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Special care for special kids

Children with learning difficulties receive learning support through Care Corner Educational Therapy Service

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SPH Content Lab

For nine-year-old Muhammad, reading and speaking English was a struggle.

However, since he started specialist tuition at Care Corner Educational Therapy Service (ETS) Tampines two years ago, his command of the language has improved and he has become more confident in his speech and reading.

His mother, Madam Samirah, 47, notes that English is now his favourite subject. Not only is he always eager to go to the library to read more books about superheroes, he also participates actively during lessons.

ETS has also improved Muhammad's grasp of mathematical concepts, such as multiplication and division. Ms Samirah says he is now able to count the amount of change he receives after buying food in the school canteen.

Muhammad has come a long way since being diagnosed with literacy delay by KK Women's and Children's Hospital and referred to ETS in August 2015.

ETS is a programme offered by Care Corner Singapore, a social service organisation, to help children with special learning needs, aged five to 13 years, improve their literacy and numeracy skills and cognitive functioning.



ETS programme head and senior educational therapist Joanne Sim (right) regularly updates parents such as Madam Lim (left) of their child's progress. PHOTO: NCSS

Under this programme, well-trained educational therapists provide support for these children from mainstream schools who are diagnosed with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder, dyslexia and developmental delay.

ETS was launched in the early 2000s at Care Corner's first centre in Toa Payoh, offering subsidised tuition fees for children from low-income families receiving help. In 2015, a second centre was opened in Tampines.

ETS Tampines was made possible by the Care & Share Movement, launched in 2013 to celebrate Singapore's Golden Jubilee.

Under the movement, eligible donations raised by Community Chest and 240 participating social service organisations between December 1, 2013, and March 31, 2016, were matched dollar-for-dollar by the Government. The matched amounts go towards building the capabilities and capacities of the social service sector to meet rising needs in the future.

Children going to ETS Tampines

mostly live in areas such as Tampines, Pasir Ris and Bedok and the centre is easily accessible for those who live in the north-eastern part of Singapore.

The setting up of ETS Tampines has enabled more children to receive the support they need.

In 2015, 68 children attended the programme, with the number going up to 95 in 2016 and 139 last year.

Targeted teaching

At ETS, trained educational therapists, four in each centre, conduct sessions in groups of up to three students.

Says programme head and senior educational therapist Joanne Sim: "We have a multi-sensory approach to teaching to stimulate and allow the children to learn through their various senses.

"We also constantly modify our instructional variables to ensure that children's needs are met."

For instance, a Concrete-Representational-Abstract approach is used to help students understand mathematical concepts more easily through concrete teaching materials and pictures before using words, numbers and symbols on paper. Pre-phonics or phonics skills are taught to early-literacy children so they can learn to read independently.

Educational therapists also work on enhancing children's self-esteem and motivation via a psychotherapeutic approach through constant encouragement and affirmation, as well as help those with minor behavioural issues.

All new students at ETS centres undergo an initial assessment of their academic abilities in the subject concerned before placing them with others of similar profiles and abilities.

They are re-assessed four to six months later to evaluate their progress. Once a child is consistently scoring above 65 per cent in school

examinations and is able to receive alternative academic help, he is discharged from the programme.

Positive experience

To date, ETS has been well-received, and there are plans for expansion.

Madam Lim Bee Ling, 41, whose daughter Shernice Tan is attending the programme at ETS Tampines, is heartened by the positive impact it has had on her child.

Shernice, 10, who has been in the programme since she was in Primary 1, understands mathematical concepts better. She can count money and memorise the multiplication table now. Her teachers have also reported an improvement in her math test scores. Reading and understanding words come easier to her too.

ETS tuition also helped improve her attention span, and she can now focus better on her schoolwork and other tasks.

Says Madam Lim: "ETS teachers are very kind and patient. Compared to group tuition outside, the class size is kept small here. This helps Shernice to focus better as the teacher's attention is on her."

A third ETS centre will open in April in Woodlands.

SHARE as One

Make a difference in someone's life by creating a lasting impact through sustained giving and volunteering.

The Care & Share Movement, which was led by Community Chest, rallied people from all walks of life to provide help for the disadvantaged from December 2013 to March 31, 2016.

It was followed by the launch of the SHARE as One programme on April 1 2016, to continue this spirit of caring and sharing, and to sustain collective efforts to

show care and concern for those in need.

Under the SHARE as One programme, the Government provides dollar-for-dollar matching for any additional donations through SHARE, Community Chest's monthly giving programme, over and above the amount donated in Financial Year 2015. Besides regular donations, there are also opportunities to be a volunteer.

Visit www.shareasone.sg for more information.