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PROGRAMME IS LOOKING AT 1,700 BENEFICIARIES, 15 PRESCHOOLS BY 2018

Initiative providing support for children-in-need to get S\$4.34m funding, expand

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SINGAPORE – Seven-year-old Jack (not his real name) has a tendency to hit his classmates and disrupt lessons in school. It started when he was in kindergarten. These behavioural difficulties came on and off, with the latest recurring when he began Primary 1 this year.

Social worker Geraldine Foo, who handles his case, noted that it ran in tandem with the marital troubles that his parents faced, but Jack — who is the third child with three siblings — and his family are not left alone to face their challenges, because the boy has been placed under a programme

called Circle of Care, and are supported by a pool of professionals, including teachers, social workers, educational therapists and other volunteer partners.

Three years after it was launched, the programme is helping 130 children now, and more will benefit from it, after the Lien Foundation and Care Corner Singapore announced yesterday that the initiative would be expanded to more preschools, and will provide integrated support for children-in-need from the kindergarten level up to Primary 3.

It will also receive funding of S\$4.34 million over the next three years, with the team looking at an estimated 1,700 beneficiaries and up to

15 preschools taking part by 2018.

In Jack's case, the team helped him by working on his known positive leadership attributes stated in his case file. His family background and educational details had been recorded by his preschool and handed over to his primary school.

Social workers and educators came up with strategies, such as assigning him leadership responsibilities in the new school, to boost his self-esteem.

Ms Foo said: "Because there is sharing of information among the various parties, the teachers do not have to review his background again and a lot of time was saved (in responding to his needs)."

The programme is going into full swing this year with two primary schools — Lakeside Primary School and Gan Eng Seng Primary School — hopping onboard. Seven preschools have also signed up: Three under MY World Preschools, two under the PAP Community Foundation, and another two under PPIS (Singapore Muslim Women's Association).

The programme started its run with just two childcare centres, the Care Corner branches at Admiralty

and Leng Kee. Of the children they have helped, almost three in five were from at-risk backgrounds — 95 per cent of them come from families with a household income of less than S\$3,000 a month.

The team is already seeing some results, saying this initiative has increased parent-participation rate in the preschools. The programme also allows the child to have earlier intervention through educational therapists, which has helped to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. More than 70 per cent of children who had early intervention improved in literacy and numeracy skills.

Lakeside Primary's principal Wang-Tan Sun Sun said one of the benefits of the programme is that a social worker is assigned to the child, allowing the school counsellor to focus on the child in school while the social worker tackled family issues.

Gan Eng Seng Primary School's vice-principal Amisarni Mohd Amin said the extension of the programme to primary schools definitely "(shortened) the bridge to know the family" and allowed teachers to make informed decisions on managing the child.

EARLIER INTERVENTION

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