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First preschool in Singapore to make full-fledged inclusive education a reality

Lien Foundation and AWWA set up preschool for typically developing children and those with special needs to learn and play together in SG Enable's Integrated Community Space

2 December 2014

1. A preschool where all children receive attention as individual learners, and where lessons, teaching and resources are customised and adapted to best suit each child – this is the vision of Singapore's first inclusive preschool that welcomes all children, regardless of their abilities or developmental needs, to learn and play together and realise their highest potential.¹
2. Catalysed by the **Lien Foundation**, with the concept developed by **AWWA** (Asian Women's Welfare Association), the **inclusive preschool** seeks to provide *all* children access to a values-based, inclusive and non-discriminatory curriculum. Such an approach aims to reduce barriers, embrace diversity and create a rich environment for enriched learning and growth, mutual respect and understanding to benefit all children and society. The preschool will be located within the Integrated Community Space that **SG Enable** is developing at Redhill.

Need for an inclusive model

3. "Forging a fair and inclusive Singapore is an oft cited national goal and our shared responsibility," said Mr Lee Poh Wah, Lien Foundation's Chief Executive Officer. "A school is like a microcosm of society - a place where we model the behaviour and attitudes we want our children to take with them into the real world. This

¹ UNESCO defines inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of all through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children."

collaboration aims to create a high-quality preschool and early intervention programme for children of all abilities and backgrounds based on an ethos of dignity, responsibility and community. We hope to provide a level playing field where children not only learn how to live with differences, but also learn from differences.”

4. For instance, the preschool would have in a class typically developing children learning side-by-side with children with special needs, whether they are hearing or mobility impaired, have cerebral palsy or autism.”

Child-centered, individualised pedagogy

5. “The inclusive preschool will employ a child-centered and strength-based approach that recognises and draws on each child’s unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning to fulfill his or her potential,” said Mr Tim Oei, AWWA’s Chief Executive Officer. “Its universal design - in environment, curriculum and pedagogy – seeks to reduce all barriers to ensure the full participation of all children as equally valued and unique individuals. The values-based and customised approach enriches and supports diverse learning, and aims to build life skills in the students, so they can become confident and self-directed citizens of the future.”
6. All children participate in a common schedule of activities, and are given the same opportunities to contribute and to be socially successful. While the children are taught the same content, highly trained teachers offer different modes of lesson delivery, through modifying materials or using supplementary aids, to suit the learning needs and preferences of each child. (See Annex B for example)

Inclusion benefits typically developing children too

7. While current preschools have children of different races and backgrounds, the inclusive preschool is intentional in including children with special needs to further enrich diversity. All children, typically developing or with special needs, will benefit from this diverse learning environment.

8. Research studies indicate that typically developing children in inclusive settings perform comparably with or better academically than those in non-inclusive programs.² While inclusive environments encourage children with special needs to strive toward new goals and achievements, children who are typically developing also benefit from interactions with those with special needs. They learn to respect and value different strengths, adopt enlightened perspectives and ways to interact with the world.

Well trained teachers and specialist support

9. To support the inclusive preschool's high level of customisation in pedagogy, it will have a teacher-child ratio range of about 1:5, depending on the needs of each class. The teachers will be supported by specialists and allied health professionals, including a special education trained inclusion facilitator, occupational therapist and speech therapist. "AWWA has extensive experience in providing special education as well as early intervention services and training, We will tap on that to ensure that our preschool teachers receive the appropriate training. We will also provide them with proper lesson planning time and support, and access to resources," said Mr Oei. He also underscored the benefits of shared knowledge and learnings that could emerge from this model of inclusive education and shared with the sector upon its success to benefit more children and families.

Focus on parental engagement

10. All teachers at the inclusive preschool will be experienced early childhood educators with degrees. They will go through special training to equip them with skills for children with special needs and improved pedagogy. They will also work closely with parents whose involvement and training are key to ensuring the best possible outcomes for their child.

² Ruijs, N. M., & Peetsma, T. T. (2009). Effects of inclusion on students with and without special educational needs reviewed. *Educational Research Review*, 4(2), 67-79.

Enrolment Open to All

11. The preschool will enrol a maximum of 75 children, of which up to 30 per cent will be children with special needs. The facility will offer full-day and half-day programmes. The enrolment process will also be guided by the principle of inclusion and open door policy which means that all children will be given the opportunity to enrol regardless of race, language, religion, economic or family background and special needs requirements.

12. All children, including those who are typically developing, have different needs and learning pace. They will gain from the individual attention and small classes offered by the inclusive preschool, its specialist support and access to resources and assistive technology, and strong emphasis on teacher-parent partnership. In addition, they will enjoy an environment designed to optimise environmental learning and shared educational experiences.

Designed for inclusiveness – universal design

13. Such shared experiences are key to the concept of inclusivity that is supported by Lekker Architects. “We have created groups of common spaces where the children can learn from each other. Free-form and imaginative options of classroom furniture that can be flexibly re-arranged reinforce the experience of inclusion and ownership,” said Ong Ker Shing, Director of Lekker Architects. “All the special features of the classrooms – from topographical mounds, to hammocks, to soft enclosures – assist in the physical development of both typical developing students and those with special needs. These appear as highly-designed play-forms, rather than medical devices.”

14. There is no discrete physiotherapy room or dedicated enclosures to separate children. Instead, any required therapy can take place in the shared school environment or in the playground spaces. Smaller "quiet" areas are integrated into the classroom scene, for example in the form of tents or reading nooks. These can be used whenever a child seeks a moment of privacy or respite. Ms Ong added, “Scenographic play environments and a green-house type conservatory are also part

of the rich and stimulating environment we envisage to complement the diversity of learning at the inclusive preschool.”

Fascinating playground fosters learning for all

15. There are several pockets of play areas across the approximately 1,100 sqm preschool created to enhance active and hands-on learning possibilities. Each is designed with activities accessible to *all* students. An elevated tree-house that is fully accessible by wheelchair, and a sensory garden for water and sand play and growing plants will feature distinctly in the inclusive playground. The public will be able to access the playground after-school hours and during school holidays. The inclusive play opportunities extend to other areas within the Integrated Community Space, such as a multi-tiered long slide next to the terrace area and a tethered raft at the bio-pond.

16. Ms Ku Geok Boon, CEO of SG Enable said, “The preschool will be one of the iconic developments within the Integrated Community Space at Redhill. It will not only serve the special needs community, but also children and families living in the vicinity. We are creating opportunities for our children to experience for themselves and learn from young that we can build an inclusive society where we appreciate each other’s abilities.”

Road to a more inclusive Singapore

17. Even as the inclusive preschool attempts to erase the physical division between the world of those with disabilities and the majority, the attitudinal barriers to inclusivity are strong. Mr Lee said, “If we can provide pervasive opportunities for full participation and inclusion as a way of life so that people with and without disabilities can meaningfully interact as classmates, colleagues and fellow Singaporeans, negative attitudes will gradually give way to greater understanding and respect, and new friendships.”

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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.

About AWWA

www.awwa.org.sg

The Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) is a registered voluntary welfare organisation that has a membership body, its own constitution and by-laws. AWWA was established in 1970 and has been maintaining comprehensive programmes that targets children, youth, adults and families to empower them by maximizing their potential for independence. At AWWA, we run 5 services, AWWA Family Service Centre, AWWA Educational Services, AWWA TM Integration Services, AWWA Elderly Services and AWWA Centre for Caregivers.

About SG Enable

www.sgenable.sg

Set up by MSF in July 2013, SG Enable is an agency dedicated to enabling persons with disabilities and building an inclusive society. It seeks to provide comprehensive support to persons with disabilities across different life stages.

ANNEX A

Global move towards inclusive education

The global trend towards an inclusive education was affirmed by the 2006 UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that recognised the rights of persons with disabilities to education. It called on countries to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and that persons with disabilities receive the support required to facilitate their effective education within the general education system¹. This was ratified by Singapore in 2012 and the Convention came into effect for Singapore on 18 August 2013.

Presently, in Singapore, young children with special needs are largely served by Volunteer Welfare Organizations (VWOs), private providers and some preschool operators.² These educational programmes are either specialised, where children with special needs are served apart from the general education system, or integrated within the parameters and constraints of mainstream education.

In 2010, there were about 7000 children in Singapore aged 6 years and below who had been diagnosed with disabilities.³

Facts & Figures on the Inclusive Preschool

A. Quick Facts

1.	What it is	<p>The inclusive preschool is an environment that reflects diversity in society, and provides a strong and rich learning ground for each child to construct a broad and fair worldview on their journey to become future citizens.</p> <p>Vision: To be an inclusive preschool that facilitates every child to reach his/her full potential by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing diversity • Inculcating moral values • Broadening learning capabilities for his/her creative mind <p>Mission: To provide quality inclusive education to every child through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Principles of Universal Design in the environment and learning, and
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¹ UN (2013), *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. United Nations, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

² They are: The Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC), Development Support Programme (DSP), Integrated Child Care Program (ICCP) and Temasek Cares – Integrated Support Program for Pre-schoolers with Autism (TC-ISPPA).

³ Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee (2012) *Enabling Masterplan 2012-2016*. Ministry of Social and Family Development: Singapore.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A collaborative team approach using a child-centred pedagogy that nurtures the whole child. 	
2.	Who are involved	Catalysed & made possible by the Lien Foundation Concept development by AWWA Key partner and landlord SG Enable Designed by Lekker Architects	
3.	Where	Integrated Community Space at 141 Redhill Road	
4.	Who is it for, ages and levels of education	Preschool children from 18 months to 6 years old (Playgroup to K2)	
5.	Capacity	75 children	
6.	Proportion of intake - typically developing children and children with special needs	70 : 30 Maximum of 30% children with special needs in each class.	
7.	Philosophy guiding proportion of intake	To ensure quality inclusive practices, the admission policy will be geared towards optimising the fit between needs of each child with that of available vacancy. An open door policy will be enforced to ensure that opportunities will be given to all children, regardless of race, language, religion, economic/family background and specific needs requirements.	
8.	Number of staff: (Includes Teachers, Inclusion Support Facilitator)	18	
9.	Allied Health Professionals	1 Speech Therapist 1 Occupational Therapist <i>(Employed on a part-time basis prior to achieving full enrolment)</i>	
10.	Teacher-child ratio <i>Class ratio may be adjusted based on needs of the children</i>	Playgroup and Nursery 1 (18 months to 3 years)	3 teachers: 10 children
		Nursery 2 to Kindergarten 2 (3 to 6 years)	1 teacher: 5 children
11.	Total Size		
	Indoor space	683 m ²	
	Playground	289 m ²	
	Sensory Garden	148 m ²	

12.	Size compared to HDB void deck preschool (Average size about 500 m ²)	Approximately 2.2 times larger
13.	Open for Registration	June 2015
14.	School Opens	July 2015

B. Fees

15.	Fees per month (Playgroup to K2)	Full Day - \$980 + GST (Before government subsidies) Half Day - \$680 + GST (Before government subsidies)
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C. Statistics for comparison

16.	Approximate percentage of residents in Singapore with disabilities¹	3% Approximately 7,000 preschool children with developmental difficulties and 13,000 school-going children with special needs.										
	Preschool (0-6yo)	3.2% (7,000)										
	School (7-18yo)	2.5% (13,000)										
17.	ECDA recommended teacher-child ratio²	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Playgroup (At least 18 months)</td> <td>1: 8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nursery 1 (the year they turn 3)</td> <td>1: 12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nursery 2 (the year they turn 4)</td> <td>1: 15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kindergarten 1 (the year they turn 5)</td> <td>1:20</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kindergarten 2 (the year they turn 6)</td> <td>1:25</td> </tr> </table>	Playgroup (At least 18 months)	1: 8	Nursery 1 (the year they turn 3)	1: 12	Nursery 2 (the year they turn 4)	1: 15	Kindergarten 1 (the year they turn 5)	1:20	Kindergarten 2 (the year they turn 6)	1:25
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1- Enabling Masterplan 2012 – 2016, Pg 8, [http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Topic/Issues/EDGD/Enabling%20Masterplan%202012-2016%20Report%20\(8%20Mar\).pdf](http://app.msf.gov.sg/Portals/0/Topic/Issues/EDGD/Enabling%20Masterplan%202012-2016%20Report%20(8%20Mar).pdf)

2-Guide to setting up a childcare centre, Pg 10, https://www.childcarelink.gov.sg/ccls/uploads/CCC_Guide.pdf

D. Funding Commitment by Lien Foundation

18.	Total cost of setting up inclusive preschool	\$3.6 million
	Capital Expenditure	\$1.7 million
	Operating and other development expenses	\$1.9 million

E. Curriculum in the inclusive preschool

The inclusive preschool will base its curriculum on the “Creative Curriculum System for Preschool” (CCSP) from the U.S.A. Chosen for its focus on strengths and holistic education, it utilises the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in its development. The curriculum welcomes diversity with its emphasis on building the strengths of each individual child and empowering him or her within a community of learners.

Curriculum Features

- Customised and adapted to the needs of each child.
- Evidence-based practice with a strong emphasis on the learning environment.
- Balances teacher-initiated and child-directed learning.
- Incorporates strong elements of parental involvement support and professional development for teachers.
- Uses the principles of Universal Design for Learning.
- Aligned with national standards and the learning goals of the Ministry of Education’s *Nurturing Early Learner Kindergarten Curriculum Framework*.
- Provides transitional support for every child to all post-preschool educational placements.

ANNEX B

A day in the life of the inclusive preschool

From the eyes of a teacher ...

Morning

The children just had breakfast and are at the playground. **Tom is on his wheelchair pretending to drive the wooden land rover structure while his friends role-play as his passengers.**



Universal Design Principles were utilised in the construction of the learning environment. For e.g. The land rover play structure was designed to allow a wheelchair user to move up independently.

It's now time for our daily assembly. It's a beautiful morning so we gather the children at the corridor and playground in the fresh open air. We sing and sign our good morning song together. The children also greet the teachers and each other. **Sara, who is hearing impaired, joins in by signing the song. Tom, who is non-verbal, joins in by following the rhythm of the song on a tambourine, guided by Teacher Belinda.**

Universal Design Principle I: Multiple Means of Representation
Morning Song is represented through words, music, signing and rhythm so that all the children can participate in it.

After assembly, the children continue to sing as they move to their respective classrooms with their teachers.

Universal Design Principle II: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression
Children can participate by expressing what they know and are good at instead of being sidelined if they are not able to sing.

Big Group Meeting Time

The children put their things into their cubbyholes and move to their seats as I push Tom into class. Teacher Abby helps some of children get seated around the table while Teacher Belinda prepares for ‘circle time’ with the children.

When all the children are ready, Teacher Belinda welcomes them with a song and takes the class attendance. I sit beside Tom and Teacher Abby sits next to Cassie, a child with dyslexia. **They need more support as Tom communicates by pictures and Cassie is new to the class.**

I assist Tom in his responses to Teacher Belinda’s questions as he takes more time with his picture communication system. Teacher Abby supports Cassie by encouraging her to respond to just her and Tom, instead of the entire class.

Universal Design Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

Creating a small group of children within a big group allows the ones who need more time and opportunities to respond and engage better.

Mid Morning

Small Group Meeting Time

We then split the class into small groups for activities and tasks, with each group led by a teacher.

Today, the children are learning about balls. They are asked to compare and describe the balls they see. Teacher Belinda works with Dave, Eileen and Joe who have already begun to sight-read before the rest of the children. **Kim is younger, but she joins this group as well because her teacher has observed her fast ability to grasp concepts. Kim also learns better when challenged with suitable tasks. However, she follows visual instructions better than verbal ones. Thus, Kim is given a set of written instructions to help her to participate in the group activities.**

Universal Design Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

Teachers recognise that children learn at different speed. Those who learn faster are given more challenges to stay engaged.

Universal Design Principle II: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Teachers support the children’s learning by working on their strengths. Kim’s strength is in visual learning so Teacher Belinda uses it to facilitate her class participation.

Teacher Abby leads another group of children who learn best through movement. She brings them to the playground. **She works on their sight-reading by incorporating gestures and movement into their activities. The children look for cards with the words ‘Big’ and ‘Small’, as well as balls of different sizes around the playground.**

Universal Design Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

Teachers recognise that children learn best in different ways. Activities are adapted to ensure they are engaged.



Meanwhile, I help Tom and Cassie learn the concept of size. **Tom puts all the ‘big’ balls into a basket with a picture card indicating the word “Big” and Cassie places all the ‘small’ balls into a basket bearing a picture card with the word “Small”.** I have printed the word cards in a larger and special font to help Cassie read, as she is dyslexic.

An occupational therapist is at hand to help Tom work on his seating and posture on his wheelchair as he does group work. She will share her observations with the teachers and Tom’s parents to ensure adequate support is provided for Tom across all settings.

**Universal Design Principle I:
Multiple Means of Representation**

While all the children are learning the same lesson about the concept of size, the teacher presents the information in different ways to cater to the children’s different learning needs.

Collaborative Team Approach

Therapists work with children based on their needs in the group context. They collaborate with teachers and parents to ensure consistent support for the child.

End of the Day

Big Group Time

At the end of the day, all the various small groups in the class come together to share what they have learnt about balls. Cassie and Tom are first to share their learnings. The children learn from each other as they take turns to recap the lesson by sharing their findings.



However, Kim begins to get restless. She sings loudly and moves around the class. **The preschool’s Inclusion Support Facilitator has been keeping a record of her observations on Kim to understand the cause of her behavior.**

After class, the Inclusion Support Facilitator shares her notes with the teacher and reveals that Kim has a problem with waiting and needs help to stay engaged in class.

The Inclusion Support Facilitator suggests the teachers let Kim play a more active role during lessons by giving her little tasks to assist them. She also suggests an incentive system to motivate Kim to self-regulate her behavior whenever she needs to wait. The teachers will work together with the Inclusion Support Facilitator to help Kim on this aspect.

Role of the Inclusion Support Facilitator.

The inclusive preschool’s Inclusion Support Facilitator provides in-class support and collaborates with teachers and parents to ensure children are learning at their full potential.

Other Highlights of the Day

The children's favorite time of the day is playtime. Teachers modify and adapt the indoor or outdoor areas according to the children's needs, interests and topic of investigation so there is always something new for them.



Sara and Eileen want to go to the dramatic play interest zone today. Eileen has learnt some basic signs from observing Sara and Teacher Abby. She wants Sara to join her princess pretend game. However, Sara cannot understand her signs.

Then Eileen has a bright idea. She gets a book from the library and points to Sara the pictures of princesses. Sara laughs and nods. Both of them run to the dress-up wardrobe to put on their princess costumes.

Another child Tom chooses to play at the outdoor sandpit today. I help him to the sandpit as he has difficulty getting there by himself. His good friend, Dave brings two toys over, "Which toy do you want to play with today, Tom?" he asks. Tom points to the spade. Dave passes that to him and stays by his side. He makes rumbling noises and digs the sand with his bulldozer. Tom watches and is fascinated. He used to be interested only in the spade. When Dave moves on to another toy, Tom takes the bulldozer and plays with it for the first time.

Children with and without special needs learn important lessons through their friendships

Eileen learns how to cope with challenges in communication with her friend. She thinks of a way to resolve these challenges. The disposition to find alternative paths to success will help Eileen in her future communication with others.

Dave learns to be helpful and sensitive to his friend's needs. He picks up Tom's non-verbal communication cues. He uses 'choice making' to interact with Tom.

At the same time, Tom benefits from Dave's friendship. Dave's broader range of interests sparks Tom's curiosity to explore and learn about more things.

Typical All Day Schedule for the Inclusive Preschool

Time	PG/N1	N2	K1/K2
7.00 am - 8.30 am	Arrival and Settling in activities		
8.30 am – 9.00 am	Morning Breakfast		
9.00 am – 9.30 am	Group Meeting Time <i>This is Large Group Time in the respective classrooms. Generally, teachers use this slot for: welcoming the class, attendance, etc. and they will introduce or review the current topic of study or interest.</i>		
9.30 am – 10.00 am	Interest Zones / Outdoor activity <i>Interest Zones are the Learning Corners which can be both indoors or outdoors. Facilitated by teachers.</i>		
10.00 am – 10.30 am	Fruity Fruits Tea Break		
10.30 am – 11.00 am	Small Group Meetings <i>Teaching Time</i>	Group Meetings <i>Teaching Time/Review</i>	Group Meetings <i>Teaching Time</i>
11.00 am – 12.00 pm	Chinese Appreciation		
12.00 pm – 1.00 pm	Brain Food Lunch	Chinese Appreciation	Chinese Appreciation
1.00 pm – 2.00 pm	Rest and Relax <i>Children will be having their routine care, e.g. bathing and naps, during this time.</i>	Brain Food Lunch	Brain Food Lunch
2.00 pm – 3.00 pm		Rest and Relax	Big Group meeting <i>Review of what was taught during the day.</i>
3:00 pm – 4.00 pm	High Tea	High Tea	Rest and Relax
4.00 pm – 5.00 pm	Interest Zones <i>Indoors only and supervised by teachers. Child-directed exploratory play.</i>	Interest Zones <i>Indoors only and supervised by teachers. Child-directed exploratory play.</i>	High Tea
5.00 pm – 6.30 pm	Interest Zones/ Outdoor Activity <i>Can be both outdoors or indoors and supervised by teachers.</i>		
6.30 pm – 7.00 pm	Read Aloud/ Quiet Time <i>Children at the Library Corners with teachers.</i>		
Home Sweet Home			