

# New initiative to train pre-school principals

**Main aim is to help them be more effective leaders, since so many are relatively young**

QUANTUM LEAP

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**LIEN FOUNDATION CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
LEE POH WAH**

**Priscilla Goy**

Amid a manpower shortage in the pre-school sector, teachers are becoming principals at a younger age. They usually have less life experience, but need to supervise teachers and keep up with various changes in the sector.

To help principals be more effective leaders, and ultimately improve the quality of pre-school services, the Lien Foundation yesterday launched a leadership programme called Principal Matters.

It involves four partners: NTUC's Seed Institute, the largest pre-school training provider here; Wheelock College, a top pre-school training institute in the US; global human resources consultancy Korn Ferry Hay Group; and SIM University (UniSIM).

The programme is based on a new model of behavioural skills, such as the management of emotions in challenging conditions. The model was developed by the

Korn Ferry Hay Group after interviews with about 50 pre-school leaders in Singapore.

The programme costs \$2.7 million and will be free for the 150 selected principals, or close to a tenth of all pre-school principals. It comprises several segments spread over six months, including a 12-day trip to Boston, where Wheelock College is based, and mentorship by veteran pre-school leaders here.

UniSIM will also conduct a study of the principals' work and progress, to better understand local leadership practices.

Overseas research has shown that school leadership is second only to teaching, among factors that affect learning outcomes.

But it has become more challenging to be an effective principal in recent years, said experts.

The number of childcare centres has risen by almost half since 2010, and teachers have had to rise up earlier to be principals. If they have the required qualifications, they can be principals with just two years of teaching experience.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah said: "In a few short years, they go from managing a class to having to manage a busi-

ness – from supervising and retaining teachers to engaging increasingly well-educated parents who are often older than them."

Seed Institute academic director Ho Yin Fong, speaking about principals at centres run by NTUC First Campus, estimates their median age to be in the 30s, down from the 40s about 10 to 15 years ago.

Korn Ferry Hay Group managing consultant Tan Khai Ling said younger principals may be less aware of their own feelings and find it harder to control them under stressful conditions.

Chiltern House principal Iris Lim, 42, one of the mentors, agreed, though she noted younger ones may have an advantage in connecting with young teachers.

Ms Lee Chin Yen, 48, a principal for about nine years at Agape Little Uni, is keen to apply for the programme. "It would be good to learn from mentors and overseas experts," she said.

Principals with three to 10 years of experience have until May 18 to apply to be part of the first cohort of 25. Those interested can apply at [www.principalmatters.sg](http://www.principalmatters.sg)

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