

**Legislative Council, Panel on Education**  
**Subcommittee on Integrated Education**  
**Meeting on Monday, 27 May 2013, at 4:30 pm**  
**in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**  
**Submission from Mr. Francis Yu, Chairman, Autism Hong Kong**

**Abstract:**

The General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution in December 2007 to designate 2<sup>nd</sup> of April each year to be the World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) starting from year 2008 onward. China is one of the countries whom agreed to the resolution of the WAAD. Autism Hong Kong (AHK) criticizes the Hong Kong government did not make any effort in public education policy or exercise positive and concrete measures in the past six years to fulfill the obligations requested by the United Nation resolution. The UN called for early detection, early intervention and community support to families and persons with autism in each signatory country. AHK requests the government to set up public health education policy and to implement public education in the WAAD in line with its existing practice in the World AIDS Day (WAD). In the WAD, government utilizes the public broadcasting media, providing funding and collaborating with non-governmental organizations to arouse public awareness on Aids.

Honorable legislators, parents and co-workers:

Legislative Council - the integration of Education Subcommittee. Public Speech - Autism Hong Kong (27-5-2013)

Before this speech, I'd like to tell you (the audience sitting in the Chamber) a story of Hong Kong as an introduction.

1. In the southern of the Central Plains, there is a Hong Kong island with a population of seven million. Due to its unique geographical location, for one hundred years this place has benefited from natural moisture brought by west wind. However, Hong Kong, although known as a place with comprehensive welfare protection network like Western countries, forefront of foreign exchange reserves, more than thirty thousand registered professional social workers, nine institutions for social work training with hundreds of teachers, hundreds of non-governmental organizations, dozens of self-help organizations by parents of autistic children and service users, has been consciously ignorant to the number one global crisis of children's public health— autistic epidemic disease symptoms (Autism Epidemic). Among every 50 children, there is a child with autism (reported by U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention on March 20, 2013, from parents self-reported survey data). In one of South Korea surveys of autism prevalence in 2011, the result was reported as high as 1 in 38.
2. The Hong Kong island that lies on the Southern Central Plains had been very calm until 2007. In this year, one Singapore Chinese young man with autism, Chen Yi-xiong, came to the Central Plains at his own expense to share his personal experiences, publish a “Guide for Portents of Autistic Child”, and set up a website ([www.iautistic.com](http://www.iautistic.com)), by using his personal power to promote social awareness of autism and support from people in the Central Plains. The story of Chen Yi-xiong, a friend with autism from Singapore, serving as an ambassador (of promoting social awareness of autism in Hong Kong), would be both happy and sad.
3. Happily, Yi-xiong is an insider (of autism). He can explore the core of the problem better, from the point of view of an adult autistic. He is also more qualified to share his personal experience. Sadly, Hong Kong, having one hundred thousand of autism families and people in this professional area, even has to rely on an overseas Chinese as a leader. Although this fact may be



acceptable to these professionals for autism in mainland China, to Hong Kong government officials, autism stakeholders, this can put them in the most uncomfortable position like having "pricks in one's back".

4. In addition to the above story of Chen Yi-xiong, Autism Hong Kong can also use similar experiences in Hong Kong, the Mainland and foreign countries to reflect extreme difficulties met in the past 13 years in the process of promoting a universal understanding among the government, professionals, institutions, families and communities about the status of the epidemic of autism symptoms.
5. First, the Hong Kong government and society lack awareness and attention to "the epidemic of autism symptoms". In the United States, the White House has specific policies and funding for autism research. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since 2008, has begun to collect survey data of autism penetration from a wide range of areas in the country.
6. Mainland China also takes actions to cope with the dramatic increase of children with autism. Starting from 2009, in most provinces and cities of China, "The China Disabled Persons' Federation" (CDPF) has implemented a pilot rehabilitation assistance program for poor children with autism, providing annual 10,000 yuan training grants. Since then, the Disabled Persons' Federations across major cities, for example: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, have distributed payment of training grants to poor children with autism based on strong financial resources of the municipal government of these cities. Together with provision of training grants, the CDPF and provincial CDPF also examine the service quality of autism training institutions, which contributes to set good service standards and norms of autism training institutions in the Mainland. Compared to Hong Kong, although Hong Kong claims its welfare safety net and the recent "Care Fund" like financial assistance, Motherland's financial assistance to the families of autistic children and professional standards could make the author as a citizen of Hong Kong feel very difficult to mention all these to mainland professionals in this area and families.
7. In the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) issued by the Central Government in mainland China, the Central Government allocated special assistance funds to support the implementation of "Rehabilitation Assistance Program of Disabled Children" in all parts of China, which aims to support rehabilitation training for 36,000 zero to six year-old children with autism with the amount of aid up to



RMB 12,000. Also, "Rehabilitation Assistance Project for Poor children with Autism " is one of the six succor projects.

8. On July 23, 2010, the General Office of the Chinese Ministry of Health issued a notice of publishing "Clinic Rehabilitation Guide for Children with Autism". It is the first official document of mainland governmental departments, providing norms and guidelines of rehabilitation services for diagnoses and treatments for children with autism.
9. In 1964, U.S. parents of autistic children and experts established "Autism Research Institute" (www.autism.com) abbreviated as ARI, to actively promote the study of the pathology of autism, classifying autism from psychiatric to the brain development disorder. The most important finding is a redefinition of autism from "incurable" to "autism is treatable". The ARI promotes the study of autism biomedical treatment, one of the main trends of the global autism treatment.
10. Since its establishment in 2000, Autism Hong Kong can also share the following work experiences to reflect situations in Hong Kong in order to promote public awareness of autism and public support. Situations we are facing:
  - 10.1 Since 2008, April 2 of each year has been named by the United Nations as the "World Autism Awareness Day". Autism Hong Kong is the only non-governmental organization without any government resources. Starting from 2009, in five consecutive years, Autism Hong Kong has organized "Hong Kong Autism Seminars" and related activities. In the past three years, each year more than 600 people participated in the autism seminars. They are teachers, social workers, psychologists, rehabilitation staff, parents and so on.
  - 10.2 Autism Hong Kong in conjunction with Guangdong and Hong Kong non-governmental organizations jointly promotes the World Autism Awareness Day. Although there are representatives of the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Government in the Preparatory Committee of the Hong Kong Autism Awareness week, compared to other types of public projects in Hong Kong, for example: "World AIDS Day", from the number of organized activities regarding autism, in which they participate (2-3 activities per year), to the government resources allocation (e.g., staff attendance and official help of renting venues), there are substantially significant differences between Government's roles and commitment of government resources allocation in assisting the two kinds of

Page 4 of 6



activities.

10.3 In 2011, Autism Hong Kong submitted an application to the Hong Kong Post for the issuance of commemorative stamps of "World Autism Awareness Day" in the region of Hong Kong. First, Hong Kong Post knew nothing about this day of the United Nations; Secondly, Hong Kong Post replied that "commemorative stamps" can only be issued officially by Hong Kong government (but no official plans to issue this). Folk organizations can only issue "Heartwarming" memento. This showed a Hong Kong Version of a fact indicating "Government can do everything, even the thing is not right, but ordinary people cannot do things that are basically needed in daily life". Contrast to Hong Kong Post, in April 2012, the Post Office of the United Nations issued commemorative stamps for "World Autism Awareness Day". Apparently, Hong Kong missed a good opportunity to issue commemorative stamps (for World Autism Awareness Day) simultaneously with the United Nations.

10.4 In 2012, Autism Hong Kong invited the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Government to co-organize free public lectures by U.S. autism experts in March, 2013. (Regarding this event) EDB simply needed to assist in renting free venues and helped with propaganda. However, EBD replied that their work schedule in March 2013 had been already full, refusing to co-organize or assist in organization. It's needless to say there is no priority ranking of the issue of autism in the policy ranking of EBD.

10.5 At the end of 2012, Autism Hong Kong submitted an application to the office of "promoting the application of information technology of the Hong Kong Government" regarding developing mobile application software for people with disabilities development, but failed. Another application of Chinese development of autism mobile applications also failed. Probably, the issue of autism is unknown in the IT industry, or IT industry has long been filled with people with autistic characteristics, such as: founders of Apple, Steve Jobs; Microsoft, Bill Gates and Facebook, Zuckerberg. They want to keep a less active profile to avoid revealing their identities.

11. The Autism Hong Kong believes that one of the core elements of a successful integration of education is sufficient awareness of autism and support from the government, professionals, groups, families and communities. Accordingly, we have the following requirements:



11.1 At the World Autism Awareness Day, each year, the Hong Kong Government should follow the example of the "World AIDS Day" to develop an overall policy of public education through public broadcasting channels, social publicity to promote "the World Autism Awareness Day", and inform the popularity of autism spectrum disorder.

11.2 The Hong Kong Government should provide resources in cooperation with non-governmental organizations to jointly promote social awareness of autism and public support from the communities of people.

11.3 The Hong Kong Post should issue commemorative stamps for "Annual World Autism Awareness Day" in the Hong Kong region, in response to local responsibility of countries of the signatories of the United Nations agreement.

11.4 The Hong Kong government should set up an cross-bureau committee to develop approaches to deal with the epidemic of autism symptoms, including: public health, education, medical care, rehabilitation, social welfare services and public education.

11.5 The Hong Kong government should also provide rehabilitation grants to zero to six-year-old autistic children from poor families so that autistic children can receive early intervention, which would not only overcome the late developmental disabilities caused by autism as early as possible, but also reduce social costs as a result of the need for long-term social care.

(This is a translated version only. For accuracy, please refer to the submitted Chinese version.)