



## Nurturing Professionals in Pre-school Special Education

*In August this year, rehabilitation professionals from the Mainland visited Heep Hong Society for an internship programme on autistic children training. Ms Fan, a pre-school teacher from Yunnan, was one of the participants. She said, 'The programme helps me understand more about the characteristics and causes of the behaviours of autistic children, and respect their individual differences. Parent education and integrated education would also be my top priorities after going back to Yunnan.'*

According to Ms Fan, there is a serious lack of special child care professionals in the Mainland, 'There are only 5 medical doctors in Yunnan who can make diagnosis for autistic children'. Many of the pre-school special education teachers had no professional training previously and have only little on-the-job training, which often makes them feel incompetent to do the job. A lack of understanding about special education has also caused a high manpower turnover in the industry.

There is nevertheless an increasing demand for special education in the Mainland as Ms Fan shared with us her own experience. 'A lot of parents need to give up their jobs and travel from XinJiang and the North Eastern part of China to places like Guangzhou for their children to receive training. There was once a mother who carried her twins all the way from Guangxi but only had enough money for one child to get trained. There are also parents who sought for alternative therapies hoping to help their autistic children but ended up delaying their treatment.'

Hong Kong is no exception when it comes to a high turnover rate in special education professionals. With an increase in children with dyslexia, ADHD and autism, there comes a greater demand for special education professionals. There are over 6,000 children with special needs receiving subvented rehabilitation services and 5,000 more in the queue for the services. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, there will be at least 200 pre-school teachers in need of professional training in special child care in the next three years. Currently, there are over 10,000 pre-school teachers and about 1,000 local kindergartens; many of them admit children with special needs. Special education training would equip them with the skills of taking care of children with special needs in school.



▲ Practicum opportunities were awarded to students from the Mainland

▼ Ms Lam is employed by a special child care centre after completing the first module



▲ Taking the course together, Mr and Mrs Tse have more common topics to share

## Developing Courses with University

To enhance the professional standards, Heep Hong Society and the Open University jointly offer two programmes, namely the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (Special Educational Needs), and the Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education (Special Educational Needs), from 2012. The programmes comprise four core courses developed by experienced psychologists and therapists of Heep Hong Society. They are delivered by distance learning with Chinese as the medium of instruction. Courses are also suitable for parents who wish to gain a better understanding of the developmental disorders prevailing in pre-school aged children.

Both programmes are recognised by the Social Welfare Department as the equivalent to the One-year In-service Course in Special Child Care Work. The Bachelor's degree programme is included as a recognised training course of both the Social Welfare Department's Training Scheme for Special Child Care Workers and Education Bureau's Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme. Graduates of the degree programme will be considered as meeting the Education Bureau's academic entry qualification for kindergarten principals.

## Applying knowledge to Pre-school Teaching

Ms Lam has been a pre-school teacher for more than 10 years and was among the first group of students taking the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (Special Educational Needs). The flexibility of studying part time allows Ms Lam to take care of her family and work.

Ms Lam finds the first two modules, 'Early Assessment and Intervention' and 'Supporting Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders', very useful and applicable to mildly disabled preschoolers in an ordinary kindergarten under the Integrated Programmes. After completing the first module in August, Ms Lam is successfully employed by a special child care centre and put what she has learned in practice.

## Enhancing Parenting Skills

Apart from pre-school teachers, parents of children with special needs are also among those taking the course. To help her autistic son, Mrs Lee has attended different courses and seminars on oral motor, DIR, social skills, etc. 'I tried to dismantle the difficulties encountered by my son, but overlooked that the problems are in fact interlinked. I am glad that I have taken this particular course, because it helped me understand about autism and different aspects of it.'

Mr and Mrs Tse's daughter was a past student of Heep Hong and the couple took the course together. Mr Tse has developed more patience towards the child and learned how to appreciate her strengths. He added, 'I have learnt to apply the knowledge to help my daughter and teach my elder daughter to accept and understand her autistic sister, hopefully to improve their relationships.' Mrs Tse's gain from the course was out of her expectations, 'Some customers and friends came to me for child rearing tips, and I shared with them things I learned from the course, e.g. TEACCH. Studying with my husband had also improved our relationships and communication.'

## Distance Learning by Mainland Students

Not only local students can benefit from the course, Mainland students are also attracted to taking the distant-learning course. Ms Tang was one of them, 'There are less learning resources in the Mainland, most of the resources available are theory-based and there are little demonstration and learning strategies for us to follow. The 2 modules I've taken were very practical. I would like to hold seminars for parents when I get back to Hangzhou to help them develop home training strategies for their children.'

To provide a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge to Mainland students, Heep Hong organised a practicum for them to visit our Centres and learn through observation. 'The course has helped me apprehend the properties of autism and the reasons behind children's behaviours. With a comprehensive understanding of the children's abilities, I can adjust training strategies according to individual needs. I wish to help parents in adjusting their expectations for their children, and promote integrated education.' said Ms Fan.

## Scholarships & Practicum Opportunities Available

Under the sponsorship from The Joseph Lau Luen Hung Charitable Trust, Heep Hong Society provides scholarship awards, practicum opportunities and rewards to encourage parents and pre-school teachers to enhance their knowledge in special education.

The practicum opportunities available for Mainland students were sponsored by different donors. For example, Ms Fan and three other Mainland students received a sponsorship of 80% of the course fee from Mrs Jessica Hung. Ms Fan being one of the beneficiaries is grateful for the opportunity and promised to teach parents and fellow colleagues what she learned from the course, hoping to bring benefit to special education in the Mainland. 🇭🇰



▼ Betty attended the 22<sup>nd</sup> RI World Congress in Korea



▲ She had a great day with centre children in Ocean Park



▲ She went on an exchange to Japan with people with special needs

# Living Life to the Fullest

*The first time I met her, I was struck by the pride and dignity she carried herself with. After years of collaboration, I have come to see another side of her: a genuine and caring person who does small things with great love. She is Betty Wong, the centre-in-charge of Wanchai Centre, to whom many parents have been attracted by fame.*

After graduation from the Baptist University in 1977, she has taken two jobs only, both are in the rehabilitation sector. This is beyond the imagination of the post-80s generation. 'My first job was being a social worker in a special school admitting children aged between 6 and 16. Most children there had serious emotional and behavioural problems. This made me realise that early intervention is of greater importance than late rectification. Moreover, I was amazed by the fact that among the 200 odd students there, only those who graduated from Heep Hong Society were able to put chairs under the tables,' she said. Driven by enthusiasm and curiosity, Betty assumed the role of centre-in-charge of Wanchai Centre in 1992, thus embarking on her 20-year journey with Heep Hong Society.

During her tenure, Betty has worked wonders, including the launch of learning foundation courses in the format of playgroups to enhance children's concentration and abilities to follow commands; the application of brain gym to attention training; the provision of interest classes and integrated activities on weekends; the formation of Heep Hong Parents Association in 2001, followed by the establishment of the Junior Gateway Clubs, the first of its kind for children aged 16 or below in Hong Kong, in the year after and its extension to all Special Child Care Centres of the Society. Undeniably, Betty has dedicated herself body and soul to the Society's mission. At the Society's first charity walk with 4,000 participants in 2002, she stood the sharp pain caused by intervertebral disk herniation to offer help. After the event, she still worked on the proposal for the Junior Gateway Clubs at home with colleagues at the night before she underwent a surgery.

To Betty, a centre-in-charge, as opposed to being merely a manager, is a leader, who sets the team's sight on the common vision, and is a shepherd, who provides a warm and safe growing environment for children, their parents and colleagues at the Centre.

To that end, Betty has kept upgrading herself. On top of a bachelor degree and a master's degree in social work, she is taking the special education programme jointly organised by the Open University of Hong Kong and the Society. She has also been qualified as a brain gym instructor and an NLP practitioner, and has a dazzling arrange of interest in religion, philosophy, painting, sports, photography, drama and the like. All in all, she enjoyed learning anything that might be of help to children with special needs and their parents.

'The diagnosis of developmental problems of their child has dealt a heavy blow to many parents, and bringing up a child with special needs could be a life-long challenge. While parents relentlessly arrange for training for their children, they give little heed to their own mental health. Therefore, supporting parents against stress is very important,' she said. In the face of problems, apart from counseling skills usually adopted by social workers, Betty also shares with parents her personal experience and knowledge acquired through self-study of religion and philosophy to help them weather the storm. 'Throughout these years, what delighted me was not only the progress the children had made, but also parents' genuine acceptance of their child with special needs,' she said with tears welling up in her eyes.

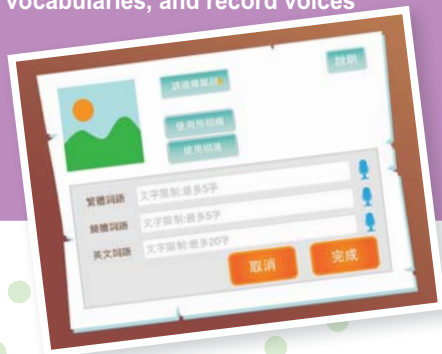
Anyone who knows Betty would not refute that she cares selflessly about the well-being of children with special needs and their parents. Every long vacation was spent on local or overseas activities related to rehabilitation or parent support, such as joining gathering of graduates and children's birthday celebrations. 'To me, helping parents build their support networks and live their life to the fullest is my greatest reward,' she remarked.



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▼ Users can add new pictures and vocabularies, and record voices



► Users can re-arrange the presentation order of categories and pictures to meet their own needs



▲ There are many language options: Traditional Chinese/ Simplified Chinese (text) and Cantonese/ Mandarin (voice)

## Communication Gap of Children with Autism Bridged by 'LetSTalk' Application

*Stephen Hawking, the world renowned scientist, cannot move or speak but only rely on a speech synthesiser to communicate with others. The equipment used by Hawking is an Augmentative and Alternative Communication device, which allows him to express his message and achieve a two-way communication.*

For years, Heep Hong has been utilising Augmentative & Alternative Communication training for children with speech and language difficulties, cerebral palsy and especially autism. Tony Leung, Speech Therapist Supervisor of Heep Hong Society, explains, 'Most autistic children have weak communication intent, which is a great obstacle to their language development. They have difficulties in expressing their needs and feelings through words and these undermine their social and learning abilities. Because of the inability to express their thoughts, autistic children will further retreat from communicating with others. In fact, autistic children, just like other children, have the needs to communicate. Although they could not use verbal language effectively, we can help them to express themselves by using augmentative and alternative communication tools. This will enhance their quality of life and create a more inclusive society.'

### Launch of 'LetSTalk' Application

Communication book is one of the most common augmentative and alternative communication tools. It is a collage of photos and word cards for children to flip through and point out what they want to express. However, due to its bulky appearance and low portability, its usage is limited. In view of this constraint and also the current popularity of mobile devices, Heep Hong Society will launch its first augmentative and alternative communication app 'LetSTalk' on the iPad platform.

'LetSTalk' is an advanced version of the traditional communication book. It has 350 pictures of common vocabularies, sentence building function, customisable pictures and vocabularies, and automatic voice output, etc. With the immediate and reinforcing audio-visual effect, the app is especially suitable for autistic children as they can communicate with others anytime and anywhere.

### Setting Training Goals by Speech Therapists

Tony emphasised that 'LetSTalk' is an electronic training tool but not any kind of computer games. Therefore appropriate training goals and systematic training approach set by speech therapist are necessary for children to learn to communicate with others through the app.

The app has been tried out with children in the Society's Special Child Care Centres during its development. Parents were impressed by its user-friendly interface, extensive stock of pictures and also its sentence building function, which facilitated their children to express their needs and emotions. This, in turns, helped to build up their confidence & intention to communicate.

'LetSTalk' will be launched at the end of this year for parents to download. For more information, please visit [www.heephong.org](http://www.heephong.org).



◀ There is a collection of 350 pictures of commonly used vocabulary organised under 17 categories

▼ Back muscle exercise to straighten up a child's trunk during cycling



► Assessment and training are essential to improve the situation as developmental coordination disorder does not disappear through time



▼ Step aerobics exercise is able to assess children motor coordination skills



## Developmental Coordination Disorder

*Normally, children aged 5 should be able to ride a bike with two training wheels. When parents notice that their child aged 6 or above fails to do this, and, at the same time, has difficulty in performing tasks that require motor skills or eye-hand coordination, such as rope skipping, swimming and ball catching, suffering frequent falls as a result of clumsiness, the child may have developmental coordination disorder. According to the Department of Health in Hong Kong, about 5-8% of local children suffer from developmental coordination disorder. Males and children born preterm are more likely to be diagnosed.*

‘Riding a bike might seem easy, but in fact it requires sound coordination skills, motor planning and balancing techniques,’ said Winnie Hui, Physiotherapist of Heep Hong Society. ‘The disorder can lead to academic, self-care and psychological problems for children.’ Academically, these children are slow at copying and writing; their handwriting is messy and untidy. In terms of self-care, they have difficulty in buttoning up or tying shoelaces, and are prone to overturning food plates. Psychologically, they tend to be passive, low in self-esteem and lack self-confidence.

### Diagnosis and Treatment

It is not easy for parents to spot the signs of children with this disorder as these children have normal intelligence and when the signs become apparent at the school age, they are sometimes misunderstood as being lazy. Winnie further explained, ‘Developmental coordination disorder will not disappear through time. Parents need to find out the cause through assessment and arrange for appropriate

training, otherwise it would affect the children in the long run.’ Physiotherapy can be used in training children’s daily functioning. Taking cycling as an example, physiotherapists will make use of different assessment tools to determine the reason behind the cycling incapability. The child may have a weak back and abdomen muscles that affect his sitting posture, or he may have weak shoulder stability that affect his control of the steering wheel; poor eye-hand coordination and eye-leg coordination may also lead to a poor control.

### Improving Physical Fitness & Motor Coordination

The developmental coordination assessment & consultation services offered by Heep Hong Society’s Supportive Learning Project are conducted by experienced physiotherapists. Based on the assessment results, therapists will come up with different training methods to improve children’s movement and coordination abilities. Research shows that with appropriate training, children exhibit remarkable improvement in both home and school performances. 🏠

► Holding weight lifting tools with two hands trains up children’s shoulder stability





## Sponsorship & Fundraising Events



◀ Mr Kenneth J. Reid, CEO of MSIG, sponsored new training facilities at Jessie and Thomas Tam Centre in Tai Po

▶ Island Shangri-la Hong Kong, Traders Hotel and Audi Hong Kong (Premium Motors Limited) organised a Christmas raffle event to support Heep Hong's children with special needs



▼ Zonta Club NT sponsored the Children Training Resource Corner at Ma On Shan Centre



# Christmas Fundraising Initiatives

Island Shangri-La, Hong Kong and Traders Hotel, Hong Kong, have organised a charity raffle in partnership with Audi Hong Kong (Premium Motors Limited) to raise funds for Heep Hong Society. The Grand Prize is an Audi TT Coupé 1.8 TFSI filled with an assortment of premium festive goodies. In the meantime, the specialty store of organic baby products, natures purest, also launched a Christmas socks charity sale with all proceeds going to the Society.

### New Training Facilities at Centres

New facilities have been installed in our centres to enhance training services for children with special needs. The Adventure Land and Sensory Integration Room of Jessie and Thomas Tam Centre, sponsored by Mr Kenneth J. Reid, Chief Executive Officer of MSIG, and Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, have been in use since last October. The Children Training Resource Corner at Ma On Shan Centre, sponsored by the Zonta Club of the New Territories, also serves to help children wait-listed for pre-school special education. To strengthen in-class interaction and children's learning motivation, the Society has installed new digital teaching facilities, including interactive whiteboards sponsored by Methanex and Chen Yang Foo Oi Foundation.

### Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

With the support of 18 business corporations, the projects submitted by Heep Hong Society to the 7<sup>th</sup> Round of the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged were successfully granted. The projects include music therapy, social adaptation training, software and application development for parents and caregivers, support for children waiting for special education and South East Asian families, just to name a few. The Society would like to take this opportunity to thank all corporate partners for their help in providing high quality training and services to children with special needs. The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged 8<sup>th</sup> Round is now open for application. Corporations are welcome to contact us to find out how government grants could match with your donation for social welfare projects. (Enquiries: Corporate Development Department 3618 6322).

### Donation Collection

Donation boxes of the Society are now placed at the service counters of the following shopping malls: New Town Plaza Phase III, Metroplaza, Tsuen Wan Plaza, Grand Century Plaza, The ONE, Silvercord and Windsor House. Funds collected will go to the Children Training Fund of Heep Hong for providing support for children who are on waiting list for pre-school special education. Corporations are welcome to support the charitable cause by placing donation boxes on sites. For more information, please contact us at 3618 6326.

### Monthly Donation Programme

Since its establishment in 2005, the funds raised from our Monthly Donation Programme have been used to benefit special needs children and their families of our Parents Resource Centres. Our fundraising team members are staff members of Heep Hong Society who visit different areas of the city to introduce the Society to the local community and invite potential donors to support our cause. They wear yellow T-shirts with Heep Hong logo and carry staff badges for identification under all circumstances. In October 2012, the fundraising team gave the greeting cards collected from supporters to children at the Tung Chung Centre to show love and care. 🧡



◀ Fundraising team members invited potential donors to support the monthly donation programme and passed all the greeting cards from supporters to our children



► Grand Hyatt Hong Kong supported the Great Chefs of Hong Kong



▲ Grand Hyatt's management team visited our Centres to show care

▼ Grand Hyatt sponsored a one-year social adaptation training programme



## Action out of Love – Grand Hyatt Hong Kong

*Grand Hyatt Hong Kong has been supporting the Great Chefs of Hong Kong over the past 11 years. The provision of venue at their hotel, in collaboration with generous help from dozens of other luxury hotels, restaurants, and wine-sellers, has given quality gourmet experience to over 1,000 food and beverage lovers annually with part of the proceeds going to Parents Resource Centres of Heep Hong Society in support of their services.*

Of course, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong's support to Heep Hong Society is far more than that. Their staff members at various levels provided voluntary services and paid visits to children with special needs at our centres.

### Beautifying Centres

Staff volunteers of Grand Hyatt Hong Kong helped furnish the game room of Fan Ling Parents Resource Centre. 'School is a place for children. We hope that they can learn in a safe and happy environment. Our staff members from the Engineering Department are very happy to take part in beautifying the centre and bringing joy to the children,' said Mr Gordon Fuller, General Manager of Grand Hyatt Hong Kong.

### Social Adaptation Activities

In 2011, the Grand Hyatt applied for Hyatt Community's National Philanthropic Trust and was successfully granted sponsorship to support the social adaptation training and activities at Heep Hong centres for one year. Over 300 children with special needs benefited from the initiative.

In a movie-watching activity under the project, about 230 children with autism and other special needs were accompanied by parents and teachers to a cinema in Tseung Kwan O. Through effective training, they were able

to overcome the fear of darkness and loud noises, and had a delightful time watching movie inside the cinema.

Grand Hyatt Hong Kong also sponsored a "Yum Cha" activity for Heep Hong children at the centres, through which children with special needs were able to learn table manners while enjoying delicious dim sum at the Hotel.

In March, their staff volunteers also participated in a centre's Sports Day, whereby children with special needs strengthened their physical fitness through educational games. 🏃‍♂️

#### Special thanks go to the following donors \* (in random order)

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\*which made donations of HK\$10,000 or above to Heep Hong Society between June and October 2012

For online donation, please go to [www.heephong.org/donation](http://www.heephong.org/donation)



▲ Grand Hyatt used Heep Hong children's artworks on their greeting cards





▲ Physical Education Programme supports children with autism in mainstream school

▼ Family support projects to help parents and children overcome hurdles in life



▲ A 3-year pilot scheme commissioned by Education Bureau to support children with autism in mainstream schools

# Introducing 'SCERTS Model' to Autistic Children

Last year, Heep Hong Society sent its professional team to the United Kingdom to learn and observe the application of the SCERTS Model, and set up a multidisciplinary working group composed of psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and child care workers. The Model is now piloted in 4 special child care centres to help autistic children improve their social communication and emotional regulation skills. It will be extended to other centres in the future to benefit more children with special needs.

## Strengthening Support for Autistic Children in Mainstream Schools

The Society was commissioned by the Education Bureau to launch a 3-year pilot project, starting from September 2012, to provide structured small-group training services and support for students with autism in ordinary primary and secondary schools.

The 'Star Programme' sponsored by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust is at its second year of operation with an extension of services to more schools and collaboration with Parents Resource Centres to provide community support to autistic children and parents in mainstream schools. Service hotline: 3618 6328.

## Physical Education Programme

A physical education programme was launched by Heep Hong's physiotherapy team to help K3-P3 autistic children in mainstream schools improve their social and physical skills. Sponsored by the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, the programme comprises 3 phases consisting of 11 sessions each at HK\$120. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases will be carried out between February and August 2013, and are now open for enrollment.

## Family Support Project Enters the Final Round of 2012 Asian Award for Advancing Family Well-being

Several large-scale family support programmes were launched by Heep Hong Society to promote positive attitudes. One of the initiatives titled 'Promoting Positive Life Attitudes among Families with Special Needs

Children', which was sponsored by Love Ideas Love HK and helped over 200 families with special needs children, has outperformed dozens of rivals from Hong Kong, the Mainland, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Korea in the first two rounds of competition, and clinched a place in the final to be held during the 3<sup>rd</sup> CIFA Regional Symposium in Singapore on 12 December 2012.

To benefit more families, the Society is sponsored by Eu Yan Sang Charitable Foundation to launch a family support programme from September 2012. Under the programme, a series of parent workshops, sharing sessions and family activities led by psychologists will be delivered to about 2,000 families with special needs children.

## Special Education Scholarships Open for Application

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 — 'Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education (Special Educational Needs)' and 'Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (Special Educational Needs)' - which are recognised by the Social Welfare Department and Education Bureau. Sponsored by the Joseph Lau Luen-hung Charitable Trust, dozens of scholarships were awarded last year to local early childhood teachers and parents who studied the 4 core courses developed by Heep Hong professionals. Teachers and parents who are interested in studying two of the core courses, namely 'Early Assessment and Intervention' and 'Teaching Pre-school Children at Risk of Dyslexia', which will be offered in April 2013, are welcome to apply for the scholarship awards. Application form can be downloaded at <http://www.heephong.org/webprod/cht/collaboration-with-open-university>

## New Service Site for Supportive Learning Project

The Jordan Child Health & Development Centre is newly established to provide assessment and training services by psychologists and speech therapists of Supportive Learning Project to children in need. Enquiry hotline: 2499 8166. ☎

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