

# Youth Impact Communication

## Not Sympathy, But Empathy -- ASD Children Need Our Help

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# Summary

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Of all the minority groups in this world that deserve our attention, why are we obliged to care for ASD children, and how can we, as a group of ordinary students, help change people's common misconceptions from "sympathy" to "empathy" ?

Since the beginning of this competition, these inquiries has been pounding in our hearts. We have been pursuing the answers through interactions with ASD children and interviews with those closest to them. We express our sincerest gratitude to them and we are proud to say that we have found the answer to both questions. First, we learned that currently, there are more than 10 million people with ASD, including more than 2 million children. In 10-20 years, they will inevitably encounter us on their way to pursue a bright future. A surging need for attention, caring, and job is going to appear when we, as the post-2000s generation, become the pillar of our society. What we are doing now might seem trivial and we barely skim the surface of this spectrum, but we will gain more experience and will understand them, care for them, and most importantly, accept them, only if we start now. It's obvious that the autistic population is astonishingly large. Thus, we limit our scope to autistic children under the age of six. Six years old is a dividing line for ASD patients. Those below six are still moulding their recognition of themselves, meaning it's much easier for them to achieve a successful result after rehabilitation while the older children usually follow a constant pattern of thinking, making it harder to help them open up their minds.

At first, we thought about a charity-organized fund raising project to help those who cannot afford proper rehabilitation. However, it came to us gradually that donations can only solve their financial problems temporarily, what they really need is companionship and understanding, approval and acceptance. We assumed that they were insensible to our judgments at first, but that was just not the case. From our survey, we concluded that 67.6% of them still held the original misconception that autistic children preferred solitude to social interactions. After an interview with Mr. Zou, expert trainer and director of the Early Bird Rehabilitation Center, we knew that our misconceptions can actually lead these children into an abyss of isolation, self-doubt and depression. "Some refused to come out of their rooms since they heard someone accusing them of 'numb', and many acquiesced this perception of themselves being pathetic because they believed that they were given zero chances of a decent future." Mr. Zou said, "When parents or teachers complained that looking after them is tough work, they don't mean it. But ASD children will take it seriously. Being viewed as a troublesome burden by those one loved is a disastrous harm to them mentally."

We, luckily, had witnessed their talents. During the New Year celebration we held in Early Bird Rehabilitation center doing handcrafts, we found out that the children spent much more time correcting themselves and redoing their work until it reached their standard of perfection. One girl specifically seemed to shield all the noise and in silence, she carefully designed her graphic, cut the paper slowly but scrupulously, and collage the graphics together in the shape of a heart. She seemed to be eager to do things independently. Actually, all ASD children want to be wanted deep down. Thus, instead of cleaning all the obstacles for them, what we should do is to guide our way with torches and enlighten them to progress at their own pace. Sooner or later, they will find a way and will be proud of who they are and what they are capable of.

We don't need to donate, nor do we need to be acquainted with professional scientific details relating to the rehabilitation process. All we need to do is to spend a little more time to listen the voices from their hearts. For us who thought it might be extremely hard to get to know their inner feelings at first, the book *The Reason I Jump* from Naoki Nigashida enlightened us and it provided exclusive examples of the autistic mindset in a brief, plain but vivid way. There are lots of books written by autistic authors discussing the disorder, including appropriate parental methods and insightful knowledge about what they are thinking when they display a specific type of behaviour.

Eleven ordinary Grade-nine students could set up an WeChat Official Account and receive more than 1500 hits for their first article, imagine what influential businessmen, aspiring leaders, and professional scholars could do to help them? Among those 1500 or more readers, there are 1500 or more possibilities. With greater possibility comes greater opportunity. An opportunity that we might actually ALLEVIATE ASD children's pain one day.

During this long-term project, we have faced numerous difficulties and abrupt turns. COVID-19 blocked us from face-to-face interactions with the children, and it provided us limited amount of resource clips for our final video. It was a challenge for all of us indeed, but the compliments and encouragements from the parents, our friends, and strangers always boost our morale. ALLEVIATE is a long process, and we hope that one day, when you encounter an autistic children, you can smile and wait. Remember that what you are looking at is not someone that needs help and lives on your donation. It is another form of life that deserves to be respected and cherished.

Hopefully, with us, they will not be alone anymore.

# Identify the Topic

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## | Topic Description

ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), is recognised as a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties with social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behaviour. They avoid any eye contacts or common interactions, persistently prefer solitude, have difficulties in understanding others, display repetitive behaviours, and manifest strong resistances to any minor changes in routines or surroundings.

Our topic is about ASD children. Many of us are not familiar with this particular group of children, and many of us take them as “special” . we have done a survey on this topic previously in our school, and the analysis is shocking. Nearly 25% of 100 participants don't have the slightest idea of any ASD treatments, information, or symptoms. 50.17% students have only a blurry impression of the concept. The astonishing percentage of nearly 76% students aren't familiar with ASD children and during our survey, many of them don't feel like they are obliged to know them because they think that these ASD children belong to another world. Their paths are parallel to ours, and there seems to be no chances of a point of intersection. This is a typical attitude towards ASD children that need to be reversed. Sooner or later these children will grow up, and there will be no protection from outside world to prevent them from being hurt. If we don't get to know them, then when an ASD adult enters your workplace and his/her behaviours are prominent enough to be taken as unusual, we will be unprepared and show our prejudices as others do. Harmful actions will be displayed and the consequences will be made towards the ASD victims. By knowing them more, we can understand them better, and establish a steadier relationship that help not only themselves, but ourselves. They are another "us" coming from another unknown universe, and they have lost their way. We are responsible to lead them and by guiding them onto the correct way, we are also finding ourselves and our positions in the wilderness of the world. Yet it is necessary to care for these children. There are more than 10 million people with ASD, including more than 2 million children under the age of 12. Yet the employment rate of Chinese adults with autism is less than 10%. In 10-20 years, the 2 million children under the age of 12 will inevitably encounter us on their way to pursue a bright future. A surging need for attention, caring, and job is going to appear when we, as the post-2000s generation, become the pillar of our society. Another problem with ASD children is that although there are numerous charity events for ASD children, but most of them are held as public donations. People

don't have a chance to enter the world of these children, to look at the surroundings from their perspective, and to establish a mind-to-mind connection that will gradually lead the children out from their sealed castle to the sunshine outside. We are trying to influence people around us, that what they need is not pity, not sympathy, but understanding, support, encouragement, and consolation. Life has many ways. Some of them are like us, looking perfectly normal from the outside but having our own defects, and some of them are like these children, living in their own world, isolated with the outside voices, closed only to themselves. What we need to do is to embrace them, to love them, and most importantly, to accept them as who they are. We need to accept every way life has been created. What ASD children really need is not our sympathy, but our empathy.

## | Why it is important

The essentiality of this topic lies in two parts.

First, the common stereotypes against ASD children might turn into severe physical and mental abuse. During an interview with an ASD psychological consultant, she told us an example of one of her young patients. The boy had taken numerous treatments and was recovering in a rapid speed. He began talking though sometimes still mumbled and joining group activities with passion and friendliness. His mother decided to send him to an ordinary public school so that he could receive the same level of education as other children. Unexpectedly, the boy couldn't stand 45 minutes of complete silence, and he couldn't bear sitting straight with his eyes focused not on the fragrant blossoms of spring, but on one piece of small blackboard with the chalk annoyingly making scratchy noises. He stood up abruptly from time to time without any provoking signs, sometimes sang songs and sometimes idly strolled around the classroom. After his first day of ordinary school, other parents and teachers complained about having a special child in class, disturbing their daily routines, and affecting the efficiency of the learning environment. Thus, negatively influenced by the teachers and parents, students around him began to sneer and mock at him, and this gradually turned into bullying because they steadily believed that "he was not one of us, so he didn't belong here. He had to go, or else we will make him leave." They separated themselves from the boy despite the fact that the boy forgave them every time and still wanted to be friends with them. The boy suffered from this mental isolation, and his symptoms of ASD retrieved. Finally, he had to leave with a wounded heart that would never heal again.

This was just a tip of the iceberg. Same circumstances happened repeatedly. If we can influence people around us, and that impact can ripple around, telling everyone in society what they should and shouldn't do when they meet an ASD patient in life, we can do our best to protect them and help them while embracing them into

the outer world.

The second essentiality is to proclaim the abilities of ASD children. The psychology consultant explained that because ASD children needed special care, careful protection, and most importantly, rehabilitation treatment. All of these cost a large amount of money, and having an ASD child also meant an extremely tough test for parents. Most of them were ashamed of their ASD children because of their mental immaturity, strange behaviour that cannot be understood and agreed with, and extremely slow or even stagnant development of mind and body. By organising events that both us and them can participate, we can show the parents that they can do things that we can, and sometimes they can master these areas even better. Although many of us still insist that they acquire not a single redeeming feature, they do have a much keener observance of the world than we do. Through art, music and creative thinking that require a keen perception and attentive insight into things in nature, their talent might be discovered and inspired.

## | Project Objective

We have two main purpose. First, we want to raise people's awareness on Autism Spectrum Disorder. Before that, we want to know how well people around us are informed with ASD. We will first post surveys online, by asking descriptive questions like, "If you are having a Maths class, and just when the final mystery is about to reveal, a child in your class begins to sing loudly as if it's his concert, what will you do?" and list out the possible reactions of teachers, students, and parents, so that everyone doing the questionnaire can choose their responses to the questions. Thus, we will have a rudimentary understanding of how they would react to the ASD children in daily life and analyse the most common stereotype against these children. After the survey, we can pertinently adjust our further plans.

Then, we hope to change people's perceptions on this matter. We will set up a WeChat Official Account that enables us to post our activities in progress, updated researches on ASD identifications and treatment, and interaction channel with our subscribers to get to know their ideas and thoughts. We plan to repost our survey after the project to see directly if their attitudes towards ASD patients have changed.

Then, we plan to set examples of some ASD children's capabilities through activities and interactions. By connecting a charity organisation that's responsible for ASD children rehabilitation, we can organise special events that not only enable us to understand them better, but also show that they can participate in usual activities as we do. These events include making sweet dumplings on Lantern Festival, designing our own T-shirts, and a drawing interaction that requires them to paint what they see through their lucid eyes first, and then allows us to continue painting our visions of the world based on comprehensions of their works, so that when the

canvases are returned to them, they can see our interpretations and know that we are trying our best to understand them and providing our sincerest help. By organising these meaningful events, we are persuading everyone to rediscover ASD children. They are not idiots who don't even know how to express themselves or to behave obediently or to restrain their actions, they are delicate porcelain that deserve our love and tenderness. They are fragile, but if we embrace them with acceptance, care and warmth, they will shine brightly like lost diamonds.

# Identify the Target Audience

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## | Who Are They?

The first type of target audience are the ASD children's parents. Firstly, they are the closest people to ASD children. They look after them, accompany them, and teach them about the outside world as their responsibility. They are essential for the children to gain the ability to communicate with the world. Thus, it will be more helpful if they know the correct ways to be with their children. Secondly, it is very difficult for the parents to raise ASD children. Some parents just cannot enter the children's hearts although they have tried their best for a long time. This may cause negative moods and great pressure to the parents. And lead to bad results such as parents who fall into despair give up all the things they strived before. Therefore, we are trying to give the parents advice and mental comfort. Also, they can have a platform to exchange their experiences with each other. So, in this way, they can encourage others in the same situation. Thirdly, our project is already an inspiration to these parents. The knowing of our project can make them face their life more positively. Because they know some people are willing to help them and describe their difficulties to the public.

The second type of target audience is other adults in the society. Although those aged similarly to these ASD children (1-6 years old) are on the same page, they don't have enough experience to comprehend this disorder itself, not to mention empathise with the children and their parents. Firstly, most adults have healthy social morality. After knowing the problems ASD children and their parents meet correctly, they can actually provide the help they need instead of simply thinking. The truth is adults in the society have influence than teenagers and can do more things. Secondly, most adults already started a family, so they can understand better the financial difficulties and emotional outbreaks these parents have to face. While parents can do the actual work of ALLEVIATE, children can watch and learn. Good education starts from an early age, and from the parents' positive influence, children can, and will gradually learn what's the correct way ASD children should be treated in.

The third type of target audience is ordinary teenagers. Teenagers don't have enough social influence like adults and they can't do much things relating to materialistic alleviation, but according to statistics, 2 million ASD patients nowadays are children. In 10-20 years, it's inevitable that teenagers like us will encounter them



on our way to pursue a brighter future. By then, we would have become the pillars of our society and would be able to provide help, if we start NOW. If an ASD child is in an ordinary school, their brothers or sisters will be the nearest people to them. Teenagers can use their influence in family to teach their brothers or sisters to get along with the ASD children in a right way. Also, teenagers can in turn motivate their parents to act. Adults that don't know or don't want to know about ASD children may change their minds after their sons or daughters' influential persuasion. Most importantly, teenagers have time and energy to make up for their lack of money and social influence. When adults are busy at work, teenagers can work on a project to call to action, just like what we are doing now.

## | Why Are They?

Target audience is an extremely important point, which determines the trend of our project to a great extent. So I decided to describe from three groups why we chose these people as our target audience.

The first is the parents of autistic children. The most frequent contact with autistic children is with their parents, who are also the most likely to make changes. Even a small act or a simple encouragement from a parent can be a fuse to change the fate of a child. As we all know, parents are the best teachers for their children. They have had an impact on children in three ways. First of all, in terms of thinking, parents' thoughts will affect their children's whole life. If parents convey positive thoughts to their children, they will try their best to manage their own lives and change their current situation by improving themselves. If the negative thoughts are conveyed to children, they will let them deny themselves and complain about their life, and they will not reflect on themselves. Secondly, in behavior, if parents will actively communicate with their children and make friends with them, and change their bad habits, they will apologize to their children for doing wrong. We can not only see the advantages of children, but also teach them. And very trust in the child, willing to let the child go. This will make it easier for children to form good habits. Finally, in terms of language, many parents now take for granted what they do as parents. You don't say "I'm sorry" if you do something wrong; you don't say "thank you" if you get help from your child; you're wonderful when your child gets praise. If children are treated like this, they will lose their ability to express themselves. However, they will not say "I'm sorry", "thank you" or "you're wonderful" to others. So in terms of language, parents have a profound influence on their children. The second is ordinary parents. Their children are likely to go to school and play with autistic children. If their children will cause problems to autistic children, it is necessary to make education and correct guidance to avoid unnecessary encounters. So what parents can do to their children is not to let them look at those autistic children with different eyes, and to treat them as normal children to

communicate and play. The difference between ordinary parents and parents of autistic children is that the former indirectly helps autistic children, while the latter directly helps autistic children.

The third is teenagers. Teenagers are also a group that may have direct contact with autistic children. However, young people are often not so understanding, those immature and stable young people in a rage will cause harm to autistic children. So it is necessary to make a good education for teenagers. At home, parents can take care of autistic children, while at school, parents can't take care of them, so students at school are a group that can often help autistic children at school. The biggest difference between home and school is the number of people. There are only parents and brothers and sisters at home, and there are all kinds of people in school, just like a small society. And in society, there is one thing that is the most indispensable, that is, friends. In school, as well, building a friend relationship with a classmate is a way to get to know him better. With friends, you won't be alone; with friends, you will get help when you need help; with friends, you can see the colorful world.

## | **What is your scope?**

The basic way is by using an app called wechat, similar to twitter or facebook. This determines that it cannot spread very far. Our friends on wechat may spread our passages, thus making it spread, but we cannot make everyone reads it. Only our friends, classmates and relatives will read the passage first. Usually, most of them will send the passage to others. However, we can not insure that his or her friends will read it. It' s likely that lots of his or her friends will not read the passage or spread it again.

Thus, we can conclude that we will target at our friends, classmates, relatives and people near them.

## | **How to reach them?**

There are two main types of way to reach them.

The first one is offline activities. This is a good way to get in touch with the children and their parents. At the beginning of the year, we held an activity with the children and their parents. Because of the coming of the Chinese New Year, we decided to make traditional Chinese lanterns and greeting cards with them. We were divided into different groups. During the procedure, we can not only get in touch with the children, but also their parents. It is a bit hard for these children to focus on the handwork. Sometimes the parents would be anxious about them. Thus, we were

trying to tell the parents to not be worried, and let the children to take their time. Although it is hard to change, but we were trying to help the children to feel the outside world, and to let the parents know that they should keep patient and wait for them. This is the first offline activity, and we are going to organize more.

The second type is online activities. They mainly face normal parents and teenagers. Firstly, we did an online survey on this topic in our school. A lot of people filled out it. Secondly, we established a Wechat interface named "the black crow and white dove" . We will update articles and videos on it. Many people can see it since nearly everyone in China uses Wechat. Moreover, we control the articles in an appropriate word count and the videos in plausible length in order to make reading or watching them not tiring things for teenagers. Most importantly, we discard the dross and select the essence, making the content more professional and more interesting. Over 1600 people have read the first article we published, and that is a great process and we made.

# Identify the Key Message

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## | The Key Message

Together, we ALLEVIATE the pain of ASD children.

A- Acquaintance- understand that autism is not a disease, but a disorder.

L- Lustre- ASD children possess lovely lustre.

L- Love- to accept who they are and to embrace them, but to acknowledge that they want to be wanted.

E- Encourage- inspire them to recognise themselves not as the outliers or the aliens of the world, but as lost stars that will outshine anyone else with a little help.

We need to approve the potent in ASD children, as they are capable of doing various subjects just like we are, and sometimes they can solve problems better than we can. Our principle is to show these outstanding characteristics to their parents, teachers and most importantly, to others who disregard them.

V- Votive- call for dedication and caring for these children, especially standardized educational services for the children that not only includes rehabilitation, but also involves psychological counsel that will help them assimilate in the society.

I- Interaction- engage in communication and activities with the children, trying to get to know each other better.

A- Assuage- calm the anxiety of their parents and remove the barrier between us and ASD children

T- Tolerance- allow mistakes.

E- Empathy- Always remember to treat them with respect, but never sympathize them as if they are disabled or intelligently inferior than us.

In order to learn ASD children better, every team member read the book *The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida. He was 13 when he wrote this book that expressed the inner voice of an autistic child, while this work was praised as a masterpiece for understanding ASD children.

In the book, he was asked if a medicine to cure autism is invented would he choose to become normal.

His response was stunning. He would rather stay the way he was. Here is his explanation,

“I’ve learnt that every human being, with or without disabilities, needs to strive to do their best, and by striving for happiness you will arrive at it. For us, you see, having autism is normal – so we can’t know for sure what your ‘normal’ is even like. But so long as we can learn to love ourselves, I’m not sure how much it

matters whether we're normal or autistic."

He wished that by reading the explanations about autism and its mysteries, we can come to understand that all the obstacles which present themselves don't come from their selfishness or from ego.

If all of us can grasp this truth about ASD, these children are handed a ray of hope. However hard an autistic life is, however sad it can be, so long as there's hope they can, and will stick at it.

When the light of hope shines on this world, the pain of ASD will be alleviated.

This is Naoki's hope, thousands of ASD children's hope, ASD parents' hope, and our hope as well.

## | The Tactics Behind

#Clarification and introduction through authorities, showing facts: (reasoning)

1. Professional ASD health care doctor:

Autism Spectrum Disorder, also known as Autism, is a developmental disorder caused by a neurological disorder. Symptoms include difficulty in social interaction, communication, narrow interests, and rigid behavior patterns.

Q: what are people's prejudices about autistic children? What are the consequences?

The first is that in schools, students tend to discriminate against autistic children because of their behavior, and there is severe school violence against them. This not only brings them physical harm, but also aggravates their perception of themselves as "different", making it more difficult for them to integrate into the society later on. Over time, a psychological cue is formed that makes them more afraid of new environments, new faces and new lives. Then psychotherapy is less effective and doesn't really help them open up to new surroundings.

Second, they will affect the classroom order and learning environment during class, so some students' parents will complain to the school, resulting in autistic children's unable to continue learning in school and can only receive education in rehabilitation institutions and secondary schools. But because there aren't a lot of educational institutions specifically for children with autism, these children have to work with other children with learning disabilities, but they can actually understand the text and learn on their own.

Therefore, this will reduce the contact between autistic children and others, and block them in a small, constant space, which is not conducive to their growth.

Q: Are there any treatments for autism?

At present, the only way is rehabilitation training. Because autism does not have any drugs, and it is not a disease itself, but a developmental disorder. There is no way to force the correction of autism itself. But we can only understand, accept them, care

for them, let them spontaneously open their hearts and communicate with the outside world. Through our tolerance and love, we can help them.

## 2. Rehabilitation center director

It is truly our great honor to come into contact with the Early Bird Rehabilitation Center. According to the study mentioned by Mr. Zou, director of the center who has been keen on organizing events that provides opportunities for ASD children's interaction with the public, the best rehabilitation intervention period for autistic children is before the age of 6. Thus, the center serves as the second home for ASD children under the age of 6. Through systematic rehabilitation training, their symptoms can be mitigated, and they can learn basic communication skills. "We hope that they can enter primary and secondary school like normal children in the future, and eventually integrate into society." He said during an interview. With such faith and sense of mission in mind, a group of public-spirited teachers and volunteers use their love and patience to make sure that every heart once closed and alone can be accepted, understood and embraced.

### #Appealing to emotion by telling a story:

During an organized activity celebrating New Year with 5 ASD children in Early Bird Rehabilitation Center, we were astonished by surprises. This was the first interacting activity we held, and frankly speaking we were still quite nervous despite sufficient preparations for what might happen. It turned out that we were worrying too much. They were naturally diligent, and because of the disorder, they can pay more attention to details than we can, spending much more time correcting themselves and redoing their work until it reached their standard of perfection. It was a costly job, one that most of us viewed as unnecessary and over-sophisticated. According to one of our team members who helped a little girl complete her paper-cutting, the child "seemed to shield all the noise, and in her lucid eyes, there were nothing but her papers. In silence, she carefully designed her graphic, cut the paper slowly but scrupulously, and collage the graphics together in the shape of a heart. She talked only two sentences during the entire activity, but I knew she understood what I was saying, and was willing to listen to my advices, though she would rather do her work independently without being distracted."

This shows that ASD children are capable of numerous matters, and one intriguing fact that occurs to us is that sometimes they seem to be eager to do things independently. They want to be wanted deep down, and they want to have their own space that will be respected and protected in the world. Thus, instead of cleaning all the obstacles for them, what we should do is to guide our way with torches and enlighten them to progress at their own pace. Sooner or later, they will find a way and will be proud of who they are and what they are capable of.

### #Mobilization through special T-shirts

We made special T-shirts for our activities. The team members wear them when

participating in events with ASD children. The background is decorated in sky-blue because the children are sensitive to their surrounding, and will feel alert and overwhelmed when unfamiliarities approach as signs of danger. According to research, blue is the colour ASD children are least comfortable with. We want the children to feel at ease when interacting with us, as one of our principles is to respect them. Our slogan is also printed on the blue background, so whenever we organise some participatory events, all of our team members can wear the T-shirts and propagate our project for the purpose of impact.

# Choose the Platform

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## | The Platform Chosen

The platform we chose for our project is online social media. In specific, an official account on WeChat. The account's name is 'The Black Crow and The White Dove'. The name came from a book written by Naoki Higashida, who is an autistic child.

For the reason we chose this platform is that. First, official account can be used in various way. We can update videos, articles and all sort of things on it. Official account is also able to conduct surveys to people online, compare to conducting surveys offline, it will be easier for people to finish it, and it will be easier for us to analyze the results. Up to now, we've already updated two articles on our account, and about 1600 people have read it. The number is increasing. We're also planning to conduct some surveys on the account as well. We are sure that using a modern technique to spread our thoughts is a good idea. Second, the account online can be accessed by large and different groups of people. With the support of our parents and classmates, the account will be widely and rapidly spread. Also, the number of likes and followers we received can directly show the impact of us.

The benefits of running an official account is various. First, it's not costly.

Comparing to other kind of platforms such as publishing a magazine or making speeches. We don't need to spend time and money on finding place and people. Instead, we can do it all by ourselves online. The second benefit is one that we have never considered when we were first choosing the platform. During this special period, we can't do anything outside because of the virus. Indeed, our plans of doing activities with autistic child is delayed, but we can still publish articles that acknowledge people about autism, and what we should do to help them. Thinking positive, if we plan to do things like speeches or exhibition, our plan will be totally messed up. This shows the second benefits of our platform. Official account can be used in different occasions even when emergencies happen, and we can continuously update our progress on it no matter now or in the future.

On the account, we update articles about autistic children, to raise people's awareness on them. We also update articles about our activities with those children. We've found an organization which helps those children to recover from the disorder. During the spring festival, we went to the organization and did some handcraft with the children there. We were glad to see those children enjoying their time. It also strengthens our determination on helping them.



# | The Alternative Platforms

Besides the online social media, we have considered three alternative platforms. The first idea is to make a questionnaire and ask pedestrians on the street to fill it out. The advantages of using questionnaires are obvious: we will be able to gather information from people of different ages and careers, which will expand our coverage and make our results more accurate. However, the plan was soon denied by us, mainly because there is little possibility people on the street are willing to answer to our questions. Now most people have rapid-paced lives, which means few of them will have time to cooperate with a survey, not to mention spreading information about ASD to people around them. We then decide to replace offline interviews with online surveys that include only multiple choice questions, which can be accessed from our Wechat Official Account. It will minimize the amount of time spent for people who are unwilling to accept an entire, thorough interview while also improving efficiency in getting the results, as the statistics can be viewed and uploaded directly, without sophisticated calculation. It is also far-reaching, as most people access news updates via Internet. Yet there are still flaws. Because only multiple choices are available, we cannot ask open-ended questions relating to people's full thoughts and opinions towards ASD children, nor can we turn to them for advice on our project, which means it is much harder to determine people's real feelings. In addition to this, the audience is limited. Our initial goal is to let more people know about autistic children and care for them spontaneously. Therefore, this topic is endowed with social significance. In other words, our target audience is not only parents, teachers and classmates of autistic children, but also the general public. Therefore, our questionnaire survey not only needs the participation of young people, children and middle-aged parents, but also needs the attention of the elderly. Because they have experienced so much, their advice and suggestions are extremely valuable. However, most of them don't have electronic devices, not to mention doing surveys online.

The second one is to hold a concert for ASD children. Inspired by an art exhibition held by another organization, we thought that a concert can show people the special melody from these children's heart, and provide them with new acknowledges of ASD children. Concerts also have a wide range of influence. Before we made a deeper understanding of ASD, we even expected some children to have born talents despite their difficulties in communication. On one hand, children's interests or musical talents can be discovered through the concert; on the other hand, a concert is an audio enjoyment to audiences. However, after we visited Early Bird Rehabilitation Center, we realized that it was hardly possible for most ASD children to play musical instruments. Secondly, they would feel extremely nervous and uncomfortable in front of so many audiences. More importantly, we learned that most parents aren't willing to reveal that their children are ASD children, since they concern that it might bring bias to their kids. A concert held for their kids will

greatly hurt their feelings. Considering those factors above, any onstage platforms are unsuitable.

The third one is to hold a lecture about ASD in our school. Firstly, it is a relatively convenient way to spread information comparing to a concert since ASD children themselves don't have to be involved. Also, audiences at our own school will be more willing to cooperate with our project than strangers. Nevertheless, the platform has a chief shortage corresponding to its convenience. That is, the scale of a group of students' lecture won't be big enough to amplify our influence, and our audiences will be limited to students and teachers in Pinghe School instead of people in society. Moreover, we are not sure if most middle school students will be interested in this topic, while preparing for a single lecture requires some time and effort. It is also part of the reason we chose online social media as our final platform.

## | The Criteria to Evaluate

As for the criteria, we considered four respects to evaluate the platforms, which includes: impression, efficiency, popularity and creativity.

By using the Wechat platform to publish the articles in official account, it has the big range of influence and high popularity undoubtedly. We had 1521 hits in our first article, and we believed that the viewers will constantly increase after we publish more articles. The articles can also be relayed by sharing in the "Moments", so they will have a considerable range of influence via Internet. The high efficiency can also be shown in the same time, our friends and relatives can share the articles written and pass on this information to their friends and colleagues, who are total strangers to us. The information can spread in an incredible speed in little time. However, it would be hard for people to have an impressive view in that way because the booming information updates they receive when surfing the internet every day. Thus, some of the information might be left in oblivion, and few people might actually display their kindness. This creates a big challenge for us to write impressive articles that will provide not only an intriguing reading experience, but also thought-provoking social phenomena regarding to ASD patients and their treatments.

Compare to the Wechat platform, the activities with the ASD children will provide an unforgettable impression to the children and their parents. The activity is a direct way to communicate with them and understand them better. Spending time to make festival lanterns and greeting cards with these children during the special New Year holiday is a meaningful experience for all of us. Seeing these little silent angels using their hands to characterize their world adroitly with patience and concentration, we can know that they enjoy the activity. We believe our sincerity, determination and willingness to provide support and help can be received by the

children and their parents. However, as it was a private activity within the group of children, the range of influence is limited. It may not be as efficient as the Wechat platform since it requires time for careful planning, sufficient preparation and cooperation with the parents.

As for the video that we wanted to make with ASD children online, can provide a chance for the children to express their idea and talent in creating music by shaking the Maracas. The video had a relatively high creativity and efficiency. We can upload the video to different famous website and gain a large amount of view in a short time. That also means the video would have the potential to accumulate a considerable popularity. We will have an introduction for the children about how to make their own instrument and how to engage in the video. We believe that they can enjoy the process of doing this and have a cheerful impression of the engagement of the video. Furthermore, since the epidemic situation is severe recently, most of the people have to stay at home. The video online can be a better way for the children to relax without running any risk.

## | The Rating Sheet

 [Rating Sheet](#)

# Set the Agenda

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## | Set the Agenda

Our key message is 'Alleviate'

For A, Acquaintance. We need to make sure that there are fewer misconceptions on ASD children. Those misconceptions might lead those children to depression or isolation. The first common misconception is that ASD children are babies. In fact, they grow and learn like every one of us, and we should treat them like normal people. Second, ASD child don't prefer to be alone at all. It's just that they can't communicate so well.

The first L, Lustre. ASD children are lovely, they are not weird. When we first went to the organization and see those children. They impressed us. They are cute, active and smart. They can also do all kind of things. Drawing, reading, singing and sports. They can do all those things, and some do great.

The second L, Love. Just like what we mentioned in A, there should be fewer misconceptions on ASD children. They are human for sure, and they have the right to love others and to be loved. We should treat them with patience and love.

The first E, Encourage. This is the most important part. ASD children need a lot of encouragement. We were told that those children are lost diamonds, who need a little help. With our encouragements, they can shine bright just like stars. When we are doing activities with them, we said a lot of compliments and encourage them all the time. I believed that they can understand us, and it was marvelous to see them smile and do great work with us.

V for Votive. A sad fact, some schools don't allowed ASD children to be their students. This is unfair. More help should be provided to them in order to make them fit in the society. Still the same word, there should be less bias and more help and love.

I for Interaction. During our project, we did a lot close activities with them. Such as doing handcraft. This will let us know better about them. For every one, we should not drift away from them. Instead, get engaged and provide love and help.

A for Assuage. Not only we need to ease the pain and barrier of ASD children, their parents also need help. We determined in showing that ASD children are just the same as us. Their parents shouldn't be so worried about their child.

T for Tolerance. ASD children make some mistakes that might seem reckless or uncompromising, but we need to understand that time is the best catalyst for growth, and instead of scolding them for not doing simple things right, we should patiently lead our way, encourage them to try harder, and motivate them so that it

boosts their confidence to solve matters independently.

E for Empathy. The first time we met ASD children' s teacher, he told us that we should only show empathy to them, but not sympathy. Which means we should not sympathize them as they are disabled. We should respect them, show our love and treat them like one of us.

# Design the Packages

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 [Video](#)

 [WeChat official platform links](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

 [Posters designed for World Autism Awareness Day.](#)

# Create and Track the Impact

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## | The Execution Plan

 [Execution Plan \(2nd edition\)](#)

## | Impact Statistics

In this youth influence project, our influence is mainly reflected in the official account of WeChat. As we all know, we are in the information age, the speed of information transmission is beyond imagination. So we think that using WeChat official account can make more people understand autistic children.

In the early days, we asked for official account numbers, hundreds of times, and hundreds of people. And get good feedback in the early bird rehabilitation center, and get the support of parents and teachers.

Our official account was issued in January 10, 2020. So far, the total number of articles we read on WeChat official account is 2057 times. The total number of people who read the book is 175 times. After sharing our articles, we have produced 2014 readings, and 33 people have paid attention to our WeChat official account.

After our statistics, the number of people in our official account is above 1400. The number of users under the age of 18 is about 145, the number of users aged 18-25 is about 50, the number of users aged 26-35 is about 175, the number of users aged 36-45 is about 450, the number of users aged 46-60 is about 545, and the number of users over 60 is about 100. Shanghai has a large number of users, followed by surrounding areas.

 [Hits received after sharing in moments](#)

 [Hits received after sharing in moments2](#)

 [Hits and comments](#)

 [Hits and comments2](#)

 [Hits and comments3](#)

 [Hits and comments 4](#)

 [Hits and comments 5](#)

 [Hits and comments 6](#)

 [Hits and comments 7](#)

# | Collect Feedback

1. Beautiful soul will shine everywhere, I understood the theme and the meaning of this activity, and I was so proud of those children.——Mr. Zou( manager of Early bird)
2. Don' t suppose small good and not to do. Children' s impact may be small, but I believe if they want to do, and try their best, they can cohesive the impact of people around them, and that is a great power. ——Mr. Wang( doctor)
3. We are so grateful for the opportunity which Early Bird and the students of Pinghe School provided, my child spent a really meaningful Sunday happily with these students. We appreciate very much that these students use their spare time to accompany our child. When she got home, she told us that she was had a great time and was really happy. ——Mrs. Zhu( grandmother of one of the ASD child)
4. I learnt what is ASD through the project of my classmates. Before I attended the lecture, I didn' t know what exactly ASD is and have held prejudice against them. But now I realized how difficult and unfortunate they are, and I am pretty sure that I will try my best to help them when I grow up. ——May( classmate of our group)
5. During the project, I leant a lot of ASD children from my daughter, I think there are still few people care about them, and this projected let people try to help these children. I believe that someday in the future, more and more people will try their best to care about ASD children, help them to talk with others fluently, instead of laugh at them. ——Mrs. Lu( one of the group members' mother)
6. As a professional organization which provides rehabilitation training for autistic children, we are very grateful to have the support and help of students ( from Shanghai Pinghe School ) in the YIC Youth Impact Communication Initiative. There are a large number of autistic community in China. With the government' s constant attention, our current rehabilitation training institutions and rehabilitation capacity have greatly improved. But these autistic children also need people from the whole society to give more attention on them and have more scientific understanding of them. By giving them more respect and understanding, they will have the opportunity to truly integrate into every aspect of our society.  
——Mr. Zou(manager of Early Bird)

[!\[\]\(34b4f260a8587d2e97eeaee361cc357b\_img.jpg\) Feedback from Professor Leslie Wayne](#)

[!\[\]\(3d8c13c92b853674f749aac6fa869926\_img.jpg\) Feedback from Mr. Zou, Director of Early Bird Rehabilitation Centre](#)

[!\[\]\(6605b201d6f14d9b3bcb8ab5f274d107\_img.jpg\) A Thank-you souvenir from Early Bird Rehabilitation Centre](#)

[!\[\]\(96cc62f861fdd6e50510c0224a756dff\_img.jpg\) Conversations between Mr. Zou, and one ASD girl's grandma who participated in our New Year celebration event](#)

[!\[\]\(fa6f3af6bfa46c5d4a2d362681095beb\_img.jpg\) Feedback from Early Bird Rehabilitation Staff after sharing our video with them](#)

[!\[\]\(17acf1afa8cdf0b67c53d4865a5ed469\_img.jpg\) The WeChat Official Account of Early Bird Rehabilitation Centre published our articles and praised our efforts](#)

[!\[\]\(e8fb589d58dad1692debababa5e928b6\_img.jpg\) The WeChat Official Account of Early Bird Rehabilitation Centre published our articles and praised our efforts](#)



[📄 The WeChat Official Account of Early Bird Rehabilitation Centre published our articles and praised our efforts](#)

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# Review and Reflections

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## | Overall Self Check

*This part is absent or not available temporarily.*

## | What Are Successful

The thing that we did pretty good is the willing and ability to adjust and improve our project.

In the beginning of our project, we discussed our topic for a lot of times. At first, we decided to do an another topic, and we searched lots of information for that.

However, after a long time exchanging information and opinions, we soon found out that that topic is not an appropriate one for us to work on. Even we were disappointed because the loss of time and energy working on that topic, but based on all the factors, we resolutely changed to a new one. We started to pay all of our attention to thinking about and searching information for the new topic again. We used the time after lunch to communicate to discuss every other day in order to make the plan better. During weekends, we went to a school for ASD children to deeply understand and feel them so as to help them in a better way.

Secondly, we have online platforms. We established an official account on Wechat which named "The Black Crow and The White Dove" . We updated a questionnaire survey, popular science articles about infantile autism and records of our only offline activity with ASD children. Because of the outbreak of epidemic situation, we were forced to cancel all the offline activities. We had to change our original plan and think of new ones. Later, an online meeting was hold by us to solve the problem. We came up with several good ideas.

One group was planning the activities were mainly facing the ASD children. Since we got to know that it' s hard for them to stay at home for a long time, we designed some activities that can be done in door for them. Four of us looked for lyrics and recomposed them into sand hammer music. Two girls composed some body building exercise based some popular dances. The children can follow them to make up the interesting sounds and get exercised. An another group was focusing on the online platform. Two boys updated educational articles such as plants in spring on the wechat account. A girl was filming and editing a video that records our project.

# | What to Improve

We have observed two aspects that require improvement.

Firstly, we need more face-to-face interactions with ASD children. It not only enables us to take a further step into their world, but also offers them more direct assistance and care. Indeed, the problems that pandemic brings are out of everyone's expectation, and we quickly think of some online activities for these children via social media on Wechat. But still, we only manage to do one offline activity with them before the pandemic occurs, which isn't enough. Therefore, we think that our plan would be more effective if we started it earlier, which would enable us to have more interactions with ASD children.

Secondly, we need more communication with the parents of the ASD children. Many parents are really anxious about their children's future. It is not only because of the difficulties their children have while communicating with others, but also because they concern that bias from society will limit their children's opportunities to learn. Therefore, parents are also the ones we need to help with when it comes to ASD issue. Besides, parents are most familiar with their own children and understand what they need; as a result, they play important roles while we are providing helps.

# | Summarize Learnings

During the past few months, we have spent lots of efforts on our project ALLEVIATE. Since the pandemic had been raging, it was a great pity that we had to cancel all of our planned activities, including interacting events with ASD children in Early Bird Rehabilitation Center and large-scale exhibitions.

This twist taught us the most important lesson of media: improvise. As concerns and speculations aroused, it was impossible to stick to our original plans before safety was assured, not to mention catching up with the deadline. The events we were able to hold via Internet were limited, so we had a long time figuring what our further schedule would be. Then, it came to us that we could record videos and send them to the ASD children via WeChat Official Account. We could as well make use of this situation, as it would be a great opportunity to record videos teaching the children how to wash their hands properly, what's the correct way to wear a mask, and how important it is to stay indoors.

Another essential lesson we learned is the importance of knowing what these children really need during this pandemic. As we found out, the children did not need any more educational exercises because the Early Bird Rehabilitation Center was providing online lessons taught by experienced teachers. Scientific instructions relating to COVID-19 were also impractical because the children wouldn't be able to understand them. After a brief conversation with Mr. Zou, we knew that the

children were not used to staying indoors for a long time without moving their bodies frequently, and they became capricious without a focus of concentration. Therefrom, the third lesson we learned revealed: what we can provide for these children that fit their needs. This requires collaboration and self-cognition of what advantages our team possesses. In our team, we have two talented dancers, some musicians who can play at least one music instrument and a science-lover who has seen many documentary films relating to space and nature. We decide to make use of these advantages.

Thus, we recorded a series of three videos teaching the children to make their own simple music instruments using daily materials like peas, newspaper, and plastic board. By following our directions and some tips given, the children can play with these little instruments. In addition, this activity requires a parent-child interaction, which not only draws a closer distance, but also provides an opportunity for parents to witness the miraculous progress their children have made and understand what they are actually capable of.

Two girls in our team chose two popular songs and recomposed some simple dance moves so that the children could exercise from time to time.

The science-lover recommended some documentary films narrated in Chinese and subtitled in English with accessible links. The films' contents were plain and the visual effects were intriguing enough to grasp the attention of these children.

All these videos and recommendation lists were sent via our WeChat Official Account, ran by former Head of the Media Division in our student council.

# Team Credits

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Emily Yu (Xinyue Yu):

I am responsible for the entire running of the WeChat Official Account, and that includes composing articles, designing graphics and layouts, and analysing the subscribers' feedbacks and related statistics after publishing them. It's indeed a tough and time-consuming progress, but the benefits are indeed worth the efforts. I am also responsible for organising group meetings, both offline in school times and online during the pandemic. Before these meetings, I prepare the questions we need to discuss and send them in our group chat so everyone can have time to think about it independently, then we will share our thoughts and come up with a final resolution. In addition to this, I also remind my team mates in time of the deadlines so that work is done efficiently.

I contacted the Early Bird Rehabilitation centre manager Mr. Zou and asked for a brief lecture introducing the centre and some previous events held there.

For the writing part, I am responsible for:

- 1) Identify the topic: "topic description", "why it is important", "project objective"
- 2) Identify the key message: "the key message", "tactics behind"
- 3) Choose the platform: "the rating sheet"
- 4) Create and track the impact: "the execution plan"
- 5) Review and reflections: "summarise learnings"
- 6) Summary

Sonic Zhang (Xiyan Zhang):

In our team, I participated in almost all the activities. First, we come up with the plan together, including the name of our social account and activities with ASD children. Then, I went to the organization with our team to listen to a lecture by a teacher. During winter holiday, we went back there to do handcrafts with them. Recently, I recorded a video of teaching them making easy musical instrument. At last, I wrote the 'the platform chosen' and 'set the agenda' part.

Sherry Zhang (Xurui Zhang):

She is responsible for two writing parts in the project, which are "the Alternative Platforms" and "What to Improve". She takes part in recording videos that teach children to create simple instruments at home. Those videos add colour to children's lives during the pandemic, when everyone has to stay indoor.

"From the writing part I learn the importance of self-examination and how to analyze things in a critical way."

Yahao Fan:

I take charge of writing articles on science knowledge. These articles consist of interesting and easy facts that I think would be a good idea to share with these children. I have only written only one article by now, which is about plants that are special in spring, but I plan to write more on some different topics. The activity I have taken part in is making some little craft with some of these children. It was near the Spring Festival, so we made something that were connected with the traditional Festival. We made a lantern and a card.

I am in charge of writing the "what's your scope" part on the website. It's a very interesting project, and this project let me know something that we have misunderstood. These special children aren't as abnormal as we think. Most of these kids whose disease isn't very terrible are very normal. They just behave like any other kids who are kind, funny and optimistic. They deserve the same life as the normal.

Siqi Xu (Susie):

I designed the team logo based on our topic and the "black crow and white dove" concept. I also sort out other teammates' questions and designed a questionnaire about ASD children in order to test how people know about them. Moreover, I was responsible for two writing parts: "how to reach the target audience" and "what are successful in our project". I have learned a lot through the project, including teamwork and empathy. It is a wonderful experience.

Cong Zheng (Vanessa)

During this process, I have joined different activities. First, I went to the Early Bird organization with my classmates to teach those autistic children to do craft projects. Therefore, we had a deeper understanding of them. Second, I recorded a dance video for those children. The purpose of making this video was to let those children exercise more and be active at home. And the dance video was released in our subscription. Third, I translated the feedback of our activities with another member of our team. And the translated version of the feedback was submitted to the YIC web page.

From this project, I realized the importance of giving understanding and inclusion to the autistic. And I believe we can let more people to know about the autistic. As a result, there will be more people have the consciousness to understand and accommodate them.

Haocheng Zhu (Max)

I'm involved in youth impact contest, and our theme is autistic children. On the Internet, I fill in the content of identify the target audience. In offline activities, I participated in the activities of early bird rehabilitation center. In terms of recording video, I recorded an introduction to the instrument.

In this activity, my biggest harvest is to try my best to help those in need.

Ce Ji (Johnson)

Compared with my teammates, I haven't done much work. The activities I joined including the manual activity with the Autistic children (which everyone took part in), the "Who are the target audience" part and the "Impact statistics" part of the writing assignment. And this article I am writing now.

In the manual activity. I stood on the rostrum to introduce our group when my teammates refused because of their shy. But this is the only thing I can speak of in all the activities I had joined.

Ziqin Xu (Olivia):

At the beginning of the project, I asked Mrs. Zhu, a professional psychologist for what exactly ASD is, what problems do ASD children face, how to solve the problems and how can we do to help them.

I took a part in the offline activity which making traditional Chinese lanterns and greeting cards with ASD children.

In March, I made a video which was an easy dance. We published the video on the official Wechat interface, aimed to encourage the ASD children do some outdoor exercise when they at home.

I also collected the feedback from our schoolmates, our parents, Mr. Zou, and other people, in order to finished the part "Collect the feedback" .

Yuxuan Zhou (Sarah)

I have done three types of activities in the project, including writing the essay about platform criteria as for my part of assignment, recording the video about the introduction for the online activity and visiting the institute of ASD children in order to know more about them and establish the subjects initially.

My gains are mainly in two aspects. To write the criteria for the platform, I do some research about the regular criteria that normal companies would have and add some new ideas into it, which provide me an access to more professional criteria of the platform. In the other hand, the subject of the ASD children is a new thinking mode of helping these children, instead of talking about their hard life, treating them like a normal person is the best way to encourage them. In some other subjects like that, I should remember not to be restricted by the regular idea, but try to innovate a different idea.

Siyuan Guo (Helen)

I was mainly charge of the video editing part. Using the only sources we have, I want to show what ASD children are suffering and change others' misconception in the video. Also, I joined the activity during CNY with ASD kids to make paper cutting together so that they can get more opportunities to communicate with others and help them build confidence and social skills.

# Judge Comments

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" Great topic idea here. Much needed, indeed. Try to avoid gush in your writing. There' s not much need for flowery prices. Say what you mean to say as succinctly and directly as possible. In your summary, spell out ASD immediately. Great idea to start with autistic children younger than 6. Research has shown that early intervention is key, so working with a younger population is smart. It' s good to be aspirational, but it' s also good to do work that' s measurable, especially for the purposes of this project. What you describe initially sounds nice and good and decent. And yes, we should all care for the people around us, no matter their disposition. But it' s challenging to measure whether someone feels empathy for someone else following a campaign of your kind. Good idea to raise awareness, but I' m not sure a survey that asks people to respond to a hypothetical is helpful. And because one autistic person is not like another, how did you determine what hypothetical to illustrate? our audience encompasses almost everyone. Narrow your focus. From how you described your project, it seems like the most appropriate audience are other students, potential classmates of autistic children, or the teenagers you describe as the future societal leaders. You' ve described an interesting key message, turning the word "alleviate" into an acronym. I worry that the acronym is too long, though, so it might lose its meaning. You' re asking people to remember a nine-letter acronym. I wonder if you could' ve played off ASD instead. I know that already stands for something, but maybe you can redefine that a little bit. Or maybe you use ABC or LOVE. The shorter the better for acronyms. But I love the energy and ambition of your messaging. Great mix of online and offline platforms. You offered good justification for what you chose and why you chose them. Your best ideas are centered on the personal interactions with autistic children. The video is well packaged and well produced. Audio and video quality are top notch. Great information contained in the voiceover, and you obviously mixed in some footage and photos from your visits. I know COVID-19 meant you couldn' t shoot all your footage, but some of your alternate choices didn' t fit naturally into the video you produced. Your WeChat content is useful and important. Good work there. Your poster designs are simple and clean, and they communicate your message clearly. Nice work. The variety and depth here was impressive. It' s always good to set goals about your reach before you begin a project, so that you can measure your impact more clearly at the end. It sounds like you got good numbers. Did you get what you were expecting? Did you do better than you thought? The feedback pieces are nice additions and offer additional perspectives about the reach of your work. I appreciated your comment about needing more face-to-face time with autistic children. That would' ve surely



helped, but you were hindered in your ability to meet with them because of the pandemic. Overall, you did excellent work throughout this project. "