

## New Partnerships Expand *Parents as Partners Program*

The second year of the Ontario Trillium Foundation funded Parents as Partners project has a strong focus on community capacity building and partnerships for sustainability. Staff training this spring in Toronto, Barrie and Timmins to increase the number of staff who are trained to use the program resources. By sharing successful practices these staff will be better able to support families who are in transition from preschool programs to school.

The parents that attend **Parents as Partners** workshops love the experience. *"It was a wonderful educational session with knowledgeable leaders with hands on experience"* and *"The information and handouts will be greatly used."* However, only a very small percentage of parents are able to get out to workshops. In order to meet the needs of more parents the Parents as Partners Community Facilitators are working with staff and volunteers from community agencies to increase the knowledge of front line staff that help parents every day.

At the staff sessions, front line workers including Child Care Resource Teachers, Family Support Workers and Child and Youth Workers, learn how the **Parents as Partners** games, activities and information resources can be used one-on-one with parents. The sessions also provide an opportunity for staff to share their experiences and ideas on how to improve the transition experience for parents.

OAFCCD is confident that the sharing of successful practices across the province will impact the many parents who prepare for the transition to school each year. Check out the Parents as Partners Website at [www.parents-as-partners.ca](http://www.parents-as-partners.ca) for tips and resources that could help you. Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting Parents as Partners.

## **"Just a Parent" – I Think NOT!!**

As the parent of a child with special needs, you get used to telling professionals, "well, I am just a mom, but I think..." "I think...", discredits everything I am about to say? "I think...", do not listen to my words? "I think..." NOT!!

Your words are setting the stage for the relationship with the person or people that are providers of services for your child. When my daughter turned two, I realized that she was different than her peers and her siblings. When consulting with professionals, not many were concerned, advising me to "give it time".

Instead, following my gut, I started to scour the internet, and picked the brains of professionals, looking for information and answers. I became an 'expert', reading all I could about children who were like my daughter, about what their parents did, about what interventions helped, and what research was out there. I subscribed to grouplists and discussion lists and attended any and all workshops that I could.

At the time, I was something of a rarity: a parent wanting to attend professional seminars so that I could gather more information about my child's condition. I will never forget the time that, once "granted permission" to attend a professional session, I was asked to sit at the back of the room and not ask any questions. It is funny now, but I wasn't amused at the time.

As time went by, I began to realize that sometimes, I had more information about my daughter's condition than some that were on her treatment team. So I shared what I knew and lent out books that I bought or copied articles or forwarded reports. As a result, and in hindsight, I think this served to establish my position as a full member of the team involved with the treatment and care of my child.

YOU are your child's only advocate. You need to understand her diagnosis, her strengths and weaknesses, and you need to ask questions when you are not sure or you don't understand. Information is power. Never underestimate the power of an informed parent. And never, ever refer to yourself as "just a parent"!

*Parent words from Rhonda Jacobson, Past-President of OAFCCD and ECHO, and mother of four.*



## Setting Smart Goals: The Key To Client And Clinician Satisfaction

Client satisfaction is often mirrored by the clinician's satisfaction. When a client enters the therapy room and is greeted by a smiling and confident speech-language pathologist, that contagious smile electrifies the entire therapy session. What lies behind the smiles of these two individuals? For the client, it is the intuitive knowledge that his/her communication difficulties are in excellent hands. It's an invitation to make a personal connection at a deeper level with the therapist. It's experiencing the initial feeling of success as the therapist sets SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goals, as well as the beginning of a partnership that is essential when planning therapy. Behind the Speech-Language Pathologist's (SLP) smile are confidence, satisfaction and compassion.

**Smiling Clients:** Goal setting and establishing a partnership with the client towards successful therapy outcomes is a strong component for success and satisfaction; however, the key to making therapy an extraordinary experience is being able to trust and rely on the clinician. At the superficial level, the setting of SMART short term and long term goals allows the client to achieve and succeed in a controlled step by step process. All goals are set collaboratively with the client and their families, allowing them to feel a sense of control over communication/feeding problems and allowing them to feel a strong sense of partnership in the therapy process. This essential partnership then extends itself to ensuring that the client and caregivers feel accountable for their role in the therapy process. Meeting goals and feeling a sense of responsibility for the outcomes is incredibly reinforcing for clients and their families.

Establishing high quality care for the client should include all levels of the social and emotional qualities that your client brings to therapy. This requires the clinician to dig beneath the surface. By asking each client for feedback regarding personal interests, taking the time to know your client, and demonstrating that you care, allows the client to open up and be more honest with what the true goals are: improved self-confidence, increased self-esteem, greater independence and choice, improved social communication. The sessions and the home programs can then be customized to include your client's own needs and caregiver's availability. You will find that by giving more of yourself to your clients and showing them that you care about them (e.g. by making the extra follow up phone call, or giving them an extra 10 minutes to share their feelings about communication/ feeding) results in highly satisfied

and productive clients.

**Satisfied SLPs:** As speech-language-pathologists, we have chosen a 'health care' profession because we like working with people on a one to one level. I wear my compassion on my sleeve when I am with a client. I listen, I see, I feel, I tune in to overall presentation. For example, I saw a 35 year old man for a fluency assessment. No one knew he struggled with stuttering, and in fact three other SLPs told him that he did not have a fluency disorder. Even his wife and children didn't believe him when he told them that he stuttered! Indeed, if I had just analyzed his speech, he would have demonstrated 100% fluency. Yet he discussed how he had dropped out of school to evade presentations and avoided work promotions. This highly fluent man had spent every day trying to hide his stuttering. For this client, the single most helpful thing to him was hearing me say "What a heavy load to carry on your shoulders; you have been covertly covering your stuttering all of your life." I had finally validated what he felt all along. Within sessions he was able to accept his stuttering, stutter openly, and then learn to control it, using simple techniques. Months later he had accepted a job promotion and was enjoying energy with the released burden of hiding his stuttering.

We need to really listen to our clients: burdened parents, children in schools, and frail elderly in long term care. It is the compassion of therapists who understand what their clients' needs are on a social-emotional basis that makes intervention so meaningful and fulfilling.

As speech-language pathologists we have also chosen a skilled profession. We need strong policies and procedures, and leadership. We need a solid clinical mentorship that supports us, shares knowledge, and searches for best practice. We need empirical data and research to be clear on goals, clinical intervention, and outcomes. We need to strive for quality with lifelong learning. Compassion and professional excellence equals a satisfied partnership between the client and speech-language pathologist.

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Reg. CASLPO, Clinical Lead for Quality Management,  
1to1 Rehab, Newmarket, Ontario

### May Newsletter Inserts

- *2008 Summer Camp Directory*
- *Invitation to the Annual General meeting*