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Press release

Speak Along – Hong Kong’s first comprehensive online platform and training programme for language development

China CITIC Bank International to pledge HK\$10 million

Supporting 10,000 children with language delays for the first three years

(Hong Kong: 4 July 2018) The Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”) on the back of a HK\$10 million earmark from China CITIC Bank International Limited (the “Bank” or “CNCBI”) today launches Speak Along – Hong Kong’s first comprehensive online platform and training programme for language development. Speak Along aims at helping about 10,000 children with language delays within a three-year span by giving them access to timely, basic but effective training which is expected to help them develop language abilities and increase their interpersonal communication skills.

Speak Along encompasses an online knowledge platform, gamified mobile apps, seminar and workshop series for parents, direct speech therapy sessions and volunteer services, catering to the needs of pre- and primary-school children with language delays.

Mr Chris Yiu, Senior Programme Officer, Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, CUHK, pointed out, “It is estimated that the number of Hong Kong pre- and primary-school children with speech impediments exceeds 20,000. Due to the limited speech therapy services available, diagnosed children on average need to wait more than a year or in some cases two for government-funded pre-school rehabilitation services. The parents can choose to go private but the cost is very high. The age of six marks a speech developmental milestone. These children, however, often waste time and opportunities waiting, lagging behind in speech, interpersonal and cognitive development. Inexpert parents and teachers are oftentimes left frustrated. Thanks to CNCBI’s full support, we take great pleasure in launching the online platform and training programme for language development Speak Along and we look forward to providing a full range of services to children with language delays.”

Ms Zoe Lau, CNCBI’s CSR Committee Chairlady noted that: “Underprivileged children have always been the Bank’s CSR focus. Over the last two years, the Bank also extended its innovative spirit in FinTech into the area of CSR, promoting e-learning for the underprivileged. The results have been encouraging. On this foundation, the Bank is bringing the advantage of innovative technologies into other areas and this time joined forces with CUHK for the launch of Hong Kong’s first comprehensive online platform and training programme

for language development Speak Along. The Bank has earmarked about HK\$10 million for the built and future development of Speak Along which aims to benefit about 10,000 pre- and primary-school children over a three-year span. This should cover half of the children in need at present. By pursuing both the breadth and depth of Speak Along for the long run, it is hoped that all the children that require the much needed speech therapies can get timely support.”

The Speak Along launch ceremony was officiated by Ms Lau and Mr Yiu in the presence of celebrity Ms Aimee Chan and innovative educator Mr Chu Tsz-wing, who is Principal of Baptist Rainbow Primary School. During the event, Ms Chan and Principal Chu also engaged some of the child attendants in language development challenges such as articulation and words formation.

Ms Chan said, “As a mother of three, I know that every parent is concerned about their children’s development. Language delays can cause great worries. Myths and misconceptions about the condition do not make it easier for the parents concerned to obtain practical information. As such, I offer my full support to Speak Along. The comprehensive range of professional information and learning tools available will facilitate such parents to provide their children the necessary help.

Principal Chu also shared his experience. “Special-educational-need pupils may have concentration difficulties. Interesting and stimulating learning tools such as audio-visual electronic learning aids and interactive games can make learning fun. Happy learning experiences can arouse their motivation and increase their enthusiasm for learning. Aside from this, e-learning can retain all the learning data of a pupil, allowing parents and teachers to keep track of the progress and cater training to any specific needs. This is in fact an important approach to education in the future. For this, I offer Speak Along my full support.”

Photo



(From left to right) Mr Chris Yiu, Senior Programme Officer, Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, CUHK; Innovative educator Mr Chu Tsz-wing, Principal, Baptist Rainbow Primary School; Ms Aimee Chan; and Ms Zoe Lau, Chairlady, CSR Committee, CNCBI, officiate the launch of Hong Kong's first comprehensive online platform and training programme for language development Speak Along

About Speak Along



Organised by The Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, The Chinese University of Hong Kong with the full support of China CITIC Bank International Limited, Speak Along is Hong Kong's first comprehensive online platform and training programme for language development with an aim to provide timely, fundamental, effective training for pre- and primary-school children, helping them to develop language abilities and increase their interpersonal communication skills. Speak Along has five distinctive pillars:

1. Online knowledge platform: Publicly accessible knowledge base for language development and training to raise awareness of the difficulties of children with language delays as well as those with special-educational-needs, and impart knowledge and skills for providing daily support to such children
2. Gamified mobile apps: Fun electronic games designed to target the most common difficulties facing children with language delays including articulation, words and sentences formation and storytelling, allowing children to increase their language ability systematically and in a relaxing environment while parents can receive useful tips for better understanding how to support their children on a daily basis. Aside from this, parents and teachers can keep track of the learning progress and help the children make progress via parent-school collaboration
3. Seminars and workshops: For parents and carers to learn the basics of language development and how to make use of the Speak Along platform and mobile apps
4. Direct speech therapies: Speech therapists and specialists offer speech training and family counselling service, in particular, five free speech training sessions for each underprivileged child in need
5. Volunteer service: Tailored training series to prepare CNCBI volunteers and specialist students who in turn help the needy parents to make use of the available resources

Schools and service organisations are welcomed to sign up. Please visit www.speakalongcuhk.com for details.

Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The Chinese University of Hong Kong endorsed the establishment of the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies (the “Centre”) in November 2003. The founding members included Gladys Tang, James Woodward, and a group of postgraduate students and deaf junior research assistants.

Since its inception, the Centre has been committed to driving the development of cross-disciplinary research related to sign language and professional sign language training programmes, alongside corpus building for Asian sign languages and for bilingual signed and spoken language acquisition of deaf children, as well as providing professional support for parents with deaf children at deaf and mainstream schools. The Centre is also active in facilitating deaf and hearing communication, raising public awareness of the deaf community regarding particularly the promotion of deaf education and social integration.

Today, the Centre has been very successful in raising awareness of the importance of sign linguistics training and its impact on deaf education in Hong Kong. The Centre’s promotion of sign languages being natural languages similar in linguistic status to spoken languages has also made a significant impact on deaf developments in Asia. Locally, the Centre has been recognised as a hub for sign linguistics research and plays a pivotal role in conducting postgraduate and undergraduate training, deaf training, and in-service training for teachers for the deaf, both in theoretical and applied sign linguistics.

China CITIC Bank International Limited

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CNCBI’s footprint in Greater China includes 32 branches in Hong Kong, as well as branches and presence in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Macau. CNCBI also has overseas branches in New York, Los Angeles and Singapore. More information about CNCBI can be found on its website at www.cncbinternational.com.

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