

# LET'S TALK

*Julia Gabriel*  
EDUCATION



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Singapore Secondary Schools  
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Long Serving Staff

**CHENGZHU MANDARIN CENTRE**  
China Family Learning Adventure

Nurturing Positive Reading Habits



## SPOTLIGHT ON...

Gong Chong Wen,  
Head of School Age Programmes,  
Chengzhu Mandarin Centre



## JULIA GABRIEL EDUCATION CENTRES

### Julia Gabriel Centre Forum

583 Orchard Road, #04-00 Forum, Singapore 238884  
T +65 6733 4322 F +65 6733 2334

### Julia Gabriel Centre Tampines

4 Tampines Central 5, #05-03 Tampines Mall, Singapore 529510  
T +65 6444 6735 | F +65 6444 6706

### Chengzhu Mandarin Centre

35 Rochester Drive, #03-01 Rochester Mall, Singapore 138639  
T +65 6737 5348 F +65 6737 2136

### Chiltern House Forum

583 Orchard Road, #04-01 Forum, Singapore 238884  
T +65 6737 1966 F +65 6735 8410

### Chiltern House Thomson

510 Thomson Road, #04-01A SLF Building, Singapore 298135  
T +65 6299 5161 F +65 6291 6651

### Chiltern House East Coast

902 East Coast Parkway, Block C, #02-17/18, Singapore 449874  
T +65 6345 9912 F +65 6345 1871

### Chiltern House Turf Club Road

232 Turf Club Road, Singapore 287982  
T +65 6468 8566 F +65 467 5214

### Chiltern House Mountbatten

231 Mountbatten Road, Block A, #01-00, Singapore 397999  
T +65 6242 8368 F +65 6242 9165

## ONLINE

www.juliagabriel.com  
www.chengzhu.net  
www.chilternhouse.com.sg



## ON THE COVER



Field trips are an important part of the Chiltern House Preschool programme. They reinforce classroom learning, engage the children in real-life experiences, help build confidence and, perhaps best of all, the children love them! Students from Nursery 2 and above enjoy visits to Singapore's star attractions such as the Singapore Zoo, Jurong Bird Park and our very own UNESCO heritage site—the Singapore Botanic Gardens. In May, children in Kindergarten 2 visited a lesser known attraction, the Malay Heritage Centre, where they discovered about the history and culture of Malay Singaporeans. Field trips are a great way for parents to join in too, as they partner class teachers to ensure a truly meaningful experience for everyone.

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## EDITORIAL

We've spent quite a bit of time so far this year celebrating. Earlier in the year we celebrated the opening of our new Julia Gabriel Centre in Tampines Mall dedicated to Readers and Writers programmes. We've been celebrating the 25th anniversary of Julia Gabriel Centre at various events: at our company Dinner and Dance on 30th April for one, when we cut a colourful three-tier birthday cake; and more recently at our annual Vision Day on 27th June when we remembered past events, programmes, centres and people in pictures, and welcomed more staff into our ever-increasing 10, 15 and 20 Year Service Clubs. And a few months ago Julia Gabriel Education's Founder, Julia Gabriel, received good news following her chemotherapy treatment for cancer—a wonderful cause for celebration for everyone.

We also recently celebrated the end of Ramadan with our Muslim colleagues. Many students and educators, Muslim and non-Muslim, came to class resplendent in their colourful baju kurung and baju melayu. I love occasions like this: when our children, staff and parents join together in recognition and celebration of an important festival, no matter what faith they themselves adhere to. The ability to live together in harmony as we do here in Singapore is something to be proud of—and a wonderful example to set to our children and the rest of the world. The rich diversity of our centre environments echoes this oneness, visible in our international staff, programme themes, and activities.

And finally, Singapore recently hosted an international event, the World Schools Debating Championship (WSDC), at which our own Head of Debating Mark Gabriel served as Convenor and head of the event's organising committee. Julia Gabriel Centre has been organising and sponsoring the Singapore Secondary Schools Debating Championship for 17 years (see p.6) and we are all thrilled that Singapore's team beat Canada in the televised final to emerge as champions, the first time any team has won on home ground. (More about this in the next issue of *Let's Talk*.) Many congratulations to Mark and the entire team. A win in Singapore's 50th year! Now that is definitely cause for celebration!

*Fiona*

**Fiona Walker**, Chief Executive Officer



## CHARITY ART SHOWS

### Chiltern House Preschool

Visit a Chiltern House charity art show and make your bid for a one-of-a-kind creation by our talented Chiltern House students. Sale is by auction to the highest bidder. Bidding can get fierce, so be prepared to put your hand in your pocket to own your favourite piece! Each one is priceless after all! Total proceeds from all shows will be donated to Very Special Arts Singapore, a charity that promotes the creative power in people with disabilities.

Venue: All Chiltern House Preschool locations  
Date: 11 September 2015  
Time: 6 pm

## PRE NURSERY REGISTRATION

### Chiltern House Preschool

Registration is now open for entry into Pre Nursery at Chiltern House Preschool for children from 18 months old. Registration also open for Nursery 1 for January 2016.

Contact Enrolment at 6346 6130 or visit [www.chilternhouse.com.sg](http://www.chilternhouse.com.sg) for more details.

## HOLIDAY PROGRAMMES

### Julia Gabriel Centre / Chengzhu Mandarin Centre

We're gearing up already for the year-end school holidays with some super exciting holiday adventures. Rainbow Bear, science and space exploration are just some of the topics waiting to be explored across two weeks at Julia Gabriel Centre. There are Speech & Drama and Readers & Writers Camps too, as well as a Performance Arts programme for older children. Animals and nature are just two of the themes during one week of holiday programmes at Chengzhu Mandarin Centre, with field trips included!

Dates: Week 1: 30th November to 4th December  
Week 2: 7th December to 11th December

(More details coming soon in our holiday programmes brochure and at [www.juliagabriel.com](http://www.juliagabriel.com) / [www.chengzhu.net](http://www.chengzhu.net).)

## Happy 25th JGC!

It is with the greatest delight that I wish Julia Gabriel Centre a very happy 25th Anniversary. My connection to the Company goes back a long way. It started in Halifax Road where I became a part time teacher of Speech and Drama. As my involvement and time with the company grew I was very proud and excited to be asked to join the Board of Directors. The move to Forum in Orchard Road was the start of rapid growth for the company and an exciting time with many changes, but with the core values of excellence always remaining the same.

The name Julia Gabriel is now not only national but international. Julia was, and I am sure still is, an inspirational teacher and leader, encouraging not only the students but also the staff to exceed their own expectations. The belief that education can be fun as well as challenging was always the motivation for all the various programmes on offer.

Thank you Julia for giving me the chance to grow with you.

With love to all who remember me.  
Shirley Smith

*Shirley now lives in Cairns, Australia.*



## ...introducing your children to travel at the earliest age and enjoying a world of discovery together.

When we travel beyond everything that is familiar to us; when we step outside of our comfort zone; when we immerse ourselves fully in other cultures with an open mind, we begin to understand the depth, colour and rich diversity of the world around us. Experiencing people and customs different from our own helps us to demonstrate the qualities of acceptance, empathy and gratitude. When we travel and make an effort to understand differences, we fully realise the similarities and connections between us all, regardless of colour, race, ethnicity, religion and gender.

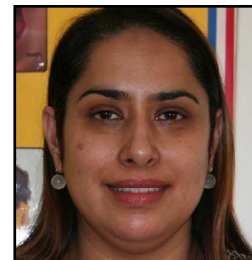
If travelling overseas is not always an option, don't forget that museums, theatre, documentaries and books also offer us a window to the world! As Mark Twain wrote, *"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness."*



## MEET OUR STAFF

Each year more and more staff members are welcomed into Julia Gabriel Education's Long Service Clubs - a kind of JGE Hall of Fame! This happens during the Company's annual Vision Day, an event that takes place at the end of June when the entire company gathers to review past months and glimpse ahead. Throughout Vision Day, time is given to celebrating each member of staff who has reached 10, 15 or 20 years service with the Company. These are heart-warming moments that involve much laughter, applause and happy tears. This year the following Chiltern House Preschool staff took their bows:

10 YEARS



**Kaur Surinder**

Part Time Senior Assistant Teacher (Chiltern House Turf Club Road)



**Rahima**

Housekeeper (Chiltern House East Coast)



**Lourdes Charlotte Teresa**

Teacher (Chiltern House East Coast)



**Noa Sunga**

Senior Teacher (Chiltern House Mountbatten)



**Zhang Ning**

Mandarin Mentor Teacher (Chiltern House Turf Club Road)

15 YEARS



**Joceline Tan**

Head of Centre (Chiltern House East Coast)



**Zhan Yan Lin**

Mandarin Mentor Teacher (Chiltern House Turf Club Road)

Fiona McDonald, Head of Learning Support (Julia Gabriel Education) and Head of Training and Programme Quality Support (Julia Gabriel International) also celebrates 15 years with the company this year. Fiona was featured in 'Meet Our Staff' in the last issue of *Let's Talk*.



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## CHILTERN HOUSE SPORTS DAY

Everyone loves the annual Chiltern House Preschool Sports Day, which this year took place at various locations across Singapore in early July. Apart from being a healthy activity, Sports Days encourage team work and support among the children as they cheer on their classmates and applaud everyone's effort at taking part. Healthy competition is always evident among the parents during the Mummies and Daddies races - the children love watching their parents having a go too! But most importantly, everyone receives a medal for taking part because in our eyes, everyone's a winner!



## CHILTERN HOUSE PRESCHOOL

## CARNIVAL TIME!



Julia Gabriel Centre's (JGC) EduPlay Department ran a very successful carnival-themed holiday programme from the 8th to the 12th of June this year. Staff went all out to plan, prepare and create an event that was memorable and meaningful for everyone who joined. Senior educator Farhan composed some special carnival songs for the start of each session. Clowns Ding and Dong entertained children and parents alike with their crazy antics and magic tricks. And art activities including candy pop, clown puppets, recreating a carnival scene, clown balloons, bubble catching and ball printing kept everyone's creativity and imaginations buzzing! Everyone had a fantastic time getting ready for the big event at the end of the week - the Grand Carnival itself!

Game booths included 'Knock 'em Dead', 'Ring Toss', 'Drop Ball', 'Baby Bull's Eye', 'Fishing' and 'Digging in the Sand.' Each child got their special game card stamped as they took part in a game and everyone received prizes! There was a special carnival cafe with treats for the children when they felt hungry, a super cool contemporary face painting and tattoo corner, and a human jukebox (JGC musicians and their guitars sitting behind a curtain!), ready to 'sing' chosen songs at any moment

And that's not all! Children could have their photos snapped behind funny photo stands or with colourful props that the EduPlay team had created earlier. And to ensure that every child left with a keepsake, a photographer was on hand to take on-the-spot snaps which were printed out and given to each child at the end of the day, along with a balloon designed to look like an ice cream!

At the end of the Carnival, every member of the EduPlay team agreed that creating and executing the entire event, though hard work, was incredibly fun and well worth it!

## JULIA GABRIEL CENTRE

## EVENTS FOR CHILDREN BY CHILDREN

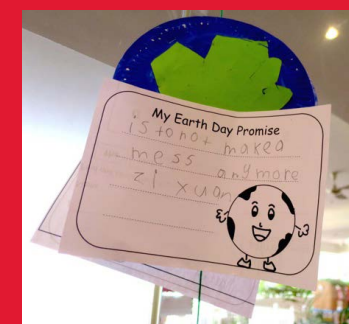
Every year both Julia Gabriel Centre and Chiltern House Preschool, in Singapore and overseas, schedule time in their calendars to celebrate a variety of events that support each centre's programmes. Book Week, Earth Week, Picnic of Words and celebrating the major festivals of all the main religions are just a few such events designed to support an enjoyment of learning, connect students, parents and staff, spark creativity and imagination, and bring greater awareness to the rich diversity of the world we live in. Taking different cultural practices or nature as themes are great ways to do this! Dressing up as a favourite book character helps bring the story fully to life for an excited three year-old. Contemplating how he might do his bit to save the environment engages empathy and understanding in the eager five year-old. And when two friends stand on stage in front of an audience of peers and adults, reciting a poem together, it builds camaraderie, confidence and an inspiring sense of achievement. These are occasions when children participate their ideas, opinions and preferences to co-create with teachers, to produce an event that everyone gets to enjoy. Excitement and curiosity build and discovery happens as preparation for these events take place—all vital components of an enjoyable and successful learning process.



*It takes two! A great double act during the first all-children's Picnic of Words at Julia Gabriel Centre, Forum (16th May).*



*A very hungry caterpillar makes an appearance at the Julia Gabriel Centre Citta Mall Book Week in Kuala Lumpur (30th May).*



*The earth (and mum) will be very happy at one student's pledge during Earth Week at Julia Gabriel Centre Kuala Lumpur (20th to 25th April).*



*Proud parents capture the children's choral piece during the Picnic of Words at Julia Gabriel Centre Citta Mall in Kuala Lumpur (9th May).*



## JULIA GABRIEL CENTRE

## SINGAPORE SECONDARY SCHOOLS DEBATING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2015

For the 17th consecutive year, Julia Gabriel Centre organised and sponsored the Singapore Secondary Schools Debating Championships in 2015. This year's tournament involved 84 schools from across Singapore. The competition is split into three divisions (based on the schools' level of experience in inter-school debating) and every team took part in three preliminary rounds on Friday evenings in February and March. The top eight teams in each division then moved on to the quarter-finals. The final results of this year's competition were as follows:

## DIVISION I

**Champions**

United World College of South East Asia

**Runners-up**

Raffles Girls' School

**Third-Place**

Raffles Institution

**Fourth-Place**

Hwa Chong Institution

**Quarter-Finalists**

Anglo-Chinese School (Independent)  
Catholic High School  
Paya Lebar Methodist Girls' School  
Singapore Chinese Girls' School

**Best Speaker of the Division**

Thirisha Murugan – NUS High School

## DIVISION II

**Champions**

Anglo-Chinese School (International)

**Runners-up**

Singapore American School

**Semi-Finalists**

Crescent Girls' School  
Tanjong Katong Girls' School

**Quarter-Finalists**

Anderson Secondary School

CHIJ Katong Convent  
Ngee Ann Secondary School  
St Margaret's Secondary School

**Best Speaker of the Division**

Dhruv Uppal – Anglo-Chinese School (International)

## DIVISION III

**Champions**

Kent Ridge Secondary School

**Runners-up**

Anglican High School

**Semi-Finalists**

Evergreen Secondary School  
School of the Arts

**Quarter-Finalists**

Coral Secondary School  
Loyang Secondary School  
Queenstown Secondary School  
St Gabriel's Secondary School

**Best Speaker of the Division**

Rachel Han – Anglican High School



Kacine Wee (left) was a student at Julia Gabriel Centre from 2004 to the beginning of 2015. For the past two years, she has also been a member of the Crescent Girls' School team which competed in Division II of the Singapore Secondary Schools Debating Championships. This year, her team reached the semi-finals of the tournament. Kacine told Let's Talk about the experience:

"This is the second year in which I've been a member of my school's debating team. Last year I was a reserve member in our squad of five debaters, and this year I was a speaker on the team in the three preliminary rounds and in the quarter-finals and semi-finals of the Singapore Secondary Schools Debating Championships.

"Debating has been an amazing experience for me. When I first joined my school team, I was excited by the prospect of having intellectual discussions and learning more about the world at large. Speaking in the debates this year, I felt nervous yet thrilled at the new experiences coming my way. The highlight was definitely reaching the semi-finals of the competition after so much hard work and dedication. Me and another member of the team were also ranked among the top-20 individual speakers in Division II, which we were very pleased about.

"As a team, we've had the opportunity to learn and grow extensively through taking part in the competition. From picking up new techniques to attaining new strategies, the tournament has allowed us to improve our debating skills. And through this enriching experience, we've also managed to foster stronger bonds within the team. I'm definitely looking forward to competing again next year when I'll be in Secondary 4."

Over 400 students were involved in this year's Singapore Secondary Schools Debating Championships which, as usual, was a great success.

In July-August this year, Singapore is playing host to the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC), which involves teams from over 50 nations around the globe. Julia Gabriel Centre is one of the sponsors of WSDC 2015 and our Head of Debating, Mark Gabriel, is serving as the Convenor heading the organising committee for the event. We'll bring you more news about WSDC 2015 in the next issue of Let's Talk.

## NURTURING POSITIVE READING HABITS

Inside the covers of books lies a world of joy, excitement and knowledge ready for your child to discover. At Julia Gabriel Education, quality literature is a vital component of all our programmes: We understand how the imagination soars on the power of words! But does your child feel the same when faced with a book? Do you struggle to encourage your child to read as part of their daily activities? Nurturing positive reading habits from the earliest age helps children to become readers for life.

If you would like to do this for your child, read on:



## Listening and responding to stories

If you do one thing only, do this: Read to your child. Reading to your child enhances all the skills and perceptions she needs for reading. Remember, a child understands and appreciates far more than she can independently read. Sharing stories and poetry with your child immerses her in print conventions, rich vocabulary and sentence structures that she will encounter in later reading experiences. In listening to or creating stories, she develops an understanding of structure and sequence. At the same time, she develops her ability to listen, focus on print and concentrate; developing her ability to multi-task physically and cognitively which are critical skills for reading success.

## Reading more than words - talking about stories

Reading is more than decoding words. Comprehension beyond word level is important if your child is to become a motivated and effective reader. Stop and talk about the story. Predict what might happen next, discuss whether you like a character in the story and make connections to your own life. This creates active engagement with the story and helps develop imagination, understanding and appreciation, basic building blocks for comprehension and reading motivation.

## Talking about reading

Reading is a multi-purpose activity. It is functional when you read for specific information. It is a learning process when you read to understand something. And it relaxes and engages imagination when you lose yourself in the pleasure of a story or poem. Does your child see you engaged in all these different reading activities? Do you verbalise your reading experiences so she sees the ways in which reading is important to you? When you say, "I need to look in this book for a phone number" or "Let's check the list to see if we have bought everything for dinner", your child sees how reading helps you get things done. When you say, "Wow! That was a wonderful story ... it was almost as if I was in that cave", your child sees the power of imagination and the worlds that lie waiting in books.

## Talking, just talking

Speech is the strongest bridge to reading. Conversation immerses your child in meaningful, rich and varied language. Before a child can read, she must know the sounds, words, meanings and

syntax of a language. The more she knows, the more complexity she commands, the easier it is to connect her knowledge in oral language to the decoding process she engages in with written language. Best of all, talking needs no special time or equipment. Anytime, anyplace is good for talking.

## Using imagination in responding to books and stories

Follow the leader, and the leader in this case should be your child. The more books become a source of play and imagination, the stronger the motivation to read. Follow your child's lead in exploring books imaginatively so that they come alive and are part of the world she actively experiences. Play games based on books, dress up as her favourite character from a book, create meals that a favourite character might enjoy, draw places and characters from her favourite stories.

## Physical ability and print convention awareness

Reading is a unique physical activity. Nowhere else (except in the related act of writing) does one engage in the kind of focusing reading calls for. Words and pictures demand fine focusing, control of eye movement in scanning print, as well as concentration on the activity for a period of time. Print material follows conventions. A child must come to understand that words and sentences go from left to right, how books open and that stories flow from page to page. There is a lot to master and understand. And this is before the actual cognitive act of decoding the written language.

## Phonemic awareness through rhythms and rhymes

Phonemic awareness includes awareness that words are made of syllables, that individual letters have different sounds and they can be combined in many different ways to make different words, and that changing one letter or sound in a word can make it a different word. Research tells us that phonemic awareness helps develop good reading skills. Obviously to be able to use this in reading, a child also needs to understand how letters symbolise sounds. Interestingly, this seemingly technical aspect of language development is strongly approached through play.

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SPOTLIGHT ON...

## Gong Chong Wen, Head of School Age Programmes, Chengzhu Mandarin Centre



Gong Chong Wen (right)

Gong Chong Wen is a familiar face around our centres. Not surprising, as she has been with the Company for 14 years since first arriving in Singapore in 2001, and graces the pages of Chengzhu Mandarin Centre's website and School Years Programmes brochures. But more than being a poster girl, Chong Wen is known to parents, students and her colleagues as a warm, joyful and dedicated educator, passionate about her work, her students and her language.

Originally from Cheng Du, China, where she majored in Preschool Education and later in Chinese Literature, Chong Wen initially co-taught the bilingual pre-nursery programme at Julia Gabriel Centre before all Mandarin programmes moved to Chengzhu Mandarin Centre in 2012. Chong Wen then took on the role of Head of School Years Programmes. Her portfolio includes Language Skills (Primary 1 - Primary 4), Creative Writing (Primary 1 - Primary 4) and Mandarin Expressions (Primary 5 - Primary 6). These programmes compliment, and indeed exceed, the demands of the Singapore Ministry of Education's Mandarin school curriculum, training students respectively to read, write, listen and speak in Mandarin, to think and write creatively, and to speak expressively.

When invited to discuss some of the benefits to students who attend School Years Programmes at the centre, Chong Wen enthusiastically explains, "We focus on developing students' interest in learning Chinese and we do this by observing their individual ability, using that as a starting point for growth. Children have different characters; different learning abilities. It's important to take that into consideration. Sometimes that can be a challenge because it means that our educators have to deal with students in one class who are not all at the same level. But that is what we are trained to do: we have to adjust our teaching accordingly. Some students' background in Chinese is weak, but we respect every individual child. We will never give up on anyone. In this way, students gain confidence, improve their skills and enjoy the process with their classmates too!"

Chong Wen continues, "One of the most common struggles we notice in children learning Mandarin is that they lack the confidence to speak the language. Usually because they are afraid that they might use the wrong sentence! This is why it is so important to work with each child individually according to their level, constantly affirming their progress along the way.

"Many students find Chinese comprehension difficult. So, as well as all the strategies we use in class to enhance these skills, we encourage them to read as broadly as possible - books and newspapers for example - to help develop their ability to understand and appreciate what they are reading."

Witnessing the growth of her students is, explains Chong Wen, one of the most inspirational aspects of her role as an educator and one of the things she loves most about working at Chengzhu Mandarin Centre. That and her "Chengzhu family" as she warmly describes her colleagues. "We are very cooperative and work harmoniously together. We are a family!"

Visit <http://www.chengzhu.net/index.php/programmes> to find out more about School Years Programmes at Chengzhu Mandarin Centre.



*continued from page 7 - 'Nurturing Positive Reading Habits'*

Phonemic awareness actually begins well before children are aware of print. It is discovered and explored in play and communication settings as children naturally explore words and sounds, enjoying their dynamic nature and discovering their properties.

All we need do to enhance this development is to take advantage of something all children enjoy - the sound play in the rhythms and rhymes of poetry and songs. Poetry connects the imagination to the concrete language properties, making it a powerful medium for learning language patterns. Exploring rhythms develops a sensitivity to the intonation patterns of language. Sound patterns in rhymes help children become aware of words as groups of sounds rather than as single objects. It is no accident that every culture in the world has rhythmic play, rhymes and songs for children.

*(A version of this article originally appeared in Singapore's Child magazine.)*

**Our new Julia Gabriel Centre at Tampines Mall is dedicated exclusively to Readers and Writers programmes for children from Nursery 1 to Primary 6. Visit Julia Gabriel Centre Tampines Mall, #05-03 or call 6444 6735 for more information.**