

A worthwhile endeavour

Childcare teacher Harlina Samat wants pre-schoolers to enjoy learning

Teo Kuan Yee

THREE months ago, Ms Harlina Samat, 28, joined a new childcare set-up — MindChamps Preschool Bukit Timah — as a childcare teacher for three-year-olds, where her duties include organising school events such as Racial Harmony Day and National Day.

But Ms Harlina's journey in early childhood education began nearly seven years ago in 2006. A fresh mass communications diploma graduate from Ngee Ann Polytechnic, she left her job as a marketing executive in corporate training after working for five months.

The desk-bound job in the Central Business District was simply not her cup of tea, so she reverted to working part-time for her mother, a childcare teacher. After her O levels and throughout her polytechnic days, she assisted her mother in conducting enrichment programmes and even helmed her own classes.

Her decision to recognise and pursue her passion instead of a deskbound job was rewarded when she chanced upon Monsters Under the Bed (MUTB), a creative writing school looking for storytellers to fill a Saturday storytelling slot at the now-defunct Borders bookshop.

She started storytelling and teaching the occasional writing class, and soon joined MUTB full-time. She also joined Julia Gabriel's EduPlay department, assisting classes and leading music in parent-accompanied programmes. She plays the pi-

ano, guitar and ukulele.

Today, she is very happy marrying working with children and most of the things which she learnt in Mass Communications — such as attending workshops and training — learning, meeting new people, exchanging ideas, and networking.

Giving the 'best years of my life'

"My goal is for them to enjoy the school experience and to enjoy learning," she says, recalling how she enjoyed her childhood days spent in childcare, starting from 18 months old to when she was six years old.

"My teachers from the Presbyterian Welfare Society (now Presbyterian Community Services) were great influencers in my life — even as a child I enjoyed learning, discovering new things, reading, storytelling and singing," says Ms Harlina.

"Those were the best years of my life. When I look back to my time in childcare as a child, I remember having a really good time. My teachers were kind. The lessons were fun. And that is the kind of environment I want to create for my students," she says.

She is completing a degree at Seed Institute focusing on early childhood literacy. The degree is awarded by Wheelock College, Boston, in the United States. In 2010, Ms Harlina pursued a second Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education, also from Seed In-

Her vocation is in serving children and their families, says Ms Harlina.

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stitute. In the future, she can branch out to become an early childhood education lecturer, start her own school, or become a playground designer.

She is also thinking of enrolling in a master's programme. Her advice to aspiring childcare teachers? "Give yourself time to decide if being in early

childhood education is for you. It is a demanding career — you need to be organised, resourceful, and creative and brave.

"We also earn less than our peers. But when you realise how much you have grown and learnt, it makes everything worthwhile."

