The Child Development Network (CDN) team is proud to present a special bumper issue for this edition of the Early Childhood Digest, in conjunction with the 2011 MCYS Child Care Seminar.

This year’s Child Care Seminar is a celebration of the early years, and the important role early childhood educators play in providing the best care and development for young children in the early years of life.

The Early Years Development Framework, which will be launched at the seminar, defines expectations and common goals for children’s well-being, learning and development. This guides educators in planning and implementing a quality programme for infants and toddlers in centre-based care, in collaboration with families and the community.

A well-trained, committed and professional early childhood workforce is critical to raising the quality of early childhood development and education in Singapore. This year, we continue to honour and recognise the outstanding contributions of early childhood educators, leaders and employers who have made a difference to the lives of young children, through the MCYS Child Care Awards. A new Training and Certification Pathway for Early Years Educators will also open doors of opportunities and create pathways for people with passion and commitment to join the early childhood sector.

Early childhood employers can also look forward to the Good Employer Toolkit for guidance on how to improve their business processes and productivity, apply fair and appropriate employment practices and uphold industry standards in HR management to attract, develop and retain their staff. Child care centres can collect their copies of the Early Years Development Framework and the Good Employer Toolkit from MCYS’ Child Care Division. Look out for more details and announcements in the Child Care Link coming your way.

Read on to find out more about these exciting initiatives, and we wish you all the best on your journey towards promoting quality in the early years!
care and learning practices that are specific to the developmental needs of infants, toddlers and nursery children.

The EYDF guides educators in the planning and delivery of quality care, strengthens home-centre partnerships, enhances professional development and fosters community partnerships. It is tailored to complement the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL), the framework for kindergartens developed by the Ministry of Education for children aged 4 to 6. Care is taken to ensure that both frameworks work well together and complement each other, ensuring continuity and stability in the child’s development and education throughout the early childhood years and beyond.

Key Pillars
The framework is built on the vision of ‘Children being Secure, Confident, Safe and Healthy’, ‘Children being Involved, Engaged and Enquiring’ and ‘Centres, Families and the Community Connecting and Relating.’

This vision is anchored on five key pillars:

- **The Developing Child**: Each child is unique and needs good nutrition, a safe, culturally sensitive and stimulating environment as well as responsive and nurturing adults to promote his holistic development.

- **The Intentional Programme**: The programme, environment and curriculum are flexible to meet the needs of young children. The environment is well-designed and purposeful, and has a wide variety of appropriate materials and resources available and accessible to children.

- **The Professional Educarer**: The educator is responsive to the needs of young children and their developmental stages. She constantly reflects on her practices and seeks to continually develop her skills and knowledge in working with young children, their families and the community.

- **The Involved Family**: The family is recognised as an integral part of young children’s development. There is a sustained partnership between the centre and the home for the optimum development of the child.

The EYDF guides educators in the planning and delivery of quality care, strengthens home-centre partnerships, enhances professional development and fosters community partnerships.
The Engaged Community: Home-centre partnership is enriched with linkages to the community. With the participation and involvement of professionals, specialists, community agencies and organisations, strong support is rendered to families while educarers have access to resources and curricular support.

Setting standards for quality care
The EYDF comprises of three parts: Guiding Principles, Desired Outcomes and Suggested Practices.

Five guiding principles constitute the foundation of the EYDF to support the best interests of infants and toddlers in centre-based care. Anchored on research evidence, neuroscience, child development literature, good practices and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the principles describe role of educarers, families and the community in promoting children’s holistic development.

Apart from defining expectations and providing common goals for children’s well-being, learning and development, the desired outcomes serve to guide decisions on care and learning practices, programmes and environments, as well as partnerships with families and the community.

Finally, the suggested practices provide suggestions of processes to achieve the desired outcomes for young children. These practices are intended to facilitate children’s growth, development and learning, create purposeful environments, foster quality partnerships and promote professional accountability.

The EYDF was formulated after an extensive consultative process involving the early childhood community, including child care operators, supervisors, educators, training agencies and parents. Research findings from the NIE-commissioned study using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R) and insights derived from observation visits to infant/toddler settings, as well as local and overseas conferences were incorporated into the EYDF.

Moving forward, MCYS will be rolling out a series of training workshops after the launch of the framework. With the concerted efforts and close collaboration of stakeholders in the early childhood sector, the Early Years Development Framework will go a long way towards supporting the holistic development of young children, as well as in building the capability and enhancing the professionalism of educarers.
The MCYS Child Care Awards recognises early childhood professionals and practitioners for their outstanding contributions in making a difference to the lives of young children.

This year, seven awards are given out in the following categories:

- Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award
- Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher (Infant Educarer) Award
- Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award
- Early Childhood Innovation Award (new)
- Exemplary Early Childhood Employer Award

**We present our winners for 2011:**

### Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award

**Ms Lim Poh Beng**

Ms Lim, a teacher with Etonhouse Pre-school (Newton), played a key role in leading the school to be the first in Singapore to attain the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) authorization in May 2010.

Through an inquiry-based curriculum, children get to experience the joys of exploring, according to their own interests and abilities.

For Ms Lim, 46, it is important for children to pick up social and emotional skills during their formative years. “The kids are encouraged to express their thoughts and emotions freely, and respect those of their fellow classmates,” she added. “They take the lead during class time. I simply take a step back to facilitate and guide them.”

### Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher (Infant Educarer) Award

**Ms Islinda bte Idris**

Her cheerful smile and constant singing is a feature at My First Skool @ Blk 677 Hougang Ave 8, where Ms Islinda works as an Infant Educarer.

Infants and toddlers are never short of tender loving care. She communicates patiently and even sings in a variety of tones and pitches to arouse their curiosity and attention. Ms Islinda, 36, also engages parents frequently to build trust and understanding, and encourages them to create a conducive home learning environment.

To Ms Islinda, nothing brings her greater joy than the moments she shares with the infants. “I would make up songs and sing to the toddlers. It’s wonderful when you see them move their little bodies and fingers to your voice. That brings me so much joy.”
Early Childhood Innovation Award

MFS@Kallang Bahru
My First Skool at Kallang Bahru undertook a novel project to drive home the message of philanthropy. This was weaved into the curriculum through storytelling, dramatization, picture talk, playtime and self-made tokens.

Younger children learnt about caring and sharing from Aesop fables, songs and rhymes, while the older ones were exposed to news of the day, like people helping tsunami victims in Japan. The children also made tokens using recycled materials, and exchanged them for food items donated by parents. These food items were then presented to beneficiaries of a Boys’ Home and an Elderly Home.

Ms Sakunthalah Devi, Principal, said: “I believe in exposing the children to concepts such as empathy and compassion because it gives them a better dimension in terms of character development.”

Exemplary Early Childhood Employer Award (less than 50 employees)

Educa Pte Ltd
Run by a husband-and-wife team, Educa exudes a warm family environment in the Sin Ming neighbourhood. The nurturing love and care of children is demonstrated daily by Mr Jan Boekhorst and Ms Cherry Huang, who set up the centre in 2004. At Educa, children learn to see learning as fun. The well-being of staff who are motivated and empowered through a hands-on management style that promotes work-life balance, team bonding and career progression is just as important.

Said Mr Boekhorst: “Happy staff mean happy children because they come to work happy. We believe in trying all things possible to keep staff motivated and help them reach their full potential.”
Help is now readily at hand for child care operators who strive to improve human resource (HR) processes, enhance professionalism, and attract and retain child care professionals. This comes in the form of the newly launched Good Employer Toolkit for Child Care Operators, which will be made available to all child care centres.

The toolkit is a comprehensive resource which serves to guide operators on HR practices that are aligned with industry standards, facilitating an environment for fair and good employment. It spells out legal responsibilities of employers and provides guidance on the many training and funding schemes available. This increases awareness of initiatives and programmes for upgrading professional qualifications of teachers.

Conceptualised as a quick and easy reference guide, the toolkit comes complete with sample documents ready for use and handy reference links to further resources online.

**Emulating the exemplary**
The toolkit showcases success stories and informative case studies, which shed insights on the best practices of industry players. This will hopefully encourage operators to take steps to emulate the innovative and enterprising spirit of successful operators.

The toolkit is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport (MCYS) and Education Services Union (ESU), with inputs from the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA). It is available in hard copies for all operators, and online on the Child Development Network (http://app.cdn.gov.sg/) and Child Care Link portal (www.childcarelink.gov.sg). A CD-Rom version is also produced.

With the launch of the toolkit, a series of seminars and workshops will be organised to familiarise operators with the contents, especially the various HR practices and functions. WDA will also spearhead small group sessions for operators to share and exchange best practices.

The Good Employer Toolkit for Child Care Operators is a significant step forward in taking professionalism of the sector to new heights – to promote retention and development of early childhood educators.
What is central to “quality” care and education for our youngest citizens? Many educators argue that relationship-building is central to infant/toddlers’ growth and learning. Young infants (birth to 9 months), mobile infants (8 to 18 months) and toddlers (16 to 36 months) often grow and learn at exponential rates when assisted by sensitive adults. Although there are differences between younger infants and older ones, they all tend to be curious, physically active, expressive and enjoy being part of a social community. Babies and toddlers are fully human in the way they function and are keen to learn about their world during every waking moment of their lives. They thrive in child care environments that help them:

- build secure relationships with primary caregivers
- guide them in exploring their world
- interact with other babies and toddlers.

Key principles for creating “quality” infant/toddler learning environments

To support relationship-building for infants and toddlers, educators should:

- provide dedicated spaces for routine care, exploration and relaxation
- make available and accessible a wide range of materials for exploration and interaction, suitable for young infants, mobile infants, and/or toddlers
- allow children to freely decide and choose materials to work with, while they develop independence and self-control.

a) Dedicated spaces
Rooms should be divided into spaces dedicated to different purposes:
- comfortable routine care spaces for feeding, sleeping, and diapering/toileting where children feel respected, dignified and gradually learn to be independent in self-care;
- appropriately large space for physical exploration where mobile infants can move about safely and within sight of adults;
- a cosy, quiet corner with soft lighting and soft textures for infants and toddlers to go to if they want to feel calm and relaxed, away from more physical and exploratory activities;
- opportunity to interact (e.g., listen and talk) with adults and their peers.

b) Availability and Accessibility of materials
Infants and toddlers are eager to explore different textures and objects, so it is important to have a variety of materials for them to look at, touch and hold. Play and learning go hand in hand. Adults must ensure that children are able to reach and independently pick out a variety of materials. This translates to low and open shelves that even mobile infants can reach. Examples of materials include different types of cloth/picture books, interactive wall displays, hanging mobiles, soft blocks for stacking and building, accessories for block play (e.g., animals, vehicles, people), puppets, nesting blocks, boxes, stacking rings, shakers and other noise makers, art materials, sand and water play materials, dramatic play props (e.g., toy telephone, plastic cups/containers, dress-up clothes for toddlers), dolls representing different races and balls of different sizes.

c) Child independence and self-control
Encouraging infants and toddlers to be independent explorers over time requires adults to help them acquire self-management skills, learn socially acceptable behaviours and the spirit of “give-and-take”. Adults should offer positive guidance and encourage children to begin to do things on their own, by setting realistic tasks and helping them verbalise their feelings and needs.

Learning to be independent is an individual journey that can start young. When adults constantly dictate what they should do or go, they may take a longer time to become independently safe and sharing players in a common space.

This article is contributed by Dr Sirene Lim, Assistant Professor from the Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group, National Institute of Education.
Those passionate about giving very young children a good start in life can now look forward to a new Training and Certification Pathway for Early Years Educators training. This pathway uses the WDA Employability Skills (ES) Certification as an alternative entry requirement, in place of academic results.

It dovetails with the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF), reflecting a clearer definition of professional standards, and raises professional competencies for the teaching of children up to 3 years of age.

The EYDF seeks to set common goals and expectations on behalf of educators, guiding them on pedagogical practices. It also sets the tone for desired learning and development outcomes for young children, and encourages effective partnerships with families and the community.

With the Workplace Skill Qualifications (WSQ) Training pathway, a person equipped with Secondary 4 and the requisite ES credentials can be an Early Years Educator - certified to teach in licensed Infants and Toddlers and N1 settings.

Pathway to more Educators

Child care centres can therefore tap into a bigger pool of potential candidates to be recruited as Early Years Educators, who can be sent for accredited ECE courses.

The new initiative recognises that Early Years Educators with relevant experience, competencies and training will be the most appropriate for providing infant and toddler care and education. Complementing the new specialised training track for the early years, the current ECCE qualifications for teaching children of ages 4 to 6 years remain unchanged, and will be aligned with those for kindergarten teachers of children from the same age group.

Under the Workplace Skill Qualifications (WSQ) Training pathway, the Certificate in Early Years Teaching (CEY) course is due to be introduced in June 2012. It is open to those who have completed Secondary 4 education with a Statement of Attainment (SOA) Level 5 Certificate, including written EL in the ESS Workplace Literacy (WPL) Series.

The series of initiatives will help raise standards and quality of teacher education, as well as create more pathways for people with passion and commitment to join the early childhood sector. Child care centres will benefit from the enhanced upgrading courses and the opportunity to welcome more teachers to the fold.