

Igniting a SPARK



Clementi Woods Kindergarten staff at the SPARK Certificate Presentation Ceremony in November 2013. Mrs Chua is second from left.

ECDA's Quality Assurance Coaching (QAC) Scheme enables pre-schools to tap the expertise of coaches from the early childhood sector for SPARK assessment. Here are five tips on how to get the best out of your coaching.

1 Focus on the area(s) in which you need help
Getting ready for SPARK certification but don't know how to approach or address a certain issue that your centre is facing? The QAC Scheme can help.

Says Mrs Ruth Chua, Principal of Clementi Woods Kindergarten, "When we decided to get SPARK-certified, we strove to re-craft our centre's vision and mission statement. But I needed someone to help me with this task and so I signed up for the QAC Scheme.

"Besides helping me rethink our vision and mission statements, our coach also assisted in other areas. She is knowledgeable about SPARK requirements so she was able to point out areas we had overlooked. She also suggested how to work on these areas. It really made a difference to our certification process."

2 Don't be afraid to ask
The coaches know precisely what is required to achieve SPARK certification. You can ask your coach questions on any of the six aspects of the Quality Rating Scale— Leadership, Planning and Administration, Staff Management, Resources, Curriculum, and Pedagogy — that you may be unsure about.

3 Learn from others
ECDA frequently organises sharing sessions by centres that have already achieved SPARK certification. Attending these or other SPARK-related training workshops and briefings can be useful.

Mrs Chua says attending these sessions turned out to be both informative and assuring. "Listening to others share about their journey to SPARK certification made the

process seem more achievable to me. These sessions also helped me look out for common pitfalls."

4 Trust your coach
As Mrs Chua says, "you have to trust that the coaches are here not to 'check on us' but to help!" Building trust is one of the first things coaches aim to do. By establishing a relationship based on trust, coaches can communicate openly and get a full understanding of the specific strengths and needs of the centre. This helps them to advise a centre properly.

5 Give yourself time
The entire coaching process can take up to six months. Centres should give themselves sufficient preparation time for SPARK certification. Coaches can provide help where needed, but the centres have to note that this process cannot be completed overnight. ♥



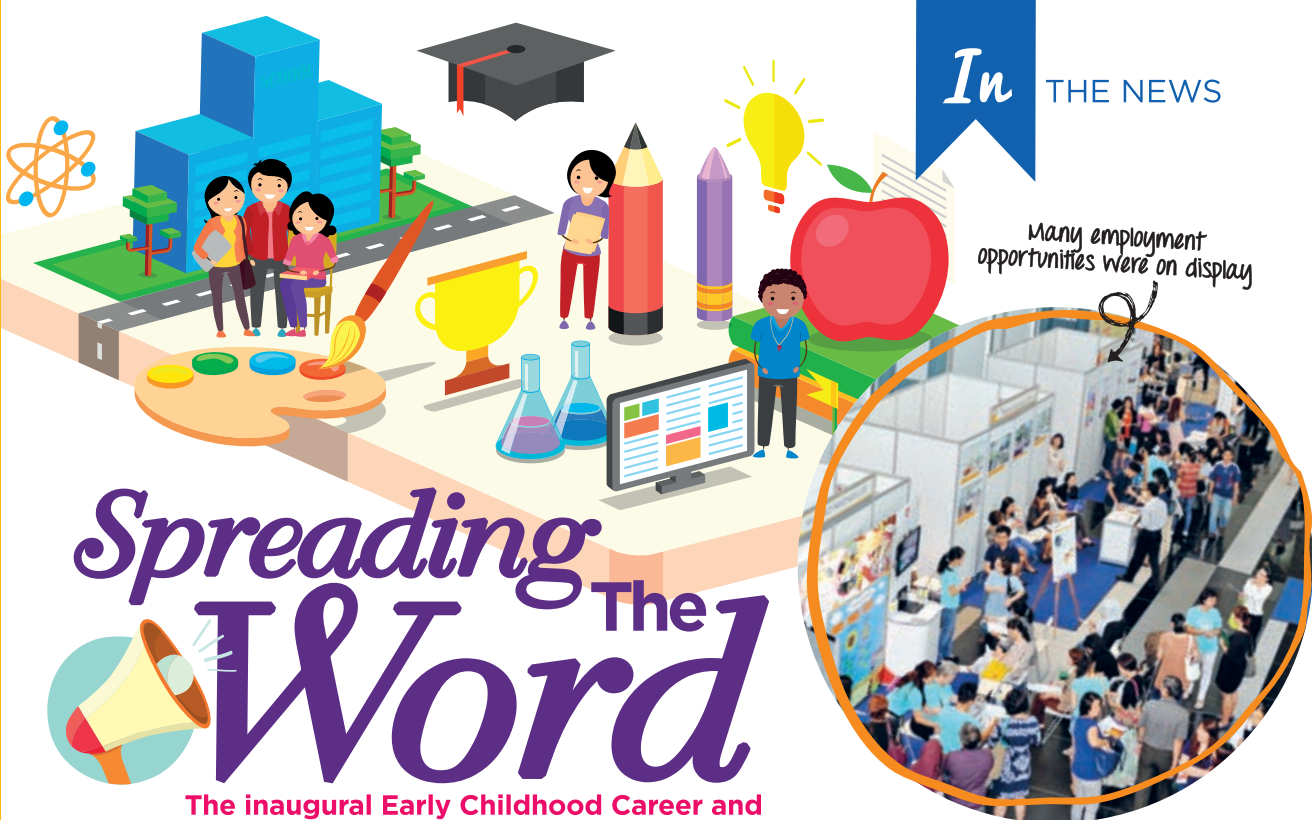
ABOUT THE QAC SCHEME

The Quality Assurance Coaching (QAC) Scheme is offered by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) to support pre-schools in their preparation for SPARK certification.

Through this scheme, pre-schools may tap on experienced coaches to guide them in making quality improvements and work towards certification. The coaches

are trained to clarify the Quality Rating Scale for pre-schools; identify and address quality gaps in structures, processes and outcomes; review the pre-school's processes and demonstrate better teaching and learning practices.

ECDA also funds up to 80 per cent of the scheme so eligible pre-schools need only pay a subsidised fee of \$250.



Many employment opportunities were on display

Spreading The Word

The inaugural Early Childhood Career and Education Fair 2014 showcased a comprehensive range of courses and careers available in the early childhood education sector.

IN A BID TO INCREASE the pool of early childhood professionals in Singapore, new initiatives have been launched by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), such as the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Master Plan in November 2013.

Following up on these efforts to retain and develop professionals in the sector by providing more incentives, training and recognition, ECDA organised the inaugural Early Childhood Career and Education Fair 2014, which attracted around 1,000 visitors. Held on 31 May 2014 at Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre, the fair featured over 30 booths representing employers, training

agencies and career counselling services. These offered courses as well as job vacancies for more than 500 teacher and educator positions.

Opening the fair, Guest-of-Honour and Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Defence Mr Chan Chun Sing said, "In 2008, perhaps only one in six of our children in that age group required early childhood services. Today, we are at one in three, and in a few years' time, we will probably reach one in two — and for some of the new estates it could be even higher than that. So obviously there is a tremendous need not just for numbers, but also quality manpower in the sector."

Working Together

Organisations who took part in the fair included training agencies like SEED Institute and pre-school operators like MindChamps and Agape Little Uni. Representatives from ECDA and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency were also on hand to

provide career information, give guidance on training programmes and offer training grant support relevant for jobseekers who were new to this sector.

"There's a good synergy at this fair from having so many different partners, agencies and schools from the early childhood industry in one place," said Deputy General Manager of Human Resource for MY World Preschool, Ms Shirley Wong. "For example, if someone was looking for a teaching position with MY World Preschool but didn't have the proper qualifications, we could advise her to sign up for the relevant courses at a booth that offered them."

Unexpected Opportunities

Ms Nur Athirah Binte Zakaria was one of the attendees at the fair. The 24-year-old Advanced Certificate in Early Years student at Asian International College was happy to be offered positions at the fair by pre-school and child care operators MindChamps and Cherie Hearts after she graduates in August 2015. For more information on career opportunities in the Early Childhood sector, visit ECDA's website at www.ecda.gov.sg. ♥