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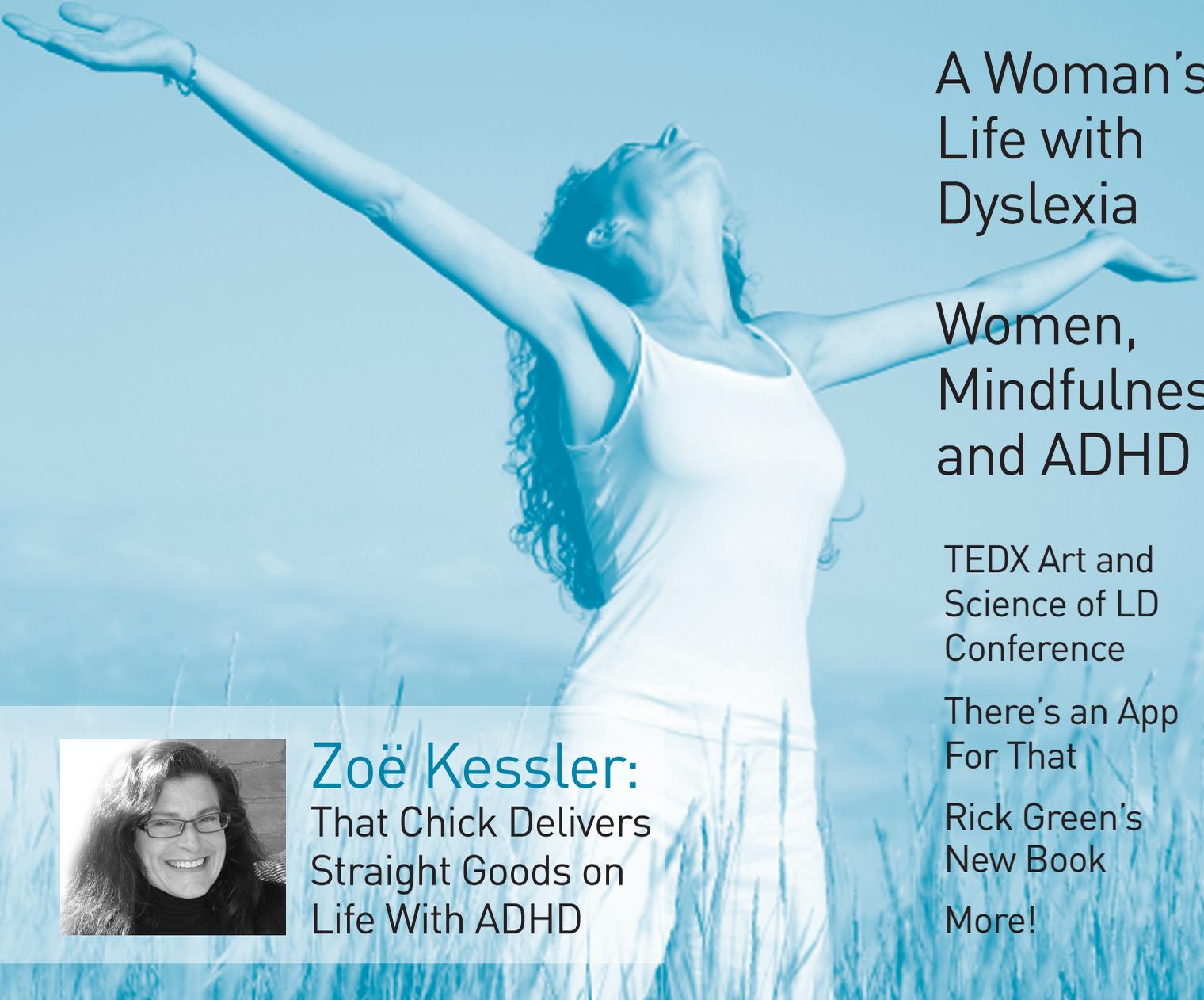
*The right to learn, the power to achieve*

# communiqué

THE PUBLICATION OF THE LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

FALL/WINTER 2011

## Phenomenal Women



A Woman's  
Life with  
Dyslexia

Women,  
Mindfulness  
and ADHD

TEDX Art and  
Science of LD  
Conference

There's an App  
For That

Rick Green's  
New Book

More!



**Zoë Kessler:**  
That Chick Delivers  
Straight Goods on  
Life With ADHD

*"Do not worry about your math problems. I can assure you mine are far worse." Albert Einstein*



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## Features

### 10 THE OTHER HALF OF THE SKY: PHENOMENAL WOMEN AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

**Wendy Terry** has a long list of accomplishments under her belt, including a degree from Harvard, and an award for starting a community-based learning program....and, oh yes, this teacher also has dyslexia too. • **Melissa L. Augustin** discovers some rude realities about the lives of women with LD in the workplace. • **IN PERSON: Donna Shaw** goes one-to-one with **Zoë Kessler** and learns some startling truths about what makes this writer/comedian tick. • **PLUS:** From across Ontario, we introduce you to some... **Phenomenal Women**

## Departments

### 3 EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK: THE OTHER HALF OF THE SKY

Lawrence Barns meets and greets • The Art and Science of Learning Disabilities thrills • Reading Disabilities Research Continues

### 5 PUBLIC POLICY ROUNDUP

Learning Disabilities Working Group • Apprenticeship Issues • Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

### 6 THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Rounding up some of the coolest apps out there to help students with various LDs.

### 7 ELSEWHERE

Difficulty estimating quantity linked to math learning disability.

### 8 THE ADHD FILES

Women, ADHD and Mindfulness...

## The Back Pages

### 18 SHELF LIFE

New books from comedian Rick Green and psychiatrist Kenny Handelman among others...

### 20 THANKS TO DONORS AND SPONSORS

### 21 LDA CHAPTER NEWS AND VIEWS

OW recipients benefit from new programming • York Region introduces new award • Social Skills Camp in Ottawa • More!

by Carter Hammett, Editor

# Editor's Notebook

## THE OTHER HALF OF THE SKY



Over the years there has been a large amount of ink spilled on gender differences and learning disabilities. The common denominator appears to be that boys, if "acting out" appear to be more likely to be diagnosed with LD. Other articles simply state that a learning disability is a learning disability and gender is but one facet of a multi-layered social concern.

But a recent conference may shed some much-needed light on this controversial topic. Indeed, the October 18 women's brain health conference, sponsored by Baycrest's Women's Brain Health Research Fund, may offer the final word. That's because recent research indicates that one of the key differences in male and female brains is in the developmental exposure to androgens and estrogens. Estrogen may have an important role in perception, memory and cognition and acts as a growth factor that can be either beneficial or harmful.

Another element that plays a big role in people with LD is memory. We can create strategies and accommodations for

memory but that doesn't mean the level of memory will actually improve. In women, playing multiple roles in the household suggests that women have perhaps developed more compensatory strategies than men have.

Unfortunately, we still live in a society where women still make only two-thirds of a typical man's salary. This often means that more women depend on food banks, supportive housing, daycare assistance and a host of programs and services. Clearly the inequality is still an issue. If you are a woman with an invisible disability then that is an even bigger barrier, and often connected to mental health and self esteem issues as well.

Although it's issues like these that have inspired us to identify the theme of "Women and LD" you will find a plethora of positive energy riding on virtually every page this issue. It's important to remember, that despite the struggles and disadvantages associated with LDs, women have made some mighty significant accomplishments despite these barriers.

Women like Cher, Whoopi Goldberg, Suzanne Somers and Kiera Knightley have all overcome either LD or ADHD to become successful in the arts, while others like businessperson Diane Swonk have succeeded in commerce despite the closed doors in the old boys networks.

It's women like these that may have inspired people like writer Zoë Kessler, who graces our cover this issue. Wendy Terry spent 17 years working on a baccalaureate degree, despite severe dyslexia. Stop there? Why bother when you can mortgage your house and go to Harvard? Then there's Ontario women like Leslie Holtman, Melissa Chung and Krissy Battistoni, who have all led quiet lives filled with integrity, although they became role models, simply because they opened their mouths and shared their stories.

Stories are organizing principles in our lives and help us make sense of the world. In a way they help us celebrate the triumphs of the human spirit, and this is what this issue is all about.



## This Issue We Were...

**LuAnn Pierce** is a clinical social worker and person with ADHD who lives in Denver, CO. She recently launched a blogsite for and about adults with ADHD and related issues. The website focuses on traditional and non-traditional treatment for ADHD, with an emphasis on psychosocial wellness. You can reach LuAnn at: [luann@adulthoodhelp.net](mailto:luann@adulthoodhelp.net), [www.adulthoodhelp.net](http://www.adulthoodhelp.net), <http://facebook.com/adulthoodhelp>

• **Donna Shaw** is a freelance writer living in Toronto and working for the municipal

government. This single mom has written short articles for online and print publications and marketing supplements for Toronto weeklies. She hopes to one day make a living writing full-time.

• **Wendy Terry** is an ESL teacher with dyslexia who graduated with an M.Ed. from Harvard in International Education. She is president of the Workers Education Association (WEA) and has written articles for Learning Curves, a WEA newspaper for adults going to school. In 2010 she received an Arbour Award from the

University of Toronto for her role in launching University in the Community. UIC offers liberal arts classes to adults unable to go to university, similar to what WEA's do in many countries.

These community based liberal arts courses were the topic of her M.Ed. research, published in Community and the World, 2003...

Next Issue You Could...



# Art and Science of Learning Disabilities Conference

## A THRILLING DAY



There is always a certain element of risk involved in trying anything new but if The Art and Science of Learning Disabilities TEDx event held in Toronto October 1, proved anything, it's that there are plenty of people doing plenty of amazing things to aid the LD community in growth and education.

About 100 people attended the event, held by The YMCA Academy, a Toronto secondary school serving students with learning differences. The event brought together some of the region's best and brightest thought leaders to discuss LDs from a variety of viewpoints, including scientific, behavioural, educational and social.

"Education is modeled in the interests of industrialism," noted one speaker. "It's got a production line mentality. We need to realize that great learning happens in groups and that recognition of divergent thinking is essential. There are lots of possible answers to a question."

That pretty much set the tone for the day, as an astounding 16 speakers, including psychiatrist Kenny Handelman, teacher and "LDAO alumni" Todd Cunningham and ADHD coach Ann Clarkson were crammed into four hours. It's a model that sounds pretty ADHD by any standards, yet somehow it worked. Each speaker devoted about 10-to-15 minutes to topics ranging from "The Power of Embracing Our Neurodiverse Brains" and "Fatty Acids for Visual and Mental Development," before another would step up to the podium in rapid succession.

Some of my favourite speakers, included the YMCA Academy's Peter Skillen, whose free range discussion was called, "Humankind is both Art and Science." "Science doesn't take into account how we experience the world," he said, outlining a

broad range of snippets that encouraged learners to, among other things, collaborate and ask questions.

Another speaker and former LDAO board chair Peter Chaban of Teach ADHD spoke about problems with teaching ADHD kids in the classroom, noting, among other highlights, that inattention affects the acquisition of pre-literacy skills and greatly affects working memory as well. While ADHD kids seem good at decoding information, they often struggle with sequencing, organization, writing and math problems, he said. It's important to determine their mental schema, to activate prior knowledge and to make analogies.

For the uninitiated, TEDx events are created by popular think tank conference organizers TED. These are local, self organized events that unite people to share in a TED-like experience. The TED conference provides general guidelines for the event, which was so successful that next year a similar event, organized by the Academy's students will be presented.

Inspired and supported by the YMCA of Greater Toronto, The Academy is a small, innovative private secondary school flourishing in downtown Toronto. Created to respond to unique learning needs, the school integrates the Ontario Ministry of Education's secondary school curriculum with practical life skills. Their personal differentiated approach, specialized programs and individualized use of assistive technology are ideally suited to those students with mild learning disabilities or learning style differences.

For more information on either the event or the YMCA Academy, please visit [www.tedxymcaacademy.com/](http://www.tedxymcaacademy.com/)



Lawrence Barns, CEO

## Message FROM THE CEO

Welcome to this issue of *Communiqué*. This edition's special focus is on women's issues. Our hope is that you will find it both challenging and informing.

When I thought about what to share with you from the activity of LDAO and its chapters, it was the call to break down the stereotypes and ultimately the stigma attached to learning disabilities.

It wasn't that long ago I was on twitter with Henry Winkler, congratulating him on a well-earned OBE. Having thanked me he left me with a challenge.

"Remember that the people you serve have greatness within them."

As we read about the inspirational stories within this magazine I want to challenge you to be part of the change we need in attitudes to LDs across our society. We all can advocate where we are as a parent, teacher, professional, employer, employee, aunt, uncle, sister or brother or friend.

Will you raise your voice and make a difference and release greatness?



# This Just In

## GENETICS OF READING DISABILITIES STUDY AT SICK KIDS HOSPITAL

The Hospital for Sick Children continues recruiting participants for its Genetics of Reading Disabilities Study. The study is running for the next three years and they are looking for students between the ages of 6 and 16 years who struggle with reading specifically. The children may struggle with reading at grade level, spelling, reading comprehension, difficulty learning letter names and sounds, and decoding. In addition, they can be easily frustrated with struggles and can avoid doing their language homework or any work related to reading.

The family calls the hospital directly. An intake is done on the phone in order to determine if the child is eligible for the study. If the child meets criteria, a time is booked for the family to come to the hospital for the assessment. One full day of educational testing for the child will take place at The Hospital for Sick Children. Both parents are required to participate on the day of the assessment. A small blood sample is required from parents and child.

After the assessment, a Research Report describing strengths and weaknesses in percentiles is sent directly to the family. Because it is a research report, there is no diagnosis given. However, the school can obtain the child's scores (after parents sign a Release of Information consent form) and the school psychologist or a private psychologist can make the diagnosis.

If you would like our brochures or would like more information about the study, please feel free to call Tasha Carter at 416-813-8207 or e-mail [tasha.carter@sickkids.ca](mailto:tasha.carter@sickkids.ca).



# Public Policy Roundup

## FALL 2011

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### Learning Disabilities Working Group

In June 2011 the Special Education Policy & Programs Branch of the Ministry of Education set up a **Learning Disabilities Working Group**, to provide expertise and share knowledge with the Ministry of Education in the area of LDs, in order to meet three key objectives:

- inform the development of Guidelines for Learning Disabilities;
- support the development of a repository of relevant resources on LD that will be available to school boards electronically; and
- inform the review of PPM 8, Learning Disabilities.

The Working Group held a teleconference in July and an initial meeting on September 7, 2011, and another meeting is scheduled for November. LDAO had called for the formation of such a group in its submissions to the Ministry of Education, and is pleased to be working with other knowledgeable people in the field to review and update policies and programs for students with learning disabilities.

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### Apprenticeship Issues

The LDAO Legislation & Policy Committee, with the help of two new members from the college sector, drafted a **Policy Statement on Students with Learning Disabilities in Apprenticeship Programs**, and submitted it in June 2011 to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) as well as to Colleges Ontario. Following this contact, and a subsequent meeting with MTCU, an Apprenticeship Symposium was set up by the College Committee on Disability Issues (CCDI) for November 3, 2011, to share effective practices and focus on Universal Design for Instruction approaches.

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### Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

On November 30, 2010, the government announced the appointment of Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh to lead a **Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario** ([www.socialassistancereview.ca/](http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/)), set up as part of the 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Commission released a Discussion Paper in the summer of 2011 and LDAO submitted a response on September 1, 2011. Feedback to the Discussion Paper is to inform the development of an Options Paper, scheduled to be released for comment by the Commission in December.

For copies of LDAO position papers and policy submissions, go to [www.ldao.ca/public-policy-advocacy/responses-and-letters/](http://www.ldao.ca/public-policy-advocacy/responses-and-letters/).



# There's An App For That

With school back in full swing, we thought it might be helpful to round up some of the coolest apps out there to help students with various LDs ramp up their academic performance with these helpful little gadgets. Here are some of the best, for both LDs and ADHD.

## Dragon Search - (FREE)

Dragon Search is a great free app that allows you to use talk commands to search for information on Google, Youtube, iTunes, or Wikipedia. No more typing!

## Dragon Dictate - (FREE)

Another super free app from the makers of Dragon Naturally Speaking. Dragon Dictate can be used to dictate your email messages, Facebook posts, Twitter, or notes to yourself.

## Web Reader - (\$1.99)

Web Reader is our pick for speech-to-text reading of web pages. Web Reader will read web pages to you and you can use copy and paste to limit the read sections. The voices are pretty good (male and female) and can be used also for Project Gutenberg books, Google Reader and RSS Feeds. You can control the speed of reading and also use a highlighter function.

## My Homework - (FREE)

My Homework is a simple color-coded organizer to help with deadlines, classes, tests, etc. Notes can be sent to your email.

## Evernote - (FREE)

Finally, Evernote is a handy app for keeping track of information. You can copy text, take a picture, record an audio message and Evernote will keep track of it and sync to your Mac, PC, or web. Pictures can also be filed with text that can be searched later. Use this for taking picture of instructions written on a whiteboard, notes to yourself, stuff you may want to look at later.

From: <http://www.dyslexicadvantage.com/to-p-iphone-apps-dyslexia.html>

With the recent passing of Steve Jobs, the man who revolutionized software left behind one more iconic piece of technology before passing on. The iPad has revolutionized the way we use computers by helping us keep up with friends, play games, manage finances, and organize our daily routines. In some cases, it might also help manage ADHD too with the benefits of these little additions, including:

## Dropbox:

Dropbox is an organizing application that may be the answer to your woes. Used across multiple platforms, it's a way to store and access your files from any computer and your iPad. Cost: Free up to 2GB

## Bento for iPad:

Bento organizes your contacts, projects, event plans, and to-do lists and is based on the Japanese resto concept. A popular app, this easy-to-use tool will make keeping it all together fun and simple. Cost: \$4.99

## iQue:

iQue is the app that helps people with memory issues. Passwords and dates are no longer a problem because this free app mimics how our brains remember things by providing an effective way to stay on track.

## Deskpad Office:

Have a penchant for Post-its®? Thanks to this app, soon your iPad can be covered in the sticky reminders – without wasting paper. This simple application can keep your desk free from the decorative notes, and may make organizing your random thoughts a little less random. Cost: Free

The ADHD App was released on 17th May 2011 and is described as the ultimate tool to help you lead a better life with ADD or ADHD.

This app lets you set goals and record your success in achieving them. It also lets you find out what your main weaknesses are.



A person with a learning disability, like ADHD or ADD, may have difficulty getting organized or staying organized.

None of us wake up in the morning hoping to forget things, disappoint people, or feel stupid. We, like every other person in this world, have our strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, our weaknesses sometimes look like laziness or defiance to those around us. Learn to self-advocate! Plan ahead for those contingencies and don't let setbacks get you down! Some of us have tried for so long to mask our poor planning skills, we haven't learned to tell people what we need or what we struggle with.

The ADHD/ADD App Organizer Features:

- A diary.
- An advice section.
- A memory bank section for those things you always forget.

ADHD App Requirements: Compatible with iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

Available From: <http://itunes.apple.com/au/app/adhd-organizer/id436366972>



# Elsewhere

## DIFFICULTY ESTIMATING QUANTITY LINKED TO MATH LEARNING DISABILITY

### NIH-supported study may lead to early screening test

Researchers funded by the National Institutes of Health have discovered that the innate ability to estimate quantities is impaired in children who have a math learning disability.

The link between difficulty estimating quantities and math difficulties was seen only in children who had a math learning disability, and not in those who did poorly in math but were not considered to be learning disabled.

"The findings suggest that students may struggle with math for very different reasons," said Kathy Mann Koepke, Ph.D., director of the Mathematics and Science Cognition and Learning program at the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), which funded the study. "Research to identify these reasons may lead to new ways of identifying those at risk, and developing the means to help them."

Math learning disability is also referred to as dyscalculia.

The study was published in *Child Development* and was conducted by Michèle Mazzocco, Ph.D., at the Kennedy Krieger Institute and the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and her colleagues, Lisa Feigenson, Ph.D., and Justin Halberda, Ph.D., also at Johns Hopkins.

In earlier research, Drs. Feigenson and Halberda have shown that the innate ability to estimate and compare quantities is present in infancy and improves with age.

"People rely on this ability in daily life," Dr. Mazzocco said. "A familiar example is when people size up which line will move more quickly at the grocery store, based on their perception of the number of persons and items per line."

The researchers compared children's ability to estimate quantity with their level of mathematics achievement. To conduct the study, the researchers gave 71 ninth graders two series of tests designed to measure their ability to estimate quantities, a capability governed by what the researchers referred to as the approximate number system (ANS). The students were a subset of a larger sample of 161 students

*"... students with math learning disability had the poorest ANS scores ..."*

from Dr. Mazzocco's ongoing long-term research study. The children's math abilities had been tested at regular intervals since kindergarten.

The ninth graders were classified into four groups, based on math achievement scores they had received since kindergarten.

- above the 95th percentile (high achieving)
- 25th to 95th percentile (typically achieving)
- 11th to 25th percentile (low achieving)
- 10th percentile and below (math learning disabled)

To measure children's ability to estimate and compare quantities, the researchers administered two series of tests. In the first, the children viewed groups of dots and were asked to say whether there were more blue or yellow dots. In the second, nine to 15 dots of one color appeared, and the children were asked to say how many dots they saw. Each screen was visible for only one fifth of a second, so the children wouldn't have time to count the dots.

Each series of tests consisted of dozens of screens; the researchers considered the most accurate answers across the two series to indicate a more highly developed approximate number system.

The researchers found that students with math learning disability (math scores at or below the 10th percentile) had the poorest ANS scores. Dr. Mazzocco said that this finding suggests that problems with the ANS underlie math difficulties for children in this group.

However, children in the 11th to 25th percentile, on average, were no more likely to have poor ANS scores than were children in higher percentiles, who had no mathematical difficulties. It seems likely, Dr. Mazzocco said, that math difficulties in this group stem from a cause or causes distinct from the ANS.

"Children with mathematical learning difficulties are often viewed as a uniform group of students, for whom a single type of special instruction or math curriculum is appropriate," Dr. Mazzocco said. "Our findings suggest, however, that children have difficulty with math for different reasons."

For more information, visit the Institute's Web site at [www.nichd.nih.gov/](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/).



# The ADHD Files

## KEEPING MY HEAD AND MY BODY TOGETHER - ALL DAY

*Before ADHD: Chop wood, carry water. After ADHD: Chop wood, carry water*

By LuAnn Pierce

I sat on my front porch this morning, journal and pen in hand, enjoying a bit of sunshine and quiet time. As I tuned in to the sensory-rich environment, I wondered again if others experience things as I do. I could hear a long, lonely train whistle in the 'far distance', the sound of the powerful engine and the wheels clacking over the tracks.

At the same time, in the 'near distance', I heard dogs barking in different directions, a squirrel scratching on the bark of a tree behind me, someone talking next door, a car starting and plane overhead. Meanwhile, I felt the hot Denver sun burning my skin; saw the dark blue of the sky and the shadow of my pen moving across the page.

That's me, being mindfully ADHD. This may not sound like traditional mindfulness, but it is one way I have learned to use the practice. My goal with this specific practice is to 'keep my head and my body together', in hopes that I will be able to keep my head and my body for longer periods of the time - eventually. To help with this, I developed a process that I call mindful journaling™. The journaling aspect helps focus my attention for longer on sensory input, which I'll explain later.

### Macro-awareness:

Although things I mentioned in the opening paragraphs are going on simultaneously, I'm told that my brain processes them sequentially. According to neuroscience research, the brain is unable to 'fully focus' on more than one thing without changing tasks. I seem to recognize each of these sensations in flashes - MTV-like - so it makes sense that my focus is changing. The research also indicated that each time

the focus changes, it creates a tiny gap in memory. This may explain the problems many of us have with short-term or working memory.

*"... I am more functional, without losing too much of me ..."*

My awareness at the macro-level is more of the gestalt - the whole, if you will. Does that sound mindful? In so much as mindfulness is about being present, experiencing the now and labeling your experience, I think it is; it works for the purpose of 'keeping my head with my body'. Perhaps it could be called mindfulness ADHD-style.

### Micro-awareness:

If mindfulness is about tuning in, it seems I have different frequencies. I consider some things to be in the 'near distance' and others in the 'far distance' - the foreground and the background - some internal and others external. In training I attended last week, we did the raisin activity, where you focus on different aspects of the raisin - how it smells, looks, feels, tastes, etc. I consider that to be micro-attention. The raisin and my sense of it were in the foreground and it was more of an internal experience. Of course, while doing the activity I was also aware of the clattering in the hotel kitchen and someone talking non-stop outside our room, presumably on a cell phone (macro-awareness).

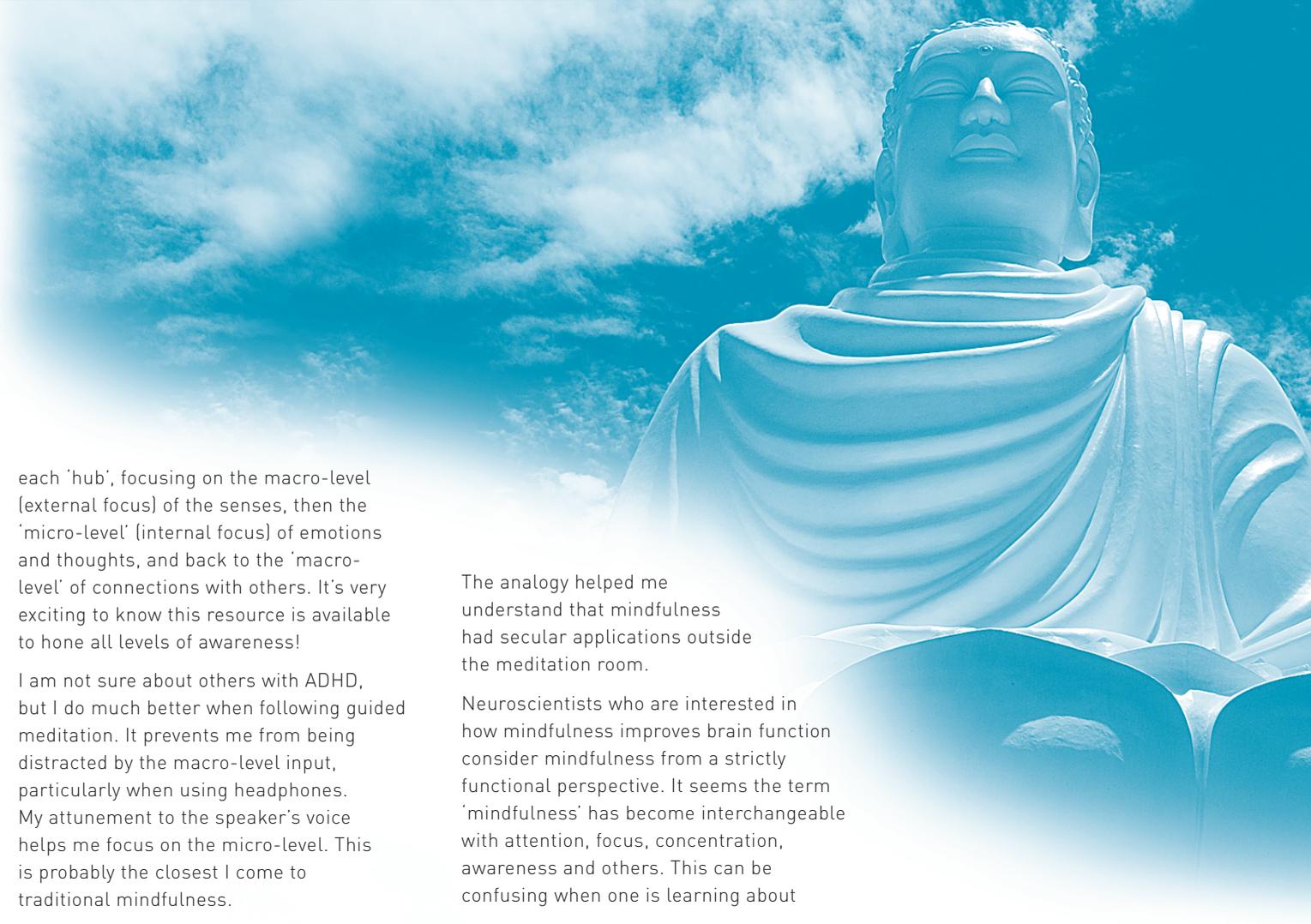
I am not sure if people without ADHD hear and sense so many things seemingly at once; I assume it is part of my hyper-

sensitivity. Since I've never known another way of experiencing the world, this is my normal - it works for me. Many people with Bipolar Disorder won't take their medication because they like the high energy instead of the lower energy level. I get that - I am not sure I'd like being me without ADHD. I know from taking the wrong dose of medication a couple of times, I did not like that blah-affect and feeling of apathy. I don't know if that was 'normal' for someone without ADHD or just what it feels like to be over-medicated. Thankfully, with the right dose and combination of meds, I am more functional, without losing too much of me.

With a bit more research on mindfulness, I discovered a model that explains and integrates my micro and macro awareness theory. I was delighted to find that the pioneer of interpersonal neurobiology, Dan Siegel, MD, has developed a model called Mindsight that makes sense of these levels of awareness. He uses the analogy "wheel of awareness" to explain how the mind is influenced by four distinct 'hubs' within the wheel - our senses, our feelings, our thoughts and our connections to others.

*"... one of the benefits of this practice is to learn detachment ..."*

Dr. Siegel offers free resources on his website, including a downloadable mp3 called Wheel of Awareness III ([http://drdansiegel.com/resources/wheel\\_of\\_awareness/](http://drdansiegel.com/resources/wheel_of_awareness/)). This is an audio recording of Dr. Siegel leading a 30-minute meditation. He takes the listener through



each 'hub', focusing on the macro-level (external focus) of the senses, then the 'micro-level' (internal focus) of emotions and thoughts, and back to the 'macro-level' of connections with others. It's very exciting to know this resource is available to hone all levels of awareness!

I am not sure about others with ADHD, but I do much better when following guided meditation. It prevents me from being distracted by the macro-level input, particularly when using headphones. My attunement to the speaker's voice helps me focus on the micro-level. This is probably the closest I come to traditional mindfulness.

In Buddhist Mindfulness Meditation tradition, the meditator assumes the role of observer, watching him/herself from a distance. When thoughts or feelings arise, they are labeled 'thinking' or 'judgment' or 'feeling', then released. This allows the meditator to return to the role of observer. One of the benefits of this practice is to learn detachment, a cornerstone of Buddhism.

For people with ADHD or other challenges that include intrusive thoughts and impulsivity, this practice can be very useful. I have read of people who learned to release and simply observe horrific intrusive thoughts and obsessive behaviors using traditional Buddhist mindfulness.

I once read a writer's response to a question someone posted about changing jobs to find something more enjoyable that she could do 'mindfully'. The writer's response was thoughtful and comprehensive, but the gist was this: you can do anything mindfully, whether it is filing, washing dishes or emptying trash.

The analogy helped me understand that mindfulness had secular applications outside the meditation room.

Neuroscientists who are interested in how mindfulness improves brain function consider mindfulness from a strictly functional perspective. It seems the term 'mindfulness' has become interchangeable with attention, focus, concentration, awareness and others. This can be confusing when one is learning about

*"... it's about the journey, being conscious in the moment ..."*

mindfulness. Rather than a contemplative religious practice, it has become mainstream, more a skill to be applied to tasks than a way of being.

My understanding is that Buddhist monks spend many years and thousands of hours in meditation cultivating detachment, loving-kindness, etc. They become more conscious in all aspects of their lives as a result. Rather than enter their contemplative practice to become more mindful, they become more mindful as they develop spiritually. It is often said of Buddhist and Taoist practices, if you are trying to accomplish a specific goal, you have missed the point. It's about the journey - being conscious in the moment - not the destination of learning to be mindful.

Marsha Linehan, the mother of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), introduced mindfulness to the mental health community in the early 90's. This may have been the beginning of the wider application of mindfulness in society. To date, thousands of people seeking mental health treatment have learned to use mindfulness skills to cope with serious (and not so serious) psychological and behavioral problems. Emotional regulation is one of the fundamental tenets of DBT. Incidentally, emotional regulation is one of the primary challenges for many, if not most, people with ADHD and many other mental health challenges.

Well ... in true ADHD fashion, I got side-tracked talking about mindfulness instead of what it's like as a woman with ADHD. I think you will learn what you need to about 'me and my ADHD' from this article. This is how I live my life - one hyper-focused, tangential tale after another, all the while trying to keep my head and my body together as much as possible.



# The Other Half of the Sky

Pretty women wonder  
 where my secret lies.  
 I'm not cute or built to suit  
 a fashion model's size  
 But when I start to tell them,  
 They think I'm telling lies.  
 I say,  
 It's in the reach of my arms  
 The span of my hips,  
 The stride of my step,  
 The curl of my lips.  
 I'm a woman  
 Phenomenally.  
 Phenomenal woman,  
 That's me.

## Phenomenal Women

It's unlikely Maya Angelou would have known what an anthem her deceptively simple poem has become. But there you have it: An ode to the power and nurturing and self love of the fairer sex. Whether it's a life in the 1960s growing up during the flower power era, or a woman in firm control of her roots, gender differences in learning disabilities and ADHD continue to be a source of debate among scientists...and men!

We set aside all obvious jokes as we embark on a celebration of women this

issue. And they come from all over Ontario...They are self employed. They are writers and teachers and engineers. They are corporate and they have a keen sense of community. They give back. They are mothers, daughters, sisters, lovers, grandmothers and wives. They roar even as they nurture.

Curiously, as these words are being composed, the writer realizes that if women were truly equal, there would probably be no need for an issue of *Communiqué*, devoted to Women and LD.

In fact, it just emphasizes just how far women need to go. That's why we need events like the recent Women's Brain Health conference held recently in Toronto. The issues are very real, including the fact that an estimated 70% of all new Alzheimer's patients will be women. That's a phenomenal number. But these are phenomenal women.

*And here are their stories...*

# Discovering the Truth:

## MY MOTIVATION TO RESEARCH THE WORK EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

By Melissa L. Augustin

*I would like to share why I chose to write my Masters of Education thesis titled, "Breaking the Silence: Exploring the Workplace Experiences of Six Women with Learning Disabilities". I first must start off by saying I do not have a learning disability (LD). However, my learning experiences have taught me to recognize my ignorance and the ignorance of others in the education system and the workplace about LD.*

*I held many misconceptions about learning disabilities. I thought that this type of disability was visible and that individuals with LD were lazy and lacked intelligence. I let myself fall into the inexcusable trap of stereotyping. I apologize for my thoughts and actions. I realized I not only had to change my perception on how I viewed people with LD but I also had to help change the misconceptions and stereotypes about learning disabilities.*

I discovered the realities of learning disabilities as a tutor in an adult literacy program. During training, the program coordinator incorrectly informed us that learning disabilities were physical constraints such as poor eyesight or hearing that prevented students from learning. This confirmed what I already believed to be true. I was naive.

My perspective changed shortly after I heard the story of the first student I tutored. That student felt strongly about having a disability but he was unsure of what type. He encountered a tremendous struggle throughout his life trying to learn to read and even dropped out of school at age 11 in his home country because he felt frustrated and inadequate.

My student desperately wanted to read to develop his career but found it difficult when he could not read instructions at work. I felt powerless because I did not know where to begin to help him. Fortunately, I ended up taking a course on learning disabilities. This is where I first learned that my thoughts on learning disabilities were false. After taking this course, the knowledge that I gained allowed me to teach him more effectively, even though I could not diagnose him with

having a learning disability. I developed a passion for learning and understanding more about LDs so I could help people living with them. I decided to further my education.

During my post secondary education, working toward a degree in Adult Education, the course instructor reviewed the guidelines from the University Course Guide and bypassed the section on "Learners with Special Needs". We simply went over what preceded and followed this section. I assumed it was because no one had a visible disability.

My mind drifted to the times when people looked at me and turned in the other direction because of the colour of my skin.

*"... I feel that I have come out of the darkness of ignorance ..."*

I am black. But instead, I was experiencing discrimination against someone with a disability. For that moment, I tried to place myself in the position of someone with a learning disability. I felt isolated, intimidated, and excluded. I knew the facilitator did not deliberately exclude learners with disabilities. I did bring this to the instructor's attention by writing the incident as part of my assignment and he did apologize to the class. I still encountered more professors who did not communicate the disability policy, especially in the first semester of my Masters of Education program. There appears to be an ongoing assumption that the disability policy only applies to students with visible disabilities and that students are aware of this policy.

My learning experiences left me concerned about the barriers that individuals with LDs contend with in the workplace, especially when this type of disability impacts their learning. Learning in the workplace is so important because it offers opportunities for career development and job retention.

I also became a staff manager of a team of only women. I wondered if any of my staff were hiding LDs and how I would assist and support them. I contacted the human resources manager from my former workplace to find out how the organization supported employees with learning disabilities. Surprisingly, my colleague did not know what the term 'learning disability' meant, which gave me the opportunity to explain it. That manager informed me that any employee with a disability must present documentation in order to receive accommodations. I knew that this was unlikely to happen because many people with learning disabilities have not been diagnosed; they are unaware that they have a learning disability, or they want to avoid the disadvantages of disclosing.

Not only was it evident that many employers, employees, and educators remain unaware of the obstacles that individuals with LDs but I also found that there is limited research that relates to the work experiences of individuals with LDs, especially for women. As a result, I felt it was important to allow the women in my study to speak for themselves and give them a voice to express the challenges they face firsthand in the workplace.

This has been a life changing experience. One important lesson that I learned is to treat people how they want to be treated, and not the way I want to be treated, in order to avoid imposing personal values and beliefs onto them.

Knowing what I know now has made a big difference in the way I teach, the way I think, and the way in which I treat people. I have become more attentive to others' feelings and actions. I feel that I have come out of the darkness of ignorance and found the light of knowledge. I also realized that I have to keep the flame burning by sharing with others the important information that I learned about learning disabilities. I hope by sharing my story that I can make a positive difference in the lives of individuals with learning disabilities.



# A Life with Dyslexia

*For Wendy Terry, dyslexia is as much about the process of discovery, as it is about the disability*

By Wendy Terry

**T**he high school guidance counsellor took me aside to ask why I thought I was not doing well given I seemed quite bright. How could I begin to answer that question?

It was the early 1960's. There was little awareness of learning disabilities or childhood sexual abuse or the trauma felt by children who witness parental violence, or the effects of being the child of an alcoholic or being the child of single parent who clearly showed the effects of having lived with alcoholism. All of these I could have told him about except for being learning disabled which I had no awareness of having.

I said nothing.

I dropped out of school in 1966 with dismal grades and was married a year later after just turning 20. There were symptoms of dyslexia here but I did not identify them as such. My husband in exasperation would say "your other left" as left-right integration is a problem for me still today at 63

It was when my work environment changed that other symptoms presented themselves. When I became the first executive director for the Continuing Education Students Association of Ryerson, I remember working late into the night, night after night, typing and retyping,

*"... I had found that I could not write meaningful phrases in a linear sequence ..."*

reading and rereading letters and reports trying to get rid of the mistakes: correcting transpositions, adding in missed words, correcting mistakes which resulted in the opposite meaning of what was intended. And even then documents were handed in

and key mistakes discovered after. My student peers tolerated this as I worked hard and was the founding force behind this association.

In the mid-eighties, this same pattern was evident in my next job as ED of a non-governmental organization, the Workers Educational Association of Canada. We



were fortunate to have taken on a project officer, Sara, whose cousin was a recognized expert in learning disabilities. Sara wasted no time after looking at my errors, sending me down to OISE where her cousin did research. I was tested for the grand sum of \$50 as part of a research project. Still I did not fully understand. True to professional norms, the tester told me there was a "significant discrepancy in my test results." I still did not really get it.

Sara was one of several work partners I have had that have taken my ideas and writing, given them clarity and coherence. Without the help of several people over the years, my work would not have been

received so well. I have read that dyslexics should seek out such partnerships; mine have fallen into sphere, thankfully.

I had come to understand enough about learning disabilities, to become a strong advocate for adults going back to school as I felt many had never been identified as having an LD. This would explain their original failures at school. This had been my path.

I had spent seventeen years, 1978-1995, getting a BA at York University, part time at night after having earned a Business Administration Certificate at Ryerson. Early in my York years, I was having a lot of difficulty with essay writing. I still spent countless hours retyping, rereading and

still there were the mistakes. But now it was the organization, the relational thinking, the tangents of thought before I came to the point that was clearly evident in my papers. This pattern, which had driven my husband to exasperation when I was talking, did much the same to my teachers when I was writing. One said to me there are two essays here, looking reproachfully as he had to try to follow my line of thought, or should I say lines of thought... I knew the problem but I did not know how to fix it. So for the first time I sought special education help, which was difficult in the early eighties and I would say even today.

At Ryerson in the mid seventies, I had taken a course about mind mapping. This had helped me take notes as my brain processed information in relational spider webs. I had found that I could not write meaningful phrases in a linear sequence as other students could. However mind mapping had not helped me to organize my essays. One day I ran into someone, dumped my frustration onto him and he recommended I work with his friend Michael of the Shoore Learning Centre.

Michael listened to how I wrote an essay and then showed me how to make that work better. I have learned that skilled learning disability tutors listen to how the learner works and then make that work better. A learning disability has symptoms unique to that individual and you cannot make a brain work in a more generally accepted way.

My pattern was to write out all of my thoughts until there were no thoughts left on this subject and at that point the focus of what I wanted to say became clear. I have learned that this is called free association writing. Michael suggested I take the end where the focus had emerged, bring it to the top and then read through the essay picking up the text that related to one key point supporting the main theme, then do the same for the second key point and the third. Then drop the rest of the text. Then rewrite the intro, to reflect the points that had emerged, then further edit the point paragraphs to relate to the revised intro. Then do the summary. It takes much longer to do this, but my essays were way more coherent. By this time I was using computers, albeit with the DOS system, but the rewriting was way less onerous than when using a typewriter. This free association, threading method got me through an M. Ed. at Harvard.

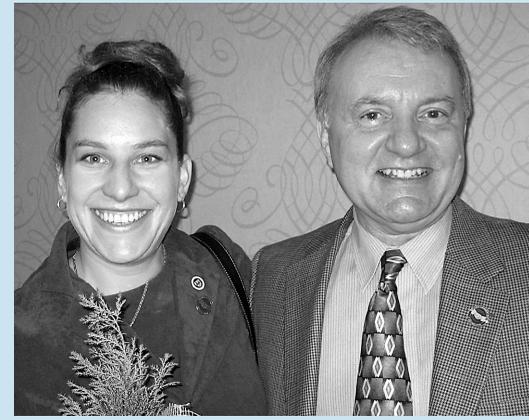
Now how did I get to Harvard given my dyslexia and grades that were sometimes A sometimes B or on occasion C and one D in math? Like my Mom, many people think that only really smart people go to Harvard. In fact Harvard looks for people who are smart and have a record of community contributions. I had the community work but being a female, I still have trouble saying I am smart. I am but it feels uncomfortable saying so.

## Phenomenal Women

### LESLIE HOLTMAN: MULTIFACETED WOMAN OF WELLINGTON COUNTY

Leslie Holtman was a student at Conestoga College when she was diagnosed with ADHD and learning disabilities at the age of 22. She had already completed a General Arts and Science program there and was in the midst of studying Electronics Engineering Technology when she began to struggle. After an assessment, she returned to the Electronics Engineering Technology program with the appropriate accommodations and successfully completed her first semester courses. This allowed her to transfer into the Computer Programmer Analyst program which she graduated from in 2003.

While still a student, Leslie was hired as a peer tutor at Conestoga assisting other students and then in 1999 she began a part time job at Conestoga as an adaptive technology assistant in the Disability Services department where she worked for five years. After that, she got a full time job through Service Canada's Learning Opportunities Fund with the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries as a web developer/technical assistant. In 2006 she took an eight-month "Start Now" program through the Guelph Business Enterprise Centre that allowed her to start her two businesses- Stylin IT and Adaptiveability. As part of the "Start Now" program, she attended monthly networking breakfast meetings where she met a corporate trainer from Conestoga College and was hired as a corporate IT trainer. She taught Office programs like Excel to various clients.



*Leslie's mentor is Charlie Matjanec, B. A., B. Ed, who is an Employment Advisor in the Disability Services department at Conestoga College. She is pictured here with Charlie.*

Leslie's next position was teaching a fulltime Second Career program in Business Applications. The program included 11 courses with 16 students in each that she taught for three sessions.

Recently Leslie has started a new job at Conestoga College at the new Cambridge Campus as an Adaptive Technologist. She runs the AT Lab/Counselling/Test Centre part time.

All during this time Leslie's two businesses have been operating quite successfully, as she designs websites that her customers can then self-manage, and is a photographer for weddings and other events. Not only that, but she has volunteered for the Employment Facilitation Network of Cambridge, and the Employment Coordination Committee of Guelph Wellington. Our chapter, The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County, as well as The Learning Disabilities Association of Kitchener Waterloo have had Leslie present on adaptive technology at public education events.

We are very proud to nominate her to be featured in the Women with Learning Disabilities issue of Communiqué.



Given my dyslexia, lack of confidence, and the fact I wanted to work in adult education, to help others go back to school, seeking professional positions was not the path taken nor do I think I would have been successful if I had done so. Despite the educational rhetoric of making accommodations, these institutions want people who can write well on the first draft to share with colleagues for a group rewrite.

So I volunteered, I worked hard. Like many dyslexics I am creative when developing projects and skilled at analysis. I had won awards and recognition from Ryerson, the federal government, the Ontario Association for Continuing Education and it was this record of accomplishments that got me into Harvard. Even today well over half of the accomplishments on my resume come from my volunteer work.

*"... for the first time I sought special education help, which was difficult ..."*

Demonstrating your strengths through volunteering was one of the compensating strategies I read about in an online course I did this year, Adults with Learning Disabilities, through Ontario Learns.

One of the things I learned in this course was to identify the psychosocial problems associated with a learning disability. Shapiro and Rich's text Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years described David, who tried to participate in group conversations but would blurt out inappropriate, and sometimes insulting and competitive comments. In my case I would say challenging comments. These outbursts have not helped my career.

Shapiro and Rich went on to describe the need for attribution training, to modify negative attributions such as attributing personal success to luck and personal failure to stupidity. This sounds like a classic description of female behavior and mine.

In this course I have learned how to take notes better, through understanding how my brain sorts and stores information; its executive function. Instead of seeing text

as a blur of equally important information, the key pieces of text now stand out.

I have also learned to advocate for myself. At York I remember being timed out in an SPSS program as it takes me five-to-seven times longer to process visual information. I was upset with myself. This year in my online course I was more assertive, stating that using Moodle, which does not offer spell check/grammar options and can time out on someone if they are not quick enough, was not appropriate for a course about adults with learning disabilities..

To compensate for these behaviors, I was fortunate to have an excellent mentor in my site supervisor, Jan, when I started working at Overland Learning Centre in 1990 at age 43. Overland is a TDSB school for adults. At first I helped newcomers find work, doing individual counselling and finding co-op placements. Then an opening came up to teach the classroom part of the co-op program. I argued that I couldn't teach. Jan came back with seeing me give workshops to adult education professionals in a creative and informative way. I argued that that was a workshop not a series of classes. But I tired of not believing I would be successful. I was. Does this not sound like a female pattern: asserting why you can't do something instead why you can?

Later this very successful co-op program was cancelled and I was redeployed to teaching ESL. I won't relate what I thought about myself teaching ESL given I can't spell, have poor penmanship and dart off in tangents when presenting to a class. I have been successful because of my strengths, analysis, creativity, putting out extra effort, caring, honesty about weaknesses. I can say such things now but still feel uncomfortable.

Following Jan, I now have a supervisor who has helped me deal with filing systems by giving me my own room; unheard of for adult educators. I have found a system of filing class handouts in binders inside plastic jackets which are laid horizontal on shelving, which ensures I can find what is filed. If these papers are filed vertically in a drawer they are lost to view.

At this point in my life with dyslexia, I have learned many things about it and compensating strategies, but the journey is still unfolding.

## Phenomenal Women

### YORK REGION'S MELISSA CHUNG: MY JOURNEY TO DISCOVERING ME

**M**elissa Chung is currently a financial advisor and enjoys providing advice and educating young couples on the importance of financial planning.

She is devoted to focusing her efforts on financial planning for individuals with disabilities as well as women and investing. According to Melissa, these are two areas in financial planning and investing that are rapidly growing with little comprehensive education available to the public.

As an independent financial advisor, Melissa owns her own business and looks forward to many years of not only growing her business but also growing with her clients. Finding herself in this position today isn't always quite that simple. Melissa was diagnosed with a learning disability while attending university. Going back to her early childhood years, her grade 3 teacher had noticed that there was something a little different about Melissa, and her ability to pay attention. While her determination and drive to succeed was apparent, the grades often did not match up to her efforts to succeed.

Her upbringing in a Chinese cultured home also limited her chances of getting a proper diagnosis. "You see, growing up in a culture that is driven by hard work and lack of knowledge and acceptance of learning disabilities made it that much more difficult to get the proper help that I needed to succeed", Melissa says. "It wasn't until my second year of university that I decided to take the steps to obtaining a proper diagnosis of a learning disability." It was then that she understood why she had been constantly struggling through various subject areas. With the proper attitude, she had the courage to tackle these challenging subjects in school. Today Melissa holds a double degree from the University of Western Ontario in Media Information and Technoculture and Economics. In addition, she has an active role on student council and is on several other committees. Her learning disability has never given her the reason to slow down.



While venturing out into the workforce, Melissa quickly realized that school, exams and learning never stop. She went through several steps in requesting her rights to accommodations while writing her various levels in Securities exams. "I think I knew that ability and dedication to hard work didn't reflect my exam marks", Melissa says. Having started out her career eight years ago at a mutual fund company, she quickly knew that a role as a financial advisor was right for her. She loves the idea of being able to help individuals understand and plan their financial goals.

The biggest advice she has for adults and young adults with learning disabilities is, rather than thinking that you have a learning disability, you should focus on how you can tackle the challenges and reflect on your achievements and successes. "Gather as many little achievements in your pockets and eventually you will see the bigger picture", says Melissa. When it comes to studying skills or techniques, it's not only about what works for "me" but what works this time!

Melissa has been an active board member for the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region since 2007. She was elected to her role as vice-chair in 2008. She currently sits on the Vintages & Jazz committee and the LDAO Adult Advisory Committee and most recently, will be taking part in the Scotiabank Waterfront Marathon run in order to raise funds and awareness for LDAYR. Melissa has a deep understanding of and identifies with the challenges of a learning disability through her ties with affected family members. She is dedicated to promoting the visions of the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region through public awareness within the workplace and she continues to spread her message among various diverse groups. 

## Phenomenal Women

### SUDBURY'S KRISSEY BATTISTONI: NORTHERN ONTARIO WOMAN RELEASES POWER TO ACHIEVE



**K**rissy Battistoni was a struggling student in elementary school, but strong outside the academic classroom, particularly in sports. Because of her difficulties with reading as well as expressing her thoughts in writing, in contrast to her above average intelligence levels, she was identified with a learning disability. Consequently, her parents connected with the Learning Disabilities Association in Sudbury and then worked to become knowledgeable about learning disabilities and ways to help their daughter. Advocating for her, they modelled and taught Krissy how to advocate for herself. Such advocacy would develop into her signature quality.

When Krissy received a laptop computer with assistive technology, she started to read and write independently, at a level befitting her intelligence. Her high school experiences included a Pilot Project Grade 9 LD Learning Strategies Laptop Program with the Rainbow District School Board. In this program, Krissy not only developed confidence in her academic potential and skills, but also self esteem in her ability to think differently, which extended onto the basketball court and into the pool. Krissy graduated from secondary school succeeding in all aspects of her life, because of her differences.

In October 2009, Krissy was the recipient of the "LDAS Rising Star Volunteer Award": a real life, shining example of a rising star succeeding academically, socially, and athletically,

yet still committed to hours of volunteer work in the community.

In October 2010, Krissy, then a first-year student at Laurentian University, co-chaired LDAS Awareness Month celebrations alongside Dominic Giroux, president of the university. What a team! They told an audience of over 100 Bachelor of Education students, educators and community leaders that a different way of learning can lead to success. They asked future teachers and everyone gathered to "help release the power."

This October, our honorary co-chairs of LD Awareness Month, police chief Frank Elsner and his wife Sue, a special education teacher, introduced Krissy to over 200 people gathered at the Awareness Month breakfast. In her remarks to the audience, Krissy put a face on and gave a voice to learning disabilities: "We have the right to learn, we have the power to achieve; we need all of you to help us release our power."

Krissy. One powerful young woman with a learning disability. Krissy will graduate from the sports psychology and education programs at Laurentian University, following a career path as a special education teacher!

From a child struggling in a classroom to a community leader in a banquet hall, her story is not a fairytale. Krissy demonstrates the power to succeed with supportive parents and educators, by setting goals, and by believing in her power to achieve. The Learning Disabilities Association of Sudbury is proud to introduce Krissy Battistoni. 

# In Person

## ZOË KESSLER – THAT CHICK WITH ADHD

A successful multi-hyphenate, Zoë Kessler is one woman determined to steer people and in particular, kids, on to the path to empowerment when it comes to successfully managing ADHD.

By Donna Shaw



**A**t the age of 52, Zoë Kessler maintains the kind of startlingly youthful attractiveness of a woman perhaps a decade younger – the kind of middle-aged handsomeness in women that seems to commonly elude girls who were pretty when young, but becomes the sole enterprise of those who have had to struggle into their beauty. A yoga enthusiast and drummer, Kessler is particularly well-known for her prolific career as a writer and comedian. Having obtained two university degrees and three college diplomas, written a well-reviewed book on adoption (*Adoption Reunions*, Second Story Press, 1993), collaborated on films, written two weekly newspaper columns and her successful blog, *ADHD from A to Zoë* at Psych Central, Zoë Kessler would be considered resoundingly successful by any standard.

Yet, beneath the sparkling veneer of professional achievements, is the story of a woman whose life had so thoroughly come apart at the seams several years before, that, in desperation, she eventually sought intervention and was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Kathleen Nadeau, editor of *A Comprehensive Guide to Attention Deficit Disorder in Adults* (Brunner/Mazel, 1995) has referred to crisis points that individuals with this condition will reach, often leading to diagnosis. In Kessler's case, having lost

a number of jobs and relationships, and now in a situation of near-financial ruin, she finally sought help for issues that had accumulated over years.

**Donna Shaw:** What had happened in your life that made you realize that something was wrong and that medical intervention was necessary?

**Zoë Kessler:** My life was falling apart in every way imaginable. I could not focus or concentrate long enough to work. I would spend my days moving from room to room.

*"... I wasn't just thinking outside of the box, I lost the box ..."*

I had rocky relationships; my life was falling into financial ruin. Those garden variety symptoms start to mess up your life...(they) become debilitating...

On the advice of a friend, Kessler, then 47, took the *Jasper-Goldberg Adult ADD Questionnaire* measuring the probability of having ADHD and scored so high ("I did very well on the test!") that she went to her GP,

who eventually prescribed a stimulant drug to help control her symptoms. Attributing some of her downward spiral to the loss of her father, "my adhoc ADHD coach," who had been a source of reason, calm and strength in the midst of her chaotic existence, Kessler had essentially reached her "bottom" and had begun, in her words, "to unravel" before seeking professional help.

### A Hyperactive Daughter: Can't You Sit Still for Five Minutes?

**DS:** Did you display symptoms of ADHD when you were a child? Where did it start? What is your back story?

**ZK:** I wasn't diagnosed until I was 47 years old. It is only in looking back that I can recognize it in myself. My mom used to say, 'can't you sit still for five minutes?' As a child, I'm thinking, 'obviously no, I can't, because nobody really knew why back in those days. We certainly didn't have the awareness that we have today...I was textbook, I was classic. I was a hyperactive little girl. I was always moving, constantly moving. I loved to play outside. I loved climbing trees. My inability to sit still was interpreted as I was a bad kid. It was a

difficult and painful thing...I wanted to be a good kid. I wanted to be a good girl.

## Going on the Pill: Controlling ADHD with Medication

Although it is widely accepted that many people with ADHD are creative, there is the question of whether taking medication to regulate their symptoms compromises or suppresses their natural gifts. Being wildly creative, noted for her wit and being a writer of some success, it is an issue that Kessler passionately expounds upon. Although she struggled with her decision to take medication to control her symptoms, Kessler now strongly advocates for their use for those who suffer from the socially

*"... it felt like someone had pulled my hand out of a wall socket ..."*

and professionally paralyzing aspects of ADHD. "I eat organic food, do not take medication for anything and I started catastrophizing...what if I lose my creativity, what if I'm not funny anymore, what if my personality changes?"

**DS:** Were you concerned that taking a drug to control the symptoms would inhibit your creative gifts?

**ZK:** (Not taking them) is like asking someone with no legs to go out and run a relay. Many, many people (with ADHD) are above average in intelligence...but our brains are different structurally and chemically... It's like Tourette's but we speak in full sentences... I tried meditation, yoga, exercise, certain foods...Medication messes with brain chemistry but I felt it was prudent to take 'the pill'. In less than 30 minutes, every cell stopped jumping. It felt like someone had pulled my hand out of a wall socket. All I felt was the most incredible relief.

Asked if this was not precisely the very thing that creates great artists, scientists, activists and innovators, Kessler quips that "I wasn't just thinking outside of the box, I lost the box."

## Pray, Meditate and Chant: Believing in a Higher Power

In discussing ADHD, Kessler makes it clear that hers is a multi-modal approach; one that involves coaching and support from a close network of friends. "The difference between those who make it and those who don't is having a coach early on." Diet, yoga, meditation, medication and creative accomplishments have all contributed to her successful ADHD management. "It is your responsibility to take ownership of your symptoms," she says.

**DS:** What about spirituality? Does having a spiritual or religious belief system play any part in successfully managing ADHD?

**ZK:** This is probably the least written about (area)...having faith in a higher power. It is extremely important to have faith of some kind... to have a place from where you can draw strength. You can draw it from prayer, from Buddhist chanting, from Jesus. It is important to find sources of inspiration and motivation. It has been proven that our brain chemistry changes when we meditate, pray or chant. My dad, who was at first an atheist, then later an agnostic, used to say "You're a much nicer person when you chant." Spirituality provides a reason for your existence, for the fact that you were made the way you are for a reason, that you have purpose.

**DS:** You have made ADHD a central aspect of almost everything you do – you write about it, do stand up about it, collaborate on films about it...You have a great blog, you have a website, Chick ADD, you have an ADHD online store. Why does it have to be the focus of your professional life, rather than just a personal issue?

**ZK:** I feel, as a writer that it is my duty ethically. It's worth it if I can save one child from going through the misery of undiagnosed ADHD, so that the child does not end up in a downward spiral: their self-esteem goes down, they have a lack of self-trust, feeling bad about themselves. This all happened to me."

## Boys are Hyper, Girls are Not: The Impact of Gender on ADHD

**DS:** What about gender? You have said that you were hyperactive as a little girl, which

is unusual. Girls tend to exhibit ADD, meaning they daydream, check out. Boys tend, at a much higher rate, to be hyperactive. How does this impact treatment, attention, social perceptions?

**ZK:** There is new research that focuses on gender differences and pays some attention to girls. It is unusual for girls to be hyperactive. They tend to be and are expected to be more quiet. Boys, being more hyperactive, can receive treatment. Girls will not and that puts them at a great deficit, they will not excel. They are robbed of their potential. A hyperactive girl is seen as "acting out" and will be perceived as a bad child.

Women are often misdiagnosed as well, with bipolar or depression because of changes in mood and the impact of hormones. Menopause (for instance) can mimic the symptoms of ADHD. In adult females, ADHD is often diagnosed during rites of passage like marriage,

*"... Spirituality provides a reason for your existence, for the fact that you were made the way you are for a reason, that you have purpose ..."*

relationship-building, having children and other demands of adulthood. As a woman, you have a household to run, others needs to attend to. You become stressed, start to 'screw up' and as a result, start to self-isolate, become ashamed and embarrassed, with no coping skills. It is more complicated for women.

**DS:** Zoë, you have come a long way. You have taken control of your life, your medication has helped you, you are a successful, accomplished woman. You are helping others. Do you like yourself now?

**ZK:** I am happy to be who I am. I accept myself for who I am. I still want to change some things... (but) I don't vilify or demonize myself anymore.



# Shelf Life

Tumbling across the editor's desk this autumn, a plethora of new, funny and important books with something for everyone...

by both are eager for help in wading through all the information available.

"Parents of kids and teens with ADD/ADHD feel bombarded by conflicting messages about treatment," says Kenny Handelman, M.D., author of the new book, *Attention Difference Disorder: How to Turn Your ADHD Child or Teen's Differences into Strengths in 7 Simple Steps*. "The stigma attached only makes it harder. This book de-stigmatizes ADD/ADHD and provides a step-by-step approach for parents to follow, which will help them to get their child's treatment (and life) on track."

The traditional approach to ADD/ADHD is that of a deficit model, Dr. Handelman explains. Attention Difference Disorder emphasizes differences rather than deficits. This strength-based approach, developed over 10 years of work with patients and through clinical research, shows how parents can implement traditional and alternative treatments for ADD/ADHD to ensure their child's success. A board-certified psychiatrist in the USA and Canada, and an expert in both conditions, he often teaches medical students, doctors, parents, educators and others about ADD/ADHD.

Synthesizing scientific and clinical research in a way that is accessible to parents, Dr. Handelman first explains the ADD/ADHD diagnosis and the nine symptoms of inattention, including

- making careless mistakes
- getting easily distracted
- often being forgetful
- poor organization.

He then introduces his concept of Attention Difference Disorder, and discusses the "journey" that most parents experience, taking them from student, to expert, to advocate.

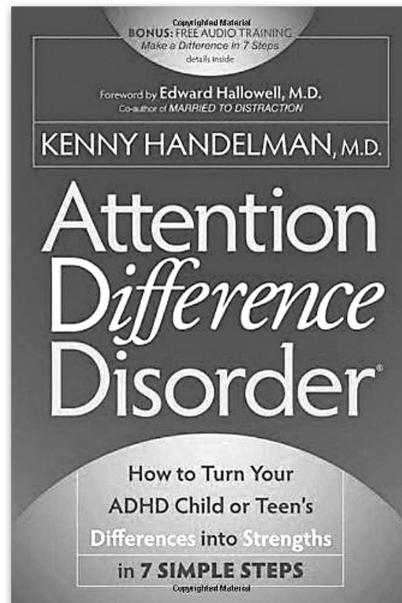
What follows is his unique seven-step Attention Difference Disorder System. "By following the steps in the system," he explains, "you are going to learn to take the deficits that your child may have as part of their ADD/ADHD and change them into differences. And as you move forward, you can convert those into strengths." Because both conditions can be helped by

you can use to master the challenges of your particular version of ADD.

This is a great book to share with the skeptics in your life as well, so they can understand the complexity and the promise of ADHD. The goal? To create a life that you love. Finally!

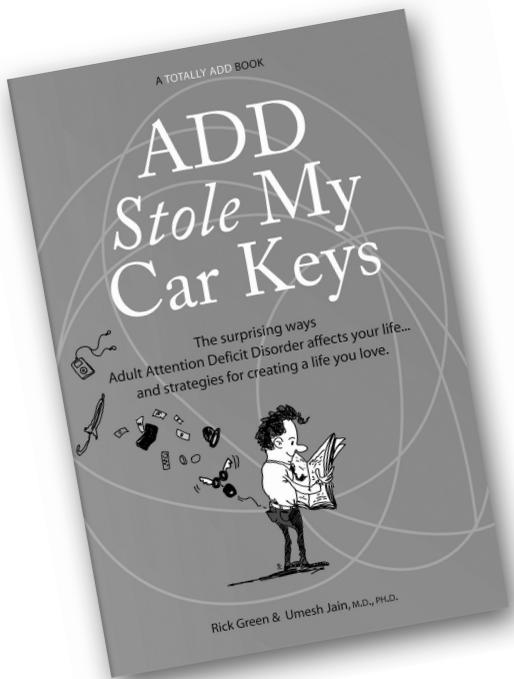
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Available from Caversham Booksellers and Amazon!: For more information, visit [www.totallyadd.com](http://www.totallyadd.com)



## Attention Difference Disorder: How To Turn Your ADHD Child or Teen's Differences Into Strengths in 7 Simple Steps

There are over 2.24 million global monthly Google searches for the terms ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder. Parents of children and teenagers affected



## ADD Stole my Car Keys

Comedian Rick Green and Dr. Umesh Jain reveal 155 common behaviors and challenges that adults with ADHD/ADD face. Short, lively first-person stories capture the wide range of ways ADHD shows up. From avoiding noisy parties to seeking out novel experiences, Dr. J explores the neurology, biology and psychology of what's behind the sometimes bizarre behaviors of ADHD adults. And Rick offers hilarious examples of the challenges, as well as the strengths, that seem to be part and parcel of this disorder.

Prepare to be surprised by the sometimes odd, obscure ways this misunderstood mindset sabotages adults.

As well, Rick & Dr. J highlight dozens of potential positives that so many ADHD adults share, and offer proven strategies

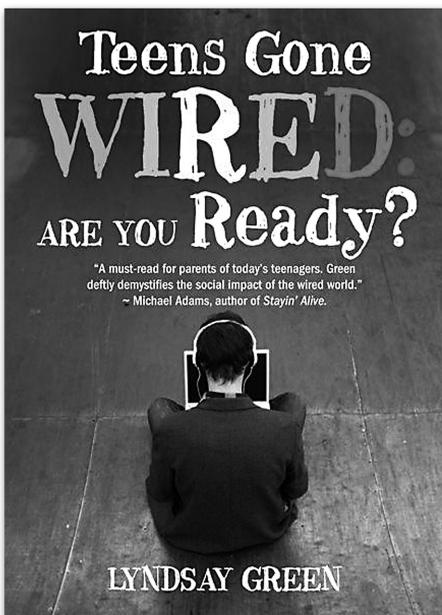
the same steps, Dr. Handelman simply refers to ADD to cover both.

"Treatment of ADD is a marathon, not a sprint," Dr. Handelman writes in conclusion. Parents therefore must be committed to the work. Armed with the correct tools, though, they can send their ADD children off into the world with their differences turned into strengths.

By Kenny Handelman, M.D.

Foreword by Edward Hallowell, M.D.

Morgan James Publishing/ June 2011 / 216 pages / ISBN 978-1-60037-888-1 / Trade Paperback \$17.95



## Teens Gone Wired: Are You Ready?

By Lyndsay Green

As you're reading this, a teen, possibly your son or daughter—is probably sending out a text message. And IMing at the same time, updating his or her Facebook profile, and possibly even having a conversation on Skype. Teens aged 13-to-17 send almost six texts per hour, or a whopping 3,339 texts per month. 20% of Canadian children have reported being cyber-bullied. Millions of teens play Farmville and an assortment of other online games for hours every day. Parents everywhere agree that it's a

struggle to cope with the challenges of children who are constantly plugged in.

Lyndsay Green knows how you feel. A sociologist and parent of two young daughters, she has done immense amounts of research for *Teens Gone Wired* in order to be able to offer concerned readers the advice of dozens of parents and teens with a wealth of recommended sources, including links to many online support systems. For the first time, teens are part of this ongoing discussion, and parents will gain insights into their point of view.

All of the key debates that parents are having with their teens are in the book, including fun vs. obsession, real friends vs. virtual friends, education vs. entertainment, and much more. Green provides the tools to boost the confidence of parents and gives them the tools they'll need to raise today's teens. Written in an easy-to-follow manner, and equipped with a guide to texting terminology in the glossary, *Teens Gone Wired* is the ultimate guide to parents seeking to understand the milieu that their children live in.

## Monkey Mind: A Captivating Bedtime Story for Children

Parenting Expert Phoebe Lee Offers First ADHD Children's Picture Book

Ten percent of children suffer from ADHD and for them, calming down enough to get a soothing night's sleep can be a challenge. But now, parents at least can rest easy with the publication of the first children's picture book aimed directly at ADHD kids.

In *Monkey Mind: A Captivating Bedtime Story for Children*, well-known parenting columnist Phoebe Lee, combines her experience in ADHD, children's sleep issues and parenting from a Buddhist perspective to craft a children's picture book just published by Chicago's Inspire You Books. The companion *Monkey-Fish-Dragon* guided meditation audio CD features music by an eight-time Emmy award-winner.

"The phrase 'monkey mind' is actually a Buddhist term for 'unsettled' or 'restless,'" says Lee, whose background includes both traditional education as well as study with Native American elders and Zen Buddhist monks and nuns. She wrote the book for her own daughter.

What can parents do to settle their ADHD kids for the night? Lee recommends the following:



- Calming music: Nature sounds and audio books are great relaxation tools for both children and adults.
- Guided meditation: Whether read aloud by the parent or played on an audio recording, guided meditation is a great way to help kids relax.
- Creative visualization: Ask your child to imagine a comfortable place they'd like to go, or an activity in which they'd like to participate, then talk through their choice and scenario.

Lee, a popular writer of parenting and ADHD articles, is currently on an around-the-world "blog tour" to promote the book, which is available in bookstores and from Amazon. You can read more on both the book and Lee's parenting blog tour at [www.MonkeyMindBook.com](http://www.MonkeyMindBook.com).

For a complimentary review copy of *Monkey Mind*, an interview with author Phoebe Lee, or information on hosting Lee on her blog tour, please contact publicist [FernReiss@PublishingGame.com](mailto:FernReiss@PublishingGame.com).



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# Chapter News & Views

## OTTAWA

### Workshops, Workshops and Workshops...

The Ottawa chapter has been very busy doing training workshops on "LD in the Workplace" for various departments of the City of Ottawa. We have also been retained to do a number of presentations on "Learning My Way" to the City's HR department.

To date we have done workshops with OC Transpo, Ottawa Public Library and Ottawa Fire Service as well as Community and Social Services.

## SUDBURY

### 2011 Coaching Program Graduation and Fifth Anniversary Celebrations

On March 31, over 100 parents, students and future educators packed the conference room at the School of Education, Laurentian University for a graduation and anniversary celebration. This unique partnership involving Laurentian University, Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, the City of Greater Sudbury Public Libraries, and LDAS, celebrated the fifth anniversary of our Coaching Program funded by the United Way Centraide Sudbury.

The program matches third year 'coaches' from the School of Education with grade 7 and 8 students with learning disabilities for the school year. After 16 hours of special education training facilitated by LDAS, students and coaches meet once a week in a public library for individualized sessions developing academic, social and self advocacy skills. The program also builds self-esteem and self-confidence during these transition years to high school. The success of this program is articulated best by testimonial comments from parents and coaches shared during the celebration.

One parent thanked the University students by reflecting on how the coaching program made a difference with her son. She said it very clearly: "Things are going well with Ivan's coach. He is also working with him

in helping him develop brain storming idea for a speech he is to present to his class.

All I know for sure is that this is the best experience that Ivan has had since his identification. He continues to be very enthusiastic about learning. He has come out of his shell so to speak. His coach has been the perfect match for him. Not only are his strategies effective but, he comes in with the sense of genuine enthusiasm to help Ivan with his learning. Thanks again for all of your support."

Lyndon Ferguson, one of the coaches summed up his experience by telling everyone gathered:

"The coaching program has helped me to truly recognize the diversity of learning styles that I will encounter later in my career, and provided a foothold of tools to use with various learning styles.

... What I learned most was the profound impact that we will soon have as teachers. The attitude that I had brought to each coaching session was reflected by the student's eagerness to work hard and achieve their goals. The coaching program has taught me a valuable lesson in self-awareness and reflection."

## YORK REGION

### LDAYR Celebrates 35 Phenomenal Years!

This year marks the 35th Anniversary of the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region! We look forward to many more years serving people with learning disabilities in York Region.

This summer we created a very successful assistive technology partnership with VocaLinks as well as with LearnStyle. The camps took place the weeks of July 25th and August 15th. We also conducted a mini advocacy session for the parents.

The chapter continues a successful partnership with Evoke Coaching. With them LDAYR has held various one day coaching workshops, as well as a 6 week series for parents of children with ADHD

and LDs entitled "Raising Self-Directed Learners". The workshop was very well received with 80% of participants rating the workshop as excellent and with 100% stating their needs were met.

We would like to bid a fond farewell to our summer students, Wilson Cheng, Monica Scott, and Alessia Rico. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all the wonderful work that they did for our agency. The LDAYR wishes each of you all the best in your future endeavours.

This year at our Annual General meeting we presented our VIP Award to Dr. Sue Ball, Coordinator of Psychological Services with the York Region Public Board of Education, for her outstanding leadership, commitment and dedication to those with learning disabilities. Lynn Ziraldo, executive director of LDAYR, said, "The right to learn, the power to achieve, is the motto that Dr. Ball's work symbolizes. She is always opening the doors for young students across the region to reach their potential." Congratulations Sue!

Our Guest Speaker at the AGM was Angie DeMarco of our LDA Sudbury sister organization. Her topic was entitled "Energize your Abilities. Address That Huge Learning Blocker, Anxiety!" Her presentation was awesome. It was part theory and part laughter. It was truly a presentation not to be missed.

## WELLINGTON

### Hosts IEP Workshop

Our chapter hosted an IEP Workshop on Tues Oct 18/11 with Sean Cameron, Ph. D, a development psychologist and certified teacher from Guelph was our presenter. Sean works in special education at the elementary level.

Sean discussed - What is an IEP? (Individual Education Plan) Who Needs One? What Should it Include? Why have an IPRC (Identification, Placement and Review Committee) meeting? We were grateful for the presentation and to all those who attended.



# LD Awareness Month in Canada

By the time *Communiqué* arrives on your doorstep or your email box, the 2011 LD Awareness Campaign will be over. So we cannot tell you how successful it has been, but we can tell

Facebook

twitter

YouTube

you about this year's launch of the first part of a continuing National Awareness campaign that the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) will roll out over the next few years.

## Update Status

I am changing my profile picture in honour of people with learning disabilities in Canada. October is LD Month.



The 2011 campaign was launched as a social media plan. Social media is a powerful advocacy tool – it is immediate, authentic and importantly, for organizations such as ours, it is inexpensive.

The goal was to continue to raise awareness about learning disabilities, and to RESPECT the successes

and struggles of people with learning disabilities.

Using social media as a vehicle of communicating with members and the general public is an idea that has been slowly taking place within the LDA family in Canada. Some, like LDA Vancouver and LDA Alberta, embraced it some years ago and have a very active following on Facebook and Twitter. Others, like some of the smaller grassroots organizations throughout the country struggled with the concept but are slowly making headway. For this campaign, the social mediums used were primarily Facebook, Twitter and short videos. Everyone was urged to share with each other and friends' messages and tweets that would be messages of respect and hope, positive in nature, to build awareness of learning disabilities.

LDA embedded three short videos that were created by LDA Alberta Executive Director Kathryn Burke on our web site and ran a poster banner talking about the campaign. The week of October 17th-- October 21, 2011 were designated the

most important times to spread the news about LDs. On our web site, we asked people to change their Facebook and Twitter profile pictures to the LDA swirl for that week and to put up a message "I am changing my profile picture in honour of people with learning disabilities in Canada. October is LD Month." Or to Tweet "I am

changing my profile picture in honor of people with learning disabilities in Canada. October is #LDMonth. #LD #sped."

We will have to wait to see what the reaction to this campaign was, but in any case, check out your local chapter's Facebook and Twitter presence, and make the connections with them. Connect to your family and friends. The more people understand that while LDs are a life-long disability, they do not have to hamper an individual's success in school, work and relationships. Give them the RESPECT they deserve. Awareness does not stop because October is over. Every day is an opportunity to increase the awareness of LDs and the LDA brand.



LDAC-ACTA has teamed up with Manifest Communications and designed t-shirts to bring about understanding of learning disabilities.



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