

In Person with NTUC First Campus' ECDA Fellow – Melissa

Meet newly appointed Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) Fellow Melissa Goh. A Senior Education Development Specialist at NFC's Little Skool-House International (LSH), Melissa juggles a wide range of tasks and activities, from curriculum development, conducting trainings, mentoring centre leaders, to managing her mother-duties at home.

On April 5, 2018, Melissa was one of three experienced early childhood leaders from NTUC First Campus newly appointed to join the ECDA Fellows fraternity. They join two others from NTUC First Campus who were re-appointed following their first term from 2015 to 2018.

The ECDA Fellows programme is an initiative started in 2015 to recognise senior early childhood leaders who display exemplary leadership and expertise, and for ECDA to collaborate with them to drive quality improvements in the sector.

We managed to catch Melissa in the midst of her busy schedule to learn more about her work, personal convictions and what drives her in the pursuit of excellence in her career.

Q: Tell us more about yourself.

Melissa: I first joined the early childhood sector in 2003, joining NTUC First Campus' (NFC) My First Skool as a teacher. In 2008, I joined NFC's Little Skool-House International (LSH) as a Principal at the Singapore General Hospital branch. I then had the chance to work at the Ulu Pandan centre, which pioneered the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Later on, I became an Education Development Specialist under LSH. My work scope has widened over the years, from working directly with children previously to now working closely with fellow early childhood professionals on a wider macro level.

Q: How does a typical work day look for you?

Melissa: Every day for me is different and interesting. I spend a lot of time on the ground, conducting trainings, going to our centres to provide support for their curriculum development, observing and mentoring teachers as well as coaching Principals. I also attend management meetings with other cluster directors and specialists, where we ensure that our operations are professionally aligned.

I believe that it is important not to lose track of what is happening on the ground. In the implementation of developmental frameworks and initiatives, we need to see if they are practical and can be implemented at the centres. All LSH centres have their own unique cultures. It is important to adapt the frameworks to each centre so that they will have a sense of ownership of what they are practising and more importantly, that what is being carried out is meaningful and authentic to the children in their care.

Q: In your own words, can you share with us what it means to be appointed as an ECDA Fellow?

Melissa: I am very honoured and humbled to be nominated as an ECDA Fellow. It means a lot to me that the contributions that I have made to the sector are recognised. It is a huge responsibility to be an ECDA Fellow and not something I take lightly, but it is reassuring and affirming to know that I am on the right track. It feels like the journey has just begun! I will continue to push for what I believe in, bringing theories into realistic practices, working with the sector and influencing the ground. The work that we are doing can go beyond NFC and LSH to benefit all children. It is about the greater good and paying it forward.

Q: What are some abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?

Melissa: Three of the most important things to me are: Passion, Resilience and Empathy. Passion comes from the heart and is about believing in what you do and being authentic. I have always found it hard to separate the two. You cannot be passionate about something without authentically valuing it. In tough times, we often need to resonate back to the passion we have for this sector. My passion has been strongly backed by resilience. It has helped see me through adversity. Resilience to me encompasses holding a sense of constructive optimism and maintaining the confidence in what you believe in and the commitment to continue to do good will help us through. Finally, this job is all about people, that's why Empathy is so crucial. To be empathetic requires us to understand people and putting them before ourselves.

Q: Share your experience so far being engaged in ECDA Fellow work.

Melissa: I have been engaged in ECDA Fellow training for some two months now and the engagement has been eventful and heartwarming. There have been great opportunities of networking with many stakeholders in the early childhood sector like other ECDA Fellows, National Institute of Education (NIE), Ministry of Education (MOE) and ECDA staff. I have also been a part of dialogues and discussions that explore the challenges and needs in the early education field that need to be actively addressed. All these have widened and deepened my knowledge and views in the field.

Q: What are some things you enjoy doing outside of work?

Melissa: I enjoy spending time with family, hanging out with friends, reading, shopping and watching reality crime shows. I am thankful that I have a great support system with my family, friends and colleagues. They are always there to offer a listening ear or helping hand whenever I need one. Exceptional gratitude goes to my parents and husband for their support in my juggles between work and home.

Q: Tell us something interesting about yourself.

Melissa: Ethnicity wise, I am actually half Chinese, a quarter Indian and a quarter Eurasian. This puts me in a unique position of being able to celebrate many of the different festivals throughout the year. It has given me the privilege of experiencing diversity first-hand, contributing greatly to me being more open-minded about the different cultures and dynamics of people. This has also positively influenced my acceptance of others.