

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN
WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

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

January 1998

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1997 AGM Keynote Presentation

Jim Brown of the Education Improvement Commission was welcomed as the keynote speaker of the Annual General Meeting. Jim was formerly the Director of Education for Huron-Perth and has been seconded to the Education Improvement Commission. Jim shared the following:

The Education Improvement Commission was created in May 1997. The same legislation also amalgamated many school boards, and reduced the total number in the province from 166 to 72. This reform is the most significant since the common school system was created by Reyersson in 1841. As of January 1, 1998, Ontario will have only one education system with four branches, English Public, French Public, English Catholic and French Catholic.

Education reform will change the way that schools are governed, organized and funded. The changes in funding are very significant because the new system will provide for greater equity. At present, school board per pupil expenditure ranges between \$4000 and \$9000.

The Education Improvement Commission (EIC) will oversee the transition from the current system to the new system. The November municipal elections saw the election of the first Trustees for the new system, and the new school districts became effective January 1, 1998.

Organizational Structure The EIC is co-chaired by David Cooke and Ann Vanstone, and has seven Commissioners. The EIC staff have all been seconded from other parts of the education system. The EIC has three key areas of responsibility:

- a) Policy and Governance
- b) Human Resources
- c) Implementation.

The work of the EIC has been divided between eight

sub-committees:

- a) Governance
- b) Human Resource
- c) Finance
- d) French Language
- e) Northern Issues
- f) Native Issues
- g) Transitional Controls
- h) Technology

Members of sub-committees include EIC staff, Board Trustees, Parents and Professionals.

Implementation The Minister of Education posed three key Questions for policy analysis by the EIC:

1. Ways the government can ensure that class sizes do not grow beyond current levels.
2. Issues that affect the amount and scheduling of instructional time that teachers spend with their students.
3. Ways to give Boards more flexibility in the program delivery and school organization, while ensuring that educational quality is maintained or enhanced.

The answers to these policy questions are provided in "The Road Ahead", the first publication of the EIC. Copies are available from your school board or on the Internet.

In the next few months, the EIC will be involved in consultations on the role of Trustees, on the role of senior staff, and on the governance of special education.

Jim reiterated that the large new school boards have to be governed differently. The Trustees will have to focus on issues of governance and not operational issues, like the type of fencing or colour of paint.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Jim encouraged OAFCCD members to get involved in education consultations. The present reform has created an opportunity to improve the system. It is up to each of us to get involved. More information on the Education Improvement Commission is available at <http://www.minofed.on.ca>.

Presidents' Update

I am very pleased to share the news of recent financial support for OAFCCD from the following organizations:

The **Roy C. Hill Charitable Foundation** has announced a grant of ten thousand dollars, payable over two years.

The **Barbershoppers** have provided a further twenty-five hundred dollars towards the costs of the AGM and operating costs.

TDS Group Ltd. in Tillsonburg has donated two thousand dollars towards the administration and operation of OAFCCD.

These funds will help with the on-going activities of OAFCCD but we still need your membership fees and donations.

The provincial government has still not announced the funding model for education and this is a major concern to OAFCCD members. Over the past two years I, and other Board Members, have met with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Training to discuss the need for provision of speech and language services by school boards to be compulsory. As an organization, OAFCCD has participated in many government consultations. However, we have no idea whether our ideas have been considered.

The present changes in education have created an opportunity for real change and improvement in the services needed by our children. But there are no assurances. It is also possible that government efforts to reduce the deficit could be at the cost of services to our children. Please be vigilant. Let your M.P.P., and your community, know how important these services are. Share your story with friends and neighbours. Help people understand that your child needs help, and that professional assistance can make a difference.

Sharen Heath,

President

Special Education Advisory Committee A Voice for Our Children

While it is still unclear what the full impact of education reform will have on our children, there is some good news. The Ministry of Education and Training continues to require every school board to have a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and has actually strengthened their role.

SEAC's were first established in 1982 and, in most school boards, have been effective in providing advice and direction to Trustees on the provision of special education services. Membership of SEAC includes local representatives of provincial parent associations (usually 12) and three Trustees. The Ministry has strengthened the role of SEAC in several ways. Each SEAC is required to have ten meetings each year and the annual Special Education Plan must be submitted with the comments of SEAC members.

OAFCCD has a member on SEAC in over twenty of the 69 district school boards. The OAFCCD rep is able to provide the SEAC, and the school board, with information about communication disorders and their impact on students. In addition, they are able to provide advice and feedback to the school board on the effectiveness of programs and services.

As a parent, you can assist the SEAC rep by providing information about your child's success or your concerns. In addition, the SEAC rep can assist you by providing information on board services and on how to navigate the education system.

To be effective advocates for your student, parents should be familiar with the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). For more information on the IPRC process in your school board, ask your principal for a copy of the Parent Guide to Special Education. All boards must provide this information for students who may be considered for identification as an Exceptional student.

A list of OAFCCD SEAC reps has been included with this Newsletter. We still need more SEAC reps. See the insert for more details.

WINTER ALERT!! Ear Infections and Speech and Language Development

Ear infections can cause fluid in the middle ear (otitis media). Ear infections are one of the most common illnesses in children between birth and three years of age. Fluid in the middle ear prevents the ear from conducting sound properly. It can interfere with normal hearing. Even a mild, temporary hearing loss can delay the development of speech and language skills. Therefore, early recognition and treatment of otitis media is important.

Some of the common symptoms of ear infections and fluid in the middle ear are:

- Earaches or draining of the ears
- Fever
- Partial loss of hearing
- Different response to speech and everyday sounds
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Irritability
- Rubbing or pulling at the ears
- Having difficulty keeping balance, running, or jumping
- Turning the television or radio up much louder than usual
- Frequent need to have directions and information repeated
- Talking less than usual or unclear speech
- Using gestures rather than talking
- Delayed speech and language development

The symptoms of serious ear infections and otitis media usually appear during or after a cold or respiratory infection, often during the winter months. Since fluid can collect in the middle ear without causing pain, children with otitis media may not complain about it. Parents may notice symptoms before the child does! If your child has recently had an ear infection, be alert for one or more of the above symptoms!

When a child gets ear infections several times during a year, it is called recurrent otitis media. A preschool child with recurrent otitis media frequently experiences a temporary loss of hearing. The loss may continue for up to six weeks after the ear infection has healed. Such a hearing loss is described as "mild and fluctuating". But it may be a major cause of speech and language delay during preschool

years.

Communication development is at its peak from twelve months through four years of age. Fluctuating hearing loss during that time interferes with learning speech and language. Children who can not hear clearly may "tune out" everyday sounds - even your voice! If your child has fluid in the middle ear, similar words may sound the same. It is not surprising that final consonants, past tense, and plural word endings are often left off by children with recurrent otitis media. Since they don't hear these sounds when others talk, they don't learn how to say them properly.

Children with recurrent otitis media over several months or years may develop:

- Permanent hearing loss if left untreated
- Speech and language loss
- Problems focusing their attention
- Problems with school work
- Poor self esteem or Social problems

Parents can help by doing the following:

1. Seek professional help. Prompt medical attention is very important. Contact your physician, pediatrician, otolaryngologist (ear nose and throat specialist), or an audiologist (specialist in testing hearing). Medical professionals are still debating which treatments are most effective. The two most common methods of treatment are the use of antibiotics to control the infection, and the placement of tubes in the ear to drain the fluid. The help of a Speech-Language Pathologist may also be needed.

2. Be a good speech and language model. Talk about what your child is doing. Describe what your child sees. Expand your child's remark. Keep your language short, simple and direct.

3. Structure the environment to help your child listen and learn:

- Get your child's attention before you begin
- Get down to your child's eye level.
- Reduce background noise. Turn off the television and radio. Quiet other children in the room.
- Use gestures and facial expressions to help convey your meaning.

excerpt from Parent Articles 1, "Otitis Media and Speech and Language Development," (1988).

Tips on Private Speech/Language Services

If you need Private Speech/Language Pathology Services there are some important points to remember:

a) If you have Extended Health Care Benefits through your employer, be sure to check to see if the cost of speech therapy is covered. If you can only get such assistance after a doctor's referral is provided, be aware that the insurance company will only pay for the therapy sessions dated after the doctor's referral is given.

Some people have run into problems with this because they started therapy and then got the referral. The initial sessions were not paid for by insurance.

Any Extended Health Care plan will require the speech/language pathologist's registration number. If you are dealing with someone new, be sure that a number is available to ensure competency.

b) If you do not have Extended Health Insurance, and public speech therapy services are not available to you, it is possible for you to claim the cost of therapy on your Income Tax return as a Medical Expense.

Submitted by Karen Silburn

NOTE: In May 1997 it was announced that GST should be charged on the purchase of speech-language pathology services effective January 1998. The Honourable Paul Martin has advised CASLPA that legislation has been delayed and GST should not be charged at this time.

Attention SLP's!!!

Call for Summer Camp Proposals

Last May the OAFCCD Newsletter included information on summer day camps. We would again like to include information on Communication Camps in the next newsletter. If you are planning to operate a communication camp this summer, please send information on the camp to OAFCCD, attention Alison Morse before April 1, 1998.

COMING EVENTS

Parent Workshops (London) - Stuttering can be Prevented - If Detected Early (Wednesday February 18th or Wednesday April 1st) **Contact: J. Anthony Wray, (519)675-0449.**

Lanark Chapter Meetings:

February 11, (7:00pm) - Guest Speaker Marsha Cannon-Houlahan, on P-CAP, Comstock Building, Brockville

March 11, (7:00pm) - Guest Speaker Dr. Dennis Collis, on Chiropractic Care and Your Special Needs Child, Smiths Falls Recreation Centre

April 8, (7:00pm) - Guest Speaker to be announced, Comstock Building, Brockville

Contact: Connie Beckett (613)284-1227

The following Chapters have meetings planned for the near future:

Thunder Bay, contact: Jan Hudyma (807)475-3609

Huron-Perth, contact: Kath McNee (519)529-7512

Windsor, contact: Rana Holden (519)948-4886

London, contact: Carol Hawthorne (519)474-0979

Peel Region, contact: Brenda Patterson (905)846-2651

Annual Membership Renewal!

Annual Membership Fees are now due. Membership Fees entitle you to copies of the three Newsletters produced each year, to information on special events or workshops in your area, and includes membership in local Chapters. (Remember membership fees will be waived upon request.)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please complete and send the attached notice to make sure that your membership information is correct. Return to: OAFCCD, Sharen Heath, 13 Segal Dr., Tillsonburg, Ont., N4G 4P4

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____ **Postal**

Code: _____ **Phone:()** _____ **Parent:** _____

Professional: _____ **Specify:** _____

New Member: _____ **Renewal:** _____

Don't forget to enclose \$15.00 Annual Membership Fee with your form.