



Singapore's first model of integrated care expands to 9 preschools & 2 primary schools. More than 1,700 children to benefit in the next 3 years.

Developed by the Lien Foundation and Care Corner, 'Circle of Care' (COC) is a multi-disciplinary, child-centric model of education and care combining social work, learning support, and parental involvement.

Circle of Care will be extended to two primary schools to support children up to Primary 3, especially those at-risk. It aims to reach at least 15 preschools by 2018.

Singapore, 2 Mar 2016

1. Three years after its launch, the Lien Foundation and Care Corner Singapore are expanding the [Circle of Care](#) (COC) programme from two to nine preschools, in partnership with three major preschool operators and two primary schools. Anchor preschool operators MY World Preschool and PAP Community Foundation, as well as PPIS (the Singapore Muslim Women's Association), have come on board alongside Lakeside Primary School and Gan Eng Seng Primary School (see annex for list). The ground-up collaboration aims to build clusters of primary schools and preschools to create a structured transition, especially for at-risk children from disadvantaged families, from preschool into primary school.
2. In 2013, the COC model was successfully piloted at two of Care Corner's childcare centres - Leng Kee and Admiralty - for children from birth to age 6.¹ It uses a new and integrated approach that weaves a 'circle of care' around the child, bringing teachers, social workers, education therapists and community partners – who typically work apart – together to provide a holistic continuum of care for children. The early intervention provided by this ecosystem of care is able to benefit children at-risk or with learning difficulties effectively because it is done in the natural setting of a preschool, where children spend hours daily.

Child-centric approach breaks silos

3. "Children from low-income families are hurt not only by their circumstances, but by the silo-ed manner the present system defines and addresses their inter-connected needs," said Mr Lee

¹ As of July 2015, all five of Care Corner's child development centres, including Lengkok Bahru and Admiralty, have been transferred to MY World Preschool.

Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation. "In the Circle of Care, we seek to break down these long-standing barriers to reduce enduring gaps in the academics and well-being of at-risk children." With social workers, teachers and therapists working as a team, the COC is able to identify the root causes of a child's difficulties, provide help on different fronts and extend assistance to the children and their families. By breaking the silos of education and care, the integrated care model safeguards the child's growth and development. The ground-up collaboration with the COC Partner Preschools and Primary Schools were based on their progressive leadership that sought to do more for children at-risk.

4. Overseeing the implementation of COC across the nine preschools is Care Corner Singapore. "As a VWO that used to run both Family Service Centres and preschools, we recognised the important link between social work and early childhood," said Mr Yap Poh Kheng, CEO of Care Corner. "The preschool is the best place for social work intervention. With COC we are able to holistically integrate learning support services and social work intervention for less advantaged children and families, within a natural childcare setting which offers extended opportunities for engagement." Care Corner transferred operations of its five preschools in 2015 to focus on providing COC as a service to other preschools.

Positive impact of COC

5. Since its launch, COC has demonstrated impact in improving child and family outcomes. In one preschool of 80 children, Parent-Teacher Conferences (PTCs) in 2012 were attended by only a handful of parents. After COC was introduced, attendance rates rose to 32% in 2013, then 54% in 2015. Considered by early childhood professionals to be a key indicator of healthy parental involvement in the most formative phase of a child's development, attendance at PTCs is nonetheless a perennial challenge that plagues preschools working with children from at-risk backgrounds, due to lack of understanding or instability at home caused by a variety of factors. In COC, social workers were assigned to engage families of at-risk children. The deeper understanding and closer ties forged resulted in the improved PTC attendance.
6. The progress made by the COC's multi-disciplinary team showed that the majority of the children (between 70% and 100%) under its School Readiness Programme (SRP) achieved improvement in literacy and numeracy. "There are four circles of care that affect the young child's holistic development: the family, child care centre, community and government policies. When one circle fails the child, directly or indirectly, there will be both short and long-term consequences on the child and repercussions on the society he or she lives in. Identifying and

intervening in the early years reduces both social and financial costs to the individual, families and the state,” said Dr Khoo Kim Choo, Consultant for Circle of Care and 25-year early childhood veteran and leader. Dr Khoo led the conceptualisation of Circle of Care.

7. The COC also revealed a latent need for intervention by social workers. About 30% of the 76 at-risk children in COC from 2013 to 2015 were new cases identified by the COC team through observation of the children’s behaviour. These cases were not served by any social service organisations either because the children’s families did not request for help, or their cases were closed when circumstances improved or when the social service organisation was unable to contact them.
8. Of the 76 at-risk children, 95% come from families with household incomes of below \$3,000 a month and the majority live in HDB rental flats. They suffer from irregular school attendance due to a litany of problems that range from health issues, financial and housing distress, unemployed parents or death in the family. The COC team managed to raise their average attendance from about 30% to close to 70% by working closely with their families. Continued and long-term engagement through COC was crucial in breaking the cycle of skipping school.

Expanding the sphere of assistance to low income families

9. Highlighting the advantages of integrated care, Mr Mohd Ali Mahmood, Senior Director, Singapore Muslim Women’s Association (PPIS) said, “We need to think beyond financial assistance and academic grades when dealing with the challenges faced by the poor. Low-income and zero-income families with multiple problems need the different skills of a multi-disciplinary team to address these challenges.” PPIS will introduce COC in two of its preschools. Anchor childcare operator, MY World Preschool, shared its reason for implementing COC in five of its preschools. “MY World believes that every child deserves equal opportunity to quality care and education. With Circle of Care, we are able to provide preschoolers, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, a good start in life,” said Ms Phyllis Tan, Director, MY World Preschool.

COC benefits all children

10. In Circle of Care, all children, not only those from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit. The children’s learning experiences are enriched with access to a diverse range of community resources. These include music and movement programmes, parent-child workshops and parent-child bonding activities with the involvement of volunteers. The integrated care

approach draws on the strengths of the community to play a role in the children's learning and development, with parental involvement setting a sound foundation. Community partners such as organisations and volunteers who would like to partner COC can sign up at www.circleofcare.sg.

How COC works

11. Children in a COC preschool will be supported by a multi-disciplinary team comprising their principal and preschool teachers, educational therapists and social workers. The COC Social Worker brings together different aspects of help and care for the child and family, and these could range from case management, community resources, and educational therapy, to counselling or financial aid. They work closely with the teachers to identify, assess and provide early intervention to children at-risk including those with learning difficulties.

Social workers play key role

12. Reflecting on the role of social workers, Ms Geraldine Foo, Care Corner's Social Worker said, "Early childhood is a golden period where we can work upstream to partner and journey with disadvantaged families to unlock various key issues." Education therapists, who provide learning support in numeracy and literacy skills to the children in small groups, support the COC team. The COC team meets regularly to update and share information in order to better understand and work more effectively with the child and family.

Investing in Integrated Care

13. The expanded Circle of Care will be supported by a \$3.8m grant from the Lien Foundation and \$500,000 from Care Corner Singapore. The funds go towards assembling a team that includes eight social workers, two of whom will be dedicated to the partner primary schools. Besides the social workers, three coordinators will focus on facilitating smooth collaboration with each of the three partner preschool operators.
14. In addition, Care Corner will conduct professional development training for preschool operators and Family Service Centres to help early childhood educators, social workers, educational therapists, volunteers and professionals from related fields to understand this new dimension of social work. They will examine and learn how to apply the fundamentals of creating an integrated care approach for preschool settings. This is part of the overall strategy to help the early education sector improve key outcomes for children and their families through early intervention.

15. Presently, the cost of supporting an at-risk child, excluding education therapy services, is about \$125 to \$165 per month, depending on the intensity of the social work cases. In the last three years, 76 out of the 230 children under COC fell under the at-risk category. Tapping on available resources will enhance the programme's scalability and outreach in the long term. To expand its reach and scale, Circle of Care will also work with existing programmes and resources, such as the government's existing Development Support Programme, which will reduce the cost of supporting an at-risk child on education therapy in COC.

Extending COC up to Primary Three

16. Spurred by improvements shown by the children at-risk, the COC team continued to extend a helping hand to the pioneer batch of COC children. This was provided with the consent of their parents. In 2015, all 13 at-risk children who still required assistance after they had graduated from Kindergarten 2 opted to continue engaging the COC team even after they moved on to P1.

17. In general, there is presently no formal system of information sharing or collaboration between the preschools and primary schools. This means that some of the hard-won progress made by at-risk children in their preschool years under COC could be affected. These children could also fall through the cracks if the school is unable to identify their disadvantaged circumstances and need for intervention. These children would miss out on the guidance they need, such as pastoral care or counselling, even though the services are available in school.

Linking care between preschools and primary schools

18. To bridge this gap, the COC team has made primary schools one of the cornerstones of the expanded COC. Lakeside Primary School and Gan Eng Seng Primary School have formalised working relationships with the COC team, enabling regular meetings between the COC social workers and the school's teachers, counsellors and pastoral care team. This leads to quicker and more coordinated exchanges of information, and more comprehensive supervision of a child's needs.

19. Gan Eng Seng Primary was approached due to its proximity to Leng Kee Centre. Many of the COC pioneer batch of children attend Gan Eng Seng Primary. Lakeside Primary School was invited to join COC to offer a continuum of care alongside the nearby PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Taman Jurong. Underlining the need for such a transition programme, PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Taman Jurong lead principal, Ms Carole See noted, "The close collaboration

between PCF preschools and primary schools in conjunction with support from Circle of Care will further strengthen and enhance the gradual progress in learning for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Working together to support children up to Primary Three

20. Under the COC’s Primary School Transition Programme, the COC team not only prepares the COC children for Primary 1, it gets the parents ready too. Besides sharing with the COC Partner Primary Schools information about the child, the COC team will highlight the child’s areas of strengths and where more support and guidance is needed. The COC Social Worker will collaborate with the school’s team of pastoral care support, class teacher and allied educator. Before school starts, workshops and school visits will be organised for the parent and child. The COC Social Worker will journey with the child and child’s parents from Primary 1 to Primary 3 and be a key point of assistance between the school and parents in relation to the child’s attendance, class performance, and relationship with teachers and peers.

21. On the synergy between COC and Lakeside Primary School, its principal, Mrs Wang-Tan Sun Sun said, “The advantage of the COC model is the early intervention at the preschool level and the longitudinal follow-through during the early years of primary school. We are excited about the potential impact it can make during a child’s formative years and the possibilities this may bring in terms of increasing social mobility in the long run.”

22. COC children attending non-COC primary schools who still require intervention and guidance will continue to receive help but on a less structured basis. The team would need parents’ consent to introduce its role to the respective primary school the child attends. The degree and level of interaction the COC team has with the school to ease the child’s transition to Primary 1 would depend on the school’s response.

COC at primary schools can ensure continued progress

23. Some students at Gan Eng Seng Primary School are already experiencing the benefits of the COC connection between preschool and primary school levels. “Our Student Welfare Officer is already working with the Circle of Care team, and our children are benefiting from this closer collaboration with our neighbouring preschools,” said Mr Ong Lye Whatt, principal of Gan Eng Seng Primary School, which is one of the five primary schools under the Ministry of Education’s Student Welfare Officer pilot scheme - where a social work-trained officer is at hand to reach out to vulnerable students and families.

24. The expansion of Circle of Care underscores the benefits of connecting care to education. Its child-centric philosophy and focus on parental engagement acknowledge the need for care and education that go beyond the classroom. Its initial success with early intervention and school readiness, especially for children-at-risk, calls for greater thought and review of the integrated approach for early childhood education in Singapore.

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About the Lien Foundation

www.lienfoundation.org

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation. In the area of early childhood education, the Foundation aims to create a better playing field by strengthening capacity in this area and opening up opportunities for disadvantaged preschoolers.

To advocate greater access to quality early childhood education, the Foundation commissioned a study, *Vital Voices for Vital Years* that examined leaders' views on improving Singapore's preschool sector. In June 2012, the Lien Foundation released a global benchmark study called *Starting Well* that ranked 45 countries on their provision of preschool education. The use of I.T forms a key strategy in the Foundation's efforts to increase efficiencies and enhance professionalism in the preschool sector. The Foundation has championed a community-based model of care where specialists go into mainstream preschools to help children with learning difficulties. Its success has inspired a scaled-up national version in Singapore. In its push for inclusivity in education, the Foundation set up Singapore's first inclusive preschool, *Kindle Garden*, with AWWA (Asian Women's Welfare Association).

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CIRCLE OF CARE (2016) ANNEX

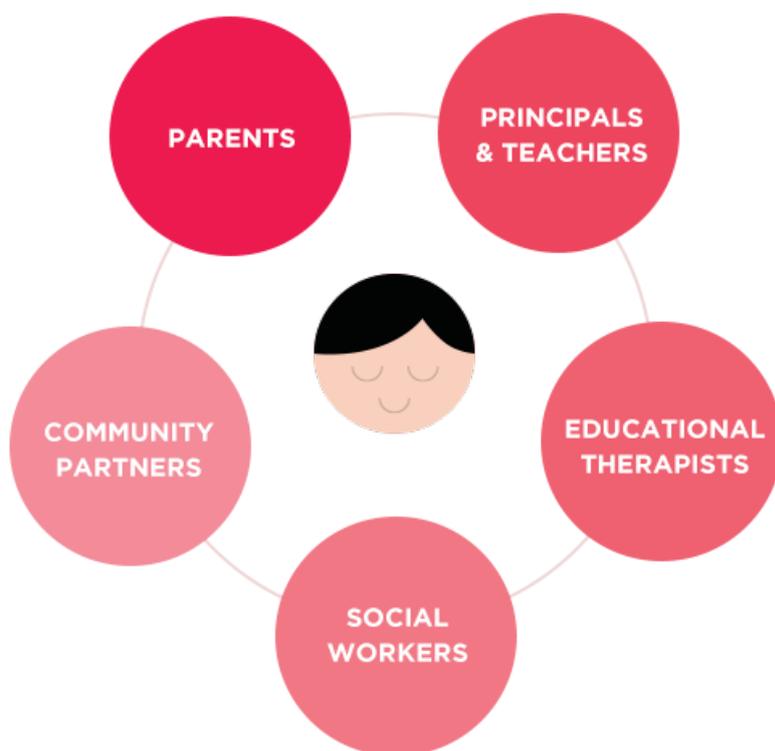
1. What is “Circle of Care”

Launched in 2013, the Circle of Care (CoC) is a project catalysed and funded by the Lien Foundation in two Care Corner childcare centres - Admiralty and Leng Kee (both centres are now under MY World Preschool). It pilots a child-centric model of care where early childhood educators, social workers and educational therapists look after the children’s holistic development, and the needs of their families, in an integrated way. It aims to improve outcomes for preschoolers and their families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can integrate confidently into school and community systems.

Under the programme, many of the children showed marked improvements in class participation. They expressed greater confidence, responded positively to music, literacy and numeracy programmes, as well as the extra personal attention given to them.

With positive outcomes and benefits to children under the programme, especially for those at-risk, Circle of Care is now being extended to a total of 9 preschools and scaled up to involve two partner primary schools.

a. **The Integrated Child Centric Circle of Care**



2. Who are Involved?

Catalyst and funder	Lien Foundation
Consultant	Dr Khoo Kim Choo, Early Childhood expert
Programme Developer	Care Corner Singapore Limited
Circle of Care Partner Preschools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Currently 9 in 2016 – At least 15 by 2018 	MY World Preschools – 5 schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MY World Preschool @ Admiralty • MY World Preschool @ Lengkee • MY World Preschool@ Pasir Ris • MY World Preschool @ Sembawang Drive • MY World Preschool @ Tampines Changkat PCF (PAP Community Foundation) – 2 schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Taman Jurong Blk 161 • PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Taman Jurong Blk 352 PPIS (Singapore Muslim Women’s Association) – 2 schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPIS Child Development Centre Bukit Batok • PPIS Child Development Centre Jurong
Expanded COC Outreach from 2016	Over 1700 preschoolers
COC Partner Primary Schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gan Eng Seng Primary 2. Lakeside Primary
COC Team (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Centre Manager 1 Team Leader 8 Social Workers 3 COC Coordinators 3 Programme Staff 1 Administrator

3. COC Milestones

Feb 2013	Launch of Circle of Care in Care Corner’s Admiralty and Leng Kee Childcare Development Centres
2014	Update on the Progress of Circle of Care (media announcement) Pioneer batch of COC graduands
2015	Care Corner transfers its five child development centres, including Admiralty and Leng Kee, to MY World’s preschools COC pilots Primary School Transition Programme for 13 children and their families
2016	COC expands to 7 more preschools, bringing total of preschools to 9 COC’s Primary School Transition Programme expands to two primary schools
By 2018	COC aims to expand to at least 6 more preschools, bringing the total of COC Partner Preschools to at least 15

4. What does it cost

a	Total investment by Lien Foundation and Care Corner	S\$4.34 million over 3 years
b	Total investment by Care Corner	S\$500,000
c	Monthly cost of supporting at-risk child	About \$125 to \$165 per child (excluding education therapy services)

5. Children at risk under COC from 2013 - 2015

Total Number of COC children at-risk	76
Number of COC at-risk children who required both Social Work Support and Educational Therapy Service (ETS)	32
Number of COC at-risk children who required ETS only	20
Number of COC at-risk children who required Social Work Support only	24

6. Improvements & Gains achieved by Circle of Care

a. Rise in Parental Involvement

Since COC was launched in MY World @ Leng Kee and MY World @ Admiralty in 2013, the level of parents' Involvement in the children's education has grown from strength to strength

Table 6a: Average Parent Participation Rate in Parent-Teacher Conferences in the two pioneer COC centres from 2013-2015

Year	Leng Kee	Admiralty
2013	32%	64%
2014	30%	80%
2015	54%	88%

Note: The COC Social Worker works closely with teachers to support parent participation in PTC. For active cases, the social worker will have conversations with parents to prepare them for PTC with teachers. COC also organises Workshops for parents on topics like Parent-Child bonding and Transition to Primary School.

COC Social Workers based in preschools help reduce the stigma families may associate with seeking assistance and provide a closer point of access to such information for the parents. Their regular presence also gives better access to Social Work support, thereby resulting in natural monitoring, observation and intervention (modelling) for all teachers and children

b. Progress in Literacy and Numeracy skills

Majority (over 70%) of children undergoing early intervention improved in literacy and numeracy skills.

Table 6b: K1 Children's Performance in School Readiness Programme (SRP)

Year	Number of Children who Required Additional Literacy and Numeracy Support	Literacy	Numeracy
		Number (%) Improved	Number (%) Improved
2013*	-	-	-
2014	8	6 (75%)	8 (100%)
2015	8	8 (100%)	6 (75%)

** In 2013, students started late for the programme and there were changes made for both the pre and post programme assessments.*

Table 6c: K2 Children’s Performance in School Readiness Programme (SRP)

Year	Number of Children who Required Additional Literacy and Numeracy Support	Literacy	Numeracy
		Number (%) Improved	Number (%) Improved
2013	11	8 (73%)	9 (82%)
2014	16	16 (100%)	16 (100%)
2015	16	13 (81%)	12 (75%)

7. Case Study

How Circle of Care weaves a holistic sphere of support around the child

Seven-year old Jo* had a hard time reading and writing. In school, he related to his teachers about his father hitting his mother. Jo and his family faced several issues – physical abuse, financial distress, unemployment and poor health. His parents’ different parenting styles and unmet expectations made things worse.

The COC team’s assessment revealed that Jo was emotionally affected and confused by the turmoil and quarrels at home. His older sister, Ally was just as distressed. Sometimes, Jo would even get aggressive with his classmates. To help him, the COC Social Worker, educational therapists, as well as his principal and teachers worked together as a team to address Jo’s behavioural and emotional issues. Through art and play sessions with the COC Social Worker in a safe environment, Jo learnt to regulate his emotions and express them healthily. He also learnt how and where to seek help for support.

In addition, the COC Social Worker brainstormed with Jo’s parents and supported them in thinking of ways to resolve their issues, avoid family violence and identify ways to manage their anger and mutual expectations. They learnt how to improve their parenting skills - like creating more structure for the children at home, creating earlier bedtimes, and coaching the children in their studies, as well as managing their expectations of Jo and Ally.

Most importantly, the COC Social Worker kept Jo’s parents engaged in his development and learning. This led Jo to attend childcare regularly and his parents getting involved in the school’s activities. The COC team also connected the couple to community resources such as the Social Service Office, Family Violence Specialist Centre, Student Care Centre, and Family Service Centre near their home. Things started getting better for the family.

Under COC’s School Readiness Programme, Jo’s skills in numeracy and literacy improved rapidly. He spoke more confidently, and as his reading and writing skills progressed, his self-esteem increased too. Since his graduation in K2, Jo’s parents have consented to him being on COC’s P1 transition programme. The COC team is continuing their work with Jo to ease his transition into his primary school and support his family in the new phase.

* not his real name.