

Where young and old can play together



The inter-generational playground has a merry-go-round with wheel-lock features, allowing both children and seniors to ride together. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

🕒 PUBLISHED 3 HOURS AGO

Infant, childcare centre within nursing home bridges generational gap with shared spaces

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One is 65 years old and in a wheelchair; the other is only five years old and bursting with energy. Yet, they sit opposite each other on the merry-go-round, enjoying the ride together.

It may sound unusual, but this is a new way of life for Madam Veronica Koh and pre-schooler Tay Yukai.

The young and old interacting and playing alongside each other is part of a new curriculum introduced at St Joseph's Home in Jurong West, Singapore's first inter-generational playground, and infant and childcare centre within a nursing home. It was officially launched yesterday.

Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health, said at the launch: "The home's inter-generational playground is a trailblazer among nursing homes in experimenting with shared spaces for the young and old. By leveraging the simple yet universal concept of play, this playground aims to attract more children and young ones to interact with seniors."

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It is part of a nascent development across Singapore, to build more inter-generational facilities. For instance, there are co-located eldercare and childcare centres being planned in 10 new HDB estates, including Kampung Admiralty, Jurong West and Toa Payoh, said a Ministry of Health spokesman.

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The childcare centre and inter-generational playground were added to St Joseph's Home after a 21/2-year renovation.

LIVELY SURROUNDINGS

Some nursing homes are very quiet with no activities. It is a good environment here and I'm happy, especially when I listen to the children sing.

MADAM VERONICA KOH, an elderly resident at St Joseph's Home, on the new inter-generational curriculum.

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The refurbished home, which reopened early this year, can take in up to about 400 elderly residents. The infantcare and childcare centre is open to up to 56 children, aged two months to six years.

St Joseph's Home executive director Geraldine Tan said: "Having an infant and childcare centre within the home reminds us of the purpose of life and of the importance of play and simplicity."

Children and the elderly will interact in activities such as singing and doing arts and crafts. The childcare teachers and nursing home staff will collaborate and implement a curriculum tailored to the needs of both young and old.

To promote interaction across generations, the playground also has special features. For instance, the see-saw has a ramp for those using a wheelchair, while the merry-go-round is equipped with wheel-lock features for wheelchairs and has custom-built seats for toddlers.

SMRT Corporation has pledged \$100,000 towards the development of the playground.

Apart from the playground, the home has other shared spaces, such as a cafeteria and a "fun house" where elderly residents, children and volunteers can engage in activities such as painting.

MacPherson MP Tin Pei Ling, deputy chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Social and Family Development, said she is keen to see more of such spaces in her constituency where the generations can interact.

"It is an old estate and sometimes it makes someone feel even older. Mingling with children can be good for the elderly from a social-emotional perspective. Most elderly people are delighted to see children, and the young can learn to have empathy for their elders," she said.

Sales manager Arthur Tay, 41, decided to put his son Yukai in the childcare centre because of its facilities, although he was initially hesitant.

"At first I was unsure about the environment but I realised that it's very clean and hygienic, and has a large space for my energetic son to run around. Mingling with the elderly will also be good for the children's growth."

Madam Koh said she enjoys the presence of the children and the shared playground. "Some nursing homes are very quiet with no activities. It is a good environment here and I'm happy, especially when I listen to the children sing."