

## Art brings together kids with special needs, those without

Priscilla Goy

Six children formed a “choo-choo train” – each placing their hands on the shoulders of the child in front as they explored a show at an art gallery in Middle Road.

Together, they learnt about friendly dragons and crocodiles eating cupcakes as well as played a modified version of hopscotch to get to the moon.

The children, who were of different ages and from different schools, were made up of those with and without special needs.

They were taking part in an “inclusive tour” of the Planet of Possibility exhibition.

More than 100 special needs children and about 200 of those without special needs have taken part in these tours since the new school term started two weeks ago.

The inclusive tours, held almost daily, aim to promote interaction among the two groups of children.

Pre-schoolers without disabilities tour the exhibition with older peers from special education (Sped) schools, under the guidance of youth volunteers.

The exhibition is funded by the Lien Foundation and National Arts Council.

Organised by community arts studio Logue and craft designers In Merry Motion, it is part of Superhero Me, a values-based community arts movement started in 2014.

This is the first time the Superhero Me movement has focused on special needs children.

Logue co-founder Jean Loo told The Straits Times: “There needs to be platforms like art events or public playgrounds, where parents and children, whether with special needs or not, can expand their social circles and get to know people who are different from them.”

According to findings from a poll of 835 parents of special needs children released last week, four in 10 of them think their children spend too little time in the community outside school.

Nearly half of those surveyed said their children do not have friends without disabilities.

During the inclusive tours, the children learn briefly about disabilities when volunteers talk about the children who produced the artworks, as well as the artists’ child-



hood ambitions and interests.

The exhibition features the work of more than 80 people, aged four to 21, from diverse backgrounds.

They include children from three Sped schools: Cerebral Palsy Alliance School Singapore, Minds Lee Kong Chian Gardens School, and Pathlight School.

Pre-schoolers from Kindle Garden – where about 30 per cent of the children have special needs – and at-risk children who graduated from Care Corner Child Development Centre were also involved.

Schools whose pupils took part in the inclusive tours said their children enjoyed themselves.

Pathlight School senior vice-principal Loy Sheau Mei said: “This was

a great opportunity to stretch and expose them to new experiences.”

Odyssey The Global Preschool centre director Candy Low said: “It’s not often that our children get to befriend others during a school excursion.”

“We’ve come to be reminded that children are innocent, open, and interact with others without any preconceived judgment.”

The art show, which is at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, is open to the public. It ends on Sunday. Admission is free.

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• For more information, go to [www.superherome.sg](http://www.superherome.sg)

Superhero Me facilitator Chen Weiyan helping kids from Pathlight School (in white) and Odyssey The Global Preschool build a rocket from recycled materials at the Planet of Possibility exhibition.

PHOTO: SUPERHERO ME