

**Project Kawaii**

7-27

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Single Year Project

## Project Overview

### 1. Area of concern

Based on a study conducted by Autism Speaks, on 16 April 2018, there are 1 in 59 children that have Autism Spectrum Disorder, which causes these children to have difficulty with communication and interaction with other people, and have restricted interests and repetitive behaviours, as well as symptoms that hurt the person's ability to function properly in school, work, and other areas of life. Also from a research, about a third to a half of individuals with autism do not develop enough natural speech to meet their daily communication needs. Differences in communication may be present from the first year of life, and may include delayed onset of babbling, unusual gestures, diminished responsiveness, and vocal patterns that are not synchronized with the caregiver.

Little clinical data exists to show how often aggression is observed in children with ASD, but reports from parents, teachers, and other professionals suggest that aggression is not uncommon.

People often have the misconception that patients diagnosed with autism do not want friends, or that they are intellectually disabled. However, this is not the case, and it is saddening that society hold such stigma against these people.

## 2. Challenges Identified

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impaired social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, and restricted and repetitive behavior. Parents usually notice signs in the first two years of their child's life. These signs often develop gradually, though some children with autism reach their developmental milestones at a normal pace and then regress. The diagnostic criteria require that symptoms become apparent in early childhood, typically before age three.

As these children can join society when they grow up, they would eventually face problems when they are communicating with others. Some of these children would require a long time to learn these communication skills, and even so, some of them would not be successful in doing so and will not be able to work in society. By this time, they would have an even harder time to pick up these skills.

## 3. Underlying Problem

Given that the public has many misconceptions about autism and children affected by autism face difficulties with communication, how can we raise awareness for the public to understand these children and interact with them such that their emotional needs can be fulfilled?

#### 4. Plan of Action

Our plan of action is detailed in the table below, which also indicates the date of completion of each action. We started with the needs analysis of the children diagnosed with autism in Rainbow Centre by attending a talk conducted by the representative of Rainbow Centre so that we can understand the objectives of the centre and can hence shift our focus to match with Rainbow Centre. Our first aim is to encourage these children to speak up more at a young age, as it will go a long way in improving their lives. Our second goal is to forge strong bonds with these children through activities that we have planned for them, this would help them get through tough times.

Date	Action	Objective
January - May	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Liaising with Rainbow Centre</li> <li>2. Planning the activities that we can do with the children</li> </ol>	
May - August	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Volunteering at Rainbow Centre Wang Tian Yue- Tuesday Tang Zhi Heng- Wednesday Cao Yang- Thursday Chen Yiye- Administration</li> <li>2. Interacting with the children</li> </ol>	Allow the children to hone their communication skills and form bonds with strangers (us!)
May	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Had music-therapy lessons with children</li> </ol>	To stimulate the auditory senses of the children, allowing them to express their emotions freely
July	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Initiated) handicraft sessions with children</li> <li>2. Had hydrotherapy sessions with children</li> </ol>	To prompt the children's tactile skills and allow their creativity to be expanded

## Implementation of the Plan

### 1. Actions and Outcomes to Date

Interaction with the children allows them to become less afraid of stranger and in time, be able to talk to them just like how they talk to their family and friends.

We participated in the activities that they have to go through and encourage them to share with us their experiences and find out a way to help them in more effective ways.

Through the handicraft sessions, we learnt that although they look uninterested at the start, they just do not have the courage to start on the task as they fear that they are going to be judged, hence we guided them, always encouraging them to express their creativity with their handicrafts.

With the information that we have gathered, we planned an outing for the children to have fun outside and to build on the strong relationship that we have with them.

## Project Outcomes

### 1. Accomplishments

We have volunteered at Rainbow Centre for cumulatively about 20 sessions in three classes,

-AT FIRST the children were indifferent of our presence, they tend to ignore us when they are playing with their toys despite they are easily distracted by their friends or teachers. Some even manifested signs of aggression when we offered help with e.g. picking up their toys or assisting them in lifting or carrying heavy materials they need, they would yell, scream, and scratch, pushing away our helping hands. It was rather frustrating interacting with them at first.

-AFTER A FEW VISITS the children clearly exhibit cordial signals to us. Some of them began to physically interact with us by playing or sharing their toys with us. Although their attention span is still very short, their apparent increase in regard of the recognition of our existence really surprised us, as they gradually show their beautiful side to us, and it is so much different from what the public view of them (which they showed us in our first visit).

-IN OUR LAST SESSION the children demonstrated great friendship towards us (as compared to the first), and that they are willing to share their “accomplishments” with us (buildings made of playdoh) whenever they are playing with their toys. This would have astonished by such a scene if it was our first lesson with them. Their fully trusting us have really touched us and we finally realised how large of a gap do the public have regarding people with autism.

## 2. Reflections

I have learnt more about autism as well as the hardships faced by the children with autism. At first, I had a preconceived notion that children with autism are all selfish and do not care about other people's feelings before I got in touch with them. However, the half-year long interaction with them has totally altered my opinion about them and taught me a lot of things that could never be taught in school. I have learnt that patience and commitment is the key to success of interaction. I have also learnt that happiness can be achieved simply by small acts of kindness.

I have seen the progress that these children have made so far and they show a lot of promise. At first, they were indifferent of our presence, they tend to ignore us when they are playing with their toys despite them being easily distracted by their friends and teachers. Some even manifested signs of aggression when we offered help for example, picking up their toys or assisting them in lifting or carrying heavy materials they need, they would yell, scream, and scratch, pushing away our helping hands. It was rather frustrating interacting with them.

After a few visits, the children clearly exhibit cordial signals to us. Some of them began to physically interact with us by playing or sharing their toys with us. Although their attention span is still very short, their apparent increase in regard of the recognition of our existence really surprised us, as they gradually show their beautiful side to us, and it is so much different from what the public view of them, which they also showed us in our first visit.

In our last session, the children demonstrated great friendship towards us, and that they are willing to share their "accomplishments" with us whenever they are playing with their toys. This would have astonished us if it was our first lesson with them. Their trust in us have really touched us and we finally realised how large of a gap do the public have regarding people with autism.

### 3. Scope of impact

#### Individual Impact:

As we have helped Cedric regain confidence, he is able to communicate better with other which is a big improvement from when we first met him. He can talk with us, and maintain a conversation well. This, in the future, will allow him to be able to communicate with others without any problems, which will result in his success in society.

#### Community Impact:

We have spread the awareness in our school, allowing students to know more about these people who are diagnosed with autism, which will allow them to be more aware of their needs and do not unintentionally harm them.

#### References:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/prevalence>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/node/113471>

<http://www.researchautism.net/autism-issues>

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