

MEDIA RELEASE

Rainbow Centre Opens New Special Education School and Launches Art Fundraiser Showcase

In response to growing needs, Rainbow Centre strengthens its services and commitment towards empowering Persons with Disabilities, calling for greater public support

1. **SINGAPORE, 1 Oct 2024** - In a pivotal step toward empowering more persons with disabilities, Rainbow Centre, a social service agency serving persons with autism and multiple disabilities, announces two significant milestones this Children's Day.
2. Rainbow Centre Admiral Hill School, a purpose-built school for 300 students with autism, will officially open on 3 Oct (Thu) with Minister for Education Mr Chan Chun Sing as the guest-of-honour. It is a first-of-its-kind SPED school designed with autism-friendly features and a Social Town concept in mind to integrate the local community.
3. Separately, Rainbow Centre aims to raise \$250,000 through an art fundraiser showcase. Held from 5 to 12 Oct 2024 at Objectifs, *CURIO: A World of Wonders, Beyond Disabilities*, features 45 works of art by student artists from Rainbow Centre's Artability Talent Art Development programme. Admission to the showcase is free.
4. To promote awareness of disability inclusion, Rainbow Centre will run a series of educational programmes including guided tours for the public, learning journeys for groups, a panel discussion, and inclusive art workshops for children led by its students and partners Superhero Me, City Sprouts, local artiste Edmund Chen, and artist Yellow Mushroom.

New School: Autism-Friendly Design, Partnerships for Inclusion

5. At Admiral Hill School, the campus primarily serves autistic students with moderate to high support needs and has been designed with social integration in mind. With the approach of the environment as the third teacher, some progressive learning spaces include:
 - a. **Training Facilities for Life after School:** To enable students to practise independent living skills and align school learning plans with their home environment, Rainbow Centre piloted the 'Good Life Boarding', an apartment-style facility for students aged 15 and above. This facility, which was supported by IKEA Singapore, enabled a 10-week Good Life Boarding Programme which included after-school training and a stay-in residency programme. Caregivers also received coaching to help their children generalise their learnings back home.

Other training facilities in Admiral Hill School include a greenhouse for vegetable cultivation, a travel training set-up with traffic lights, EZ-Link card top-up machines, and replicas of bus and MRT cabins, as well as a vocational room to train students in packing and logistics.

- b. **Learning Bases:** Moving away from traditional classrooms, each learning base consists of a cluster of demarcated classroom spaces with common areas where teachers can run joint activities. This allows students to interact with peers from other classes to practise communication and social skills, while still having access to support structures like calm rooms. Teachers also gain exposure to the diverse learning needs of students.
 - c. **Use of Greenery:** The campus has been designed with an abundant and strategic use of greenery, helping students to regulate while providing a calming effect for educators. For example, the 'Meadow', a carpeted grass area with a mini obstacle course and art wall, is a favourite among students to play and self-regulate. Another example is the 'Labyrinth', a cosy maze area near the bus bay, allowing students to move in lieu of waiting time.
6. **Ms Jessica Wee, Principal, Rainbow Centre Admiral Hill School** said: "We see a lot of potential for the spaces to help our students thrive. Equally important is staff development to equip them with the knowledge, skills and coaching on growing into confident practitioners. Strengthening support for staff wellbeing and building their resilience is crucial, as we work with those with moderate to high support needs. We want them to journey the distance with our families."
7. Another highlight of Rainbow Centre Admiral Hill School is its focus on hyperlocal partnerships in the Admiralty region, with partners like Tower Transit Singapore, Assyafaah Mosque and schools in the area.
 - a. As part of efforts to make bus service 859 (which services the school) more inclusive, bus captains from Tower Transit Singapore came to learn more about the school. Admiral Hill School also worked with the Public Transport Council to showcase students' artwork, which was used as a bus wrap design, to create public awareness on how to engage commuters with autism.
 - b. Volunteers from the Assyafaah Mosque, located down the road, came to Admiral Hill School to celebrate Hari Raya with the students, where they engaged the students through game booths. The mosque also hosted a group of AHS students for a tour.
 - c. Students from Sembawang Secondary School came over to paint a hopscotch together with Rainbow Centre students, while students from Northland Secondary School harvested vegetables with Rainbow Centre students and supported basketball activities as part of its Values-In-Action programme.

8. **Ms Tan Sze Wee, Executive Director, Rainbow Centre** said: “Schools like ours have to take the initiative to create opportunities where more Singaporeans can become familiar with our students. While it takes time to reduce social stigma, proactively reaching out to our neighbours and the public to invite them to experience inclusion on our campuses is a start, as it demystifies disability, while also providing students with authentic spaces and opportunities to practise communicating with others.”

Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities Through Art Showcase

9. Separately, Rainbow Centre’s art fundraiser showcase *CURIO: A World of Wonders, Beyond Disabilities* aims to be a starting point for people to learn more about its mission and ways to get involved in fostering inclusion of people with disabilities.
10. Members of the public can register for a 45-minute guided tour led by Rainbow Centre’s staff and student artists, at \$10 per person, to learn more about disability inclusion and the artworks, while families looking to expose their children to disability awareness can take part in inclusive art workshops led by Rainbow Centre students and partners. To learn more, visit rainbowcentre.org.sg/curio2024 or download the [programme brochure](#).
11. Through CURIO, Rainbow Centre hopes to raise \$250,000 to empower its work through three key areas of needs: Enabling low resource families to access services, reducing caregiver stress and social isolation through services such as special student care and adult community programmes, and developing research and innovation driven practices.
12. Rainbow Centre is a pioneer in special education in Singapore. Founded in 1987, it currently serves over 2,000 clients from birth to adulthood through a multitude of programmes and services, with a clear mission to help them build good lives.
13. From the setup of Margaret Drive Special School in 1987 to address the unmet educational needs of children with multiple disabilities, to the establishment of Balestier Special School (now Yishun Park School) in 1995, Rainbow Centre has been a key stakeholder in the advancement of special education in Singapore.

Rising number of children diagnosed with autism in Singapore

1. Although no formal study on the prevalence of autism has been conducted in Singapore, estimates based on data from public hospitals suggest that numbers are also increasing here due to greater awareness and screening. According to recent figures released by the Ministry of Health, more than 7,000 children aged six and below were diagnosed with developmental problems in 2023, an increase of 32% from 5,300 in 2019. Among these, about 20% have autism. Currently, it is estimated that one in 100 children¹ in Singapore is on the autism spectrum.

¹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/we-thought-he-was-just-naughty-over-1-in-100-kids-in-singapore-have-autism>

2. For many, the transition into adulthood is marked by a significant challenge, in particular, for those with moderate to severe needs where support post-18 is still inadequate. Commonly referred to as the Post-18 Cliff, caregivers struggle with bleak options, often limited to long waitlists for day activity centres, which can stretch up to five years, and an absence of employment opportunities and community support.
3. A 2017 study² by the National Council of Social Services identified social inclusion and participation as having the greatest impact on improving quality of life for vulnerable groups, like those with disabilities. However, most Singaporeans are foreign to interaction with them, having grown up in separate school systems from young. A 2016 Inclusive Attitudes survey³ found that only 1 in 10 Singaporeans are confident of interaction with children with special needs.
4. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a broad range of lifelong, neurodevelopmental conditions characterised by challenges with social skills and speech; repetitive behaviours and non-verbal communication. Individuals on the spectrum can range from being able to live independently to requiring significant support in their daily lives.

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FOR MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

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PHOTOS AND CORPORATE VIDEOS: bit.ly/RC-AHS_CURIO2024

ABOUT RAINBOW CENTRE, SINGAPORE

Rainbow Centre, Singapore envisions a world where persons with disabilities live Good Lives. Through practical education, meaningful support and effective training and partnerships, we create opportunities for our clients to fulfil their potential and participate in society. Registered as a charity in 1992, Rainbow Centre, Singapore is an Institution of a Public Character, and a registered society, with the Constitution of Rainbow Centre as its governing instrument.

²<https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-press-release-doc/media-release-on-ncss-quality-of-life-study-12-june-pdf.pdf>

³https://www.lienfoundation.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20-%20Inclusive%20Attitudes%20Survey%20Part%201_30May16.pdf