



“Catch them doing right than wrong”

“Character is an important pillar that will take a child throughout life. We must leverage on the crucial years where we can make an impact – to shape their minds, mould their hearts and chart their destiny.”

Heeding the call to serve

“Sow a thought, you reap an act; sow an act, you reap a habit; sow a habit, you reap a character; sow a character, you reap a destiny.”

...Samuel Smiles

These words about shaping the destiny of children have been an inspiration to Ms Patricia Koh who currently heads TOUCH Character Development (TCD).

A social work graduate, Patricia started her career doing Human Resource Management, Training and Finance in the creative production services and editorial training departments in the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and Singapore Press Holdings. Now, Patricia makes it her business to educate children on character values.

“In 1990, I was at the crossroads where I seriously contemplated a career switch to go back to social work,” said Patricia. “My ex-colleagues were shocked as I was just promoted. Going to the social service sector would mean a hefty pay cut. But it was not a flippant decision. I wanted to help the needy.” During this period, Patricia became actively involved in volunteer work with needy children, youths and the elderly in the Tanglin Halt area.

In 1993, Patricia proactively applied to TOUCH for a career in social work. However, she took up the challenge to set up the Human Resource, Administration and Corporate Affairs Department at TOUCH. In 2000, Tanglin Primary School opened its doors to set up TOUCH Tanglin Thinkers, a before-and-after school programme to help needy children. The momentum to teach character development in schools gained speed when TOUCH was approached by the vice-principal of the school to run such programmes. The timing was perfect. During this time, the Ministry of Education was also beginning to encourage schools to also focus on non-academic areas, such as sports, the arts or character development. Against this backdrop, TCD was formed in 2001.



Good Progress: Patricia with Nur Lizanna who clinched top position in class after going through the character development programme and with encouragement from teachers.

Giving the right nudge

Patricia's previous experience in the broadcasting industry came in handy. From recruitment and training to video production and marketing, her team plans and develops the curriculum, produce children character videos and interactive tools for school programmes. And, from just two staff in 2001, Patricia now has five staff and over 40 trained volunteer coaches under her wings. Over the past five years, TCD has served 16 schools, reaching out to over 13,000 children. It also has plans to widen its outreach overseas to countries like Cambodia.

The rewards have been immense. From a rebellious child who now sits attentively in class to a poorly performing student who has shown significant academic improvements, they tell the same story: Children can be guided to walk the right path. Patricia recalled a primary-five boy who would draw things on himself and disturb his friends. During one of TCD's sessions, he was asked to write the names and draw a picture of his classmates. He did just that and dedicated it to his friends. They were shocked. The boy is now well-behaved and has many friends. There was also another attention-seeking primary-five student who was disruptive in class. After doing something good, he would be presented with awards which he would paste them on his bedroom wall. Even after weaning him off the awards, he continued his good behaviour and was even nominated for the “Overall Child of Character Award”.

“Character is an important pillar that will take a child throughout life,” said Patricia. “We must leverage on the crucial years where we can make an impact - to shape their minds, mould their hearts and chart their destiny. Desired results cannot be achieved overnight. You need to spend time building it. Catch them doing right than wrong”. In this light, TCD has been working with schools over the past five years to continually and systematically develop children's character through fun and innovative ways.

Beyond character values

Taking a step further, TCD now goes beyond teaching character values. It is taking its developmental school social work to include preventive and remedial services. “We adopt a holistic approach in developing our programmes. Apart from character values, we also look at enhancing the psychological and social emotional aspects, such as teamwork, goal setting, leadership skills and anger management to services for children-at-risk and National Education,” said Patricia. Active steps are also taken to forge closer rapport with needy children and their families through Club Aspire – a community programme for children-at-risk. Activities organised include outings, camps and visitation. Said Patricia, “Stakeholders like parents and teachers must work together to affirm the child. It takes a village to raise a child.”

For more information on TCD, please call 6317 9669.