

SINGAPORE

Getting ready for primary school

Pre-school's support scheme teaches kids skills like how to buy food, make friends

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When Kalila Herman entered My First Skool (MFS) in Edgefield Plains as a nursery pupil in 2020, her teachers helped her acquire literacy and numeracy skills.

Today, the six-year-old is an avid reader and looks forward to embarking on the next phase of her education at Edgefield Primary School on Jan 2.

Kalila was enrolled in NTUC First Campus' (NFC) Classroom Support Programme (CSP) when she was in Nursery 2.

She was slower in picking up reading and writing skills at the time, and needed additional prompts to answer questions during class discussions. Tasks that involved multiple steps were also challenging for her.

As part of the CSP, which was launched in 2013, classroom co-facilitators (CCFs) provide additional support to improve the academic performance and socio-emotional skills of children from low-income families who study at MFS pre-schools.

In 2022, NFC rolled out three socio-emotional modules as part of the CSP, to better prepare these children in Kindergarten 2 for primary school education.

Titled "Primary School, Here I Come!", "I Am A Big Child!" and "Making Friends", these modules help children build skills necessary for primary school such as planning their daily schedule, buying food, and making friends.

Ms Rita Lim, 37, learning support manager of NFC's child support services, said MFS teachers ensure all children are ready to attend primary school.

However, for pupils enrolled in the CSP, the CCF extends the preparation further by engaging them in real-life scenarios that they are likely to encounter in primary school.

For example, the CCF will introduce the word "recess" and discuss what is done during recess and how to buy food. The CCF then uses scenario cards, which

provide examples of possible challenges that the children may encounter.

These include what they should do if they forget their recess money, how they should react if someone spills food on them, and deciding what to eat from the available canteen stalls.

As the children navigate these unfamiliar situations, the CCF will guide them to talk about their emotions, explore options, and direct them to making good choices.

"When there is a trusted adult to guide them through these challenging moments, it helps the children cope better when they actually (encounter) them," said Ms Lim, adding that this is a start to helping children understand what the expected behaviours are when they enter primary school.

Kalila's mother, Madam Ernylawaty Sulaiman Ibrahim, 36, told The Straits Times that she can see how her daughter's confidence has grown, thanks to the social and emotional support she received under the CSP.

She said: "I am glad, and I worry less about her going to Primary 1. I know that she can do it."

The store helper, who also has a three-year-old daughter, said she appreciates teachers and CCFs like Madam Siti Junaidah Jasni for working closely with Kalila, and showing her how different primary school would be from her pre-school.

Madam Junaidah, 33, attends to 30 pre-schoolers from Nursery 2 to Kindergarten 2 at MFS in Edgefield Plains.

She feels that such socio-emotional modules are important as pre-school settings are very different from what the children will encounter when they move on to primary school.

"In a pre-school, children are just confined to this area, but in a primary school, there will be different buildings and levels that they will need to move around," she said.

As a CCF, Madam Junaidah is able to vary the approach and attention she gives to children under her charge in the CSP.



Kalila Herman at her pre-school graduation ceremony with her parents, Madam Ernylawaty Sulaiman Ibrahim and Mr Herman Othman, and younger sister Khayra, in October 2023. PHOTOS: MY FIRST SKOOL



Madam Siti Junaidah Jasni, the classroom co-facilitator at My First Skool in Edgefield Plains, providing extra guidance for children in the support programme, to improve their academic performance and socio-emotional skills.



Kalila learning how to identify money to purchase food in preparation for the transition to primary school.

LESS WORRY

I am glad, and I worry less about her going to Primary 1. I know that she can do it.



MADAM ERNYLAWATY SULAIMAN IBRAHIM, on how her daughter's confidence has grown, thanks to the social and emotional support she received under NTUC First Campus' Classroom Support Programme.

"When I see Kalila being able to do a task by herself, I will step back. I will focus more on the ones who need more help. I know that she is trying and able to be independent," she said.

In 2023, there were 739 children from 22 My First Skool centres under the CSP.

One CCF is assigned to a maximum of 30 children per centre to ensure that children have sufficient contact time with the CCF.

Previously, the maximum household income that qualified pupils for NFC's CSP was \$4,500. In 2024, it will be increased to \$6,000.

According to an NFC spokesper-

son, this change aligns with the Early Childhood Development Agency's new low-income definition.

In 2024, NFC will be rolling out a fourth socio-emotional module titled 'I'm Possible!' to expand the primary school preparation programme. This module will teach children to practise positive talk and help them build resilience.

Two more modules will be developed in 2024 as well, bringing the total number of modules to six.

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