



**Ontario Association for Families of
Children with Communication Disorders
O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER
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P.O. Box 63, Tillsonburg, Ontario N4G 4H4 Phone: 519-842-9506 Fax 519-842-3228 Website: www.oafccd.com

School Health Support Services (SHSS) Program Review: An Opportunity to Improve Speech and Language Services for Students

As shared in the November 2009 OAFCCD Newsletter, the three Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Health and Long Term Care and Education are conducting a review of the School Health Support (SHSS) Program. Members of OAFCCD believe that this review provides an opportunity to look at how speech and language services are provided in schools and make recommendations for how they could be improved.

In this article, the strengths and challenges of the School Health Support Services (SHSS) Program have been highlighted. In the box on the right, the OAFCCD position on school services has been summarized. The scope of the SHSS Review is limited to identifying areas of improvement within the current model. OAFCCD has advocated for a more comprehensive review of speech and language services that considers how best to serve students with speech and language impairments at school. This means looking at the services provided by both the School Health Support Services program and by school boards to make sure services are provided in the most effective way.

SHSS Program Review

The SHSS Program review involves a number of activities including consultation sessions with stakeholders; site meetings with CCAC staff, contracted service providers, school boards, and families. Consultations with provincial organizations took place in February and site visits are occurring through April and early May. A public on-line survey is also to take place and the link will be provided on the OAFCCD Website as soon as the survey is posted. Check www.oafccd.com regularly to have your opportunity to comment on School health Support Services.

(For details of the SHSS strengths and challenges identified by OAFCCD see page 2.)

OAFCCD Position on Speech-Language Services for Students

OAFCCD holds the position that all speech and language services for all school age children, regardless of diagnosis, should be provided by school boards. This position has been consistently put forward by OAFCCD reps in various committees and consultations, including the Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM 81) Review in 1999-2000, and the Review of Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) Request for Proposal Process in 2005.

One of the most significant barriers to change is that funding for speech-language pathology services is currently provided by the Ministry of Health through the School Health Support Program, and the Ministry of Education through various grants to school boards. OAFCCD believes that by combining the funding from the two Ministries more students can be served.

Provision of speech-language pathology services by school board speech-language pathologists would reduce fragmentation of services, improve the integration of speech and language services into the student's school program, and reflect the belief that communication is essential to education.

Children with speech or language impairments should have access to a full continuum of speech and language services. The child's needs may vary over time and different interventions, including group therapy, mediated intervention, collaborative intervention, or consultative services may be required. It is critical that a new single service system support a full range of intervention services.

OAFCCD recognizes that for a very small percentage of students, especially those with multiple disabilities, there may be a need for continued involvement of specialized agencies, particularly the Children's Treatment Centres.

The development of a new single system will also require that the funds are dedicated and protected.

School Health Support Services Program Review (continued)

Earlier this year, OAFCCD had the opportunity to participate in a consultation session with Deloitte as part of review. At the session OAFCCD identified some of the strengths of the SHSS Program as:

- **One to one therapy:** There is considerable research and evidence to show that one-to-one direct therapy is an effective intervention for articulation disorders.
- **School Based Delivery:** Most of the SHSS speech therapy services are provided to children at school, an accessible location that provides minimal disruption of child's routines and equitable access for all children.
- **Goal directed Therapy Plan:** The CCAC model for SHSS requires the development of a service plan with input from families. The plan clearly outlines the goals and the measures that will be used to assess progress.
- **High Quality Personnel:** Most parents are very grateful for the services they have received from the SHSS and many have commented on the valuable support and high quality service that they have received.

OAFCCD also used the consultation opportunity to identify some of the concerns about SHSS that have been raised by families. These include:

- **Eligibility Criteria:** The services are limited to those students that have speech impairments, including articulation, fluency, or voice disorders based on the Inter-Ministerial Guidelines for Speech and Language Services (1988).
- **Variable Access:** OAFCCD has received reports that the criteria for access to the SHSS speech services varies across the province. In some areas the focus is on children with mild to moderate impairments, and in others on those with severe impairments.
- **Transition Challenges:** Families have identified gaps in service when there is a transition from one program to another, particularly the transition is at the start of Elementary school when children leave the Preschool Speech and Language Program (PSLP). Families have reported gaps when students leave the PSLP in Junior Kindergarten and they don't get SHSS services till Grade 1.

- **Therapy options:** The CCAC SHSS model of service delivery does not support a full range of interventions. Families have reported that their child was only able to get a block of therapy sessions, or a maximum number of sessions before being discharged from SHSS.
- **Life long or long term impairments:** For some individuals with speech impairment their need for intervention will continue or reoccur as the demands of the environment change. Parents have reported that it is difficult to get back on to the SHSS or there are long delays as they return to the bottom of the wait list.
- **Speech Impairment and Literacy:** Children with articulation or phonological awareness may have difficulty with development of literacy skills. The SHSS therapy goals may not link with the literacy programming provided in the classroom.
- **Case Management:** For students with speech impairment only, who do not need other professional health services, the Case Manager is an extra level of administration and expense. In some cases this may result in a child being seen or reviewed by three SLPs and a case manager, before they get any services.
- **Case Conference Collaboration:** Effective interventions may require family members, school staff and others to work together to implement the child's program or to provide support to the child. The CCAC SHSS contract with the service provider does not always allow the SLP time for meetings and collaboration with school staff or community agencies that also support the child.
- **School Team Collaboration:** The SHSS contracted service provider is external to the school board and not part of the school team. The SHSS SLP is not able to access the student's documentation (Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Ontario Student Record (OSR)) and may not be able to participate in formal or informal student planning meetings.
- **Outcome Measures:** Some parents have reported that the goals for the child seem to be very limited to small improvements in the child's impairment or to changes that can be measured in the therapy session. The development of effective communication skills requires the child to generalize the skills and use them in multiple environments. Outcome measures should include the typical activities related directly to the disorder and consideration of child and environmental factors that influence function.

How Music Can Help Develop Your Child's Communications Skills.

By: **Kim Kearns-Pace, M.Sc., S.L.P. and Noreen Donnell, MMT, MTA, Music Therapist**

Children and music are natural companions. From an early age, children play with sounds. They experiment with vocal pitch, imitate sounds from their environment, and create and move to rhythms.

Music is a natural motivator and is a highly effective tool that encourages children to interact and play. The play that emerges from participation in musical activities enables children to be expressive and spontaneous.

There are many ways parents and educators can incorporate musical activities at home or in the classroom to encourage children to communicate.

Here are some suggestions:

- Select songs that are repetitive (e.g. Old MacDonald). These songs have a predictable pattern and give children many opportunities to practice words.
- Introduce songs at a regular tempo to attract the child's attention, and then repeat the song at a slower tempo. Many times, songs are sung too fast for children to understand, let alone repeat. Remember that while it may feel exceedingly slow to you, a slower tempo will provide the child with increased opportunity to participate and to succeed. This is particularly important for children with communication difficulties or motor challenges that prevent them from speaking or singing quickly.
- When singing familiar songs, leave a word out so the child can fill it in. "Twinkle, twinkle little _____, how I wonder what you _____." Wait for the child to respond (i.e. Sing, vocalize, gesture, or sign) the word before moving on to the next line in the song. Children will be motivated to bring closure to the line of music, especially if they are familiar with the song. Each time you sing a familiar song, change the word that is left blank to maintain interest and to keep your child challenged by the game.
- Write your own songs by putting words to familiar tunes. If your child needs to practice specific sounds, use words beginning with that sound in your song. Again, make it repetitive. Write a song with just the sounds themselves. When possible,

involve your child in the song writing process.

- Objects can be used as visual cues to indicate desired spoken words. For instance, when singing "And on his farm he had a sheep," hold up a sheep figurine and wait for your child to insert the word into the song. This will provide a visual cue to help your child use their words (signs, or pictures), as well as help maintain attention.
- Get out the drums! Drumming is a fun and interactive way to practice language and communication skills with your child. Take turns imitating what your child plays and they will begin to imitate what you play. Use the drum to beat out syllables of words. Tap out words in short phrases. Have a drum dialogue. This takes the pressure off the child who has communication challenges, but still engages both of you in a lively conversation.
- While reading a story, involve your child in making up sound effects for characters and actions. Robert Munsch books are great examples to work with. There are other books that use music to frame the story. Some examples: "Waves in the Bathtub" by Eugene Fernandes and "Bling, Blang" by Woody Guthrie.
- Use music as transitional cues. Consistently sing a 'tidy-up' song when it is time to tidy-up. Create a 'get ready for bed' song that cues the beginning of bedtime routines. Sing the same song to your child every time you are getting ready to go in the car. Musical transition cues provide a predictable and easily interpreted signal to your child at times that otherwise may be difficult.
- JUST HAVE FUN. You don't have to be a musician or a great singer to have fun with music.

About the authors:

Kim Kearns-Pace is the Clinical Director of Speech-Language Pathology at blue - balloon Health Services, and Noreen Donnell is the Clinical Director of Music Therapy. Together, they have co-founded blue-balloon's Music Express! program designed to promote development of speech, language, and communication skills for children within musical activities. The program operates out of blue-balloon's facilities in Burlington and Toronto, and has recently been launched in Waterloo and will be available in Aurora beginning in July 2010.

Pace and Donnell have also written and produced the ever-popular CD entitled "Sing-A-Ling-A-Long," a collection of music designed to stimulate and encourage young minds. For more information check the website: www.blue-balloon.com

Early Learning Program: What does it mean for Students with Speech and Language Impairments?

The Ministry of Education has recently introduced legislation to develop a full day learning program for all 4 and 5 year old children. The Early Learning Program will be introduced over 5 years, and starts with 600 schools this fall. The new legislation will allow school boards to employ Registered Early Childhood Educators (E.C.E.) and develop a model of learning that uses the skills of both teachers and ECEs in a play based program.

The development of the Early Learning Program has created a lot of uncertainty for providers of preschool programs and services as well as for school staff. At this point, no firm decisions have been made about service delivery and the three Ministries involved are still identifying the potential barriers, and discussing possible solutions.

Over 60,000 children with speech and language delays or impairments are currently receiving services through the Preschool Speech and Language Program and Infant Hearing Program. The development of the Early Learning Program is going to impact these children and it is important that they have a voice in the discussion.

As part of the planning process, the Ministries of Children and Youth Service, Health and Long Term Care and Education have established an Early Learning Program Special Needs/Special Educational Needs Reference Group. OAFCCD has been invited to participate in the committee and attended the first meeting in February

As your voice at the planning table, OAFCCD is interested to hear from families about their concerns and issues. We are also interested to hear about effective practices related to the successful transition of children into Kindergarten. What makes the difference? How can community agencies that provide preschool programs and services support smooth transitions to schools?

Please call Alison Morse at 519-842-9506 or e-mail to abmorse@kwic.com.

**A Parent Guide to Supporting Success at School
Helping Students with Speech and Language
Impairments** Copies available at only \$10 for
OAFCCD members. Mail a cheque to OAFCCD
P.O. Box 63 Tillsonburg, Ontario N4G 4H3

OAFCCD Continues to Struggle

Thank you to all of those who renewed their membership or made a donation to OAFCCD. OAFCCD is a recognized voice for children with speech and language impairments, but the organization does not have enough funds to continue operating.

Please consider helping OAFCCD by

- making a donation
- encouraging your colleagues and friends to become members
- holding an event during May, Better Speech, Language and Hearing Month to raise money for OAFCCD
- volunteering with OAFCCD as a Board member or a SEAC representative

The Membership application form has been included with this newsletter and can be used to renew your membership, for a new member to join, or to make a donation. Credit card donations can also be made at www.CanadaHelps.org. Select OAFCCD from the list of charities.

Call Alison Morse at 519-842-9506 if you can help or if you have any ideas on how to support OAFCCD activities.

Parent Information Events

Parent engagement in the school system has been shown to improve student success at school. In efforts to build relationships between schools and parents, many school boards, often in partnership with community agencies, hold parent information events. These mini-conferences or workshops usually include activities or presentations on special education. Check with your school board to see if there is an event in your community planned for this spring.

For example, a free parent information event is being held in York Region:

Tuesday May 18th – **Children's Treatment Network (CTN) of Simcoe York Parent Information Fair**, at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area, 3-8pm. For information call 905-773-4779 Ext. 2313