

**C**HILDREN ARE NEVER too young to make a difference in our society — this is the impetus behind the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)'s Start Small Dream Big project. Developed in support of the President's Challenge and to mark Singapore's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, the project's aim is to help children recognise their potential as contributing members of society, and instil in them a spirit of giving and values such as service, kindness and compassion.

At the project's launch on 1 April 2015, some 1,000 children and 200 of their educators gathered at the Science Centre Singapore to pledge their commitment to the community. Another 4,000 took the pledge in their centres led by their teachers. The children made dot drawings to symbolise how every child could make his or her mark and together make a difference in the lives of people. They also took part in

craft-making and experiments at various stations around the Science Centre. At the GymChallenge station, every child who completed the obstacle course raised funds for charity — and these would go towards helping physically-disabled children.

"We want to encourage our children to be kind, and to start to do good deeds however young they are and however small the deed," said Guest-of-Honour

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IS BUT ONE ASPECT. IT'S ALSO ABOUT ... HAVING THE RIGHT ATTITUDES AND VALUES.**

//Vanny Low

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat. "Because every good deed counts, and when they grow up, they will be caring, responsible citizens. That's how we can build a better society together."

Mr Heng asked the children to tell him about some of the good deeds they had done. A trickle of responses quickly gained momentum as more children chipped in with answers like "I hold the lift for people" and "We draw art for the less-fortunate". These responses drew "awws" from the adults in the hall.

TOUCH Child Care Manager Ms Vanny Low, 48, firmly believes in involving children in community service.

"As young as the children are, they can be a blessing to the people around them," said Ms Low. One of the centre's Start Small Dream Big projects will involve children visiting the elderly at the TOUCH Seniors Activity Centre to do aerobics with them. This activity not only teaches children to take care of the elderly, but also encourages them to make the link to their own grandparents and how they can exercise with the older folks to stay healthy.

"It also sends an important message that charity is not just about money; it is also about giving one's time."

Rainie Leow Zi Xuan, six, from TOUCH Child Care, said, "When you help others, they will be happy and I will be happy too."

Some 150 pre-schools have signed up under the Start Small Dream Big initiative to roll out projects throughout the year. The project will culminate in the Early Childhood Conference & Carnival 2015 on 26 September (Saturday) and will feature the children's dot drawings and presentations by participating centres. All parents are invited to this exhibition.

Affirming the good deeds children have done is crucial to helping them understand the value of their actions. "In a holistic education, academic achievement is but one aspect. It's also about character-building and having the right attitudes and values — these will take the children further in life," said Ms Low. ♥



Hearing about the good deeds children have done puts a smile on Education Minister Heng Swee Keat's face.

# OFF TO A Good Start

More than 5,000 pre-schoolers pledged to give back to the community through the Start Small Dream Big project.

