



# ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

## O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

March 2008

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### OAFCCD Provincial Update

The Board of OAFCCD is very excited with the continued expansion of the *Parents as Partners* program. The team of Community Facilitators is excited with the progress and the high level of interest from community partners. This Ontario Trillium Foundation funded project continues to attract new partners.

Parents from across the province want the best for their child and recognize that by working collaboratively with school staff they can help their child be more successful at school. The recently released Resource Guide from the Ministry of Education: *Shared Solutions A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Special Education Programs and Services for Students with Special Educational Needs* shows that school staff are also interested in working collaboratively.

There are many other Ministry of Education initiatives that are aimed at helping children with special needs, including the recently announced project: *Oral Language Foundations for Academic Success* with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA); and the *Student Assessment Project: Kindergarten to Grade 4*, project with the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA). Information on both of these projects is included in this Newsletter.

#### Membership Renewals Due Now!

OAFCCD continues to rely on membership fees to sustain the Newsletter and other activities. Please complete the Membership Renewal Application included with this newsletter. You can also support OAFCCD by making a donation, and we will issue a tax receipt.

### *Oral Language Foundations for Academic Success*

#### Resource Guide for Elementary Classroom Teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 3)

Since May 2007, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch have been working with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA) to develop a comprehensive resource guide for elementary classroom teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 3). The resource guide will contain evidence-based and curriculum focused differentiated teaching strategies for improving the academic performances of all students but essentially supportive for students with oral language needs.

The Core Project team (CPT) is comprised of both English and French-language Speech-Language Pathologists. In addition, a Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) was formed with both English and French-language representatives to provide feedback and advice on a regular basis. The PAT consists of Speech-Language Pathologists, a Special Education Coordinator and Education Officers.

At the advice of the PAT, a Teacher Focus Group comprised of K – Grade 3 teachers, English and French from across the province was formed to review and provide feedback on the resource guide throughout its development. The resource guide will be available in both English and French, and distributed to all school boards in Fall 2008.

#### Inserts in this Issue

- **Peer Relations in School Age Children – Appeal for Volunteers**
- **Membership Renewal Form**

## **Ontario Psychological Association**

### ***Student Assessment Project:***

#### ***Kindergarten to Grade 4***

In 2006, the Ministry of Education provided \$20 million to the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) to reduce current waiting times for students who require assessments and to enhance teachers' capacity to provide effective programs for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 4. Every school board was required to determine their professional assessment needs, which may have included: psychological; speech and language and occupational therapy and apply for funding for their board projects. The board projects are to be completed by August 1, 2008.

Over the last two years school boards have been able to implement a variety of projects to meet the OPA goals to:

- a. reduce current wait times for students in junior kindergarten to grade 4 requiring professional assessments,
- b. enhance teacher capacity to provide effective programming for students provided with professional assessments,
- c. improve literacy/numeracy for students provided with professional assessments, and
- d. sustain these assessment process improvements for the long term.

The OPA established a provincial advisory group that includes educators, psychologists, an occupational therapists and a speech/language pathologists to inform the project development. Results from the first year of the projects are posted on the OPA website at: [www.psych.on.ca](http://www.psych.on.ca)

### ***What Does This Mean for Parents?***

The OPA project allowed for each school board to establish their own priorities and develop their own project. School boards have selected a broad range of activities and the impact on parents may include:

1. Improved early identification of students with learning problems that may require additional

intervention → More students getting help earlier.

2. Referral processes for professional assessment that are well understood and used appropriately → Shorter wait times for professional assessments
3. Professional development of professionals to better understand the needs of teachers and classroom practices → Assessment reports that are relevant and useful for Classroom Teachers
4. Joint professional development for all staff on the development of effective Individual Education Plans (IEP's) → Assessment reports that use common language and improve IEP's
5. Professional development for teachers to understand the value and role of professional assessments → More appropriate referrals for assessments and improved understanding of assessment reports
6. Classroom literacy and numeracy strategies that integrate assessment results and evidence based intervention → Professional assessments support efforts to improve students reading and math skills
7. Improved assessment report formats in plain language → Reports that are easier for parents and teachers to understand
8. Detailed feedback sessions with parents to discuss the assessment results → Improved understanding of the assessment results by parents
9. Collaborative feedback sessions involving teachers, professionals and parents for the development of effective classroom programming for the student → Classroom strategies that are able to be implemented by teachers
10. Follow up meetings between professionals and teachers to monitor results → Opportunity to change or improve strategies to help students.

As a parent you may not see all of these changes at your child's school, but the development of these strategies and the sharing of the information will result in gradual improvements to the system.

# The Parent Role in the Speech-Language Assessment

- 1. Trust your instincts!!** Parents that are concerned about their child's speech or language development are usually right, and are often the first person to recognize the problem.
- 2. Find out about how to obtain speech and language services.**

*If your child has not started school,* contact the local Preschool Speech and Language Program (check the OAFCCD Website for contact information) or the local health unit.

*If your child attends school,* talk to your child's classroom teacher. The classroom teacher can assist in making the connections for referral for speech and language services.
- 3. Get your child's hearing tested.** It is important to rule out hearing loss as a cause of speech or language delays, and if your child does have a hearing loss to get help. The Infant Hearing Screening Program is available for children under two years of age. Screening for hearing loss may be done by the local health unit, however, to get a complete assessment contact an audiologist or your family doctor.
- 4. Provide a history of your child's speech and language development.** Parents may wish to use baby books or other records of developmental milestones to help them in filling out checklists and ratings. Their knowledge of the child's understanding of language, as well as his or her speech and language production, is an essential part of the assessment.
- 5. Provide informed consent.** Formal testing of your child requires your consent. If you are asked to sign a *Consent Form*, make sure that you understand the purpose of the assessment, what will be involved for your child and how the information will be used or shared. If additional information is required from other agencies or professionals, you may also be asked to sign a *Consent for Sharing or Releasing Information*. Make sure that you understand what information is needed and how the information will help.

A speech language assessment may include a parent and teacher interview, testing of both receptive (listening) and expressive (speaking) language and assessment of sound awareness, sound production (speech), voice and fluency. The speech-language pathologist (SLP) may also check the structure and function of your child's mouth. Depending on the age of the child the SLP may use checklists or complete formal testing, as well as observing your child.

- 6. Attend the assessment and prepare your child.** Depending on the age of the child you may be asked to attend or observe the session. Your observations and input will help the SLP to be sure the session is an accurate reflection of the child's abilities. It is important to prepare your child for the testing by telling them what will happen and who will be involved. You want your child to be comfortable and willing to complete the tasks.
- 7. Meet with the SLP to get the results.** The SLP will prepare a written report with the results of the assessment. It is best to meet with the SLP in person and discuss the results. Ask questions to make sure that you understand all of the information. Make sure you understand the recommendations or programming suggestions.
- 8. Make sure there is a plan to use the assessment information.** Find out how the information will be used to help your child. It may be necessary to have a case conference or meeting with the childcare or school staff to discuss the program plan.
- 9. Monitor your child's progress.** Work with the SLP and your child's teacher to implement the program plan. Help your child at home by working on the language or speech skills or activities that have been suggested. If your child is making progress share the news. If you have concerns talk to the teacher. Keep working together to support your child's progress.
- 10. Evaluate the process.** Many agencies and school boards provide opportunities for feedback through program surveys or comment sections on reports. Make note of things you liked about the process or that could be improved. We can all support efforts to improve quality.

**Children Wanted for  
University of Western Ontario  
*Peer Relations Study***

Researchers at the University of Western Ontario Child Language Lab are seeking children aged 9 to 12 years who have Specific Language Impairment (SLI) to participate in a study. Children who have **SLI** have **difficulty** expressing and understanding ideas when **talking, listening, reading, or writing**. SLI affects about 7% of children and can seriously impact school performance and social adjustment. Its exact cause is unknown. For the study, researchers are seeking children with SLI, who don't have any other significant difficulties, such as hearing or vision problems, autism, developmental delays, or medical problems, such as seizures or head injury.

Given the important role of language for communicating and interacting with others, the researchers are completing a **Peer Relations Study** to look at factors related to the social adjustment of children who have **spoken or written language difficulties**. The study may help to find out why some children with SLI may be at risk for experiencing social difficulties. The study requires families of children **aged 9 to 12 years** with **specific language impairment** living in Southern Ontario. The 2 one-hour appointments may be done in your home. For more information, see the enclosed flyer or contact Wenonah Campbell at [wcampbe@uwo.ca](mailto:wcampbe@uwo.ca) or 519-661-2111 x80203.

**Attention!**

**Summer Camp Directory**

OAFCCD will once again be producing a Summer Camp Directory to mail with the OAFCCD May Newsletter and post on the OAFCCD Website. You are invited to provide information about your summer camp for inclusion in the OAFCCD Summer Camp Directory. This year the cost is: \$75 for non-members or \$50 for OAFCCD members.

Please forward your cheque and the camp information to OAFCCD by April 25, 2008. The camp information may also be faxed to 519-688-4889 or sent by e-mail to [abmorse@kwic.com](mailto:abmorse@kwic.com). If you need more information, please call Alison Morse at (519)842-9506.

**OAFCCD  
Volunteers Wanted!!**

OAFCCD continues to need volunteers to help with activities. In particular, volunteers are needed for:

- Board of Directors
- SEAC Representatives and alternatives
- Chapter Contacts and Leaders
- Assistance at the Annual General Meeting and Workshops
- Writing Articles for the Newsletter and Website

If you are interested, please contact Alison Morse by phone at 519-842-9506 or e-mail: [abmorse@kwic.com](mailto:abmorse@kwic.com)

**OAFCCD Parents as Partners  
Website**

[www.parents-as-partners.ca](http://www.parents-as-partners.ca)

Check the **Parents as Partners Website** for the dates of upcoming workshops, and for resources to help you understand and work with the school system. The program and website are funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.



**May is Speech, Language and  
Hearing Month**

Children with communication disorders need publicly funded speech and language services. **Please make plans to share your story and help others understand the importance of speech and language services.** You can also share this newsletter or print information from the OAFCCD Website to post in your office or on a community bulletin board. Remember, we need public support if we are going to obtain adequate services for our children.