

**ldao**

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

*A different way of learning  
can lead to success.*

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# communiqué

THE PUBLICATION OF THE LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

*Getting Inspired!*

**York University's  
Mentoring Program  
Celebrates 20 years**

**STRENGTH-  
BASED  
IEPS**

**A Profile of  
ADHD Coach  
Barbara Durst**

**Meet Camp Kirk's  
Executive Director**

**Teacher Tips  
on Communicating  
with Parents**

# communiqué

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From the enduring mentoring program at York University to the common sense approach of coaching those with ADHD, these are the people who inspire us! Camp Kirk's *Henri Audet* shares his moving story as a person living with learning disabilities, while *Jayne Greene-Black* and *Chris Gaspar* celebrate the twentieth anniversary of York University's mentoring program, Toronto's *Barbara Durst* discusses the secrets of successful ADHD coaching and *Anne Watson Russell* proposes a new approach to creating IEPs.

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**Communiqué** provides a forum for information, news and opinions relevant to the field of learning disabilities. The Association does not, in any sense, endorse opinions expressed or methods or programs mentioned. Articles may be reprinted unless otherwise stated. Please mention "**LDAO Communiqué**" and the article's author if and when articles are reprinted.

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# EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

## Paris Je T'aime



Carter Hammett, Editor

**E**arlier this summer the world issued a collective yawn in response to the latest Paris Hilton incident.

After being released from her all-too-brief stint in jail, the actress/model/singer/whatever revealed to broadcaster Larry King she had ADHD, as if to atone for all the sins she's unleashed upon the world in recent years.

From the cat-in-the-hat yowlings issued forth on her self-titled album – although “Stars are Blind” was a nice distraction – to the standing ovation audiences nation-wide gave after her character was knocked off in the film *House of Wax*, Hilton has personified time after time the late artist Andy Warhol's prophesy that everyone can and will be famous for 15 minutes.

Surely, Hilton's “best before date” expired, like, 14 minutes ago.

Working with job seekers with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), I often find myself repeating that simply having ADHD isn't an excuse. You have a disability, and there are certain responsibilities you owe to yourself and your network to honour your disability. You take ownership over it; find a lifestyle, talents, values, accommodations and motives that fit you and build a life with integrity. After the foundation's been created then you can put it on YouTube if you like, but only after discovering a sense of *who you are first*.

As a writer, I have become increasingly appalled at what constitutes “news” these days. “Nicole's pregnant!” “Britney dumps K-Fed!” “Whitney's on crack!” Back in J-school, this used to be known as “bunny rabbit journalism” and was viewed as writing of the worst kind. Now, even respected dailies have jumped on the bandwagon recycling unsubstantiated “stories” on the latest antics of a bunch of rich, spoiled, untalented, unconscious party-going crack heads who do, well...nothing much. Even Lindsay Lohan, once the most promising of the bunch, has traded in whatever talent she once had for photo ops in rehab. Writer Gertrude Stein was wrong when she observed that the group running with Ernest Hemingway was a “lost generation.” Clearly, Gertrude was still on dial-up. That epithet was never more apt, *now*.

I was wondering where all the youth role models of today – especially those for youth with LD – had disappeared, when Kate emailed, asking what the theme for this issue was going to be. Sifting through this issue's content, I realized the role models were *right here*. Although several stories are timely in the “back to

school sense” – for kids, youth *and* adults – many of the articles are linked here by inspiring, practical solutions that help make living with LD and ADHD just a little easier.

Special education expert **Barbara King** offers up sound, practical and tactful suggestions to teachers on approaching parents whose children may be exhibiting ADHD behaviours, while education specialist **Anne Watson Russell** proposes the “radical” concept of offering strength-based IEPs to special needs children. Children eventually mature, and mentoring has been touted in recent years as a form of “living accommodation” that has benefited many. We are pleased to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of York University's mentoring program in these pages with contributions from program founder **Jayne Greene-Black** and program participant **Chris Gaspar**.

There has been some debate about where mentoring ends and coaching begins. Perhaps it's sometimes better to say that those with LD are mentored, while those with ADHD are coached. Both are pragmatic solutions that are offered by inspiring people, including ADHD coach Barbara Durst. **Henri Audet** has certainly secured his place in LD history as the founding director of Camp Kirk. His moving story is shared here, as is documentary filmmaker Lana Lovell's, who, after years of lingering on the fringes of her art, recently won acclaim at the Detroit Film Festival with her film, *Underground*, and its resonating images.

These are the people who speak volumes through practical actions and words; the people who move and inspire us to be just a little bit better as human beings. The people who say, “you can do it too.” They are our true role models.

I have often said that we should invert our perceptions about LD and start to re-think them as a *culture*. People with LD possess their own language, heroes, humour, and history that is uniquely theirs. Indeed, the very term, “learning disabilities” is pejorative with an emphasis on what people *can't* do. This issue is filled with those who place an emphasis on what people *can* do, and we celebrate them here. And, unlike Ms. Hilton and her motley crew, the essence of those individuals will resonate long after the next edition of *Trivial Pursuit*.

Carter Hammett, Editor



## LDAO and LD NEWS

# JOINT MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**M**y dream is of a province where disability rights are advanced, not only for those with classically defined physical disabilities, but also for those so-called invisible disabilities.”

- David Onley, Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario



Peter Chaban

To anyone living with or working in the field of learning disabilities, the words spoken by Ontario's new Lieutenant-Governor at his swearing in on September 5<sup>th</sup> provided affirmation and hope.

In spite of a long list of illustrious individuals with learning disabilities who have made enormous contributions to our society and to the world's development, there are still many people with LD who continue to suffer in silence. These are people who lose confidence in their abilities to be productive, creative and engaged members of society. Instead, they often fall seriously short of their potential or in worst cases become entangled in our legal or social service systems. This is not acceptable and we are counting on people like our new Lieutenant-Governor to help us give voice and presence to this invisible disability.

In recent issues of *Communiqué* LDAO has highlighted our position on issues related to learning disabilities and many of the

projects we have undertaken to stay at the forefront of training, education, scientific and technical advances, advocacy and public awareness. In all this activity we realize that we have, in our various chapters across the province, some of the most passionate, committed, and experienced partners whose direct service in their communities makes profound differences in individuals' lives but to a great extent goes unnoticed.

LDAO is taking this moment to acknowledge these partners and to reaffirm our commitment to them, to better understand the needs in their specific communities, to make them a part of the process of project and resource development and to work with them to make sure that all our efforts are not only effective but sustainable.

Maggie L. Wygant  
Executive Director

Peter Chaban  
Chair



Maggie Wygant

## LDAO Welcomes New Executive Director

**T**he LDAO Board and staff are pleased to introduce **Maggie Wygant** as the new Executive Director.

Maggie has a background that combines

professional training and expertise in counselling, not-for-profit business management and conflict management. She worked in the United States as a therapist in the early 1980's and following a move to Toronto in 1986 became the Head of Marketing and Development for Canada's National Ballet School (NBS) from 1987 to 1995. From 2004 until 2006 Ms Wygant worked again with NBS and for the last three months of her contract she assumed the role of Interim Administrative Director. From 1996 to 2004, she was the founding Executive Director of Sheena's Place, a community-based charitable organization offering sup-

port programs for people affected by eating disorders. During her tenure as Executive Director, Sheena's Place expanded its support programs from eight groups per week to over 200 and from 60 group participants to 2,000. Her experience in senior management specializing in not-for-profits has earned her the respect from this community. In addition to her excellent organizational strengths, Maggie has worked in challenging environments with vulnerable populations around sensitive issues and has facilitated supportive and creative working environments.

Maggie has an Advanced Certificate in Conflict Management from Conrad Grebel University, Waterloo, ON; a Masters in Education from Lesley College, Boston, MA; and a certificate in Arts Management through the Canadian Opera Company and the National Ballet of Canada, Toronto, ON.

With Maggie's strong background in non profit management and knowledge of relevant issues, we look forward to our new direction in leadership and welcome her to the fold.

ldao

# Gloria Landis Memorial Bursary



**T**his bursary was established in memory of Gloria Landis, a longtime dedicated advocate for individuals with learning disabilities. Its purpose is to provide financial assistance to a mature student with LD in a postsecondary program who has been absent from full-time education for a period of three years.

In spite of facing considerable adversity in her life and hardship in her first year at Fanshawe, Misk demonstrated she could be successful in her academic studies and life with a good attitude, proper balance, and understanding and insight into her disability. Congratulations Jelena! *ldao*

## Roy Cooper Award

**B**enjamin Sadlowski, of Kingston, ON is the recipient of this year's Roy Cooper Scholarship award.

Sadlowski headed to Hamilton's McMaster University in September to start first-year studies in the Engineering program. He is an auditory learner requiring supports that include note-taking during class and/or books on tape or scanned textbooks so they can be read back to him. Because of his learning style, he hopes that at the end of his postsecondary studies, he will have the opportunity to design software programs to help accommodate learning problems and/or entertain people.

The annual \$1,000 Roy Cooper Scholarship award is given to a high school student who has a documented LD and will be attending a university or college during the 2007-08 school year, majoring in engineering and/or a physical sciences discipline.

The award is named in honour of Roy Cooper, who for 30 years has been a steadfast supporter of LDAO's work, his local chapter, LDA Ottawa-Carleton and the Learning Disabilities



Association of Canada. Mr. Cooper's observation of the final seven candidates to be considered was that more and more students with LD are seeing that they can take the next step to attaining a postsecondary education and that is very encouraging. For the first time ever, we also had a female candidate. We will put out a call for nominations in May 2008.

*ldao*

## CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE

**Henri Audet** is Executive Director of Camp Kirk, a residential summer camp in Kirkfield, ON for children with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders. Camp Kirk takes the focus away from children's learning disabilities and puts it on their strengths. • **Chris Gaspar** is currently a student at York University • **Jayne Greene-Black** is the Career Specialist in the York University Learning Disability Program. She has over 20 years' experience career counselling people with learning disabilities and was the initiator and director of the York University Career Mentorship Program.

She is the author of *Secrets for Success: Profiles of University Students with Learning Disabilities* and a recipient of an Ontario School Counsellors' Association award for her contributions to Ontario career guidance • **Barbara King**, Owen Sound, ON has worked in Special Education for 17 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Development Studies from Renison College, University of Waterloo, a Bachelor of Education from Nipissing University College, North Bay and a Specialist Certification in Special Education and Guidance. She is presently working as a Developmental Learning

Teacher and Curriculum Lead Teacher in a secondary school in Owen Sound, Ontario. • Currently a Resource Teacher with the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, **Anne Watson-Russell**, B.A., M.Ed., Ph.D. (OISE) has taught Special Education at every level, from primary through tertiary (U.B.C., Trent U.) and has been a psychoeducational Consultant for various school boards and in private practice. She is co-author of the best-selling guide book for child witnesses, *So, You Have to Go to Court!* (1992).

## PUBLIC POLICY ROUND UP:

# LDAO Recommendations Reflected in Safe Schools Action Team Submission

Since the last edition of Communiqué there have been developments on several fronts.

### Safe schools initiatives.

On June 5, 2007, Bill 212, the **Education Amendment Act (Progressive Discipline and School Safety)**, 2007 was unanimously passed in the Ontario legislature. LDAO wrote a letter congratulating Minister Kathleen Wynne and the members of the Safe Schools Action Team, stating that we were pleased to see many of the recommendations LDAO had made in our submission to the Safe Schools Action Team reflected in the changes. Important features of the amendments include a progressive discipline approach, the requirement that mitigating factors be considered before students are suspended or expelled, and the requirement that school boards provide programs for students on long-term suspensions or who are expelled from all schools in the board (as of February 1, 2008).

On August 24, 2007 the Ministry issued two public policy memoranda (PPM 141 and 142) giving direction to school boards on programs to be set up for students on long-term suspension and expelled students. LDAO was pleased to see an emphasis on providing continuing academic support to these students, and the statement that “in all cases, every effort must be made to maintain the student’s regular academic course work throughout the suspension period”. In the case of students with special education needs, boards are required to provide appropriate support consistent with the student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP).

### Dispute Resolution Processes

The Ministry of Education has recently produced a handbook for parents and educators on welcoming schools and informal dispute resolution. In addition, a provincial advisory committee on Formal Dispute Resolution has been meeting over the last few months to provide input to the Ministry concerning a continuum of dispute resolution processes, and the design and implementation of a formal dispute resolution pilot. LDAO is represented on this committee through PAAC on SEAC (Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees).

### Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Standards Development

The Information and Communications Standards Development Committee has met several times since March, and is working on the format of the proposed standard. With the rapid evolution of communication technologies the development of this standard will be challenging. LDAO is represented on this committee, and learning disabilities will be represented on the Employment Standards Development Committee by Greg Yarrow, Executive Director of ALDER (Adult Learning Disabilities Employment Resources). The proposed transportation standard was released for public review, and LDAO commented on a few relevant details.

### Human Rights Reform

LDAO sent a submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, on Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, recommending that:

- At all stages of the complaints process, including the Tribunal hearing, there be adequate time and funding allotted for the accommodation requirements of complainants with disabilities.
- Complainants who have disabilities be assigned a case manager/advocate to assist them through the various stages of the process, including investigation
- Disability awareness training be mandated for the staff at the Human Rights Legal Support Centre and the Human Rights Tribunal.

Bill 107 was passed in the legislature, and LDAO has written letters to the Chair of the Human Rights Tribunal and the Transition Director of the Human Rights Legal Support Centre outlining our concerns about supports for complainants with LD. The Human Rights Legal Support Centre is to be funded by the Ontario government to provide advice and assistance on persons’ rights under the Human Rights Code. The Centre is also to provide legal services in relation to applications to the Human Rights Tribunal, proceedings before the Tribunal, enforcing Tribunal orders, and applications for judicial review of Tribunal proceedings. *ldao*

# The ADHD Child in the Classroom: Approaching the Parents

By Barbara King

**A**s teachers, we value collaborative and cooperative relationships with the parents of our students. We want to celebrate successes together and work as a team when there are challenges in a child's education.

One of these challenges can be approaching a parent whose child is exhibiting symptoms of ADHD. We know that grade school teachers are often exposed to the symptoms of ADHD more than anyone else in the child's life.

Although approaching a parent whose child may have ADHD can be difficult, it is important to do so in order to ensure the child is appropriately assessed by a health care professional.

What makes this initial discussion difficult? In speaking with a parent whose child was recently diagnosed with ADHD, it was reinforced from our discussion that we, as teachers, need to be sensitive and supportive. As this parent explained, if a teacher indicated a worry about her child's vision, she, the parent, would undoubtedly discuss the observations made by the teacher and the various strategies attempted to accommodate the student's needs. The parent would probably make an eye doctor's appointment, have the child's eyes checked, a diagnosis would be made and corrective lenses would be prescribed if needed – a relatively simple solution to a medical problem.

We may feel the discussion of a child's behaviour and attention problems can be just as exact and readily rectified. When we approach parents with our concerns, however, tackling the issue of the child possibly having ADHD can create an enormous amount of stress for the parent, and for you as the child's teacher.

As professionals, when we observe a child over a period of time and recognize the classic signs of ADHD, we acknowledge that specialized intervention will be required. We have usually made behavioural and academic observations, gathered data, possibly consulted with other school personnel who have expertise in dealing with behaviour and attention problems, and probably have introduced strategies with the child to accommodate his or her learning needs. Despite your sensitive approach, there could be several reasons why the initial discussion with parents may be difficult. Parents may feel you are blaming them for their child's behaviour difficulties; this may not be the first time they have engaged in this same conversation. The observed behav-

iours may not be as relevant at home and parents may feel that the school is not meeting the child's needs or does not understand the child. Parents themselves may have had similar problems in school.

Whatever their thoughts coming into the discussion, being mindful of the parent's feelings during this time sets the stage for an ongoing positive working relationship.

Listed below are some tips to use when approaching a parent to tell them that you have concerns about their child's behaviour:

- Approach the parent with sensitivity and have your discussion in private.
- Share with the parent your concerns regarding the child's behaviour and academic performance. Be specific about what you have observed – share your observations and collections of the child's work. Parents may indeed have seen some of these behaviours at home.
- Begin to explore solutions and strategies with the parent – engage them in the process. Parents know their child better than anyone else and all parents want to see their child being successful.
- Share strategies that you have already implemented that are working – even those that are not working. This is a clear message to the parent that you are not giving up on their child.
- Inquire about strategies that parents use at home, perhaps words or phrases they might use that are effective. This helps to engage them as being part of the solution for their child.



Barbara King



- Treat the problem as something that can be addressed. A child who is struggling is not a “lost cause.” Be sure to inspire “hope.”
- Refer the parent to support groups and informational tools.
- Include the child in discussions, if they are old enough. Children know they have issues and want to be successful in school. They, too, may have some ideas and strategies that would be helpful.
- Meet with the parent on a regular basis to discuss the child’s progress. A parent’s acceptance of the problem may be difficult to obtain after one meeting but may evolve after several meetings.
- Refer to other children that you know who have been diagnosed with ADHD and learning disabilities, but who have been successful in managing their symptoms.
- Tell the parent that you are committed to helping his or her child.
- Be aware of the sensitivities that may be present. The parent himself or herself may also have undiagnosed ADHD.

## STRATEGIES TO AVOID:

- Don’t label the child. Focus on the behaviours that the child is demonstrating (i.e. not sitting still, distractibility) with the parent rather than telling them that you think their child has ADHD.
- Don’t blame or judge the parents. Recognize that the child’s behavioural problems may be the result of a serious medical condition.
- Don’t approach the parent when the classroom is full of other children. Schedule a private meeting to discuss the issue.
- Don’t attempt to make a diagnosis. Ask the parent to discuss the issue with the child’s physician.
- Don’t push medication to the parent as a “quick fix” to the problem. Although medication is often critical to success, it is only one component of a total treatment program.

Although it may be difficult for a parent to accept that his or her child may be demonstrating some concerning behaviours, by working together, parents and teachers can do their best to help the child succeed. *Idao*

## THE BOOKSHELF

# Book Review – *Ready or Not, Here Life Comes*

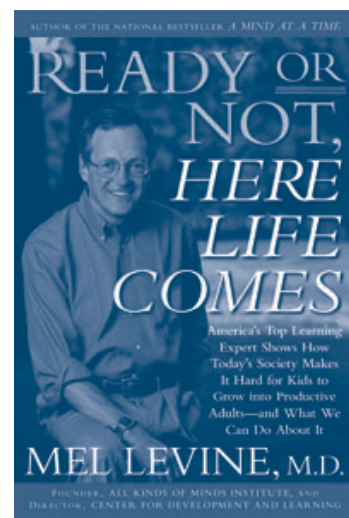
Dr. Mel Levine’s latest book, *Ready or Not, here Life Comes*, focuses on the way in which we need to go about preparing kids for the real world and career success. Every parent wants to know, “What will he be like when he’s in his twenties?” After decades of observing children grow into young adults, Mel Levine, nationally-known paediatrician and author, addresses the question of why some youngsters make a successful transition into adulthood while others does not.

Levine urges that schools teach life prep courses to equip adolescents with the abilities they will need to succeed as adults. He identifies these skills as falling within four growth processes, “the four I’s”: inner direction, or self-awareness; interpretation, or understanding the outside world; instrumentation, or the acquisition of mental tools; and interaction, or the ability to relate to other people effectively. It is these abilities that ensure a suc-

cessful transition into the start-up years of early adulthood. Parents, schools, and adolescents themselves can all work together to improve work-life readiness, and Dr. Levine shows how. He even offers advice for young adults who find themselves unable to navigate the world of careers.

According to Ron Lessard, executive director of LDA Sudbury, “the role our children with learning disabilities will play in their community and society will unfold as part of their engagement with those in the workplace, friends, colleagues and family. How we prepare them is critical”.

- LDA Sudbury staff





# HOTWEB: Headstrong Nation

The site bills itself as “a community of strong-minded, intelligent, dyslexic individuals who refuse to dwell on our learning disability... No excuses. Just action. Join us.”

Headstrong Nation is a blunt, almost in-your-face website that lays Dyslexia on the line. Discussed in cold, hard facts, the web site is an easy-to-navigate, plain language site that dispels myths about the learning disability.

Also addressing ADHD, the site is divided into three parts. The “Learn” section provides a clear definition of what Dyslexia is and isn’t, as well as brief descriptions of other learning disabilities. The “Act” section focuses on self-advocacy and what you can do to make your needs known. Lastly, the “Connect” portion of the site includes a forum for discussing relevant topics, a news

feed documenting recent activity and a subscription feature that enables readers to stay tuned to the activities of the organization. For those with reading difficulties, the site is equipped with screen-reading software to help navigate the site.

But the most compelling features are the documentaries the California-based non-profit produces, notably, the award-winning *Headstrong: Inside the Hidden World of Dyslexia and ADHD*, clips of which are available for viewing. It is a heart-breaking look into the struggles faced by 30 million Americans with LD. It’s empowering and evocative too, and a must-watch.

Make no mistake: Headstrong is one organization worth watching. Make sure you visit this much-needed site at: <http://www.headstrongnation.org> [/dao](#)



## JOIN THE HEADSTRONG NATION

*Click on the speaker icon to hear this page read aloud, or highlight a section of text first to only hear it read.*

We are a community of strong-minded, intelligent, dyslexic individuals who refuse to dwell on our learning disability.

We empower ourselves with knowledge about dyslexia.

We give open, honest feedback and support to others that are struggling with dyslexia.

We equip ourselves with the latest technology and resources so we can succeed with our disability.

No excuses. Just action. Join us.

*Watch our nationally broadcast documentary, [Headstrong: Inside the Hidden World of Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder](#).*

# ELSEWHERE



## 'Amazing Race' Former Contestant Inspires Children With Learning Disability

Kelly McCorkle Parkinson, a former Miss South Carolina beauty queen and contestant on *The Amazing Race* season 7, graced the homecoming festivities of the West End Baptist Church last month and served as an inspiration to many children.

Growing up in Greenville, South Carolina, she was diagnosed with a learning disability and was told by doctors that it would likely prevent her from accomplishing goals she had set for herself. However, she proved doubters wrong as she fulfilled her dreams, which included winning beauty pageants and joining the renowned reality show, *The Amazing Race*.

"A few months ago, I heard Parkinson speak and she was outstanding. Several of the other girls at our church also heard her and thought she made an impact on their lives and could do the same to even more," West End Baptist Pastor Rodney Cook said.

Parkinson encourages children diagnosed with a learning condition to pursue major strides in life by uplifting others with her experiences with the Miss America pageant and *The Amazing Race*.

Source: [www.buddytv.com](http://www.buddytv.com)

## Food Additives May Cause Hyperactivity: Study

Certain artificial food colourings and other additives can worsen hyperactive behaviors in children aged 3 to 9, British researchers reported on Wednesday.

Tests on more than 300 children showed significant differences in their behavior when they drank fruit drinks spiked with a mixture of food colourings and preservatives, Jim Stevenson and colleagues at the University of Southampton said.

"These findings show that adverse effects are not just seen in children with extreme hyperactivity (such as ADHD) but can also be seen in the general population and across the range of severities of hyperactivity," the researchers wrote in their study, published in *The Lancet* medical journal.

Source: *Maggie Fox*, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com) (September 5, 2007)

## Overcoming Dyslexia: Timing Of 'Connections' In Brain Is Key

Using new software developed to investigate how the brains of dyslexic children are organized, University of Washington researchers have found that key areas for language and working

memory involved in reading are connected differently in dyslexics than in children who are good readers and spellers.

However, once the children with dyslexia received a three-week instructional program, their patterns of functional brain connectivity normalized and were similar to those of good readers when deciding if sounds went with groups of letters in words.

"Some brain regions are too strongly connected functionally in children with dyslexia when they are deciding which sounds go with which letters," said Todd Richards, a UW neuroimaging scientist and lead author of a study published in the current issue of the *Journal of Neurolinguistics*.

"We had hints in previous studies that the ability to decode novel words improves when a specific brain region in the right hemisphere decreases in activation. This study suggests that the deactivation may result in a disconnection in time from the comparable region in the left hemisphere, which in turn leads to improved reading. Reading requires sequential as well as simultaneous processes."

Source: *Science Daily*

## Crafty Tracy Turned Dyslexia into an Art Form

Crafty cardmaker Tracy Creed is another entrepreneur who proves that you can enjoy success, despite the challenges of dyslexia.

Mrs Creed, from Sleaford (who was Miss Henderson before marrying this year) is the brains behind the web-based business [www.dragoncraftcreations.com](http://www.dragoncraftcreations.com).

Her dyslexia causes her short-term memory loss when it comes to words and figures, but she also suffers arthritis and has spinal problems and painful feet.

Despite this Mrs Creed won a National Dyslexia in Business Award.

A specialist in individually-made boxed cards, corporate and wedding greetings, she got her business off the ground with the help of a Grantham JobcentrePlus disability employment adviser.

"When you understand you have dyslexia, you can learn from it, rather than letting it beat you. People should speak to disability employment advisers for advice," she said. "I did tests which showed me that, academically I had an IQ of 117, but artistically my IQ was 132."

Source: [www.thisislincolnshire.co.uk](http://www.thisislincolnshire.co.uk)



# ***GETTING INSPIRED!***

*Life is that great journey. It's about change, expansion, discovery, pain, insight, continuously increasing your vision of opportunity, growing our limits, learning to see clearly and deeply, listening with integrity, taking risks everyday. This is the path and it is exactly where you are meant to be. And from here, you can only go forward in abundance, shaping your narrative into a living poem; a tale of healing, beauty, wisdom, and love.*

*The people featured in this issue sing to us through their concerted efforts and communal strength. They inspire us with actions, from managing non-judgmental spaces in nature like Camp Kirk, to participating in enduring programs that inspire others to find their true calling in York University's mentoring program. They quietly coach ADHD clients from the sidelines and they identify common sense solutions that fill the gaps in education.*

*Collectively, they remind us that wisdom is in the everyday and that change, while painful, can be accomplished. These common-folk heroes suggest that change is also accomplished by action, by movement, vision and commitment. We are honoured to share their stories with you this issue and find inspiration in their united wisdom.*



# York University's LD Career Development Mentorship Program Celebrates Twentieth Anniversary

By Jayne Greene-Black



LD mentoring program director Jayne Greene-Black facilitates a professional development session for mentors.

**T**he focus of the Career Development Mentorship program is to help York University students with learning disabilities (LDs) identify their career passions and turn them into strategic actions that promote their career success. Industry mentors who volunteer their time and expertise to enhance the career development of this talented population have assisted almost 500 students with LDs. One-to-one mentor matches are created annually based on the stated objectives of the students who partici-

knowledge and expertise that comes with their experiences of overcoming LDs at school and at work.

Past mentors have come from diverse industries, companies, and areas of expertise. They have represented all levels of government, large corporations such as IBM, BMO, Bell Canada, and Motorola, successful small business owners, and independent entrepreneurs. Mentors have also represented unique career paths such as interpersonal skills

*“There is no greater joy than helping someone become who they are, rather than who they were told that they were supposed to be!”*

pate. In addition to individualized, custom-designed assistance, mentors also participate in a variety of group activities that promote student career effectiveness.

Now that there are so many successful York University graduates with LDs, we have a new valuable pool of potential mentors. Our graduates with LDs have become lawyers, doctors, teachers, television producers, business owners, human resources specialists, policy developers, and numerous other interesting professionals. Many of our graduates are happy to give back to the university by sharing their career knowledge and expertise with current York students with LDs. These successful role models bring unique

consultants, award-winning artists, and film and television personnel. Many mentors participate year after year, whereas others are recruited for one year only to fulfill a unique niche in that year's program. Mentors report that their participation is worthwhile and fulfilling. Rodger Harding has been a mentor in this program for over 15 years. He recently said, “There is no greater joy than helping someone become who they are, rather than who they were told that they were supposed to be!”

The students who join the program are at different career development stages and have diverse reasons for joining. Some just want to build their self-esteem, their assertiveness, or their networking skills.



Jayne Greene-Black has coordinated York's mentoring program for 20 years.

Some want to learn more about themselves and what careers may be best suited for their unique learning profile. Others want to improve their job finding or job maintenance skills. Still others know exactly what career they want and are looking for detailed, concrete information and contacts that will bridge their transition into their dream job. Some participate for only one year and others join for many years in a row, each time with a new objective, and sometimes with a new mentor match to fulfill their current career development request.

Feedback from participating students has been outstanding. They often report that the program has been inspirational and instrumental in helping them reach their career objectives.

Participant feedback has included such comments as:

- helped me stay optimistic about my career path and myself

- opened up new options that I would have never considered
- taught me how to think about my LDs as assets not liabilities
- learned new ways to think of disability disclosure and accommodation
- gained valuable job search skills and new job networks
- gained clarity on the steps needed for success in the career path I am pursuing.

It has long been recognized that mentors are a key factor in the career success of workers, not just those with LDs. Mentors can often be that important key that unlocks one's talents and turns mediocrity into greatness.

More information on York's Career Development Mentorship Program can be found at:

<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/ldp/careers/mentoring.htm>



# Learning With a Learning Disability

By Chris Gaspar

**G**rowing up with a learning disability (LD) can be one of the toughest challenges a person has to face. I remember struggling to read in school. Processing information was tough and taking courses like math felt like having a migraine every day. I remember my teachers in elementary school didn't know how to deal with a child with LD, and many wondered if I would make it far in school. With the help of some good special education teachers in elementary and high school I was able to succeed academically.

Today at the age of 25, I'm a successful graduate from York University working on his second degree. It was York's Learning Disabilities program (LDP) that helped me understand the nature of my LD, both the biological causes, such as how LD is a neurological dysfunction in the brain, and the social stresses that go with it. This includes the stigma that people with LD are lazy, stupid, etc. None of this is true. People with LD have average-to-above average intelligence; it just may take us a little longer to learn certain things, but the point is that we can still learn.

York's LD program helped me to understand all these things and a few added bonuses: that a learning disability is nothing to be ashamed of, everyone has challenges whether you have LD or not, and you can achieve anything as long as you have the drive to succeed. There are many ways a person with a learning disability can work around their challenges, and York's LDP program is one resource that students can use to help them overcome their academic obstacles.

York's LD program has a lot: intake and assessments to help determine your strengths and challenges as soon as you are admitted to York and identified with LD; an adaptive computer lab to work in, extra time on tests and exams, etc. In addition, there is a lot of good emotional

support with the Mentorship Program that deals with career exploration, a Language and Learning Seminar course that helps you understand your LD better, and an LD support group. The greatest feeling I get when I'm at York is that even though I have a learning disability, I'm just like any other student. The school adapts itself around my needs making me feel included. We get accommodation letters from the LDP to give to our professors, outlining our needs in class. Some students have note takers; most need to write on a computer and extra time is a must because it takes students with LD longer to process information.

The great thing is when you show your letter to a professor they know right away what your needs are. Just about everyone at York knows that not all students learn the same way and that's no big deal. Just

because we learn differently doesn't mean that we can't learn. Without resources like the LD program, going to university would be much harder, for some people next to impossible. That's why it's great to have resources like that to give all students the same educational opportunities.

This is a good thing because there have been a lot of successful people with learning disabilities thanks to outside support, from teachers, business people, scientists, writers, etc. Students such as myself have come a long way from struggling to learn in school as young children, to being successful young adults. I think we have helped to show others, with a little help and support from our parents, teachers, and well-wishers, that having LD doesn't have to be a setback but can be a new opportunity for learning. *Idao*

## At a Glance:

- *For two decades, York University has run a successful mentoring program for students with learning disabilities. The goal of the program is to match aspiring students with mentors in the fields they wish to pursue. To date, over 500 students have been mentored, and many graduates, now in diverse careers of their own, mentor other students.*
- *Students have many reasons for joining the program. Some are interested in career and self exploration, while others want to build up their networking skills or self esteem.*
- *Mentors have long been recognized as key to LD student success. It is also valuable for non-LD students.*
- *Chris Gaspar, who is now working on his second degree, is a returning student to York University's mentoring program. During his primary and secondary studies, he struggled with learning disabilities, but with special education assistance, was able to succeed academically. The mentoring program at York offers assessment, and disclosure assistance so students can be properly accommodated. The program also offers a Language and Learning Seminar and an LD Support Group as well. Gaspar believes that the program demonstrates students like himself have a lot to offer and can succeed with the proper assistance.*



# Strength-Based Individual Education Plans

By Anne Watson-Russell

There's a rule of thumb that posits a 20-year span between research and practice. If so, then it's just about time for the findings of the massive 1987 study of children's mental health in Ontario<sup>1</sup> (headed by Dan Offord) to influence how we set about nurturing the mental health of our most vulnerable school children – those with an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

By now, we should be building IEPs around the protective factors determined by Offord's team of researchers, to inoculate against the highest-ranking risk factors of poverty, poor health, low maternal education and poor parenting. The number one protective factor the study identified was a child *strength* – if a child did something very well or had a natural talent, that child was likely to be resilient and mentally healthy despite the odds. At present, we write IEP programs to minimize, remediate or circumvent the academic and social manifestations of risk factors. To write programs based on protective factors would be a whole paradigm shift – from a focus on *needs* to a focus on *strengths*.

To some extent, that shift is underway. In the United States there is a move afoot to base the IEP *transition program* page for fourteen-year-olds on strengths. Pioneered by Dr. Michael Epstein at the University of Nebraska and now promoted in many states, the focus on strengths requires school staff to conduct a standardized interview called the *Strength Based Assessment (SBA)*<sup>2</sup>. It takes the form of a forty-five minute structured discussion with the student and family, designed to plan for the student's future after high school. What makes it different from any other transition plan meeting is the focus on the student's dreams, strengths, talents, abilities, skills and interests. Using the student's own words, Post School Outcome Statements are developed and recorded, along with tasks that need to be accomplished. The goal is to build a positive communication process and a plan for community interaction for

the student. This is a worthy goal and, done well, will generate a strength-based "to do" list for high school resource/guidance personnel to implement (e.g. Jake spends a lot of his time videotaping and wants to learn more about producing TV shows – Explore a community placement with local cable TV).

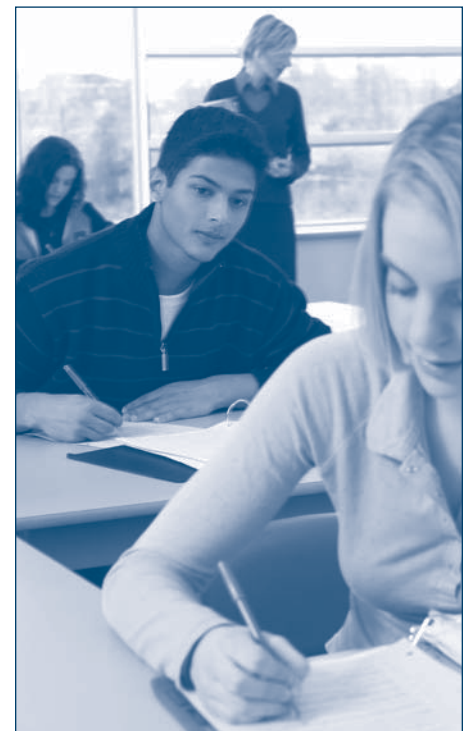
However, the SBA is inappropriately lengthy for younger students, most of whom have no clue what they want to do after high school, nor have yet developed any substantial skills, abilities, talents and strengths. Although we list "*Strengths*" as well as "*Needs*" on the front pages of elementary student IEPs, it is the latter for which we build program pages. We are not required to make any formalized effort to develop talents and strengths.<sup>3</sup> How, then, at the time of an SBA or similar transition interview, will students know what to talk about pursuing? How do our vulnerable elementary students come to develop the strengths that will help them become mentally healthy, productive, happy adults? Eventually, when they seek employment, they will not be hired on the basis of their needs, but on their strengths. Current elementary school IEPs do little to entrench *Strengths* development.

Building on strengths is something mental health practitioners have begun to work on with adults, if not with children. Coincidental with the finding of a *strength* as the major mental health protective factor for at-risk children, the field of Applied Positive Psychology was being launched. Its goal was (and remains) to help people find happiness and meaning.<sup>4</sup> Movement founder Martin Seligman recognized that psychology had become obsessed with pathology. In the same way that our IEPs build all our programs around *Needs* (every dysfunctional aspect of academics, cognition, and behaviour must be addressed), Seligman noticed that practicing psychologists focused almost solely on diagnosing and treating mental *disorders*. Nowadays, Applied Positive Psychologists follow Seligman's empirical,

research-based, *universal* list of strengths (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence – each with its own subset of virtues) to diagnose people's strengths and help them find "ways to cultivate excellence."<sup>5</sup> They conduct therapy for adults based firmly around building strengths. We should do no less for children.

In fact, none of the items on Seligman's list of strengths found universally in happy, mentally healthy people are mentioned as worthy of inclusion in Ontario IEPs. The 2004 revised Ontario Ministry of Education Resource Guide, *The Individual Education Plan*, suggests appropriate information under "Strengths" should include:

- the student's preferred learning style (e.g. visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner)<sup>6</sup>
- previously *acquired* skills (e.g. organizational skills, time-management skills)
- strengths in areas such as cognitive processing and communication.



None of these represents a talent or skill upon which a career path can be built (the strengths of Offord's group), nor are they any of the Seligman character traits! The guide does allow that: "In some cases, it may be appropriate to include information on... hobbies and interests, and non-academic accomplishments, *but such information is insufficient on its own*" (italics mine). Yet it is precisely those traits, those passionate hobbies, interests, and non-academic accomplishments that may open pathways to employment and life satisfaction – the ingredients of good mental health. If we apply Offord's results, it is the skills-and-talents strengths we should help students build; if Seligman's, the focus should be on character.

Based on the powerful findings of these researchers, we should be aggressively seeking ways to build on both these types of strengths. The endeavour may not be easy in schools robbed of their once popular "Shop" or "Home Economics" rooms. And to develop character we need to create authentic situations for displaying kindness, being wise, etc. But this *can* be done – great teachers have always gone the extra mile to showcase a student talent and move that talented student's skills forward. And we now have universally accessible character building websites such as [www.actsofkindness.org](http://www.actsofkindness.org). We are all able to at least ensure authentic audiences to whom students can display their skills and traits publicly. In a curriculum-packed day, it may be difficult to dedicate time and resources to enable students to work on their strengths. But it can be done, as can finding appropriate mentors, inviting parents to demonstrate and teach hobbies and skills not currently taught in school, and inviting coaches and community activity leaders into the school as inspirational demonstrators. If strength-based goals and objectives are enshrined in IEPs, these things *will* be done.

The best part of creating a strength-based IEP is that parents, as part of IEP planning, can be enlisted on the spot to brainstorm resources precisely as "strength-based" expectations are being written.

What should a strength-based IEP look like? Well, not having ever seen one, it's wide open for discussion. At very least,

*Program* pages should include as many goals, objectives, and teaching strategies for *Strengths* as there are for *Needs*. Objectives might include embedding the remediation of a need inside a strength or interest (e.g. addressing poor fine motor skills through manipulating small engine parts). This "embedding" practice is already commonplace (though not required) in many schools. But beyond that there should be specific goals for developing specific strengths (e.g. in the case above, there should be an expectation around acquired knowledge/skill of small engine repair). The IEP should definitely reflect whether an objective is *Need* or *Strength* driven, or a combination thereof. Parents should be able to see, at a glance, whether a strength is being enhanced, or being used to embed the remediation of a need, or being ignored. Every *Need* gets a program, so why not every *Strength*?

It is true that the IEP is only developed for students who have *Needs*. But we now

know (and have done for twenty odd years), that our vulnerable students will have the best shot at being mentally healthy, productive, happy adults through identifying and strengthening their *Strengths* at the same time as addressing their *Needs*. In a teaching climate where "research-" or "evidence-based" practices are promoted, let's use the evidence!

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Offord, D., Boyle, M., & Racine, Y., *Ontario Child Health Study: Children at risk*. Ottawa: Queens Printer for Ontario.
- <sup>2</sup> [www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/transition/toolbox/sba.htm](http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/transition/toolbox/sba.htm)
- <sup>3</sup> See the two Resource Guides: *The Individual Education Plan* (IEP) Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, and *Transition Planning*, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> Haidt, Jonathan, *The Happiness Hypothesis: finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. Basic Books, N.Y., 2006, p.x.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.168
- <sup>6</sup> In truth, a stronger visual rather than auditory preference is not a strength at all, but a style.

ldao

## At a Glance:



• *A 1987 study on promoting mental health in vulnerable school children suggests that IEPs should focus on the child's strengths, not weaknesses.*

*While some movement is afoot in the United States to emphasize strengths, the process has not been well refined.*

*Canadian teachers and psychologists tend to focus on needs instead, which does little to prepare students for their careers. And while government IEP documents encourage attention be placed on preferred learning styles and cognitive strengths, which do not skills upon which to build a career path.*

# The ADHD Whisperer

By Carter Hammett

**F**or many adults living with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), there is often a gap in distinguishing between what's interesting and doing what's important.

This was certainly the case with former aerospace engineer-turned-entrepreneur Tina Bauer, 36, who was finally diagnosed with the disorder earlier this year.

"Man, I needed help!" she laughs, looking back on her situation. "I'm bright, but experienced problems throughout school and work. I'd always have a long honeymoon period, but then things would erode over time as my organization and focussing problems got worse. And nobody ever caught it!"

After consulting a series of books to educate herself about her condition and some time finding the right balance of medications, Bauer realized this simply wasn't going to be enough to move forward with her life.

"I really felt demoralized by the whole experience," she says. "I know the theory of things; I am organized, but how to do it is another matter. I know what to do, but couldn't. I felt paralysed."

After confiding her frustrations, her psychiatrist offered a suggestion: ADHD coaching. The suggestion resonated.

Enter Barbara Durst, one of only a handful of ADHD coaches in Canada.

For Bauer, the experience was transformative. "Barbara tailors the theory to your personality and offers personal feedback, which for me is key," says Bauer.

"Personal engagement is what keeps me going. She understands where I'm coming from."

"Coaching is all about the 'how' of doing things," says Barbara Durst. "It's about changing thought to behaviour. You have to figure out what's realistic. It's regular contact and problem-solving that makes coaching work."

In their landmark book *Driven to Distraction*, ADHD specialists Edward Hallowell and John J. Ratey write: "We particularly like the idea of a coach. The person is just what the name implies: an individual standing on the sidelines with a whistle around his or her neck barking out encouragement, directions and reminders to the player in the game. The coach can be a pain in the neck sometimes, dogging the player to stay alert, in the game, and the coach can be a source of solace when the player feels ready to give up. Mainly, the coach keeps the player focused on the task at hand and offers encouragement along the way... the coach can stave off a reversion to old bad habits: habits of procrastination, disorganization and negative thinking, the most damaging and pernicious of which is negative thinking."

Durst emphasizes that coaching is a holistic process. You have to start coaching the human, the person," she says. "I always see it as a balance between the internal and external. You're helping a person actualize their dreams, while helping them to manage their lives and the real world around them. If ADHD traits start to show up, then we address those specifically."

ADHD coaching normally begins with an initial consultation session during which data's collected about the person's past



ADHD Coach Barbara Durst

experiences and challenges. The coach asks questions about goals and changes the client wants to make in their life. The coach and client settle on fees, frequency and duration of meetings as they determine if they're a good fit for each other.

"I ask what changes they want to make in their lives; there's usually a defining reason why they want a coach," says Durst.

"Many ADHD adults have difficulties with memory and planning. This can include problems with time, money and ideas. Really, it's all about organization – being able to choose what's important from what's interesting and knowing that those choices will help you move forward in positive ways. With coaching, we develop systems, strategies and tools to help with all these functions."

"Everything was a priority," says Bauer. "I have no 3D perspective. I'm great when it comes to organizing other people, but not great when it comes to organizing myself. Maintenance is not engaging, but Barbara puts things in perspective."

However, neurology is just a reason, not an excuse, says Durst. "It often comes



down to executive functioning,” she says. “Their wiring doesn’t allow the person to access processing to help with planning and organization or move into action, and they get overwhelmed. They get paralysed and coaching keeps them moving.” This is, as advocacy group Moms on a Mission has described, a “gap in knowing what to do versus doing what they know.”

Once Durst develops a sense of the goal and its intent, she provides triggers that link the two. Triggers can be something as simple as an alarm clock, chart or other visual stimuli, since many adults with ADHD have problems with short-term memory and auditory processing. Once this has been applied, then the process becomes ritualized.

“To change a habit you can’t just have intent, you need curiosity about what doesn’t work and a way to create a plan which will work and finally, consistency, until it’s for real,” says Durst.

ADHD clients need to apply these triggers in consistent ways, in order to manifest as behaviours. They also need to learn to be flexible and resilient if change doesn’t happen. “It’s a way of eliminating the ‘shoulds’ and giving permission to speak to yourself about needs.”

Durst emphasizes that coaching’s a process and its essence is “helping people unlock keys of what they’re all about.” She normally recommends a six-month period to fully implement strategies. During that period Durst will usually see most clients at least weekly to review progress, celebrate success, and if necessary, alter strategies. “Regular contact is key because you need to set some kind of accountability. It can be a dynamic, interactive process,” she says.

That regular contact was essential to Bauer’s success. She and Durst met weekly and during that period several organizational strategies, including a “data dump book” and a Tickler system were employed to help Bauer organize her affairs. Barbara’s “engagement is what keeps me going,” says Bauer. “She’s wherever I’m at.”

Coaching’s a service that’s clearly needed, and Durst is rather surprised at the profession’s slow rise in Canada. She estimates there are only a few coaches in Toronto, two of which she’s mentored. Entering a new decade as an ADHD coach, the former nurse and business consultant became interested in the field after watching a TV program on the subject, and something clicked.

“I thought this makes perfect sense,” she says. “You get to be involved in people’s lives at critical points.” By then a business coach, Durst had cultivated a career that mixed her two passions: health care and business. Many successful people, including Virgin Airways’ Richard Branson have developed flourishing careers despite, or perhaps, because of, their ADHD.

Durst graduated from CoachU after three years of part-time distance studies and then obtained her Master ADHD coaching certification from The Optimal Functioning Institute. She is also a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation.

Some coaches have a therapeutic background, while a newer sector, professional organizers, is taking on the role of ADHD coaches, says Durst. In Canada, the field sits poised for growth.

But coaching can also be quite costly. Durst says most coaches charge anywhere between \$350 - \$500 monthly for their services. “It’s worth every penny!” declares Bauer.

“I’ve learned, as corny as it sounds, how truly different we all are,” says Durst. “I’m in awe of that. With coaching you’re helping people actualize what they’ve always wanted to do, but didn’t know how. It’s taught me respect and appreciation for human differences.”

For more information on Barbara Durst and ADHD coaching, visit: [www.durstandassociates.com](http://www.durstandassociates.com)

**ldao**

## At a Glance:



*Barbara Durst has been coaching people from diverse backgrounds with ADHD for over a decade. She has a background in nursing and business and has combined these skills in her current practice as an ADHD coach.*

*Coaching normally involves regular weekly contact with the ADHD client over a period of six months and tends to focus on changing behaviour through practical tips that become ritualized. Often there is a focus on developing organizational skills and self monitoring. Durst emphasizes the importance of treating the whole person.*

*Durst is only one of a small number of professional ADHD coaches in Canada, where growth in this field has been slow. She obtained a professional coaching certificate through Distance Education at CoachU.*

# Learning The Ropes

By Henri Audet

**M**any parents like to think of their children as regular kids and will either not recognize or even choose to ignore the fact that their child may have learning disabilities. What many do not see is that attention deficit disorders and learning disabilities impact and permeate a child's whole life span and every aspect of his-or-her life.

There is no doubt of the importance of early detection and treatment of learning disabilities. However, I want to stress something else, specifically, the necessity to constantly boost self-esteem in these kids.

Recently, I outlined this idea in a speech to school principals affiliated with Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). After showing a slideshow of the youth at Camp Kirk, I asked a simple rhetorical question – "When you looked at their faces, did you once detect a disability?" The answer was an unequivocal no. These kids are not freaks; they are not weird or slow. They are fundamentally average and normal kids. That normality, as ironic as it may seem, is part of the problem. Learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders are invisible disabilities. People rarely take notice of these kids' challenges and if they do, they often accept the familiar refrain that these kids are simply lazy, dumb, crazy or just do not give a damn.

This attitude often prevails until that one illuminative moment when a parent discovers their own child has learning disabilities. All of a sudden, the light goes on and they begin to understand that their child is not lazy – this is real and something must be done.

Yet, in addition to any clinical environment or treatment regimen, kids with LD also need a nurturing, non-competitive and

structured environment that allows them to develop social, emotional and physical skills – this is how you raise their confidence and self-worth. Once within this environment, these kids will have the courage to take risks and increase their opportunities for success and happiness throughout life.

This self-esteem boost can be sparked by support from a teacher, parent, camp counsellor, employer or friend. If these people give children LD an environment and the tools to develop social and physical skills, the kids will be able to take risks and increase their opportunities for success and happiness.

As one parent said after her son attended Camp Kirk, "the transformation came when Jonathan realized that being different does not mean being worse; that each person has something special to bring to the world and that trying is the first step along the road to succeeding."

I also have a significant learning disability, Dyscalculia (Math Dyslexia), as well as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and I feel the effects of these more often than I care to admit.

My youthful behaviour was generally lumped into a few theories by my parents and teachers:

**One**, *I was a disturbed, hyperactive and hypersensitive child who needed to be disciplined and who needed a thicker skin;*

**Two**, *I was a lazy, intellectually-unstimulated and academically-incapable child who needed to be taught the right way to learn, through regurgitation and fear;*

**Three**, *a combination of one and two.*







*Camp Kirk Executive Director Henri Audet (top) and friends*

If I was given a toy for Christmas, the first thing I would do was to take it apart. My parents thought I was being a destructive and ungrateful little boy, when in fact all I was doing was being highly inquisitive in trying to see how the toy was made. What mechanism made the wheels on my truck turn? What wonder of science allowed my electric train to blurt those neat sounds and billows of smoke from its chimney? What magic spell made the eyes on

my sister's dolls open and shut? (You should have seen the trauma and expression of fear on everyone's faces when I showed-up with my sister's decapitated doll in two hands.)

When told to do various things I would always ask "why?" and was seen as oppositional and defiant, when in fact, all I ever wanted was to understand the fundamental questions asked of me.

Sitting in class, I froze at the mention of a spelling bee, or at having to stand in front of the class and regurgitate answers to questions that I did not even understand (such as the catechism) To put it simply, I did not learn simply by reading, or listening to lectures. I was (and still am) a visual and experiential learner.

I knew I wasn't stupid or dumb, so why could I not succeed? I was devastated and the ripple effects on my development and early childhood are still with me today. There is not a day that goes by where I am not reminded of my learning differences.

Being sent away to camp at a very young age to learn to speak English was probably, in retrospect, the best thing that could have happened. I had lots of opportunities to shine and build my self-esteem so that I could cope with all of the negatives I had to endure in school. It was at camp that I learned the physical and social skills required to become the best I could be, and that was to become a camp director, amongst other things. This was a dream I had when I was in my early teens and I just did what I had to do to get there. There were never any accommodations made along the way for me to overcome my Dyscalculia. To this day, I simply try and be as resourceful as possible and surround myself with people who have the knowledge and the skills that I lack in order to succeed.

Upon reaching grade 10, one special teacher not only recognized that I learned differently, but also took note of my strengths and talents and drove me to embrace the struggle to enhance those strengths; essentially, he taught me how to kick my own butt. He gave me simple tricks and strategies to help me organize my thoughts and work. He took the time to explain concepts until I grasped them, taking me out of the book-learning environment and into life's real experiences and examples to help me learn. He used current affairs, news, sports and music to pique my interest and recognize my strengths and abilities, and in doing so, he gave me back my dignity and self-esteem.





Children from across the province spend part of each summer at Camp Kirk.

After 30 years in the field of recreational camping, I could tell you countless success stories related to children with special needs. I do believe that residential camp is one of the best tools to work with these kids, primarily because you are placing them in a safe, non-competitive

environment where they are given the opportunity to challenge themselves physically, socially and emotionally.

Kids with significant learning disabilities are often more socially inept and have low self-esteem. Raising their self-confi-

dence to the point of pride, often for the first time in their lives, is a magical feeling. If a child is accustomed to struggling with his social and physical environment and then all of a sudden he is able to accomplish a task successfully (such as a ropes course) you will surely see him beam from ear to ear. From this point on you can actually see and feel the growth in that kid. You know that somehow he will be okay.

The most gratifying moment during any summer is the ending, when the camper who was a thorn in your side the whole session long; the one who was defiant and didn't seem to give a damn, all of a sudden, teary-eyed, tells the group how, for the first time, he was in a place where he was and where his disabilities just didn't matter.

It is our responsibility to help children like this discover their full self-worth.

No matter the degree of disability or difficulty children have, they must be given the opportunity to discover their strengths, to learn to accept their limitations and be given the opportunity to shine. *Idao*

## At a Glance:



*In this article, Henri Audet emphasizes the importance of enhancing an LD/ADHD child's self esteem by placing them in non-competitive, non-judgmental environments. He feels that role models offer much, and the combination of these two elements does much to boost a child's physical skills and self esteem.*

*Audet, who lives with both Dyscalculia and ADHD, who was perceived as either lazy and/or hyperactive and not academically*

*motivated to succeed in school. This continued until he reached grade 10, when a teacher noticed his learning differences and offered him tools that played to his strengths.*

*Audet, who is the founding executive director of Camp Kirk, promotes recreational camping a source of pride that encourages kids to bring out the best of their abilities. He says one of the most gratifying moments of the summer is when the kids leave transformed into something positive.*

# Chapter News

## CHATHAM-KENT

### Tech Access and Programs Promote Independence Thanks to \$75,000 OTF Grant

On July 26 the Learning Disabilities Association of Chatham-Kent (LDACK) was excited to share plans for programming improvements thanks to a \$75,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). Pat Hoy, MPP for Chatham-Kent Essex, joined OTF representative Dianne Flook in congratulating the group.

“This significant grant from OTF will enable local children and youth with learning disabilities to access computer equipment and software,” said MPP Hoy. “It’s an example of how OTF and the Province support the full participation of all in today’s society, to build self-esteem, social and literacy skills.”

Over the next two years, LDACK will use the grant to purchase equipment and software to develop and provide training workshops to children, youth, adults, parents and professionals. The installation of the assistive technology software will enhance and improve technological access and programming for LDACK, while fostering an environment where there are no barriers and promote independence.

“This grant acknowledges the important role that assistive technology can play in helping an individual reach their potential by enabling them to capitalize on their strengths,” said LDACK Chair George Argenti. “Assistive technology can help individuals at school, home and work place settings. We are thankful for OTF’s commitment to supporting families dealing with a learning disability.”

For more information, please contact:

Dawn Babkirk, Learning Disabilities Association of Chatham-Kent 519-352-2024; Email: ldack@netrover.com

## KINGSTON

### Dr. Garth Smith visits Kingston

The Learning Disabilities Association of Kingston has just hired Annabelle Williams as its executive director effective September 4, with funding provided by The Ontario Trillium Foundation.

We welcome Annabelle and look forward to working with her.

October is LD Awareness Month and we held a workshop with Dr. Garth Smith who spoke on *Behaviour Strategies for Students with ADHD and/or Nonverbal LDs at Home and School*. The workshop was held October 27 at St. Lawrence College, Kingston and was well-received. Thanks to all those involved in planning this event.

For more information on this workshop, contact the Learning Disabilities Association of Kingston at 613-545-0373.

## PETERBOROUGH

### LDA Peterborough Opens New Satellite Office

This past spring, we received confirmation of a grant from the City of Kawartha Lakes United Way to assist us with the opening of a service location in Lindsay. This office location will allow us to provide services to residents spanning the City of Kawartha Lakes (CKL) region.

We have confirmed the hiring of a new CKL Resource Facilitator and we began running the CFLD Tutoring program at this location in early June. We plan to begin providing full services as of mid-October. To celebrate, LDAP held an open house at our new CKL office on October 10th.

We welcomed everyone from the LDA family to join us in celebrating our newest service location and to welcome Janice Balfour to the LDAP team.

Our CKL office is located at 206 Lindsay St. S. Lindsay, ON K9V 2N3. And Janice can be reached at (705) 324-2596.

On October 3, 2007 we hosted **Dr. Umesh Jain** who discussed *Updates on Learning Disabilities and ADHD Diagnosis and Treatment*. This event was sponsored in part by Shire BioChem Inc. and the Ontario Power Generation.

On Thursday, September 27, 2007 we welcomed **Dr. Timothy Bilkey, Hons.B.Sc. M.D., F.R.C.P. Consultative Psychiatry Specializing in A.D.H.D.** who presented: *ADHD Across the Lifespan: Children and Adolescents*.

## SUDBURY

### Happy Feet Film Shuffling Off to Sudbury

When Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.’s award-winning movie *Happy Feet* appeared in theatres last year, children and adults across the country immediately connected with the main message “It’s Okay to Learn a Different Way!” We are extremely excited to announce that LDAS has been granted a copyright release to use film clips from the movie as part of our educational outreach PowerPoint presentation. Angie DeMarco, community outreach coordinator, has produced and will be coordinating the presentation of “It’s Okay to Learn a Different Way” to every grade two class in the Rainbow District School Board and the Sudbury District Catholic School Board starting this September.

As an expansion of our coaching program, five fourth-year Laurentian University concurrent education program students will be visiting the classrooms and presenting this fun and interactive workshop to the grade two students. Through the workshop, students will be provided with messages of understanding, tolerance and appreciation of their peers “who learn a different way”.

Also embodied in the presentation are messages about bullying, appreciating our differences and respecting the unique and special characteristics each of us possesses. A second PowerPoint presentation entitled "A Different Way of Learning Can Lead to Success" will be shared with the grade seven classes from both schools.

## **TORONTO**

### **Gearing Up for Another Exciting Year**

We have expanded our programming to include a series of one day workshops that we call the CAN-DO series. This series is directed to youth and will cover topics such as "Knowing Your LD", "Getting Organized", "Stress Management" and more. Of course, our standard complement of programming is in place as well. For youth, we will be offering our Friendship Club and our Keyboarding program. For parents we have the parent support group and the parents' workshop series. We are also offering an adult support group meeting every second Monday for adults who wish to meet others and obtain information on learning disabilities.

We are always looking for innovative ways to raise additional dollars for our cause. We are in the process of assembling a new fundraising committee to explore our options and seize every opportunity for new fundraising endeavours. We coordinated a very successful lottery last year and are looking to build from our experiences to create an even better campaign this year.

The coming months will certainly prove to be busy months here at LDATD but we are poised for the challenge and eager to assist our clientele.

## **WELLINGTON COUNTY**

### **LD & Mental Health Conference Planned for November**

The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County and the Community Mental Health Clinic, Guelph are working together on an exciting conference on LD and mental health to be held November 9.

Keynote Speaker will be Peter Chaban, M.Ed. Chaban is head and chair of the School Liaison Project in the Community Health Systems Resource Group (CHSRG) at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and Chair of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. He will be speaking on "Learning Disabilities and Mental Health". Another highlight of the day will be a workshop by Dr. Lisa Weaver from the Community Mental Health Clinic. Other workshops to be confirmed.

The conference will be held from 9 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. November 9, 2007, at The Holiday Inn, 601 Scottsdale Drive in Guelph. Cost: is only \$100.

For more information, contact either Karen Guse or Kathy Beckwith at (519) 837.2050 or by email, [wclda@rogers.com](mailto:wclda@rogers.com)

## **YORK REGION**

### **Fall Programs Announced**

#### **Fall Programs, (all held at 11181 Yonge St.):**

LDA York Region offers a wide range of programs geared to children, parents and professionals. Our social skills program commenced September 19. We also offer support groups for parents and adults with LD. The first meeting for the parents support group was October 4th and the first for adults with LD was held October 10th. All meetings start at 7:00 PM. Please contact the office for information about the dates of future scheduled meetings of both groups. Parenting courses designed to meet the needs of interested parents are offered in a variety of models – a ten-week, generalized course, a more specific topic-targeted course of four weeks (smaller group) or one-on-one sessions are also offered. A date has yet to be announced for our ten-week, fall session of the SOAR (Some Assembly Required) program.

Our summer was very busy – we ran two one-week camps, presented a summer version of our successful SOAR program and carried out our ABCs and 123s tutoring program where volunteer tutors are matched with students who require some support over the summer to keep up their skills in numeracy and literacy. Our thanks to the tutors and teachers who referred these students.

Our thanks to all our summer students – Candace who worked on public relations, Albert, who worked on technology activities, Diane who worked in our library and Paula, who coordinated our programming and updated some of our public materials.

Recognition of these students, our other long-standing volunteers and the LDA York Region Board was noted at our 2007 Annual General Meeting on September 24, which featured guest speaker Diane Vandebossche, Special Education Consultant.

Look for information in the future on our website or in our chapter newsletters for our annual Vintages and Jazz fundraiser, scheduled for Sunday, May 4, 2008. **ldao**



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# Consulting Engineers of Ontario Golf Tournament in Support of LDAO

*On September 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 the Consulting Engineers of Ontario (CEO) held their 20<sup>th</sup> annual fundraising golf tournament at Rattlesnake Point in Milton in support of LDAO. CEO has been a long-time supporter of LDAO's and funds raised from the tournament are used to support LDAO's programs and services for individuals and families affected by learning disabilities. LDAO extends a very heartfelt thank you to CEO and the following sponsors for their generous and ongoing support of our organization.*

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# IN PERSON: Lana Lovell

**T**ruth has always been stranger than fiction for Toronto documentary filmmaker Lana Lovell.

From chronicling the vocal insult of an outraged black community protesting a controversial art exhibit, to celebrating the life of a Canadian theatre legend, Lovell's films are portraits in miniature, that have freeze-framed significant cultural Canadian moments for over a decade.

"I've always known I wanted to do documentaries, because true stories are more interesting than fiction," she says. "I have something important to say about the world and you see the world differently as a woman of colour."

Currently putting the finishing touches on her latest project, *The Incomparable Jackie Richardson*, for Bravo! Lovell reflects on a long journey that has seen her gradually working up the ranks from humble production assistant to an in-demand, award-winning, producer and director.

The films she watched as a young girl drew Lovell to an advertising career, but she quickly discovered she was much more interested in making movies than promoting them. At Toronto's Centennial College, she graduated with a diploma in broadcast media.

Instead of following the traditional film studies route, she studied anthropology, graduating in 1995. "My major allowed me to get a perspective and see the world and make a future. Anthropology allows you to be both artist and journalist. I've always connected to both. Journalists ask the right questions, but artists bring images to the screen, so I'm both of these things."

Her first independently-produced film, *Into the Heart of Africa* (1997) documented the protests of Toronto's black community who perceived a controversial art exhibit told from a colonialist point of view at the Royal Ontario Museum as racist. "The curator saw it as ironic, but Africans have a different perspective," says Lovell.

Other than viewings at occasional film festivals, the film garnered little attention, and it would be eight long years of pitches, development and scrambling before her next independent film materialized.



Lana Lovell

During that long period, Lovell struggled to find work for herself, finally directing several industrial shorts for Rooftop International and landing series work on *Caribbean Tales* for Bravo! She also served as producer of the Open Door Pitch for the annual Innoversity Festival, which creates opportunities for diverse filmmakers to market their works to broadcasters. She also spent a lot of time developing her own pitches.

When her second independent production was finally released, she struck gold. *Underground* (2005) which documents the hopes and dreams of struggling subway singer CoCo Brown, scored a win as best documentary film at Detroit's Motor City Film Festival and generated major buzz during Toronto's Hot Docs festival the following year.

"In documentaries, it's become cliché to say that filmmakers speak for the voice-

less," she says. "It's arrogant because there are no voiceless people. They just lack access to resources so they can get their stories out. But I am always struck by how articulate people are about their own situations.

"Most of us documentary filmmakers struggle," says. "We have to figure out how to tell stories but also how to make a living, so I go back and forth working for others, but also working for myself. It's taken a long time, but I refuse to give up."

As if struggling in the film business wasn't enough, Lovell has also had to deal with the challenges brought on by Dyslexia as well. Like other people in the arts, ranging from actors Tom Cruise and Danny Glover to Whoopi Goldberg, Lovell has worked hard to carve a niche for herself in a competitive and crowded industry.

Lovell's long battle to realize her own visions and stories may encourage budding documentarians to pursue their own dreams.

"You need to get a good education in anything," she advises. "and you have to be good connecting with people – not only your own crew. They need to understand and help you achieve your vision. You also need to be able to interview with compassion but with a critical eye as well."

With work on the Richardson project nearing completion, Lovell looks forward to her next effort, a music series for Bravo! including a segment profiling reggae band The Satellites. While she harbours dreams of going abroad and making films internationally one day, she has also arrived at a point in her career where she is content.

"After being a starving artist for so long, I've come to a place where I'm happy with life and feeling good. I've learned it's possible to be creative, to express myself and gain control over my voice."

-Carter Hammett



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## Parent Consultant in Education Advocacy Training Program

*an online course on positive and effective advocacy*

**New Course Starts  
January 7th, 2008**

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) has partnered with the Ontario Association of Education Advocates (OAEA) to offer a comprehensive and innovative online course in advocating for children with special needs.

The course topics include detailed examinations of the psychology and art of advocacy, the school and special education systems, educational law, and assessments, tests and reports. This web-based distance learning opportunity is recommended for anyone involved in the exceptionalities field – including parents and guardians, school professionals, special education program staff, and residential and treatment centre personnel.

Successful participants will receive a Certificate of Completion from OAEA for their Parent Consultant in Education Advocacy course. A new session of this course begins Jan. 7th, 2008. For more details, or to sign up for the course, please visit [www.LDAO.ca/oaea/index.php](http://www.LDAO.ca/oaea/index.php)

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Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

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