

# MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

**EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS IS NAOMI LEE'S SECRET TO SUCCESSFUL EARLY INTERVENTION.**



Ms Naomi Lee (right) pairs picture cards with objects to teach Dana about colours as her mother looks on

“**E**very child thrives when educators and parents tap into his or her interests and needs to find developmentally appropriate strategies to encourage learning,” says early intervention educator Ms Naomi Lee Shi En, who won the ECDA Outstanding Early Intervention Professional Award in 2022. This family- and child-centred approach undergirds her work at Rainbow Centre (Margaret Drive), where she helps children with developmental needs such as Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder and cerebral palsy.

Ms Lee sees her role as a facilitator who supports and empowers parents to be advocates for their children. For instance, she explains early intervention terms and acronyms in simple language that parents can understand. If a child struggles with speech or with expressing himself or herself, she teaches parents to use gestures, picture cards, tablets, or other strategies and tools.

The individualised activities planned for the intervention sessions are interesting and motivating for children, yet still feasible for family members to carry out at home daily. Ms Lee explains, “I build a rapport with the children by showing interest in the things they like and being

curious about their environment. I also encourage parents to be a part of the planning, intervention and follow-up processes. It’s a journey we take together.”

### BITE-SIZED LEARNING STRATEGIES

One of the children Ms Lee cares for is Dana Chan, 2½, who has Down syndrome. Mrs Jennifer Chan, Dana’s mother, shares how sessions with Ms Lee have made a difference in her daughter’s development.

➤ **Breaking down complex tasks into simpler ones.** To improve Dana’s gross motor skills, Ms Lee gives her fun muscle-strengthening exercises. Mrs Chan notes, “Depending on how Dana responds, Ms Lee may break them down further to ensure Dana works specific muscles within her capability. Then, she guides me in conducting the exercise with Dana so that I know how to do it on my own.” At Ms Lee’s suggestion, she also encouraged Dana to be more active with her hands to strengthen her fine motor skills by providing sand play and peeling-related activities.

➤ **Adding little challenges to everyday tasks.** The centre has a daily greeting routine where Dana and her classmates identify their



Ms Lee (middle) and a therapist coach a mother on the proper use of facilitated seating during feeding



### BELIEVE IN YOUR CHILD

Ms Lee has three tips for parents of children with developmental needs.

- **Change your mindset**  
Look beyond your child’s disability. Believe that your child can thrive and learn to do many things, rather than limiting him or her to a diagnosis.
- **Join a support group**  
Whether it is a face-to-face or WhatsApp group, parents benefit from sharing experiences and resources, and offering mutual encouragement.
- **Connect with professionals**  
Deeper communication with your child’s medical team and early intervention professionals enables parents to make more informed decisions.

photographs and say hello to one another. To make it more challenging, Ms Lee changes the location of the photographs every day so that the students need to look for them. “This has helped Dana exercise greater flexibility in her thinking and be more aware of her surroundings,” says Mrs Chan.

“When I am able to help a child gain skills and work towards independence, the family’s confidence increases and they learn to appreciate their child’s capabilities,” says Ms Lee. ●

Be inspired by Ms Naomi Lee Shi En at [go.gov.sg/ecda-awards-2022-naomi](https://go.gov.sg/ecda-awards-2022-naomi)

