

# DREAMS- A Community Advocacy Project to Empower the Mothers of Children with Disabilities

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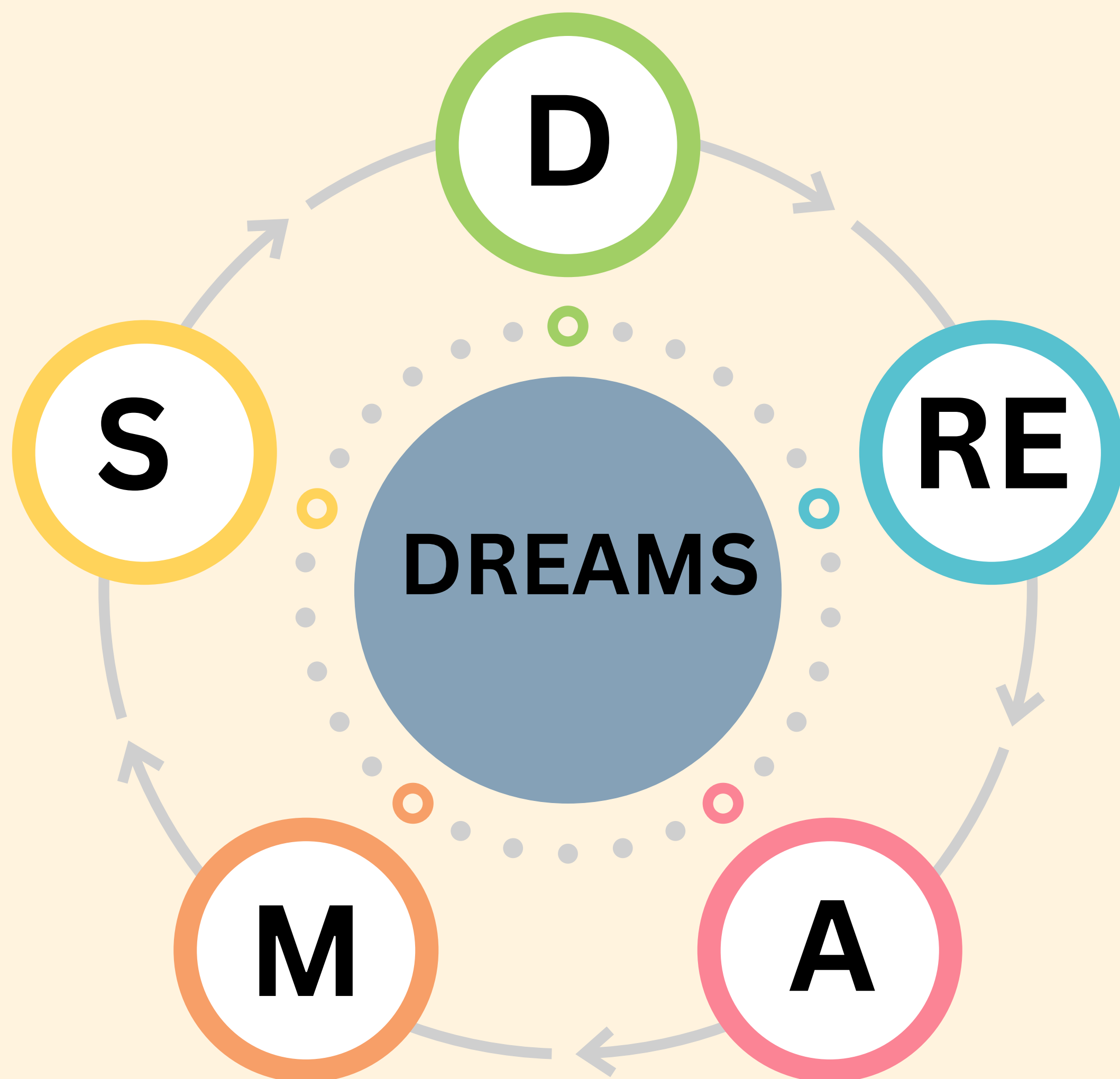
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## Background

High parental self-efficacy (PSE) has been found to have a positive parenting outcome in supporting children with disabilities (1). In Malaysia, the disabilities of children are categorized into physical disabilities, visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, speech disabilities, learning disabilities and mental disabilities. Commonly, the children are cared for by their parents, with mothers playing a significant role in their care. Mothers of children with disabilities (MoCD) often juggle multiple roles, especially in a child's psychosocial development; hence, improving their PSE is vital to help them face challenges in child care. They face a wide range of challenges, including dealing with difficult emotions, maintaining other responsibilities, managing a child's medical care, and advocating for the child. Parent training programmes are effective in increasing PSE in MoCD. We introduce DREAMS as an advocacy project to empower MoCD to navigate their roles in daily life, to raise awareness and empower MoCD towards balancing the needs of themselves, the disabled child, and all of her children.

## Project Details (1)

We aim to strengthen the PSE of MoCD by providing them with knowledge and skills in taking care of children with disabilities, to raise awareness on the importance of the mental health of the MoCD, and to provide resources on available aid and support for the mothers. During this program, participants will be educated on 5 essential components of caring for children with disabilities:



**D** It's essential to create awareness of the significance of the early detection of the conditions and accurate **DIAGNOSIS**. This will help the MoCD to seek help from the right expert as early as possible and increase the chance of improvement.

**RE** We aim to facilitate the MoCD to receive comprehensive **RIGHT EDUCATION** regarding diagnosis and personalized therapy tailored to specific types of disabilities. MoCD can obtain applicable therapy information from qualified medical practitioners and therapists.

**A** MoCD should be informed about the **AVAILABLE AIDS** provided by government authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including medical, financial, and educational assistance. The information and distribution of aid should be fair and accessible to all

**M** MoCD have a high risk of experiencing a high level of developing mental health issues in taking care of the children and managing the household. We want to enhance **MENTAL HEALTH** awareness among the MoCD and equip them with coping strategies for navigating the difficulties of their daily life.

**S** Due to exposure of high level of chronic stress (2), therefore it is crucial for them to find **SOCIAL** connection and **SUPPORT** either for themselves or their children in order to reinforce their confidence and ability to cope with the stress of parenting their children.

## Project Details (2)

This is a proposed agenda for the DREAMS as community advocacy program:

Sessions	Content	Potential speakers
Forum	Understanding the importance of early detection and accurate <b>DIAGNOSIS &amp; RIGHT EDUCATION</b> on the Diagnosis and Tailored Therapy	Neurodevelopment Pediatrician, Special Education Teacher, Occupational Therapist
Talk	Talk on <b>AVAILABLE AID &amp; Resources</b> such as available medical, financial, and educational aid	Government Agency Representative, NGOs Representative
Forum	Interactive forum & sharing from experienced mother for <b>MENTAL HEALTH</b> Support	Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Experienced Mother
Group Discussion	Building <b>SOCIAL</b> Connections and <b>SUPPORT</b> Networks	Community Support Group Representatives, NGOs Representative

- Different types of support:
- In-person support groups
  - Parent groups online or via social media
  - Peer mentoring, or one-on-one emotional support provided by another parent of a child with a disability
  - Faith communities
  - Therapy or counseling

## Expected Outcome

By implementing DREAMS, the PSE among MoCD will be enhanced through the knowledge, understanding and skills delivered throughout this program. We envision this project to significantly empower the MoCD and their families' well-being in the future. The acronym DREAMS may seem idealistic, but we want MoCD to understand that any component can come first, and it doesn't have to start with getting a diagnosis of their children. The process is flexible, each element is crucial and interconnected within the cycle.

## Conclusion

DREAMS is a program dedicated to empowering the MoCD who play a crucial role in maintaining a balance between the needs of children and their own. This advocacy program aims to support MoCD in their position as the cornerstone of the family unit, ensuring that they are equipped to effectively meet the needs of both children and themselves. By providing resources and support, DREAMS aspires to strengthen and empower MoCD, recognizing their vital contribution to family well-being.

## References

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2. Miodrag N, Hodapp RM. Chronic stress and health among parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*. 2010 Sep;23(5):407-11. doi: 10.1097/YCO.0b013e32833a8796. PMID: 20592593.