



For the past 11 years, this 53-year-old has been a mother to more than 2,000 kids. They are aged between four and 29 and are of different races and backgrounds —and they come together to make football magic every Saturday afternoon.

For Carol Lim, the sweat and tears that went into founding and then running the Elias Park Football Club (EPFC) are worth it, if the children get to play their favourite sport all year round.

“It makes my day just seeing the kids enjoy themselves,” said the administrator by day.

The club was born out of Mdm Lim’s curiosity over the kind of friends her sons, then aged 10 and 12, were playing soccer with. Setting up her own youth football club seem like the perfect idea. She sourced for a training venue, equipment and coaches, all on her own.

Their first practice session

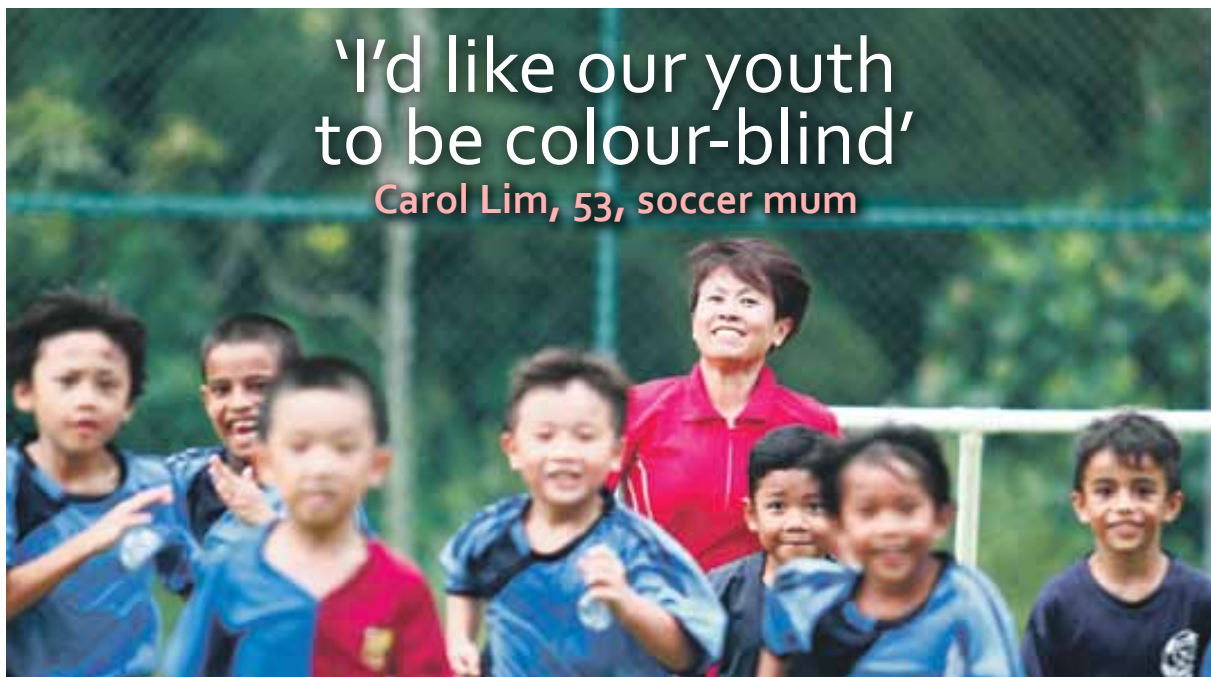
at Pasir Ris Park involved 20 kids. Today, some 140 youths — who come from as far away as Yishun — play at a permanent field next to the Pasir Ris Bus Interchange each week. They are a mix of recreational and competitive players who are guided by coaching company Little League for a nominal fee.

Players take away more than just football skills during training. Mdm Lim divides them into teams of mixed races in friendly games to encourage “colour-blindness”.

Skin colour is the last thing on the kids’ minds when they get together, she says.

“Children do not care whether you are Malay, Chinese or Indian. As long as they get to play together, that’s all that matters to them,” she said. “Some have even picked up bits of conversational Malay and Mandarin from their peers.”

In 2006, the club was pro-



‘I’d like our youth to be colour-blind’

Carol Lim, 53, soccer mum

SIMYI JIN

moted to the Football Association of Singapore’s National Football League Division 3. But good skills were never a prerequisite to be part of the fun. For boys who failed to make their school teams, EPFC was

a second chance.

“We do not emphasise on sourcing out those who can play. There isn’t any trial,” said Mdm Lim.

Apart from helping to keep youths off the streets, EPFC has

been a life-changer for some — like Mohammed Naufal, who started out as a shy 10-year-old with EPFC and went on to win the National Division “A” football tournament with Meridian Junior College. NG HUIWEN

‘1 yearn for the kampung camaraderie’

Kent Tan, 34, senior IT officer



SIMYI JIN

We may have traded in those old kampung days for modern fast-paced lifestyles, but there are those like Kent Tan, 34, who yearn for Singaporeans to rediscover the easy communal camaraderie and friendships of the old days. “Nowadays, we seem to be a little more distant from one another because of technology ... We are not as close as before,” said Mr Tan.

In his own little way, the senior IT officer is working to fulfil his dream through the Bugis Beatles Football Club, which he founded in 2000.

Set up with a group of his friends, and friends of friends, the club had its first practice sessions at the field opposite Parkview Square in the Bugis area. Today, there are over 200 members, and each Sunday two-hour training session sees about 30 players

turning up. The venues vary each week.

Members range from advertising professionals to call centre helpdesk staff; from fans of the Red Devils to Gunners supporters. “We value players who participate more often, rather than skillful players who turn up only once in a blue moon,” said Mr Tan.

Some of them have forged firm friendships, organising get-togethers outside of training, such as catching the recent World Cup matches at a bar. With a deskbound job, Mr Tan said he never would have made so many friends otherwise.

“As an IT guy, I don’t really get to meet new people that often,” he said. “Many of us have become close friends who look out for each other. Bugis Beatles Football Club is a second family to me.” JACLYNYING

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