



THIS IS HOW OUR GARDEN GROWS

Blue hearts are springing up all over St. Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC). Our Blue Hearts Garden is a testament to the love, imagination and resilience of pupils from St. Andrew's Autism School (SAAS).

Guided by art teachers Jaslyn Seow and Angelia Ang, the youngsters, aged between 9 and 16, took time out to work on these collaborative pour painting projects.

As its name implies, paint is poured onto the wooden hearts and swirled from side to side, hence achieving a marbled effect.

"Every time the paint is poured, it results in a different effect," as Angelia points out, "but the mix of different paints and effects can create a gorgeous marbled appearance. In the same way, while our students may seem to have the same 'disability', each one is a unique individual."

Each heart features 3 to 4 pours of paints, with blue as the base and pink and/or purple for vibrance and depth. Of blue, the hue associated with autism, Jaslyn says: **"There's no right or wrong blue - the perfect one is different for every child."**

To give these budding artists a voice, both teachers encouraged them to add a finishing touch. This was achieved by using various embellishments, such as

pipe cleaners, beads and sprinklings of glitter.

These blue hearts will be completed in April, a very special month for everyone at SAAC. To kick off World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April, we are rolling out a new edition of #LovesBlue.



The celebrations culminate on 20 April at SAAS Open House 2024. Happening at our Siglap campus at 1 Elliot Road, from 9.30am to 12nn, Open House 2024 is an opportunity for parents with children who are on the spectrum to visit our school and find out more about its curriculum and programmes.

#LovesBlue - Show Your Acceptance For Persons With Autism

Our #LovesBlue campaign returns with a new theme, "Awareness >> Acceptance". For the month of April, let's take this conversation further. Here's how:

♥ Consider the challenges persons with autism & their caregivers face in their daily lives, such as dining out, watching a movie & taking public transport.

♥ Where in your community do persons with autism & their caregivers need support and acceptance? Snap a photo of this public space/activity & share on social media on 1 April 2024.

♥ Please include the following text, "I accept persons with autism", hashtag #LovesBlue, & tag us @saacsg

More details on our socials.

Adopt a blue heart for World Autism Awareness Month. For details, scan this QR Code



POINT OF VIEW

STUDENT

What Kasper Gwee learnt from his first camping trip

Kasper has been attending SAAS since he was 7 years old. Now 18, he graduates in November. He tells us about going to his first camp. [Right: Kasper, receiving his certificate, with mom Jasmine on his right]

"I am Kasper Gwee. I went to camp in December last year. It was my first time at camp. I wanted to go to camp because I thought it would be fun.

"The camp was organised by St. John. It is my CCA at school since 2019. Being a St. John member allows me to help people.

"The evening before departure, my teachers from SAAS and instructors from St. John visited my home. They gave me the final briefing and assured my parents that I was in good hands. So my mom signed the consent form.

"So from 15 to 18 December 2023, I went to the 38th Sinmal Camp. It took place in Kawasan, Johor, Malaysia. The activities began as soon as we arrived. After the opening ceremony, we listened to a health talk.

"After this, we had our first aid case study. I enjoyed it because I could put my first aid knowledge to the test.

My most memorable moment happened on the second day. We visited Che Ann Khor in Yong Peng. This was a very big temple, where I got to see how the local Chinese community depicted heaven and hell. No, I wasn't scared.

"I liked most of the food at camp, especially dinner on the second day. We had hot pot, and I got to cook ingredients like vegetables and meat myself.

"After dinner, we visited residents in the village. We shared first aid knowledge with them. For example, we demonstrated to them how to safely handle sharp utensils.

"On the last day, we attended the closing ceremony. We took so many pictures. I was well liked by officers and campmates. **I was not shy; I could mix with people and made many new friends.**

"I also learnt many things at the camp, like first aid and foot drills. I want to work hard to become an officer with St. John, and find full-time work with them.

"I have become more independent and responsible. I texted my mom every day; and called her one day. I missed her - well, just ok lah. I missed my dog Wendy too.

"One day, I want to visit Moscow. I'm not afraid of the cold. My mom says it's very far, so we may go to Harbin in China instead. I'll let you know when I've saved enough money."



PARENT

Why I allowed my son to go to camp: Kasper Gwee's mom Jasmine Tan

"When Kasper asked me about going to camp, I was worried but only a little. He is the youngest of my 4 sons and has never been away from me. But I trusted his teachers and instructors.

"My husband initially objected; he felt that Kasper would be too far away from home. But I convinced him that our boy should go out and explore the world.

"It helps that Kasper has learnt to communicate with people around him. In class, for example, if he didn't feel well, he'd inform his teachers. He has studied in SAAS since Primary 1. He was officially diagnosed with autism only at around 3 or 4 years old. When he started at SAAS, he couldn't communicate at all. We knew what he wanted only from his gestures!

"I've tried my best to raise Kasper like I would any neurotypical child. I'm happy to know that Kasper enjoyed his time at camp. He's become more aware about personal safety. For example, if he sees me wearing my bag on my back, he'd pull it in front of my body. It protects against snatch theft, he explains to me. So if he decides to go to camp again, I'd feel more at ease.

"Kasper is graduating in November. I want him to find a job; I feel it's not good for him to be holed up at home. I also hope for more opportunities for him to interact with others in the community and make new friends."



VOLUNTEER / DONOR

How Marisa Chua wants to make a difference, one bake at a time

Marisa's admiration for our beneficiaries' simplicity and intelligence strengthened her resolve to contribute. Her home bakery business donates 5% of sales to SAAC. [Right: with David Matthew Fong, head of Strategic Partnerships & Volunteer Management]

"In 2023, fuelled by a deep yearning for meaning, I stepped away from my corporate career and embarked on a journey of giving back.

"I felt compelled to offer support to disabled or underprivileged children, recognising the importance of providing them with life skills for survival in the community.

"My yoga instructor told me about SAAC - she volunteered here. Drawn to its welcoming approach, I started as a volunteer in March at Day Activity Centre (DAC) Siglap.

"Autism was not unfamiliar to me; I'd heard from a relative about his experiences with his autistic son. Hence my initial steps were filled with trepidation. But the warmth and guidance provided by the coaches quickly eased my concerns. It allowed me to immerse myself in various tasks, from assisting with walks to accompanying clients with their lunch box collection routine.

"I was motivated by the clients' appreciation for simple joys in life. Among the initiatives I undertook was to make a new steering wheel for a client, who cherished his worn cardboard version. I also repurposed my furniture and appliances to support SAAC's endeavours.

STAFF

Speech and language therapist Caleb Lai enables our beneficiaries to express themselves

There's more to communication than words, says Caleb [left]. Pictures and symbols are crucial too.

"I chose to specialise in speech and language therapy because it allows me to serve people with children. I love kids and have always enjoyed helping to take care of them. I've been working as a speech and language therapist with SAAC's Allied Professionals team for 2 years. What I do here - if I were to describe in one sentence - is to give a voice to the voiceless. Which I find very meaningful.

"Many children who attend our school are non-verbal. Even some who possess limited verbal ability usually struggle



"In December 2023, I launched LoveBites Eats, a home bakery business. I donate 5% of its sales to SAAC. The support from my customers during our Lunar New Year bakes was overwhelming. We raised nearly \$150, which I matched to double the contribution.

"In February this year, I collaborated with SAAC to set up a donation page and invited friends and customers to contribute towards our shared cause.

"Fundraising is a new endeavour for me but I want to start small and aim high. My target is to raise \$1,000 by year-end. **I am driven by the conviction that the true worth of this journey resides in the effort put forth.** We can make a difference - one step, one bake, and one donation at a time.

Scan here for
volunteering
opportunities



with expressing themselves. Our students are taught to use the AAC (or Augmentative and Alternative Communication) comms board in class. These charts show pictures and words customised to each child's needs and abilities. So some may have a larger comms board with several pages than others.

"I also work closely with parents and caregivers, to encourage them to use the comms board at home to communicate with their child. There are both group and individual training sessions. And since parents and caregivers have their own goals for the child, our strategies must align with these too. **My advice is to keep your eyes on the goal and don't give up.**"



Scan here for SAAC
career opportunities

FARM TO FRIDGE

Veggies Available Here

Residents of Laguna Park in Marina Parade can now purchase fresh greens grown and harvested at BlueAcres-SAAC Rooftop Farm. It is part of our Dignity of Work programme, which enables vocational training for DAC clients in sustainable farming practices. Pick up yours at \$5 for 2 packets. Pop over to our Community Fridge at Blk 5000C.



ADVOCACY

SAAC Shares at Post-Show Dialogue for *Falling*

A discussion about autism invariably raises the question: how do you love someone who is difficult to love? SAAC CEO Bernard Chew (10 March) and SAAC Principal Veronica Ho (13 March) spoke at the post-show dialogue for *Falling*, a play by Pangdemonium about the pressures of caring for an autistic child.



AUTISM-FRIENDLY SPACES

Gone to Sentosa

SAAC is helping organisations build inclusive environments for persons with autism. Over 2 days at Sentosa, our training team shared with its staff about autism, challenges PWAs face, and ways to create a positive experience for them.



INVITATION

Walk of a Lifetime

21 Sept 2024 (Sat), St. Andrew's Junior College

Our annual community celebration returns with a bigger line-up of games and activities, culminating in a charity walk where persons with autism are joined by those without. Other details on our socials.



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