

TOGETHER AS ONE

SALUTING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF EDUCATORS, PRESCHOOLS AND PARTNERS AT THE FIRST EARLY CHILDHOOD CELEBRATIONS.

ECDA launched the inaugural Early Childhood Celebrations (ECC) on Saturday, 29 October 2022 at the Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre. The two-hour hybrid event combined three iconic events: the ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development, the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) Certificate Presentation Ceremony, and the Start Small Dream Big (SSDB) Finale.

Themed 'Celebrating as One, Together We Soar', ECC 2022 brought together the EC sector to celebrate their achievements and successes. In his welcome address, Mr Tan Chee Wee, Chief Executive of ECDA, thanked educators for standing strong together as a fraternity during the COVID-19 period over the past few years. "The ECC serves as a call for all EC educators to reflect on your growth, renew your passion and dedication,



ECDA Awards winners on stage

and above all, inspire more to embark on the quality journey and pursue professional excellence," he said.

Taking the stage next, Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development, announced key changes for the EC sector over the next two years. Apart from adding 22,000 more full-day preschool places, parents can expect fee cap reductions in government-supported preschools from 2023. Also, in recognition of their higher job responsibilities and skills requirements, educators in government-supported preschools can look forward to a boost in salaries (details on page 10).

ECC 2022 also offered an opportunity for children from different preschools to showcase their talent. Little ones from TwinkleKidz Academy delighted everyone through their skit, highlighting the good work of educators, centres, families and the community. The hearts of everyone were also captured by the endearing children from Children's Cove (Orange Grove), The Little Skool-House International (Mountbatten), PCF Sparkletots @ Jalan Kayu Blk 970 and YWCA Preschool (Bedok) as they performed the theme song "Step by Step" as part of the SSDB Finale. Their lively performances were a timely reminder that children are at the heart of all we do.

The ECC concluded with the EC fraternity reaffirming their commitment to give every child a good start by reciting the pledge 'We Promise' in unison. Attendees also enthusiastically fuelled the EC

“SPARK is only the first step. It helps us reflect and review all our processes to make quality cycles of improvement.”

MS JASMINE CHUA,
Principal, Agape Little Uni. @ Gambas



ECDA Chief Executive Mr Tan Chee Wee and Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, with representatives of SPARK-certified preschools



A performance by Children's Cove (Orange Grove)

rocket (an online activity), carrying the sector's hopes and dreams, so that it could soar to new heights.

STRIVING TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Into its 10th year, the ECDA Awards recognises educators and centres for their professional excellence. This year, 29 winners were honoured. Making history is Mr Reuben Cheng, the first male recipient who clinched the Outstanding Early Intervention Professional Award.

A complete list of award winners can be found at go.gov.sg/ecda-awards.

CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

A SPARK certificate is a mark of quality for preschools, indicating that a centre has been assessed to have quality processes, practices and programmes. This year, 121 preschools received SPARK Certification, of which 39 attained the higher Commendation standard. Strong leadership, a vibrant learning environment,



Mr Reuben Cheng (centre) received his ECDA Award from Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Social and Family Development & Home Affairs, and ECDA Chief Executive Mr Tan



Some of the community partners who collaborated with the preschools in SSDB projects

“Besides teaching and caring for children in their classrooms, educators need to work more closely with parents and community partners to foster children's growth and learning at home and in the community.”

MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI,
Minister for Social and Family Development

and collaboration with parents and the community are all part of the SPARK Quality Rating Scale, a quality guide for preschools.

See go.gov.sg/spark-about for more on SPARK.

FOSTERING HOME-PRESCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Some 75,000 children from 1,100 preschools participated in SSDB 2022. True to the SSDB theme of 'Our Family, Our Community', these children embraced positive values like love, care and concern, commitment and respect. Collectively, they contributed 2.5 million hours of community service and raised \$130,000 for charity. As part of the SSDB Finale, community partners who had collaborated

GOOD TO KNOW! In place of the annual Early Childhood Conference, ECDA will now organise the Early Childhood Celebrations and Conference in alternate years. The EC fraternity can look forward to an even more meaningful and engaging conference every other year. If you missed the ECC 2022, catch it at go.gov.sg/ecc-2022-livestream or scan here.



with preschools on the various activities and projects were recognised for their role in the movement.

Scan this QR code to view the SSDB Finale video.



“The SSDB movement has given our children many opportunities to learn how to be kind, compassionate and active citizens.”

PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB





SURROUNDING CHILDREN WITH A SUPPORTIVE AND CARING COMMUNITY EXPOSES THEM TO A DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPE THEIR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.

Nurturing children into well-rounded individuals relies on more than their immediate family. An entire ecosystem is needed. It includes teachers, friends and relatives, neighbours, the community, government agencies and so on. Hence, it is fitting that the inaugural ECC was themed 'Celebrating as One, Together We Soar'.

"With a shared vision, families, preschools and community partners can be better aligned in developing children holistically. Each party takes up an important stake in raising our next generation," says Mrs Audrey Chen-Lee, a lecturer at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development. Joining her in sharing their views on the importance of such partnerships are educator Mrs Diana Yee-Lim; parent Ms Iswariya d/o Popathi;

“Creating more opportunities for parents to engage in hands-on activities with their kids in preschool is a great way to build the home-preschool partnership.

MS ISWARIYA D/O POPATHI, 31
Training Manager, mother of Aurora Iswariya Roy, 3



and Ms Chia Yee Sing, Head of Education Outreach at the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM).

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS YEAR'S ECC THEME?

Iswariya d/o Popathi: It resonates with parents as we have to work closely with preschools for our children's optimal development. When my daughter Aurora's preschool started teaching the uppercase letters of the alphabet, we followed up at home by teaching her to write and recognise these letters. When parents and preschool are on the same page, it helps the child to become a confident learner.

Diana Yee-Lim: Educators, families and the community should make a concerted effort to bond and work together. Positive partnerships uncover and support children's learning potential and can develop them into confident, adaptable and resilient individuals who are able to think independently and communicate effectively.

Audrey Chen-Lee: Much learning can be derived from educators, families and community partners working together. When families share information about their children, such as their strengths, teachers can plan activities to better cater to children's interests and learning needs, and in turn, families feel their insights are valued and affirmed. Community partners provide additional resources to enhance and take learning beyond

the classroom. Collaborating with others also hones educators' leadership and organisational skills, and challenges them to become more creative and better problem-solvers.

Chia Yee Sing: The ECC theme reflects our ability to lift one another up through our collective strength. This is similar to SKM's campaign tagline this year, 'A Kinder You, A Stronger Us', which emphasises the collective effort that comes from each individual kindness.

HOW DO PARTNERSHIPS WORK IN THE INTERESTS OF THE CHILD?

Audrey: For example, to inculcate the value of water as an essential resource, educators can work with national water agency PUB and organise a field trip to a NEWater plant where children learn how used water is treated to produce drinkable water. Educators can also share resources with parents to reinforce water-saving habits at home. Such collaborations deepen children's learning and are a win-win. They achieve our aim of instilling positive values in our young ones as well as the community partners' aim of educating the public.

Iswariya: To children, everything is new. Each experience will shape their perspective. For example, if my child visits a senior day care centre with her preschool, she can learn how to put values such as empathy and compassion into practice by interacting with seniors.

Diana: During Racial Harmony Day this year, we invited parents of different nationalities to share about their home countries such as Greece, India and Vietnam. For shy or timid children, seeing their parents giving a talk to their friends and teachers helps them feel secure and be more open and sociable. A positive partnership between parents and preschool encourages parents to be more engaged in their children's learning.

WHAT ARE SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING QUALITY PARTNERSHIPS?

Audrey: Communication and mutual respect are key to establishing trusting and reciprocal relationships among educators, families and community partners.



“When objectives are aligned, and lead to a win-win outcome, it becomes a fun collaboration for everyone involved.

MS CHIA YEE SING
Head of Education Outreach, Singapore Kindness Movement

Diana: Open, two-way communication is important — whether it is a casual conversation, a parent-teacher meeting, an email or a WhatsApp exchange. During internal meetings, teachers can learn from one another how to be patient, tactful and respectful towards parents. Such sharing strengthens the teachers' ability to build strong relationships with parents.

Iswariya: With good communication, any challenge involving a child's behaviour or learning can be more easily addressed. When Aurora sees me chatting with her teachers, she can draw a connection between mummy and her teachers, which helps regulate her behaviour. She knows I can check in with her teachers, so this helps set behavioural boundaries at home.

Yee Sing: An effective partnership starts with honesty and transparency. When objectives are aligned, and lead to a win-win outcome, it becomes a fun collaboration for everyone involved.

TELL US ABOUT A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCE.

Diana: In August, our centre organised a friendly competition for families to make lanterns from recycled materials. Teachers observed that parents were enthusiastic about collaborating with their children on the project. The children were proud to show off their lanterns, and seeing their handiwork displayed in preschool gave their confidence a further boost.

Yee Sing: We were heartened to see how Teacher Amirah from PCF Sparkletots @ Kembangan-Chai Chee Blk 341 used SKM's resources to enhance her centre's SSDB 2022 project. Instead of just booking our online puppet show for the children to watch and learn about kindness, she involved the preschool's beneficiary partner, PCF Sparkle Care @ Eunos, to take part as attendees. After the puppet show, the children made their own puppets with the help of their elderly beneficiaries, for use in storytelling. It was an innovative and heart-warming project, and inspires us to curate more relevant and meaningful programmes for our preschool partners.

WHAT ARE SOME BLIND SPOTS OR CHALLENGES, AND HOW CAN THESE BE MANAGED?

Diana: When there are language and cultural differences, it can be challenging to understand expectations and views about parent-teacher partnerships. We approach the relationship with respect and use different modes of communication, such as the communication handbook or visual cues, to ease parents in and help them get comfortable with being involved in activities.

Yee Sing: Educators' heavy workload is a challenge. They may not have enough time to plan and conduct lessons focused on character values such as kindness. As a community partner, SKM works closely with preschools to better understand their challenges and constraints. Doing so enables us to develop age-appropriate resources, ready for educators to use in class. This helps lighten their workload.

Audrey: Teachers, families and community partners may differ in their views and expectations of the collaboration, and each stakeholder may have different ways and means of contribution. Being open to varied sources of contribution enriches classroom experiences. It is also important to convey our appreciation to community partners with a thank-you video or a collage of the children's drawings capturing what they have learned. This helps strengthen and sustain relationships. When working with families with financial needs or other concerns, be sensitive and supportive in sharing information and connecting parents to community help channels. Some families may not be open to seeking help and need time to change their mindset.

“ Positive partnerships uncover and support children's learning potential.

MRS DIANA YEE-LIM, 60
Principal, Little Treasures Childcare @ Macpherson



THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

What educators should ask before starting a collaboration with parents or community partners, advises Mrs Chen-Lee.

- **What is our intent? What are we trying to accomplish, and why?**
- **What are appropriate ways of communicating and conveying messages to parents?**
- **How will we measure success and what other conditions must exist?**
- **How do we get there and what is the timeline?**
- **How will children/families/preschool/community partners benefit?**

“ Being open to varied sources of contribution enriches classroom experiences.



MRS AUDREY CHEN-LEE
Lecturer, National Institute of Early Childhood Development

HOW CAN PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS, PRESCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS BE IMPROVED?

Diana: Parent-teacher meetings are important avenues for educators to reflect on their teaching and learning practices and evaluate feedback relating to a child's learning and development. Educators should also be open to learning from fellow colleagues on strategies that have worked for them. Being aware of varying approaches allows educators to discern what is appropriate for different partnership situations.

Iswariya: Having more parent-teacher meet-ups would improve communication. I would also like to be more involved in centre-based activities. Whenever I visit Aurora's preschool, she is so eager to show me around her class. With the easing of COVID-19 safe management measures, creating more opportunities for parents to engage in hands-on activities with their kids in preschool is a great way to build the home-preschool partnership.

Audrey: Educators can take a more proactive role. They can share with families-in-need on where and how to approach family service centres for help. They can also connect families with agencies like the Health Promotion Board to get information on preparing healthy meals for their children. A well-informed educator, who is also a good listener, can do much to dispel parents' doubts and anxieties, while supporting them to get help resources that are often free or subsidised.

Yee Sing: Community partners can continuously update and curate targeted programmes and resources for preschoolers, ensuring they are age-appropriate, inclusive, and allow for differentiated learning. ●