

Taking Heart

iC2 PrepHouse

WHEN Audrey Looi's nine-year-old son, James, was diagnosed with low vision three years ago, she was surprised to learn that most schools in Singapore were unequipped to deal with cases like his.

"Oftentimes, the perception is: 'Oh my, this is too difficult for us to handle'. But really, there are simple things we can do to keep children with low vision in mainstream schools," noted Dr Looi.

Together with her husband, neurosurgeon Ang Beng Ti, Dr Looi – who heads the Oculoplastic Service at the Singapore National Eye Centre – is working hard to change such attitudes.

In 2012, she set up iC2 PrepHouse, a charity which customises support programmes for children with poor vision.

"Different children have different visual impairments, and iC2 recognises the need for a customised approach," she said.

When first enrolled at iC2, each child undergoes an assessment to test his or her pattern of visual impairment, and the kind of functional vision that is left. From there, a teacher crafts a customised support programme appropriate to the child to help maximise his or her visual potential.

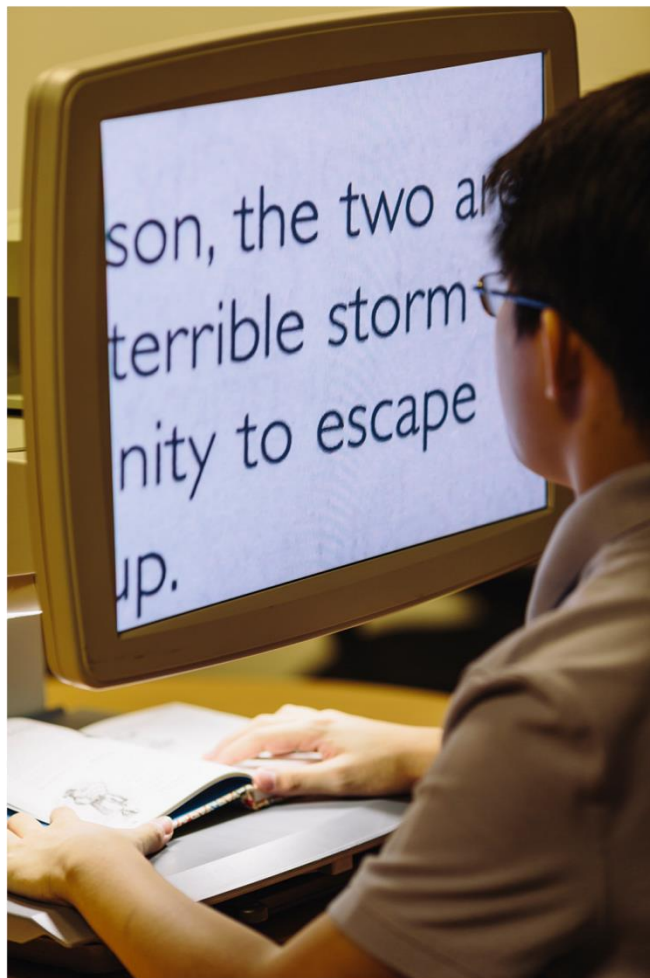
"In our curriculum, we teach them orientation and mobility – how to cross a road, how to find their way in the kitchen. On top of that, we (coach them in) the use of assistive devices such as CCTVs to enlarge text, or computer software to help them surf the Net. We also teach braille," said Dr Ang.

"We do this so that they can continue to study with their peers in mainstream schools, to go into tertiary education, and to function as part of normal society," he added.

iC2 PrepHouse also works with schools directly to ensure that a child with low vision can continue enrolment there; it seeks to equip institutions with the right skills and tools

Said Dr Looi: "It's important to remember that for these children, vision is the only problem. They have normal IQs and can continue to function well in mainstream schools. People will be amazed at how much these kids can do with the right support."

Because of the grants it receives from donors, iC2 PrepHouse is able to subsidise its services – which would ordinarily cost \$17,000 per child per year – to just over \$2,000 each year. The centre also has programmes to help defray costs for needy families.



Boosting abilities: At iC2 PrepHouse, a student with low vision is taught how to use an electronic magnifying machine.

Visit www.ic2.com.sg to find out more about iC2 PrepHouse and the services it provides.