targeted
 There is a presence of needs in the child and/or family. Caregivers have limited capacity and/or there are signs of emerging risks which can lead to adverse impact on the child.
- 
Secondary
 Caregivers have limited capacity and there is evidence of imminent risks with adverse impact on the child and/or household member that need to be de-escalated.

Figure 1: Description of CoC membership tiers

Families from the Primary All, Primary Selected and Targeted tiers form more than 90% of CoC members. They do not present with imminent risks and may not need remedial help from social service agencies.

Based on our evaluation findings, parents from these tiers reported more benefit from being supported by CoC, which supports our hypothesis that these families have the capacity to learn and develop parenting skills. It is worth noting then that intentional preventive and developmental efforts should be directed

towards such families, with more concerted efforts to partner parents and provide support for the children to enhance their learning and development and to set them up for greater success in later stages of life.

For families which present with imminent risks, a different response is required which entails working effectively with other systems, especially social services, healthcare services and preschool educators to ensure safety for the children while risks (e.g. family violence, domestic or child abuse, severe neglect or harsh discipline, etc.) are being addressed.

Outcome = Scale of agreement	Felt supported	Learnt new skills	More able to apply the skills	More confident	Less anxious	More motivated
Lowest risk (Primary All)	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1	3	3.2
Lower risk (Primary selected)	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.1	3	3.3
Higher risk (Targeted)	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	3	3.2
Highest risk (Secondary)	2.5	3	3	2.5	2.5	3

Figure 2: Average self-reported gains in parental outcomes due to CoC, by subgroups (0- Strongly Disagree, 2- Neutral, 4- Strongly Agree)

Outcome = Scale of agreement	Gains in language skills	Gains in math skills	Gains in life skills (Average)	Gains in social skill (Average)	Gain in emotional skills (Average)
Lowest risk (Primary All)	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.7
Lower risk (Primary selected)	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9
Higher risk (Targeted)	4.8	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.1
Highest risk (Secondary)	3.5	4.0	4.8	5.0	4.0

Figure 3: Average self-reported gains in child outcomes due to CoC, by subgroups (0- Strongly Disagree, 3- Neutral, 6- Strongly Agree)

1.2 Potential Returns On Investment

Based on CoC's Phase 3 evaluation study which included surveys and interviews with parents and caregivers in the programme, parents supported by CoC have reported improvements in both child and parental outcomes.

academic achievement in children, and these relationships are consistent over age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status^{12,13,14}. Parental perceptions of their child's ability, their educational expectations and values are also found to have a significant impact for the academic motivation and beliefs in their children^{15,16}.

In order to demonstrate the potential returns on investment for a preventive developmental programme such as CoC, we can examine the overall programme costs per child compared

to potential increments in wages from gainful employment.

Weighted median wages based on increased aspirations for child are significantly higher than the median wages of CoC parents.

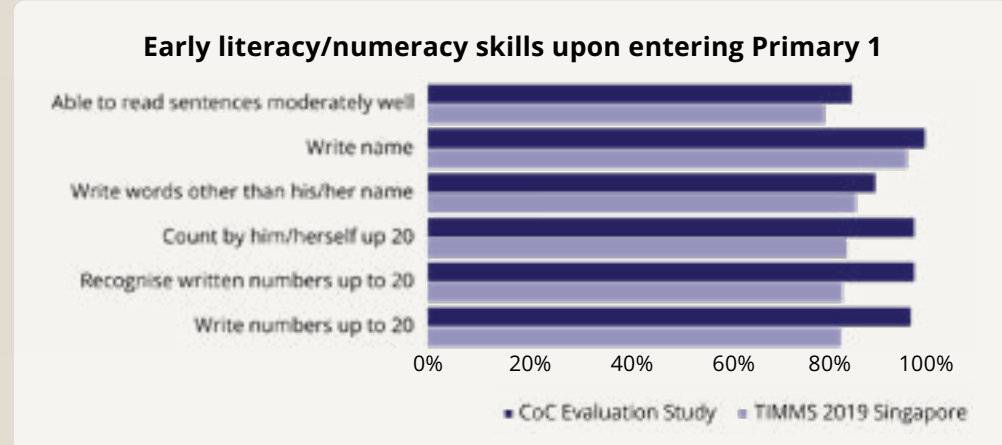


Figure 4: Parents' assessment of child's literacy and numeracy skills upon entering Primary 1 in comparison with national benchmark obtained from Boston College, 2023

CoC children were observed to be performing similar to the current population (regardless of household income) in a comparison with results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019¹¹, see figure 4.

Significantly, parents also expressed positive aspirations for their children's educational attainment. Figure 5 highlights how parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment are higher than their own educational attainment.

Many studies have shown that parental educational expectations and aspirations are positively related to the

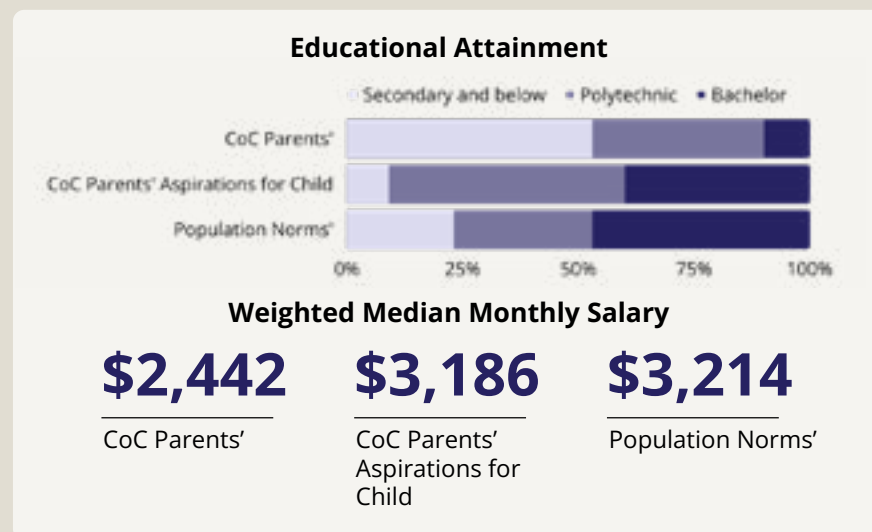


Figure 5: Estimated earnings associated with schooling attainment (Population norms and weighted median wage referenced from Ng et al, 2022¹⁷)



\$20,000

Average cost per child going through the CoC programme over 5 years from preschool years to Primary One

The average cost per child is approximately \$20,000, calculated as total programme costs per child over an average duration of 5 years in the programme, from preschool years to Primary One.

Based on the children's potential median wages (see figure 5 on weighted median wages obtained from Ng et al, 2022¹⁷), hypothetical values of the equivalent lifetime gains in wages (based on 45 years of gainful employment and

7X Return on investment (ROI)

$$= \frac{\$136,000 \text{ (Potential Gains In Wages Over 45 Years)}}{\$20,000 \text{ (Cost per child over 5 years)}}$$

factoring an annual discount rate of 3%) are estimated to be approximately \$136,000 at net present value.

As seen from the ROI calculation, whether the children meet parental aspirations, or perform to current population norms, the net return on investment is potentially as high as seven times based on potential increase in wages due to higher educational attainment.

It is worth noting that while investments in a preventive developmental programme such as CoC are not cost-saving during the programme life-cycle, they are likely to return significantly higher societal value in the long term. Improved academic outcomes and socioemotional competencies are likely to

lead to savings in terms of averted costs on social care and learning support needs, as well as reduced high-risk behaviours in adolescents, although we are not able to quantify these in our evaluation study.



Although we cannot conclusively state the impact of parental academic aspirations on child outcomes, there is evidence that through the CoC programme, parents have gained motivation, confidence and ability to support their children in reaching the outcomes that the parents have aspired towards. CoC empowers the parents by recognising and building on parental strengths, and capabilities.

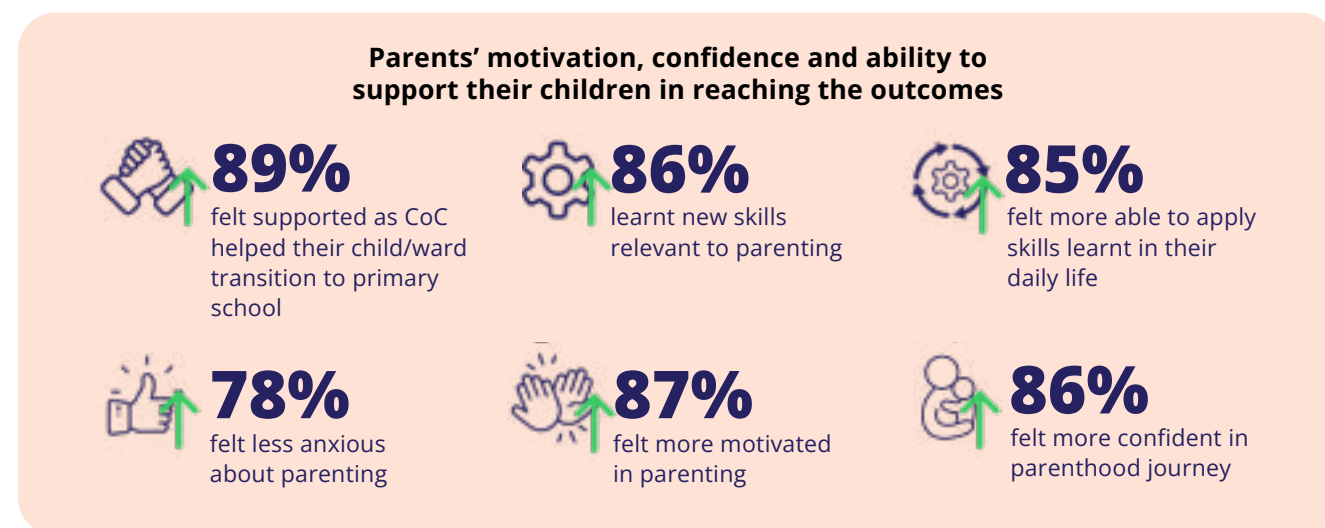


Figure 6: Parental/caregiving benefits realised as a result of joining CoC (146 respondents)

*Survey Question: In my opinion, after participating in the CoC programme(s) offered to me, for each statement select one of the following responses: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree

“Last time, I don't really interact with any of [my children's] studies and things. But now, I'm the one who packs their schoolbag for academic timetables, everything. It's because I see progress in their studies. So, when they start to do the extra things, so I say “why don't I change myself also?”. Yes, to actually make them to be a better student in the school.” (Parent, Targeted tier)

“CoC teach me a lot of good benefit. What I don't know also, what I never try also, I try. They asked me to try to let my son make a sandwich by himself...I always say “No no no cannot, you will make a mess”. So when SWP said “you need to try this, it's good to hone his motor skills ”...When I think back, “why I say cannot?” But it can be done, yes, so I try.” (Parent, Primary Selected tier)

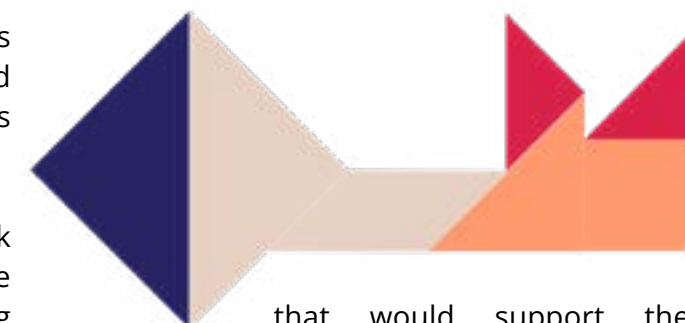
Responses from Parents
(Extracted from Phase 3 Study)



2 Empowered For Life, Not Just For School

CoC's model seeks to provide holistic gains for children by adopting a customised approach based on assessed family needs and strengths, in collaboration with key stakeholders including parents, educators and healthcare professionals. CoC social work practitioners (SWPs) are trained to provide different programmatic interventions using different modalities. Intervention goals and solutions are then tailored to meet the unique contexts of different families and their young children through their early years.

The CoC journey is centred around regular engagements between CoC practitioners and member families, which involve scheduled or ad-hoc visits and phone correspondences with the families, as well as child observations in preschool. Through these regular engagements, practitioners learn of members' needs, strengths and interests, which leads to identification of goals and suitable services



that would support the families. Goals are subsequently shared during an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) meeting where the practitioner, the preschool and other partners can align on an integrated care plan which outlines specific and coordinated follow-up actions.

At CoC, the services member families receive are largely preventive and developmental in nature with a clear intent to help unlock the potential of children for life, not just for formal education.

Services Provided by Circle of Care



Social Work Support

- Individualised family coaching and support by SWP
- Facilitated interdisciplinary team meetings for integrated care plans
- First responders to risk and safety planning
- Referrals and coordination with external systems / social services as needed



Executive Function-based Life Skills Support

- Workshops where parents and their children engage in activities that promote essential life skills
- Promote essential life skills (MITM)
- 1-to-1 coaching of families who attended the workshop by volunteers



Transition Support

- Structured support from mid of K2 to mid of Primary 1 to support and empower children and parents through child's transition to Primary School
- Newsletters for P1 to P3 to continue to promote essential life skills in the context of the different phases of Primary School life



Learning and Developmental Support

- Literacy and Numeracy Support Programme (LNSP) for K1 and K2 children identified with literacy and numeracy needs
- Health and development screening conducted by health care professionals from NUH at partner preschools for early identification of health and developmental concerns



2.1 Holistic Gains for Life

As families participated in these activities, they observed holistic gains in their children. Out of 146 respondents, more than 85% agreed that they observed improvement in their children's skills after receiving CoC's service.

Academic Skills and School Readiness

- Language and mathematics ability

“Before CoC, they don't really show any progress in their studies. Even in spelling, dictation, they would give me zero. But now I can see, every subject, there's progress... Now they can give me ten out of ten. (Parent, Targeted tier)”

87%
agree

Life skills

- Adaptability to unexpected changes in activities and routine
- Performing self-help skills

“Our SWP taught my child how to make a timetable to determine his study and play time. She taught my child to make it, then my child would make it himself. She would explain to my child what time he should eat, what time he should shower, and what time he can go and play, and then my child would make the timetable himself. (Parent, ex-Secondary tier)”

89%
agree

Social skills

- Communication with others
- Making close friendships
- Willingness to help others

“I can see the difference from my child who was in the same preschool but without CoC in it... I would say the confidence that they had and the way they converse is different...they were a bit more prepared socially.” (Parent, Targeted tier)”

88%
agree

Emotional skills

- Emotional management
- Willingness to take responsibility for own actions and to seek help from peers/adults when needed
- Communication of feelings, strengths, likes and dislikes

“CoC helped my two children realise that problems can be solved. If the problem cannot be solved now, you just need to walk away and come back later. You don't have to get mad over it. This is really fantastic, because until now, both my children would face these problems with their emotions. Nowadays, when they face such problems, I would ask them to think about practical steps to solve the problem. (Parent, Primary Selected tier)”

87%
agree

Figure 7: Parents' assessment of child's improvement in academic-, life-, and socio-emotional skills.

*Survey Question: Please rate the extent that CoC has benefited your child for each statement. Select one of the following: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

2.2 Strengthening Foundations For All

For children identified to experience challenges in keeping up with their peers in class, CoC offers a Literacy and Numeracy Support Programme (LNSP) to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills such that they can better grasp concepts taught in the preschool. Designed to be a small-group and targeted intervention with 3-4 children a class twice a week, learning and special needs specialists from Care Corner's Learning and

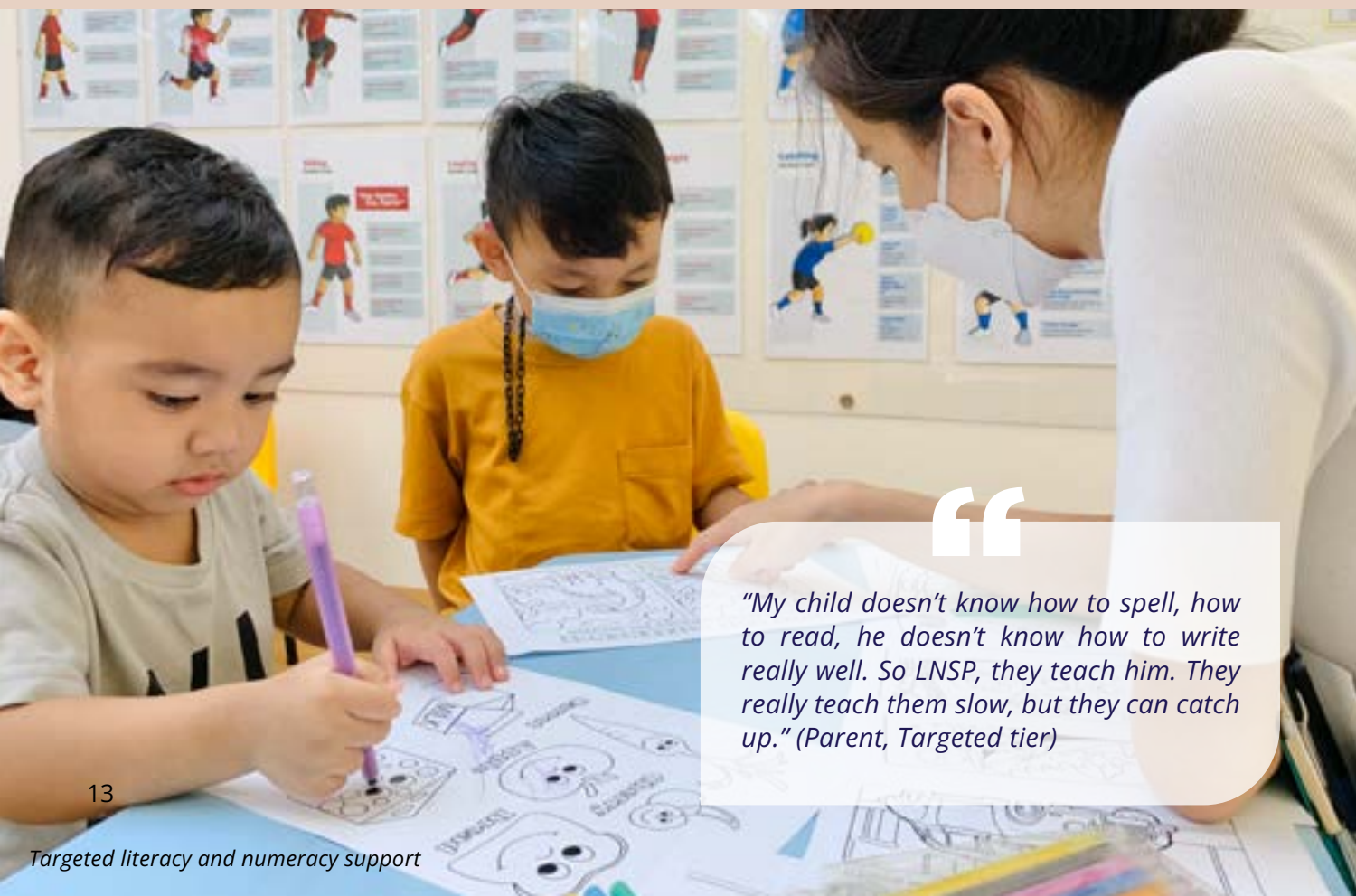
Special Needs service unit are better able to tailor their intervention strategies to children's needs. This also plugs an important gap in the ecosystem of early childhood programmes as some schools may only be able to offer learning and development support at K2 whereas LNSP spans across K1 and K2. Some preschool partners have also observed children to no longer require these services as they have progressed significantly in K1.



*"When children come to us, they do not recognise the alphabets, or they may know the alphabets but they do not know the sounds. If they don't know the sounds, they can't read, they can't comprehend. So, we have a very long way to go. And then by the end of K2 they are able to comprehend the text and read it. I think that is a feat for them."
(Learning and special needs specialist)*



*"My teachers gave quite good feedback regarding LNSP, because initially the child was not able to concentrate in the classroom or they are really lacking in the language and literacy part. But after attending LNSP, they can see actual improvement in the child's concentration and work."
(Preschool educator)*



*"My child doesn't know how to spell, how to read, he doesn't know how to write really well. So LNSP, they teach him. They really teach them slow, but they can catch up."
(Parent, Targeted tier)*



Health screenings in preschools



*"The HDSP doctor send my son for dental. We going next month for day surgery for dental because my son have a lot of decay, everything, they need to do crowning... The CoC send a group of doctors come here and check this, at least early action is better."
(Parent, Primary Selected tier)*

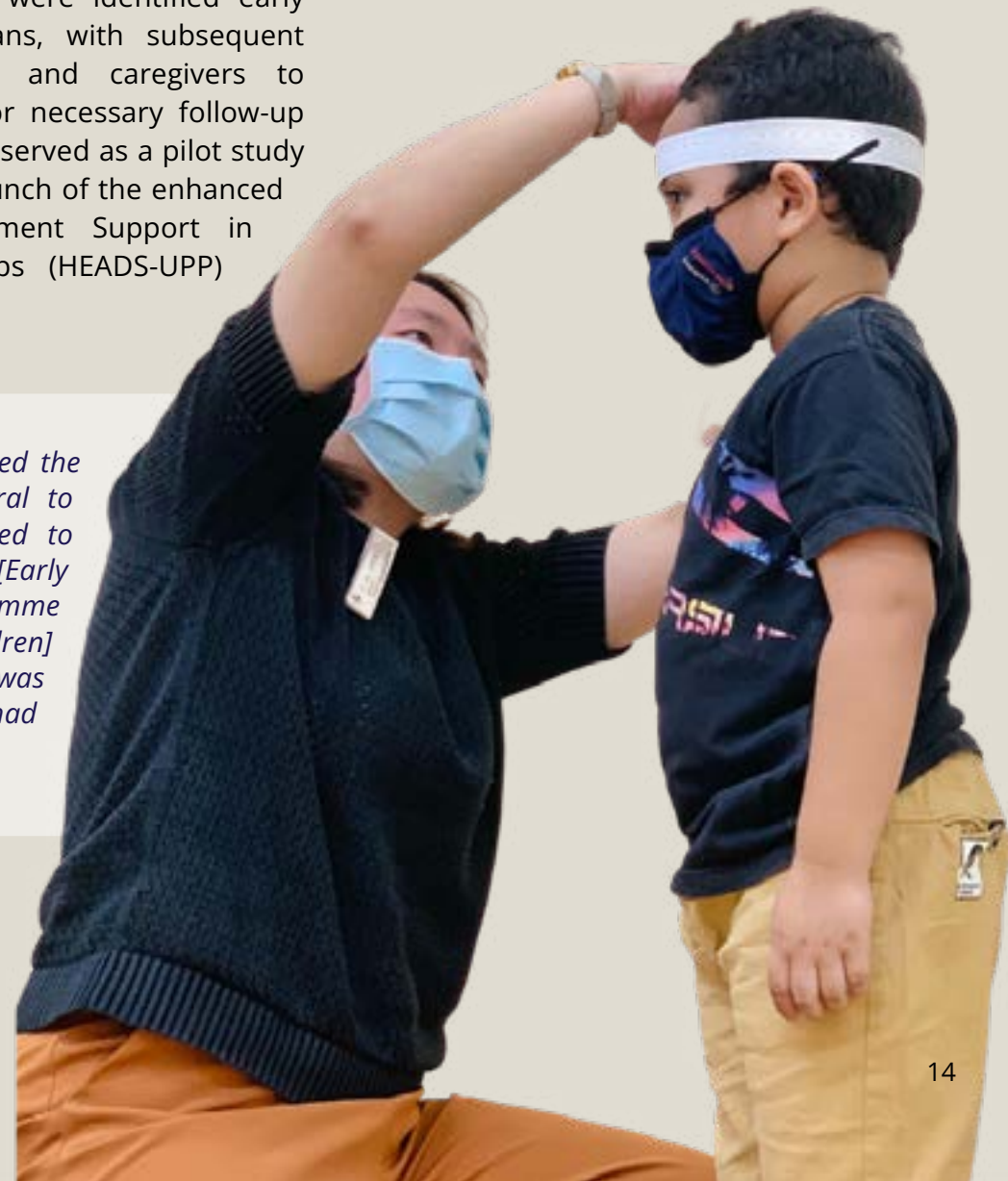


*"They have screening regarding the eyes. After that, I went off to HPB and yes my child had to wear specs... It's now been rectified."
(Parent, Primary All tier)*

In addition, CoC's partnership with NUH on the Health and Development Screening Programme (HDSP) allowed parents and caregivers to access timely preschool-based health screenings for their children. This helped to ensure that any health or developmental issues were identified early by NUH's paediatricians, with subsequent support for parents and caregivers to bring their children for necessary follow-up treatments. HDSP also served as a pilot study which informed the launch of the enhanced Health and Development Support in Pre-school Partnerships (HEADS-UPP) programme¹⁸.



*"HDSP actually helped the parent get a referral to go and get assessed to go into the EIPIC [Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children] route... because it was clear that the child had autism."
(Preschool educator)*



3 Navigating Through Life: What Does It Mean To Journey With The Family?

Families with young children go through many transitions as the young child develops new skills and increases in independence. Transitions can take many forms e.g. moving from home to preschool, moving houses, change of employment for parents, birth of a new child etc. Transitions can be a stressful time for the family as it involves change, adjustments and different emotions for members in the family¹⁹.

Low-income families can be particularly taxed during these transition periods, as they are less well-resourced. It is thus essential for practitioners to be aware of key transitions that families will face and be ready to provide support.

"CoC guided me on learning how to be a mother. I was a young mother previously...When you become a first-time mother, especially a young parent, you don't really know what's out there." (Parent, Primary All)



3.1 Being Proactive And Timely In Supporting Transitions

In order to better serve parents and help them through transitions, it is crucial that they must first be aware of what resources are available. This is where practitioners play a key role in taking the initiative to explore and share resources that are suitable for the family's needs and life stage, in a way that is easy for families to understand.



"We were moving house and we moved house twice, so there's changes in environment. Our SWPs helped alleviate that kind of worry from both parents and the child...When we moved house for the final time, we also had to move her school...Our SWPs wanted to make sure that our child was well prepared and pre-empted before the final move - this change of environment, change of friends, and academics as well. So yes, we really appreciate their support and we're grateful that we know them in the first place." (Parent, Primary All tier)

"Our SWPs helped me to manage the childcare of my child. They understood my situation. Mine was a bit complicated because Family Service Centre was also involved...CoC represented me in arranging for my son's student care...they work it out among the school and everything and then they just let me know, "Oh, we managed to secure a place". You know, it's really something that gives me a lot and I am very grateful for that." (Parent, ex-Secondary tier)



3.2 Being Present To Share Perspectives

Parents from low-income families are often time-strapped and mentally-taxed — many having to juggle caregiving responsibilities with long work hours or shift work, while also having access to fewer resources. Sometimes, parents are not able or comfortable to vocalise and share concerns with close friends, family members, and other parents they know for fear of judgement or being hurt. When practitioners focus on where parents are at in the present and truly engage, parents feel supported and learn how to engage and nurture their children.



Provide a listening ear with no judgement, encourage open communication and provide a different perspective



“SWP sat down with me, hear what my stress was, he provided a listening ear for me. Since I’ve been not working for five years, it actually made me sad because I can’t provide for the family even though I have financial difficulties. So he actually listened and he provided some emotional support as well.” (Parent, Primary Selected tier)



“During home visits, SWP engages with the kids and then also she monitors how I engage with the kids. Certain things that she feels I could use a different method to communicate to get it through better to the child, she will let me know after the session, and then what I can improve or what may be a better way to address this to the child. I would say one thing that I took away from everything with SWP was to have open conversations with my kids, which is something I would say a lot of us parents do not know.” (Parent, Targeted tier)



“The most impactful part of the CoC journey is the family coaching. The coach shared with us and showed us how to take a child’s view into consideration, and then, for a child, a problem can be really major. So he taught us how to take it down, and also to share reasons with the child why he has to do certain things. And then how to encourage them also, build a foundation for them to learn to tackle problems. Sometimes these things are not easy for us because we are already adults, and then we don’t remember that we used to go through these also.” (Parent, Primary Selected tier)



Anticipatory guidance for transition to Primary school

3.3 Providing Continuity of Care For Sustained Stability

We have found that supporting families through transitions means to equip and prepare families before, during and post transitions. This entails extending care beyond the period of transition to support sustained stability.



One common major milestone that all young children (and their parents) face is the transition from preschool into primary school. For children, this means being in a totally new physical and social environment as well as different classroom expectations and routines. Many parents and caregivers expressed appreciation for having support during this

major milestone. This was especially so for first-time parents, parents whose children entered primary school during the pandemic period, as well as parents who had been through the process before but had limited bandwidth.



“I remember that CoC did send me the registration details, and then sent our details for the financial support...I remember the bursary all that. They really helped. They sent a link and when I opened because my child was going to Primary One for the first time, I said ‘Oh I’m not too sure’. Then my SWP said ‘Okay we will guide you.’” (Parent, Primary All tier)



“I’m not a first-time mum. I’ve experienced all this [referring to the transition process]. But having someone to guide you through helps...when my daughter went to P1, it’s the COVID period so she didn’t have the opportunity to have the buddy system. Our SWPs provide all these pamphlets, all these readings on what to expect. They even talked to my daughter, ‘this is how it’s going to be and things like that.’ More of emotional support.” (Parent, Primary All tier)



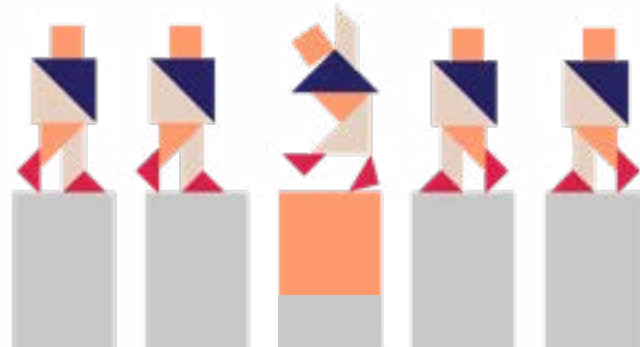
Parents are appreciative of the guidance they received regarding registration, financial support and emotional support given to their child on what to expect



While entering primary school occurs within a few days, the emotional adjustment that children and their families undergo spans a longer duration. As such, CoC's primary school transition support has been deliberately structured to extend into the initial months of Primary 1. This aims to aid both children and families in comprehending and navigating the changes necessary to achieve a newfound sense of stability.

“Our SWP came over then we go through some articles on what to expect for primary school. They're such interesting articles because it's in a comic style...that she gave to my daughter. Then she read it because she's interested in this kind of style so it's easier for them to read up. Some scenarios on what to do, what to expect, what are the changes, things like that.” (Parent, Primary All tier)

“Our SWP came by and checked in on us, and then asked the child if there's anything that he likes or dislikes, and then from there she helped to stop him from crying everyday in school... he just wouldn't adapt to the new environment, so each time our SWP saw my child, she explains to him that he will be transitioning, what to expect and if he has difficulty, who to speak to...” (Parent, Targeted tier)



CoC's primary school transition support is also designed to give primary schools an early understanding of CoC children, which can enable primary school teachers to better provide the necessary support, resources and arrangements for new P1 students.

This information is captured in the form of a Holistic Development Profile (HDP) for each K2 CoC child. It details child's needs and strengths as well as tailored recommendations for primary school support. These recommendations are developed through a collaborative effort involving the practitioner,

teacher, and if necessary, a specialist in learning and special needs.

It is worth noting that adolescence is a second window of opportunity to leverage on and shift trajectories, with positive learning experiences, healthy support and scaffolding from trusted adults in the community²⁰. This remains an area of interest for CoC; if further continuity and integration of support will enable children's life trajectories to be positively shifted or sustained to greater effect as they enter adolescence and early adulthood.



Supporting transition into the primary school setting

“With all this information provided by HDPs, we are better able to see which child will go to whatever class and to have the appropriate teacher for those children. We have some very experienced teachers who will know how to help the child if the child is really very weak [academically and socially], then we can actually put this child to that teacher.” (Primary school educator)



4 Charting The Course Together: The Central Role Of The Practitioner In Catalysing Change

The preschool is a natural setting where the network of professionals from different disciplines, centering around the child, can connect. As a preschool-based model, we have found that practitioners play a critical role in connecting and galvanising collaborations amongst partner systems (social services, education and healthcare, where relevant). Effective collaboration extends beyond coordination of tasks to building empathy and alignment amongst stakeholders to develop feasible solutions and an ecosystem of care that is truly responsive to the unique needs of each family.

4.1 Catalysts For Paradigm Shifts and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

For practitioners to empower families towards positive change, we have found that a strengths-based approach is key in interactions with families, to build insight and motivation for positive change. It is also equally essential to share strengths-based languaging and perspectives in partnerships with stakeholders, to deepen alignment and foster inter-disciplinary collaborations that result in client-centred solutions.

“You can see that CoC puts the children and the families first in the heart of all they do. It’s very strengths-based. Because as a school, we work with other social agencies as well, and sometimes it’s more of like finding out what’s wrong with the family to break down the barriers. But I would say that no one will look at the family and say, “This is your family strength”, or “This is what you’ve been through, let’s empathise together, and let’s work for the best interest of your child.” It’s very positive, especially the way they view children.” (Preschool educator)



Interdisciplinary teams (IDTs) are valuable as stakeholders share their observations of the child in different settings

“IDTs are definitely helpful. Because some parents may feel more comfortable sharing personal and family issues with the social worker who has been with them through the years. But also because with us, teachers, we are always in the classroom right, we do not have time to really have this teacher session with parents... The social workers do home visiting, they get to observe how’s the home setting like, what the child does after school, what’s the parenting style. So with this information gathered they share it with us, and we will have a better understanding of the family.” (Preschool educator)

“At the end, after we actually shared observations of the children and all, then we actually come to a common goal that we have in mind for the children, but of course it has to be achievable. So, for example, in terms of me developing the children’s social skills, and how the parents at home can support them as well. So I guess it’s more of the common goal both for the parents in the family setting, as well as the teachers.” (Preschool educator)



CoC puts the children and the families first in the heart of all they do - Preschool educator



Interdisciplinary Team Meetings In Preschools

4.2 Shaping Core Competencies For Upstream and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The role of the practitioner is highly dynamic and calls for multiple skillsets as they interface with both families and partner professionals with different areas of expertise.

For practitioners to play this role well, we have found that investments in training and coaching of professional competencies across multiple domains have been essential, including:

- Interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, and
- Soft skills needed for effective engagement of parents and partners



Understanding of child-centric practice

"In addition to life skills, the other model methodology that I've received feedback that's been helpful, is the awareness in terms of child-centric...family-centric kind of perspectives. I mean, that lens that different families cope differently, different children develop differently...that holistic lens, as well as that some families do need the additional support. [This] understanding...has developed over the years. I still remember "naughty children" and a lot of labelling. We do try to advocate on that paradigm shift and that different mindset...a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset with the children as well as with the families." (Cluster Lead)



Proficiency in sharing evidence-informed approaches

"Whatever we have learnt through CoC helps us in our lesson planning, as well as our assessment of children, and how we can actually better portray [life and executive functioning skills] in class." (Preschool educator)



Ability to engage and communicate effectively with parents in an opt-in programme

"CoC is more friendly. I am quite a private person, but...they knew how to prompt me to share, and I would be more comfortable sharing with them and get them to look at the situation for me." (Caregiver, Primary Selected tier)



Ability to convene and facilitate interdisciplinary team meetings

"The quarterly IDT sessions are really very important. We will share information about the child, what the child's strengths are and then areas for improvement. We set goals for the child, maybe in term one they are going to do this, this, this and we can all do this. We focus, and then the SWPs will try to get the families to help at home. So setting the goals for the individual child, what we can focus on and move on, and sharing of all this information is really very good. Then we see progress in the children." (Preschool educator)



Ability to respond to and escalate risk or safety concerns

"Recently, we had this K1 child who came to school and had some bruises around his body. So we feedback to CoC. Then after that, CoC engaged with the Child Protection Service because we suspected that this child could be abused at home... From this communication that CoC had with CPS, they were able to retrieve some information from the family, which the family don't want to be very honest with us teachers in school. That's why this partnership with CoC enables both parties [CoC and school] to actually find out what's really happening." (Preschool educator)



5 It Takes A Child To Raise A Village: Our Children Inspire Us to Do Better

The endeavour to bring about holistic gains for families of low income requires a whole-of-society approach, whereby multiple disciplines work together to provide holistic support for the family.

Across disciplines and sectors, we need to continually invest in deepening the skills of each profession, in broadening the understanding of the collective that is involved in this endeavour – parents, educators, health workers and social workers, and in strengthening our capacity for collaboration. In addition, community support in the form of private funding from foundations to support ongoing innovation and learning, as well as dedicated individuals offering their time as volunteers are all critical resources that help make the work sustainable.

“Working with CoC has helped us to put ourselves in another person’s perspective... We try not to really push the parents but instead we have to respect them. We need to ask how they feel, how they think about this... So as a preschool it’s still our responsibility to highlight to parents certain issues in the children... We become less judgmental, more empathetic, and we want to go through these six years of preschool together with the family to better support the child. We all come together with same objectives.” (Preschool educator)

5.1 Learning Together: Communities of Practice

For proficiency building internally and amongst partners, CoC has developed a series of professional development (PD) content for various professions. Examples include:

- Executive Function-based Life Skills (adapted from ‘Mind in the Making’)
- Supporting Children’s Learning and Development
- Assessment and Case Planning
- Working with Low Income Families
- Working with Systems
- Risk Identification and Assessment
- Parenting Capacity
- Child-Centric Practice
- Strengthening Parent-child Relationships
- Early Childhood Development

Partner preschools who have participated in sessions on Executive Function-based Life Skills, adapted from ‘Mind in the Making’ (MITM), have picked up useful knowledge and skills for their work.

“[MITM] really help lay that foundation for us to see children in a different way, to understand what’s going through their cognitive processes.” (Preschool educator)

“I think what is helpful for some teachers is that they find that now they can know how to use life skills terms to label some of the things that they do but don’t have the terms to say it. So it brings up that common language now to talk about life skills, and labelling some of these activities that lead to life skills and executive function in their teaching styles and activities in class.” (SWP)

Cross learning opportunities through webinars and interdisciplinary work have helped widened perspectives of the children whom we are supporting and created synergy that benefits the children.

“We did have webinars for the teachers to understand how health affects children’s behaviours in a classroom. Just giving you an example, a lot of teachers didn’t know if a child is very inattentive in a classroom...they never asked about sleep. They never asked whether or not at night the child is sleeping, is there eczema scratching, whether there’s snoring, whether there’s disturbance in breathing. And the next day they just see a very inattentive and very hyperactive kid, so teaching them about health helps them to understand children’s development better.” (Healthcare provider)

“A few children were involved in health screening. From doing the assessments, my teachers learned at the same time ‘oh this is how you observe this thing’. The criteria in the booklet were very detailed and they were observing “yes, my child actually cannot do this” or “my child can actually do this”...I can see that it was added knowledge for them, because at the end, the summary report shows certain details that are very clear in their write-up.” (Preschool educator)



MITM Workshop with Partner Preschools

5.2 A Growth Mindset: Integration And Innovation Require Investment

The efforts in professional development and interdisciplinary collaborations are not easily achieved and sustained.

Every organisation (and professionals) possesses unique service contexts accompanied by policies and processes, practices and performance indicators. Investments in time, resources and support from leadership are needed to allow for different professionals to understand one another's roles and skillsets, as well as a joint commitment to overcome and innovate to address challenges in the here and now.

What is helpful is an openness to improve on the status quo and a desire for continuous improvement.



“There’s a lot of things that you want to listen from the social worker and a lot of things you want to share. But then, sometimes, we just have to share it on the surface. We can’t really go in-depth... as much as we want to share a lot of information, it tends to get cut short because of the time.” (Preschool educator)

A particular recommendation mentioned by various stakeholders from different disciplines is about better defining and communicating the scope of the Early Childhood practitioner's role and hence his/her contribution and responsibilities. This would help allow the practitioner to work more effectively with families and different systems in the community. It is thus noted that the role of the early childhood practitioner is still one that is evolving, amidst a rapidly growing ECCE sector.



27
Care Corner Circle of Care team

NEW HORIZONS FOR A COLLECTIVE FUTURE

“We are at a crossroads in our nation’s journey. Our social compact must evolve and respond to both new opportunities and emerging challenges. Forward Singapore is an exercise for all of us to come together, examine our values and aspirations, build consensus, and so refresh our social compact. Through this exercise, we will examine what we want to see for Singapore’s future, what we should prioritise, and what each of us is willing to contribute, in order to get there.”²¹

Indeed, as Singapore journeys into a new era of nation building, it is timely for us to come together to consider what we truly value and what success really looks like, especially for our children who embody our hopes and aspirations for our collective future.

As part of a rapidly evolving ECCE sector, we look forward to being able to work closely with more partners in a spirit of ongoing learning, collaboration and creativity. In particular, it is our hope that as a sector, we can continue to:

- Engage one another through inter-organisational sharing on the latest research and learnings from the ground, and how these can be translated into best practices and tools or metrics used to track the progress of beneficiary parents, caregivers and children
- Grow deeper in our professional competencies, not only in our respective domains of expertise, but especially in areas such as partnering effectively and proactively with low-income families, and interdisciplinary collaboration and practice
- Create space for innovation, in terms of rethinking how we can adopt a whole of society approach by effectively incorporating beneficiaries, volunteers or technological advancements in the continuous improvement of services in the community
- Work together to sustain gains in the early years through adolescence and into young adulthood

Care Corner Singapore is committed to being active partners in the ECCE sector, and will continue to forge new horizons for our children and our collective future.



“Circle of Care was conceptualised with a clear aim to unlock the potential of our children from underprivileged backgrounds. Ten years on, it is heartening to see there is now greater attention on preventive developmental work in the child’s early years, to address the twin concerns of social inequality and mobility.”
**Christian Chao, Chief Executive Officer
Care Corner Singapore**

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- Presbyterian Preschool Services
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- Lakeside Primary School
- Gan Eng Seng Primary School
- Queenstown Primary School
- New Town Primary School
- Huamin Primary School
- Riverside Primary School
- Centre for Evidence and Implementation
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