

Presentation Transcript

Topic: My Son's special journey and amazing transformation through the power of sports

Speaker: Lucy Siau, Parent Volunteer of Special Olympics Singapore & Siau Ek Jin, Athlete, Special Olympic Singapore

Lucy: Hi, my name is Lau Kiing Leh, mostly known as Lucy Siau. And, this is my son.

Ek Jin: I am Siau Ek Jin. My sport is running, jogging and swimming. I like listening to music. My age is 29 years old, and my favourite color is red.

Lucy: I'm married with three children. Ek Jin is my second child. He was born slightly premature. He showed signs of Global Developmental Delay in first year of his life. He had difficulties in coordination and speech. I noticed he was very different from other children. I've an older girl who could walk at 10 months and talk so much at one. When Ek Jin was five, I started taking him for medical checkups. He was initially called mildly retarded, which the correct term now should be Mild Intellectual Disability. But eventually, he was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with low IQ and learning difficulties. And also, he was said to have dyspraxia due to his difficulties in coordination. He was put on Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Physiotherapy for several years in NUH. The early interventions helped Ek Jin learn different motor skills and oral articulations. I made a tough decision at that time to stop working to help him. My house was basically turned into an early intervention center. I strongly believe in active parents' involvement in therapies and interventions to help our special needs children learn effectively. When Ek Jin was 11, he suffered a bout of viral encephalitis. We almost lost him, but he recovered. At 14, he started having a form of focal epilepsy, which requires him to be on long term medication. He went to Grace Orchard School and later in Delta Senior School. He has worked for quite a few years since his graduation. We sent Ek Jin to a swimming lesson with his big sister when he was younger. But he was so scared of the water, he wasn't able to continue learning as others have progressed on in the group. The school has compulsory 'learn to swim' CCA once a week, he refused to get into water.

I remember once, three instructors took turn to get him into a swimming pool. He'll curl himself tightly around the railing at the poolside, wailing loudly. Three years passed and he didn't learn one bit. One night, I had a nightmare that he was pushed into water by some bad guys and drowned. I was crying so loudly that I woke up and felt so fearful. I shared my fears with one of my fellow special moms, whose daughter was already in swimming competition. And she was

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

trained one on one by an experienced swimming coach who is very passionate about teaching persons with disabilities to swim. So I put Ek Jin in the waiting list under him. In 2006, Ek Jin started learning swimming with Mr. Oh. With persistence, patience, and lots of encouragement, he finally made his first stroke after one and a half year. From there on, swimming became a big part of Ek Jin's life and also our lives. He became a competitive swimmer and trained four to five times a week for nearly 12 years. He competed in various local competitions every year. Many thanks to all the swimming clubs and coaches who have trained Ek Jin in one way or another.

The first Special Olympics event that Ek Jin joined was the seventh Special Olympics Singapore National Games in 2009. He continued to join the eighth and ninth games in 2013 and 2017 respectively. He took part in swimming events in all the games. The highlights of his swimming athlete journey came when he was selected to represent SO Singapore, in the Special Olympics World Summer Games 2019, in Abu Dhabi, where he took part in two personal events, he managed to clinch a bronze medal. In a course of a swimming training, Ek Jin has learned that life is never smooth sailing, there will be challenges in many forms. For him, it meant he had to get out of his comfort zone, to go to the swimming pool after school, or after work, no matter how far, rain or shine, to do the two to three hours of land and water training. To learn to take instructions from coaches to train in a big group, which included the able-bodied swimmers, who were fast and strong. But he looked up to them. He learned to bear body aches after some tough training and the pain of not winning. There were times when he felt tired after work. He felt lousy during training, but he will still go for the training. He will always emerge with broad grin at the end of the training. Swimming training and competitions have brought upon the calming effect in Ek Jin. He learnt to be patient and he learnt to take turns. He learned to follow rules and instructions. He made friends and cheered for them. He has become an independent young adult. As his mother, I will say that Ek Jin is very resilient, a fighter, a strong survivor and he does not give up easily even during tough time in life. As parents, his training in swimming, means supporting him in all areas. Learning more about the sport itself, helped us to help him reach his goals. From our experience, I can say that parental support is crucial for the athlete's success.

Recently, Ek Jin has switched sport to running because of his age. He's turning 29 this year. Besides swimming, Ek Jin also join Special Olympics Bowling outreach program. Currently, he attends the bowling program on Tuesday evenings. There, he learned to play in groups and take turn to play and most importantly, he made new friends. Through Special Olympic sports program, Ek Jin has gained confidence in various aspects and I believe this will provide better quality of life in long term. Ek Jin also likes cycling, listening to music and going to the library during his free time. Recently, we will go on nature walks with friends on Sunday afternoons. I

© Sport Singapore 2021

Any illegal reproduction of this content in any form will result in immediate action against the person concerned.

INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE

would like to share a bit about myself volunteering in SOSG family support network. When Ek Jin went to school, I became an active parent volunteer in school. Since then, I have not stopped volunteering. It was at Special Olympics Outreach Sport program training that I came to know about SOSG Family Support Network, in short FSN. I was invited to join FSN by the then chairperson, Auntie Mimi. So I became a FSN committee member in March 2015. As a new member, I have a lot to learn from the leaders and other members about how to achieve the objectives of FSN. In FSN, we help to organize family day and other SO events. I help in SO bowling outreach program as a parent volunteer to look after the athletes during their training, encouraged them to try harder and do their best.

I also helped to communicate with the parents on various training matters. For me, to volunteer is also a form of giving back to the society as my son has benefited under SO sports outreach programs. In fact, Ek Jin involvement in sports activities has changed the mindset and lifestyles of my whole family, it has brought us stronger and closer together as a family. Few years ago, my husband, Mr. Siau King Ing also came on board as an active volunteer coach in SO badminton outreach program. Both my daughters also chipped in to help bring Ek Jin for his training when I couldn't make it sometimes. My youngest daughter also volunteered in SO Young Athletes event during her school days. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Special Olympics Singapore for creating a difference in the lives of our athletes. I also like to encourage all the parents, caregivers, to bring their special needs children to come and actively participate in sports, and live an active lifestyle.

Help them take up spots and realising their potential which will benefit their whole life. Through sports, their coordination becomes better, their muscles became stronger. Hence, they become more resilient and will never give up easily in life. Always have faith in them. They can be trained, no matter what condition they are in. Lastly, I would like to encourage my fellow parents here to continue to hard work in realising the potential in our children. We can never imagine how far they can reach unless we are guiding them in this journey. Thank you very much, everyone!