

= Denise Phua =

Denise Phua Lay Peng (Chinese : 许佩玲 ; pinyin : P?n Lìpíng , born 9 December 1959) is a Singaporean politician and disability rights activist . After a successful corporate career spanning two decades , she became the president of the Autism Resource Centre (Singapore) and co @-@ founded Pathlight School . She is currently a member of parliament (MP) representing the ruling People 's Action Party (PAP) in Moulmein @-@ Kallang GRC . She was previously a MP representing Jalan Besar GRC from 6 May 2006 to 18 April 2011 . As a MP , she has focused on developing programmes for the disabled and special needs communities in Singapore .

= = Early years and corporate career = =

Phua studied at Balestier Girls ' Primary School , Raffles Girls ' School and Hwa Chong Junior College . She graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Golden Gate University . In a career spanning two decades , she held management positions at Hewlett @-@ Packard and the Wuthelam Group . She then founded a regional leadership training firm , the Centre of Effective Leadership .

= = Volunteer work = =

Her son was diagnosed with autism at the age of three . As Phua consulted professionals and did research on how to help him , she thought about how she could help other autistic children . She subsequently founded WeCAN , a charity which helps caregivers of autistic people and offers early intervention programmes for autistic preschoolers .

In 2005 , Phua left the corporate world to be a full @-@ time special needs volunteer . She and her partners sold the Centre of Effective Leadership to Right Management , a Manpower Inc. subsidiary . Phua then became president of the Autism Resource Centre . She often wrote to newspapers and government agencies on issues affecting the special needs community .

Phua was co @-@ founder and former acting principal of Pathlight School , the first special school for autistic children in Singapore . The school offers mainstream curriculum and life skills education to its students . A believer in helping autistic people realise their potential and integrate into society , Phua helped develop many of the school 's programmes . These include employability skills training through a student @-@ run café , specialised vocational training , and satellite classes where Pathlight students mix with mainstream students . In four years , enrolment increased tenfold and the school attracted media attention for its impact on students .

= = Political career = =

Phua joined the ruling PAP 's Jalan Besar branch in 2004 . The following year , she was appointed to the Feedback Supervisory Panel , which leads the government 's Feedback Unit . In the 2006 general election , she was fielded as a PAP candidate in Jalan Besar GRC , which was contested by the Singapore Democratic Alliance . During the election campaign , she promised to make Singapore a more inclusive society by representing the disabled and special needs communities . The PAP team won Jalan Besar GRC with 69 @. @ 26 % of the vote .

In July 2006 , the PAP formed a workgroup , headed by Phua , to explore initiatives to improve the financial security of disabled and special needs children . Phua also led a committee that drew up a five @-@ year plan to improve services for special needs children . The PAP studied their proposals and later implemented some , such as a National non @-@ profit Special Needs Trust Fund . Laws were also drafted to prohibit abuse of the mentally disabled and to allow parents to appoint someone to look after their special needs children after they die .

Phua criticised the PAP 's " many helping hands " approach , where social services are provided by charities and overseen by the PAP . She said that special education should be led by the Ministry of

Education (MOE) , as it had more resources and expertise . Minister for Community Development , Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan defended the policy , arguing that it reduced bureaucracy and left jobs to the right people . However , the MOE agreed to play a more active role in special education , with increased funding and teacher training . The MOE also introduced more satellite classes in mainstream schools and helped special schools set targets for learning outcomes , such as O @-@ Level passes . In 2014 Phua also spoke out during the second reading of the Remote Gambling Bill , calling for a complete ban on remote gambling .

In April 2016 , Phua caused widespread controversy when , during a debate on the Ministry of Home Affairs ' budget in Parliament , she suggested the installation of fences at communal areas in Little India , like playgrounds , to prevent the congregation of foreign workers there and to allow residents to use the facilities away from them . " Congregations of such high density are walking time @-@ bombs and public disorder incidents waiting to happen , " she remarked . She apologised two days later .