



KidSTART practitioner Ms Sua Swee Lee (right) conducting a home visit with the Yeos

Photo courtesy of Community Chest

RIGHT FROM THE START

EVERY KID DESERVES A GOOD BEGINNING FROM THE EARLY YEARS.



families as part of KidSTART's Home Visitation Programme. It is available to low-income families who are expecting a baby and those with children up to 12 months old. The family will be supported until the child turns three. Home Visitors check in regularly on the parents, listen to their concerns, ensure their mental well-being, and offer parenting support and guidance.

Mrs Yeo says, "My husband and I learnt a lot from KidSTART. When I went back to work, my parents looked after Jun Cong and did not limit his screen time. Swee Lee recommended some toys and games to support his learning and interests. She taught us how to manage his behaviour and moods, and to spend better quality time together. We treasure our improved relationship with our son."

Looking back, the first six months after birth was the biggest transition for them. Mrs Yeo feels that both her and Jun Cong, now 3, would have benefitted from the support in maternal care and health if they had joined the KidSTART programme earlier.

She also provided resources and information on health, safety and child development.

EMPOWERING PARENTS

Ms Sua is a Senior Home Visitor who provides parenting support to

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MRS YEO LAY HOON,
mother of Yeo Jun Cong, 3

First-time mother Mrs Yeo Lay Hoon had hit several bumps on her parenting journey. She experienced problems breastfeeding her son Jun Cong when he was about two to three months old. At that time, she had a minor health scare with breastfeeding. As her son grew older, he developed an allergy to egg whites. She was concerned whether he was getting sufficient nutrition but had no one to turn to for advice.

When Ms Sua Swee Lee came into the picture, she showed Mrs Yeo how to prevent Jun Cong's egg white allergy from acting up.

UPSTREAM SUPPORT

KidSTART's upstream support for parents and pregnant mothers stems from the belief that parents, as a child's first teachers, play a key role in setting the child up for a good start in life. Besides imparting parenting know-how, Home Visitors regularly screen the child's development and maternal well-being to monitor the family's progress, and to detect and treat issues early. They work closely with partners, such as social service offices, family service centres and preschools, to ensure that the family's holistic needs are met. The programme also facilitates placement of children in preschools.

Jun Cong was enrolled in a full-day childcare centre in January this year. "With increased opportunities for social interaction with peers and teachers, he has shown progress in his communication skills and is expressing his needs clearly," observes Ms Sua. She adds, "Enrolment in preschool complements the caregivers' efforts to enhance the child's development and growth in their first 1,000 days."

ON HOME GROUND

Typically, home visits would involve visiting families in their homes and

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MS SUA SWEE LEE,

KidSTART Senior Home Visitor

having face-to-face interactions with them. However, with the safe distancing measures due to COVID-19, Home Visitors conduct sessions via digital platforms such as WhatsApp, while face-to-face visits continue for developmental screenings and families requiring higher needs.

Conducting home visits online has not been without its challenges. "It can be difficult to maintain young children's attention online. Sometimes, the family has to manage several children while trying to focus on the online session," says Ms Sua. Trying to work around families' health situation amid a pandemic makes coordinating home visits — already constrained by the competing demands on caregivers' time — even tougher.

Despite this, the feedback from families has been encouraging. "KidSTART has benefitted more than 2,000 children since its inception in 2016. Parents feel better supported, more confident in their parenting skills and better able to engage their children. Their children are more expressive and interacting better as health and development issues were detected early. Younger children on KidSTART were also enrolled earlier in preschool," she shares.

Having previously worked in a preschool, Ms Sua's early childhood background and training are useful in her role as a Home Visitor: "The child development theories have given me a sound foundation to understand young children's development and growth. Working with families has also been a humbling and valuable experience for me. I have learnt to be more empathetic and sensitive. Every child's needs and family's dynamics are different and constantly evolving. I need to be flexible in my thinking and adapt my approach, based on their needs and situation." ●



THE KIDSTART ECOSYSTEM

The Home Visitation Programme is one of three components in KidSTART, a free programme for low-income families with children up to six years old. Together, they support a child's development at home, in the community and in preschools.

- 1. KidSTART @ Home Home Visitation Programme**
(intake age: antenatal to below 12 months)
For pregnant mothers and families with children up to 3 years old. It provides:
 - Support for mother's and child's health and well-being through home visits
 - Tips on child's growth and development, and parent-child bonding
 - Links to other support if needed

- 2. KidSTART @ Community KidSTART Groups**
For families with children aged 1 to 3 years old. It provides:
 - Knowledge and skills on child development and well-being
 - Fun activities with other parents and children
 - Useful tips for parents on bonding with their child
 - Connections with other parents in the neighbourhood
 - Links to other support if needed

- 3. KidSTART @ Preschools Enhanced Support to Preschools**
For families with children aged 2 months to 6 years old. It provides:
 - Help to sign child up for preschool
 - Support throughout child's preschool journey
 - Tips on parenting and child development
 - Connections with other parents
 - Additional support for family when needed