

SAAC Connect

April 2022 Issue

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MCI (P) 065/02/22



Commemorating World Autism Awareness Month

April is always an exciting month for us at St. Andrew's Autism Centre. As the world commemorates World Autism Awareness Day, it is an opportunity for us to drum up our efforts to bring awareness to autism and enrich the lives of those we serve.

Read more in this issue!

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World Autism Awareness Month 2022: #ThisIsMe Campaign

Each year, SAAC and our partners from the Autism network Singapore (ANS), AWWA, Rainbow Centre, AAS and ARC come together to come up with an impactful campaign to raise greater awareness for autism in April.

SAAC is proud to lead the campaign this year themed "This Is Me". The campaign invites the public into the world of persons with autism through 10 specially curated stories of persons with autism as well as their families, caregivers and professionals working with them.

These stories will be compiled into a special e-book which will be available for download at the end of the month. Do look out for details on our social media or <https://sgautism.org/>.

As part of the campaign, we also produced 5 comics which illustrate the different ways in which people with autism perceive the world around them.



Comic illustrating sensory overload that a person with autism might experience. One of five comics featured as part of the #ThisIsMe campaign.

Through the book and the comics, we hope to create a deeper understanding of autism - the reality, struggles and sacrifices but also the love, support and courage.

SAAC In The News



On 4th April, our CEO Mr Bernard Chew was featured in The Straits Times (*'More can be done to support adults with autism, says parent'*). In the article, he made the call for more to be done to support adults with autism. Below, he shares some of his reflections and his hopes for persons with autism.

"Indeed, autism is a broad spectrum. Not everyone with autism may be capable of paid employment, whether in open or supported settings. For some of them, a quality Day Activity Centre programme is necessary to provide the daily engagement and dignity/quality of life that is often taken for granted by other young adults. And DACs need to be resourced properly to ensure that a good programme can be delivered with a proper level of engagement, and staffed with adequate staff:client ratios.

Further down the road, these autistic adults will need some form of residential care in a dignified environment. In Singapore, that's provided for in Adult Disability Homes, most of which are currently ill-equipped to handle residents with more complex needs. Otherwise, there is a chance that some of these adults will spend a good number of years in a psychiatric care setting, which is inappropriate for them. **We need to do more for persons with more complex needs arising out of their disability, not just for those with autism but for those with other moderate to profound disabilities as well.**

My appreciation to The Straits Times for allowing me to share my story. And also for bringing to the public's attention the Autism Awareness Month campaign run by Autism Network Singapore."

For the full article, [click here](#).

A Story Of **Love And Resilience**: Jacqueline And Her Twins



Hunkered down cross-legged on the floor, 20-year-old Cheryl Yeo is staging a silent sit-down protest by the platform doors of an MRT station. Despite the cajoles of her hapless domestic helper and chaperone May, she refuses to budge. This is actually considered progress. "Now it's not too bad, at least she's in the train station," said her mother, Mrs Jacqueline Yeo, 45, while playing the video of the sit-down protest.

In the past, Cheryl would dash out of the station. That was when she first started taking the train after enrolling at the St. Andrew's Autism Centre's Day Activity Centre at Sengkang in January 2021.

It has since stopped. After 16 months of experimentation to find the best way for Cheryl to commute, minuscule milestones have been achieved. Today, crying at the station is considered a marked improvement.

Yet, Mrs Yeo remains on heightened alert at 2.30pm almost every weekday when her daughter begins the two-hour commute home from Sengkang to Jurong West. For Cheryl, who is on the severe end of the autism spectrum, the journey spanning a staggering 26 stations can be a frightening expedition into the unknown.

Find out how Jacqueline overcomes the challenges of bringing up twins on the spectrum and why she is grateful for every little bit of progress. Jacqueline's story was featured in the #ThisIsMe campaign alongside 9 other inspiring stories of autism. To read more stories, visit <https://sgautism.org/waad2022/>

Ride For Autism



Congratulations to Darryl, Sean and Bryan, SAAC's Day Activity Centre (Siglap) clients for completing the "Ride for Autism 2022" last Friday, 1 April 2022.

After weeks of training, and lots of encouragement from their caregivers and coaches, the trio successfully completed the 15km route! And they even rode the 15km back from OUE Bayfront to East Coast Park. While the distance may not seem like much for most, for our clients, this took a lot of practice and grit.



Darryl's mum, Madam Daisy Ng shared how the idea for the event came about, **"As an avid cyclist, Darryl cycles often. I thought, what better way than to tap on this hobby of his to benefit the community. I'm so happy that everything turned out so well today and I'm thankful that this event brought us all together."**

Riding alongside the Ride For Autism team were a number of employees from Bank of America and of course our very own CEO, Bernard Chew.

We have currently raised \$38,731 through our partners and friends. Our supporter, Mr Charlie Chan, will also be matching the donations dollar-for-dollar up to \$50,000.



"I think today's event was very well done. It's an opportunity for the public to have interactions with the clients and understand the challenges they face. I have been a supporter of St. Andrew's Mission Hospital for a very long time. I think this is part of God's work and I feel it's my duty to support the cause," said Mr Chan.



Closing 15 May!

Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone for your support!

SAAC Staff Spotlight

Ever wondered what being a coach at SAAC's Day Activity Centre entails?

We sat down with DAC (Sengkang) Coach, Nyam Kee Jong to find out what a day in the life of a DAC coach is like.



Q: You've been a coach at SAAC since 2017. What does your role as a coach entail?

KJ: As a coach, my role is to help clients with training and support in the development of daily living, recreational, vocational and community living skills. For example, we teach them how to regulate emotions, personal grooming, social interaction, road safety and even basic money skills. As part of my job, I plan programmes and activities for the clients so that they can practise and maintain these skills. For those with the potential for work, we may train them in one or more vocational areas such as retailing, laundry and horticulture. This is to help encourage a dignified quality of life and greater independence and adaptability.

Q: Could you share what are some challenges that you face as a coach?

KJ: When I first started, the first few weeks were rather tough. However, with encouragement from colleagues and clients' parents, I persevered and five years later, I can say that I truly love my job. As a coach, we face different challenges every day. For example, we may experience physical aggression from clients when they are unable to regulate themselves. Burnout is also a real possibility if we do not pace ourselves. Over the years, I have learnt a lot and have become better at overcoming these challenges. The most fulfilling part of being a coach is seeing clients make progress and when caregivers tell us they appreciate what we do.

Q: What has being a coach taught you?

KJ: My experience as a coach has taught me to be more patient and not to put too much pressure on myself or the clients. The client may take one or two years to learn a skill and that's okay. This job has also taught me not to judge so quickly. You never know what someone may be going through.

Q: What is one thing that people may be surprised to know about a coach?

KJ: Many people have the impression that us coaches have the patience of a saint but actually we are just like everyone else! We have to work at being more patient and getting better at our job. Autism is a broad spectrum and the profiles of our clients are ever-changing. That is why it is important that we remain adaptable and open to changes. **Every day is an opportunity to learn new things and we coaches are constantly learning from one another so that we stay ready to serve to the best of our ability!**

Volunteer With Us & Make A Difference!

"Hi, everyone. My name is Jennifer Nguyen and I started volunteering at SAAC a year ago as a class assistant. My experience has been eye-opening and inspiring, especially as a student majoring in Psychology. It was very interesting to see the different visual aids being used in class as a useful guide for the students to communicate and learn new skills.



I also learned that each student has their own unique traits and by observing their behaviours I was able to figure out how they communicate and find ways to connect with them. In addition, I learned how to look for cues in their behaviours which helped me in understanding the motivation behind each meltdown. **Volunteering at SAAC has helped me build my confidence and I hope to continue contributing to the autism community and promote inclusivity!**"

If you wish to find out about volunteering opportunities at SAAC, drop us an email at volunteer@saac.org.sg.

Let's stay connected!

Follow us on Facebook (sg.SAAC) and Instagram (@saacsg) to keep abreast of our latest events and initiatives. To find out more about what we do, visit www.saac.org.sg