

## Press Release

### **Launch Ceremony for Phase II of “JC A-Connect: Jockey Club Autism Support Network”**

To catalyse social inclusion amid the increasing trend of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust has donated \$243 million to support JC A-Connect: Jockey Club Autism Support Network (JC A-Connect), a project aiming to provide holistic support for students with ASD in mainstream schools, their families and schools, for another three years (2018-21). JC A-Connect is supported by the Education Bureau and the Faculty of Social Sciences of The University of Hong Kong. Project partners include Caritas - Hong Kong, Heep Hong Society, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council Limited, Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association, New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, SAHK, The Salvation Army, and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

A launch ceremony was held at The University of Hong Kong Centennial Campus today to share the achievements and key features of JC A-Connect. Mr Kevin Yeung Yun-hung, Secretary for Education, Education Bureau, HKSAR, Mr Leong Cheung, Executive Director, Charities and Community, The Hong Kong Jockey Club and Professor Paul K H Tam, Acting President and Vice-Chancellor, The University of Hong Kong officiated at the Launch Ceremony. Representatives of 400 schools also attended to show their support to the programme.

Mr Kevin Yeung Yun-hung, JP said that under the Government's integrated education policy, JC A-Connect was launched in 2015 with support of the Education Bureau to provide public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools with additional resources, professional support and teachers' training to help schools support students with ASD. Under this project, most students receiving support have shown remarkable improvement in their social cognitive and adaptive skills. Schools have also enhanced their overall capacity to cater for the needs of these students.

425 mainstream primary and secondary schools had so far taken part in JC A-Connect, which equated to 40% of total schools in Hong Kong and exceeded the original project target of 250 schools by over 70%. Mr Leong Cheung said, “JC A-Connect has directly benefited over 5,000 ASD students, amounting to over half of all ASD students in mainstream schools. We are encouraged that 90% of the participating students have shown different levels of improvement in communication skills, emotional expression and control after the training, which is helping them integrate better into mainstream school life and the study environment.”

HKU Faculty of Social Sciences provided academic leadership to JC A-Connect and equipped school personnel and related professionals to support students with ASD in the last three years. Professor Paul K H Tam said, “At the same time, JC A-Connect also provides support to the families of these students. In the next three years, two more partner NGOs will join the programme, which will enable us to broaden cross-sectoral knowledge exchange, enhance our professionalism and serve more students and their families.”

Principal Yung-pong Cheung of St. James' Primary School, one of the beneficiaries of JC A-Connect, said that JC A-Connect not only helped his students but also encouraged their teachers to participate in the programme so that they can learn professional skills for knowledge transfer to the school. Students after training became more involved in schools, more polite and attentive, as well as more capable to establish interpersonal relationship with others.

Dr Kathy Wong, Project Director (School Support) of JC A-Connect, pointed out that due to the continuous demand of students and schools, JC A-Connect was supported by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for another three years. In Phase II, school support will be extended to serve 500 mainstream primary and secondary schools. Her team also plans to provide training to school personnel, especially Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), on the resource package developed in Phase I, which covers a range of skills essential for both primary and secondary school students with ASD.

Apart from supporting students with ASD in the school context, JC A-Connect also provides community-based parent education and support services through 18 district centres, and public education activities to raise awareness and understanding of people with ASD. In the coming three years, HKU is planning to introduce the World Health Organization Caregiver Skills Training Programme for Families of Children with Developmental Disorders or Delays programme that is currently being applied in 18 regions around the world. Dr Paul W C Wong, Project Director (Family Support) of JC A-Connect, hoped that in the long run, a set of evidence-based and internationalised tools will be introduced to Hong Kong to support families in need, as well as to promote knowledge transfer and experience sharing to support children with ASD on an international level.

JC A-Connect involves cross-sectoral collaboration to help enhance support for children with ASD at home, school, and community through an innovative service model. JC A-Connect also aims to strengthen the expertise development of teachers and service providers for the sustainable development of ASD support services in Hong Kong.

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