

# Raising children in a circle of care

Canossian Village provides a range of services to support pupils and their families

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In the nearly borderless space of schools and services started by the Canossian Sisters, the saying that it takes a village to raise a child rings true.

The 1.75ha Canossian Village in MacPherson houses not only a pre-school, a primary school and a special education school for children with hearing loss, it also offers early intervention for pre-schoolers with hearing loss, after-school care, social work, counselling and therapy support, as well as assistance to low-income families.

All these services, which come under the Canossian Circle of Care, have been given a boost in recent years, with an \$11 million grant from philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation.

The bulk of the funds – \$5 million – went to renovation works for the pre-school and student care centre. Some of the funds also went towards support for low-income children to access enrichment activities as well as professional development for staff.

Another \$3.4 million was channelled to setting up an in-house child development unit with allied health professionals, social workers and family counsellors.

This amount is projected to last

## SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

He would always say he could not read, it was too hard or too much. Through the school and student care's support and patience, he now tries harder and is more willing to complete his homework.



MS DOLLY CHANNA, 36, about her son, Ishaan, who is in Primary 2 at Canossa Catholic Primary School.

## School seen as a microcosm of society

The Canossian family's journey of inclusion goes back more than three decades.

As early as 1989, a handful of children from the Canossian School for those with hearing loss spent a few hours a day attending lessons at the nearby former Bukit Batok Primary School.

Then in 1999, the Canossian School moved from its location in Jalan Merbok to its current Sallim Road campus. Pupils from the special education school played and learnt alongside their mainstream peers from the institute formerly known as Canossa Convent Primary School.

Over the years, the children from both sides have done all sorts of activities together, from attending morning assemblies and having recess to going on overseas trips and adventure camps.

Today, all 56 pupils in the Canossian School join their mainstream peers on a daily basis in the re-named Canossa Catholic Primary School, which has about 550 chil-

ren. The children with hearing loss are assigned to different classes based on their levels.

Ms Christina Michael, Canossian School principal, said about 70 per cent of her pupils are fully included in the mainstream primary school. This means they take both core subjects, like English language and mathematics, and non-core subjects like physical education, art and music together with mainstream pupils.

In class, teachers wear an FM device, which transmits their voices directly to the pupils wearing hearing devices, so that they can hear better above background noise.

Special education teachers work alongside their colleagues in the classrooms and provide support when needed.

Ms Michael said: "The beauty of it is that the children all wear the same uniform. Our teachers from both schools work closely with one another and don't make any distinction between the children." Canossa Catholic principal Eugenie

Tan said: "The pupils can see their peers wearing the hearing devices, but they don't think any differently.

"We use the same principle – some people need glasses to see clearly, so some children wear devices to help them hear better."

Ms Michael said being part of the mainstream school has helped her pupils grow in confidence in the six years of primary school.

"Kids with hearing loss have some challenges with social skills, but being able to play games and have recess with friends boosts their confidence," she said.

"On our own, we wouldn't be able to offer them such a wide range of academic programmes, so the tie-up with the mainstream primary school really helps."

For instance, even though the children with hearing loss are exempted from taking mother tongue language at the Primary School Leaving Examination, some of them opt to do so because of exposure to the subject.



Pupils from Canossian School, a special education school for those with hearing loss, mingling with pupils from Canossa Catholic Primary School during a physical education lesson last week at the Canossian Village in MacPherson. Sister Theresa Seow, Sister supervisor of the Canossian Village, says: "We pray that when our children leave us to go to other schools, they will promote inclusion wherever they are and be a catalyst for change in society." ST PHOTOS: GIN TAY

Pre-school English teacher, Ms Charis Chua Xiang Ling, 27, interacting with pupils of Canossaville Preschool on Wednesday. The pre-school, which was renovated to take in more children for full-day childcare in 2018, has 103 children, 33 of whom have hearing loss.



## Bringing children with hearing loss into the fold

Mrs Melissa Chan has seen tremendous improvements in her son since he started attending Canossaville Preschool in January 2019.

Her son, Philip, now four, was previously with another pre-school for six months but teachers there thought he was a "slow learner", she said.

It turned out that he has bilateral sensorineural profound hearing loss, which means he has 90 per cent hearing loss without any aid.

When he was two, he had cochlear implants installed. "As he had his cochlear implants late, we were worried that he was unable to catch up with his peers as he had already lost two years of hearing and speaking," said Mrs Chan, 31, a fundraiser.

"We also needed him to receive extra early-intervention classes to ensure he was able to pick up speech as soon as possible."

"We were unsure if there were pre-schools that could provide such care on top of the daily cur-

riculum," she added.

But Mrs Chan has been reassured by the support given by Canossaville Preschool in the past two years.

From having just 10 words in his repertoire of speech at the start of 2019, Philip now speaks in multiple sentences and can read books on his own. "He grasps concepts very well and is able to articulate them clearly," she added.

The pre-school, which was renovated to take in more children for full-day childcare in 2018, has 103 children, 33 of whom have hearing loss. It has five early interventionists who teach alongside early childhood teachers.

Principal Ow Yang Jing Yi said the centre now has more outdoor space, including a sensory playground with a waterplay feature.

It also has dedicated classrooms for the Early Intervention Programme (Epic), to provide support for children with hearing loss. Mrs Chan said it helps that Epic

is run within the pre-school's daily curriculum, so she does not need to send him to an external centre. He has also received one-to-one speech therapy.

"With an onsite audiological team, we were also able to get support whenever his cochlear implant processors break down. We did not need to make an extra trip to the ENT clinic. Hearing assessments are also done twice a year to evaluate his progress," she said, referring to the ear, nose and throat clinic.

Mrs Chan, who has a younger son aged two in the same pre-school, said it is important that Philip learns and plays with typically developing children, instead of being seen and treated as a child with special needs.

"He will eventually have to be out on his own in society and I do not want him to feel that he is unable to relate and communicate with others, or that he has to rely on others as he has 'special needs'," she said.

"Not only does he have friends who care for him, he has also learnt to care for others in need."

She added: "As for my younger boy, as a typically developing child, I wish for him to learn to be compassionate and kind to others, and to be sensitive to their needs."

Amelia Teng

70%

Percentage of pupils from the Canossian School – for children with hearing loss – who are fully included in the mainstream Canossa Catholic Primary School.

## FULLY INCLUDED

The beauty of it is that the children all wear the same uniform.



MS CHRISTINA MICHAEL,  
Canossian School's principal

In another move to make its environment more inclusive, Canossa Catholic recently revamped its library, which will be open to pupils from its school and the Canossian



School within the month. Canossa Catholic engaged architects to design a space that would be comfortable for all pupils, including those with hearing loss.

The plan is to also open it to the children from Canossaville Preschool. Ms Michael said that the library's furnishings, from the

acoustic panelling on the walls to curtains and cushions, help to absorb sounds and prevent echoes. Mrs Tan said: "School is a microcosm of society. The fact that the



children grow up accepting one another as equals and unique stands them in good stead to work with people of different strengths." Amelia Teng

Canossa Catholic Primary School recently revamped its library, which will be open to pupils from its school and the Canossian School within the month. The library's furnishings (above, left), from acoustic panelling to curtains and cushions, help to absorb sounds and prevent echoes. ST PHOTOS: GIN TAY