



E-RESOURCE
GUIDE FOR

EARLY

CHILDHOOD

EMPLOYERS



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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

The **Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)** offers Training Awards (TA) to pre-service students pursuing full-time early childhood courses at ITE, Polytechnics and SUSS. As they pursue their passion and aspire to play an integral role in giving our children a good start, ECDA is committed to walking alongside and supporting our recipients in this meaningful journey.

When they graduate and enter the early childhood sector, our TA recipients would receive an induction booklet to help them assimilate into their new working environment. We want to take it one step further and partner you, the employers, to help these promising educators in their transition from school to work and make a strong start in their career. With your consistent guidance and support, they will grow professionally and this, in turn, will improve children's learning and staff retention.

This e-resource guide is specially curated for Early Childhood employers and designed to complement your centre's existing developmental plans and policies. Even if you do not employ a TA recipient, this guide can be used to support educators who are joining the sector for the first time.

We look forward to working together with you to help our aspiring early childhood educators succeed so that they can contribute more to the growth of their centres and the early childhood sector!

CHAPTER 2. UNDERSTANDING THE PROFILE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF BEGINNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Though our TA recipients come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, a large proportion share similar traits. For your new employees to assimilate into their roles within your centre, it is important for you to understand and acknowledge their unique characteristics. This will enable you to fulfil their career expectations and tap on their unique strengths at work, transforming them into long-term assets to your centre. To cultivate a strong working relationship with your new employees throughout their transition period, we encourage you to cross-reference the following suggestions with your centre's current policies.

PROFILE / TRAITS / CHARACTERISTICS	TIPS / SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged from around 19 – 26 • Freshly graduated with little to no long-term or full-time experience (most only having experienced short attachments or internships as an assistant teacher) • First time being left completely in charge of a classroom without mentorship or active assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand differences in expectations for communication: As newly graduated students, these employees come from environments rich in feedback, individual praise, and guidance. As such, constant, positive reinforcement and guiding support similar to what they had in their schooling systems will help them feel secure and appreciated at their workplace. • Recognise that new educators are not all-rounders, especially at the start. Try long-term strategies such as monthly or termly review sessions, focusing not only on improving their weaknesses, but tapping on their strengths as well. • Other than professional support, it is also crucial to provide emotional support and emphasize on self-care to ensure their psychological well-being.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have unique skills from prior experiences • Passionate and excited about nurturing children and making a difference, but may have misconceptions or overly optimistic expectations • Want to be treated with respect and feel a sense of belonging to their workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower them by giving these new employees avenues to showcase their specialities and unique abilities, so that new and experienced teachers can learn from one another. Since many of them come in with high hopes of making a difference, yet lack the industry experience to carry it out alone, giving them this opportunity allows them to grow. It also recognises their abilities despite their youth, enhancing their sense of belonging. • Examples include tapping into their ease with technology, expertise and creativity in making

PROFILE / TRAITS / CHARACTERISTICS	TIPS / SUGGESTIONS
	<p>classroom props and learning corners, or ability to lead and plan events with a committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition, employees wish to see the centre protecting their interests and trusting their handling of classroom matters, especially in dealing with difficult situations or persistent parents. Open efforts to protect the authority of the teachers in the face of parental pressure will lead to them feeling respected and valued in their role as a teacher. "Praise publicly and correct privately," when applied to feedback, assures the employee that he/she is valued by the employer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value work-life balance as an important factor of career satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set professional limits for your employees' working hours: Because of the heavy workload, employees often end up bringing work back home or responding to messages late into the night. By taking a firm stance on your employees' work-life balance, you also look out for their welfare and satisfaction. Alternatively, if workload is an issue during peak periods, consider giving your employees paid time off in proportion to the extra hours they put in, after the busy period is over. Additionally, rostering employees for both opening and closing shifts ensures a fairer distribution of work as it provides flexibility for employees to manage their work-life demands.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strongly value career growth opportunities and desire to advance¹ Serving a bond of 1 – 5 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually engage employees: After the transition period, employees look towards fulfilling their career objectives and available advancement opportunities when considering their future with the centre. Try to make time to truly understand what each educator is looking for and check in frequently to ensure that they are still challenged and engaged at work.

When working with new employees, it is important to acknowledge that they have different developmental needs and require support at different points of time. To start this journey, let us first understand how beginning educators develop over the course of their career. Like the children, our educators face transitions in their professional development. This process typically occurs in 4 stages and their training needs change as they gain experience over time².

Having a better idea of the needs and common challenges faced by the new employees at each stage will help us develop corresponding approaches to support them. **Dr Chua Bee Leng, Associate-Dean of Professional Practice at the National Institute of Education³**, has outlined supporting strategies and tips to help early childhood educators with their professional development transitions.

1. Brad Harrington et al., "How Millennials Navigate their Careers," *Boston College Center for Work & Family*, 2015,

<https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/research/publications/researchreports/how-millennials-navigate-their-careers.pdf>

2. Lilian G. Katz, "Developmental Stages of Preschool Teachers," *The Elementary School Journal*, 1972 73:1, 50-54

3. Dr Chua is at the Office of Teacher Education in NIE, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She regularly shares her expertise in subject disciplines such as educational studies and instructional pedagogies with schools and educators from other organisations and countries. She is also a Senior Lecturer with the Psychological Studies Academic Group.

TRANSITIONS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1ST YEAR SURVIVAL

The new teacher is challenged to adapt to taking charge of a classroom and applying theories to practice.

1ST – 3RD YEAR CONSOLIDATION

The new teacher gains some experience and begins to focus on mastery of skills.

3RD – 4TH YEAR RENEWAL

The teacher starts to be interested in new pedagogies and wants to upgrade his/her skills. He/She begins looking for long-term progress.

5TH YEAR AND BEYOND MATURITY

The teacher has become more mature and reflective. He/She starts looking for growth and career opportunities. He/She may also seek out leadership and mentoring roles.

* Do note that timelines given are estimates. Individual educators may vary in the length of time spent in each stage.

CHAPTER 2.1 / STAGE 1:

SURVIVAL

In their first year, new educators, especially those with little to no prior experience, struggle to adapt to the assertive role of a teacher. Most of the time, their expectations or experiences from their internships/practicum vary greatly from the actual role they are about to step into in terms of age group or job duties. They may also experience difficulties applying theories learnt in school to practise at work. While they are excited to start their new role, the large influx of new information and responsibilities may overwhelm them, leaving them unprepared to handle aspects such as parent-teacher relationships and classroom management. This provokes teachers' anxieties and triggers their survival mode, where they simply hope to get through the day-to-day demands. Repeated failures or negative feedback from other teachers and parents also causes rising insecurity and low self-esteem.

Over time, some new educators may not be able to fit into their roles at work and choose to leave the centre or even the sector. While the centre may engage a replacement, this inevitably causes disruption to the children and centre, as there is a need to retrain new hires.

NEEDS

To manage the steep learning curve in this stage, the new employees need plenty of guidance, reassurance, encouragement, and appreciation of the effort they have put in. They also need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

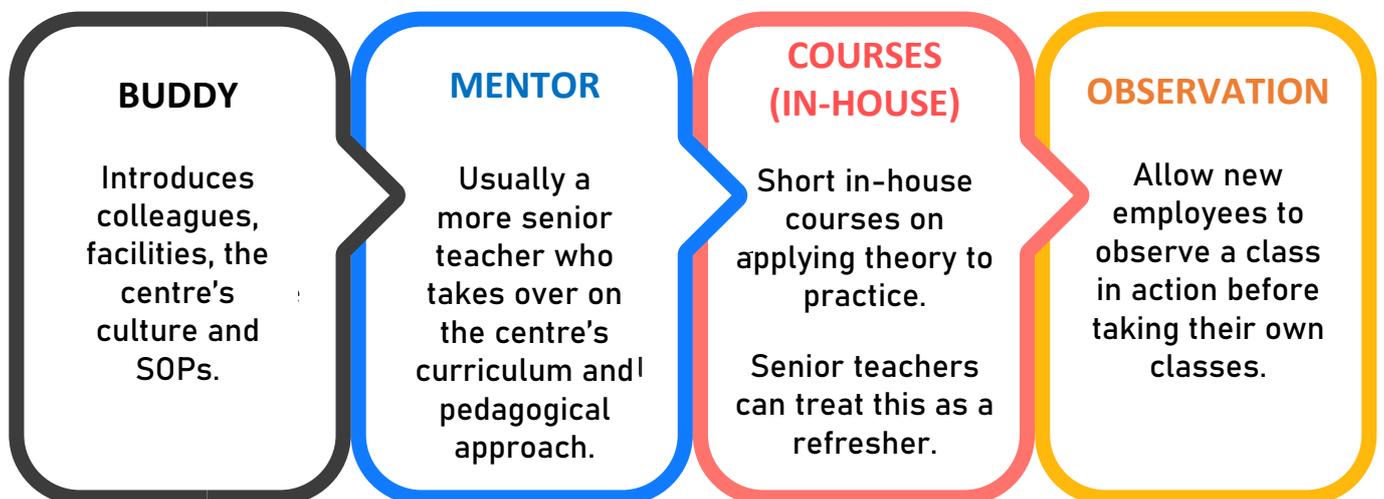
1. Introducing a customized induction programme

Since many new employees come in unsure of their precise role, which differs from centre to centre, it is important to clearly communicate things like basic expectations and standard protocol, as well as to ensure that new educators get sufficient support, instead of being thrown into the “deep end”.

While most centres do have an induction programme, common problems such as insufficient manpower and joining at peak periods may affect the level and quality of support the centre can give.

It will be helpful if your centre can try to identify gaps in your induction programme and find ways to circumvent associated problems, including the following common pitfalls:

- Using non-specific, external resources to replace physical induction programmes:**
 While lack of time or manpower may make it more practical to rely on existing resources such as onboarding booklets, such resources will likely not be specific enough to your centre's culture. Especially for larger companies, delays in HR communications may prevent employees from receiving timely information. Consider complementing such handbooks with hands-on guidance from a mentor or buddy and encouraging newcomers to take an active approach to their learning.
- Not introducing information beyond that of the immediate teaching context:** Common lapses include classroom set-up, where teaching materials are kept, and how to build professional relationships with parents. It is important to introduce your centre's SOPs to new employees as different centres handle problems differently, and they may be unaware of what issues are urgent and how to respond.
- Mis-matching new employees during their introductory period:** Many fresh entrants are assigned to assist classes in a different age group from that of the class they eventually take. Consider their strengths and interests when assigning them. If manpower is a concern, it might help to place them with long-time employees who have rich experience working with different age groups.
- Overloading new employees with information:** Consider spacing out information over a period of weeks or placing them in a common and accessible resource folder. This is a useful workflow in planning a structured induction programme that provides bite-size information for fresh entrants over time:



When new employees enter the sector, they hope for their new employers to be able to cover the basic job expectations and duties of their role. Take a look at the sample checklist below to see a rough guide of what most employers should aim to provide for new employees in their first year.

CHECKLIST

BEFORE 1ST DAY

- Provide where, when, and whom to report on the first day of work
- Appoint a Senior Teacher for guidance

END OF 1ST WEEK

- Provide an employee handbook
- Introduce employee to colleagues, work area, centre's SOPs, safety, and culture
- Assign job duties

END OF 1ST MONTH

- Discuss progress
- Review job assignments and training plans

END OF 3RD MONTH

- Discuss progress and review job assignments
- Provide feedback from mentor

END OF 6TH MONTH

- Discuss progress and review job assignments
- Review performance

END OF 12TH MONTH

- Discuss progress
- Review job description and performance



“ It is worth every effort investing in these young educators as they are our next generation of Early Childhood educators. ”

As a centre leader, Aizat has worked with a number of freshly-graduated educators. Similar to most employers in the sector, he often has to reconcile new employees' expectations with the reality. To do so, he sets clear expectations and guidelines from the onset, helping them fit into the centre and providing them a supportive environment.

For an onboarding process to be successful, it must be effective and sustainable. Using an onboarding booklet, Aizat encourages newcomers to actively seek out the centre's pedagogical approach and SOPs from colleagues.

When assigning mentors, he selects those with the right disposition and energy to guide the new educators. Aizat also engages the new educators in regular trainings and professional development activities to enrich and upgrade their skills. It may take time, but he assures employers that any investment in the employees' development would reap benefits for the centre in the long run.

Mohammad Aizat Bin Hashim,
Principal at Mosaic Preschool
(ECDA Scholarship recipient)

2. Establishing a defined mentorship system

Since mentors are both a source of professional feedback and a form of emotional support, building trust and rapport is critical to ensuring a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship. As different educators have different mentoring styles, it is good to standardise a system that sets expectations for both the mentee and the mentor.

While most centres do implement a certain probationary period and mentorship or buddy system, non-regulated systems may be affected by problems like heavy workload or a constant change of full-time employees. To cultivate a strong and beneficial mentor-mentee relationship, you can refer to the following tips:

- **Choose the right mentor** – Consider whether mentors have the time and mentorship ability. An experienced teacher is not necessarily a suitable mentor. Besides their ability to commit long-term, interpersonal skills, personal obligations such as maternity leave, and experience in the sector all play an important role. A relatively fresh teacher who is similar in age and competency might also be better able to empathize with the fresh entrants' needs and to inspire them.
- **Encourage your mentors to be attentive to the needs of each mentee.** New employees come from varied backgrounds and possess different communication styles. For mentees who are excited to explore and develop their own teaching style, having space to try new things and present new ideas can build a more trusting relationship, while those who lack confidence may require more guidance.
- Mentors commonly have their own classes and responsibilities, making it difficult to allocate time for proper mentorship. We encourage centres to set aside **non-contact time or fixed regular meeting times**, such as weekly reviews, for mentors to check in with mentees. You may also get mentors to **schedule unplanned visits** to their mentees' classroom during lesson time to observe and provide constructive feedback.
- **Have a proper exit plan.** At the end of the typical mentorship cycle, consider possible plans that mentor and mentee may have, and how they can integrate this experience into their own growth, including further mentorship if necessary.

More detailed information on nurturing future mentors and sample templates for mentorship review sessions can be found in the ['Mentoring Matters' e-guide](#) here.





Sarasvathy D/O Ravee,
Teacher at Mindchamps Preschool
@ Serangoon Pte Ltd
(ECDA TA Commendation Award
recipient)

Having had a good experience at the practicum centre during her school days, Sarasvathy chose to return to that same centre when she started her early childhood career. Nonetheless, like many other new educators, she struggled with the transition from school to work-life. There were many hats to wear and when Sarasvathy was unclear of her role, she was apprehensive to seek help for fear of being reproached.

Despite these challenges, Sarasvathy managed to assimilate quickly into the centre and her role by actively reaching out and seeking advice from her colleagues. She is very thankful for her supportive colleagues who openly shared learning materials with her and welcomed her into their conversations. Her Vice Principal would also check in on her from time to time to ensure that she felt supported emotionally. Despite being new to the centre, Sarasvathy hopes to stay on in her centre and take up a leadership role someday.

CONSOLIDATION

Between the first and third year, educators are ready to consolidate their learning from the first year. They become more proficient in classroom management and relationship building, and increasingly focused on their mastery of skills.

Without proper guidance, new educators may lose out on the valuable chance to grow and discover their strengths in these crucial developmental years, which later define their role in the sector. Similarly, it is also easy for employers to miss out on educators with potential, if they are not nurtured.

NEEDS

In this stage, support from employer and colleagues continues to be valuable. Educators also benefit from trainings or resources that deepen their knowledge and skills.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

1. Enhancing HR practices

For many new employees, their curiosity and passion for their new role drive them to actively seek improvement, especially in teaching and learning. To fully tap into their potential, you should work with each employee in actively growing their strengths to prepare them to take on specific roles that will benefit the centre in the future.

The following are some common tips, shared with us by various centres, that employers may consider implementing to manage potential talent:

- **Conduct regular performance reviews with your employees and use a benchmarking system** to objectively differentiate employee capabilities for future developmental programmes and larger roles. You can take this time to plan activities to work on known strengths and areas of improvements, based on their current duties or aspirations, giving them a stake in their own progress. If they are unaware of their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, consider recording their teaching so they can better understand themselves from a third person's perspective.
- **Consider implementing a system to promote and track active professional development.** Find avenues for experienced teachers in your centres to regularly share useful developmental courses with new employees and encourage them to take charge of their own professional development.
- **Start early in preparing employees to take on future roles.** Identify and develop employees' readiness to take on larger roles whenever possible.

2. Providing educators avenues for growth

ECDA conducts Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for early childhood educators to learn new skills or enhance existing strengths. However, not all educators may be aware of the range or relevance of CPD. As employers, you are in the best position to identify developmental areas and discuss plans with your educators, catering to the needs of the centre. We strongly recommend that educators attend at least 20 hours of CPD a year. Here are some programmes that educators can participate in:

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

CPD PROSPECTUS

Outlines all current courses for educators from all levels of experience.
Educators can register via the ONE@ECDA portal.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE (ECC)

Annual sector-wide event organised by ECDA. Do encourage your educators to join us for exhibitions, concurrent sessions, and learning journeys.

OTHERS

Centre-initiated activities like web-based learning and peer sharing.



**Syasya Syazwani Bte Junaidi,
Teacher at E-Bridge Preschool
(ECDA TA Commendation Award
recipient)**

As a fresh graduate, Syasya initially struggled with the transition from school to work, where she had peers of the same age group and similar experiences. At her new job at E-Bridge Preschool, Syasya faced a multitude of new problems, including her main concern that she might not fit in due to her age and experience. She was also unsure of the appropriate practices.

Syasya decided to observe and learn from the experienced teachers and she was thankful for the internal trainings which helped her to assimilate. The discussions between experienced and novice educators like herself allowed her to become more familiar with ordinary duties such as creation of weekly plans. There were also bonding sessions with the staff, enabling her to establish new and positive relationships with her colleagues.

After almost a year at the centre, Syasya is establishing herself as a teacher. She is very grateful for the strong and positive relationships she has formed and cannot wait to continue her next chapter at the centre.

RENEWAL

In their third to fourth year, educators become interested in exploring new pedagogies and putting research or newly learned strategies into practice. Although some may be keen to move up the career ladder, promotions may be limited especially in smaller centres.

Without appropriate intervention, these educators may get restless and tired of the routine nature of work. Many, especially TA recipients who have just finished their bond, may be considering a change of centre or career. Employers could risk losing these experienced educators after a heavy investment of your time and resources.

NEEDS

At this point, the loyalties that educators have built towards their current workplace and the future they envision for themselves there play a large role in encouraging them to continue. In lieu of a promotion, it is important to renew their passion and retain their curiosity towards the sector, as well as provide more opportunities to grow and network with others.

In doing this, employers show that they respect the desires of their educators and are planning for their long-term progress within the centre. As such, you are more likely to retain them while they grow professionally and explore their desired fields in a familiar environment, rather than them having to switch employer to achieve that.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

1. **Enabling educators to take charge of their learning and broaden their sources of information to satisfy their need for growth**

By giving educators the space to explore what they are truly interested in and take charge of their own growth, they gain greater fulfilment and pride in what they do, promoting continued interest in this sector. ECDA's resources like the [GROW ME map](#), a planning sheet for personal reflection, and the Individual Professional Development Map in the [CPD Prospectus](#) be useful as guidance in this aspect.

At this point, educators may also be keen to network with fellow educators, not just to learn but also to share their ideas with one another to improve centre practices. This helps to build a fraternity of educators and expose them to fresh perspectives, thereby promoting greater exploration of their own career plans. Employers should continue to encourage your educators to participate in ECDA programmes, such as CPD and ECC, or collaborative projects that allow them to connect with their peers in the sector.

2. Encourage long-term planning for the future

The [Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education](#) is a guide for individuals, employers, and training providers to promote skills mastery and lifelong learning. The career pathways and skills maps allow educators to envision their aspirations and set realistic goals to accomplish them. Seeing their roles in the context of the sector promotes greater employee retention. For employers, you can use this framework to plan for your educators' long-term professional growth.

High-performing educators might be seeking opportunities to learn and do more. They can acquire new skillsets or deepen existing ones by undertaking professional programmes in preparation for larger job roles. Here, you can nominate them for [ECDA Professional Programmes](#). For a start, these are a range of programmes which they can consider:

ECDA PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES

PDP (E)

A 3-year structured professional development programme open to in-service educators preferably with 3 years of EC teaching experience, and have met the competency level of an Infant/Toddler Educarer or Beginning Educarer.

PDP (T)

A 3-year structured professional development programme open to in-service educators preferably with 3 years of EC teaching experience, and have met the competency level of a Pre-School Teacher.

ECDA SCHOLARSHIP

Open to outstanding in-service educators who wish to pursue a part-time Bachelor or Master degree in ECCE, and have demonstrated strong leadership qualities and competency level of at least a Senior Pre-School Teacher.



“ The centre will eventually reap the benefits of raised capabilities, confidence and knowledge of these educators on the PDP. ”

In My First Skool at Toa Payoh Lorong 4, Executive Principal Ms Jesie Lee nominates a staff from every batch to participate in the Professional Development Programme (PDP), which she considers to be a win-win situation for both the organisation and educator.

With each of her four staff having at least three years of EC experience, Jesie felt that PDP has been timely in preparing them for larger job roles and deepening their individual capabilities. She added that all four were extremely capable and had high potential. All they needed was a structured programme to hone their skills. Jesie has debunked the myth that sending educators on the PDP will adversely affect her manpower plans, since she has managed well with the flexibility of the programme and careful planning. Currently, all four teachers are now assuming larger job roles.

Jesie shared that through showing tremendous support and encouragement for her staff, providing detailed explanation of the programme and reassuring her educators that they were capable and suitable for PDP, a strong sense of 'PDP community' was formed among them. A strong advocate for life-long learning, Jesie is also currently pursuing the PDP for Leaders to continually upgrade herself.

**Ms Jesie Lee,
Executive Principal at My First Skool
(PDP-T nominator and PDP-L participant)**

MATURITY

After the fourth year, educators become more mature and reflective of their inner self, teaching philosophy, practices and identity.

NEEDS

At this point, they have become relatively experienced and will likely be seeking new opportunities for more responsibilities or career growth.

More experienced ones might be seeking to take on leadership roles to guide their peers and newer employees.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

As employers, you can best measure how ready each educator is to take on leadership roles and should cultivate their interest in this direction. Give them the time, space and trust to do so.

You can consider nominating them for other [ECDA Professional Programmes](#) in Stage 4 which require more experience and are targeted towards those interested in the leadership track. Programmes for Stage 3 are also relevant if educators have not undergone them.

ECDA PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES

PDP (L)

A 3-year structured professional development programme open to in-service centre leaders with at least 3 years of EC leadership experience as a Principal, or Lead Teachers with at least 5 years of EC teaching experience, and have met the competency level of a Centre Leader/Lead Teacher.

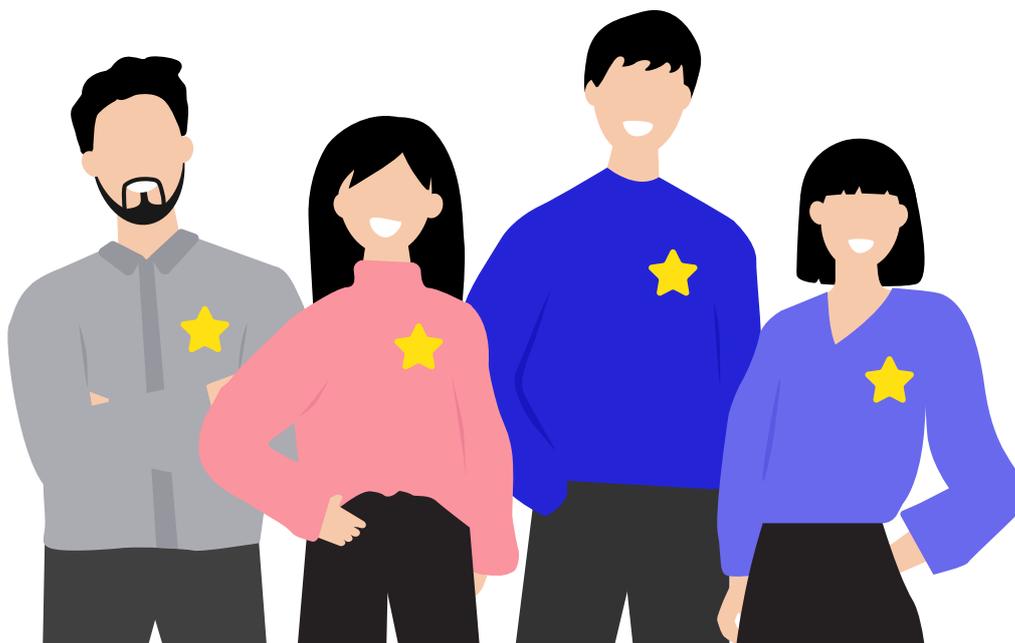
ECDA FELLOWS PROGRAMME

A 3-year programme to help EC pinnacle leaders further develop their careers and fulfil their aspirations. The ECDA Fellows work closely with ECDA to drive quality improvements for the sector and build the fraternity of educators. Open to in-service EC leaders with relevant ECCE qualifications and at least 10 years of EC teaching and/or leadership experience, and have met the relevant competencies and skills required of a Senior Centre Leader/Senior Lead Teacher.

- **Community of EC Leaders:** Centre Leaders can also join the Community of EC Leaders events or check out the e-resources e.g. Keep Calm and Lead On e-newsletters to interact with and/or learn leadership tips from experts, ECDA Fellows and other EC Leaders.
- The **Inquiry-Based Action Plan (IBAP)** projects are evidence-based projects conducted by ECDA Fellows to guide and equip centre leaders with knowledge and skills in specific EC areas. With the Fellows' coaching, centre leaders are given opportunities to implement what they have learnt and improve practices in their centres.

By giving your educators the chance to develop professionally, you enable them to take on more senior roles to support the centre. They also gain a greater sense of fulfilment and achievement in their careers, qualities which are increasingly important to most employees.

LEADERSHIP NOMINEES





Ms Lee Chin Yen,
Principal at Agape Little Uni @ Kallang
(IBAP participant)

Making changes in an organisation is often perceived as an intimidating challenge. For Ms Lee Chin Yen, the IBAP project was an opportunity to apply what she had learnt back at her centre. For instance, using Kotter's (1995) 8-step Change Model at her centre, she was able to resolve the issue of compromised hygiene caused by the bulky beddings brought by children for naptime, by gaining the support of the teachers and parents. She kept the practice going and this act of orderliness and responsibility slowly became deeply embedded into her centre's culture.

Beyond participating in the IBAP to implement what she has learnt and improve practices in her centre, centre leaders like Ms Lee can also contribute to the sector by sharing their learning experiences with other early childhood professionals, inspiring more in the sector to take action.

CHAPTER 3.

CONCLUSION

Our early childhood educators are at the heart of quality care and education. ECDA is committed to supporting them at every stage of their career. This e-Resource Guide aims to provide strategies and tips to help our new educators with their professional development transitions.

We hope to partner you – the employers and mentors – as our Training Award recipients embark on this journey in the sector. With a supportive working environment and professional development opportunities, we hope to see them grow into confident and respected early childhood professionals.

Let's work together to nurture and support our educators so that they will enjoy a long and fulfilling career in the early childhood sector. This will ultimately benefit our children.

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