

THE STRAITS TIMES

SINCE 1845

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2013

New pre-school scheme to help the disadvantaged

By SANDRA DAVIE
SENIOR WRITER

CHILDREN of disadvantaged families will have access to high-quality pre-schooling under a scheme that aims to close the gap between them and better-off pupils.

They will be monitored by a social worker and educational therapist as part of the Circle of Care programme, started by the local philanthropic group and a welfare organisation.

This will allow staff to identify problems and address them quickly – meaning families who need help are spared the lengthy process of dealing with various organisations and agencies.

The programme will be run at two centres operated by Care Corner, with the help of \$1.8 million pledged over four years by the Lien Foundation. It aims to be up and running by next month.

At the moment, children and families who need additional help sometimes face an uphill struggle.

Problems that are often multifaceted have to be identified by a social worker or pre-school teacher. The family will then be directed to various centres run by gov-

ernment agencies and welfare organisations.

Care Corner chief executive officer Yap Poh Kheng said the new scheme will streamline the process by making help available at the project, which will be run in Leng Kee and Admiralty.

“Let’s say a pre-school teacher notices that a child is overly anxious,” he said. “She can bring in the social worker who will go and meet the families, investigate the matter further and bring together different aspects of help and care. These could range from educational therapy to nutrition, counselling and financial aid.”


Lien Foundation officials said various studies show high-quality early education provides a good foundation for academic achievement later on.

Early childhood expert Khoo Kim Choo will review the centres’ curriculum to make sure it boosts the children’s holistic development. Talks, workshops and support groups will also be set up to enhance parents’ skills.

“Research has shown children’s sustained gains in development are closely associated with parental involvement,” said Dr Khoo.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah said: “Young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of poverty. They often lag behind their peers in social and intellectual development as they do not have access to the same educational and developmental resources.”

The Government has taken several steps to raise the quality of



ENABLING ELVIS

Elvis Lim, five, was lagging behind in reading, writing and counting when he joined a childcare centre in Leng Kee. Was it just because he comes from a single-parent, low-income family? How can Singapore help children like Elvis catch up?

“Many children begin life at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, we can’t change that. But we can change other things, such as providing quality pre-school education and helping poor families provide a more nurturing environment.”

— Mr Lee Poh Wah, chief executive of the Lien Foundation

ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

HOME B12-13

pre-schooling and is looking into how it can be made more accessible to children from low-income families. Mr Lee said more help such as counselling and educational therapy must be made available within easy reach.

One mother, whose husband is a lorry driver, said she hopes that an educational therapist can help her four-year-old. “I cannot get my son to do his homework,” said the 34-year-old housewife, who asked not to be named. “I really don’t know what to do.”

sandra@sph.com.sg

240 PAGES IN TEN PARTS

TO SUBSCRIBE: 6388-3838
www.sphsubscription.com.sg

\$1.00

sph

A Singapore Press Holdings publication



MCI (P) 050/02/2013 *