



Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **First Special Student Care Centre in MINDS for Children with Special Needs Officially Opens to Provide Greater Caregiver Support**

- *More than 55% of MINDS' caregivers expressed their interest in enrolling their child / charge in special student care centre*
- *Offering a tailored educational and enrichment programme catered to students with varying learning needs and difficulties, MINDS Raintree has one of the longest operating hours in before-and-after school care services for children with special needs*
- *With support from corporates such as UAE Embassy, students also experience unique enrichment programmes conducted by external vendors on a regular basis*
- *Students have since reportedly shown more enthusiasm in lessons, and reduction in behaviours of concern*

**Thursday, 5 September 2019** – The Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) officially opens its first special student care centre – MINDS Raintree – today, providing greater support for caregivers beyond MINDS' immediate circle. In addition to offering a tailored educational and enrichment programme catered to students with varying learning needs and difficulties to enrich their knowledge and hone their skills, the special student care centre also encourages independence by building up their resilience beyond schools' structured curriculum, thus improving their quality of lives.

The opening of the MINDS Raintree is officiated by Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC. In attendance is His Excellency Dr Mohamed Omar Abdulla Balfaqeeh, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates. The opening also features performances put together by the students from MINDS Raintree - a culmination of their learning journey at MINDS Raintree since its soft opening this year on 2 January.

The MINDS Raintree marks the first special student care centre in MINDS for children with special needs and the sixth in Singapore, which not only provides much-needed support and respite for caregivers who are juggling between career commitments and caregiving responsibilities, but also engages children with special needs through meaningful play and activities. Operating from 7.30am – 7pm, MINDS Raintree has one of the longest operating hours in before-and-after school care services for children with special needs, giving additional flexibility and convenience for caregivers with conflicting work schedules or domestic caregiving challenges.

The special student care centre was years in the making with caregivers joining the chorus of voices for a before-and-after-school care service to provide high-quality care for their special-needs charges. In a survey conducted by MINDS, 55% of MINDS' caregivers expressed their interest in enrolling their child/charge in a special student care centre. "The need for support among caregivers is enormous, pressing and ever-changing. Not only do they give up potential income to care for their special-needs child or charge who requires constant supervision and care, which places significant financial and emotional strain on the family, caregivers are also conflicted by the need to provide high-quality and affordable education for them. MINDS recognises the necessity of respite to prevent burnout and other adverse effects. Through providing such services, it not only enables their caregiving situation to be more sustainable and manageable, it also enables their child to further grow in major domains and reach their fullest potential," said Ms Koh Gee May, Deputy CEO of MINDS.

### **Enhancing Student Proficiency through Raft of Programmes and Activities**

Fully equipped with a myriad of activity stations and interactive learning areas dedicated to hone activity of daily living (ADL) skills, improve academic ability and develop critical thinking skills, the special student care centre engages its students through a structured educational programme comprising meaningful activities and play. Educational materials and lesson plans are tailored and delivered based on students' varying learning needs to complement with their schools' structured curriculum. The special student care centre has also come up with customised behavioural plan for students with behaviours of concern where programme officers work with students on a one-on-one basis on positive behaviour reinforcement and caregivers to address the concerns. To provide dedicated attention for the students, MINDS Raintree maintains a small teacher to student ratio of 1:5.

In addition, MINDS Raintree employs a thematic-learning and activity-based approach to enable students to draw connections from the real world and gain a better understanding of abstract concepts, thus sparking students' engagement and improving their learning. Since its opening, students have reportedly shown more enthusiasm in lessons, and reduction in behaviours of concern.

To provide an optimal learning environment for students with autism spectrum disorder, visual communication aids and structured schedules are used and tailored to the choices and needs of students. The centre is also wheelchair accessible for persons with physical disability.

### **Providing Unique Enrichment Programmes through Community Support**

With support from corporates, students also experience unique enrichment programmes conducted by external vendors on a regular basis. These enrichment programmes aim to complement with its holistic educational programme and further develop students' critical skills such as communication, collaboration and aesthetics skills. For instance, through funds pledged by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Embassy, students from MINDS Raintree have benefited from a music & movement programme conducted by I'm Soul Inc., a social enterprise that uses state-of-the-art technology to translate body movements into music. The UAE Embassy will also be supporting students in MINDS Raintree by equipping them with digital readiness skills through the immersion of such similar enrichment programmes.

"In the United Arab Emirates, individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities are called Heroes, because they are commonly found to face difficulties in processing their sensory information compared to other individual. Thus, the UAE Embassy is committed to supporting them by empowering and equipping them with skills and competencies that enable them to be future-ready for the technologically advanced world," said His Excellency Dr Mohamed Omar Abdulla Balfaqeeh, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates.

### **Capitalising on In-School Facilities**

Students also benefit from the various in-school facilities at MINDS Woodlands Gardens School set up specially to hone skills in specific domains. For instance, students are able to ignite their creativity and build on essential lifelong skills such as problem-solving skills

through play at its “Explorer Centre”, which provides a slew of creativity-based activities for students to engage in.

### **Providing Greater Caregiver Support**

Besides operating for longer hours to add flexibility and provide more convenience for working caregivers, MINDS Raintree will also be utilised as child-minding service for caregivers who are attending caregiver workshops conducted by MINDS. Beyond providing before-and-after school care service, MINDS Raintree will be organising tea sessions to share their experience in raising a child with special needs, providing a platform for them to form their own social network and build resilience amongst the caregivers.

The MINDS Raintree will be able to accommodate 50 children with special needs including those who are not enrolled into any of MINDS’ programmes and services who are aged 7 – 18 years old. Currently, 23 children are enrolled into the centre.

“We are confident that the carefully designed educational and enrichment programmes MINDS Raintree has established will not only further foster the repertoire of skills students learn in schools, it will also create additional breathing spaces for caregivers while their charges are meaningfully engaged. With the success of MINDS Raintree, we are also exploring to open more special student care centres in the rest of the MINDS’ schools.” said Ms Koh Gee May, MINDS Deputy CEO.

Apart from MINDS Raintree, MINDS is establishing a multitude of programmes, services and facilities to support and address the needs of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers as MINDS continue its expansion of its footprint in the social service sector. Earlier last year, MINDS has also established its **Customised Respite Care Service** where persons with intellectual disability are meaningfully engaged through social activities while their caregivers can seek respite or attend to errands that require their attention. The Customised Respite Care Service has since gained good traction from caregivers with close to 20 caregivers subscribing to its service. To improve access to caregiver workshops, MINDS is also working with community clubs to conduct caregiver workshops outside of MINDS’ premises to bring these workshops closer to the community. These caregiver workshops will also be extended to residents in the neighbourhoods as well.

Against the backdrop of Singapore's ageing population and ageing parent caregivers, the need to make future care arrangements for their charges become increasingly imminent and important. Thus, MINDS is devising a strategic roadmap to provide future care planning and improve the transition planning process for elderly caregivers. This includes launching a caregiver initiative, **MINDS Care Circle**, a learning and support network for caregivers of persons with special needs. The initiative aims to reach out to caregivers from all walks of life, including adult siblings who would be taking over the reins of caregiving responsibility from their elderly parents. Through the formalising of a social network, MINDS Care Circle provides a safe platform for caregivers to know and support each other in their caregiving journey, thus strengthening their resilience while enriching their caregiving knowledge. This platform will also be utilised to share dedicated caregiving information and resources to the caregivers.

**About MINDS:**

The Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore was founded in May 1962 by a group of philanthropists who saw the need to provide equal opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities to receive education and later, to be integrated as contributing and responsible citizens in Singapore.

MINDS is one of Singapore's oldest and largest social service organizations, and has 17 facilities comprising 4 Special Education Schools, 3 Employment Development Centres, 8 Training and Development Centres, 1 Multi-purpose Residential Services catering to the needs of persons with moderate to severe intellectual disability in Singapore, and 1 Caregivers Support Services Centre.

MINDS also delivers Home-Based Care Services, administers the Appropriate Adult Scheme for Persons with Mental Disabilities, and runs a befriender programme called Me Too! Club. Since then, MINDS has grown to be one of the largest social service organisations in Singapore, serving some 2,600 students, clients and their families from the age of six to their ripe old age.

To know more, visit <http://www.minds.org.sg/>

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