



**BRIDGING NEEDY  
 CHILDREN, SCHOOLS,  
 PARENTS AND  
 THE COMMUNITY**

Initiated and funded by:



The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

Host Institution:



Faculty of  
**Social Sciences**  
 The University of Hong Kong  
 香港大學社會科學學院

社  
 科  
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 Societist

Partners:



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東華三院  
 Tung Wah Group of Hospitals



教育局  
 Education Bureau



In view of the increasing number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Hong Kong's mainstream primary and secondary schools, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust initiated the "JC A-Connect: Jockey Club Autism Support Network" (JC A-Connect) in 2015. The first of its kind in the city, the programme provides holistic support for the increasing number of students with ASD in mainstream primary and secondary schools and their parents. The programme offers school-based support for students and provides support to needy families and caregivers over the past six years. The project is dedicated to strengthen the expertise development of teachers and service providers for the sustainable development of ASD support services. Public education programmes are organised with the aim to raise public awareness and understanding about ASD.

Since the launch of this programme, the School Support Team has been actively promoting the non-governmental organisation (NGO)–school collaboration model in mainstream schools, which provides group training for the students with ASD to improve skills in areas like social communication, emotional regulation and learning strategies, and builds the capacity of key stakeholders. To conclude the positive influence of school-based strategies, the team will share their findings over the years and the lessons the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has taught us.

To mitigate parenting needs for children with developmental delays or ASD in Hong Kong, the Family Support Team had introduced and adapted the World Health Organisation's Caregiver Skills Training (WHO-CST) programme in Hong Kong. This newsletter covers the story of success in the implementation of WHO-CST in Hong Kong, the local and international impacts and the way forward for this remarkable initiative.

To celebrate the concerted efforts of JC A-Connect, our NGO partners will share the inspiring stories of how students with ASD and their caregivers are benefitted from the services provided by this programme. We are proud to see the children's advancement in adapting to school lives, family relationships and personal growth.

Public education has always been a core component of the programme and we seize every opportunity to promote social inclusiveness and raise public awareness and understanding of ASD amidst the global pandemic. Various virtual events including workshops, international conference and webinars are organised to keep the community engaged and inspired.

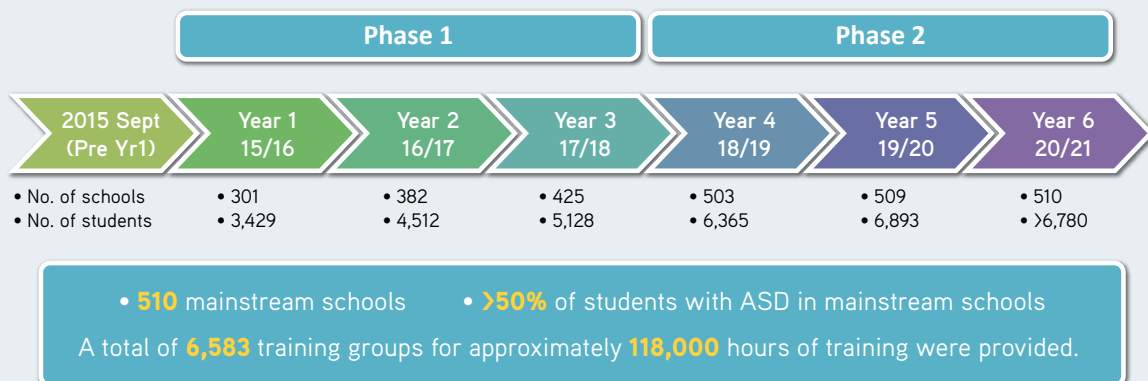
Thanks to the collaborative endeavour of all the parties, JC A-Connect has benefitted not only local families and students, but also the global community. In the future, we will continue to share the visions in enhancing social inclusiveness via knowledge exchange and developing sustainable professional support for the ASD community.



# School Support Programme Research Findings



The JC A-Connect School Support research programme is initiated and funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. We collaborated with the Education Bureau and eight NGOs from 2015/16 to 2020/21. Since its launch, the programme has provided training to more than one-half of the students with ASD in 510 mainstream schools. The following graph shows the number of schools and students we served since 2015/16.



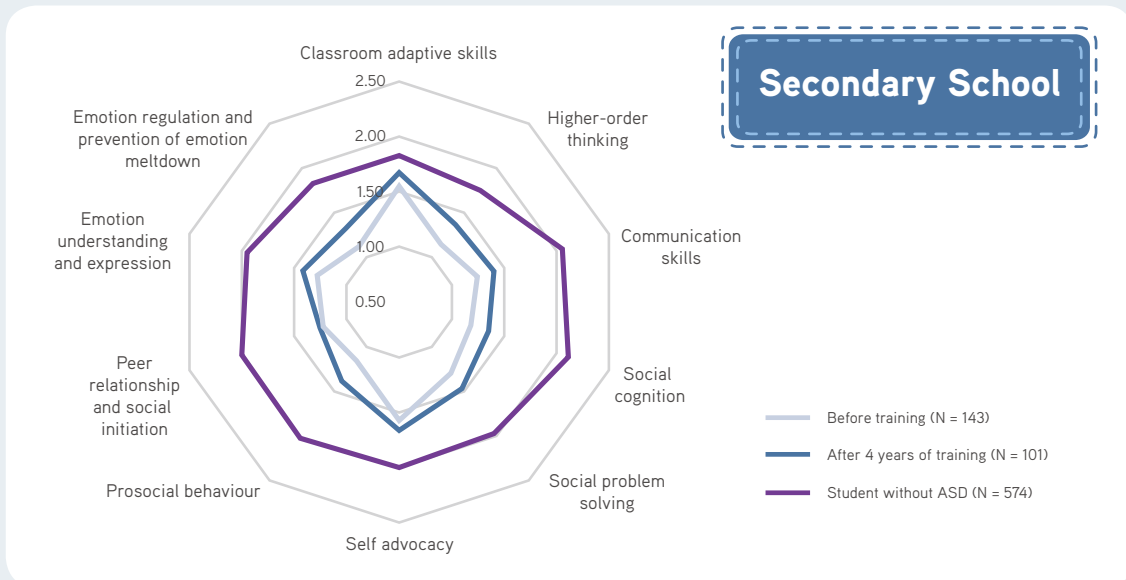
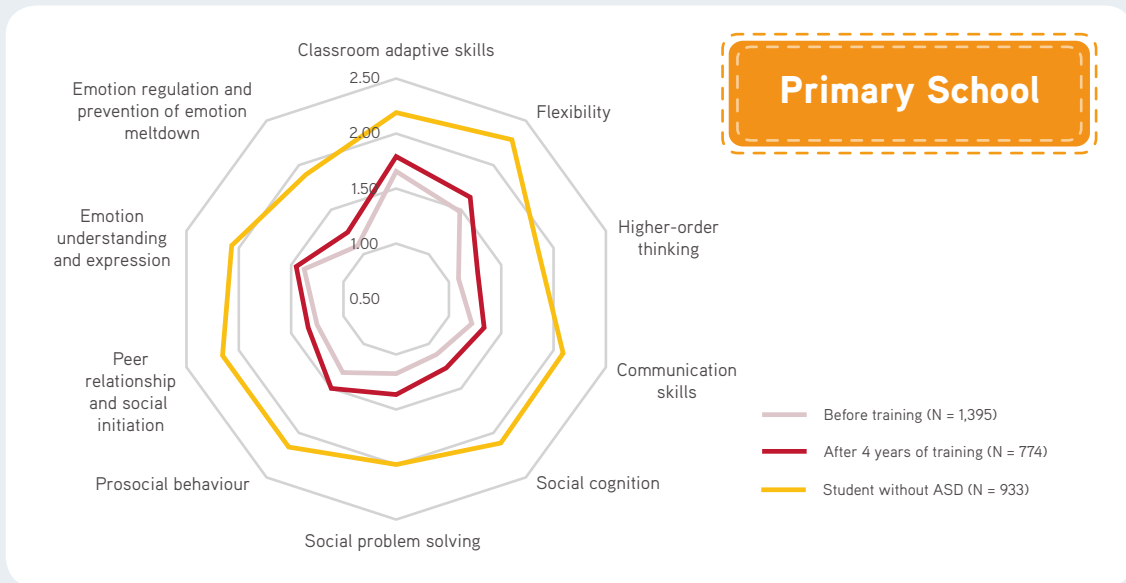
Our programme aims to:

1. Enhance schools' support to students with ASD under the NGO-school collaboration model through school-based group training:
  - A. Introduce the expertise of NGOs to mainstream schools by providing school-based services.
  - B. Provide supplemental training to a critical mass of students with ASD so that a significant number of schools would experience its benefits. The training is delivered in a small group format using evidence-based methods, where needs assessment and training goals are highly individualised.
  - C. Facilitate the knowledge exchange with NGOs, schools and community through the development and dissemination of resource materials to support students with ASD.
2. Increase the capacity of key stakeholders, such as teachers, training coaches and parents.

As the School Support research has come to an end, we would like to share our findings on student's progress over the years and lessons we learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Students' progress from teachers' and parents' perspectives

Before and after the group training, teachers completed the *Learning, Social and Emotion Adaptation Questionnaire-Short form* to assess the learning, social and emotional skills of the participating students under ten subdomains to help formulate training goals and monitor progress. We found that students show improvement in all areas after four years of training. However, they still need more support from schools to improve their skills to narrow the gap between their performance and their typically developing peers.



Parents also completed the *Social Responsiveness Scale, Second Edition (SRS-2)*, a scale that measures ASD-like behaviours, before and after the group training. The results showed that fewer ASD-like behaviours were observed after four years of training.

From the results of the two questionnaires, students have shown improvement from the perspectives of parents and teachers after our training but they still need continuous support.



## Pandemic Situation in 2019/20

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all walks of life. It has a dual impact on parents – parents must deal with the interference in both their personal and their children’s lives. Parents of children with ASD may face even more challenges. For example, classes were suspended and home learning was adopted. Hence, parents had to provide additional support to facilitate their children’s learning.

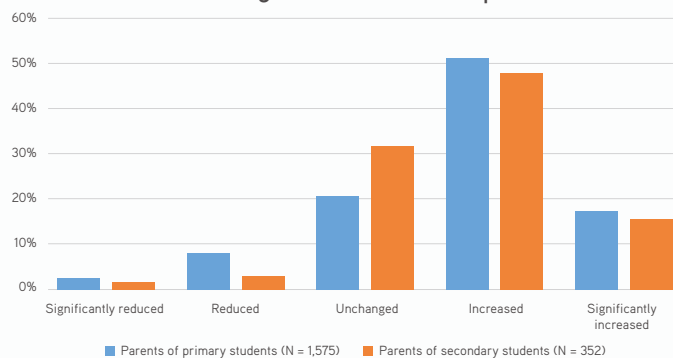
We need to understand the impact of the pandemic on parents and students so as to provide more targeted support to them during or after class suspension. Thus, we distributed questionnaires to parents and secondary students in order to understand how the pandemic had affected their lives.

### Parents’ point of view

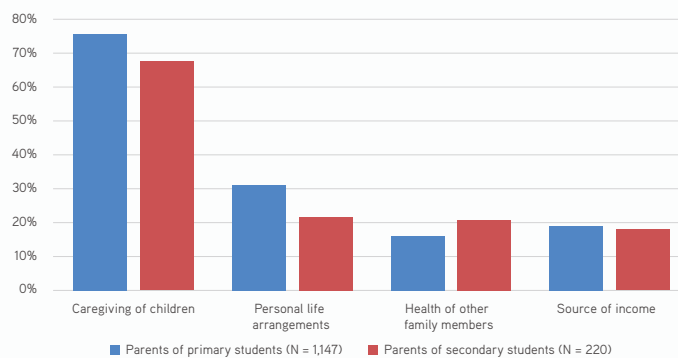
We collected questionnaires from 1,575 parents of primary students and 352 from parents of secondary students. 69% of the parents of primary students and 63% of the parents of secondary students reported that their stress levels had increased. For parents who felt more stressed during the pandemic, around 70% reported that caregiving of their children was the main source of stress. Other stressors included personal life arrangements, the health of other family members, and source of income.

Under caregiving of children, over 80% of parents of primary students and nearly 70% of parents of secondary students indicated academic progress of their children as the top cause of stress. Other less reported causes included their children spending too much time at home, children’s difficult relationship with other family members, children’s difficult behaviours, children’s health, children’s mental well-being, and children’s usage of electronic devices.

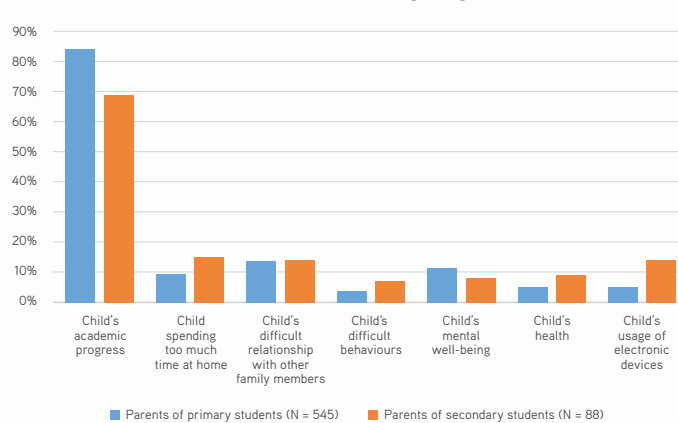
Stress during Pandemic Class Suspension



Source of Stress



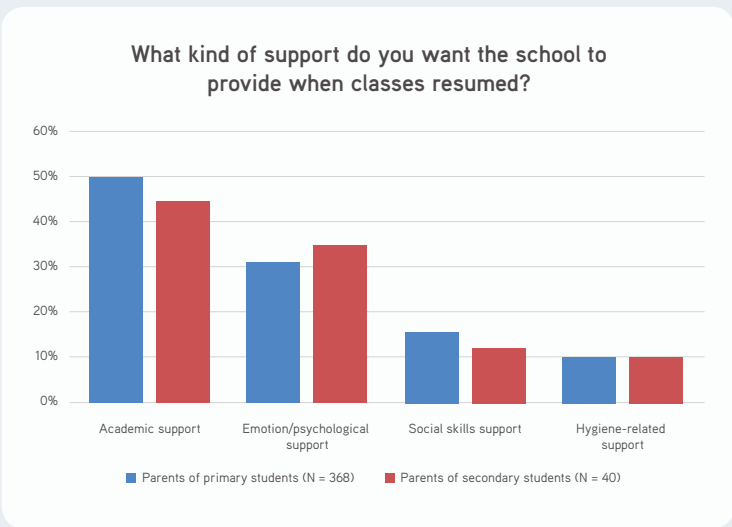
Source of Stress under Caregiving of Children





We also asked parents to suggest the support measures from schools that they considered important after class resumption. Academic support came first, and emotion/psychological support came second. Social skills support and hygiene-related support (such as surgical masks, water supply) ranked third and fourth.

In short, our survey showed that academic progress was both the top stressor of parents and the area that parents hoped to receive support most after classes resumed.



### Students' point of view

We collected 351 questionnaires from secondary students for the research. We asked them to write down the area that they worried the most during class suspension. 271 students provided written responses and nearly 60% of them mentioned academic-related stress, e.g. academic progress, homework, assessment, or difficulties in learning online. This echoed the parents' concern over academic progress.

We also wanted to know if the students were able to remain socially active during class suspension, so we asked them if they had contacted their classmates outside school-arranged class time. 19% of the students responded that they did not communicate with their peers at all. For the remaining 81% who stayed in touch with their classmates, they usually used text messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp) and social media (e.g. Instagram).

As our group teaching mode was switched to videos, online classes, worksheets or phone contacts with trainers, we asked the students which mode they believed would be the most useful to them. Results showed that online classes (59%) and phone contacts with trainers (33%) were their preferred mode during the pandemic. However, 61% of the students preferred face-to-face groups over online groups under normal circumstances.

### Recommendation

In summary, both parents and students reported their major concern to be academic-related. Hence, schools and NGOs should also provide necessary academic support, in addition to the usual social and emotional support that are often provided under the current programme. In view of the stress experienced by parents during the pandemic, NGOs had organised various activities such as mindfulness training, Pastel Nagomi Art and Zentangle Art for parents, aiming to reduce their stress level. Parents are encouraged to continue engaging in these activities along with other hobbies they enjoy, in order to release their tension whenever they feel stressed.

As the ways students socialise with others have changed during the pandemic, the social skills training provided to the students should reflect the new skills needed to utilise these social media platforms. Furthermore, as one-fifth of the students reported to have isolated themselves during the pandemic, schools may need to provide some support for students with ASD to reconnect with their peers after the resumption of face-to-face lessons.

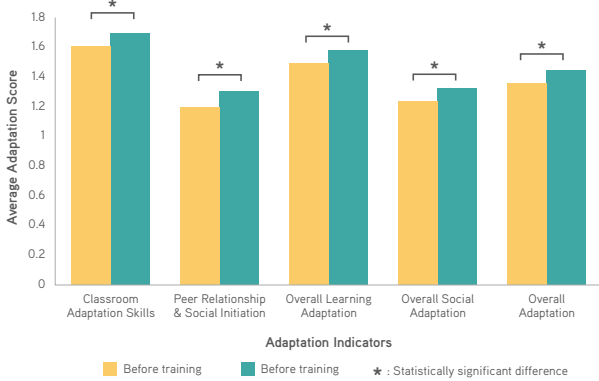
### Programme Effectiveness

Time flies and the current phase of JC A-Connect has come to an end. The Caritas team walks the path with schools and parents to help students with ASD improve their social communication, emotional management, and environmental adaptation abilities, and put the skills they learnt in practice in classroom activities and campus life. The team also promotes the participation of teachers, parents and typical students, so that students with ASD can get comprehensive support and fit in at school.

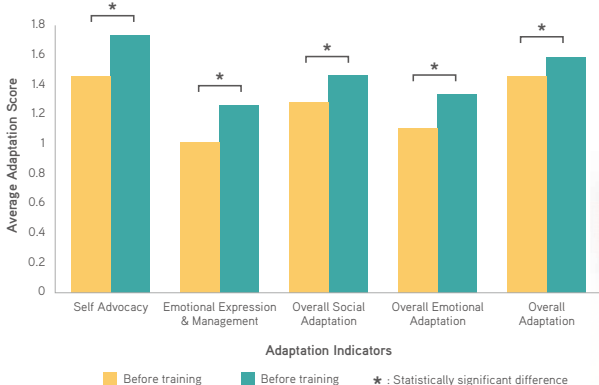
Thanks to the team at the Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong (HKU), we continuously collected feedback from service users, including schools, parents and students, and analysed the effectiveness of student training and support services, with a view to improve the quality of our services.

The following charts illustrate the aspects that primary and secondary students had made progress:

Comparison before and after training – Learning, Social and Emotional Adaptation Questionnaire (Primary)



Comparison before and after training – Learning, Social and Emotional Adaptation Questionnaire (Secondary)



### Feedback from Participants

In addition to data analysis, service users also expressed their opinions and thoughts on the programme through questionnaires and interviews.

**Teacher:** The students who participated in the group have made progress in social communication, getting along with others, verbal expression and behavioural performance. The workshops organised by the team have taught me about the core problems faced by students with ASD and the effective support strategies.

**Student:** Group activities allow me to get along with my classmates, and let me know that I am not alone.

**Parent:** I am thankful that my son is given the opportunity to participate in this programme. His isolated world is not easily open to others. It is the love and teaching of the coaches that open his heart. Thank you for the love and patience of the coaches.

### A New Start

Thanks to the donations of The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the support of the Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU, we were able to provide services to students with ASD in the past six years. In the new school year, the Education Bureau has adopted and regularised the service model. We are pleased to see that the services will sustain and look forward to working together with parents and teachers in providing effective support for students with ASD and achieving a better future.







After six years, the JC A-Connect programme finally comes to an end. As a service provider, we join the path with more than 1,000 students with ASD, their parents and teachers every year, and walk with them on the path of growth. We would like to share our experience gained during the programme with “JCAC”:

**Joyful to see the progress and growth of students -**

Students who have joined the group training improve in the relevant training areas to varying degrees. In addition to the improvement in emotional control and social skills, which are the focus of the training, self-confidence and self-efficacy of students have also improved, which in turn helps promote learning and integration in campus life. As a companion, we feel the joy of the students on the path of growth.

**Company of parents and teachers -** Through sharing and providing support to parents and teachers, they are able to give appropriate encouragement and assistance to students in the family and campus environment. The consolidation and application of some skills also depend on the cooperation of parents and teachers, so that students have the opportunity to put the relevant skills and techniques in practice, and receive feedback. In addition to the training results of the students, parents and teachers can better understand the strengths and limitations of the students through participating in the training, and become the strongest support for the students' growth.

**Affiliation between families, service organisations and schools -** The programme requires the cooperation of families, service organisations and schools in enhancing and sustaining the effectiveness of the training. Supporting teachers assist in the training, thus



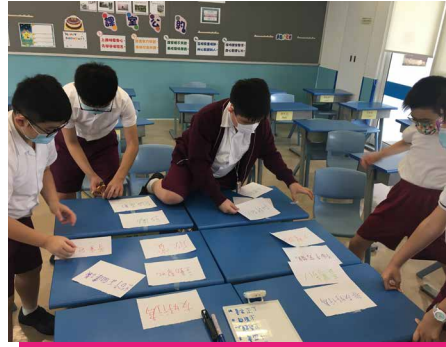
they can learn the training skills and methodology, which help schools to establish a school-based support system for students with ASD.

**Comprehensive support on the road of life -** The support for students with ASD requires sustainable development so that students can benefit from training that may last for several years. Thanks to the support of The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the efforts of the Education Bureau, HKU and eight NGO partners, the school group training model for students with ASD has been deployed by the Education Bureau as a support service. The service is extended to all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong to benefit more students in need.

We hope that in the new school year, we can continue the journey with the students, parents and teachers.







For the past three years, the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council (Welfare Council) has provided a full range of support services for students with ASD studying in mainstream schools through JC A-Connect, which include the provision of school-based social skills group trainings to 614 students with ASD, support services for 1,874 parents and 1,595 teachers, and campus inclusion-promoting activities for 43 primary and secondary schools.

Regarding student training groups, the professional team of the Welfare Council aims at enhancing students' overall learning and social skills through applying evidence-based intervention strategies and group training frameworks. A wide range of highly pertinent training themes has been devised, which include communication skills, emotional regulation and social thinking. Apart from achieving the group training goals, individual training goals are set according to the abilities and individual needs of each student in order to address the challenges commonly encountered in each student's developmental stage. The team is keen to monitor and support the overall growth of students who participated in the three-year project. With consolidation and generalisation of concepts in the training content in each year, the professional team aims to help students learn systematically, practise skills, build confidence and achieve success. The positive learning

experience and self-confidence are crucial and helpful to students as they continue to apply these skills in their daily life and fit in at school.

In terms of support for parents, the professional team of the Welfare Council works closely with schools, discusses various parent support models, and provides support services to parents according to their needs. Services delivered in the past include workshops, seminars, and individual consultation services. With these services, the team helps parents understand their children's developmental needs and learn strategies to foster positive parent-child relationships. The team also exchanges suggestions with teachers concerning support on student- and school-level, striving to create a more nurturing, inclusive and effective learning environment for all students.







### Accompanying Growth, Connect with Families

**T**ime flies and The Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is in its third year in the JC A-Connect programme. YWCA and our school partners have experienced a unique process of growth with the students with ASD. Throughout the journey, just as how we always advise our students, we remain flexible. More importantly, we accompany their families, and show care and appreciation to their children's dedication and progress.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the life habits, students and their families have become closer. A large number of training tools and materials that meet the needs of students at home and in their daily lives were designed by our coaches, which include the shooting of thematic demonstration videos to help students to adapt to home learning and social life under the pandemic, and improve their emotional management. In addition, in order to provide continuous support for the training needs of students and enhance their motivation to participate in the group, the coaches transformed various interactive activities and board games into online teaching versions when they design the curriculum. The group training process remains interactive and professional while accompanying the growth of students.

In light of the changes and restrictions in daily routines, we hope to take care of the students and their families in a more fitting way, and help them fill in more love and tolerance in the tense family interactions. The YWCA coaches are determined to increase the number of parent interviews and telephone consultations to better

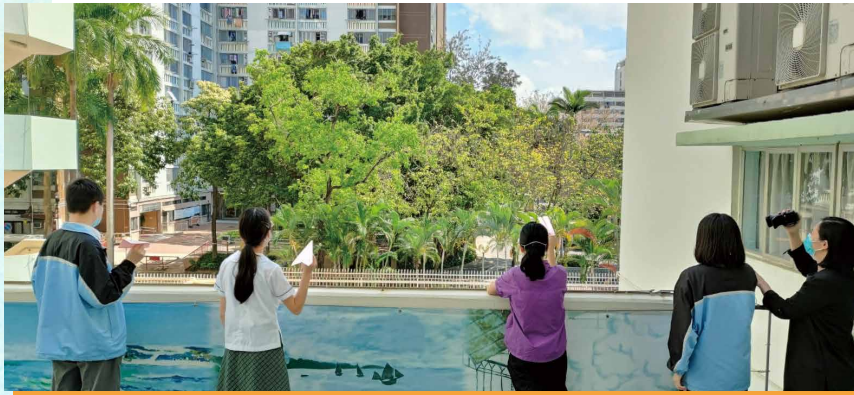


understand their difficulties and needs, share strategies to support their children by adjusting their everyday life routines, and enhance communication on the students' performance in group training, so that students can put the skills they learnt into practice. During the pandemic, we also take a multi-pronged approach to provide families with personal/COVID-19 protective items and home training tools to cater for the needs of students and families, and at the same time connect with them.

Thanks to the cooperation of parents and schools, and the participation of our cross-disciplinary professional staff, including educational psychologists and speech therapists, the programme has been implemented successfully and effectively. The professional team provides professional opinions and guidance for online and offline training, which enable various training themes and tools to be utilised at their best diverse training modes, and thus supporting the growth of students.







### Providing Comprehensive Support, Growing with Students and Parents

#### Supporting students' growth by offering different thematic trainings

Students with ASD will encounter different challenges and transitions as they grow. JC A-Connect responds to the needs of students with ASD and utilises evidence-based training methods to improve their social and self-management abilities.

For the past six years, the programme has designed and established a series of training themes:

- Mental interpretation
- Communication skills
- Building and maintaining friendships
- Emotional management
- Problem-solving skills and flexible thinking
- Game skills
- Skills on coping with bullying
- Speaking skills
- Leisure activities
- Social skills
- Adaptation to secondary school life
- Presentation skills
- Skills on getting along with people of the opposite sex
- Online communication skills
- Negotiation skills
- Time management
- Further studies and employability skills

We encourage students to practise the skills they learnt through interesting games, cooperative activities, student sharing and homework. In addition, the programme focuses on enhancing students' motivation in social learning, and fostering students' introspection and insight, such that they can respond to the various challenges in life more independently.

### Going beyond the classroom and contributing to school

Students with ASD usually lack generalisation skills, hence JC A-Connect has designed and established different platforms and real-life scenarios to allow them to practise the skills and knowledge they learnt. The coaches will intervene in a natural manner and explain during the process to strengthen their social skills.

We always encourage students to work together in their final year in the group to produce "graduation projects" in different forms, which include preparing booths at school, designing and producing souvenirs, planning and organising events, and making micro films. One of the teams produced a video with the theme "Sailing Your Dream" and created a story linking up the dreams of all team members. The students were responsible for the script, song writing, song arrangement, recording, choreography, and shooting. During the production process, they practised the skills on self-expression, problem-solving, negotiation and time management. They showed great improvement in the process and were proud of their work.

### Parental support on the grounds of compassion and reason

It is never easy to be a parent of a child with ASD. In response to the needs of parents, JC A-Connect organises workshops on different topics for parents to learn the appropriate strategies to support their children's growth, including skills on handling school bullying, children's access to the online world, sex education, children's adult life preparation and the ways to happiness for children. In addition, we focus on the importance of parents taking care of their bodies, minds and souls. Therefore, various parent groups on parental training and mindfulness are organised to support parents in becoming more caring and reasonable in parenthood, and to be more confident in accompanying their children.





JC A-Connect provides holistic support for students with ASD attending mainstream schools and their parents. Starting from 2018, we have provided group training and different supporting services for more than 800 students and their families in 86 primary and secondary schools to enhance their learning, social and emotional skills and help them adapt to campus life.

Coaches use evidence-based methods to improve students' social communication, emotional adaptation and learning skills, such as building social, communication, and emotional regulation abilities through mindfulness courses. The programme also provides parents with different types of services, such as individual consultations, class observations and thematic workshops, so that they understand the knowledge and skills their children learnt in the training groups. In order to act in concert with the school support for students with ASD, we communicate with school coordinators before the groups start, set appropriate goals for the students, and conduct teacher consultations in such a way that teachers can follow the students' progress outside the groups. Teachers will also master the strategies to support students with ASD in the classroom.

In response to the pandemic, the programme has undergone great changes. We still remember the time when the suspension of face-to-face classes was first imposed, our services had to be suspended all at once. All coaches, teachers, parents and students with ASD faced unexpected challenges. Everyone's teaching and learning patterns were changed. Therefore, in March 2020, we took the lead in producing the resource package for social activities *Fighting Against COVID-19* and the picture book *The Days of Suspension are Like Driving a Bus* to help students and their parents to cope with the challenges and restless emotions brought by the pandemic and class suspension.

Since the launch of the programme, in addition to providing targeted and appropriate training for students in need, the coaches also maintain very close cooperation with parents and schools. Parents have expressed appreciation for the services we provide and we have received a lot of positive feedback. The programme does not only benefit their children, but also help parents relieve

their pressure of parenting. In addition, the coaches also maintain close contact and communication with schools. Various supporting services are provided to schools to enhance teachers' awareness of students with ASD and assist them in extending the group training to the classroom, magnifying the impact of student training.

Thanks to the donation from The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, we are able to train a group of professionals during the six-year programme to take care of students with ASD. Through regular thematic training and supervision, the quality of the team has improved. The professional team has then provided high quality services to schools and communicated with school coordinators on a regular basis, effectively helping students with ASD to adapt to campus life in mainstream schools.

This phase of JC A-Connect has come to an end and we are honoured to be part of the programme and witness the growth of all the students who participated in the programme. It is a rewarding experience for all participating schools, parents and organisations. We hope that the tripartite cooperation model of home, society and school will be sustained and optimised, so as to benefit more students with ASD and their families, and help them better adapt to campus life.

鄭姑娘：

非常感謝您邀請琛瑜參加小組，即使期間大部份時間是用 zoom 形式參與，我們應覺得琛瑜透過這個活動獲益不少。也感謝您分享小組內容，希望我們也能夠在日常生活協助琛瑜實踐吧！

我也特別感謝江姑娘的仔細安排和耐心教導，把社交技巧的信息細細分拆，讓同學們明白為何在不同情況下需要採用合適的技巧，甚至還按同學們的喜好買小禮物鼓勵他們，實在是非常細心。請你為我代為感謝江姑娘吧。

希望你們日後繼續舉辦這些小組活動，讓有需要的同學能夠學習社交技巧，令日常生活及接物待人更加得心應手！

祝身體健康！工作順利！

琛瑜媽媽

2:48 pm





The JC A-Connect programme provides comprehensive support to students with ASD and their caregivers across different age groups, aspects and levels.



## Family Support

### *From Pre-school to Adolescent Age*

The WHO-CST programme has benefitted over 70 families in which the caregivers have learnt abundant parenting and play skills, and more importantly, a deeper understanding towards their children.

Programmes were modified to accommodate the needs of primary and secondary schools. An Executive Functioning group was introduced to teenagers providing experiential learning. The teenagers were required to design and produce products. After assigning their positions as if in a company, they had to formulate the budget, discuss on a number of items, and conduct various researches. Meanwhile, their parents learnt about executive functioning strategies and assisted their teenagers throughout the process, witnessing their improvements in analytical, planning, and implementation skills. The teenagers had the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills they learnt into practice.

The PEERS® programme is a signature programme in effectively improving the social skills of teenagers with ASD and empowering their parents. During the pandemic, the programme was held online. Both the original and the adjusted versions received positive feedbacks from the participants.

### *From Intrapersonal to Interpersonal, From Psycho-educational to Therapeutic*

To handle caregivers' inner stagnation more effectively, a body-mind-spirit therapeutic group was designed. Participants experienced calmness and learnt their personalised way of stress alleviation, with their self-care awareness raised.

### *From Personal to Community*

Innovative programmes were established for the caregivers. An online radio channel was launched to offer thematic tips on parenting skills and stress relief. More remarkably, three fathers of children with ASD joined as guest speakers and shared their fruitful experience on parenting under the pandemic.

To convey community support and enhance public understanding towards families with children with ASD, a card writing campaign was organised. Over 600 cards from the public were collected and delivered to our families together with our 5-senses stress relief kit. The families were touched and encouraged by the heart-warming blessings from the public.





## School Support

Different evidence-based intervention strategies with tailor-made training themes have been developed to enhance students' overall psychosocial adaptive skills and competencies for successful participation in school, family and community activities.

Apart from the services for students with ASD, the NGO partners have successfully transferred the knowledge and skills to school personnels to provide better support for students with ASD in daily school environment. The partners also work closely with the SENCo of each school to provide more comprehensive support services for students with ASD and assist in home-school cooperation.

Under the programme, all partners have established close and trustful relationships with parents. Over 80% of parents reported that the programme had helped their children improve greatly in the areas of emotional and behavioural performance.

Coaching programmes with different themes, like social skills, emotional and behavioural management, assist those students with ASD to better adapt in mainstream schools.

The research team from the Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU and all NGO partners have also developed some effective resources and materials, and shared them with school personnels and parents, which will benefit students with ASD in the long run.

All in all, the programme helps fill up the service gap in current ASD services, with the greatest support from The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU and the Education Bureau.

For more details about SAHK JC A-Connect, please scan:



Family Support



School Support



In the JC A-Connect programme, not only do we care about students with ASD in mainstream schools, we have also witnessed the transformation of parents and caregivers. With the support group model and evidence-based strategy, children with ASD have improved in social, communication, and emotional aspects, which enhances their confidence and potential for development. When parents and caregivers realise the improvement of their children, they will understand the importance of giving continuous support to the children. Through the parent consultation service, seminars and workshops, parents and caregivers gain knowledge and then put it into practice in daily life.

The greatest support the programme has offered is to provide an open platform for NGOs to launch innovative and comprehensive services, based on the needs of stakeholders and the change in circumstances. During the pandemic, organisations have actively responded to the needs of students, parents and caregivers, and launched more flexible and creative services. Online learning platforms are very different from face-to-face lessons. Nonetheless, the use of online resources is where the interests and strengths of many students with ASD lie. We discovered that some students with ASD established positive relationships with teachers and their peers more quickly and became more willing to share their thoughts in online classes. Teachers, parents and caregivers can better understand the performance of students in the group and are benefitted from online services as well.

As one of the project partners, we believe that the success of the JC A-Connect programme depends on the cooperation of all parties. In addition to the direct services teachers provide to the students with ASD, the programme has achieved sustainable development and helped nurture the students. The teacher workshops and resource packages prepared by the Education Bureau and the Faculty of Social Sciences, HKU have helped our staff to master the appropriate methods and plan for a long-term fit for the support programmes. Furthermore, by participating in various sharing sessions and conferences, representatives of NGOs can share good practices, promote peer experience exchange, and generate greater synergy.



## Bridging Needy Children, Schools, Parents and the Community

In the past 50 years, the total number of people diagnosed with ASD worldwide has increased. The 2010 Global Burden of Disease study revealed that 52 million people had ASD globally<sup>1</sup>. The prevalence rate of ASD in 2021 in the US was one in every 44 children<sup>2</sup>. Despite this increasing global trend, the majority of the parents are neither well equipped with the knowledge nor the skills to face their challenging parenting tasks, and oftentimes, the children's well-being suffer vastly.

In May 2014, the 67<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on "comprehensive and coordinated efforts for the management of ASD", supported by more than 60 countries. With support from the World Health Organisation (WHO) experts, parents' associations, and Autism Speaks, an autism advocacy organisation in the US, WHO-CST was developed, and it is currently being implemented in more than 30 regions worldwide. The programme aims at mitigating parenting needs for children with developmental delays or ASD around the world.

“WHO-CST is a very systematic and helpful programme. I particularly like the main themes of each lesson, it changed my way of thinking, such as having more positivity when taking care of my son with special needs. I also want to thank Dr Lau and all of the instructors - they are so professional, patient and supportive. The programme provided a precious platform for me to meet other parents who are facing similar situations. It is a safe environment for us to share and learn from each other.”

– Ranee  
Participant of WHO-CST



### The implementation of the WHO-CST Programme

With the alarming increase of ASD prevalence in Hong Kong, the programme was introduced and adapted when the JC A-Connect Family Support Team was set up in August 2018. The WHO-CST provides early intervention because caregivers or parents can join the programme even before their children are diagnosed with ASD.

Despite all the challenges that Hong Kong had to face since 2019, the Family Support Team had made every effort to help the families of children in need in the community. From the initial phase of adaptation to the phase of implementation, constructive adaptation meetings and in-depth interviews were conducted with government officials, NGO representatives, community professionals, and caregivers to shape the version of WHO-CST in Hong Kong for training and being piloted at the pre-pilot phase<sup>3</sup>. With almost 12 months of periodical school and social services lockdown, prior to the pilot stage, programme materials were further adapted to an online version and the WHO-CST in Hong Kong was implemented and evaluated during the final nine months of the project.

Nine WHO-recognised Master Trainers and over 15 qualified Facilitators served over 500 families of children with ASD or developmental delays. The WHO-CST in Hong Kong bridged the families in need when Hong Kong was undergoing a challenging period.



“ I was depressed when I was told that our son is autistic. This programme helped me and my family better nurture my son. My husband said I have significantly improved in being a caregiver. He appreciates my effort in spending more time with our son every day. The training is also effective in improving my family relationship. The professional facilitators helped me get through this difficult time.”

– Carmen

Participant of WHO-CST



research data while organising an international webinar and an international conference to share our experiences. In March 2021, a webinar on the Implementation Science of WHO-CST in Chinese Societies was held with research results shared by various CST teams from New York, Taiwan, Hong Kong and cities in Mainland China. The webinar distilled the wisdom of how the WHO-CST can be better implemented in Chinese societies.

With empirical evidence from the team and feedback from the participants, we assuredly advocated the implementation and effectiveness of WHO-CST in Hong Kong at our signature Hong Kong ASD Conference 2021. Research findings from our randomised controlled trial and focus groups of the third implementation stage and our latest research on different delivery methods were shared to enhance social inclusiveness and good practices in supporting children with potential ASD and their families amidst complex emergencies. Beyond July 2021, the JC A-Connect Family Support Team abdicated her role in Hong Kong, and this substantial responsibility is passed to our partners in the community.

### International Knowledge Exchange

When there are crises, there are opportunities. Though Hong Kong battled the COVID-19 pandemic ahead of many countries, our team and the collaborating NGOs found our ways to help the families by delivering the programme online so as to satisfy the soaring parenting needs for the children with developmental disorders or delays under the pandemic<sup>4</sup>. These experiences were so precious that this project as well as our team gained more international involvement in the knowledge exchange activities for our thriving experiences of the adaptation and implementation processes. Our Project Director, Dr Paul Wong, and Project Manager, Dr Janet Lau, shared these experiences at the WHO-AS Global Community COVID-19 Discussion Meeting. Dr Wong was also invited to be the keynote speaker at the International Society of Autism Research (INSAR). After all, our learning does not merely benefit the families in Hong Kong, but also support families and help professionals and researchers around the globe.

### Way forward

2021 marked the conclusion of the JC A-Connect Family Support Team. Our team members wrapped up the

KW (participant of WHO-CST) sent us her drawing “Flower of Life”, showing her experience with WHO-CST and the gratitude towards our facilitators who accompanied her and her child in the three-month journey.



#### Note:

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## 1. Online Learning Platform



A team of educational psychologists from the School Support Team has championed this online learning platform. Through the platform, users will learn about the needs of children with ASD and the suitable ways to support them. They will also acquire skills in helping children with ASD to overcome challenges and develop their talents, in order to nurture them into pillars of society.

### Key characteristics

- Self-paced learning: Learn flexibly anywhere and anytime online
- Comprehensive content: Understand the characteristics, needs, social and emotional development of students with ASD through evidence-based strategies
- Diversified learning: Adopt engaging elements, such as animations, interviews with professionals, demonstration videos, interactive games and downloadable resources, to facilitate users' learning in a progressive way

### Target participants

Parents, professionals and general public who are interested in supporting students with ASD

The course is now available **FOR FREE!**

Start learning at : <https://www.asdsupport.org.hk/>



## 2. Artwork Competition & Exhibition



To celebrate the Autism Awareness Month in April, an artwork competition, with the theme "Care and Social Inclusion", was organised to promote care, respect and social inclusion in the community. The competition provided an opportunity for students and the public to demonstrate their creativity and reach their fullest potential by creating various kinds of artworks.

We received overwhelming responses for the competition with a total of 319 entries, 160 from primary schools, 116 from secondary schools and 43 from the general public.

Take a look at their amazing artworks on our online exhibition.



## 3. Parent-Child Drama Workshop Series for Children with ASD

51 pairs of parents and children with ASD were coached by a professional drama tutor to express their feelings and emotions through drama exercises. Participating parents and children cooperated to act and create a jungle with various kinds of animals using their imagination.

To increase the interactivity level of the online workshops, participants practiced throwing virtual balls, and acting as traffic lights with their peers.

### Parent's Feedback:

I am happy to discover my child's talent in acting. She proactively interacted with her classmates who were also behind the monitors. She showed her interest and passion in performing. Although it was an online workshop, it didn't limit her creativity and provided her with a comfortable and familiar setting to try different body movements.

### Tutor's Feedback:

Some students were quiet in the first class; they then gradually became more proactive in the next few weeks. At first, some students needed their parents' assistance to complete the tasks. I am proud to see their progress in the last class, where they followed instructions independently. The students enjoyed the class a lot.



## 4. Hong Kong ASD Conference 2021



The Hong Kong ASD Conference 2021: Community Engagement and Integration of Care was held in July 2021. The Conference brought together more than 500 stakeholders from NGOs, universities, primary and secondary schools, the government, the healthcare sector, and the general public to engage in knowledge exchange and professional sharing.



Dr Peter Vermeulen, founder and director of Autism in Context, delivered an inspiring keynote on “Autism: Redefining the Outcomes - The Shift Towards Well-being and Full Citizenship” and a pre-conference workshop on “I Feel Good at School: Well-being as the Lever for Successful Inclusion of Students with Autism”.



Moreover, Dr Ramzi Nasir, a developmental-behavioural pediatrician and leading expert in the field, delivered a thought-provoking keynote on “Children with ASD/Developmental Delays in Humanitarian Emergencies”.

Dr Kathy Wong, Project Director (School Support), and Dr Paul Wong, Project Director (Family Support), shared the latest research findings and good practices in supporting children with ASD and their families.



Representatives of NGO partners and local experts from the JC A-Connect team introduced the rationale and core components of the first local evidence-based *Chinese Writing Package for Students with ASD (Primary and Secondary Schools)*, good practices amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of WHO-CST programme in Asia.

Along with 27 poster presentations, 9 partner booths and lounge sessions enhanced the interactivity of the Conference, despite that it was conducted online. Participants expressed that they were greatly inspired and impressed by the Conference.

### Participants' Feedback:

1. The whole conference was indeed professional, evidence-based, down-to-earth with case illustrations and life stories, integrating multi-faceted theories with local and overseas practices, and HK educational toolkits.
2. I like all parts of the programmes that I attended. I especially like the keynote lectures, really deep reflection from the veterans.

## 5. Chinese Writing Package

The School Support Team has developed a 12-session training package on Chinese writing, which is an area in which students with ASD often face great difficulty in and is crucial for school success and later school transition. Two evidence-based writing packages—one for senior primary students, focusing on narrative essays, and one for junior secondary students, focusing on argumentative essays—were piloted in 2019/20 and 2020/21. The two packages with lesson plans and teaching materials were published and distributed to all schools in the summer of 2021.



## 6. Online Workshops

網上工作坊



JC A-Connect is committed to keeping the ASD community and the public connected amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We organised various engaging online workshops for the general public and children with ASD and their families, to ignite their creativity and discover their hidden talents while staying at home.



### 1. Art & Craft Workshop Series

To stretch the creativity of our participants, three online art and craft workshops were held in February 2021. 127 participants from diverse backgrounds, e.g. students from special schools, elderlies and the general public, joined the workshops:

- Pop-up Card Workshop**  
 Participants expressed their love and gratitude through making their unique pop-up greeting cards.
- Paper Doll Making Workshop**  
 The tutor guided participants to create their own dress-up paper dolls. Participants learnt to observe and appreciate their uniqueness while creating the dolls.
- FOTOMO Workshop**  
 Participants followed the tutor's instructions to create a 3D decorative frame, using the printable worksheets and folding techniques.



### 2. Mid-Autumn Lantern DIY Workshop

The joy of celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival was not diminished albeit social distancing measures in force. Nearly 60 participants joined us for an online workshop, where children from all backgrounds learnt to make and decorate their own lanterns with their families while staying at home.



### 3. Draw All You Can Live Streaming

During the workshop, 120 participants expressed their emotions and thoughts as well as demonstrated their talents through arts. Using only drawing papers and two marker pens, participants created their unique modern drawings together with their friends and families at home.



**Missed the workshops? Don't worry! Visit our website to watch playback videos and create the artworks at your own pace.**

