

# More help needed for kids with development issues

Experts: Break down walls between pre-schools and early intervention field

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More than 5,500 children aged six and below were diagnosed with developmental problems last year, up from an average of 4,362 new cases each year from 2015 to 2017.

In the wake of these rising figures from the Child Development Programme at KK Women's and Children's Hospital and National University Hospital, a group of 35 early childhood leaders have called for more to be done to help these children at the margins, as well as those from low-income families.

In a report released by the philanthropic group Lien Foundation yesterday, the experts, who cut across education, health and social service, acknowledged

that the Government has played a more active role in the sector.

But they said early childhood development is more than just how a child fares in school and the walls between pre-schools and fields such as health, social service and early intervention should be broken down.

The report, available online, comes seven years after Lien Foundation's first study of the pre-school sector, where it called for the Government to be in charge of pre-school education.

The latest study was led by principal investigator Lasse Lipponen, professor of education from the University of Helsinki, and co-principal investigators Lynn Ang, professor of early childhood from University College London, and Sirene Lim, academic lead of early child-

hood education programme at Singapore University of Social Sciences.

The interviews were conducted between April and September last year. The report was completed in March this year.

The three academics said early childhood educators need to be better equipped to support children who do not seem to fit in, whether because of developmental needs or complex home backgrounds.

They added that career pathways of pre-school teachers and early intervention professionals should be reviewed, so both practitioners can better work together to meet a child's holistic needs.

Support from different providers – pre-schools, voluntary welfare organisations and



(From left) Co-principal investigator Lynn Ang, Lien Foundation's Yang Huiwen, co-principal investigator Sirene Lim and principal investigator Lasse Lipponen.  
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primary schools – should be more seamless for families so they do not need to shuttle between venues and the children can better ease into the primary school years.

At a press conference yesterday, Associate Professor Lim said canvassing the views of the 35 key leaders is “seminal”, given the fact that practitioners in the fields of early childhood and early intervention have not worked together here in a significant way in the past.

Their recommendations come after the Ministry of Social

and Family Development (MSF) announced in April that it would be setting up a workgroup to look at how to better integrate children with learning needs into pre-schools.

It had also said from July, early intervention programmes will be transferred from MSF's Disability Office to the Early Childhood Development Agency in stages, for the agency to have better oversight of developmental needs of all children under the age of seven.

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