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Singapore

# More children with developmental delays could get early intervention in preschools, at home

It comes as demand for early intervention services continues to outpace supply, stretching wait lists for enrolment into years.



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## SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Social service agency Rainbow Centre in Margaret Drive runs a government-funded Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC).

EIPIC supports children with developmental needs, and who require medium to high levels of early intervention support. It aims to raise the child's developmental growth potential, reduce the development of secondary disabilities, and help them integrate into mainstream settings.

These needs can range from mild delays in speech, social or motor skills, to more complex and acute conditions.

Si... Dahlea, who has health conditions such as dystonia and microcephaly, has FAST ... ow Centre since she was a year old. Currently, she attends the centre four days a week, for two-and-a-half hours each time.

school.”

Children in the programme are referred by doctors. However, wait times to enrol at these EIPIC centres can range from two months to two years.



Experts say everyone directly involved in the care of a child with developmental needs must play a part for early intervention to work.

## EXTENDING SUPPORT TO MORE PRESCHOOLS

While the government has plans to add more spaces later this year to meet the demand, some social service agencies hope to fill the gap by extending their early intervention support to more preschools and homes.

Ms Tee Yi, lead early interventionist at Rainbow Centre, said: “For intervention to be successful, early intervention must really look at the natural context of children. And [preschools are a natural context](#) in which the children participate in.

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Ms Siti Mariam Selamat, deputy director of independent living and caregiver support at disability agency SG Enable, said: "As childcare teachers are more equipped with information and are able to detect certain behaviours, then they may give feedback to the parents and encourage parents to do a check for their kids."

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## EQUIPPING PARENTS, CAREGIVERS

Parents and caregivers can also make a real difference at home, according to social service agency AWWA.

"We often find that parents who are able to consistently carry out intervention strategies outside of the early intervention setting will often see their kids have greater and quicker progress in their development," said Mr Ngoh Yi Rui, therapy head at AWWA Early Intervention Centre at Fernvale Woods.

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This is because of the opportunities such parents have to practise these skills in their natural environment, such as at home and in the community, he added.

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ent plans to test out a training programme for caregivers at home later



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said Mr Ngoh.

“It is in fact during the first few years of life, where there is the highest level of plasticity, which means that that’s the time where the brain is the most flexible in responding to changes through the experiences that we have.

“Early intervention ... capitalises on this by providing children with developmental needs the appropriate level of support that they require at a time where there is a greater chance of reaching their potential, and these early experiences actually do help lay the foundation for future learning.”

SG Enable, which provides referrals to early intervention centres, said communication is critical to support parents, and that everyone directly involved in a child’s care must play a part for early intervention to work.

There needs to be “a very good, tight communication line” between the therapists, parents, and other social services that are supporting parents, said Ms Siti.

“From a caregiver support perspective, we would want to support the parents with information, with skills and what they can do, and also support them through the process.”

*Source: CNA/ca(It)*

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