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**MEDIA RELEASE**

## "Aspire" advances autism in the workplace

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A Simon Fraser University student project aimed at providing meaningful employment opportunities for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is heading out of the classroom and into the community.

"Aspire" was created by a team of fourth-year students in the Beedie School of Business for their course on Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Their goal was to leverage the characteristics of autism as a competitive advantage in the software testing industry, and creating a suitable and nurturing work environment for those with ASD.

Now two of the students – Alice Chen and Robbie Hsieh – are taking it a step further, approaching business and community representatives to help them launch a pilot project. "We are taking the next steps and talking with different software companies and autism agencies in B.C. about starting this project with us," said Hsieh.

Hsieh says the idea is based on the premise that high-functioning individuals with ASD are well suited for code verification software testing.

During their preliminary research, the students found a similar venture in Denmark, which offered them support and guidance as they carried out their own feasibility studies.

The SFU Surrey business course teaches students to design sustainable, market oriented, and socially impactful ventures. "More than just community engagement I think it is entirely critical to instil a sense of responsibility, and possibility, in our emerging leaders," says instructor Shawn Smith, who is a co-founder of Global Agents, a United Nations recognized organization that finds sustainable strategies to combat global poverty.

"Simon Fraser University has a lot of opportunities for students to engage with local organizations and projects in ways that both draw the school closer to the communities its rooted in, and create real value for both the partners and students."

Aspire took the top prize at SFU's recent Opportunity Fest, a Beedie School of Business entrepreneurship competition held at SFU's Surrey campus. Judges from the wider business community, including academics and prominent industry leaders, named Aspire's project as the best among more than 50 student projects at the marketplace-style exhibition.

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