



To strengthen home-school partnerships, the centre gets parents involved in preschool activities such as making Chinese New Year decorations, digging a vegetable patch, and cooking Indian delicacies



TEAM PLAYERS

SUNFLOWER PRESCHOOL @ FRANKEL SHARES HOW THEY HELP PARENTS APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME-CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS.

When children first enter preschool, they, as well as their parents, may feel anxious as they navigate new experiences in an unfamiliar environment.

At Sunflower Preschool @ Frankel Pte Ltd, frequent communication (via Facebook, newsletters and so on) on how their child is settling down goes a long way in putting parents at ease. "Parents seek honesty, transparency, constant reassurance and sincerity," says Centre Leader Ms Zoe Toh.

BUILD TRUST, KEEP AN OPEN MIND

"Establishing trust is a gradual process," says teacher Ms Charissa Poon. "Regular communication on a child's progress during drop-off and pick-up shows parents that you are constantly observing and care for their child."

"It is also crucial to demonstrate openness to ideas, feedback and perspectives when it comes to devising a plan to support a child's

learning," she adds, as respecting each other's viewpoints reinforces the home-centre relationship.

Establishing good communication and building trust allow parents and teachers to recognise shared responsibilities and exchange information to work towards the common goal of providing quality preschool experiences for the child.

ENGAGE FAMILIES IN PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Home-centre partnerships are further strengthened when parents get involved in preschool programmes.

The centre has organised baking sessions where parent volunteers teach children simple baking skills. Parents have also been invited to talk about their occupations in conjunction with the theme 'My Community Helpers'. Actively participating in a child's learning creates opportunities for skills and knowledge to be transferred from home to preschool and vice versa.

"We recognise the importance parents play in encouraging and developing curiosity and critical thinking in their children. When parents become involved, a child develops a more positive attitude towards school and learning," says Ms Toh.

Parents with heavy work commitments may find it challenging to volunteer their time in preschool or even get hands-on with their child's learning. In such cases, says Ms Toh, grandparents or other family members can step in to help busy parents. For instance, the centre assigns termly home activities where children, together with family members can create crafts based on themes. When grandparents get involved in their grandchildren's learning, it chalks up memorable bonding time in the process. ●

TIPS FOR PARENTS

How to better support your child's learning.

- **Work closely with teachers and the centre leaders on your child's learning needs. Discuss concerns and together, work on strategies to help your child in preschool and at home.**
- **Make time for your child and get involved in preschool activities. This can help you identify and push for the resources needed for your child to succeed.**



The Learning Garden at MOE Kindergarten @ Punggol View lets children apply their knowledge and skills in a real-life setting

VITAL LINK

IN HER 25 YEARS AS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL, PANMELINE WONG HAS MADE IT HER MISSION TO GROOM PURPOSE-DRIVEN EDUCATORS AND NURTURE FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS.

The Learning Garden at MOE Kindergarten @ Punggol View represents the centre's efforts to enhance children's learning by fostering collaboration between teachers, parents and community partners.

It was set up to give children opportunities to explore the outdoors, and learn to apply the knowledge and skills in a real-life context from landscaping and plant selections to maintenance, says Centre Head Ms Panmeline Wong, winner of the 2018 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award.

The process of constructing the garden itself has helped build a community spirit of sharing and learning, facilitating professional exchanges between teachers and parents. Teachers discuss the activities they are planning with parents and share their reflections on the children's learning experiences.

CHILDREN'S LEARNING IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Parents are an important part of the preschool's resource development team. Ms Wong elaborates, "We involve and engage parents in activities such as small group storytelling, cooking demonstrations, show-and-tell, and creating learning resources together."

It is through such collaborative efforts that parents and teachers' approaches become more aligned as they work in tandem to better support children's learning, she explains.

BUILDING PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

To cultivate strong relationships, the centre keeps parents updated on their children's progress. It does it through formal channels like newsletters and meetings at the end of each semester, and informal chats during daily arrival and dismissal times. "The more inclusive you are in keeping parents informed, the more they will feel like a part of the team," says Ms Wong.

For instance, termly Weeks of Wonder (WOW) projects offer opportunities for parents to be a part of the child's learning experience. Families can help their child research a given topic, work with the teacher to suggest a site for a field trip, volunteer to share their expertise with the class as a guest speaker, and so on. "Parental involvement helps instill in children a love for learning," she says.

EMPOWERED TEACHERS ARE MOTIVATED TEACHERS

Inspiring and empowering her staff is also an area of focus for Ms Wong. "Purpose-driven educators find meaning in what they do and are motivated to try innovative ways of bringing out the best in children," she explains.

"I believe it is important to value everyone's strengths and to create opportunities for teachers to learn and lead in ways that deepen their expertise. It is important to make teachers feel their voice matters as it increases their confidence and motivation to learn." ●

LESSONS FOR CENTRE LEADERS

How to inspire and nurture your teachers.

- **Build trust.** Adopt an open and sincere approach when you communicate with teachers. Be genuinely interested in their aspirations, families and the challenges they face in their lives.
- **Nurture aspirations.** Help teachers achieve their aspirations by tapping on training opportunities as well as matching assignments that will hone their skills.
- **Harness strengths.** Teachers come from all walks of life. Use their wealth of experience to imagine possibilities and opportunities to enhance the quality of curriculum for children, and your centre.



Meet Panmeline Wong at youtu.be/sVHAD-krPag



A grandparent volunteer sharing his memories of *kampong* life

KAMPONG SPIRIT

ELFA TAMPINES ROPES IN FAMILY MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO IMPART VALUABLE LESSONS.

Children today know very little about *kampong* life, when the community spirit was alive and thriving. Teachers at ELFA Tampines decided to focus on this for their Innovation Grant Project, *My Kampong, My Playground*.

The centre invited parents to recreate a *kampong* house on stilts, together with the children. They used it to explore Singapore's past, heritage and values such as respect and tolerance that were part of *kampong* living. The project also provided the means to link the children's experiences to the



Drawing water from a well recreated as part of this project

NEL Framework. For instance, the children learnt about numeracy (playing hopscotch), literacy (tracing letters in the sand) and environmental concerns (saving trees), and much more. It made the experience fun, memorable and educational for the children.

EXTENDED FAMILY SUPPORT

Family involvement is key. Parents contributed resources and materials for the learning corners and activities, and researched suitable fieldtrips.

Grandparents, too, had a part to play. Former *kampong* resident and grandparent volunteer Mr Yeo Eng Hua, 67, shared his experiences with his young audience, regaling them with tales of how he used to chase after chickens, draw water from the well, and play in the rain when he was living in a *kampong*.

For Mr Yeo, it was a great opportunity to revisit memories of *kampong* life and an opportunity to

share his past and impart values. He says, "It was a mix of different races and dialect groups; everyone knew each other and looked out for one another."

For the children, one of the most exciting highlights was learning about the traditional games of yesteryear such as *chaptah*, 'five stones' and marbles. "It was an opportunity to talk about teamwork, patience and tolerance," says Ms Rosie Koh, a teacher at the centre.



Children learnt traditional games such as 'five stones'

“Grandpa told us stories of the olden days in Singapore and taught us to play *kampong* games like *chaptah* and 'five stones' which I love to play with my friends.”

CLARE CHAN, 6, granddaughter of Mr Yeo Eng Hua

BEYOND PRESCHOOL GROUNDS

As part of the *My Kampong, My Playground* project, the centre invited NParks to share about the importance of saving trees, and organised a field trip to the Asian Civilisations Museum to help children understand the origins of Singapore's multi-ethnic society and how the country has since evolved.

"There is value in working with other community partners. I strongly believe that the expertise of other professionals value-adds to the preschool curriculum and raises the quality of learning. This further enriched experiences for children as their learning became more integrated and holistic," observes Ms Koh. ●



ECDA INNOVATION GRANT PROJECTS

All Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) may apply for funding support through the ECDA Innovation Grant. The aim is to encourage educators to explore innovative ideas and approaches to enhance learning experiences for children. For more information, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/Educators/Pages/ECDA-Innovation-Projects-Grant.aspx