

# Never too young to help

Senior Social Worker Angela Chung shares the work that goes on behind the scenes and the support needed to ensure the success of a disabled student's integration in a mainstream school.

After months of waiting, the day finally arrived for 9-year-old Yee Yu Ouan, diagnosed with cerebral palsy, to begin his mainstream education at Shuqun Primary School. Shuqun Primary is a Special Needs School designated by the Ministry of Education (MaE).

Until then, Yu Ouan had been a student of a special school. He was assessed to be suitable for mainstream education and today, is successfully assimilated into the school system.

On Yu Ouan's first day of school on 19 February 2008, his enthusiastic classmates readily went forward to help him, even jostling with each other for the job. In the end, specific roles were assigned to avoid further dispute.

The overwhelming support shown by Yu Ouan's classmates affirms the merits of MOE's inclusive education policy. A mainstream school setting provides students with physical disabilities an intellectually and socially stimulating

environment to develop their potential to the fullest. The inclusion of physically disabled students in a school also provides opportunities for non-disabled students to accept functional differences and encourage altruism at a young age.

Such an arrangement is ideal for character and social development for children, who at that age are eager to help others and are receptive to learning about differences and acceptance.

Successful integration of physically disabled students into mainstream schools demands effort from different parties. In Yu Ouan's case, a multi-disciplinary team of social workers and occupational therapists from SPD worked closely with the staff of Shuqun Primary School to 'prepare the ground' before he started school.

School assembly and classroom preparatory talks were conducted in a child-friendly manner to instill basic understanding in the students on disabilities and etiquette in relating to disabled people. A workshop was also conducted to equip teachers with skills on how to support physically

disabled students in their classrooms during lessons.

To ensure a holistic development for Yu Ouan, a comprehensive Integration Support Plan (ISP) was drafted with contributions from the school, the family, the occupational therapists and social workers.

According to Mr Gary Tsu, Principal of Shuqun Primary School, "We believe in making this (integration) work for Yu Ouan, his family and our school. We are glad he is with us. This is only the beginning. We are looking forward to learning together with him."

Yu Ouan's form teacher, Mdm Felicia Lee, added "We welcome students with physical disabilities in our midst as it gives our students a wider exposure to people from different walks of life and teaches them values such as compassion and tolerance."

Indeed, the warm reception and hospitality by the staff and pupils of the school have helped to ease Yu Ouan's transition to his new school. As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child". With the collective contribution of all parties, a child with physical disabilities can be integrated successfully into the mainstream education system and blossom in time.

We are heartened that Shuqun Primary School has partnered SPD to kick-start Yu Ouan's educational journey and thank the management and staff who have worked tirelessly to make his integration possible.

*SPD partners mainstream schools to equip both staff and pupils with skills to provide the necessary support to students with physical disabilities. This is to level the playing field for students with disabilities so that they can develop their potential in school. For more information, please contact Angela Chung at 6236 6395, or e-mail [Angela\\_Chung@spd.org.sg](mailto:Angela_Chung@spd.org.sg).*



Yu Ouan (on wheelchair) loves participating in team activities in school

Enthusiastic volunteer helpers surround Yu Ouan

