

**SPEECH BY DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN,
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH AND SPORTS, AT
WECAN (WORLDWIDE COLLABORATION ON
AUTISM NEEDS) LEARNING CONGRESS
2010, 01 JUNE 2010, 8:55 AM AT PATHLIGHT SCHOOL**

Ms Denise Phua, President, Autism Resource Centre

Presenters and participants of WeCan Learning Congress 2010

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Thank you for the invitation to the WeCan Learning Congress 2010. Over the past decade, the Autism Resource Centre (ARC) has helped many individuals with autism maximise their potential, through a wide range of services like education, pre-vocational and employment training. It has also supported caregivers and engaged professionals. This conference will provide another opportunity for all of us to have a deeper understanding of various issues pertaining to autism.

Challenges of Autism

2 The needs of a child with autism are complex and change with each life stage. All of us need to better understand these needs in order to provide appropriate support for the child. Thus it is necessary to equip families and the caregivers with the knowledge and skills to manage the myriad challenges faced by a child with autism.

3 The theme of today's conference is "Autism Lifespan" is most apt. The strong panel of local and international experts in autism will provide an experiential learning journey with relevant demonstrations of teaching strategies. I'm told that students with autism will be involved in these sessions, covering areas such as daily fitness and physical education. Over 30 topics will be covered in this 3-day conference, and I'm confident that the knowledge that you receive will enable you to better support the needs of children with autism.

Services offered by ARC

4 Studies have shown that with timely intervention, therapy and treatment, we can help an individual with autism adapt and function better. Direct intervention services, special education for children with autism, and training and consultancy services for the autism community are important to maximize the developmental opportunities of the child.

5 MCYS recognizes that early intervention is important. In March this year, I announced in Parliament the additional subsidies for EIPIC. Every citizen child who attends EIPIC will receive a base subsidy at \$300 from the Government. This base subsidy helps to ensure that EIPIC services remain affordable for children who require these services. The new subsidy will begin on 1 July 2010. Over and above this, low income families will receive means tested subsidies. NCSS will also continue to provide a block grant in addition to Government subsidies.

6 The WeCan Early Intervention Programme, operated by ARC, has served more than 300 students. I am happy to note that the National Autistic Society of United Kingdom has awarded the International Accreditation Status to WeCan Early Intervention Programme in January 2009. I applaud ARC for its continuous effort to ensure standards and quality in the delivery of early intervention services to children with autism spectrum disorder. Congratulations to you on this achievement, and I'm confident that you will continue to provide a strong foundation for the students, to maximise their ability to live independently in the community.

7 ARC also operates the Pathlight School for children with autism and related conditions. The enrolment of the school had grown from 40 students in 2004 to 555 students in 2010. I'm heartened to see increasing numbers of children reaping benefits from the school's unique curriculum blend of life skills, mainstream academics and partnership with mainstream schools. I'm confident that with your continued support in nurturing them with quality education, these children will be engaged in lifelong learning, and hopefully be gainfully employed in future.

8 These services are complemented by the training courses offered by ARC Intervention, Training and Consultancy Unit (AIRC). In addition to provision of direct intervention services to students with autism in areas such as social skills development and behaviour management, AIRC offers more than 40 training programmes and 2,500 training seats annually. You have reached the professionals and caregivers to equip them with a deeper understanding of the techniques in caring for the unique needs of children with autism.

10 years of experience and increasing outreach

9 ARC has achieved much over these years through your professional services. I believe this was made possible by the dedicated and passionate leadership, as well as the untiring commitment of staff and volunteers. This is the 10th anniversary of the AIRC and I am very appreciative of the good work of ARC in serving the autism community. I am confident that you will continue to grow and thrive in the years ahead.

10 I wish all of you a most fruitful time at this conference. Thank you.