

Getting more companies to set up childcare centres on site ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Making childcare centres more affordable and accessible.

That is what the enhanced Marriage and Parenthood package may address, said Minister of State for Social and Family Development Madam Halimah Yacob.

And the ministry aims to set up more childcare centres in the heartlands and at workplaces in the coming years.

Three-year-old Lucas tags along whenever Louise Koh heads off for work at Changi Airport.

It's also where he goes to school.

For 29-year-old Louise, having a childcare centre within her work premises makes a big difference.

It is also where he goes to school

Koh said: "The cost of bringing up kids now is very high, so both parents need to work to keep the family going, so it does help that there are such facilities around for us.

"It is very assuring because when I'm working in the day, I know that my son is close by to me, if anything happens to him) let's say if he were to fall sick in the middle of the day, it is very easy for me to reach him very quickly.

Ms Koh said it also encourages her to have more children.

Changi Airport is one of the 34 workplaces that has benefited from grants provided by the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

Childcare centres located within government buildings can receive a one-off capital grant for conversion at 20 per cent of total cost, currently capped at S\$52,700.

Those sited within a commercial building can receive one-off capital grant for the purchase of furnishings and equipment, currently capped at S\$50,700.

It is part of efforts to make the workplace more pro-family.

Robin Goh, assistant vice president of corporate communications at Changi Airport Group, said: "It gives our employees a peace of mind well knowing that their children are in good care, and again in terms of proximity very close to them and of course with that peace of mind, our employees can of course do their work better and be more productive."

This childcare centre has been operating since 2006 and is the only centre within Changi Airport.

It caters up to 140 students and there's already strong demand for more places, with about 50 children on the waiting list since the start of the year.

The ministry aims to increase the number of childcare centres in workplaces.

Nine employers and building owners voiced interest when the ministry launched an information kit on the grants last May.

But only one decided to set up a childcare centre this year.

Madam Halimah said: "The challenge for many of these childcare centres who want to set up is that it can be quite pricey for them in terms of the rental cost, particularly in commercial buildings so that is their concern.

"Employers should think for themselves to think that this is a win-win strategy for them to attract and retain talent you see."

For now, the ministry aims to see about five workplace childcare centres being set up every year.

Madam Halimah said: "We aim to have at least about five per year, so you see, the aim is modest but we feel that is one source we feel it is to be supplemented by the other efforts to set up childcare centres near the homes."

The ministry also wants to address issues beyond access to childcare.

Madam Halimah said, "It has to be accessible, if it is too far, it is no use to families. It has to be affordable, if it is too expensive, then it is

prohibitive as well, and thirdly it has to be of certain quality so we try. We are improving all these three prongs so the Marriage and Parenthood package may address some of these."

Workplace childcare centres currently make up 27 per cent of all child care centres.

As of this year, there are a total of 272 workplace childcare centres. This is about 20 per cent more than 2010 when there were 223 workplace childcare centres.

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