

Early childhood professionals lauded for their good work

New award also created to recognise their role in helping kids with developmental needs

Syarafana Shafeeq

Ms A. Susila hesitated when she saw a six-year-old stretched out on the ground, doing nothing, on his first day at the childcare centre where she was teaching.

Instead of asking him to get up, she got down to lie next to him in silence. The child, who has autism spectrum disorder, felt comfortable enough after a while to give her one of his favourite toys, something he had never done for anyone before, said his mother.

Ms Susila, 55, was one of 23 early childhood and early intervention professionals – and centres – recognised on Saturday at the ninth Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) Awards. She received the Outstanding Early Intervention Professional Award, a new award this year that recognises the important role early intervention professionals play in supporting children with developmental needs.

Ms Susila started her career in the sector more than 30 years ago in the late 1980s. She was part of the team at pre-school education provider Presbyterian Community Services that pioneered intervention services in 2003.

She said a child who had refused to interact with anyone finally opened up to her after she had spent a month coaxing him out of his shell, in 2003, her first year working in intervention. “It felt great to make an actual difference in a child’s life,” she said. “At that moment, I felt this was the right career path for me and I was so grateful to be a part of such a nurturing sector.”



Ms Pearlyn Tan, executive principal of NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at 997 Buangkok Crescent, received the Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award this year. PHOTO: NTUC FIRST CAMPUS

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Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli attended the virtual award ceremony on Saturday and expressed his appreciation for the people in the sector.

“I thank all early childhood educators and early intervention professionals for your commitment in nurturing our children, regardless of their background and ability. Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, you have worked hard to enable our children to continue learning in a safe environment and to give every child a good start,” he said.

Ms Pearlyn Tan, executive principal of NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at 997 Buangkok Crescent, received the Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award this year. She has 10 years of experience as a principal, following two years of teaching. The 33-year-old said: “Being a young leader, I naturally faced some anxiety when I was transitioning from a teaching position to a leadership one.

“Besides working directly with children and parents, I needed to acquire new skills like strategic planning and staff management and lead teachers who have more years

of teaching experience than me.

“I believe that leadership is an ongoing journey of learning and discovery, and I must remain open and humble to learn and practise every day,” she said.

It was also announced at the event that ECDA will open the Early Childhood Innovation Award to all pre-schools starting from next year. Previously, only pre-schools with projects under the ECDA-funded Innovation Grant and Practitioner Inquiry programmes were eligible.

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