



## Overcoming Autism to Live on Their Own

**“Autistic people are not in want of sympathy. What they yearn for are respect, acceptance and opportunities. Through employment, they can apply what they have learnt, integrate into the community and lead an independent life.”**

— Mr Godwin Cheung  
Regional Manager of Heep Hong Society

**B**enny Wan, aged 22 with autism, studied strenuously, but underperformed at public exams due to nervousness. He intended to pursue an associate's degree and affected by epileptic fits, finally steered to electrical engineering. He took 3 years to graduate from the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational

Education and is now taking a librarian course.

Owing to sensory and communication problems caused by defects in brain development, people with autism have to conquer great challenges before their performances could be up to par. Fearless in the face of difficulties, what they want the most is to stand on their own feet and support their families.

Unfortunately, their hopes are often dashed. In a survey conducted by Heep Hong Society, only 30% of autistic youth responded had been employed, mostly as a part-time worker. From time to time, there are always mismatches between their talents and the types of jobs, frustrating them further.

Patrick Wong twice worked as a part-time cleaner. Once, following a communication problem with a colleague, he was immediately displaced without a second chance.



▲ The clerical work experience reshaped Patrick's career path

◀ Acceptance in the workplace helped autistic youth find their feet in office



▼ Autistic Youth Pre-job Training Programme enhanced job-related capabilities and team spirit of trainees

## Work Placements Broaden Job Experience

In 2008, Heep Hong Society initiated the Autistic Youth Pre-job Training Programme with the sponsorship of MSIG Insurance (Hong Kong) Limited to enhance job-related capabilities of trainees. In 2011, over 20 PolyU students from the Department of Applied Social Sciences joined the programmes as mentors of their autistic peers and various companies also provided internship opportunities and guidance.

Patrick was given a placement in Pui Kiu Primary School to tidy up books and produce teaching materials; the fresh experience helped reshape his career path. Lik Chan, who did not have any job experience before, was also enlightened by his internship employer, Dookaz International Limited.

## Progress Steadily under Guidance

General Manager of Dookaz, Iris Chan, briefed her staff on the characteristics of autistic youth well before the placement commenced. She invited experienced and patient staff to be mentors. Tasks were assigned to trainees based on their strengths and daily objectives were set for them. Step by step, trainees were helped to overcome their own limitations and boosted self-confidence. At the beginning, trainees were accompanied when delivering products and going to banks. Later on, they were provided with maps to handle such tasks independently. To promote workplace harmony, trainees were teamed up with other interns and each teammate took turns to lead the team and present progress reports.

## Hard Working & Dedicated

After 1.5 months' placement, Iris summarised her observation, "I don't see much difference between autistic youth and their normal peers except that they need more patience and acceptance. They follow and execute instructions strictly,

and are not picky about tasks. So long as they find the right positions, they would dedicate themselves body and soul to the job and take great delight in it."

Over half of the employers offering placements commended autistic youth on their organisational, work and computer skills. More than 80% of them rated "Very Good" with the motivation to learn, work attitude and punctuality of autistic youth.

"Autistic youth are good at visual learning and up to finishing jobs that require strong observation power like proofreading and goods inspection. They have the patience to complete tasks that are regarded as mechanical, repetitive and tedious, like packaging and library chores. Warehouse work and word processing are also suitable for autistic people with strong memory," Regional Manager of Heep Hong Society, Godwin Cheung, remarked.

## Acceptance & Understanding

Understanding and acceptance in the workplace play a vital role. Benny and Patrick were among those who have secured full-time jobs upon completion of the training programme. Benny is now working as project assistant to handle data input and phone enquiries in a government department. His mother Mrs Wan recalled, "A colleague took the initiative to search autism information on the web and helped him find his feet in office." Patrick has taken up clerical work in a construction company. His mother said, "When colleagues get to know him and make friends with him, he is brightened up." 🌟

Check out the Autistic Youth Pre-job Training Programme at [www.heephong.org/msig](http://www.heephong.org/msig)

Parities who are interested in offering placement opportunities or hiring autistic youth, please contact Hoi Fu Centre at 2777 5588 or email to [hfc@heephong.org](mailto:hfc@heephong.org). You may also leave messages of encouragement for autistic youth at our facebook page [www.facebook.com/heephong](http://www.facebook.com/heephong).



◀ Kurtis volunteered to teach children African drums



▲ Staging performances with African drum classmates

## “It's My Turn to Give Back”

*Kurtis is a swimming coach, a black belt 2<sup>nd</sup> den in Taekwondo, an equestrian, and notably a Special Olympics champion in figure skating. His achievement in sports has not undermined his other talents in language, math and music. Such an energetic and talented youth, it is hard to believe he is autistic.*

Having won numerous medals and honours, Kurtis was a boy who could not yet walk at the age of three. Coming through all the challenges that came his way, Kurtis has been holding onto one belief, “I wish others can change their perception of autistic people. I hope they would know, given time and opportunities to learn, we can do it too.”

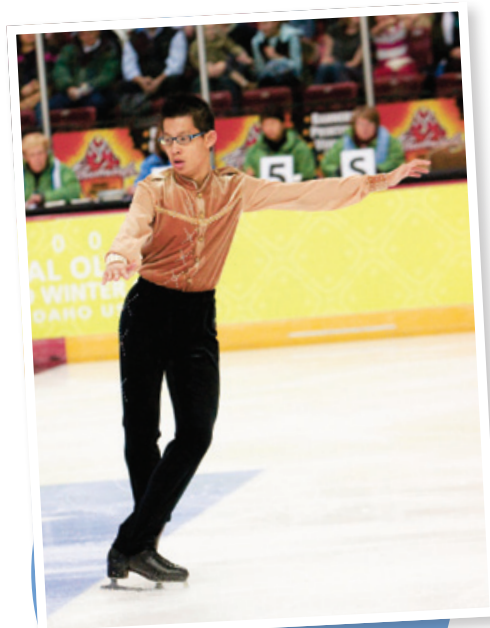
Since young, Kurtis has been active in joining a wide range of training provided by Heep Hong Society, including Taekwondo, African drums and family activities to enhance his physical and mental well being. He has not forgotten how others have helped him through his way and is determined to give back to the society, “People helped me in the past and now comes my turn to help others in need.”

With a grateful heart, Kurtis enthusiastically volunteers his services from teaching children African drums, Taekwondo, to flag selling and paying regular visits to the elderly. Kurtis does not think his service is worth mentioning.

However, his dedication has certainly made an impression on people. Christina Chan, Centre-in-Charge of Jockey Club Parents Resources Centre, recalled a visit they made to an elderly centre. She said, “We all wondered why Kurtis brought along a suitcase. He was so thoughtful to fill it with ornaments and decorations, hoping to share the joy of Christmas with the elderly.”

“Kurtis puts all his heart into helping children in need. He managed to learn Chinese typing within days by skipping meals in order to use the new skill to prepare name lists for children and volunteers. He has been bitten by children and that has not deterred him from continuing to serve them with love and care.”

So this is Kurtis, an autistic youth full of talents and kindness. 🐶



▲ Taking part in figure skating competitions



Charity listed on  
**WiseGiving**  
惠施・慈善機構

▼ Autistic children might exhibit self-stimulating behaviour



▲ In-class simulated activities enhance children's social adaptation skills

▼ Getting the message across to autistic children with the aid of visual cue



# Autism

**Over the last Christmas-New Year period, an eight-year-old autistic girl was reported to be assaulted by her tutor who was said to be unhappy with the child making strange noises.**

The news is saddening. Most people don't know much about autism. Many teachers have not received professional training to handle students with special needs. In this issue we will take a glimpse of the causes and characteristics of autism and ways to cope with it.

## Diagnostic Criteria for Autism

According to the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the fourth edition), an autistic child has obvious impairments in three domains: social interaction (e.g. lack of eye contact when talking with others), communication (e.g. failure to use gestures to help express oneself) and restricted or repetitive interests or activities (e.g. preoccupation with parts of objects).

## What Causes Autism?

It is generally believed that autism is a global developmental disorder caused by neurobiological impairment. Aside from the environmental factor, different genes may also cause various sensory and communication impairments in brain.

## Only Very Few People Have Autism?

Recent studies revealed that including people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, the autism prevalence rate is 1 in 110 births. The rising rate may due to a change of diagnostic criteria and more distinct differentiation between autism and other related cases. Besides, the male-female ratio for a diagnosis of autism is 4-5:1. Autism always surfaces before the age of three. Yet, about 20% of autistic children do not demonstrate developmental difference over the period from birth up to age 24 months. Nevertheless, the development of communication competency will then remain stagnant or even

regress. According to figures of the Department of Health reported in *South China Morning Post*, the number of children diagnosed with autism has risen sharply in recent years, up 75% from 2008 to 1,790 in 2010.

## Why Autistic Children Prefer Objects to People?

Autistic children could not enjoy an intimate relationship with their parents or communicate with others. Comparatively, manipulating objects could be satisfying to them. Some objects could even bring strong sensory stimuli, which to them are far more appealing.

## Why Autistic Children Always Get Emotional and Lose Self-control?

Autistic children always encounter difficulties in using language, facial expressions or gestures, and thus could not express themselves or adjust their emotion through interacting with others. Some are so obstinate that they could not divert their attention and get rid of negative emotions. And they thus have to learn to adjust their emotions with the help from adults.

## Can Autism be Cured?

To date, there is still no cure for autism. But a number of studies pointed out that systematic education and training, appropriate environment, together with ample opportunities to interact with others can help autistic children to overcome their obstacles.

In the next issue we will introduce the DIR (Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-Based) Model which is effective to guide teachers, therapists, and most importantly parents to learn to relate and interact with children on the autism spectrum in ways to promote their development. 🌟



▲ Blocks of various length help children grasp abstract numeric concepts

▼ Some children have mathematics learning difficulties



▲ Learning multiples of nine with fingers

## "I Hate Maths!"

**9 - 1 - 2 = 912**

***Going to Primary 2 soon, Jason has worked his best to do the above subtraction. His answer is obviously very disappointing for his mother who could not but ask herself: "Is my child really that stupid?"***

Jason is not fond of numbers, in fact, he rejects all games related to numbers. At the age of 6, he was still unable to tell his date of birth. He uses his fingers to count even there are only 4 or 5 items. He could not tell why 7 is larger than 3, and would think a "3" in a bigger font size is larger than a "7" printed in small font. Abstract numeric concepts such as symbols, sequence, the decimal system and multiplication and division are more difficult for him to master.

Poor mathematical capability can affect children's academic performance and self-confidence, and cause a higher level of anxiety. They could be easily labeled as "stupid" or "dumb". They experience a lot of inconvenience in daily lives when they could not do simple calculation in normal chores such as shopping because they could neither work out the quantity the number represents nor understand its value.

### Math Difficulty Caused by Abnormal Brain Development

Alice Keung, Educational Psychologist of Heep Hong Society, explained, "The cause of dyscalculia is usually related to abnormal brain development. When children's fundamental math capability is impaired, their memory, visual-sensory and visual-spatial skills, interpretation of word meanings, sequencing and information processing abilities are affected, making it difficult for them to handle abstract mathematical concepts such as the decimal system and fraction. Therefore, mathematics becomes a hurdle for children like Jason, no wonder he feels as if numbers are his enemies.

### Training in Creative Ways

Children with dyscalculia have normal intelligence though they do not perform as well in maths. Parents are advised to adopt a gradual approach in teaching their children to learn maths in small steps. Keung said, "Parents may use actual objects like number blocks to help their children understand maths concepts. Through pairing up games, children can learn odd and even numbers and combinations. Units and tens digits can be written in different colours for easy differentiation. Parents may also seize opportunities in everyday life to make learning maths more interesting. They could take their children to shopping and learn to sum the prices and quantity of the goods to buy. Counting concrete objects such as pocket money is also a more lively way to learn.

### Highlight Key Points & List out Steps

Children with math difficulty need more time to memorise maths concepts and skills, therefore constant practice is vital. When doing equations, a step-by-step approach is particular helpful to them. Let's take a look at this equation:  $X + 5 = 8$ . One way to work out X is to rewrite the equation as  $X = 8 - 5$ . But for children with math difficulty, the equation  $X + 5 (-5) = 8$  (-5) would be easier to understand.

Some children can manage arithmetic but have difficulty in understanding and solving maths problems. If that is the case, parents are suggested to find out whether their children have difficulty in recognising characters, and try to help them understand by asking them to read out the sentence and mark the key points.

Heep Hong Society provides maths training programmes for children with math difficulty and their parents. For details, please visit our website at [www.heephong.org](http://www.heephong.org).

## Sponsorship & Fundraising Events



◀ Matching grants were sought from the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged to conduct seven new projects



▲ Clifford Chance LLP donated iPads to facilitate children training

▼ "C" Hamper charity raffle raised funds for Heep Hong Society



## Your Every LIKE Brings a Special Gift

**G**ive Heep Hong a LIKE in facebook ([www.facebook.com/heephong](http://www.facebook.com/heephong)) to express your concern for children with developmental problems and support of social integration. For every new "Like" on Heep Hong's facebook page, RBS will donate a remote control helicopter, up to 600, for giving to families under the care of Heep Hong.



▼ Your "Like" brings an RC helicopter to children with special needs at Heep Hong

Playing helicopters, under parental guidance, is more than fun. Children will benefit from enhanced eye-hand coordination and the family strengthened parent-child relationship. Invite your friends and families to support us now. The more "Like" we receive, the more children will receive the gifts.

### Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged has accepted all 7 funding proposals submitted by Heep Hong Society and approved matching grants amounting to over \$1.6 million. Our thanks go to 47 corporate partners for bringing these programmes to reality, benefiting special needs children and their families.

If you would like to know more about how corporate donations can be matched with the Fund, please contact Corporate Development Department at 3618 6322.

### Salute to Carers

Hong Kong Disneyland donated over 6,500 tickets to children of Heep Hong and their carers as a token of appreciation to their effort in taking care of children with special needs.

### iPads for Children

Clifford Chance LLP donated 10 iPads for use in centres to enhance the training effectiveness and learning experience of children with special needs.

### Support from Long-standing Partners

Island Shangri-La Hong Kong and Traders Hotel organised a charity raffle in partnership with Mercedes-Benz Hong Kong during Christmas last year to benefit children with special needs and their families.

The specialty store of organic baby products, natures purest, launched a Mini- Elephant Toy Charity Sale last Christmas with all proceeds to be donated to Heep Hong in support of our service for children with special needs and their families.



▼ natures purest launched a mini-elephant toy charity sale for Heep Hong children

### Fairwood Donation Collection

Fairwood Fast Food placed Heep Hong donation boxes in all its branches from 16 January to 24 February. Funds collected will go to the Children Training Fund for providing support for children in the government waiting list of special needs services.

### New Way of Donating to Heep Hong

Donations can now be made to Heep Hong by PPS. Simply register with the PPS for an account and donations can be made online or by phone.

Bill type	Donation Code	Bill number (11 digits)
Gneral Donations (Parents' Resources Centre)	188	188 + donor's phone number (8 digits)
Children Training Fund	288	288 + donor's phone number (8 digits)

For any donation of HK\$100 or above, an official receipt will be issued for tax deduction purpose. Details are available at Heep Hong website. 📄



◀ Lily Yuen, Director of Diamond Design Limited, visited Heep Hong centre

▶ Donation of M6 machine enabled children to benefit from endermotherapy



## Caring for the Needy – Diamond Design Limited

**“We feel honoured to be able to contribute to the welfare of children and families in need through the professional care of Heep Hong Society.”**

— Ms Lily Yuen  
Director of Diamond Design Limited

**D**iamond Design and Heep Hong's partnership dated back to 2007 when the company donated rock climbing walls to Mary Wong Centre, Chun Shek Centre and Leung King Centre for training children with developmental delay, motor coordination problem and autistic features. Over the past five years, the company has contributed to the setting up of new training facilities and introduction of new treatment method, sharing the Society's mission of helping children achieve their best in a healthy and happy environment.

“It's great to know that the facility helps enhance children's motivation in training,” Lily expressed during her visit to one of the centres.



▶ Installation of rock climbing walls helped children improve their physical fitness

### Sponsoring New Treatment Method

Once in a centre visit Lily saw the pain a child went through in physiotherapy treatment. It inspired her that endermotherapy, a painless treatment widely used in beauty industry, could be used in treating children with developmental disabilities. Without hesitation she donated a unit of the professional equipment LPG Cellu M6 Keymodule-I to Heep Hong for piloting the treatment in 2008.

The subsequent research jointly conducted by Heep Hong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University revealed that endermotherapy has the same treatment effect as traditional therapeutic method. In addition, children were found to have a higher acceptance level towards treatment with the pain level reduced.

Since then, endermotherapy has been extended to more Heep Hong centres. This innovative treatment would not have been possible without Lily's genuine concern and empathy for children in need. “A simple thank you from a parent is the most rewarding part of all,” Lily said.

### Visiting Children at Centres

Lily visited our children from time to time to know about their needs. In a recent visit to Mary Wong Centre she and her colleagues celebrated Christmas with the centre children and their parents. 🎄

### Special thanks go to the following donors \*

ACCA Charitable Foundation Limited  
Bull Capital Partners (Hong Kong) Limited  
Diamond Design Limited  
The Fung Yuet Ngor Charitable Foundation  
Mrs Lucina Ho  
The Hong Kong Golf Club Charitable Foundation Limited  
The Incorporated Trustee of the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hongkong, Canton and Macao  
Island Shangri-La, Hong Kong  
林祺敏先生  
Mr Lin Kwok Keung  
Lionrock International Limited  
Mr Lo Chun Hay, Brian  
Mr Andrew P.B. MacGeoch  
Ms Mui Ha Yee  
Pfizer Nutrition  
Remad Foundation Limited  
Rotary Club of City Northwest HK  
Rotary Club of The Peak  
Rotary Club of Wanchai  
Sunnyside Club Limited  
Dah Chong Hong Holdings Limited  
United We Stand Charitable Foundation  
Ms Esther Wong Ka Wai

\* which made donations of HK\$10,000 or above to Heep Hong between August 2011 and January 2012



▲ Latest publications on professional parenting skills



▲ Heep Hong Society signed a programme development collaboration agreement with the Open University of Hong Kong.



▲ Mr Lau Ming-wai (centre) of the Joseph Lau Luen-hung Charitable Trust made a HK\$5 million donation to Heep Hong in support of its two academic programmes with the Open University of Hong Kong

## Partnership with Open University

To equip child care workers with professional knowledge and skills in teaching children with special educational needs, Heep Hong Society has collaborated with the Open University of Hong Kong to offer two academic programmes in 2012. The programmes comprise of four core courses developed by experienced psychologists and therapists of Heep Hong with dual emphasis on theory and practice.

The courses are taught by distance learning with Chinese as the medium of instruction. They are also suitable for parents or interested individuals who wish to enrich their knowledge and gain a better understanding of the developmental disorders prevailing in pre-school aged children.

The society is glad to offer scholarship awards sponsored by The Joseph Lau Luen-hung Charitable Trust and practical training opportunities for in-service child workers in the industry; as well as study awards for parent members of the Society.

### News Series of Professional Training and Parent Education Programme

A new series of the Professional Training and Parent Education Programme is now open for enrolment. Among the new training programmes are the DIR Floortime training workshop for teachers and seminars on supporting children with learning difficulties, parent-child communication, vocabulary learning and children behavioral management.

### Services for Children Supported by Community Care Fund

The Community Care Fund introduced the "Training Subsidy for Children who are on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services", to provide pre-school children from low-income families and in need of rehabilitation services with a monthly subsidy of \$2,500 for 12 months. Eligible children will be able to use the subsidy to obtain no less than 3 hours' training/therapy services when waiting for rehabilitation service. Parents may contact any Heep Hong centres or the Social Welfare Department for more information.

### Training in Greater China

To support the rehabilitation services for children with special needs in Greater China, a series of professional training

courses and seminars has been scheduled to be held in Taiwan, Macau and the Mainland in 2012. Practicum opportunities are also available at Heep Hong's centres in Hong Kong. In response to the state policy on training social workers, Heep Hong has tailored courses for social workers in the child rehabilitation sector of the Mainland to enhance their professional levels.

### New Publications

*Enjoying Floortime: Social Interaction Training Package* is written by Heep Hong's professional team. It introduces DIR/ Floortime Model, which helps teachers, therapists, social workers and parents to interact with children on the autism spectrum, to promote their development. The manual includes more than 60 activities for classroom and home training while the DVD contains video clippings illustrating how the DIR/ Floortime Model is applied. This package is sponsored by Bull Capital Partners.

*The Finger Fun Activity Guide – 134 Fine Motor Exercises for Children*, based on the clinical experience of the Occupational Therapist Team, covers the fine motor development objectives of children aged up to six, and is compiled of 134 intriguing parent-child activities, which enable children polish their fine motor skills with the aid of commonly used domestic resources, and save parents extra expense for expensive toys.

*The Booklet on Easy Stretching* marshals the clinical experience of the Physiotherapist Team and is dedicated to parents of children with special needs for their training at home. The booklet expounds on causes of soft tissue tightness, and demonstrates the skills of stretching children's neck, body, upper extremities and lower extremities. Parents are advised to follow the guidelines mentioned in the booklet in doing stretching for their children. The booklet was sponsored by the Partnership Fund for The Disadvantaged.

*Raising Your Child: A Parent Guide to Early Childhood Development* is a comprehensive parenting guide for parents of ethnic minority families in the hope of enhancing their understanding of child developmental stages so that early intervention could be arranged when necessary. Monthly donors who wish to receive a complimentary copy of the book can send an email with their name, contact number, and donor number to [cdd@heephong.org](mailto:cdd@heephong.org). Copies are limited and available on a first come first served basis. 📧

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