

TEACHERS' DAY - SHAPING LIVES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

It takes a village to raise a child

Ms Fish Kok, centre leader of E-Bridge Pre-School, works closely with parents to ensure the children's social, emotional and academic needs are supported – BY KENNETH GOH

Ms Fish Kok, 30, firmly believes that it takes a village to raise a child. A centre leader at E-Bridge Pre-school's Corporation Drive branch, she realised that even more during the circuit breaker, when pre-schools were closed, leading to many parents having to juggle working from home with childcare.

Besides wanting to ensure that the children continued to receive social and emotional support at home, Ms Fish (as she is known to the children and their families) and her team also wanted to help parents keep their kids engaged.

Apart from weekly electronic home-based learning kits, the school also introduced ways to engage the children — such as recorded storytelling, and Zoom singalong and storytelling sessions — progressively, after most families would have settled into a routine.

Ms Fish says: "During that time, we were very mindful not to stress the families. We encouraged them to focus on building positive relationships with their children."

ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

With her team of teachers, Ms Fish had to pick up digital skills quickly to connect with



PHOTO: MOHAMED ISMAIL

the children and help them with their learning.

"These new skills, ranging from video-making to planning for a virtual graduation, were beyond our capability pre-Covid-19. I'm proud to see how quickly my team managed to adapt to the new demands placed on them due to the pandemic," says Ms Fish.

One of her key takeaways from this challenging year is maintaining a calm mind in order to focus on making decisions that best benefit the children.

"Covid-19 or not, the education landscape is ever-changing. What worked today might not work tomorrow. The best we can do is to show the children who look up to us as role models how we can adapt to changes and stay grounded," she says.

I was diagnosed with cancer shortly before the circuit breaker, while my husband is an essential worker, so I had to send my kids to E-Bridge when I started chemotherapy. I appreciate the teachers' willingness to stay later in school when I couldn't pick my kids up in time after my treatment. I am very grateful to them for their utmost help during my toughest time.

Ms Liyun, parent of an N1 child



ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK

Showing care during trying times

Principal Denise Tham is on top of looking after her community at MY World Preschool @ Matilda Court – BY GEL CABOTAJE



PHOTO: MOHAMED ISMAIL

When Ms Denise Tham, in her early 30s, started working as a pre-school teacher's assistant 13 years ago, it was because she wanted to fund her degree programme in interior design.

But as she spent time with the children, she found that they gave her much more joy than expected. So, after graduating with an honours degree in interior design, Ms Tham decided to change track and pursue a career in early childhood education.

She has not looked back since — obtaining first a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education - Teaching in 2013, followed by an Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership in 2018.

Ms Tham rose through the ranks over the years and eventually took on her current role as principal of MY World

Preschool @ Matilda Court this year. She oversees the school's operations and supports her staff in ensuring the safety of the children.

Ms Tham says: "Interacting with the children, seeing their smiles and watching them grow continues to be something that I look forward to every single day. It is something that gives me a sense of accomplishment even after 13 years in the sector."

Here, she gives us a glimpse of life in a pre-school during a pandemic.

Q: How has your pre-school adapted to the pandemic?

Before Covid-19, lessons were conducted through group learning. Now we have to observe safe distancing, so classroom learning is limited to groups of less than 10 children.

In the classrooms, children are now given their own spaces which are clearly demarcated on the floors and tables. For some of the older children, we are using foldable laptop tables, which we can move around to ensure safe distancing while working on different classroom activities.

Q: Has the pandemic changed the focus of school lessons?

The teachers conducted lessons about Covid-19 to help children understand the pandemic and how they can play a part in



ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK

exercising social responsibility.

We also constantly explain to them why there is a need to keep a safe distance from their classmates from other groups, or why they are unable to share toys and learning materials. Even so, the children are still encouraged to care for one another in different ways.

Nurturing character development in our children is most important to us, thus we will not compromise on that.

Q: How do you address parents' concerns during this time?

Some parents are concerned that they have fewer opportunities to talk to the teachers about their children's learning progress.

To address this, we are currently working on documenting snippets of the children's learning and achievements, and uploading them onto our parent's portal for parents to view and celebrate their children's achievements with us.

We also keep up parent-teacher meetings and other communications through video conferencing platforms.

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