



epworth

# moments

an official publication of  
Epworth Community Services  
February and May 2023

## **Challenges of a Teenager**

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## ABOUT US

Epworth Community Services is a Social Service Agency (SSA) that helps at-risk children and youths from needy and disadvantaged families. We want to create a better world for them so that they can develop their potential. Our work focuses on promoting the mental well-being of children and youths by building strong families and imparting skills for resilient living.

## VISION

Strong Families, Resilient Living,  
Beautiful Minds.

## MISSION

To reach out in Christian love, by providing quality programmes and services to all children, youths, parents and their families, of all language, race and religion, and nurturing each family member in body, mind and spirit.

## EPWORTH MOMENTS

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## ED'S MESSAGE: SAFE TO THRIVE

### Introduction

Staff often ask me these questions in relation to Epworth Community Services being a "Centre of Excellence for Trauma Care":

- 1) What is Epworth focusing on? Mental health or trauma?
- 2) What does being a "Centre of Excellence for Trauma Care" mean?
- 3) How is our existing work related to Epworth becoming a "Centre of Excellence for Trauma Care"?
- 4) Should we be focused on intervention and therapy only?



These are very important questions. If left unanswered, staff will be directionless

While it is clear that we are concerned with the **mental well-being (mental health) of children and youths**, how can we have clear guidance for our staff? We need to guide the organisation and staff in their work. The focus on **trauma** seems to add another layer of veneer that clouds the clarity of our vision.

### Trauma and Mental Health are Related

If one was to delve into the subject of trauma, one would realise that trauma is a significant cause of mental health problems for many sufferers. Many victims of traumatic experiences exhibit mental health issues like depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance use disorders, psychosis, self-harm and suicide attempts. Some also exhibit anti-social behaviours like being defiant, abusive, aggressive and violent.

### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood (usually from birth until 18 years).** Such events are "unsafe" and result in harm or potential for harm to a child's health, survival, development or dignity. **ACEs include emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; household dysfunction such as living in a home with violence; having family member(s) with alcohol and substance misuse, mental illness, or incarceration; and, parental separation or divorce.** Research over the past few decades attests to the detrimental impacts of ACEs on functioning throughout the lifespan of an individual.

ACEs are associated with an increased risk of mental disorders in later life including depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance use disorders, psychosis and suicide attempts. Converging evidence suggests that early life exposure to such toxic stress, abuse and related adverse experiences cause epigenetic modifications to gene expressions. These modifications in turn can lead to altered brain structure and, consequently, resulting in brain dysfunction that affects the lifelong health and quality of life of the individual.

It is also possible that early life trauma leads to structural and functional changes in the brain and its stress regulatory systems. These affect emotional regulation and fear response and, in turn, predisposes individuals to harmful health behaviours like smoking and excessive drinking; and, subsequently, adverse health outcomes.

Individuals who have ACEs can be more susceptible to diseases through physiological development and persistence of health-damaging behaviours. The association between ACEs and increased risk for negative effects across life course and long-term adverse outcomes is increasingly becoming recognized as a public health concern. The effects range from poor academic performance to early death. In other words, individuals who experience ACEs tend not to "thrive".

Studies have also shown that exposure to one ACE increases the individual's chance of experiencing another. The cumulative risk hypothesis suggests that the accumulation of risk factors increases the probability of adverse cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Thus, a graded relationship exists between the number of ACEs and the likelihood of lifetime psychiatric disorders, with the risk of negative consequences increasing with more adverse experiences.

(continued on page 4)



How Does the Study on ACEs Help In Sharpening Epworth’s Vision?

When we think about work on “trauma” in children and youths, we tend to have a narrow viewpoint on the type of work that Epworth should be doing. In other words, we see trauma as some kind of “mega” (usually one-time) event in someone’s life that affects the person severely. Hence, trauma work is seen as intervention that addresses the “mega” experiences of traumatic events. **This is not correct!**

**The study on ACEs widens our perspective on trauma, opening up new avenues of work in advocacy, prevention and early intervention.** From the list of adverse experiences identified under ACEs, as well as the higher odds of such adverse experiences occurring among those with lower education, our direction to providing student care centres, literacy intervention, behavioural management intervention; imparting resilient life-skills; providing parenting training; building strong family bonds; providing foster care services; and, treatment at our therapeutic group home; are all **congruent** to trauma work. We are creating “safe” environments or situations for children and youths to develop to their fullest potential!

Conclusion

In fact, there are other works in advocacy, prevention and early intervention that we can explore and do too. **As long as the work we do addresses one component of ACEs, we are doing trauma-related work!**

Taking on-board the correlation of trauma and mental health; and, the correlation of ACEs and trauma; Epworth’s focus on **trauma care IS doing upstream work of promoting mental well-being** amongst children and youths. By being able to effectively create environments and situations that are “Safe to Thrive”, we become a “Centre of Excellence for Trauma Care”!

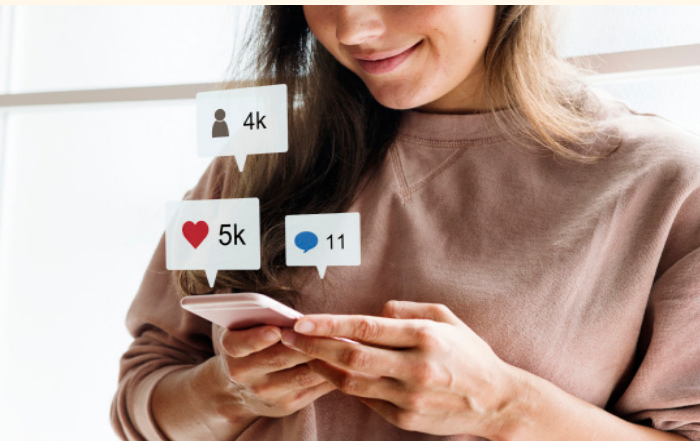
CHALLENGES OF A TEENAGER

By Grace Yee, Social Worker of Epworth Family Welfare

We all have different tales to tell of our adolescent days, and many would agree that being a teenager had its own set of challenges. It is a confusing season of navigating friendships, many seemingly important decisions to make, and nerve-wrecking (or embarrassing) moments that we wish we could bury. Being a teenager in this day and age is no less difficult and has been made more challenging in many ways.



According to Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development theory, we tend to experience moments of internal conflict during our teenage years: while we are figuring out our identity, we are also struggling with what society says we should be. Furthermore, the search for self is made more complicated by the advent of social media, where others – often under the guise of anonymity and the safety of physical distance - can readily critique the self we present over these platforms. The constant access to social media can also lead to comparison, hence causing more stress.



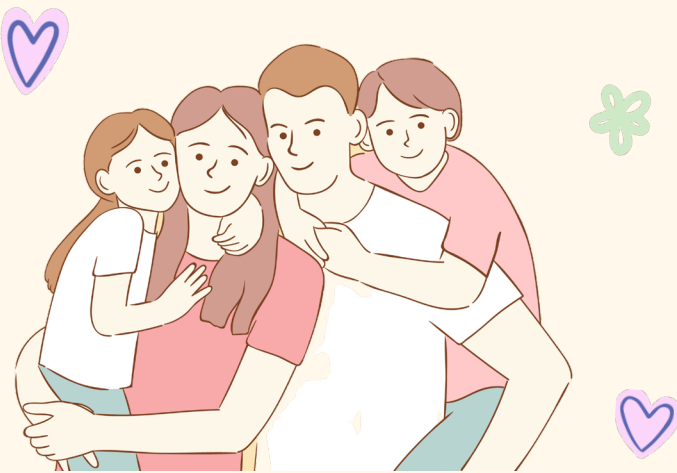
These factors, among other stressors such as academic and family stress, have contributed to the rise in mental health struggles we see in teenagers today. In 2022, the Singapore Youth Epidemiology and Resilience Study noted that 1 in 3 youths aged 11-18 reported internalising mental health symptoms (such as sadness, anxiety and loneliness), while 1 in 6 youths reported externalising mental health symptoms (such as hyperactivity, rule-breaking and aggression). Those aged 14 to 16 were found to experience more severe symptoms.

This shows the importance of strong and healthy family relationships, which serves as a needful source of support and safety for teenagers amidst the turbulent waves of adolescence. Here are some ways you can support an individual through their teenage years:

- 1. **Maintain a curious stance when your teenager shares their struggles.**  
We might be tempted to problem-solve or downplay their struggles. However, understanding how they perceive things can affirm their sense of autonomy and experiences, even if the matter really does seem trivial!
- 2. **Do activities that speak love with your teen.**  
It is helpful to discover your teen's love languages, and planning time or space for activities that speak love to them.
- 3. **Affirm, affirm, affirm!**  
Teenagers are in the process of developing their identity. Affirming them for the things they do well (rather than only pointing out areas for improvement), helps them to develop a healthy self-esteem and lets them know you acknowledge the good in them.
- 4. **Be a positive role model.**  
No matter how aloof your teenager might seem, they are constantly looking to you: how you control your emotions when you are upset, or how you manage your own struggles and disappointments. Model to your child who you want them to be.

Throughout this process, it is important to recognise that no two families are the same, and parents of teenagers often find themselves dancing between doing too much or too little. Most importantly, remember to be kind to yourselves in the process of achieving this delicate balance in parenting a teenager.

At Epworth Family Welfare, we journey with families who face exceptional difficulties in their parent-child relationships under the Pre-Family Guidance Order (Pre-FGO) programmes or while the youth is under probation. Many parents of teenagers who display challenging behaviours feel helpless in understanding the struggles of their child, and consequently express difficulties in managing them. Through our programmes, we equip these families with skills that helps to foster a better understanding between parents and their teenagers, thus reducing feelings of isolation.



Ultimately, our aim is to build strong and resilient families; so that family members are able to support one another through the different stages and challenges of life.



# SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

By Pratyusha Sridhar, Literacy Intervention Teacher of Epworth Literacy

In Singapore, children who do not meet age-appropriate developmental milestones, or struggle to learn at a similar pace as their same-aged peers are usually highlighted by professionals as having 'learning difficulties'.

The term 'learning difficulties' is an all-encompassing term used to represent a myriad of difficulties these children encounter when placed in mainstream education. From experience, some common signs and symptoms of learning difficulties observed include, but are not limited to:

1. difficulties in sequencing letters of the alphabet;
2. not being able to recognise and form certain letters of the alphabet;
3. inadequate fine-motor control, hence leading to poor handwriting;
4. not being able to understand instructions;
5. not understanding conversations;
6. difficulty in reading and spelling age-appropriate words;
7. lack of impulse control;
8. poor organisational skills; and,
9. weak working memory.



Despite the difficulties these children may face, it is important to note that having a learning difficulty is not an indication of low intelligence. In fact, many children with learning difficulties have average, or above average levels of intelligence. What makes them unique is that they don't learn in typical ways as most of their peers - they just have to be taught differently.



As children with learning difficulties struggle to grasp knowledge the same way their peers do, this creates a gap between them. This gap is further widened when these children are placed in mainstream educational institutions that do not tailor to their learning needs. As they struggle, the constant comparison with their peers can create a false sense of not being 'intelligent' or 'smart'. Over time, these repetitive negative experiences may chip away at the child's self-esteem. This causes them to assume a mindset of learned helplessness, leading to school refusal – a child-motivated refusal to attend school.



Below are some tips on how to support children with learning difficulties:

1. **Observe and seek professional help for their learning-related struggles.**  
Seeking help allows the child's struggles to be addressed early and appropriately. Be attentive of where and when these struggles happen, and how they are usually presented.
2. **Build your knowledge and awareness on learning difficulties through the wealth of resources available online, or by consulting professionals.**  
Share any relevant experiences with appropriate professionals. This may include advice from family members or friends who had sought help for similar experiences.
3. **Converse with your child in a supportive and assuring manner.**  
Put yourself in their shoes when talking to them about their difficulties and challenges.

*It is imperative that we do not disparage children with learning difficulties; but understand that their challenges do not define them.*

*With the right support and resources, they will be able to bloom – in their own time and at their own pace.*





# EPWORTH COMMUNITY SERVICES' 25TH ANNIVERSARY FUNDRAISING GALA DINNER

*Remembering*  
OUR PAST

*Celebrating*  
OUR PRESENT

*Building*  
OUR FUTURE

On the 14th of April 2023, Epworth held its 25th Anniversary Fundraising Gala Dinner at Carlton Hotel, Singapore. Through the evening, guests were entertained by performances from talented individuals, had the chance to participate in an exciting auction; as well as, reconnect and connect with old and new friends. It was a night to remember our past, celebrate our present, and build our future.

Epworth would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the Guest of Honour, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, for gracing the event. We are also very thankful to everyone who had played an integral part in making the gala dinner a successful and memorable one. With the generosity of donors, sponsors and guests, Epworth managed to raise about \$440,000.

Moving forward, Epworth will continue to build our future in being a Centre of Excellence for Trauma Care by pushing on 3 fronts:

## 1. Building our Resources

Through the years, we have built the knowledge and skillset of our staff as well as our financial resilience. We will continue to strengthen ourselves in these areas, so that we can better support our present clients, and strongly support future clients; especially during times of major crisis.

## 2. Building capabilities in advocacy and prevention of trauma amongst children and youth

We will work towards raising the community's awareness of trauma and how it affects children and youths. We will run more positive parenting programmes; teach life skills, pro-social and assertiveness skills that build confidence; and, educate children and youths on prevention of bullying of any form through various platforms of communication.

## 3. Building capacity to reach more in the community

We will continue to find new avenues to reach out to more people in the community who need and can benefit from our existing and developing capabilities in intervention and trauma care. We will also grow other related services so that there is ample support when they are in emotional and psychological distress.

We ask for your continued support as we move forward in faith and continue to give our best to help as many children as possible, so they are not left behind.

Here are some photos of the eventful night:



Guests started arriving early!



Welcome speech by Mr Christopher Chow, Chairman of Epworth Community Services.



Speech by our Guest of Honour, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan.



Our emcees, Miss Gabrielle Tan and Mr Steven Chia, who did an amazing job hosting the event together!



Judging by the smiles, everyone had an enjoyable time.





Stars of the Gala Dinner!



Exciting auction that drew spontaneous responses.



Thanking Mrs Joy Balakrishnan who performed a special item in support of children attending Epworth Literacy. During this segment, guests donated to our Epworth Literacy programme that helps children with learning difficulties.



A huge Thank You to Malaysia Dairy Industries and Skin Inc Singapore for sponsoring the door gifts!

With that, Epworth's 25th Anniversary Fundraising Gala Dinner came to an end. Thank you to all who joined and supported us, and we hope to see you at the next fundraising event!



# EPWORTH AMAZING RACE 2022

By Nicolette Lien, Community Relations Executive of Epworth Community Relations

On the 2nd of December 2022, Epworth staff gathered together for the first organisation-wide event after 2 years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Everyone got to meet their colleagues from different departments. They bonded over an Amazing Race around Singapore's heritage sites, followed by a scrumptious lunch at the Furama Riverfront Hotel. Read on to see the activities that happened on that day!



Everyone then broke up into their groups and the race commenced! It was an exciting time of completing different challenges around Bugis, Little India and Chinatown. Staff took part in traditional activities such as playing Capteh, Five Stones and writing Chinese calligraphy.

The event started with an ice-breaker activity where staff got to take part in a game of 'Human Bingo'. They got to know each other better in things not related to work!



After working up a sweat and an appetite at the race, staff headed to Furama Riverfront Hotel for a delicious meal.

During lunch, prizes were awarded to the winning teams of the Amazing Race, and long-service staff who had been with Epworth for 5, 10, and 20 years were honoured.

**Fun fact: did you know our Executive Director, Mr Tan Khye Suan, has been with Epworth for 20 years?**

As a bonus, staff had fun at a photobooth and brought home memories of themselves and colleagues in interesting poses!

A huge thank you to our Epworth board member, Ms Christina Cheng, for taking the time to be with us, as well as all staff who were present. This event would not have been complete if not for every single one of you!



# GIVE'N'FEAST 2022

By Ruth Tsoi, Community Relations Executive of Epworth Community Relations

The Give n Feast campaign is in its third year and has become Epworth's signature fundraiser for the festive season.

Led by our Executive Director – and chef – Mr Tan Khye Suan, this has become a meaningful meal that donors can share with friends and family around Christmas and New Year.

For this campaign, donors who contributed \$5,000 or more to Epworth were treated to a delicious homemade Peranakan dishes prepared by Mr Tan himself; and we hear that the *Ngoh Hiang* is simply 'to-die-for'.

Epworth Community Services would like to thank all of our donors for their continued support. Because of you, Epworth is able to continue our work of building strong families in the community through imparting skills for resilient living and nurturing beautiful minds.



Epworth staff doubling up as Mr Tan's minions!



Said legendary *Ngoh Hiang*.



The end product: what a spread!

# PROJECT LIGHTBULB: MEET OUR TUTORS!

By Stephanie Poon, Community Relations Executive of Epworth Community Relations

Project Lightbulb is a complimentary tuition-befriending programme for Primary School children who struggle with their schoolwork.

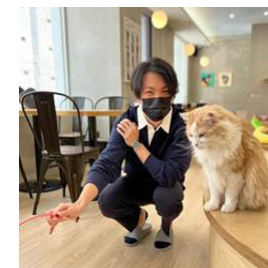
Our volunteers help students with their schoolwork, while also building meaningful relationships with them. We owe the continued success of this programme to our team of hardworking, selfless, and dedicated volunteers!

Read on to see how 4 of our Project Lightbulb tuition befrienders have positively impacted the lives of the students under their mentorship!

Meet Nisha (N),



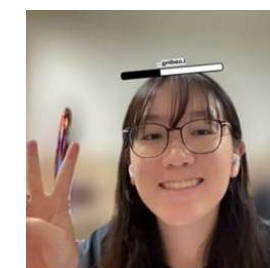
Wei Soon (W),



Sum Nok (S), &



Pek Yan (P).



## 1. How long have you been volunteering for?

**N:** 3 years.

**W:** Slightly more than half a year.

**S:** 2 years.

**P:** 3 years.

## 2. What is one meaningful takeaway from your time as a tuition befriender?

**N:** Our purpose may be to teach the children, but sometimes roles can be reversed and we might end up learning a thing or two from them instead!

**W:** I was initially worried about the difficulty in handling a young tutee through an online platform. However, over time, I realized that a lot of their behaviour was dependent on how strong of a bond I am able to form with them and how much I am able to inspire them!

**S:** Being a positive role model and helping them reach their fullest potential has been a meaningful experience for me!

**P:** It has been very heartening to watch and help my students grow, both academically and in character as well.

## 3. Share one thing you like about being a befriender.

**N:** I like that for a short time, I get to forget about my worries and just be with the children.

**W:** Constantly learning to empathise and relate to children from different backgrounds. Although challenging, it has been meaningful!

**S:** Knowing that I have made a difference in their lives!

**P:** I enjoy listening to students' stories about their daily life. It helps me relive my Primary School days!

## 4. What would you like to tell someone who is considering being a befriender?

**N:** If you enjoy working with children and find a sense of satisfaction in teaching, do join and come with an open mind!

**W:** Take the leap! It is a very fulfilling journey to see your tutee grow and transform due to your personal influence.

**S:** Join if you enjoy making a difference in children's lives!

**P:** Keep an open mind when getting to know the students. They all have different likes, dislikes, and learning styles. My tutees have always surprised me with their energy and enthusiasm!



# DECEMBER HOLIDAYS @ EPWORTH LITERACY CENTRES

By Jonadab Phua, Community Relations Executive of Epworth Community Relations

The end of the year was filled with memorable activities for the students at our literacy centres. Read on to find out more!

## Hasbro Global Day of Joy

Hasbro organised a carnival especially for the students, held at Bukit Batok Community Club.



**Bouncy enjoyment:** the Hasbro team made sure all the students had their turns in the bouncy castle!



**Upsized Jenga:** a familiar classic game greeted our students!



**Snuggling up to the mascots:** our students were surprised by the appearance of familiar faces! and commemorated the end of the carnival by getting a picture in with them.



**It's magic:** Captain Dazzle shows off just how many tricks he has up his sleeves!

## Nagomi Art Workshop

We were pleased to introduce our students to Nagomi art: the art of finger painting using pastel powder. Under the guidance of the instructor, they created Christmas cards to bring home!



Learning just the right amount of force to be able to produce a good painting.



They also learnt a good deal of patience as the piece cannot be rushed.



No runny noses here; the students had to make sure that their fingers were dry, otherwise the powder would not adhere to the paper.



Using stencils to create baubles on the Christmas tree.



Our instructor putting the finishing touches for the students.



The end result and the looks of accomplishment on the student's faces!

**A huge thank you to Hasbro Singapore for the time and effort spent in planning such a wonderful afternoon for the students! They sure had an enjoyable time during the event, and every one of them even went home with gifts! It was indeed a memorable day!**



# DECEMBER HOLIDAYS @ EPWORTH STUDENT CARE CENTRES

By Jonadab Phua, Community Relations Executive of Epworth Community Relations

The year-end holidays was packed with activities for our students! Here are some of the highlights of their holiday at our Student Care Centres.

## Project Artemis

Students from National Junior College planned and conducted a 2-day educational program about cruelty-free living and wildlife conservation. The boys learnt a lot about caring for the environment through games, videos, and clay stop-motion.

They listened attentively as the students from NJC presented on Animal Welfares; such as illegal trade, and how human activity can have a negative impact on wildlife.



They then had a go at playing a classic game of *blow, wind, blow*.



To end off the very interesting and knowledge-filled session, the NJC students guided our boys as they created clay animals and painted them from scratch!

**A huge thank you to the NJC students who took the time out to educate our students on being more mindful of the environment!**

## Learning Journeys to Changi Jewel and Singapore Science Centre

Students enjoyed 2 wonderful days of activities when they had learning journeys to Jewel @ Changi and Singapore Science Centre. It was definitely an enjoyable time of discovery. We'll let the pictures do the talking.



The heartbeat drum amplifying the student's heartbeat through hand sensors, and some friendly competition seeing who has the fastest reaction time!



Ball games at Canopy Park suspended 25m above the ground!



All laughs, smiles, and funny faces!



Delighting in windows to the world at the Changi Experience Studio.



Tired but happy faces as the day draws to a close at the Rain Vortex.

Safe to say, our SCC students sure did have a fulfilling December Holiday!



# How can I make a **DIFFERENCE?**



## **SUPPORT US**

The important work of Epworth Community Services is funded primarily by generous well-wishers who strongly believe in our cause. We invite you to join us in making a difference in the lives of children and youths under Epworth Community Services.

## **VOLUNTEER WITH US**

Volunteers play an important role in our programmes and services. Volunteers can choose to be engaged in ad-hoc, short- or long-term programmes and are matched to programmes according to their time and interests.



For donation or volunteering enquiries, visit [www.epworth.sg](http://www.epworth.sg)  
or contact us at [community.relations@epworth.sg](mailto:community.relations@epworth.sg).

In order for us to keep you up to date with Epworth's happenings, contact us at  
[community.relations@epworth.sg](mailto:community.relations@epworth.sg) to update your personal particulars.

**STRONG FAMILIES, RESILIENT LIVING, BEAUTIFUL MINDS.**