

NEW COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO START EARLY CHILDHOOD WELL

A day before Children's Day, Lien Foundation kicks off a series of ground-up initiatives to rethink the priorities of childhood in Singapore

2 October 2014

1. At the "Early Childhood Conference 2014" held last month, the preliminary results of Singapore's first national early childhood parenting study¹ identified the top three priorities parents have for their children: "Have a happy life", "Be gracious and caring", and "Get along well with others".
2. But the realities of everyday life mean some of these ideals may remain just that – ideals.

The importance of starting well

3. A new initiative by the Lien Foundation, called **StartWell**, aims to urge parents and educators to rethink the priorities of childhood and re-examine the values they want to inculcate in their children. It seeks to support parents in their quest to ensure their children have a happy childhood amid the pressures of Singapore's competitive society.
4. The campaign involves early childhood educators and organisations that share the vision of wanting to improve our children's early years. They include anchor partner SEED Institute (Singapore's largest early childhood training provider), and community partners like Preschool Teachers' Network of Singapore (PTNS), the British Council, KidsStop @ Science Centre and VWOs.
5. The state of Singapore's early childhood education has come under the spotlight in recent years with many government-led initiatives. "But more needs to be done from the ground to rethink what is best for our children. We want to gather the support of parents and educators who believe in the importance of the early childhood experience to help our children have a happy childhood," said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO of the Lien Foundation.

¹ Findings from ECDA's Early Childhood Parenting Study 2014 as announced during the ECDA Conference on 19 September 2014

6. To this end, the StartWell initiative will comprise a series of projects aimed at helping Singaporeans reconsider the priorities of early childhood.

Pipeline of initiatives

7. The ground-up initiatives by different partners include:

Superhero Me: A values-based craft project that imparts **ethics and life skills** to K2 preschool children at Care Corner Childcare Centre (Leng Kee) (See Annex for details)

Design for Play: An international competition together with the British Council to design **playgrounds of the future** with imagination and adventure.

Science of Play: An online guide to **purposeful play** designed by preschool teachers with guided experiments for parents to attempt with their child. This is created by SEED Institute, Preschool Teachers Network of Singapore and children's edutainment centre KidSTOP @ Science Centre.

Inclusive Grounds: A purpose-built preschool and playground where mainstream and **special needs** kids can learn and play together.

Parents College: A one-stop education and resource centre to support parents of young children from birth to 6 years.

Backed by leaders from preschool sector

8. The StartWell campaign will also be guided by an advisory committee made up of leaders from early childhood education. The committee will work with partner organisations to guide and support the series of the StartWell projects. It comprises:
 - Ms Ho Yin Fong, Academic Director at SEED Institute, Singapore's largest early childhood training provider
 - Mrs Jacqueline Chung, Senior Principal at St James' Church Kindergarten
 - Dr Khoo Kim Choo, industry pioneer with 30 years of experience and leadership in the early childhood sector
 - Dr Christine Chen, founder of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore)
 - Mr Philip Koh, founder of the 7,000-strong PTNS

9. In addition, the Committee will examine a range of early childhood issues like:

Values: The values children should be armed with; what else can be done to build up the socio-emotional capacity of the children; why that is important;

Play: The need to get kids physically active; and the benefits that nature and the environment can bring;

Teachers: More recognition for preschool teachers so they can continue to be inspired to do their job well and the children under them can flourish

Parents: The role parents play, how important it is to play with their children

10. Said Mrs Jacqueline Chung, Senior Principal at St James' Church Kindergarten:

“Play is an important aspect of a child’s development and should be a priority of childhood. We also want to address critical issues relating to our children’s socio-emotional development and their acquisition of vital values. We desire to equip our young with ethics that will serve as their moral compass for life.”

11. Ms Ho Yin Fong, Academic Director at SEED Institute, added that the new

Parents College has an important job to engage busy parents with quick access to the knowledge they need: “Parents are a child’s first teacher and leave indelible imprints. They greatly influence the world-view of the child. With the impact they have, it is crucial to provide parents with the right resources from the start of their parenting journey.”

Superhero Me

1. The first project, “**Superhero Me**”, launched together with StartWell, is a collaboration with Care Corner Childcare Centre (Leng Kee). It is a values-based craft project for children to create the Superhero they wish to be, and at the same time discover their dreams, pick up values and develop life skills. The project is done with children who are mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds and involved in Lien Foundation’s Circle Of Care project where educators, social workers, educational therapists and health professionals look after children’s development in an integrated way.

Details can be found in Annex. A video of Superhero Me can be watched online at superherome.sg

2. StartWell advisory committee member and Care Corner consultant Dr Khoo Kim Choo, noted that projects like Superhero Me impart skills and values that can stay with the children for life: “When children create their identity and the costume that goes with it, they have transformed into the ideal

Superhero in them. They feel a sense of power, confidence and pride. They may not change the world with their superpowers but they will change themselves if we believe in them,” she said.

3. Their teacher Ms Vaishnavee Thanabal said the project drew out creative talents that may otherwise have remained hidden: “One of them, Eyman, said she wanted to be a Master Chef. No one would think that chefs are superheroes but she wants to be a Masterchef because she wants to cook anything and everything that she wants for her friends and family. It was an enriching experience for them.”
4. Ms Jean Loo, from content creation studio Logue, the creative mind behind Superhero Me, said the project would let the children end preschool on a high note, since they would be wearing their Superhero costumes at their graduation ceremony: “Instead of a mortar board and scroll photo session and concert, we thought of how we could let these kids graduate with the belief that ‘I am my own hero’ and with values like perseverance, patience and gratitude.”
5. Besides Care Corner, some members of the PTNS intend to run the Superhero Me project at its preschools. A travelling exhibition of Superhero Me is being planned with a community partner. Other preschool teachers and parents in Singapore can use the Superhero project as a model for teaching values and craft. A how-to guide for parents or preschool teachers can be downloaded at superherome.sg
6. “Tomorrow is the last Children’s Day before Singapore turns 50. It’s an important milestone to reflect on what kind of Singapore we have created – and wish to create – for Singapore’s children,” said Lien Foundation’s Mr Lee.

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ANNEX A	About Superhero Me
ANNEX B	Quotes from kids, parents, teachers and principal
ANNEX C	Superhero Me – pictures of children

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. In June 2012, the Lien Foundation released a global benchmark study called "Starting Well" that ranked 45 countries on their provision of preschool education.

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. 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.

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Annex A

Superhero Me

About the project

The first project under the StartWell Initiative is Superhero Me, where a class of 15 K2 pupils from Care Corner Childcare Centre (Leng Kee) went through a two-month long values-based craft project that has transformed them, literally.

Aims

Superhero Me aimed to impart values, shape the character of preschoolers and encourage them to pursue their dreams. It is especially meaningful as majority of the children in the project are from under-privileged homes.

How

Through a series of simple questions, the children were encouraged to search their hearts for a hero they wish to be. Each of them was then guided to create their very own Superhero by putting their imagination on paper. A team of designers worked closely with the children and their teachers to produce the Superhero costumes, which the kids will wear at their graduation ceremony in October.

Transformation

K2 pupil Brandvan Yang was shy and tongue-tied during the first craft session but grew in confidence over the weeks. The petite six-year-old wants to be Superhero Bolt to give people electricity to light up dark places. Today, he speaks confidently at the Show-and-Tell and does not hesitate to tell off disruptive classmates.

Said Brandvan: "I like to come to school because I love to do difficult work. My superpower is electricity because electricity can give people power. When I grow up, I want to be a pilot because I want to fly in the air. My superheroes are Daddy and Mummy, because I love them."

His motor skills are still not perfect. But he has progressed from not being able to cut shapes, to eventually cutting all the bolts of lightning for his Superhero costume. His teacher noticed that he is no longer a meek child and has become more assertive and shows leadership qualities as a result of the project.

Examples of questions posed to pupils

Do you have a hero? Why?

If you can choose a special power, what special power will you have?

What does it mean to be brave?

When are you happy?

With this super power, what do you want to change?

Values and skills learnt

The project has taught the children:

Perseverance and focusing on a task: Through cutting, pasting and colouring their creations.

Communication of ideas: Facilitators constantly engaged the children with questions like, *“Why blue?” “What do you want to do with the feathers?” “Is this what you had in mind?”* to help the child express a choice or idea.

Peer Encouragement: Children were tasked with helping their friends when they finished their tasks

Patience: The workshop took two months, during which the children had to manage their emotions and learn to listen, complete the task at hand and to focus on the long-term outcome of the show-and-tell session and graduation ceremony.

Confidence: Through a “Show-and-Tell”, they learnt to speak and present who their “Superhero” was to the class and members of the public. This experience was new to all the children.

Gratitude: At the end of the sessions, the children had to make a hero’s robe for their teachers. This robe consisted of batches in the shape of medals with descriptive terms like ‘smart’, ‘inspiring’, ‘funny’ chosen by the children. This was given to the teachers as a graduation gift from the class during the show-and-tell.

Parents and educators can carry out this exercise with their children with the help of an online guide from www.superherome.sg. There are lesson plans, suggested activities as well as instructions for materials that could be used with each activity.

Watch the Superhero Kids at work in the documentary on www.superherome.sg and check out the photos on Instagram at [@SuperheromeSG](https://www.instagram.com/SuperheromeSG)

Superhero Me Project facilitators:

Jean Loo & Yang Huiwen with videographer Ong Boon Kok (Logue)

LOGUE is a content creation studio that builds strong narratives across the mediums of film, photography and the written word. Rooted in the principles of journalism, we help ideas take flight through emotive and credible storytelling. Our ongoing projects include First Homes, a social story on Singaporeans' first homes for the Singapore Memory Project. In 2013, we worked on After Cicely, a documentary project commissioned by the Lien Foundation in celebration of Asian women pioneers in palliative care.

Chen Weiyan, Joyce Li & Grace Goh (In Merry Motion)

IN MERRY MOTION is a studio run by designers Chen Weiyan and Joyce Li, both of who are graduates from the National University of Singapore's School of Design & Environment Division of Industrial Design. Their other projects include craft workshops with National Library Board and Trade School Singapore, an alternate learning space that runs on barter, as well as designing a range of wedding experiences.

Annex B

Feedback on Superhero Me

Parents

Mr Ng Aik Khoon, 57, taxi-driver 黄亦坤

Father of [Crystal Ng - Princess Tweeter](#) who can fly anywhere to feed the birds

“She loves to learn. We don’t expose her to art and craft at home. I hope such classes continue so the children can develop over time. She tells me that she wants to be a doctor. She has promised me that she will study hard.”

Mr Ng works the late-shift work as a taxi-driver, but Crystal makes it a point to remind her dad to send her to school on time when there are Superhero Me sessions.

Mr William Yang, 33, crane operator 杨全发

Father of [Brandvan Yang - The Bolt](#), who can give people electricity to light up dark places

“The Superhero Me class has improved his self-confidence. I explained to him the purpose of the course, that it’s about working hard for your dreams. He didn’t understand it at first, but he learnt that it’s not about wearing nice costumes. Self-confidence is important for him because of his eczema. His teachers said he has improved a lot in school and I think it is because of programmes like this.”

Brandvan was awarded the Superhero Me Shining Star Award for the best behavior through the whole course. He has grown in confidence over the past two months and will even speak up against disruptive classmates.

Kids

Crystal Ng, six, 黄楚婷 Princess Tweeter who can fly anywhere to feed the birds

“It’s so fun to draw and make my costume. This is the first time I’m making a costume. It is very pretty and I love it. From this class, I learnt that I must help people and be helpful because superheroes are good people. She helps everyone.”

Maryangelly Jayabahan, six, Lady Rain who can rain down happy things like sweets to make others happy

“I like drawing because I don’t draw at home. This is my first time making a costume. Painting makes me happy because there are many colours. Lady Rain likes to bring people happiness so I also want to make people happy.”

Ryle Tay, six, 郑敬哲 Weather Warrior who can control the weather, prevent disasters and give electricity

“Superheroes have to be good people because we have to save the world. I must be good to people.”

Quote from Teacher

Ms Vaishnavee Thanabal, 24, K2 teacher, Care Corner Childcare Centre (Leng Kee)

“This is a good project for the kids to exercise their imagination. They have imagination and creativity dormant inside of them and suddenly there is this platform for them to release everything. I could see they enjoyed the process because they were giving a lot of ideas.

One of them, Eyman, said she wanted to be a Master Chef. No one would think that chefs are superheroes but she wants to be a Masterchef because she wants to cook anything and everything that she wants for her friends and family. It was an enriching experience for them.

They were learning language as well when they were communicating their ideas. They wrote about the superheroes and did a Show-and-tell which developed their speech and communicative skills.”

Quote from Principal

Ms Patricia Tham, 40, 谭慧惠 Principal of Care Corner Childcare Centre (Leng Kee)

“At the beginning, they did not understand the project and kept saying they wanted to be Superman or Wonderwoman. Now, they know that it is about them, about being their own individual, and not other people. Dreams are important for kids. Children have to dream big to be motivated. The project helps them to think about who they want to be in the future and how they can help people.”



BENJAMIN LOH
I am the Whisperer. I can talk to any animal, like the crocodile and tiger.



SHAYSTA EMELDA BINTE MOHAMMAD HUSSAINI
I am Flower Fairy. I have the flower power to plant and grow flowers in the sky.



MARYANGELLY D/C JAYABAHAN
I am Lady Rain. I can rain down happy things like sweets to make others happy.



CRYSTAL NG
I am Princess Tweeter. I can fly anywhere to feed the birds.



HUIOS OW
I am the Walking Flame. I am a giant flame and full of fire to give people heat and cook food.



ELVIS LIM
I am Eagleboy. I have very big wings so I can protect other people and protect myself.



ALFRED GOH

I am Waterboy. I shoot water from my arms and mouth to put out fire and save people.



RYLE TAY

I am Weather Warrior. I can control the weather and prevent disasters. I can also give electricity.



MUHAMMAD AZEEQ BIN MUHAMMAD FIRDAUS

I am the Singing Tornado Boy. I can sing and spin to create wind and move very fast.



MUHAMMAD AFEEQ BIN MUHAMMAD FIRDAUS

I am Electro Claws. I have electricity claws to shock bad people and I can survive any current.



BRANDVAN YANG

I am the Bolt. I can give people electricity to light up dark places.



RADEN RAUF BIN RADIN PADLI

I am The Snow Globe. I can make ice and make snow so people can play in the snow.



NURUL EYMAN BINTE SAMSUDIN
I am Master Chef.
I can cook anything I feel like eating.



VAISHNAVEE D/O THANABAL
Teacher of the K2 class



CHEN LI HONG
Teacher of the K2 class

Note: Two students were not present at the time of the costume making and photoshoot.