

Study finds strength-based coding clubs benefit autistic teenagers

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Autistic teenagers who participate in computer coding clubs that utilise their skill strengths show improved confidence and self-esteem, health and wellbeing, and social relationships, which can help lead to meaningful employment, new Curtin University research has found.

The research, published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, involved autistic teenagers who participated in Coderdojo programs run by Curtin's Autism Academy for Software Quality (AASQA).

Lead author Dr. Elinda Lee, from the School of Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Speech Pathology at Curtin University, said participants in the coding club benefited by having their skills developed through activities they enjoyed and were passionate about.

"Autistic teenagers have many strengths, such as attention to detail and an interest in computers and coding, which can be harnessed in strength-based programs, such as in a computer coding club," Dr. Lee said.

"These programs leverage the strengths, skills and interests of autistic adolescents and are likely to result in long-term positive outcomes for autistic young people in their careers and personal lives.

"This environment also met the participants' need to feel accepted and engaged and for their talents and abilities to be recognised by others."

Research co-author Professor Sonya Girdler, Director of the Curtin Autism Research Group, said understanding and meeting the needs of students with [autism](#) was challenging and the study's findings could help teachers, school staff and other professionals improve their work strategies and knowledge of autism.

"These findings will be valuable to teachers currently in the classroom, pre-service teachers, and education and health professionals who work with children with autism," Professor Girdler said.

"Parents of the teenagers were surveyed and felt strength-based programs provided their children with a safe, informal and friendly learning environment, and the opportunity to meet with like-minded peers and mentors sharing similar interests and challenges as their children.

"When activities genuinely interest and engage autistic teenagers they improve their coding skills and programming knowledge, as well as their social skills."

More information: Elinda Ai Lim Lee et al. "We Can See a Bright Future": Parents' Perceptions of the Outcomes of Participating in a Strengths-Based Program for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2020). DOI: [10.1007/s10803-020-04411-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04411-9)

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