

The magazine for early childhood practitioners and parents

Beanstalk

Jan-Mar 2015

LET'S GO
OUTSIDE!

THE IMPORTANCE
OF OUTDOOR PLAY
FOR CHILDREN



GREEN
SANCTUARY
A trip to the Jacob Ballas
Children's Garden is a must!

GAME
FOR THIS?
TEACH YOUR KID
YOUR FAVE SPORT

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE
Increasing accessibility, improving affordability and raising quality

IN THIS ISSUE

A New Year and a Good Start for Every Child!

As we bid adieu to 2014, we ring in the New Year with a basketful of hopes and aspirations. Singapore is celebrating its 50th birthday and we are glad to present you this issue of *Beanstalk*, our 1st SG50 edition.

Fifty years is a significant milestone not only for Singapore, but also for the early childhood (EC) fraternity of professionals, parents and partners, in terms of what we have accomplished collectively. We thank the EC fraternity for working together with us to uplift the quality of the sector and to implement various programmes to enhance the accessibility, affordability and quality of our pre-schools. Some of the programmes include the launch of the Child Care Registration and Management System, enhanced infant and child care subsidies and Pre-school Opportunity Fund, as well as continuing professional development (CPD) courses for EC professionals. These would not have been possible without the unstinting support of all stakeholders.

In this issue of *Beanstalk*, we turn the spotlight on play. Research shows that play offers children myriad benefits — they explore, discover, negotiate, communicate, self-regulate,

develop empathy, resolve conflicts, problem-solve and more. Play is the bedrock upon which a child develops physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. But a child's play is also an opportunity for a parent or an educator to develop a warm and nurturing relationship with the child. So, do create more opportunities for play or set aside some time to have play dates with your child.

What are ECDA's aspirations and hopes for 2015? We share a common goal with the EC fraternity and this is to create a bright future for our children. In this coming year, we are looking forward to:

- Stronger and more dynamic parent-centre partnerships;
- More centres embracing SPARK in their quality improvement journeys;
- More professional development opportunities for EC professionals and the appointment of the first group of ECDA Fellows; and
- More children benefiting from the enhanced subsidies and support schemes available.

As the new year beckons with the promise of new beginnings, we encourage EC professionals to make their workplace a "worthplace". A "worthplace" because it is a happy, healthy and fulfilling workplace where you can



Dr Lee and daughter, Kaydon, 6, having a play-date at Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park.

find meaning and purpose in what you do. A "worthplace" because you are nurturing our young for the future.

There is an inspirational quote from Edith Lovejoy Pierce, a 20th century poet, that comes to mind: "We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day."

We invite you to continue working together with us to write a new chapter and give every child a good start. On this note, my colleagues and I at ECDA wish you a fulfilling year ahead.

DR LEE TUNG JEAN
CEO
Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)



ON THE COVER

From left: Thangam Nareshkumar, Ameera Stacey, Abbeimanyu Nareshkumar, Victor Phillippe, Lim Ber Shien, Janice Chua, Ellie Chan

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A play-based project helps My First Skool @ 333 Kang Chin Road win the 2014 ECDA Innovation Award



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The Seriousness of Play

Do parents and educators see eye-to-eye on the benefits of play for pre-schoolers? *Beanstalk* talks to parents Winston Ng, Gillian Chan and Thangam Nareshkumar, and their children's educators, Kartina Bte Sudirman and Janice Chua.

PHOTOS BY EALBERT HO & TAN KAY HIAN

Parents, what is your definition of “play”?
Thangam: When children are at play, they should be doing something that they enjoy, that [has not been] forced upon them, and has been ideally created or invented by them.

Gillian: To me, play is all about having fun and learning from the process at the same time.

What lessons or values do you think children can learn through play?

Winston: Naomi usually plays with her older sister, Nicolle, who is eight. I find that through playing, they develop social skills and critical thinking. Don't underestimate little children — they form their own social networks just like adults!

Gillian: At home, we have Lego sets, cooking toys, board games, jigsaw puzzles, musical instruments, art and craft materials, etc. Sometimes my kids make their own toys out of recycled paper. The variety of toys keeps them occupied, and it is interesting to see how creative and imaginative they can get with these.

Thangam: Abbeimanyu likes to pretend-play with his younger sister, Aanyaa, who is two. One of their favourite games is to imitate my husband and I, and act as 'parents' to their dolls. For example, they will say things like “Shh!” or “Don't do that!” to their dolls, just like what we often say to them! It shows that they have registered what we teach them. Sometimes, Abbeimanyu prefers to play alone with his cars, trains and action figures while Aanyaa amuses herself with her toy kitchen and Barbie dolls.

Educators, do you have a similar view of the term?

Kartina: Yes! I define “play” as an activity

PLAY ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE RELEVANT AND MEANINGFUL FOR CHILDREN IN THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO RELATE THE ACTIVITY TO THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES.

//Janice Chua

that is child-directed, enjoyable and spontaneous. Some parents may think that playing with toys or running around the playground with friends is not as essential as learning how to read, add or subtract. However, I believe it is through play that most of our children's early learning is achieved.

Janice: Play activities should be relevant and meaningful for children in that they are able to relate the activity to their everyday lives. For instance,

when we were talking about transportation, we had our children at the centre wash a real car while we showed them the basic parts of the car.

There are different domains of child development — physical, cognitive, language and social-emotional. How is play incorporated at your centre to support each domain?

Kartina: At PCF Chong Pang, we have an indoor piazza made up of various play areas. For example at the art studio, children can paint objects or mould

Naomi with classmates at her school's water play area.



Janice Chua
27, ABBEIMANYU'S
TEACHER AT
PMI@EAST



Winston Ng
41, STAY-AT-HOME
FATHER, AND GILLIAN
CHAN, 33, CORPORATE
COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGER, PARENTS TO
NAOMI, 6





PCF Chong Pang kids playing with coloured salt at the light box area.

clay to build up their finger dexterity and fine motor skills. Cognitive development is also stimulated when they explore what happens if they mix colours or use different art techniques. The light box area is a wonderful way to learn about shapes, colours and shadows, and to expand their vocabulary. As for social-emotional development, the more children play together, the better they can get along with one another.

Janice: All of the developmental domains can also be integrated in one activity. For example, at PMI@East we organise cooking 'classes' in which children make food like pizzas and cookies. Reading the recipes introduces them to new words, while numeracy concepts are learned by measuring the ingredients. Steps like kneading the dough and stirring the mixture involve physical movement. And interpersonal skills are facilitated through role-play as the children pretend to be waiters, customers and cashiers.

A toy cash register at PCF Chong Pang's dramatic play area.



Is outdoor play as important as indoor play?

Janice: Definitely, if not more important, because children's sensorial, hands-on experiences are mostly outdoors. Instead of just seeing, for example, pictures of snails in books, they can actually see real snails in the garden. My centre has an outdoor playground consisting of equipment such as tire swings, monkey bars, a trampoline and a sandpit. We let our kids play outside for one hour each day.

Kartina: I believe that learning does not have to be confined to the classroom. At my centre, we have twice-weekly Physical Education lessons in which the children navigate obstacle courses to stimulate gross motor skill development. Numeracy lessons are also conducted outdoors where we use the environment to teach new concepts. For instance, children can use leaves, flowers and twigs to create their own ABAB patterns [a pattern composed of two alternating variables, which plays an important part in developing numeracy and thinking process].

Parents, do you place equal emphasis on outdoor play?

Thangam: Yes, although we only go out on weekends when my husband and I are not at work. We often go to the East Coast Park and cycle or walk on the beach.

Winston: Outdoor play can be fun and educational, too. I recently brought Naomi

Kartina Bte Sudirman

30, NAOMI'S TEACHER
AT PCF BLK 309 CHONG PANG KINDERGARTEN





Ameera (left) and Ellie,
playmates at PMI@East.



Thangam Nareshkumar

32, JUNIOR COLLEGE
TEACHER, MOTHER TO
ABBEIMANYU, 4

on a trail hike at MacRitchie Reservoir. She fell in love with the place after seeing squirrels, snakes and even a huge monitor lizard!

Thangam: Indoor playgrounds are a good alternative to outdoor ones. They have contained and padded play areas, so kids are safer and less prone to injury. Whenever I take my children to an indoor playground, they can easily spend half a day there.

How much time do you allocate for play?

Winston: I don't stipulate an exact amount of time. I have a pact with Naomi — as long as she finishes her homework, she can play all she wants.

Gillian: I feel that it is important for Naomi to enjoy her childhood and [to] keep playtime as the main part of her life for now. But as with her older sister, her playtime will likely be limited to weekends once she starts primary school.

Thangam: Abbeimanyu is only four, so every time is still like playtime for him. When I ask him, "What did you do in school today?", his usual answer is "I played." That will probably change as he grows older. The challenge

I DON'T STIPULATE AN EXACT AMOUNT OF TIME. I HAVE A PACT WITH NAOMI — AS LONG AS SHE FINISHES HER HOMEWORK, SHE CAN PLAY ALL SHE WANTS.

//Winston Ng

then will be how to make sure he enjoys his schoolwork as much as his playtime.

Educators, do you think parents are becoming more aware of the importance of play for their children?

Janice: Yes, based on my experience with parents at my centre. We maintain regular contact with parents not just when they drop off and pick up their kids from the centre. We also keep in touch with parents through our six-monthly parent-teacher meetings, quarterly newsletters and fortnightly class notes. We use these opportunities to show parents photos and other documentation of our play activities, so they are now more knowledgeable about the benefits of play.

What tips can you give to parents on extending learning through play in the home environment?

Kartina: Let play ideas develop naturally; there's no need to overthink them. Use things available around the house as teaching aids, such as socks for 'matching' lessons or household items for a treasure hunt. Through play, enjoyment and curiosity for learning can be cultivated. These will then shape the child's attitude towards learning. ♥

On Ber: Shien: Polo tee, Gingersnaps; Pants: Marks & Spencer; Hat: Model's own; On Ellie: Sundress & sandals: Gingersnaps; On Victor: T-shirt: Marks & Spencer; Shorts: Gingersnaps; On Ameera: Parka & Top: George; Denim shorts: Marks & Spencer; Boots: Not Too Big; Sunhat: Stylist's own; On Abbeimanyu: Shirt: Gap; T-shirt: Gingersnaps; Shorts: Marks & Spencer; Styling: Sharon Tan & Wai Ting Lim; Hair & makeup: Manisa Tan & Anna Lim



Putting the Joy of Play into Learning

Dr Catherine Donahue, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Wheelock College, USA, on the value of play.

What is play? Play is the way a child engages with his or her environment to learn through exploration and experimentation, questioning and hypothesising. It is one of the most important experiences children can have to promote their development and learning.



DR CATHERINE DONAHUE Ed.D., joined the faculty at Wheelock College in 1987, following 15 years of experience in child care and early intervention. She teaches courses on infant

development, assessment and curriculum, as well as infant mental health and research. She also consults with staff and parents in a variety of early childhood education settings.

THE EVOLVING COMPLEXITY OF PLAY REFLECTS THE CHILD'S CHANGING COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

//Dr Catherine Donahue

How does play promote learning in young children?

Play develops from birth along a continuum and in stages. During the pre-school years, an infant's play behaviour progresses from visual and tactile exploration to trial-and-error exploration to experimentation to symbolic play (using objects to represent something else). The evolving complexity of play reflects the child's changing cognitive development. Play also provides the foundation for learning mathematics, science, physics, language and reading. It can address several curriculum areas in a positive and age-appropriate way.

Are there any 'best practices' in terms of incorporating play to encourage children's learning and development?

Open-ended play activities — both indoors and outdoors, such as with water and sand, or block and dramatic play — provide opportunities for children to work at their own pace, to question and create new strategies to solve problems.

What are some practical strategies for parents and educators to support children's learning through play?

Observe the child and match his or her emerging abilities with activities that challenge his or her thinking. That provides opportunities for practice learning. Adults can guide the child's play by allowing him or her to engage with the material, asking questions ("What would happen if you _____?") or extending play with additional props.

Can you suggest some cheap and easily-accessible play materials that parents and educators can provide for children?

Look for materials that allow the child to direct his or her play, explore and experiment, and that invite active engagement. Examples include blocks, paint supplies, housekeeping toys, farm sets and Lego sets. ♥



Taking Stock & Looking forward

AS ONE YEAR ends, another begins. Before 2015 progresses in earnest, let's take stock of key developments in the Early Childhood sector over the past year, and what is in store for parents, professionals and ECDA in this new year.

INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY

2014

70 new child care centres facilitated by ECDA since 2013. → +7,000 additional places created for children across Singapore.

Anchor Operator Scheme

Enhanced scheme to increase the number of AOPs to 5

to provide parents with a variety of good-quality and affordable pre-school options.

AOP

Non-AOPs

New support schemes introduced to expand child care places in high-demand areas and at workplaces.

Online Registration Management System

launched to make the search for child care centres more convenient for parents and enrolment of new children easier for operators.



2015

More child care centres

By 2017, one in two children aged 18 months to 6 years will have a child care place.

Working with the sector

- To provide 20,000 additional child care places from 2013 to 2017.
- To increase the provision of services in estates with young families.

IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

2014

\$360 million provided in subsidies to 79,000 children in infant and child care.

31,000 children supported through the enhanced infant and child care subsidies for lower- and middle-income families in 2014.

Pre-school Opportunity Fund

set up to support projects that promote the holistic development of children from less-advantaged or at-risk backgrounds.

2015

Enhanced Kindergarten Fee Assistance (KiFAS)

offered to families with gross household income of up to \$6,000, for children who attend kindergartens run by Anchor Operators or the Ministry of Education.



FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

Early Childhood Conference 2014
attended by over 1,300 participants.

Early Childhood Parenting Study

- FOCUS:
- ➔ Parental knowledge and beliefs of early childhood development and learning.
 - ➔ Parental aspirations for their children.
 - ➔ Parenting practices.

2015

Additional online parenting resources

- ➔ Contain developmentally-appropriate tips for parents.
- ➔ Complement ECDA's existing suite of print, mobile and web-based resources.

Interactive workshops for parents

- ➔ Work with community partners and support pre-schools in organising workshops for parents.
- ➔ Platform for parents to exchange ideas, knowledge and skills with EC professionals.

RAISING QUALITY

2014

SPARK™

Streamlined the assessment process and enhanced outreach efforts.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) masterplan

- ➔ Implemented to develop more structured career pathways.
- ➔ Instituted support measures (e.g. building up a pool of relief teachers and providing additional CPD days).
- ➔ Offered 9,000 CPD training places in 2014 to create more opportunities for upgrading for Early Childhood professionals.

Quality and innovation in teaching and pedagogy

Promoted through grants and guidance projects to centres.

liveBeinstall

APParent Log

Developed online resources on parenting.

ECDA Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Training Award

Offered to attract more students to join the EC sector.

2015

Modularised Polytechnic diploma courses

With modularised continuing education and training Polytechnic diploma courses to help in-service educators balance work with professional upgrading.

Structured competency-based career progression pathways

To create more opportunities for EC professionals to upgrade their skills.

Commendation category

To recognise SPARK-certified centres with strong teaching and learning practices for children's holistic development.

Enhanced Internships for full-time Polytechnic & ITE students

To strengthen pre-employment training.

ECDA Fellows

- ➔ To appoint EC professionals who display exemplary leadership and expertise.
- ➔ To serve as role models to uplift sector quality and create a fraternity of professionals.

Young & Charitable

As PMI has discovered, young children can be inspired and motivated to reach out to the less fortunate.



The children from PMI selling cookies that they made at the carnival to raise funds for Care Corner.

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY for children to 'do good,'" says Dr Khoo Kim Choo, founder of the Preschool for Multiple Intelligences (PMI). And she doesn't just pay lip service to that idea, for in July 2014, she initiated a 'Children for Children' (CFC) project in partnership with Care Corner Singapore to instill the concept of altruism among the children.

Care Corner is a voluntary welfare organisation that provides support services for low-income families. These services range from child care to elder care and include operation of family service centres. In conjunction with SG50, Care Corner is launching a Jubilee Programme to provide direct financial assistance and trained volunteer befrienders for needy families. PMI has pledged to contribute to Care Corner's Jubilee Fund by raising \$50,000 for families with young children. Dr Khoo explains, "[The project] offers our children opportunities to learn that they can show 'Love and Compassion' — one of PMI's core values — in different ways."

The CFC project involved children, parents and teachers from both PMI branches, PMI@Newton and PMI@East. So far, they have organised a fundraising dinner/art session at La Barca restaurant, a hosting session for Care Corner children at PMI@Newton, a children's carnival at PMI@East, a piggybank donation and a children's art sale at PMI's year-end party.

At the art auction, an art piece made up of tongue depressors decorated by the children and put together by a professional framer was

NO CONTRIBUTION IS TOO LITTLE, AND IT'S GOOD FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS TO LEAD THE WAY AS ROLE MODELS

//Dr Khoo Kim Choo

auctioned off for \$6,000. The CFC project officially ended on 15 December after the final event — an online art auction comprising art created by the children. PMI is proud to announce that they have achieved their target of raising \$50,000 to contribute to Care Corner's Jubilee Fund.

Dr Khoo is bowled over by the enthusiasm of the children and parents for the project. The parents planned the carnival which was attended by children from Care Corner. The children were generous in donating books and toys for the carnival. "They were [also] good hosts [to the children from Care Corner], though some were a little shy. They also gave money from their own piggybanks after discussing the matter with their parents," reveals Dr Khoo.

K1 child Liam Farrer thoroughly enjoyed running the stalls at the carnival. He says, "I feel happy and good about it. I want to help them and share what we have." K2 child Kyra Wu shares the same sentiments: "Baking the cookies was fun. We can sell them and give the money to children in need."

As Dr Khoo puts it, "[No contribution is] too little, and it's good for teachers and parents to lead the way as role models." ♥

PMI children sorting out their contribution of toys & books before the children's carnival.

Dr Khoo and the children from PMI presenting a pledge of \$50,000 to the chairman of Care Corner for the Children for Children project.



Darius Ng on stage at the Ceremony.



O N 9 OCTOBER 2014, the latest batch of ECDA scholars was recognised at the second annual ECDA Scholarships and Awards Presentation Ceremony. At the event, Guest-of-Honour Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Defence, handed out awards to 53 recipients.

In his opening address, Minister Chan expressed gratitude to both aspiring and current EC professionals. "Your efforts will set the foundation for our children in the years to come," he said. "Many of you have joined the [EC] sector because you want to be respected as a professional in your own way... At the end of the day, what will make you stand out will be your passion for the profession and the development of [strong] foundations for our children."

Awards were given out in the following categories:

ECDA Scholarship and ECDA Teaching Award

For outstanding and deserving in- and pre-service EC professionals who wish to pursue a Bachelor's or Master's degree in early childhood care and education (ECCE) to enhance their pedagogical practice as well as hone leadership competencies.

ECDA Sponsorship

For in-service EC professionals who wish to pursue a Diploma in ECCE on a part-time basis.

ECDA Polytechnic Training Award

For deserving students who aspire to be an EC professional upon graduation and are pursuing the full-time EC diploma courses at Ngee Ann Polytechnic or Temasek Polytechnic.

Two recipients, Siti Nurrafidah Binte Samat and Darius Ng, shared their ambitions as existing and aspiring EC professionals with the audience. ECDA Scholarship holder Siti Nurrafidah is currently balancing her job as a teacher at the Ministry of Education (MOE) Kindergarten @ Tampines with her part-time Master of Education (Early Childhood) studies at the National Institute of Education (NIE). "The training at NIE will enhance the professional conversations I have with MOE curriculum specialists, with whom MOE Kindergarten teachers partner closely to review and enhance the EC curriculum," she said. "I look forward to advocating 'best practices' for all children and families in the EC sector."

Darius, a full-time Diploma in Early Childhood Studies student at Temasek Polytechnic, is an ECDA Polytechnic Training Award recipient. His mother, a primary school teacher, inspired him to become an educator. "I saw how devoted she was to helping students of various abilities and backgrounds improve. Her drive to see the children become better people inspires me to want to be an educator, one who is committed to help a child grow holistically...I strongly believe that as educators, we must always continue our own learning to develop more innovative and interesting ways to help children learn," he said.

PHOTO BY HONG CHEE YAN

Educating the Educators

Two new initiatives are set to complement ongoing efforts to open up opportunities for early childhood (EC) professionals and improve the quality of teaching in the Early Childhood sector.





ADECL

ECDA ITE Training Award

WHO CAN APPLY

ECDA-certified (L2) teachers who have at least one year of experience as a Senior Teacher in the EC sector and have met the competency level of a Senior Teacher.

Full-time ITE students in their first or second year of the Higher Nitec programme. Recipients must serve a one-year bond with the EC sector for each year of support.

WHAT IT FEATURES



850 course hours to be completed on a part-time basis over 1.5 years



A blend of face-to-face classes, e-learning and practicum



A modularised structure comprising Post-Diploma Certificates

WHAT IT COVERS



Full course fee sponsorship (capped at the amount payable by Singapore Citizens)



A study allowance of **\$500 per month**



A one-off learning resource grant of \$1,000 for study-related expenses



Funding for professional development

of up to \$1,000 per year for related supplementary courses (e.g. Art, Speech & Drama, Special Needs)

Coming Up . . .

At the ceremony, Minister Chan also announced two new initiatives to attract and develop educators in the EC sector. One is the ECDA Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Training Award, which supports ITE students pursuing the two-year Higher

National ITE Certificate (Higher Nitec) in Early Childhood Education.

Interested applicants can now apply for this Award on ECDA's website (www.ecda.gov.sg).

Gayathri Ariu Selvam, a Year 1 Higher Nitec student at ITE College Central, looks

forward to applying for the Award in her second year, as it would help her fulfil her aspirations of contributing to the EC sector. "It's good that ECDA has now opened up the Training Award for polytechnic as well as ITE students", she said. "I am especially interested in child psychology, as I want to help children [who may have problems]."

The second initiative is the Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership (ADECL) for in-service EC professionals keen to take on the role of centre principals or supervisors. It will be offered at Ngee Ann and Temasek Polytechnics from April 2016, and will replace the current Diploma in ECCE - Leadership (DECCE-L) programme.

"The ADECL provides more flexibility due to its modular structure and the introduction of e-learning. This will enable in-service teachers to have a better work/life balance," said Ms Phyllis Tan, Director of MY World Preschool and CEO of Metropolitan YMCA Singapore. "And since it is only eligible to Senior Teachers, applicants have most likely already been identified by their centres as having leadership potential." ♥



Minister Chan awarding the ECDA Scholarship to Ms Siti Nurrafidah.



Scholars and Teaching Award recipients with Minister Chan, ECDA management and representatives from institutes of higher learning.

Ready for Reading

For her work in getting parents to participate in their children's learning, Kartini Binte Sudirman was conferred a 2014 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award.



Ms Kartini rehearsing with her students.

A S CLICHÉD AS it may sound, the phrase 'It takes a village to raise a child' is true. Indeed, it is this philosophy that helped Ms Kartini Binte Sudirman, K2 form teacher and Malay Language K1/K2 teacher at PCF Bukit Panjang Blk 254 Kindergarten, win a 2014 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award.

"Parents are the first role models for their young ones and they are key to their children's development," says the 30 year-old who has been working in the early childhood sector for seven years. Embracing this philosophy, Ms Kartini is keen for parents to be involved. Not long after she joined the PCF centre three years ago, Ms Kartini initiated reading-awareness workshops for parents to promote early literacy in their children. Held in January at the beginning of each school year, these workshops equip parents — especially those of Nursery children who have just joined the centre — with tips on how to make reading more exciting for children, and thus foster the habit at home.

"The feedback from parents has been very positive," she says appreciatively. "Many of them have said that before attending the workshop, they did not know the difference between phonemic

awareness [using sounds to make spoken words] and phonics [applying the sounds to written language]."

A Trip to Remember

In November 2014, Ms Kartini went on a week-long study trip to Osaka, Japan with other 2013 and 2014 ECDA Award winners and ECDA officials. They visited several pre-schools and the main highlight for her was seeing how Japanese teachers embraced the concept of play in their kindergartens and child care centres.

"Their focus is for young children to grow up filled with curiosity about the world and why things are the way they are," says Ms Kartini. "I was impressed by how they placed

great importance on outdoor activities, which allowed children to use their five senses such as smelling the air and touching the soil or sand."

She has proposed to her principal that she brings her students out for a short walk each day. "I believe this will improve their concentration and I can spend that time chatting and building positive relationships with them," she says.

Currently pursuing a part-time Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Care and Education at KLC International Institute, Ms Kartini says she is humbled to have won the award. She is grateful for the support of her family, centre principal and fellow teachers.

"My father, who recently passed away, was the one most excited when I said I wanted to be a teacher. So I dedicate this award to him," adds Ms Kartini. ♥

I WAS IMPRESSED BY HOW TEACHERS IN JAPAN PLACED GREAT IMPORTANCE ON OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES.

//Ms Kartini



KARTINI BINTE SUDIRMAN
30, Teacher,
PCF Bukit Panjang
Blk 254

PHOTOS BY HONG CHEE YAN

PARENTS, DO TAKE NOTE

How to develop your child's interest in reading? Children model themselves after you, so if he or she sees you reading at home regularly — be it a book, magazine or newspaper — or if you make it a practice to read to them, they will follow suit!



Mrs Ava Wang, Principal of Bedok Methodist Church Kindergarten receiving the SPARK Certificate from Dr Lee Tung Jean, CEO, ECDA.



practices," she shares.

Ms Koh Huiyu of Star Learners @ Simei echoes Mrs Wang's sentiments: "The assessors clarified the report so that we were clear of our strengths and areas for improvement. We now know where the gaps are and we have greater clarity of what is expected for quality improvement."

Star Learners @ Simei received SPARK certification while Bedok Methodist Church Kindergarten received their SPARK re-certification at the SPARK Certificate Presentation Ceremony at the Early Childhood Conference (ECC) 2014. The year 2014 also saw a total of 191 pre-schools attaining SPARK certification and re-certification — the highest number in a single year since SPARK was launched in 2011.

SPARK has also inspired centres to forge partnerships to improve the quality of their education programmes. Three kindergartens — Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Kindergarten, Living Sanctuary Kindergarten and Ascension Kindergarten — forged a camaraderie through an exchange of ideas when they first embarked on their SPARK journey.

In 2015, ECDA will also be introducing a Commendation category to recognise SPARK-certified centres with strong teaching and learning practices. This will further differentiate the

quality of pre-school programmes and help parents make informed choices in selecting a pre-school for their children. ♥

WE SOON REALISED THAT ATTAINING SPARK WAS THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER MEANINGFUL JOURNEY TOWARDS CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

//Mrs Ava Wang

improvement. "We then decided to focus on the curriculum plan as it was an important component contributing to the quality of Teaching and Learning. We evaluated our lessons, made amendments and reviewed them. These reviews are still on-going today and have become part of our culture to sustain good

Even More SPARKLE

A pioneer batch of SPARK-certified pre-schools has been recognised for their continued efforts in providing quality pre-school education through SPARK re-certification. Find out what SPARK re-certification does for your pre-school.

SINCE ITS LAUNCH in 2011, the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework, or SPARK, has been keeping a passion for quality education burning among pre-schools. A quality benchmark that serves as a guide for pre-schools to improve their education programmes, SPARK has been instrumental in raising the quality of pre-school education in Singapore.

As Mrs Ava Wang, Principal of Bedok Methodist Church Kindergarten says, "I could still remember how delighted we were when we received the news that we had 'passed' SPARK. We soon realised that attaining SPARK was the beginning of another meaningful journey towards continuous improvement."

From their first SPARK assessment report, Mrs Wang and her team looked into areas for



Mrs Wang and her team of teachers from Bedok Methodist Church Kindergarten.



In

NOVATION
& RESEARCH



Little Olympians

Lead The Way



A novel way of developing motor skills through play helps centre clinch innovation award.



OUTDOOR PLAY IS

an important part of a child's social, physical and cognitive development. As a firm believer in the merits of outdoor play, My First Skool at Block 333, Kang Chin Road launched the "Little Olympians" project on March 2014.

"While the aim of the project was to help children develop and refine their motor skills, the intention was also to foster an appreciation of and interest in sports," explained Ms Rita Lim, the centre's principal.

To help their children develop, refine and master motor skills, the teachers in the centre set up game stations (made from recycled materials) that mimicked actual sports. The game stations were regularly modified to sustain the children's interest and engagement, based on the teachers' observations and children's feedback.

Through weekly hour-long play sessions held in open spaces around the centre, the children had opportunities to develop three key skills: locomotor skills, object control and stability.

The project culminated in a Sports Day held at Taman Jurong Community Club.

At the event, parents also joined their children in a self-designed obstacle course and picked up strategies on how to develop their children's motor development through simple activities.

For its innovative use and implementation of motor skills development concepts and resources, the centre won the Innovation Award (Commendation) at the ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development 2014.

"To us, innovation is about learning new ideas and doing things in a different way to support the development of our children. This was the goal of the Little Olympians project," said Ms Lim. "Previous motor development classes were restricted to simple movements like running and jumping. We found that such classes were not as enjoyable."

To tackle this, Ms Lim and her team revamped the classes with the skills learnt at the "FUN Start, MOVE Smart" course run by the Singapore Sports Council. The course is designed to help early childhood educators understand

fundamental motor skills development.

They also visited Lakeside Primary School and observed how a Physical Education class was conducted for Primary One students.

The centre has plans to share its knowledge, and is also currently in talks with grassroots organisations to set up activity booths at community events. ♥



CALLING ALL PRACTITIONERS

You can tap on the Practitioner Inquiry (PI) scheme, to explore innovative ways of delivering your curriculum and classroom activities.

Applications are open until 31 Mar 2015 (Tue) to all ECDA-licensed child care centres and registered kindergartens. As a funding requisite, educators are required to attend the Practitioner Inquiry in Early Childhood Education (PIECE) Workshop to be held in Mar 2015.

For more information, please visit the TEACHER'S gallery section (Professional Development) of www.growatbeanstalk.sg.



Ms Rita Lim (middle) with teachers at the centre.



DEVELOPING PRESCHOOLERS' FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS

A three-day course, is available for all ECDA-registered teachers. For more information, please refer to ECDA's Online Prospectus 2015: www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/Continuing-Professional-Development.aspx



Alman Safwan, 6, having fun batting a ball at a game station.



PHOTOS BY MARK LEE

THRIVE

DEALING WITH THE PHYSICAL, LANGUAGE, COGNITIVE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD



LEARN

A green sanctuary of interactive experiences



GROW

A cute character bento your child can assemble



PLAY

Help your child to understand the 3Rs of recycling



watch it grow!



learn

A world of PLAY

The Jacob Ballas Children's Garden is a green sanctuary where your child can learn and play to his heart's content.

Did you know that a daily dose of sunlight can reduce the risk of myopia?

Outdoor play helps develop happy and healthy children. It promotes wholesome physical development and develops muscle strength, co-ordination and motor skills. Research also tells us that children learn through play. Experiential opportunities and interacting with the environment allow children to explore, discover and learn.

One great place for you and your child to spend a few hours playing outdoors is the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden. Set amid the lush grounds of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the interactive, educational garden was created as a place where children up to the age of 12 can learn all about the world through plants and nature, as well as through hands on interactive experiences.



Highlights include a Fantastic Forest, set in a grove of banyan trees and complete with an exciting treehouse fully equipped with slides and ladders. Scaling the treehouse can help your child develop gross motor skills, balance and coordination. Your child can also step onto a floating platform that provides a close-up experience of water and pond life, then walk through a tunnel of frangipani trees to explore a tropical rainforest.

As you expose your child to the different sights, sounds and movements, stimulate your child's thinking by talking about these, and encourage your child to share his or her observations with you.

If you would like to talk to your child about plants, you can visit the Photosynthesis Exhibit. Made up of four cranking stations, the Exhibit is specially designed to educate children about the magic of photosynthesis. Your child will be amazed at how sunlight, water and carbon dioxide can sustain plant life.

In the Trail of Colours Guided Tour, children examine flowering plants to understand their forms and functions.





Getting up-close and personal with various plant and animal species.



Sara Goes Carbon Footprinting and Sara Goes To The Supermarket Garden from the Sara series of books.

Who was Jacob Ballas?

The Children's Garden is named after Mr Ballas, a Jewish-Singaporean philanthropist who died in 2000. It opened on 1 October 2007. According to NParks, it is Asia's first children's garden.



You can also visit the Sensory Garden where children will use all five senses as they interact with plants. Let your child see, touch and smell the plants and discuss the different sensory experiences. This is a perfect opportunity to develop your child's observation, communication and language skills. Your child can see where familiar beverages like coffee, tea and cocoa come from! They can learn all about plants worth "dye-ing" for, such as the blue butterfly pea and henna. They can also observe fruits and vegetables in their natural form prior to harvesting or processing.

If it gets too hot, have fun playing together with your child at the fountains. Crank up the fun factor by bringing different containers to fill up, and play with. For another adventure, explore the ever-changing maze and its 'animals' with your child. Let your child decide the route to take to complete the maze.

If you would like your child to explore the gardens in greater depth, sign up for one of NPark's guided tours specifically created for younger children. According

to Ms Winnie Wong, Assistant Director, Education, Singapore Botanic Gardens, the tours are designed to bring children outdoors to learn about the environment, instead of learning through books and television shows.

Many of the guided tours, catered for pre-schools and families with children, are based on the Sara series of books. The young ones get to follow the fictional Sara the Botanicosaurus on her adventures outdoors!

"[Through the books] young readers are encouraged to use their senses when taking part in the various activities, which include smelling flowers, crushing leaves or touching tree bark. They also learn how to observe and document nature through drawing, colouring, making bark rubbings and labelling plant parts," says Ms Wong.

One of the programmes, 'Storytime with Sara', features a storytelling session followed by an outdoor guided tour, during which children can take a close-up look at the plants featured in the story. "By engaging their senses, we hope that children will be able to better appreciate the outdoors and Singapore's rich biodiversity," says Ms Wong.

The Jacob Ballas Children's Garden is located at the Bukit Timah Core of the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Opening hours for the Garden: 8am to 7pm (last admission at 6:30pm). It is closed on Mondays except when Monday falls on a designated public holiday. Visit www.sbg.org.sg for more details on guided tours and programmes. ♥

Engrossed in learning about aquatic plants and animals during the Pond Life Discovery Guided Tour.



COMING UP...

Some highlights at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden (for children & families - individual):

FEB 2015

- Chinese New Year Special: Plants & Their Uses Guided Tour
- Chinese New Year Special: Floral Arrangement Workshop

MAR 2015

- March 2015 School Holiday Programmes Series: Adventure with Plants: Sara at the Evolution Garden (A Guided Tour)



Playing to learn

LEARNING TO PLAY

Make the outdoors a fun and educational place for your child.

FOR 0-2 YEARS

GO ON A TREASURE HUNT

Pick up different-shaped leaves, pebbles, shells, twigs and other "treasures". As you sort these out with your child, take the opportunity to talk about their differences and similarities. Talk about colours, textures and shapes. Stick the treasures on a board to make a texture board for your child.

FOR 3-4 YEARS

BUILD SANDCASTLES AT THE BEACH

Bring shovels, containers, trucks and plastic toys to the beach. Make up a story as you build sandcastles with your child. Ask him or her "What are you building?", "Who lives there?" and offer suggestions like "Do you want to make a ramp for your car park?". Sand play allows your child to explore concepts such as measurement, volume and shapes. It is also a great vocabulary builder.



LET'S PLAY

Two books to help parents get their kids (and themselves) out and about!

WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT

By Michael Rosen & Helen Oxenbury

"We are not going on a bear hunt again." The closing line of this award-winning picture book promises young readers that the journey, especially when various obstacles need to be overcome, matters more than the destination.

Just as the story's characters (father, mother, three children and their dog) set off in search of a fearsome bear, readers are also encouraged to embark on their own journey through a forest of onomatopoeic words such as "squelch squelch", and over pages of lovingly-drawn illustrations and faraway places.

Contributed by James Tan, Associate Librarian, National Library Board



FOR 5-6 YEARS

DISCOVER SHADOW PLAY

Explain what shadows are to your child. You can define a shadow as the outline of something that blocks a path of light. Have your child try to make shadow pictures with his hands and fingers. Go outdoors at different times of the day for your child to experience different types of shadows. Take a photograph to paste in his or her scrapbook. ♥

THE KIDS' OUTDOOR ADVENTURE BOOK: 448 GREAT THINGS TO DO IN NATURE BEFORE YOU GROW UP

By Stacy Tornio, Ken Keffer and Rachel Riordan

The Kids' Outdoor

Adventure Book is a manual for getting kids — and parents — outdoors to appreciate the subtleties of nature in our media-saturated society. The book is divided into four chapters, one for each season, but many of the activities suggested translate well to our warmer climates. They range from the simple to the whimsical and include trip suggestions, recipes and nostalgic outdoor games. Each activity is also rated on an Adventure Scale, so parents and kids can decide just how intrepid they would like to be.

Contributed by Nurul Huda Hassan, Associate Librarian, National Library Board



Eat A 'HAPPY COW'!

grow

Have fun assembling this cute character bento with your kids.

The next time your child asks what's for dinner, tell him or her 'Happy Cow' is on the menu. Invite your child to help you get this character-bento meal ready for the dining table. Assembling this dish with your junior kitchen helper not only teaches your little one about food (tastes, textures, colours), it's also a hands-on bonding activity. Best of all, you can encourage your child to eat more greens! ♥



CHARACTER
BENTO

MAKES
ONE
BENTO SET

WHAT YOU NEED

- 100g –120g cooked Japanese short-grain rice
- 1 seaweed sheet
- 1 little pink Japanese fish roll (*kamaboko*)
- Lettuce
- Alfalfa sprouts

Sides

- 3 sausages (chicken, beef, or pork)
- Fried meat roll (chicken, beef, or pork)
- Vegetables of choice
- Fresh fruit

TOOLS YOU'LL NEED

- Cling wrap
- Scissors
- Seaweed punch*
- Round cookie cutter

*Seaweed punch is available at Daiso

FOLLOW THESE STEPS:



1 Divide the cooked rice into two portions.

2 Divide one of the portions into two parts. Using cling wrap, shape one part into a flat oval for the cow's muzzle. Take one tsp from the other part and shape into two triangular ears. Shape the other part of the rice into an oval for the cow's head.

3 Using cling wrap, shape the second portion of rice to form the body and legs of the cow.



4 Using a seaweed punch, cut two ovals for the eyes, two circles for the patches on the cow, and a curved line for the mouth from seaweed.

5 Cut two small circles for the cow's nostrils from seaweed.

6 Using the cookie cutter, cut two circles for the cow's cheeks from the pink layer of the Japanese fish roll.

7 Using a knife, cut two small triangles for the cow's inner ears from the pink layer of the Japanese fish roll, and a tail from the white layer of the Japanese fish roll.

8 Fill the bento box with lettuce and alfalfa sprouts and assemble the cow. Using a pair of tweezers, place the features on the cow.

9 Complete the bento meal with side dishes such as sausages, fried meat roll, vegetables of choice and fresh fruit.



VEGGIE MIGHT

Broccoli

The flavonoids present help counter allergies and inflammation; high concentrations of carotenoids are useful for eye health.

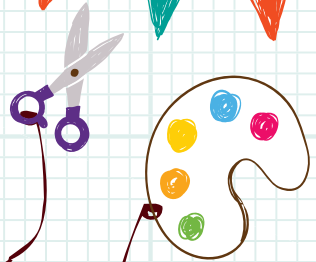
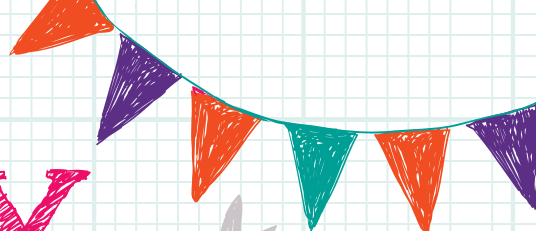


This recipe is taken and adapted from *Kawaii Bento* (\$32, excluding GST), published by Marshall Cavendish.



Jan-Mar 19

Get CRAFTY



Let your kids be creative and learn about recycling at the same time

When it comes to making arts and crafts with your children, the only limit is your imagination. There is no need to buy expensive materials – with a little ingenuity, common household items are easily turned into fun toys or cool crafts!

Making recycled crafts is also a great way to help your kids learn all about the 3Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle.

Almost anything can be repurposed – plastic take-out containers, used juice boxes, straws, paper bags and more.

Stuck for ideas? Old magazines can be turned into creative collages. One-litre milk boxes can be turned into lightweight stacking cubes.

Or take the humble toilet paper roll, for example. The cardboard roll can be transformed into a multitude of items. Here are a few ideas:



FANTASY FOREST

Materials Toilet paper rolls, cardboard milk cartons, paint, scissors

Turn the cardboard roll into a nifty base for a tree of your own design! Cut a tree shape out of the cardboard carton, paint the shape green and decorate (add fruit, birds or flowers). Trim the roll to the desired tree height, and then cut two slits at the top of the roll, 180° apart. Stand your tree up in the slits and you're done!

TP NINJAS

Materials Toilet paper rolls, coloured straws, paint, markers

Paint an empty cardboard roll black, leaving a small rectangle for your ninja's eyes. Use a black marker to draw in a pair of eyes and eyebrows – make them as scary as you want! Tie a coloured straw around the roll to create the belt, tuck a short black straw into the belt to act as a sword and *voilà* – a tiny ninja! ♥

CRAFTY BENEFITS

Art and craft projects can be a great way to enhance your child's development as well.

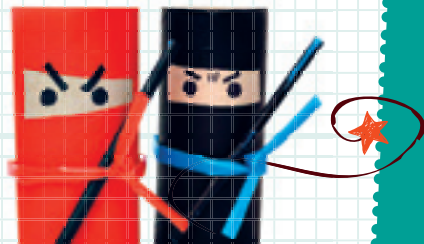
- Craftwork makes your child use both hands at the same time. This improves bilateral coordination and is essential for developing self-help skills such as buttoning, dressing and even being focused.
- Using scissors and drawing shapes improves fine motor skills.
- Not all craft projects are speedy. Waiting for paint to dry or glue to set teaches self-control and patience.
- Best of all, doing crafts is one of the best ways to bond and have fun with your child!



Fun Fact

Do you know the life cycle of a hen?

➤ Egg, Chick, Hen



Q&A

Getting active at home, and interacting effectively.

Q What are some ideas for physical activities we can do at home with our children aged three and five?

Dr Esther Chia: Engaging your child in physical activity is a great way to bond as a family, and also develops your child's psychomotor skills. For children as young as three, it is very important to develop Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) such as balancing, running, jumping, throwing and kicking. FMS lays the foundation to develop more complex motor skills such as running towards the ball, and jumping to catch it. It is a common misconception that children develop FMS naturally.

FMS can be taught and here are some activities that can be done at home:

➤ Catching butterflies (Locomotion Skill)

- Draw and cut out butterfly shapes with your child.
- Hang these at different heights, just above your child's immediate reach.
- Wrap a hairnet around a bent clothes hanger to form an insect-catching net.
- Ask your child to skip around while catching the butterflies with the net.



➤ Role play as puppies (Stability Skill)

- Get down on all fours, with arms and legs slightly bent like a puppy.
- Keep head up and move quickly forward, backward and sideways to chase after other 'puppies'.
- Imitate puppy-like behaviour by rolling over, then flipping back onto all fours.

➤ Tic-Tac-Toe (Object Control Skill)

- Draw a 3x3 Tic-Tac-Toe grid on a sheet of 'mahjong' paper.
- Play Tic-Tac-Toe by using small objects you can find at home to throw on a chosen space on the grid.

For more ideas, go to www.myactivesg.com/start-out/children-youth/guide-for-parents/fundamental-movement-skills.

Q Interactions are important to developing infants and toddlers. As an educator, how can I be sure that my interactions are effective?

Janet Gonzalez-Mena: Infants and toddlers thrive on effective interactions with adults. You can tell if your interactions are effective by watching the reaction of an infant or a toddler. For example, imagine approaching a young baby who needs a diaper change. You approach slowly from the front so the baby can see you



.....
YOU CAN TELL IF YOUR INTERACTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE BY WATCHING THE REACTION OF AN INFANT OR A TODDLER.
//Janet Gonzalez-Mena

coming. You make eye contact, and say, "I want to change your diaper..." You pause, hold out your arms and say quietly, "I'm going to pick you up now." The baby makes a slight movement of her arms to show that this part of the interaction is effective. You continue to involve the baby in the process, always going slowly and waiting for a response.

Now imagine this scene where two toddlers are in a confrontation. One raises his hand to hit the other. You take hold of the hand, saying in a quiet, matter-of-fact, voice, "I won't let you hit him". You continue talking calmly, putting into words what you perceive he is feeling. More calm words and soothing strokes may be needed as you continue to model gentleness with voice and actions. You know the interaction is effective when the dispute finally dissolves! ♥

Ask The Experts!



DR ESTHER CHIA is a Sports Science PhD graduate who is passionate about developing the movement capabilities of children in Singapore. She believes that building a strong base in fundamental movement skills in young children is necessary for the development of more advanced sporting skills in the future years. Dr Chia is currently with ActiveSG at Sport Singapore.



JANET GONZALEZ-MENA is author of many books and articles, including *Infants, Toddlers and Caregivers*, in use in most infant/toddler courses in Singapore. She sits on the faculty for WestEd's Program for Infant Toddler Care, USA. Ms Gonzalez-Mena studied with Magda Gerber, infant specialist, as well as Anna Tardos, who now directs the well-known Pikler Institute in Budapest, Hungary.

AS CHILDREN GROW, their muscle power increases and physical skills improve. With renewed ability, the energetic pre-schooler is ready for new challenges. For a start, introduce your child to a simple version of your favourite outdoor sport. This will help your child develop gross motor skills like running, jumping, kicking, pedalling, throwing and catching. With regular outdoor activities, hand-eye coordination and sense of balance will also improve.

SHOOT & SCORE
Dads who love soccer can transfer their passion for the sport into a fun activity. All you need is an open space or field, a football and imagination. Start with easy-peasy exercises like rolling or

throwing the ball back and forth to each other. Tag on a simple challenge: if your child catches the ball three times in a row, he or she gets to pick what activity to do next.

You could also instruct your mini soccer pro to kick the ball. If it rolls past a designated point, for example, a frangipani tree, he or she earns a sticker. Collect five stickers and receive a small prize from Dad! Getting deeper into the mechanics of the game, set up a makeshift goal and encourage your child to kick the ball in. If your child scores three times out of five attempts, present him or her with a Dad-made certificate. It's a small touch, maybe a little silly, but if it puts a smile on your child's face, why not?

MAKE A SPLASH
Help your child gain water confidence with some easy activities restricted to the shallow end of the pool. Throw various objects — a

small plastic bottle filled with jellybeans, for example — into the water and allow them to sink to the bottom. Give your child one minute to go underwater to pick up as many of these sunken 'treasures' as possible. Always keep water safety in mind and ensure all activities in and around the pool are supervised.

WHEEL FUN
Try this biking activity with your child at a park. Map out a simple circuit — it could be past the park bench, round the pond and back, and ask your young cyclist to pedal the route three times without stopping. You can also make it more exciting by drawing the circuit out as a colourful map for your child to follow. Make sure your child has put on a safety helmet. If he or she completes the task, acknowledge the achievement with a little treat, such as 10 minutes extra time at the playground. ♥

Game For This?

Encourage your child to love sports and the great outdoors by bending the rules a little.

Physical activity is essential for children as it lays the foundation for a healthy body and mind. Besides helping them achieve optimum development and growth, children who perceive themselves as physically competent (able to bike, run, or swim) also enjoy a boost in self-esteem.

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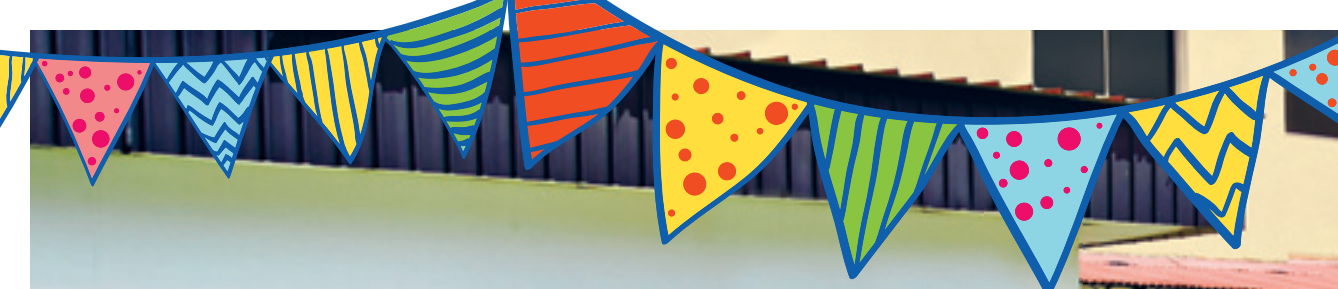
Let's Play Outside!

Can you find your way to the playground?



Answer





YOUNG AND CHARITABLE!

Pre-schoolers at the Preschool for Multiple Intelligences take the lead in their 'Children for Children' project



THRIVE

TIPS AND IDEAS FOR THE PHYSICAL, LANGUAGE, COGNITIVE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD