

TEACHERS' DAY - SHAPING LIVES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

# Being an early childhood educator means...

Helping children learn and grow is but one aspect of being an early childhood educator. Two teachers and a parent share what it means to be a child's carer, protector and friend – BY CHERYL LEONG



ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK

**... HELPING CHILDREN TO REALISE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL**

When Ms Vicki Liaw was in Kindergarten 2, she was asked to draw what she wanted to be when she grew up. "I remember drawing my teacher at that time, and that has stuck with me ever since," recalls the 20-year-old, who did eventually fulfil her aspirations, and is now a teacher herself.

After graduating with a Diploma in Early Childhood Education from Ngee Ann Polytechnic last year, Ms Liaw joined E-Bridge Pre-School as an assistant teacher in June the same year, before becoming a class teacher for Nursery 2 in January this year.

Just as she was settling into her role, an unprecedented challenge in the form of Covid-19 came around to stretch her capabilities and change the future of learning.

When Ms Liaw found out that one of the children in her class had tested positive for Covid-19, she was concerned about the well-being of her family members — one of whom is highly vulnerable — and that of the other children in her class and their families.

She says: "I knew, however, that I had to be strong for my children and their families. My co-class teacher for Mandarin and I were wondering if we could manage the parents' responses. Surprisingly, many parents were not only cooperative when the news broke, but they also offered encouragement to us in handling the situation. So I'm very thankful for the trust we've built with the parents, as well as the support of my family and colleagues."

Ms Liaw and the other children in her class rallied online to cheer up the child who had been hospitalised. "We collated get-well-soon notes and videos, conducted video calls with her and sent a care package with items that would bring her joy and help her to pass time meaningfully," she says.

When school reopened in June, Ms Liaw and her team had to help the children make sense of what was happening — such as the need for



PHOTOS: MOHAMED ISMAIL

**It's not enough to have passion for educating the young. Grit, tenacity and being highly adaptable are also important attributes of being a good pre-school teacher. It is being able to see learning opportunities in both good and not-so-favourable situations, and understanding that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching. To help children realise their potential, we should view them as unique, competent and capable individuals."**

Ms Vicki Liaw, teacher, E-Bridge Pre-School

safe distancing from their friends and mask-wearing.

It was confusing, and sometimes frustrating, for the children at first. But ever the optimist, Ms Liaw acknowledges that getting the children familiar with life in the new normal has its own benefits, too.

"The children are able to apply what they have learnt about the different modes of communication and acquiring information during their home-based learning. This is an important quality of the 21st century learner, as they move from print to digitalisation," she adds.



**... PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS FOR THE CHILDREN**

Mrs Janette Chong and her team of teachers at Aces Champion Preschool took the term "going the extra mile" to new heights when a parent of a child at the pre-school was due to deliver her second child during the circuit breaker, and had to turn to the school for emergency childcare services.

Due to border closures, the mother's family were not able to come to Singapore to help out, so Mrs Chong offered to look after the older child when the mother was in hospital.

Mrs Chong says: "When we found out later that the mother hadn't yet delivered, we helped look after the child over the weekend as well."

Later, upon realising that the mother had no confinement help, Mrs Chong also prepared tonic soups for her, which she delivered to her home together with her passionate team.

A co-founder of the already established pre-school Aces Montessori Kidz, Mrs Chong went on to start a second pre-school, Aces Champion Preschool, in October 2018. The 60-year-old mother of three is responsible for curriculum development, and training and development of the

teaching staff at both pre-schools.

Some of the challenges she has faced this year include having to rapidly digitalise the pre-school and transition to virtual lessons. Leading by example, she guided her teachers through the processes, readily admitting that it was a sharp learning curve for herself too.

But in the spirit of unity and life-long learning, she has fully embraced the challenges and encourages fellow educators to do the same.

Even after 30 years in the industry, her passion for working with children shows no signs of waning. "Children inspire me. I love seeing each individual child blossom under our care. When I see their transformation and the gratitude on the faces of their parents, it makes my day," she says.



**Training and education are important, but having the passion and love for children, and possessing a willingness to go beyond one's responsibility to care for people in need are even more important to being a good pre-school teacher."**

Mrs Janette Chong, principal, Aces Champion Enterprise (Singapore) LLP



**... MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S LIVES**

When pre-schools were closed during the circuit breaker, Mrs Beverly Carpio and her husband were concerned that learning would be disrupted for their youngest son Jover, six, who attends NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Kampung Admiralty. Both husband and wife are diagnostic radiographers who work in healthcare and have two older sons aged 13 and 19.

"As essential service workers, we aren't able to take much time off from work. We do have a trusted and reliable helper, but we were worried that there'd be no one to guide Jover with his home-based learning," says Mrs Carpio, who is in her 40s.

What complicated matters was that Jover has trouble expressing certain emotions such as frustration in an appropriate fashion, which led him

**To a mother working in essential services, you are my unsung hero. You inspire, nurture, encourage and care for our children. Teachers like you play a major role in moulding the next generation of youths, of leaders and of good teachers. Please continue to be an inspiration not only to your students, but also to all of us."**

Mrs Beverly Carpio, senior radiographer, National Healthcare Group Diagnostics

to prefer to be alone at school rather than play with his friends.

He was enrolled in a social skills support course with NTUC First Campus' in-house psychologist, which helped him slowly come out of his shell. But Mrs Carpio was worried that her son's progress would be for naught when schools closed during the circuit breaker.

However, the school's dedicated team of teachers put her fears to rest. They checked in on him regularly and shared engaging videos of themselves doing crafts, and encouraged parents to post pictures of their kids and their work to stay connected.

Mrs Carpio says Jover was always excited to see

his friends' pictures and now that he is back in school, she has noticed that his social skills have improved.

"According to the teachers, he now asks questions during lessons. His teacher has also given him a major role in his graduation play and he's very excited about it," she adds with pride.

Among the teachers who have made a difference in Jover's life is his favourite Teacher Adri, who has ignited his imagination and curiosity with her interesting lessons, says Mrs Carpio.

"After classes with Teacher Adri, Jover would ask me to search the Internet for topics like inventors, inventions and planets. Though she can be strict, Teacher Adri is also very approachable and the kids like her very much. I wish there were more teachers like her."



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