

Circle of Care - Singapore's first-ever holistic childcare and preschool education model that combines social work, learning support, health services and parental involvement

An initiative by the Lien Foundation and Care Corner, this child-centric approach to achieve high quality early childhood education aims to help preschoolers-at-risk close the gap

Singapore, 23 Feb 2013

1. Children from Care Corner's Leng Kee and Admiralty childcare centres are the first in Singapore to receive "Circle of Care", a pilot model of childcare where educators, social workers, educational therapists and health professionals look after children's development in an integrated way. Circle of Care aims to improve outcomes for all preschoolers and their families, including those-at-risk, so that they can integrate confidently into school and community systems.
2. The majority of children at the Leng Kee centre receive government financial assistance. Sixty percent of them come from families with a monthly household income of \$1500 or less. At the Admiralty centre, about five percent of the children are from households earning less than \$1500 a month.

Early intervention crucial for preschoolers-at-risk

3. Studies show that the early years of a child's life are the most formative. Parenting and the home learning environment, health and financial wellbeing all influence child development. "Young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of poverty. Children in poverty often lag behind their peers in social and intellectual development as they do not have access to the same educational and developmental resources," said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation. He added, "We've got to deliver on greater equality of opportunity, as persistent poverty & social immobility are ultimately expensive for society."

Creating a circle of care

4. Over the next four years, Circle of Care is expected to reach about 280 children at Care Corner's Leng Kee and Admiralty childcare centres. Half of the \$1.8m committed for the initiative will go to the hiring of additional teachers and boosting teacher training and

resources. The rest of the funds will be used to engage the services of an educational therapist, social worker, researcher and consultant, and to improve classroom resources. This would effectively raise the average spend per child to about \$800 per month. Presently, the monthly childcare fee (full-day) at both centres are about \$560-\$650 per month.

5. Circle of Care will inject private sector expertise into the two VWO-run childcare centres. As a consultant to the project, early childhood education pioneer and specialist, Dr Khoo Kim Choo will review the centres' existing curriculum and services, and make recommendations on how to boost the children's holistic development. She will also enhance teacher training and beef up the training and learning resources for teachers and children.

Tapping on Care Corner's ecosystem of care

6. Care Corner's CEO Mr Yap Poh Kheng highlighted what makes Circle of Care different from other childcare initiatives. He said, "This initiative leverages the various strengths and services already present in Care Corner – social work, early childhood education, counselling, educational therapy – and pulls them into the holistic web of care we are weaving around each child and family." For instance, the social worker also acts as a case manager bringing together different aspects of help and care for the child and family, and these could range from community resources, educational therapy and nutrition to counseling or financial aid.

Levelling the playing field with high quality childcare for all

7. Welcoming the changes that Circle of Care would bring, Care Corner's CEO, Mr Yap said, "As a VWO childcare operator running a tight ship, our constant challenge is to provide high quality childcare at non-premium rates. This initiative not only boosts our capabilities and resources, it enables us to offer a holistic model of childcare for *all* children, regardless of their background or financial means. The children from our Leng Kee and Admiralty centres will enjoy quality learning and receive integrated support in early childhood education, educational therapy, health and social services." The new injection of funds will also allow Care Corner to hire four additional teachers and improve the overall teacher-student ratio.

Parental engagement crucial

8. The new approach that Circle of Care offers not only looks after the child's development, it also supports his or her family's wellbeing, encourage positive parent-child relationships and involves parents as learners and lifelong educators. Research has shown that children's sustained gains in development are closely associated with parental involvement. A nurturing home learning environment and active parent engagement can reinforce a child's

learning and progress substantially. Circle of Care’s Consultant, Dr. Khoo Kim Choo said, “Parental involvement is a key component in the community of care we are building around the child. We will engage parents actively, especially those from disadvantaged families, to encourage them to be actively involved in their children’s development. We need to support parents to support their child.” Talks, hands-on workshops and support groups will be set up to enhance parental skills and knowledge. The social worker will conduct home visits to engage parents personally.

9. **Government’s role to help disadvantaged children**

Government leadership is crucial to tackling the range of issues that disadvantaged children face in their learning and development. In countries like the United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia, the government runs early intervention programmes on a national scale. Globally, the growing attention on early child development underscores the need for policy framework to go beyond traditional government department silos. Support for the child’s wellbeing is needed across a wide spectrum – from health, welfare and education to ensuring social mobility and access to infrastructure. Mr Lee said, “As our government seeks to improve the preschool sector, we hope that children from disadvantaged homes will receive greater emphasis and resources. Increased support to these children and their families could result in broader community outcomes that make up the upsides for greater investment in this area.”

~oOo~

About the Lien Foundation

www.lienfoundation.org

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation.

In the area of early childhood education, the Foundation aims to create a better playing field by strengthening capacity in this area and opening up opportunities for disadvantaged preschoolers. To advocate greater access to quality early childhood education, the Foundation commissioned a study, “Vital Voices for Vital Years” that examined leaders’ views on improving Singapore’s preschool sector. In June 2012, the Lien Foundation released a global benchmark study called “Starting Well” that ranked 45 countries on their provision of preschool education.

The use of I.T forms a key strategy in the Foundation’s efforts to increase efficiencies and enhance professionalism in the preschool sector. The Foundation has championed a community-based model of care where specialists go into mainstream preschools to help children with learning difficulties. Its success has inspired a scaled-up national version in Singapore.

Media contacts

Genevieve Kuek	Qeren Communications	gen@qeren.biz	+65 9763 3110
May Tan	Qeren Communications	may@qeren.biz	+65 9791 3059

ANNEX: CIRCLE OF CARE

