

**Welcome to SENIA-Beijing**, a volunteer organization committed to support, teach, and learn from parents, teachers, students, learning support professionals, counsellors, and anyone involved with education for differently-abled people!



Dear SENIA-Beijing, it is an honour to share our latest news with you! In this edition, you will have an overview of what is happening in our community.

We are truly grateful to all collaborators across our platforms (**WeChat, Facebook, Newsletter, Website**)!

In these unusual times, connecting the dots and navigating together with respect, love, patience, and understanding is without a doubt our strength. Thank you everyone for being part of this journey! **By Juliane Karlsson**

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## **SENIA-Beijing Board Statement**

Dear Vendors and Participants of SENIA-Beijing Spring 2020 Conference and Resource Fair,

Due to the effects of COVID-19, the SENIA-Beijing Spring 2020 Conference and Resource Fair scheduled April 17, 2020 at Keystone Academy is cancelled and will be rescheduled for a later date. Please pay attention to SENIA-Beijing's communications for further updates on this and upcoming conferences.

Regards,  
**The SENIA-Beijing Board**



## WeChat updates

As our community has grown fast, in order to support us in the best way possible, we are requesting the new members to fill up this brief form below. SENIA-Beijing appreciates your time.



<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ZA9iCIfM0u67zTlIjyNaHeSTwVK7WY5NswmAj2dL9eRURUZNU01DOUdLSIBKU0dSM0U1T1FDWTZLMS4u>

## Coming on board

Interested in joining a strong, dynamic team, dedicated to promoting inclusion in Beijing? If interested, fill in the application (see QR code) and take a look at the current SENIA-Beijing board roles. Applications due March 31.

**By Tanya Farrol**



**Interested in Joining a Strong, Dynamic Team dedicated to Promoting Inclusion in Beijing?**

If interested, please fill in the application:



Roles and regulations of the board can be found here.

Don't delay and fill in your application today!  
Applications due by March 31, 2020.

A graphic illustration at the bottom of the poster showing a row of hands of various colors (purple, red, orange, yellow, green, blue) raised in a gesture of unity or support.

## Mars Story

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, I had an amazing time with a courageous and lovely mum named Stella, who has an autistic son. Stella shared her fantastic story about what challenges and successes her family have been facing since her son, Mars, was diagnosed with high-functioning autism.

As many parents have experienced, one day (when Mars was four years old) the principal from his preschool asked Stella to have her son evaluated. The director's concern was that the child might have some sort of disability.



Stella, who had worked previously as a volunteer with severe autistic kids, never really considered that her own son could be diagnosed on the ASD spectrum. Mars seemed to be fine. However, she sometimes had this feeling that something might not be quite right, something was different.

With Mars' results on hand and feeling a bit lost, Stella went back to the school to meet the principal. At the meeting, she was informed that her son was "invited to leave". She just recalls that it was Christmas time and all children were performing in the theatre, Mars danced happily on the stage, not knowing that it was his last time with his class. The festive atmosphere was not for her family; instead, Stella was very sad.

In Stella's mind only questions remained "What can I do for my son? Where will he study? Should I move to the US, the UK? Should I try another international school? Or should I apply for Chinese public schools?" For each choice, her family would have to deal with different consequences.

Initially, what appeared to be three possible choices, quickly turned into two, as the international schools at that time did not accept Mars. This situation made Stella believe that there wasn't any inclusive international school in Beijing. So, as a family, they evaluated the available options:

1. Moving abroad with him would mean to be all by herself, without her husband, friends, family, without her culture and society;
2. Applying for a public school would mean to manage a strict curriculum and rigid rules.

Stella decided to apply for Chinese schools anyway; and it took her two, three months before any school opened their doors to Mars. Initially, Mars went to a Chinese private preschool; and he had a great time there. But, after one year, she applied for a Chinese public school for him. Prioritizing her moves made a big difference in how Mars was accepted at his new school.

She soon realized that finding a place was just the beginning of a long road. She dealt with the initial teacher's resistance, after at first being asked to come back yet one more year later, when Mars had done some home schooling. Stella convinced the main teacher to observe her son a few days, as she understands the importance of the social environment offered by a school to any child, among other

benefits. (Mars is the first ASD pupil in the school. Nobody knew what to do with him when he'd suddenly leave his seat in the class or talked to himself.)

Due to the circumstances, Stella's approach was not to appeal for her rights; the better way was to try and support the teachers (for example, she'd provide books and videos to the teachers to work together with them). Which makes me think, how can we, as an educational system, provide better support to all involved? What is necessary to help those who are in the front line? Raising awareness and building an inclusive society, as Stella has done, is a goal we all have a great opportunity to be part of.

As a mum, she is always moving forward to guarantee her son a fair chance, as much as possible. Looking for a therapy was another decision. Unfortunately, it was hard to find good clinics and therapists. As she says, "the most important thing is to find someone to trust and work with." At first Mars had therapy twice a week. And now he has no less than 15 hours of therapy per week, including 1 to 1 games, game group (4-5 kids), physical therapy, swimming, musical therapy, PE (skip rope, running, riding a bicycle, badminton, and hiking).



Mars is an active boy. He is 8 years old and, as the way he interacts with the world is through movement, staying seated at school is a challenge. Stella remembers one time when the principal called her to pick up Mars, after he refused to go to class during wintertime.

Because of this type of situation, Stella organized a meeting with the principal and teachers. In this meeting supported by Eva and professor Yang, explained why a shadow teacher was important to help Mars at school. What initially seemed to be a solution became a new problem. Finding a good shadow teacher is also not an easy task.

The first shadow teacher was always complaining about her and Mars. Even though Mars is a very warm boy, he would say to his mum "I don't like her." Then she hired a second shadow teacher. This one with four years of experience. However, experience was not enough. The new one just wanted to stay in the classroom, not doing much, as the class teacher told Stella. Mars now has a third shadow teacher, a therapist. However, due the Covid-19, she did not start yet...



Based on Stella's experience, the requirements for someone to work as a shadow teacher are:

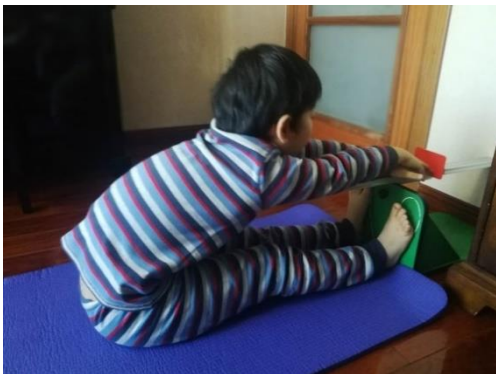
1. Take responsibility for your job, loving what you do;
2. Ability to learn, the disposition to identify and understand the child's needs and help them when necessary;
3. Background knowledge: know what you are doing (why, how, what, when).

The shadow teacher's role is important to the child's development at school. There are many parents, who have more independent differently-abled children, working in this role. However, one negative aspect of this is the constant comparisons between their children, which does not lead to a healthy relationship/environment. And there are other concerns related to some people who work as a shadow teacher only because of the better pay.

Stella's experience has shown that some Chinese public schools are not as strict as it is said. "Mars is very well treated at school. The principal accepted him without any requirement. The main teacher paid much more attention to him and asked other classmates to help him. Once there was a special English class, where kids had to watch a video. Mars did not go since he would not always stay put. However, after that, the teacher taught this lesson again and everyone accompanied Mars to learn it again. I was touched. The PE teacher also taught him with special attention. It is a small school, and there are only 19 kids in a class. It is very suitable to Mars. I do appreciate what he got at school. I've made a right choice."

Being at school, with therapy and constant work at home, has helped Mars' development in general. The hard work has been paying off in unimaginable ways. Nowadays, he speaks more, regardless of his language problems (for example not understanding abstract concepts, and how to elaborate long sentences with high frequency words). He is able to write simple sentences in Chinese and English, when 4 years ago he could not hold a pencil. Before he also did not understand basic maths concepts; but today he can do calculation almost at the same level as his peers.

What takes others kids half hour, sometimes takes him five, ten times more. Besides the odds, his mum, family, his therapist, school, and everyone involved in Mars progress knows how hard he works. Mars also plays piano and his schedule every day is well structured even under the Covid-19. 😊



These days, from 8:30 to 12:00, his teacher teaches him at his home.

Then from 13:00 to 13:30, he helps the ayi prepare supper.

From 13:30 until bedtime, it's his mum who provides a balanced arrangement of different activities. A mix between English work, reading, music, listening to stories, writing, talking about their holidays when looking at photos, and physical exercise. She emphasizes the importance of retelling

what happened in his day as a routine. It helps him to build up his language skills. He is also learning how to type on the computer.

Even though there is no “magical recipe” to follow through, as every child is unique, having a support group, willing to learn and deal with the obstacles when they appear, celebrating the small achievements, walking it step by step (even when it means going back some), and repeating countless times, are some suggestions that can help all of us.

Above everything, Mars is a true gift. He teaches those who have the opportunity to know him to think out of the box, to open their minds and hearts to new ways of seeing, listening, moving, and feeling. These are deep learning lessons, intermingled with vulnerabilities and possibilities to overcome them. Paved with love, patience, bravery, acceptance, trust, resilience, consistence, and support.



Mars shows us that there are no limits when we dream together. When we use our resources and capacity to create what is not there yet. Thank you, Mars, for being exactly the way you are. Thank your family and your support group (teachers, therapist, school, community, ayi, shadow teacher) who believe in your potential. We are all proud of you!

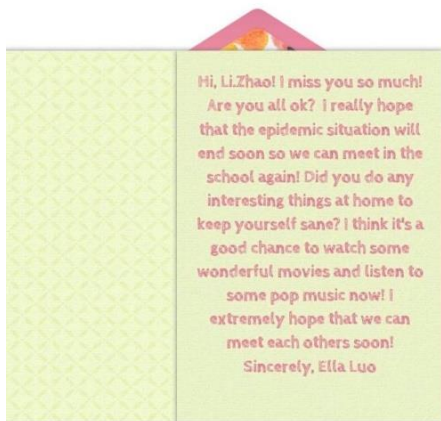
By Juliane Karlsson

## Best Buddies

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak and community quarantine restrictions, Best Buddies China is celebrating Best Buddies Month. In a joint collaboration between Rong Ai Rong Le Family Support Center for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (RARL) and Harrow School Beijing, students are getting in touch with each other through recorded videos, audio recordings and ecards. This will carry on for the entire month of March aiming to spread special needs awareness and promote inclusion in the broader community.

As we are barred from organizing activities involving face to face interaction, students are making efforts to send their greetings to their buddies even if they are engaged in full time online learning. They share what they have been doing and suggest productive and fun things that they can do while staying home. The restrictions brought upon by COVID-19 can be isolating, challenging and can even trigger anxiety in most of us but like all other ordeals we face, it can also be viewed in a positive light. It reminds us to look after ourselves.





One student shared “please take time to have some rest and remember do some exercise at home. Drink enough water... really important too.” This is also a great opportunity to spend more time with our family. Family relationships are strengthened as there is ample time to bond. It has made us discover new ways to negotiate sharing of spaces and communicate with each other. “Family relationships can be tense. I believe a lot of people feel the same way like me. I think therefore it’s important to express ourselves in a positive way”, one student contemplates as she refers how she struggles to communicate with her parents and siblings sometimes.

RARL has organized an online platform for individuals with special needs to connect each other and other people too. People with special needs are often isolated and excluded in social settings. It can be even worse during this time when everyone is obliged to remain indoors. We can say then that this is a time when gadgets and technology are put to a good use in connecting people. Through this meaningful connection, inclusive environments are created no matter the circumstances. At the end of the day, human connection has been proven to be important to all of us.

**By Janice Pineda**

## Resources

### Movies

Based on real facts, **Horns Normes (The Specials)** narrates the story of two men, Bruno (Jewish), and Malik (Muslim), working with severe autistic kids who have been rejected by other institutions because they are too difficult to care for. One of the highest points in the movie is Joseph, the character played by an autistic young man, Benjamin Lesieur, who overcomes many of his fears during filming. Despite the hard topic, the movie flows between drama and the pleasure of what it means to be in the front line helping and learning from those who have a unique way to show us the world.

**Recommended by Juliane Karlsson**





Pixar's new short animation, Float, also brings awareness to autism while making Filipino-American cinematic history.

[https://abc7ny.com/education/pixar-film-brings-awareness-to-autism-while-making-filipino-american-cinematic-history/5980531/?fbclid=IwAR3ZOOfKpQ7tZELYnWYF\\_dpulqyCSDMZQnn6oNlKnX43e9QsszIl2j5Uebw](https://abc7ny.com/education/pixar-film-brings-awareness-to-autism-while-making-filipino-american-cinematic-history/5980531/?fbclid=IwAR3ZOOfKpQ7tZELYnWYF_dpulqyCSDMZQnn6oNlKnX43e9QsszIl2j5Uebw)

**Recommended by Reed Rhodes**

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## E-learning



Many apps can be helpful for children with autism. Take a look at some of them:

- <https://www.bridgingapps.org/2019/04/7-best-apps-children-autism/>

- <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/apps-for-kids-autism-spectrum | 5ca28b0be4b0b4b422772d1e>

**Recommended by Juliane Karlsson**

Brain Pop has created a lesson about Coronavirus. I haven't previewed it yet but here is the link:

<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>

**Recommended by Candence Gadomski**

Looking for something else? How about the latest clinical practice guideline for complex ADHD?

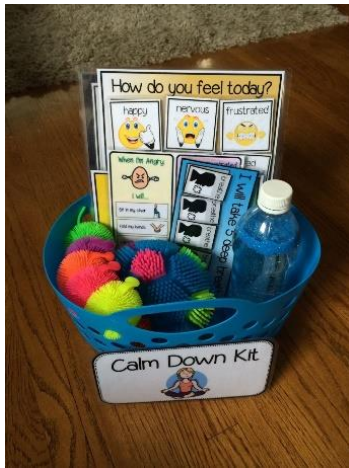
<https://chadd.org/new-clinical-practice-guideline-for-complex-adhd-in-children-and-adolescents/?from=groupmessage>

**Recommended by Eva Ma**





## Our mental health toolbox



Here are two articles in English and Chinese.

Helping kids cope with the anxiety of Quarantine

EN -> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/P0nzlzaAYFk4budNhc3ZZw>

CN -> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vtYcf17ae8MdpMdBfNhoTg>

Coping with a stressful life event

EN -> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LY2bN-vsbn47c5rLMI8VBw>

CN -> <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Yz41030hP9ygPQWMTTrncQA>

**Recommended by Candace Gadomski**

"With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend."

-- Kristin Neff

<https://self-compassion.org/>

**Recommended by Juliane Karlsson**

Great free resources on emotions for young children.

<https://www.therapistaid.com/>

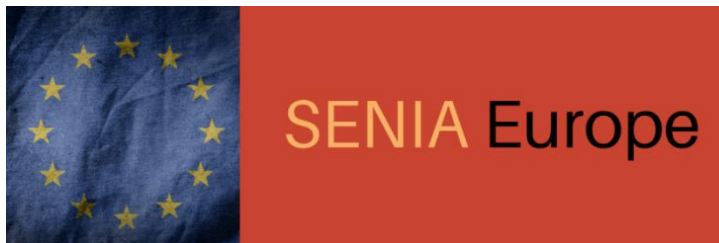
**Recommended by Eryn**

## Anxiety Management

*"As the news of the COVID-19 or Coronavirus spread continues to flood in, those with anxiety will need extra support. Although the information about the location of the virus is out of date in this article, it still has excellent advice on how to manage stress and anxiety during this uncertain time."*

[Managing Coronavirus Anxiety Tips from a Psychotherapist](#)

**Recommended by SENIA-Europe**



## Other online resources (courtesy of our friends at SENIA-Europe)

- [How to talk to kids about Coronavirus](#) - New York Times article

- [Ten Strategies for Educators' Wellbeing: A Handbook for Schools During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#), from Sea Change (by Ellen Mahoney)
- [Resources on Managing Feelings, Fears and Worries about COVID-19](#), by the International School Counselor Association (ISCA)
- [Care for Caregivers: Tips for Families and Educators](#), by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
- [Extensive List of Free Online Educational Subscriptions](#)
- [Coronavirus Social Story](#)
- [Khan Academy Free Sharable Resources](#)

## SENIA-Beijing Hot discussions

What are the best platforms to support teens who are struggling with the lack of social interaction and the pressure of managing online learning?

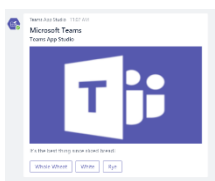
A hot question posted by **Samantha Colle** brought us a great list of tools to look at and use according to our needs.

**Thank you**, Gerald and Candace (**Keystone**), Samantha Colle (**Wellington College International**), Sharon Vanderlinden (**WAB**), Luis Roger (**Spanish Cultural Center in Beijing**), Tanya Farrol and Petra Z (**BCIS**), Eryn (**Jack and Jill Academy**), Hallie Whitmore (**HIS-Guidance**), Holly Poppell (**Dulwich**) and Sai for the collaboration!



Photo source:  
<https://oionline.com/oglebay-institute-offers-dance-classes-for-students-with-disabilities/>

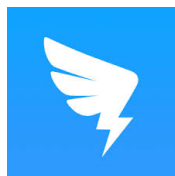
The **most popular applications** were:



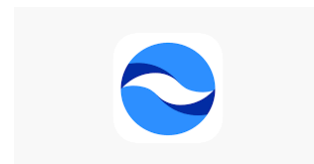
Microsoft Teams



Zoom



Ding Talk



Zhumu

\* For Zhumu, you must register on their Chinese website, but its interface can then be changed to English.



**Fun fact:** trying to avoid the burnout of online homework, Ding Talk suffered a major strike back from Wuhan’s students, as soon as they realized that giving the app many one-star reviews it would be removed from the App Store.



“Thousands of reviews flooded in, and Ding Talk’s ratings fell from 4.9 to 1.4 overnight. Legends.”  
– Mike Bird, on Twitter.

Photo source:  
<https://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/16/how-to-stop-your-kids-from-stressing/>

### SENIA-Beijing is supported by...

SENIA-Beijing wants to give a **massive thank you** to our closest organizations and personal collaborators who has in many occasions supporting our community.





## Getting in touch. Meeting the board

**Dr. Reed Rhodes**  
(Chair)

[reed.rhodes@bcis.cn](mailto:reed.rhodes@bcis.cn)

**Tanya Farrol**  
(Secretary, Facebook)

[tanya.farrol@bcis.cn](mailto:tanya.farrol@bcis.cn)

**Juliane Karlsson**  
(Newsletter/WeChat)

[pejuli@outlook.com](mailto:pejuli@outlook.com)

**Dr. Gerald Anthony**  
(Membership/L.I.N.K)

[geraldanthony@keystoneacademy.cn](mailto:geraldanthony@keystoneacademy.cn)

**Katy Cameron**  
(PD/Events/External Expertise)

[katy.cameron@dulwich-beijing.cn](mailto:katy.cameron@dulwich-beijing.cn)

### Facebook

Another way to stay in contact is through our **Facebook** page, titled SENIB - Special Education Network in Beijing. It is a closed group, but you can request to join at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1728937867318355/>

### SENIA-Beijing Newsletter/WeChat

Are you interested to collaborate on our next edition? Ideas, experiences, questions, practices, and much more to share... Get in touch by emailing

**Juliane Karlsson**

[pejuli@outlook.com](mailto:pejuli@outlook.com)

### L.I.N.K

Do you want to participate on it? Talk to **Dr. Gerald Anthony**

[geraldanthony@keystoneacademy.cn](mailto:geraldanthony@keystoneacademy.cn)

### Website

<https://seniainternational.org/beijing/>

