

Children for Children

Lim Yi Jun, CHIJ (Kellock)

What can one child teach another? More than you would think, says Ms Lim Yi Jun, who since 2009 has worked with fellow teachers and partner organisations to bring more than 7000 children together for a day of fun and learning.

I believe that in order to develop the values and skills my students need in future, I need to teach beyond the textbook and expose my students to social contexts where they learn through interactions with others. As such, I constantly seek out platforms and take on challenges to give students at CHIJ (Kellock) more chances to learn by doing. I believe that for my students to learn, I need to give them something to do that demands thinking so learning comes about naturally.

A project that is close to my heart, which I have worked on for the past seven years, is “Children for Children”. I took over Children for Children in its second year of inception and have reached out to numerous students at various stages of the programme over the years to hone their leadership qualities and social-emotional competencies.

Children for Children is an annual platform for our students to pay it forward by making Children’s Day more meaningful for about 1200 children from underprivileged backgrounds around Singapore. Every year on the eve of Children’s Day, approximately 300 of our students take on roles such as arts facilitators, games masters and actresses as they facilitate activities and put up performances for the less privileged children at various iconic spots such as The Singapore Zoological Gardens, Underwater World and Universal Studios Singapore.

Adapting from the concept of service learning, I spearheaded and implemented Children for Children over the years using the 3As approach – Awareness, Action, and Advocacy. In order to generate awareness of the less privileged children amongst my students, my team and I created the Primary 4 Values in Action package. Our students discussed what it meant to be ‘less privileged in society’ through real-life examples.

For instance, they were asked to bring their utilities bills to school for discussions. Comparing their utilities bills with case studies of the less privileged presented in class, we asked our students trigger questions such as ‘*How much do you think a meal cost today?*’ and ‘*Can you survive on \$2 a day?*’ to enable them to better understand the differences in the circumstances faced by the less privileged and the students themselves. Through this activity, the girls were often surprised to learn that not every child received three meals a day, or that there were actually families who did not have enough money to pay their utilities bills. They made comments like ‘*A MacDonald’s burger cost more than this.*’ and asked questions like ‘*How can one*

possibly survive like that? We tied in math concepts like decimals and money, which students needed to use when adding up their daily expenses.

Reading students' reflections, we knew it made an impact. One student wrote that she was shocked to learn that there were people in our midst who had no choice but to survive on so little each day. Such a platform is truly meaningful for students to develop empathy for others and be motivated to pay it forward and make a difference in their own ways. We gave them various opportunities to take action and volunteer for the various activities leading up to Children for Children. Students personalised Children's Day cards with their heartfelt messages and packed goodie bags for the participants. Student facilitators also researched and prepared materials for games like Pass the Parcel and Keep the Balloon Afloat. Using items such as the parcels and balloons to symbolise kindness, student facilitators conveyed messages of kindness and encouraged the participants to pass the kindness on through the little things they do in their daily lives.

These various Children for Children activities provided students with the room to grow their strengths and learn from one another. I fondly remember a Primary 4 student I once taught. Being larger than her peers, she often tugged at her own shirt during Physical Education lessons and would cover her body with her arms when presenting in class. I saw potential in her through our interactions. Her writing showed a vivid imagination, and when she did speak up, she was always thoughtful and eloquent. As such, I encouraged her to try out for a role in the drama that was staged as part of Children for Children. In preparing her for the role, I taught her the importance of eye contact, voice projection and posture, so she could improve on her stage presence.

Through this learning experience, she blossomed from a girl who was not able to hold the attention of a crowd to one who was able to rally the crowd and interact with them on Children for Children. The increase in her confidence was also evident when she rallied her teammates in a presentation of a song which she composed on the divide between the rich and poor for the Open Little Eye Symposium in 2011. Titled *Different Worlds*, the song touches on two children from two different economic strata and highlights the differences in the lifestyles they lead. The song was also featured in the *Humanity Magazine* that year.

An excerpt from the song:

Poor: Every day I wake up to an angry voice.

Rich: Every day I wake up to a mum who's nice.

Poor: I line up to wash my filthy face.

Rich: It's not like that, in my case.

Poor: I feel helpless and I've got no power.

Rich: I've got my own room, and I've got my own shower.

Today, this student is pursuing film studies in School of the Arts. She recognises how the opportunities given to her in primary school has helped her become more confident and gave her a taster to drama. Years on, this student still keeps in touch with me through Facebook and would inform me when there are film-casting opportunities for her juniors in CHIJ (Kellock).

It has been 8 years since Children for Children began, and our school has been working with the The Business Times and The RICE since then, with the addition of Resorts World Sentosa in 2014. Being a fundraising event, The Business Times was in charge of sourcing for sponsors while The RICE was in charge of logistics for the event. Resorts World Sentosa has been the venue sponsor since 2014. This invaluable sustained partnership allowed our school to focus on making Children for Children a meaningful learning experience for our students. This event has grown from a simple day out at the Singapore Flyer to an elaborate day of fun-filled activities as participants take on roles of adventurers, explorers and pirates, as they explore each iconic location and immerse themselves in crafts, games and performances. In this time, I have seen students step out of their comfort zones, work together in teams and solve problems. And it's not just the students who have grown.

The Children for Children journey has been a great learning experience for me. It has been an uphill task for me to juggle my classroom responsibilities with Children for Children. However, seeing how the students have benefitted and blossomed through Children for Children, with the support of my colleagues who work closely with me, I hope to continue to provide the students with the opportunities they deserve. This Children for Children partnership has been mutually beneficial. The children from the various primary schools we reach out to look forward to this event every year, while our students at CHIJ (Kellock) have the privilege to benefit from the different initiatives which have sprung up from it.

Seeing how my students blossomed and grow through Children for Children and the happy faces of the participants on Children's Day every year, I know this is a partnership worth keeping. I know I cannot build the future for my students. What I can do, and what Children for Children does, is build them for their future.