

In Person with NTUC First Campus' ECDA Fellow – Suhana

From waking up early to prepare meals for her family to ensuring that thousands of pre-school children get a good headstart in life, Suhana's passion and dedication are impacting the lives of many around her.

Meet Suhana Binte Salleh, one of the newly appointed ECDA Fellows. On April 5, 2018, Suhana was one of the three experienced early childhood leaders from NTUC First Campus to join the ECDA Fellows fraternity. They join two others from NTUC First Campus who were re-appointed following their first term from 2015 to 2018.

The ECDA Fellows programme is an initiative started in 2015 to recognise senior early childhood leaders who display exemplary leadership and expertise, and for ECDA to collaborate with them to drive quality improvements in the sector.

We managed to speak to Suhana in the midst of her busy schedule, to learn more about her work, beliefs and what motivates her in juggling work and family as a working mother.

Q: Tell us more about yourself.

Suhana: I am a Cluster Quality Manager (CQM) at NTUC First Campus' My First Skool (MFS). I have been working in the Early Childhood sector for 25 years since graduating from Wheelock College with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. I joined My First Skool in 2010 and was given the opportunity to grow professionally over the years, taking on roles such as Principal, Executive Principal, and now Cluster Quality Manager.

Q: How does a typical workday look for you?

Suhana: My work role has evolved such that I am now more focused on working with the centre leaders and staff. A typical day involves providing support on the ground at the various MFS centres. My main role as a CQM is to provide guidance for the centre leaders (under my care), helping them address the needs and challenges of their centres. As part of my work responsibility, I also do in-house audits and evaluate centres, preparing them for SPARK accreditation. I visit the centres and assess them using the SPARK booklet before following-up with a report on my findings of the strengths and the areas of improvement for the centre. Through all these, I also make sure I continue to build up the capabilities of the teachers, motivating them to give their very best. All these are done with the aim of supporting the centres on their quality journeys.

Q: In your own words, can you share with us what it means to you in being an ECDA Fellow?

Suhana: As an ECDA Fellow, I want to uplift and contribute to the Early Childhood Education sector in Singapore. I hope to share my experiences in leading centres to obtain quality assurance (e.g. SPARK Accreditation) and in the areas of Professional Development and Curriculum Leadership.

Centre Leaders need to develop their curriculum leadership by guiding the teachers in designing and implementing a holistic curriculum backed by strong centre pedagogies. However, in my opinion, curriculum leadership needs to be strengthened in many of the early childhood centres as Centre Leaders tend to focus more on operations. Centre Leaders need guidance in executing their role as a curriculum leader. As an ECDA fellow, I

want to guide and inspire Centre Leaders to improve themselves in the area of curriculum leadership.

Professional Development is another area that I wish to look into as an ECDA fellow. On the national level, we have numerous grants and opportunities for teachers and leaders to embark on professional development. However, professional development actually begins in the centre. Centre Leaders need to set a learning culture amongst the teachers and inspire the team to be positive about learning. A good form of learning culture is mentoring – which sees an experienced person in the centre help to develop specific skills and knowledge and enhance a less-experienced person's professional and personal growth.

Q: What are some things you enjoy doing outside of work?

Suhana: I enjoy exercising with friends during the weekends. It is a good way to de-stress, bond with them and keep myself active. Cooking is another favourite activity of mine. On weekends, I cook extra food and share them with my neighbours. I also love to bake, my specialties are Chocolate Chip Cookies and Ayam Masak Merah. Another one of my favourite activities is going on holidays with my fellow colleagues and principals.

Q: You have achieved a lot in your career thus far in NTUC First Campus. Any word of advice to aspiring individuals who are keen to join the pre-school sector?

Suhana: I am very thankful to NTUC First Campus, all my bosses and fellow colleagues for the experiences and opportunities that have allowed me to continuously contribute to the early childhood sector. I am very fortunate as all my bosses have given me their utmost support and guidance whenever I need them. All these contribute meaningfully in my role as a Cluster Quality Manager and also as an ECDA Fellow.

To those who wish to join the pre-school sector, it is important to have passion for this sector. You must have a positive attitude towards learning as having a positive outlook on life will help you tide through challenging times.