

KOLOLO METHOD IN SERI MENGSIH CENTRE

INTRODUCTION & FIRST CONNECTIONS

Seri Mengasih Centre is a special training centre in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. It was established in 1981 and was the first special education school in Sabah which provides education and training for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In the beginning, Seri Mengasih did not have any students with Autism. But about 10 years after it was set up, parents of children with Autism started to bring them to us, and at that time, Mr. Makoto Hashimoto had also joined our teaching team (from 1991 to 1993). Mr. Makoto was Seri Mengasih's first JOCV (Japan Overseas Corporation of Volunteers) staff and was a qualified special education teacher specializing in Autism. We are very thankful to know Mr. Makoto because he opened a door for us to enter having an early understanding of Autism and how to help individuals affected by it.

After Mr. Makoto left Seri Mengasih Centre, more and more children with Autism came to us for training. At that time, we did not know about the Kololo Method. So, we did our best to train them using the method Mr. Makoto's and our own teaching techniques but we found it was not sufficient.

A few years later, we met Dr. Daniel and Mrs. Judy Fong for the first time when they brought their young son, Adrian Fong to Seri Mengasih Centre. Adrian has Autism. During that time, the Principal of Seri Mengasih Centre, Mrs. Cecilia Thane gave them the contact number of Mr. Makoto so that they can find out more from him a suitable training for their son.

Although Mr. Makoto was not trained in the Kololo Method, he knew about its good report, therefore, he introduced Dr. Daniel and Mrs. Judy Fong to Kololo Tokyo. This connection was the beginning of the entry of Kololo Method into Sabah, Malaysia.

In the year 2000, Dr. Daniel and Mrs. Judy Fong together with their son Adrian and a daughter Audrey who also has Autism, and another parent, Katherine with her son, Felix Wong who has Autism; attended one month of training at Kololo Tokyo.

When they returned home to Kota Kinabalu, they started a small Kololo Centre in a rented house. Ms. Keiko of Kololo Tokyo helped them to set this up. The main local teacher was Ms. Raneh, assisted by 4 parents, Mrs. Judy Fong, Mrs. Katherine Wong, Mrs. Indarjit Kaur, and Mrs. Julia Wong. The 5 students were Adrian, Audrey, Felix, Jishen, and Alfred.

EARLY DAYS – FIRST DECADE

In 2001, Mr. Ishii Hijiri was invited by us to conduct an introduction workshop on Kololo Method during Seri Mengasih Centre's 20th anniversary "Learning and the Brain" conference held in a hotel. We were indeed very privileged that the founder of the Kololo Method came to conduct this himself together with his teachers, and, we were happy that he found the time to pay a visit to our centre after the conference was over.

Follow up to this visit by Mr. Ishii, one of Seri Mengasih teacher were sent for training in Tokyo. They were the first teachers from Seri Mengasih to be selected.

In 2003, when that first Kololo centre started by the parents in the rented house was winding down, Ms. Clarice was assigned to start a part time Kololo training programme in Seri Mengasih Centre for our students with Autism who were at that time in the different classes' teaching programmes. Mr. Hardih Madin who was at that time a class teacher assistant, was given the responsibility to bring the students with Autism to join this part time Kololo training programme in the hall.

By 2004, the Kololo/Autism Department was formally set up in the hall with a full-time training programme and all students with Autism were transferred from the different classes to this department. Ms. Clarice and Mr. Hardih were assigned to be in-charge of this department.

In 2005, for the very first time, Kololo Japan sent their trainer, Mr. Kyoji Sugawara to conduct 2-weeks staff training in Seri Mengasih Centre. Mr. Kyoji taught us a lot. He was assisted by a Japanese local resident, Mr. Oike Atsushi, with the Malay translation. We were deeply grateful to both of them as it had helped us to better understand the Kololo Method, and to continue the programme in order to improve the lives of our students with Autism.

FAST FORWARD DEVELOPMENT – SECOND DECADE

In 2010, for the very first time Ms. Saeko Kubota and Ms. Naoko Watanabe came to Seri Mengasih, together with Ms. Hiroko Taira as English translator, to conduct another 2-weeks of Kololo staff training. Even though 5 years had passed since the first training by Mr. Kyoji, they were touched in their hearts to see that Seri Mengasih had never stopped using the Method, but they also saw there was a lot we still needed to learn. In the same year, Kololo Japan invited Seri Mengasih's Principal Ms. Jenny Tham to Tokyo for a one-week study visit. This was an eye-opening visit because she was able to observe the different Kololo Programmes and facilities which catered for young children until they reach adulthood.

During the 9-year period from 2010 to 2019, there have been regular Kololo staff training; 5 times in Seri Mengasih Centre and 2 times in Tokyo. Throughout that

time, we continued to use and talk about the Method to parents, other schools' teachers and anyone interested to help people with Autism. Besides people from Sabah, we have also introduced this Method through various ways, to people from Sarawak (a state in Malaysia), Indonesia, and China.

With this long-standing professional relationship that Seri Mengasih Centre has with Kololo Japan and also being the first established organization in Malaysia to adopt the Method, we realized it was time to officially recognize this relationship. Thus, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between both organizations in 2012. However, the most significant milestone for Seri Mengasih was 7 years later in September 2019, during an official ceremony whereby both parties signed the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and at the same time also, Kololo Japan presented to Seri Mengasih Centre the Certificate of Accreditation recognizing it as Kololo Malaysia. It is indeed a great honor and we wish to thank Kololo Japan for having confidence in Seri Mengasih Centre to be its representation in Malaysia! We are also very honored that Ms. Saeko Kubota as the co-founder of the Kololo Method, had represented Kololo Japan during both the MOU and MOA signing ceremonies.

Also, during both years of the official ceremonies (2012 and 2019) Seri Mengasih was very happy to receive each time, a large number of adults with Autism from Japan with their teachers, to hold big DR activities with our students. The first group was from Mizuki and the second group was from Gonokami. We were very impressed by how well-trained these adults were, and it motivated us to also want to see our own students reach to that level of high awareness, and good behavior while on long distance international travel, and being in a new, and unfamiliar country.

Another major milestone for Seri Mengasih was in 2018 when our Autism Department Senior Officer, Mr. Hardih became the first person in Malaysia to be awarded the Level 4 GDT Chief Trainer Certificate. He has 16 years of experience and knowledge of this Method. Mr. Hardih's certification and Seri Mengasih's accreditation as Kololo Malaysia mean a lot to us as we are now officially legible to help more teachers and parents within Malaysia.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR KOLOLO MALAYSIA?

Starting January 2020, we will begin making gradual changes in Seri Mengasih Centre towards our role as Kololo Malaysia. We aim to see the Kololo Method eventually permeating into the whole centre, as we know that Kololo is not just for our students with Autism, but also for our other students of the other types of intellectual and developmental disabilities. The advantage that Seri Mengasih has is that there already exist good facilities, training programmes and services, and we

have very clear goals for our young children until they reach adulthood. Thus, using that we already have and introducing Kololo Method gradually into the whole system, the following are what we will be implementing in this early phase.

- . To conduct big DR for 2 hours once a week for all the students and teachers of the whole centre.
- . To conduct Level 1 GDT Supporter Training and Certification for all the teachers of the whole centre.
- . To transfer high functioning students with Autism into classroom teaching for Functional living skills training towards achieving community inclusion; and into work skills training settings towards achieving future employment. However, they will continue with their basic Kololo training activities for 2 hours daily.
- . To start an overnight stay programme for adults with Autism. Parents can choose short term or long term stay but they go back home during the weekends.
- . To promote the Kololo Method to other schools and centres, and to conduct Level 1 and Level 2 GDT Training and Certification for their teachers, and also any interested parents.