Exceptional Minds Students and Profectum Foundation Help Parents Reach Children with Autism

*Parents have been trying to break through a communication barrier since autism was first diagnosed. Now, a new webcast series produced by leading autism experts and animated by young adults with autism gives them the tools.*

*Sherman Oaks, California – March 21, 2016 –* What better way for parents to engage and connect with their child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) than to apply the proven techniques of internationally renowned autism experts as seen through the imagery and animation of young adults on the autism spectrum?

**Profectum Parent Toolbox (PPT)**, a new interactive webcast series introduced at the 4th Annual International Profectum Conference in Pasadena yesterday, was developed by the Profectum Foundation and edited and animated by Exceptional Minds visual artist students to help parents interact with their ASD child.
“Exceptional Minds students truly understand this communication challenge as individuals on the spectrum themselves, and they brought an incredible depth of creativity and professionalism to the project,” says Dr. Ricki Robinson, MD, MPH, a faculty member of Profectum Foundation and leading Los Angeles pediatrician specializing in children with autism.

Dr. Robinson worked on the project alongside 15 Exceptional Minds second- and third-year students, all young adults on the spectrum preparing for careers in the fields of digital animation, graphic arts and visual effects. She cited the students’ creative use of animation as one of the more notable contributions to the Profectum Parent Toolbox (PPT), a toolbox of strategies, ideas and techniques available to parents at no charge to engage their child on a more personalized level.

For example, the students created an animated robot icon to guide parents through a difficult process or when an interactive session isn’t working out as planned. “The students brainstormed the idea themselves and even gave the robot some interesting expressions. He starts out looking sad and broken, kind of like you’d expect the parent and child to look when things aren’t working out. Then, he grabs the correct tool from the Profectum Toolbox and his expression changes from sad to happy,” explains Jon Clark, one of the second-year instructors at Exceptional Minds and the manager on the project.

Two of the artists, second-year students Annie Leffe and Steven Asidilla, gave presentations on the project during the Profectum conference, which gathered together more than 300 childhood development professionals and families at the Pasadena Convention Center March 18 through the 20th.

“Managing 15 students with autism was fraught with all the kinds of weird problems at first, and just general issues that you’d expect of any team starting a new project. But after two months of working on this, I have a team that can do the work and do it well. I can count on them. These students are in their second year here and they already know what it’s like to work on a large project and to deliver a quality product,” comments Clark.

Exceptional Minds is the only nonprofit vocational school and working studio for young adults on the autism spectrum with hands-on training and career preparedness in the digital arts fields. In addition to the Profectum Parent Toolbox (PPT) series, Exceptional Minds students created an original animation for Sesame Street’s autism initiative See Amazing in All Children, and Exceptional Minds graduates have worked on movies such as Ant-Man, The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2, Avengers: Age of Ultron and Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.

In total, the students will have completed editing and animation for all 37 episodes in the Profectum Parent Toolbox series, which instructs parents on the basics, such as how to set the stage for interaction, as well as on more advanced concepts, such as how to capture the “gleam” in a child’s eyes when connecting and interacting. The overarching goal of the Profectum Parent Toolbox series is for parents to build their own personalized toolbox filled
with ideas, strategies and hands-on techniques that will help them interact with their child based on his/her own individual psychological and sensory makeup.

Webcasts average 30 minutes each, and step parents through a process of setting goals, trying new ideas and developing strategies for engaging and interacting with their child. They learn how to become an effective play partner, discover a child’s individual differences, build on interaction circles, and practice interactions in different situations and settings. Video demonstrations within each webcast show how various strategies can be used. Icons identify where parents are in the process and guide them throughout the webcasts and accompanying interactive workbook, which parents use to record observations that will help them develop an individualized strategy for their child.

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the U.S.

**About Exceptional Minds** ([http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org](http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org)): Exceptional Minds is a nonprofit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. It was chartered in 2011 to provide the training necessary for creatively gifted individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who may not otherwise be able to make the transition from high school to careers. Exceptional Minds offers technical proficiency and work readiness training that prepares students for careers in graphic arts, animation, web design, visual effects and rotoscoping. Located in Sherman Oaks, California, Exceptional Minds is both an instructional learning facility and a working studio with hands-on student involvement in production projects, many for the film industry.

**About Profectum Foundation** ([www.profectum.org](http://www.profectum.org)). Proectum comes from the Latin for “advancement or progress,” and Profectum Foundation is dedicated to advancing the development of all children, adolescents and adults with autism and special needs. Proectum provides the most comprehensive collection of materials and experienced faculty on the [Developmental, Individual Differences, Relationship model (DIR)](http://www.profectum.org); Proectum created [Foundational Capacities for Development™ model](http://www.profectum.org) (FCD™ model) to provide an integrative framework to help parents and practitioners determine how to anticipate challenges and integrate different approaches to help an individual with special needs address his/her barriers at various stages of development across the lifespan.

*Caption: Dr. Ricki Robinson, center, brainstorm with students at Exceptional Minds vocational school for young adults with autism on a new interactive webcast series to help parents interact with children on the autism spectrum.*