

# PUTTING KIDS FIRST

Little Lambs Wellness Center offers spa only for children

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**I**f adults get pampered, so should kids.

It's the philosophy behind the first and only spa for children, the *Little Lambs Wellness Center*.

Pediatrician and registered pharmacist Roselyn Balita came upon the big idea when her seven-year-old daughter, who was told she couldn't join her parents at the spa, asked why there was no such place for children. Balita thought, "Well, why not?"

"Kids deal with a lot of stress, *lalo na ngayon, ang daming* technology and gadgets. Sometimes, there's pressure at home, at school, even from traffic. These are some of the stress that the majority of us may not notice," she says, adding that kids often do not express their feelings the way adults do. "Once they're stressed, they lose their appetite, *baba ang* immune system *nila*. Disease and infections will come in because they're very vulnerable."

"I did a lot of research, at *nalaman ko na malaki pala ang nagagawa* ng touch with regard to the upbringing of kids," she continues. A massage does more than alleviate stress: the child's sense of security is restored, nutrient absorption is enhanced, and quality of sleep improves, which stimulates the release of hormones that support growth.



Convinced by the healing power of touch, the doctor underwent infant massage training in Singapore and became a certified instructor by the United States-based International Association of Infant Massage. When she told colleagues about her plan to put up a kids' spa, they were less than enthusiastic.

Their usual response was, "*Bakit* infant massage? We're already doing that in the nursery." In fact, premature babies held in

incubators are sometimes gently stroked to help boost their chances of survival. Balita points out: "We have the background concept on infant massage, but it was never really taken seriously—you massage the baby only when you feel like massaging the baby."

Far from being discouraged, she forged ahead with the full support of her husband, Carl E. Balita, the radio personality behind the award-winning *Radyo Negosyo* and founder of the popular nursing review center



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that bears his name. “It was never my orientation to be in the business world, after being in the hospital for so many years. Actually, majority of doctors *walang* entrepreneurial mind—*takot mag-risk*, *takot mag-set* up ng money. So in my case, it pays to know that you have a partner who will be with you all the way,” she says.

Once everything was all set, getting the business off the ground proved to be harder than she originally thought. “*Maraming* times

*gusto ko nang sumuko, kasi mahirap i-penetrates yung market, mahirap i-educate yung public. For them, massage is like luho—luxury. Pero kahit mahirap na tao, nagpa-pa-massage. If we adults nagpa-pa-pamper, the more these kids need pampering,”* she argues.

Eventually, with the media’s help, the couple’s efforts paid off. Now going on four years, *Little Lambs* has attracted a steady clientele, including child stars and kids of celebrities, like Anthony and Maricel

Pangilinan, Randy Santiago, Jamie Rivera, Charmaine Arnaiz, and Claudine and Raymart Santiago. Aside from body scrub and foot spa, *Little Lambs* offers different types of massage, such as reflexology and shiatsu, which are specifically designed for its pint-sized customers, and therapeutic massage for coughs and colds—all performed by therapists licensed by the Department of Health.

The wellness center is also home to a kiddie salon, where fussy tykes can have their haircut, and tweens and teens get primped from head to toe, with a hot-oil treatment, make-up, manicure, and pedicure. In another room across the spa, Balita holds clinic with a developmental pediatrician and a nutrition consultant. She likes to give her patients a treat, such as a massage, after their immunization.

Because the establishment provides highly personal services to a tender-age group, there is little room for error. Balita is particular about every detail of the spa-salon-clinic, from the products used to the layout of the place and its interiors.

Massage oils, soaps, and body wash are specially formulated with mild ingredients, like oatmeal and virgin coconut oil (no petroleum-based mineral oil here), and are free from preservatives, including sodium lauryl, a toxic chemical used in detergents. As you would expect, the entire place is childproof. And while the parents wait, they could get a massage or a facial at the adjacent aesthetic center, also owned by the Balitas.

Three years ago, they set up another spa-salon-clinic, the *Fun Ranch*, in Tiendesitas. Since the business was open for franchise, she has received many applications but most of them were declined. For the pediatrician, it’s not enough to put down the franchising fee of PhP300,000; the prospective owner should have a genuine passion for serving children. “If you are only after the returns, the kids won’t appreciate the care,” she says.

Now that the business has proved to be viable—the demand is there and the profits are finally rolling in—Balita has finally found vindication. And the best part about the whole entrepreneurial experience has nothing to do with the bottom line: “It’s a joy *na lang* that you’ve created a different niche in the pediatric world. So *kumita man o hindi, nagkaroon ako ng* place sa pediatric world—that makes a difference. And—*hindi siya matatapatan ng* money, *kasi madaling bayaran ang* training. But if your heart is not in it, you don’t have the passion and you’re not determined to pursue it, it’s useless.” **M**