

A MESSAGE FROM DAS PRESIDENT

Eric Lee, DAS President



As I write this message, Singapore had exited the COVID-19 "Back to Phase 2 - Heightened Alert" stage but still combatting clusters that are sprouting up. I would like to thank the DAS Executive Committee, members of our various committees, management and staff for being adequately prepared to switch all classes to Online Teaching when the Ministry of Education instructed us to do so from School Term 2 Week 9 (17 May 2021). DAS is again able to continue delivering our programmes and services for most of our over 3,000 students. Their learning was thus not disrupted for the last two weeks of Term 2, 2021 just as it was not disrupted during the circuit breaker in April and May 2020. This reflected the alertness of the DAS to national developments and the commitment of staff to serving our students as they responded positively to the switch to online teaching. The above also demonstrated the resilience of students with dyslexia as they persevered during these difficult times and continued to learn. DAS will continue to be responsive as the COVID-19 situation evolves in Singapore.

2021 is the 30th Anniversary of DAS! Having been initiated as a community service project by the Rotary Club of Raffles City, that the DAS has been working for the dyslexia community for 30 years would not have been possible without our supporters, donors, volunteers, parents and of course the staff of DAS. I would like to thank the Ministry of Education (MOE) for their continuous support over the years and providing the MOE Grant for dyslexic students attending the MOE-aided DAS Main Literacy Programme (MLP) at our fourteen DAS Learning Centres. We expect the Grant to amount to \$9,661K in FY2020-2021.

Students from lower income families also benefited from the MOE Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS). If not for the MOE Grant and FAS as well as DAS management's productivity and cost saving measures, DAS would have to charge higher fees in order for MLP to be sustainable. The MLP fee payable by parents is \$25.68 (including GST) per hour and this has not changed since

2007. Nevertheless, over the next few years, we anticipate significant financial stresses as demand for our services increase and especially if MOE funding on a per capita basis is not increased in line with inflation.

DAS also provides bursaries for students from lower income families to access much needed non-MOE funded DAS programmes. In FY2020-2021, the amount of DAS bursaries provided was \$1,516K although net donations raised was only \$713K during a financial year impacted by COVID-19. We are most grateful to the many generous donors who have come forward to help children from lower income families benefit from DAS services. I am not able to name them all but we will certainly not forget the many individuals and organisations who have supported our children with dyslexia.

During FY2020-2021, in response to the COVID-19 safe management requirements, DAS initiated online fundraising efforts including the "HELP DYSLEXIC PEOPLE ACHIEVE#wegiveinsolidarity" campaign from 3 April to 15 May 2020 and the "Help DAS Raise SGD50,000" campaign from 14 August 2020 to 28 February 2021. Due to the splendid efforts of Executive Committee members, staff, parents and students of DAS, we raised \$10,360 and \$99,899 (before Toteboard dollar for dollar matching) respectively. Adam Khoo Learning Technologies Group was the biggest donor for the second campaign with \$20,000. As part of World Dyslexia Awareness Week, we also organised a "DAS WALK FOR DYSLEXIA 2020: 20KM FOR \$20K". This was held from 1 October to 30 November 2020. There were 480 participants who raised a total of \$54,554 with the largest contributor being Apple Singapore contributing 257 participants and \$43,874. Staff also contributed over \$15,577 in FY2020-2021 from their monthly salaries towards the DAS bursary fund. It is wonderful to see staff, parents, students and the many DAS supporters contributing to these efforts to ensure children from lower income families can access much needed DAS programmes and services.

Other notable contributions in FY2020-2021 include the Singapore Teochew Foundation who donated \$365,750 in support of 152 students to attend non-MOE funded programmes. These students qualify for 100% bursary and can attend up to 3 non-MOE funded programmes as well as receive a Review Assessment. There was a \$300,000 donation from the Lee Foundation towards the building of the new Yishun Learning Centre. This new centre is projected to be completed in 2022 and will increase the number of classrooms from 4 to 8 thus catering to double the number of students at the centre. I would like to once again thank the MP Advisor of the Yishun Central area, Associate Professor Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim for his wonderful support. There will also be a \$280,100 donation over the next three years from the Lim Hoon Foundation in support of our effort to reach out to students in Institutes of Higher Learning. The President's Challenge (PC) has been a great supporter over the years and has donated significant sums to DAS. DAS has received \$60,000 from PC2020 while PC2021 will also donate \$60,000. And there were many other important donations.

Because of the COVID-19 Safe Management Measures, the DAS Student Graduation and Achievement Awards Ceremony on 28 November 2020 was held virtually for the first time. I am most appreciative of Ms Lucy Tay, Director, Special Educational Needs, MOE for being our virtual Guest of Honour! Her wonderful speech via video truly encouraged everyone and re-affirmed the Government's support for our students and their parents.

As a Pre-Event to the above virtual Graduation Ceremony, Her Excellency President Halimah Yacob most graciously visited the DAS Rex House Centre on 17 November 2020 afternoon where she was introduced to the many programmes and services DAS provides for our students and met with our annual Young Achiever and Special Achievement Award recipients. President Halimah was most encouraging to our students with dyslexia and we are most grateful to her for taking time off her busy schedule to visit us.

Very importantly, I would like to express our appreciation to our ever supportive patron, Mrs Goh Chok Tong. Mrs Goh has been our Patron since 1995 and her encouragement has been instrumental to our continued development. Mrs Goh's kind letter on our behalf to the Lee Foundation was instrumental in the aforementioned \$300K donation from the Foundation towards the building of our new Yishun Centre.

Board renewal continues to be an important item on the Executive Committee's agenda. We now have four Executive Committee members, Mr Jim Lee, Mr Kevin Kwek, Ms Wong May Lyn

and Dr Zubin Daruwalla who are around 50 years old and below. We also have six new Committee members Ms Alicia Tan, Ms Lye Ay Wen, Mr Anuraq Pandey, Mr Dickon Addis, Dr Richard Yap and Mr Andy Lim who joined us in 2020 and 2021. They will be contributing to the various DAS Committees including the Audit and Risk Committee, the Finance and Investment Committee, the Fundraising Committee, the Programmes and Services Committee. We will endeavour to continue to attract qualified and committed people to join the Executive Committee and supporting Committees to ensure the Board level continuity necessary to pursue the outstanding work achieved by DAS over the years.

I am delighted that at the management level, there continues to be stability and progress under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer Mr Lee Siang. Under Lee Siang and his General Management Team, DAS has continued to grow from strength to strength. I would like to thank him and his team for another outstanding effort in the past year in reaching out and helping many more students with dyslexia and associated learning differences despite limited funds and resources. It was on 23 March 2020 that the unprecedented yet relatively smooth transition to online teaching by over 3,000 students across our 14 learning centres took place in response to the COVID-19 situation. The management team then managed a phased transition from online teaching back to in-person teaching through Terms 3 and 4 of 2020 and they responded to the switch to online teaching again from 17 May 2021. These are excellent examples of management's excellent stewardship, willingness to embrace change and make improvements.

Looking forward, although COVID-19 will continue to impact our operations, DAS will not stop focusing on quality and sustainability. We will continue to invest resources and expand efforts to secure funding and donations to support a comprehensive and holistic range of programmes. We will continue to invest in the professional development of our staff. We will also invest time in programme evaluation and research to ensure the reliability of our programmes and services. This is so that the DAS can reach out and serve even more people with dyslexia and associated learning needs with high quality services.

We will continue to engage, collaborate and partner MOE in all our efforts. We will strive to reach out to new partners, donors and supporters. Even though we already have a well-run organisation internally, we will not stop always looking at better ways and newer perspectives.

We will continue to further our mission - Helping Dyslexic People Achieve.