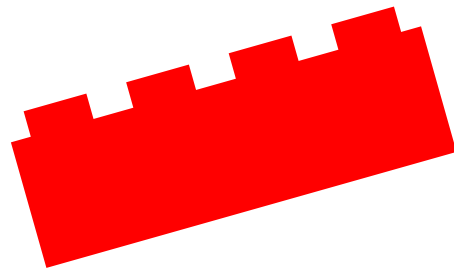


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# Supporting children's social skills development in Hong Kong using the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme

Anna is an experienced Play Therapist who works with yNOTplay Play Therapy, the Hong Kong-based social enterprise. The organisation supports children to develop their social-emotional skills by delivering Brick Clubs, while also training other professionals to deliver the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme.

Thousands of children and young people in Hong Kong require support for a range of different needs, including anxiety, developing communication skills, and engaging in social interactions. As a result, parents are seeking effective ways to help their children.

When Founder of yNOTplay, Canace (RPTS), and partners Anna (RPT) and Fiona (PT) (a.k.a. The Team), learnt about Play Included<sup>®</sup> and the Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme, they were excited about how the programme “doesn't just help neurodivergent children – it also supports neurotypical children as it encourages social skills development.”

## Setting up Brick Clubs

After completing her Brick-by-Brick<sup>®</sup> programme training Level 01 Initiate and Level 02 Facilitator, Anna felt equipped to deliver Brick Club sessions. As qualified Play Therapists, Anna, Canace and Fiona identified children through her own research work in Hong Kong, Facebook groups, and word of mouth recommendations from her professional network.

Initially, sessions were available on a Saturday to three groups of six to eight children at a local children's centre. One of the challenges that yNOTplay faced at the start of implementing its Brick Clubs was the availability of children:

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“We tried to schedule a session on a weeknight, but many children were too busy at that time.” Attending Brick Club at the weekend meant that children had the opportunity to have fun, and make friends, while they developed important skills through social interactions facilitated through playful experiences.

While the programme has evidenced benefits for autistic children, neurotypical children were also invited to take part in Brick Club: “As long as they like LEGO®, they are able to take part.”

*The popularity of playing with LEGO bricks made it the perfect tool to support the development of social skills and help club members to build meaningful connections with other children. Anna noted that after a few sessions, children began to “recognise their individual achievements and praise other children in the group.”*

## Social skills development

One of the positive outcomes for children taking part in a yNOTplay’s Brick Club was a generalisation of skills from one setting to another. Anna shared that one child was too anxious to take the subway before joining Brick Club. “After just a few sessions of Brick Club, the child developed in confidence, which enabled them to move at ease outside of Brick Club and they confidently use public transport.”

Brick Club also helped children to develop their creativity and translate their individual ideas into physical LEGO models. During free play sections at Brick Club, children learnt from their different social interactions and demonstrated improvements in their negotiation, problem-solving, and collaborative skills.



## Evidence and education

Reflecting on her experience of the first Brick Clubs, Anna said: “When parents came to us, many of them had already tried other settings and other support programmes. So, in the beginning we did a lot of education on the Brick-by-Brick® programme and its benefits for children. The first session for each child was a trial. We observed the children while the parents received a presentation during that time to showcase the evidence base behind the programme.”

## What next?

yNOTplay’s Brick Club is gradually expanding and currently serves around 30 children each week. As a social enterprise, yNOTplay regularly holds numerous charitable events using LEGO® bricks for underprivileged children and their families. Following completion of Play Included’s Level 04 Trainer training the organisation has now trained around 200 people to deliver the Brick-by-Brick® programme in Hong Kong. Due to demand, Anna would like to scale the organisation’s capacity to offer Brick Club sessions to all children who would benefit from the programme: “We cannot fit any more sessions into our schedule at the moment, and we want to offer more. We need more facilitators.”

yNOTplay is a trained provider of the Brick-by-Brick® programme training courses. Health professionals, education and child-care professionals who are interested in learning how to support children’s social skills development through LEGO therapy can enquire about training here:

<https://playincluded.com/training-programmes>.

