

## CAREERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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# A heart for nurturing young minds

Her enthusiasm for interacting with kids and the ability to form a connection with them set this early childhood educator on a fulfilling career path

BY CHERYL LEONG

Finding joy in babysitting her 11 nieces and nephews when they were young was one of the first inklings Mrs Marian Lee had that teaching might be her vocation.

As a result, the 41-year-old — who is a mother of three kids aged six, four and two — made the decision to enter the pre-school industry and has never looked back since.

After graduating with a Diploma in Early Childhood Education (With Leadership) at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 2002, Mrs Lee went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (Honours) at the University of South Australia in 2004.

### A multi-faceted role

Before taking on her current position as centre head of MOE Kindergarten@West Spring, Mrs Lee spent almost a decade with another pre-school operator — working her way up from a beginning teacher to a trainee principal, principal and, later, as a project officer and curriculum development officer.

But working directly with the children and their families was what she was passionate about. So when recruitment for the new MOE Kindergartens (MK) started in 2013, Mrs Lee jumped at the chance to be part of the pioneering team.

She says: "After being in the industry for so long, it was important to me to align my own beliefs and principles with the organisation's purpose. I joined MK not only because I believe

in MK's mandate to provide affordable and quality pre-school education, but also because it would provide opportunities for me to work towards a smoother transition to primary school for our K2 children."

A typical day for Mrs Lee involves meeting the children and their parents at arrivals and dismissals for the various sessions, conducting walk-throughs, interacting with the children, and looking into the operational needs of the kindergarten and training needs of the staff.

### Tackling new challenges

A major obstacle of the Covid-19 situation is the difficulty in "safeguarding what is developmentally appropriate for children", says Mrs Lee.

She explains: "Technology can be a double-edged sword — we use it to complement how children learn, but we also have to ensure that it doesn't replace concrete learning experiences, which are important in the pre-school years."

"We also had to cope with guiding the teachers on a steep learning curve to pick up IT skills very quickly and supporting the parents — many of whom are struggling with working from home and home-based learning."

Thankfully, Mrs Lee and her dedicated team managed to overcome these challenges, and even found heartening ways to inject personal touches into their digital interactions with the children.

"For instance, one of my senior mother tongue language teachers, who is not IT-savvy, took the initiative to video herself talking and



One of Mrs Marian Lee's ambitions as a child was to become a teacher. She now takes pride in making a difference in children's lives. PHOTO: MARIAN LEE

singing to the kids because they missed attending her lessons," she adds.

### Two-way relationship

But teaching is never a one-way street. Being surrounded by children daily has taught Mrs Lee how to retain a sense of wonder, the art of happiness, as well as the importance of using kind words.

To connect with the children, Mrs Lee tries to engage them to plan for their individual

developmental needs and help them succeed, even within a large group setting.

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MRS MARIAN LEE  
centre head,  
MOE Kindergarten@West Spring



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