



Europe's Children Our Concern asbl

supporting children and young people with learning difficulties

Under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde

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"Together we can make a difference"

ECOC News No. 55 – December 2006

If you have news that you would like us to pass on, or if you would like us to publicise an event or mention a resource that you have found useful, please send us the details.

ECOC News

Carol singing in the European Institutions

ECOC will again be celebrating Christmas this month in various buildings of the EU with a mixed nationality choir singing carols from all over Europe. Do come along and enjoy the exquisite singing – and the mulled wine. The choir will be in action at lunch time on the following days:

Friday 1 December	Madou building
Tuesday 5 December	Sq. de Meeus 8
Friday 8 December	ave. de Beaulieu 5
Monday 11 December	Charlemagne rue de la Loi 170
Wednesday 13 December	European Economic & Social Committee rue Beliard 99
Monday 18 December	Council (Justus Lipsius) Rue de la Loi, 175
Wednesday 20 December	Berlaymont (Piazza)

Other news

3 December is the European Day of People with Disabilities

This date was chosen to coincide with the International Day of Disabled People proclaimed by the United Nations in 1992. Every year, the European Commission organises a conference to mark the European Day of People with Disabilities, in partnership with the European Disability Forum (EDF). This year the conference is entitled *Youth = Future. Let's make an equal future for all* and will take place in Brussels on 4 and 5 December. It will bring together policy makers, people with disabilities and the organisations that represent them, along with other actors and experts in the field of disability.

Help into the labour market for those with disabilities

Do you have experience with mentoring or with easing people with disabilities into the labour market? If so then the VOCA2 project would be pleased to hear from you. VOCA2 is an EU project partially financed by the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission under the Leonardo Da Vinci – Community Vocational Training Action Programme (Second phase: 2000-2006). It comprises 14 partners from seven different countries and runs from 1 January 2006 until 31 December 2007. The network is developing training courses for aspiring mentors who would like to help people with disabilities make a smoother transition into the labour market. The target group for the project are institutions providing vocational training and education, teachers, people with disabilities, and the labour market.

More information from www.voca.dk

Bullies 'target disabled pupils'

Children with disabilities struggle to protect themselves from bullying because they lack confidence and friends, a study suggests.

The study, carried out by the children's commissioner for England, also found that many victims were left feeling suicidal. It includes recommendations on how to deal with bullying.

Researchers examined the experiences of children with disabilities, visible illness and learning difficulties and found alarming examples of bullying.

The commissioner, Professor Al Aynsley-Green, will also publish proposals for improving the handling of bullying incidents in schools. Shortly after his appointment last year he said almost every child was affected by bullying and was growing up in a society that sees violence as "the norm".

More information from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6160548.stm>

US school promotes high-tech tip line

A school has set up a web site to offer students a way to report their personal troubles, bullying or dangerous peers to school authorities.

More information: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/4329783.html>

Social exclusion may cause changes in brain function

In new research, reported in the current online issue of the journal *Social Neuroscience*, researchers from the University of Georgia and San Diego State University in the US claim that social exclusion actually causes changes in a person's brain function and can lead to poor decision-making and a diminished learning ability.

"Our findings indicate that social rejection can be a powerful influence on how people act," said W. Keith Campbell, who led the research.

Researchers have known for a long time that there is a link between social exclusion and the failure of self-control. The new study, however, is the first to use magnetoencephalography (MEG) to show that there are actual changes inside the brain when test subjects are manipulated to feel socially excluded. MEG is an imaging technique that measures the magnetic fields produced by electrical activity in the brain. It is most often used by physicians to localize brain tumors prior to surgery or to study the brain function of patients with epilepsy.

"We found that there was a direct link between social exclusion, brain activity and performance," said Campbell.

More information from

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/11/061108154256.htm>

Gene therapy may inhibit epilepsy

Neurology researchers in the United States have used gene therapy to modify pathways in the brain, reducing the number of seizures in test subjects.

"We have shown that there is a window to intervene after a brain insult to reduce the risk that epilepsy will develop," said one of the lead researchers, Amy R. Brooks-Kayal, a pediatric neurologist at [The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#) and associate professor of [Neurology and Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine](#).

"This provides a 'proof of concept' that altering specific signalling pathways in nerve cells after a brain insult or injury could provide a scientific basis for treating patients to prevent epilepsy."

The researchers concentrated on a neurotransmitter called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in an area of the brain that acts as a gateway to the hippocampus, a focal point of seizures in people with temporal lobe epilepsy. GABA can inhibit the repetitive, excessive firing of brain cells that characterises a seizure.

The research is published in the 1 November edition of the journal [Neuroscience](#).

New website for those with learning disabilities

A father with dyslexia, who says he was once written off at school and work, is on line to help others. Brian Nuttall, whose son Nathan, 12, also has dyslexia, has taught himself web design and set up an internet site. He hopes his story and the website will give a positive message and encourage others with the condition.

The site has been designed to be easily accessible and dyslexia-friendly, with such features as a facility to chose the background colour for text and an option for the text to be read aloud. There are educational games on the site for children and useful links. The target audience includes parents, carers and professionals and children who want to access information about dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, dyscalculia, Aspergers' Syndrome and autism.

The website is at www.fylde-coast-dylexia.co.uk and it links to www.blackpool4me.com/bwfdassociation.

Sunflower Trust claims promising results

The Sunflower clinic, in Guildford, Surrey, UK, was set up by Mark Matthews, an osteopath and dyslexic, 20 years ago. Matthews claims the Sunflower therapy can help children with dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism.

He states that the treatment will make children "perform better, feel better, achieve more and have greater self-esteem" if the underlying causes of the problems, such as misalignment of the skeletal system, neurological chemical imbalances, nutritional deficiencies and low energy levels, are tackled. Many of the children who are referred to the Sunflower Trust have already been assessed by GPs and paediatric specialists and are deemed to be beyond help, or "at the end of the line".

Matthews believes that if a child's skeletal system is out of alignment it causes stress to the whole body and can exhaust the child's system. He claims his observations suggest that children with learning difficulties are often out of alignment. Treatment can correct the alignment and improve the child's learning ability.

The claim of a rise in IQ in children undergoing Sunflower therapy has recently been researched in a three-year study by the University of Surrey. Some 61 children found to have dyslexia were assessed in the Guildford treatment rooms, and the results showed a 66 per cent improvement in neurological and other tests, with an overall rise in IQ of 12 per cent.

More information from The SunflowerTrust at www.sunflowertrust.com

Have British scientists found a 'cure' for dyslexia?

At the end of October a university professor announced the discovery of a drug-free solution for the symptoms of dyslexia and ADHD.

Professor David Reynolds of Plymouth University made the announcement after carrying out a three-year study into a pioneering intervention. The results are published in the peer-reviewed academic journal, *Dyslexia*.

The study, working with the lowest performing children in a Midlands school, showed that following the treatment the pupils had strong and lasting improvements in their scores in national literacy tests.

Professor Reynolds said: "Before the treatment began, independent school reading tests showed that the children with learning difficulties were making only seven months' progress in 12 months. And they were falling further and further behind their peers. In the 12 months of treatment the children made 20 months' improvement in reading progress and caught up with their peers.

"After the treatment the children maintained their progress - in other words the treatment provided a permanent solution to the problem. The programme was just as effective whether or not the children had been previously diagnosed as dyslexic."

The co-author of the study, Professor Rod Nicolson, of Sheffield University, said: "The treatment's effect on those children with ADHD symptoms was particularly striking. "Before the intervention 12 of the children were diagnosed as ADHD. After the treatment only two had symptoms of ADHD and that position has remained one year after the course was finished. The treatment is eliminating the inattention problems in the vast majority of children."

The treatment in question is pioneered by a British medical clinic, Dore. Founded by a father who came out of retirement to help his daughter after her severe dyslexia caused her to attempt suicide, Dore's methods work using individually prescribed eye, balance and sensory exercises designed to stimulate the cerebellum - a tangerine sized organ at the back of the head that is now understood to be involved in learning new skills (eg reading) and controlling attention.

Further information from <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-DYS.html>

Children with dyslexia should read out loud

The reading of children with dyslexia can be improved if they are allowed to read out loud or move their lips while reading. These actions activate the Broca's area of the brain which remembers speech muscle movements.

More information from <http://www.dyslexia-program.com/22a.html>

Great new web site for children with learning disabilities

The Askability website was inspired by The Children's Society, after workers there noticed that children misunderstood the news about the war in Iraq. They decided that there was a need for a website which was presented in symbol to enable children with learning difficulties to be informed about current affairs and also create a central forum for children to express their views and opinions. It's multi-sensory! More information from <http://www.askability.org.uk/>

Which medication for ADHD?

Researchers from the University of Illinois in Chicago, US, are hoping to help clinicians with one of the most pressing problems when prescribing medications to children for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) – will the child respond to a medication including stimulants, or will they do better with a drug that is a non-stimulant?

The scientists will compare two drugs commonly used to treat ADHD to determine if genetic factors predict which children will respond to either or both drugs.

The study, funded by the US National Institute of Mental Health and led by Dr. Mark Stein, will be conducted in Chicago and New York. Stein and colleagues will enroll 160 children and adolescents between ages 7 and 17 in Chicago. Dr. Jeffrey Newcorn of Mt. Sinai School of Medicine will head the New York site.

Participants will undergo psychiatric evaluations, IQ and achievement tests, a blood test, an electrocardiogram and a physical exam. They will then receive several doses of atomoxetine (a non-stimulant medication), methylphenidate (a stimulant medication), and a placebo, during a carefully monitored blind dosing sequence to determine their optimal response to each medication.

During the 12- to 15-week study, researchers will assess the children's ADHD symptoms, social functioning, problem-solving skills and sleep patterns to determine the efficacy and tolerability of each medication.

Previous research conducted by Stein and colleagues found that children with a variant form of a dopamine transporter gene — a variant known to be associated with ADHD — responded poorly to stimulant medication and had more side effects at lower doses. The new study will test whether patients with this genetic marker respond better to non-stimulant medication.

"At the end of the study we hope to be able to look at a child's biological characteristics to statistically predict who is more likely to respond to a certain medication and to determine who is more likely not to respond or to have a particular side effect," Stein said.

"The study provides an idealized standard of care in that the children will be carefully evaluated during their treatment with two different medications, with frequent monitoring that typically does not occur during the normal course of ADHD treatment," said Stein.

At the end of the trial, participants will be referred back to their primary care provider or given a referral for ongoing treatment with information learned from the study.

Resources

Books

They Are What You Feed Them by Dr. Alex Richardson

This is a book for parents, parents-to-be, students, teachers, school and prison administrators, educational physiologists, and anyone who cares, or should care, about what they and others are eating. It will answer many questions about how what we eat can influence our personalities as well as our physical bodies.

A Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, University of Oxford, UK, founding director of FAB (Food and Behaviour) Research, and a former teacher, Dr. Alex Richardson is an expert on the effect of nutrition on psychological phenomena. Always interested in the practical benefits of her investigations, she works closely with educational and health practitioners as well as support groups and charities, such as the Autism Treatment Trust and the Dyslexia Research Trust. She says that she has written this book to share her discoveries on how diet can affect children's behaviour, learning and mood, and that although they are relevant to all children, she has found that these findings may be especially important to those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

Some prime points to take away:

1. eat fresh and in season
2. know where your food is coming from and what, if anything, has been done to it to improve its shelf-life in stores
3. avoid the use of over-refined foods with their colourings and additives (this will save you lots of time and money when you go to the grocery store)
4. always consult with your child's doctor before introducing major dietary changes
5. be sure to vary your menus
6. introduce new foods slowly and with respect for your children's preferences
7. involve your children in meal preparations
8. offer choices
9. be sure to explain why we eat certain things, and how these are necessary for good functioning bodies and minds
10. set a good example for your children to follow

The information contained in this book is of great value to all of us, not just children. But children are the most vulnerable among us, and Dr. Richardson has rightly directed her attention here. Profits from the sale of this book will go directly to the Food and Behaviour Research Trust (<http://www.fabresearch.org/>) to help fund further investigations. All of her research into the importance of nutrition is independent of any commercial influences or interests.

ISBN: 0007182252, 2006, 448 pages, paperback, £8.57.

Building a Joyful Life with your Child who has Special Needs by Nancy J. Whiteman and Linda Roan-Yager

All parents want the best for their child, and for parents of children with special needs, this can mean that their own well-being is neglected. Drawing from their own experiences of parenting children with special needs, interviews and workshops with parents, and research findings, Nancy J. Whiteman and Linda Roan-Yager explore practical ways in which parents can develop a resilient and positive attitude towards caring.

This book considers the challenges of caring for children with physical, developmental and mental health disorders and proposes methods such as learning to see events through your child's own eyes, celebrating their strengths and achievements and recognising how others can help your child. Chapters deal with key topics such as coping with a diagnosis, discussing support needs with a child's teachers and explaining a child's differences to their peers, and the authors stress the importance of parents building support systems for themselves and their children. Crucially, *Building a Joyful Life* warns against parents neglecting their own needs, and includes exercises to be completed by parents which will help them to find ways of regaining balance in their lives.

ISBN 1 84310 841 0, 2006, 208 pages, paperback, £12.99/US\$19.95

More details from: <http://www.jkp.com/new/1-84310-841-0>

Special Stories for Disability Awareness; Stories and Activities for Teachers, Parents and Professionals by Mal Leicester
Illustrated by Taryn Shrigley-Wightman

Stories both educate and entertain. We learn from them and the learning is fun. They also stimulate our imagination and creativity. In this collection of short stories, the heroes and heroines are disabled children who defy the stereotypes associated with being disabled.

Special Stories on Disability Awareness provides stories that fire the imagination and promote disability awareness and discussion among children aged 4–11 about universal issues such as fear, loss, feeling 'different', bullying, exclusion, joy, success, friendship and emotional growth. The stories provide a safe environment for young children to discuss painful emotions as well as a tool for teachers, parents and professionals to understand the experiences of disabled children.

Each chapter features an engaging story, linked discussion and learning materials as well as suggestions for activities and photocopyable handouts. All those who work in early education or support young children will find this an invaluable resource.

ISBN-10: 1-84310-390-7 ISBN-13: 9781843103905, 2006, 160 pages, paperback, £17.99, \$29.95.

An Asperger Dictionary of Everyday Expressions
2nd edition by Ian Stuart Hamilton

This revised and expanded edition adds over 300 new expressions that help unlock the meaning of everyday expressions.

Both informative and entertaining, the book addresses an important aspect of social communication for people with Asperger Syndrome, who use direct, precise language and 'take things literally'. This dictionary aims to dispel any confusion that arises from the misinterpretation of language. It provides explanations of over 5000 idiomatic expressions and a useful guide to their politeness level. Each expression is accompanied by a clear explanation of its meaning and when and how it might be used. The expressions are taken from British and American English, with some Australian expressions included as well.

Praise for the first edition:

'This is a truly inspirational book and teaching tool and a very successful dictionary for all. It should be on the bookshelves of every inclusive classroom, house and office.' – *Good Autism Practice*

ISBN 1 84310 518 7, November 2006, 256 pages, paperback, £13.99/US\$19.95 .

How To Be Yourself in a World That's Different
An Asperger's Syndrome Study Guide for Adolescents by Yuko Yoshida. Translated by Esther Sanders

How to Be Yourself in a World That's Different is an accessible guide to Asperger's Syndrome (AS) written for young readers who have been diagnosed with AS and other autism spectrum conditions.

The book features a clear explanation of the condition, including common symptoms, such as a hypersensitivity to touch and difficulties with balance and coordination. The characteristics and symptoms of other syndromes that often coincide with AS are also discussed, for example ADHD and tics, as well as temporary states of mental dysfunction, including depression, anxiety, obsessive and compulsive behaviours, and catatonia.

This informative and encouraging text highlights the positive aspects of autism spectrum, but it also acknowledges the daily challenges faced by young people with AS and, crucially, offers strategies for dealing with them. Using case examples, Yoshida explores the difficulties of disclosing a diagnosis, takes readers through the stages of practising key social skills, and offers advice on seeking support.

ISBN-10: 1-84310-504-7 ISBN-13: 9781843105046, 2006, 112 pages, paperback, £9.99, \$14.95

DVDs/videos

Discussing Dyslexia is a 25-minute video aimed at teachers, youth workers, parents and others interested in learning more about dyslexia. It is also a valuable resource for young people with dyslexia, enabling them to share the experiences of other dyslexics. The main part of the video consists of students with dyslexia from Waltham Forest (UK) secondary schools, Heathcote, Lamma, Rush Croft and Warwick Boys', talking about dyslexia. They also carried out the interviewing, filming and editing of the video. In the final section of the video a teacher and two older students from the area discuss how dyslexia has affected them.

Part funded by a grant from the Jack Petchey Foundation
Copies are available at £8 per copy from the Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association
54 Church Hill, LONDON E17 9RY, UK.
place.

Conferences and events

November 2006-December 2007

Seminars on speech development

Heidelberg, Bochum, Hamburg and Munchen

Seminars led by Dr. Zvi Penner. More information from info@gk-quest.de
www.fortbildung-sprache.de

2 December 2006

ASK lecture on dyslexia

Webster University, Geneva Switzerland

Due to the huge interest in Dr. Gavin Reid's lecture, the event will now take place in the common room inside the LLC Bldg at Webster University. For programme information:

http://www.allspecialkids.org/DrGavinRied_Lecture_02Dec06.htm

4 December 2006

An introduction to NLP

The Pickerings Hotel, Garstang, UK

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is an approach to behavioural changes based on psychological principles. NLP encourages us to develop flexibility of thought and behaviour to achieve more from any interaction. It helps us to develop an awareness of our emotional responses and to gain more effective control over them. These strategies and ideas will be useful for you personally, will help you to be more effective at work and will be of great value to the children/ young people you work with.

More information from carol@achieve4u.org

12 December 2006

Inspire, Include, Improve – HeadsUpScotland 2nd annual conference,

Falkirk, Scotland, UK

More information from www.childreninscotland.org.uk/iii

14 December 2006

Le TDA/H et les fêtes : gestion du stress

Brussels, Belgium

Organised by TDA/H Belgique, the Francophone Belgian ADHD association, this session will deal with children and adults and take place at 8 pm at 24 Rue de la Glacière, 1060 Bruxelles (Ma Campagne). More information at info@tdah.be

27 January 2007

British Dyslexia Association AGM

London, UK

The British Dyslexia Association will hold its Annual General Meeting – postponed from 18 November – at the Institute of Child Health. Further information from:

admin@bdadyslexia.org.uk

Tip of the month

Christmas! Some web sites where you can find presents especially for children with special needs – thank you ASK!

www.specialneedstoys.com

www.fledglings.org.uk

www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk

http://toysrus.richfx.com/catalog_toysrus/diffabled_06_t/diffabled_06_t.html

A joyful Christmas to you all!

ECOC Online News will be back in the New Year.