

ADVOCATING BARRIER-BREAKING COMPASSION

How Charlene Marie Samuel Empowers Women Through Autism Behavioral Center

As we celebrate International Women's Day this month, it's essential to recognise and celebrate women who dedicate their lives to making a profound impact on others. Charlene Marie Samuel, the Director of Autism Behavioral Center (ABC), stands as a beacon of compassion and empowerment in the field of autism services, particularly focusing on women. In this interview, Charlene shares her journey, challenges faced in the field, and the transformative work of ABC.



“ Working directly with children and seeing the positive impact in communication, behaviour, and social skills changed my life. Daniel, a little boy, changed my life!

- Charlene Marie Samuel ”

A Journey Ignited by Passion

Charlene's journey into the world of autism advocacy began during her second year of studying psychology when she decided to apply for a part-time role as an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapist. Initially drawn to clinical psychology, Charlene's life took an unexpected turn as she immersed herself in the world of ABA full-time. Her dedication to the field grew as she witnessed the positive impact of ABA on children, notably a young boy named Daniel, who transitioned from non-verbal to verbal communication and took his first steps towards education.

The lack of standardisation and regulation in autism services, particularly in Malaysia, became evident during Charlene's early years as a full-time ABA therapist. Recognising the absence of local Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and the varying application of ABA programs, Charlene identified the need for international standards in autism services. This realisation fueled her commitment to establishing the Autism Behavioral Center (ABC), a centre dedicated to maintaining high-quality ABA practices through continuous training, supervision, and adherence to evidence-based interventions.

"Poor regulation leads to poor practice of the science, and families often pay for the poor outcomes of therapy. ABC channels resources to ensure our team is continuously updated with the latest technology and findings in ABA," says Charlene.

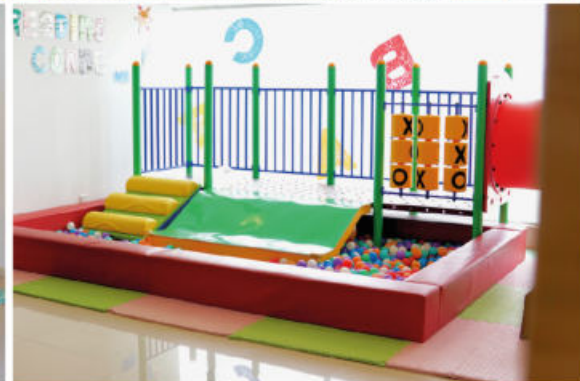


ABC's commitment to inclusivity and individualised services extends to its support for females within the autism community. Recognising that autism may manifest differently in females, ABC tailors its programs to address the unique needs of girls on the spectrum. The center places a strong focus on life skills, including self-care and independence, especially during puberty, ensuring that young girls receive the necessary support for a successful transition into womanhood.

Autism may manifest differently in females.

Charlene's advocacy for early intervention is manifested in ABC's ongoing CSR initiative, providing free autism screenings for children between 16-30 months old. This initiative aims to identify delays and risks for autism at an early age, paving the way for timely interventions that can significantly impact a child's developmental trajectory.





Empowering Female Therapists & Support for Women on the Spectrum

With a team comprised of 95% women, ABC serves as a platform for empowering female therapists. Charlene leads by example, emphasising that success knows no gender boundaries. ABC's environment fosters skill development and leadership among its female staff, showcasing how women can play pivotal roles in changing the lives of children with autism and special needs.

ABC also integrates educational and supportive initiatives for women on the autism spectrum seamlessly into its programming. With a focus on individual needs, including sex education and skills training for managing monthly menstrual cycles, ABC ensures that each child's journey is personalised and prioritised according to their unique requirements.

"Due to the resources we have, we are able to cater to each child's needs, prioritizing according to what's most important to the individual and the family," says Charlene.

Transformative Impact

In the interview, Charlene also highlights the transformative impact of ABC on both patients and therapists. Stories of children with

autism and additional health conditions, thriving in mainstream schools after receiving specialised care at ABC, demonstrate the centre's commitment to holistic development.

"We have worked with children with autism and heart conditions, coming in with no speech, and now, these kids are healthy, happy, and able to communicate, attending mainstream school," says Charlene.

The formula for success? Start early. According to Charlene, "every day is precious. Stick to evidence based interventions, and for most children on the spectrum that we see everyday, we get the best outcomes when: parents are involved and trained, children start intervention early, and intervention is intensive and consistent. This is the formula for success."

“ There is nothing a man can do that is unattainable to a woman. ABC empowers our team to impact other women around them, changing lives every day. ”
 - Charlene Marie Samuel

Charlene Marie Samuel's story is a testament to the impact one individual can make when fueled by passion and a commitment to inclusivity. As the Director of ABC, she continues to break barriers, advocate for international standards, and empower women within the autism community, creating a legacy that goes beyond diagnoses and challenges, ultimately changing lives every single day.

For more information about the Autism Behavioral Center, head on to abcautism.com.my.