

Take Time to Smell the Flowers

CapitaKids and their mentors spend the day at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden

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CapitaKids and their mentors at the Floating Platform, marveling at the aquatic plants in the pond at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden

For the 7 CapitaKids, it was an especially exciting day. Not only were they spending it at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden, Asia's first children's garden, they were spending it with their mentors.

"The other times that we were with our mentors at the P.E.E.K. event at JCube and at the CapitaLand Family Day at the Jurong Bird Park, there were other children there as well. This time, we are the only kids who were invited. I feel very special," 12-year-old Nicholas Thiam enthused.

Nicholas and his nine-year-old sister, Alicia, are among 10 children from HELP Family Service Centre whom CapitaLand have taken under its wings as part of the 10-year support scheme, CapitaKids Programme (CKP). The long-term effort goes beyond providing financial assistance for the children's education to giving guidance and companionship as CapitaLand staff volunteers take the time to spend weekends with them. The picnic at the garden was one such occasion for CapitaKids and mentors to spend quality time with each other.

For CapitaLand Limited's Group Financial Controller Belinda Gan, being a volunteer mentor gave her the chance to be with young children again.

"My children are all grown up and I thought I could bring some of my experience as a mother to help and mentor these children," said Gan. "It's always nice to be with children."

Spend Time with Nature



The children and volunteers were given a guided tour around the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden

The day began with an exclusive guided tour of the garden by its staff. Designed as an interactive green playground where children can learn about plants, nature and the environment through play, the children's garden gave the CapitaKids a lesson in Life Sciences they would not soon forget.

They were introduced to local plants and herbs and told of their uses in daily life. Until that day, few of the children had seen the plants that yielded the food they were familiar with like tapioca, yellow ginger, banana, coconut and sweet potato.

"I didn't know that the banana comes from a plant, not a tree," grinned 11-year-old Mohammad Iqbal Khan.

But the plant that wowed the children the most was the cotton plant.

"I know what cotton wool and cotton buds look like but I didn't know it grew from a plant," said 10-year-old Denise Phoon.

While most of the children threw themselves into the day's fun, one volunteer did notice 11-year-old Seah Jia Yong often trailing behind. Quietly, Alfred Ong, Managing Director of Ascott Southeast Asia & Australia, The Ascott Limited, went alongside the boy and simply walked with him to put him at ease. Neither spoke very much but there soon developed a comfortable silence between the pair.

"I think it is good for the soul to contribute to the community. I signed up for the mentoring programme because I wanted to use my own personal time rather than office hours to help the children," said Ong who has two boys of his own aged 9 and 15.

"I hope to be a role model and friend to the CapitaKids because I believe they need our strong support."



Alicia (left) and her brother Nicholas (right) capturing the moment

Alicia and Nicholas wanted to make the day last forever and spent a lot of time clicking away on their cameras.

"I enjoy observing the children and seeing how they interact with their surroundings. When you see things from a child's perspective, it is very refreshing. Looking at Alicia's pictures, you can see this child has a good eye," said Irene Lim, Assistant Vice President, Customer Relations, The Ascott Limited who became a volunteer so that she could contribute to people in a meaningful way.

Spend Time at Play



The children reveled in the waterplay area as they unabashedly splashed each other and their mentors

The children were then given time to explore the garden which provided lots of free-play areas like a maze, a suspension bridge, a tree house and the perennial crowd-favourite, the Waterplay Area. Shrieks could be heard throughout the garden as the children soaked up the fun and tried to get their mentors wet as well.

Ascott Residential Trust's Investor Relations and Communications Officer, Maria Kozhanova, took time to explain science facts further to the kids. The 24-year-old has been a volunteer since she was in her teens in Russia when she helped out at an orphanage.

"When I first came to Singapore, a group of my friends and I volunteered at the YMCA, working with kids aged eight to 10. But after a year it fizzled out. That's why I signed up with the CapitaKids Programme. I wanted a more long-term commitment," said Kozhanova.

Her gentle, cheerful way won the heart of Tishalini Chandramorgon.

"I like her. I think she is very kind, polite and pretty. She's very good at Science, too," said the 12-year-old.

Spend Time Over Food



CapitaKids spending quality time with their mentors over a picnic

When even the rumbustious Nicholas, who had spent a large part of the day leaping and running from plant to plant, was exhausted, everyone settled down for a home-made picnic. The volunteers brought finger foods and snacks they had prepared and relaxed with their young charges over a good meal.

“My favourite part is the picnic,” Tishalini quipped.

Mel Rose Angeles, Assistant Manager, Human Resource at The Ascott Limited has three children of her own aged 17, 15, and eight. A trained psychologist who has been in Singapore for four years, she joined the programme so that she could have some work-life balance.

“I want to use my training to counsel children, to really understand them and their needs,” she said.

Taking time out of their work and lives to spend with the children and to invest in their welfare, these volunteers truly showed that spending time is perhaps one of the greatest gifts of love one person can give to another.