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# Learning Disabilities

## Association of Wellington County

*learning disabilities, different paths, same destination*

SPRING 2009

### Welcome

The arrival of new season brings a new newsletter for our Association. Spring is in the air! The Association is anticipating our spring information session on April 22nd and plant sale on May 9th.

Lately I have heard more parents sharing their stories of struggle and triumph about raising children with learning disabilities and or ADHD. One of the messages we continue to tell parents is that you are your child's greatest resource and advocate. To prove the point, I recently heard from one successful adult that he is very grateful for the support and belief his parents put into him as a youngster and fully credits his success today to his parents.

Our association needs to grow in order to continue to provide resources and to advocate on many levels for change in how learning disabilities are viewed and accommodated. The bigger the voice, the bigger the impact. If you have skills or time or by simply becoming a member, you are helping shape the future for

for people with learning disabilities.

Kara McFarlane, Board Chair

### Skilled Volunteers Needed

Do you have a few hours a month to join the Board of the Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County. Board meetings take place monthly for two hours.

Or

Do you have some spare time to join one of our planning committees to organize community events or fundraise.

For more information please contact us at 519-837-2050 or email us at [wclda@rogers.com](mailto:wclda@rogers.com)

The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County is a non-profit charitable organization. We are a chapter of The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and affiliated with The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.

Led by a volunteer Board of Directors who advise and guide the actions of the association, we also have two part-time staff members.

Our local Chapter is supported by the United Way of Guelph-Wellington and our chapter fundraising activities.

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## **LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO POLICY STATEMENT ON EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES**

The following policy statement of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), as recommended by the LDAO Legislation and Policy Committee, on November 17, 2008. **Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) Policy Statement on Educational Inclusion for Students with Learning Disabilities** (presented to the LDAC Executive Committee in February 2005, the LDAC Board of Directors in June 2005 and ratified on November 26, 2005).

### **STATEMENT**

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) does not support full educational inclusion or any policies that mandate the same placement, instruction, or treatment of all students with learning disabilities or the idea that all students with learning disabilities must be served only in regular education classrooms at the exclusion of all other special education placement options. LDAC believes that full inclusion, when defined this way, violates the rights of parents and students with disabilities guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedom* and *Human Rights Codes* which guarantee education equality and freedom from discrimination and rejects the arbitrary placement of all students in any one setting. LDAC supports the availability of a continuum of education services as prescribed in an individual educational plan for each student with learning disabilities to ensure success and must be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of students with learning disabilities by:

- 1) Providing a range of options and services and diverse learning environments (placements) to meet the specific needs of each student.
- 2) Providing the most enabling environment for that student that will effectively meet the student's best interests socially, emotionally, behaviourally, physically and educationally; and,
- 3) Focus on what is in the best interest of the student and, in that context, consider all the needs of the student as expressed by the student and his/her parents and that of their consulting professionals.

### **RATIONALE**

Because each student with learning disabilities has unique needs, an individualized education plan and placement must be tailored on individual strengths and needs. For one student, the plan may be provided in the regular classroom yet for another student, the regular classroom may be an inappropriate placement and may need alternative instructional environments, teaching strategies, and/or materials that cannot or will not be provided within the context of the regular classroom environment. The severity and nature of the individual needs should determine the alternative teaching strategies, accommodations, resources, supports and placement required.

*learning  
disabilities—  
different paths,  
same destination*

## Roy Cooper Scholarship

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario is offering a \$1,000 scholarship award in the name of a long serving LDAO Board Member, Roy Cooper. The scholarship is available to a high school student, who has a documented Learning Disability and will be attending first year at a University or College during the 2009-2010 school year, majoring in engineering and/or a physical sciences discipline. For more information see the scholarship registration forms attached.

## National Early Literacy Panel

### National Early Literacy Panel

The National Institute for Literacy in the United States has a very interesting new publication recently published (2009) entitled **Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel**. Their main web site at [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov) You will find an executive summary of 11 pages (the full report is 260 pages).

## CareerMeter at Mohawk College

The CareerMeter features interactive feedback on career choices, videos of students, graduates and professors, as well as information about the many exciting fields of study at Mohawk College. The site can be visited at:

<http://www.mohawkcollege.ca/careermeter>

## Families Needed for Study

Families are needed for a research project at Sick Kids, which is investigating the genetic basis of reading disabilities. We require the participation of families and their children, age 6 to 16 years, who have reading problems. Parents will receive a report describing their child's test results, which may be helpful in educational planning. All testing will take place at Sick Kids.

## Successful 50/50 at Guelph Storm Game

We had a very successful fundraiser at the Guelph Storm Game on Family Day, February 16/09!

Congratulations to the storm fan who took home \$2000.00. Thanks to our volunteers: Matthew, Sarah, Daniel, Emily, Katie, Cheryl, Craig, Andrew, Brett, Matt and Pat.

As well we appreciate the support of the Storm Trackers and the Guelph Storm organization!

# ADHD & Women

## Juggling Family, Work, Short Attention Spans

ADHD can look a lot different than what you might expect. Instead of focusing on young, wildly uncontrollable boys, doctors and researchers are beginning to recognize that both genders and all ages can be affected by this disorder—and that women face special challenges that can make it difficult for them to be diagnosed and treated.

For a long time after ADHD was first identified in the 1970s, diagnoses and research focused on the little boy who bounces off walls, does poorly in school, and constantly disrupts the rest of his class.

"You had these boys who were aggressive and difficult to manage and those were the ones being brought into clinics initially. The research was done on clinic populations. And the diagnostic manuals were all based on that research," says Ellen Littman, Ph.D., co-author of the book *Understanding Girls with ADHD* and one of the first psychologists to start focusing on gender differences with the disorder. "It wasn't even until 1980 that we started to accept that you could have ADHD without the hyperactive component."

And that's a big deal for women with ADHD, most of whom, according to experts like Littman, don't display that classic hyperactive behavior. Instead, Littman says, women and girls are most likely to be inattentive. The daydreamers. The space cadets. The little girls who making eye contact with the teacher, but whose minds are 1,000 miles away. To make things more complicated, experts say young girls often have elaborate systems that allow them to compensate and still do well in school. "A girl with ADHD will stay up very late into the night, re-do homework, have parents help her. She turns in good work and looks bright. But what we don't see is the effort she puts in," says Patricia Quinn, M.D., director of the National Center for Girls and Women with ADHD.

The result has been that girls often don't get the help they need; what's going on with them doesn't look like what their parents and teachers have come to expect from ADHD. Twenty-five years ago, Littman says, it wasn't unusual to see 10 boys diagnosed for every 1 girl. But the situation is improving. Today, now that doctors and researchers know that inattentiveness, and not hyperactivity, is the key characteristic of the disorder, those numbers are closer to equal, "which is what you'd expect for some-

thing that isn't a sex-linked disease," Quinn says.

But for girls who aren't diagnosed in childhood, the struggle continues as they age. That, too, is a relatively new concept in ADHD diagnosis. "The theory used to be that ADD disappeared at puberty, and they said that because the most hyperactive symptoms disappeared around [then]," Littman says. But, she says, as research has changed the medical community's perception of what ADHD is, more and more doctors and mental health professionals are recognizing that adults can be affected, too. And that's a big help for women. ADHD interferes with the ability to manage the household chores women are often expected to manage.

Women describes times when they set out to do the dishes, but quickly became distracted by one unrelated chore after another until she ended up reading on the couch for an hour, finishing none of the tasks she meant to. Quinn and Littman say it's very common for women with ADHD to feel overwhelmed, be chronically stressed and disorganized and be unable to prioritize the tasks expected of her, particularly in relationships and parenting.

**Continued next page.**

## Submit an article to our newsletter

The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County accepts articles for inclusion in our newsletter. Articles will be chosen at the discretion of the newsletter committee and as space allows.

Contact us at:  
**519-837-2050 or**

**email**

**[wclda@rogers.com](mailto:wclda@rogers.com)**

**for newsletter**

**deadlines.**

ADHD when they bring in one of their own children for testing. Finally, women in their late 40s are also frequently diagnosed. That's because the symptoms of ADHD appear to have strong connections to estrogen levels in the body. As those levels fall during menopause, women who've only had mild symptoms can suddenly lose their ability to juggle multiple responsibilities.

"She says that women tend to get diagnosed with ADHD in waves. A common time is just under the age of 30, as many women are getting married or having their first child.

Those events can throw off routines and make it difficult to compensate for the symptoms. In their early 40s, many women who've struggled for years often realize they might have ADHD when they bring in one of their own children for testing. Finally, women in their late 40s are also frequently diagnosed. That's because the symptoms of ADHD appear to have strong connections to estrogen levels in the

body. As those levels fall during menopause, women who've only had mild symptoms can suddenly lose their ability to juggle multiple responsibilities.

ADHD and its treatments can be very differently for women and men. This is especially true when it comes to hormonal cycles, like menopause and periods. For example, as estrogen levels rise and fall over the course of a month, a woman's ability to manage her symptoms can also go up and down. For some women, starting a hormonal method of birth control can make monthly cycles smoother by keeping estrogen at a more constant level.

Women also have unique concerns related to pregnancy and breastfeeding. When women became pregnant and stop taking Ritalin, causing a noticeable drop-off in their organizational and social skills. (As with other mental-health drugs, such as antidepressants, experts say it's vitally important that women consult a doctor about what's safe to use before they become pregnant.)

Another problem is that women, more than men, tend to have other mental health disorders, such as depression and chronic anxiety, often brought on or exacerbated by the ADHD. In fact, Quinn and Littman say that women with ADHD are frequently misdiagnosed with depression. And while it's true that many of them *are* depressed, that's usually a related symptom of the ADHD and the way it wreaks havoc in their life.

The good news: Once a woman does get an accurate ADHD diagnosis, things start looking up. "For women, this is a very hopeful diagnosis," Quinn says. "We have effective medication and behavioral therapies and I've seen so many changes. Once they're treated, women can go and be anything they want to be."

Read more information on ADHD in women and girls from the [National Center for Girls and Women with ADHD](#).

# Learning Problems Not Always Easy To Identify

March 5, 2009  
 Andrea Gordon  
 Family Issues Reporter  
 The Toronto Star

*This is a portrait of a child moving from grade to grade without learning. There are thousands more like him, slipping into indifference and insecurity while schools rubber stamp their progress.*

When her son talks, Linda listens. But she knows behaviour – and a mother's intuition – often speak louder than words.

Linda has listened for years while Josh, 13, claimed he didn't need extra help in school.

She has listened to teachers shrug off her concerns that he still counts on his fingers and wrestles with writing a book report. After all, his grades are mostly Bs and Cs. He's a well-behaved kid, they tell her, an average student.

But Linda has been watching and worrying since Josh was in Grade 5, as he struggled with homework night after night in their GTA apartment.

It was around then she realized her son couldn't remember passages he read. "He does much better if you read it aloud to him," she explains.

Josh brought home decimal problems he had no idea how to solve. report cards noted he wasn't par-

ticipating in class.

His confidence began to slip. He got easily frustrated and gave up quickly, even while playing hockey. He woke up at night, sometimes ended up sleeping on the floor of his parents' bedroom. Linda knew something wasn't right.

"When it's your child, you just can't ignore it," she says. "You have to do something."

**EVERY DAY**, in classrooms across the province, children like Josh gnaw their pencils and puzzle over fractions and spelling lists. Every day, parents like Linda try to figure out if their child's uphill battles are just part of life's inevitable bumps or whether it's time to intervene.

Some children make it clear, even if the message isn't expressed in words. They may throw tantrums, have trouble falling asleep or not want to get out of bed in the morning. They may cry over homework or refer to themselves as stupid. They may disrupt the classroom or get into schoolyard fights.

Or they may quietly disengage without anyone even noticing.

There are myriad and complex reasons, ranging from learning disabilities to mental illnesses. Maybe they are being bullied or their parents are divorcing. They may be wired on too much technology, not enough exercise, lack of sleep.

Maybe the teacher doesn't have time to cater to a range of learning styles.

The challenge for worried parents like Linda is twofold: in an overburdened system, finding out what exactly is wrong; then, armed with that knowledge, getting the child the appropriate help.

"There is a great gaping maw of understanding for parents," says Toronto District School Board trustee Cathy Dandy, who runs an annual workshop for parents seeking help for struggling children.

"The system itself, because of the lack of resources, has become ever more closed. And, let's face it, it's time-consuming work to inform parents and empower them to ask questions." Annie Kidder of People for Education says her grassroots advocacy organization fields more calls from parents about special education and how to get help than any other issue.

"It's because it's so complex, because it takes a lot of advocacy...and you have to have some understanding of how the system works. "Almost 30 years ago, Bill 82 was passed, giving Ontario students with "exceptionalities" – those who learn differently from the majority whether they have learning disabilities or are gifted – the right to receive special education programs and services in the public school system. It's estimated one in 10 Canadians has a learning disability. Today, almost 15 per cent of Ontario's 2.1 million public school students receive those

services. That translates to roughly four children in every class of 30. The definition of "learning disability," according to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, is a neurological impairment to one or more processes that help a person think, perceive, remember or learn. It's estimated one in 10 Canadians has a learning disability.

There are many variations: disabilities may be related to the way people understand and remember what they hear and see; how they plan and make decisions; whether they can remember; whether they can pay attention.

In school, learning disabilities can mean it's harder for kids to read, express themselves, keep up in math. According to Ministry of Education statistics from 2006/07, about 29 per cent of students in special ed had a learning disability, 9 per cent were gifted and 8 per cent had a mild intellectual disability. Other special needs include behavioural problems, autism, and developmental and physical disabilities. But one-third of students receiving the supports had not been formally "identified" or diagnosed with a condition affecting learning. The number of students being pushed and pulled along is suggested by statistics revealed in a 2008 report by the Canadian Council on Learning, which found that one-third of Canadian parents have hired tutors to assist their kids.

In the meantime, as a Toronto District School Board survey showed recently, teachers are dealing with a complex student body that includes a range of cultures and languages. Poverty and its effects on learning are an increasing concern. There are higher incidences of attention and behavioural problems. Statistics show roughly one in five Ontario children and youth has a mental health problem and, often, these are concurrent with learning disabilities.

For Linda, doing nothing is not an option. She has allowed us to use her son's story – all names have been changed to protect their privacy – because she hit a roadblock. She may not know the statistics, but she does understand the perils for kids who feel marginalized at school. Research from organizations like the learning disabilities association shows students with learning problems who become disillusioned are twice as likely to drop out and are at higher risk of substance abuse, mental health problems and poor employment prospects.

Linda has asked teachers to help. As a result, Josh received informal supports including weekly school-based tutoring and an after-school math club. But, still, his mother spends night after night in a Sisyphean challenge, re-explaining homework, encouraging Josh and trying to prevent him from sliding backward. She was convinced long ago that it was time to take the next step – a formal psycho-educational assessment to try to determine the root of her son's difficulties. Is he one of those kids who needs more time to absorb material? Is he one of the many children drifting through school unengaged? Or does he have a learning problem?

The psycho-ed assessment is the tool that can provide some answers. The series of standard academic, cognitive and psychological tests measures intelligence and reasoning skills and diagnoses learning disabilities. The assessments, administered by trained psychologists or psychological associates, can identify attention problems or mental health issues related to a child's learning such as anxiety or depression. A diagnosis requires that other conditions that may affect learning – developmental delays, hearing or vision impairments, the impact of a different cultural background or being taught in a second language – are ruled out.

Students can get help beyond the classroom teacher, including a tailored learning plan, without a formal diagnosis, but assessments are the only way to qualify for many of the heavy-duty services that cost school boards extra money. This focus on finding children's deficiencies in order to teach them more effectively concerns some educators. "We have developed a huge network and system that accentuates the negatives more than the positives," says Toronto District School Board psychologist Tayyab Rashid. He says teaching kids to understand the way they learn and build on their assets makes them resilient, self-confident and successful.

The downside of labelling is evident in Josh's attitude. He would rather flounder than admit he "doesn't get it" or needs extra help. Like most teens, he just wants to be a normal kid who fits into the way the school system expects him to learn and perform.

Linda knows this but there isn't much choice. She needs answers for her son, and time is running out. She will jump at the first opportunity for an assessment. The good news for her is that assessments are available without a fee through Ontario school boards. The bad news is, unless a student's situation is considered urgent, he or she will have to wait.

The wait can be so long that advocates advise those who can afford it to pay for a private test, which costs an average of \$2,000. Linda is a mother of three sons and has a job working with children. Her husband is a physical labourer. She is ready to fight like a pit bull for what her middle son needs. But there is no money for private tutors, special schools or a private psycho-ed assessment.

Continued on next page.

So Josh has waited, and waited. He was in Grade 5 when Linda first asked the school to put him on the wait list for a school board assessment. She inquired each year; but other students in worse situations jumped ahead in the queue. At the beginning of Grade 8, with high school approaching, Linda discovered he had fallen off the list, which is reviewed each year to prioritize critical cases.

The Ministry of Education does not keep statistics on assessments or wait times because they are administered separately by the province's 72 school boards. However, in its 2008 survey of public schools, the advocacy group People for Education reported 36,000 elementary school children and 4,800 high school students were waiting for assessments. This is despite the widely accepted principle that early identification of learning disabilities or other problems that affect learning is critical to a child's long-term success.

Delays aren't the only problem. Judy Kerr, executive director of the learning disabilities association, says the assessment system is flawed because there are no set standards. The association wants universal screening of kids in primary grades to identify problems and start helping kids early,

long before most elementary schools typically start doing full assessments in Grade 2 or 3.

John McNamara, of the Canadian Association of Educational Psychology, says the current "wait to fail" model is not sustainable. For many kids, the help comes too late to catch up, says McNamara, also a professor who specializes in learning disabilities at Brock University in St. Catharines. The system is changing but it's happening slowly, he says. Progressive school boards are realizing that intensive intervention in the early years works better for children and will save money down the road. "Science knows now that if you do it early, you're changing the way the brain works."

**IT WAS TOO LATE** for an early intervention for Josh, but he still needed an assessment and Linda was stymied by red tape. This is where the *Star* stepped in. We were looking for an opportunity to observe the process and write about it but no major school board would allow us to be present. So, when we found Josh and heard his story, we offered to hire a psychologist with experience, credentials and recommendations to conduct a private assessment. Linda and the psychologist willingly participated to help shed light on the inner workings of such an important but little understood process.

*The Star observed from start to finish and watched the actual testing through observation glass in a separate room.*

*The day of testing and its aftermath are the subject of stories that can be found in the Living section of the Toronto Star, March 7, 2009.*

*<http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/article/596626>*

The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County does not endorse or recommend any facility or the methods, programs, products or treatments offered by such facilities. Our aim is to keep the community informed about services and facilities that are available to people with learning disabilities. We urge consumers and service providers to review carefully any programs and services in order to select those which will meet more appropriately the identified needs of the person with learning disabilities.

## Resources

### School for LD Students

LD/ADD/dyslexia Gr 1 to  
Gr 8

individualized programs  
for success

[www.talacademy.com](http://www.talacademy.com)

### Individual Education Plan

Learn how to develop an  
effective IEP for your  
child

[EC-Ontario.com](http://EC-Ontario.com)

### School Testing

Interactive Educational  
Online

Resources for Families in  
Ontario

[TVO.org/Parents](http://TVO.org/Parents)

## Upcoming Events

### Nonverbal Learning Disabilities

Please join the Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County on a presentation by Barbara Post, an itinerant NLD Resource Teacher with the Waterloo Region District School Board

Date: Wednesday, April 22, 2009

Time: 7:00—9:00 pm

Location: Community Room at Zehrs, corner of Imperial Rd &  
Paisley Rd., Guelph

There is no charge for this event. Seating is limited. Please reserve your seat by calling us at 519-837-2050 or email: [wclda@rogers.com](mailto:wclda@rogers.com).

Webster Educational Services and *Learning Outside the Box* 5th Annual LD Conference, Friday, May 8/09, Waterloo, Ont.

"What the Eye Doesn't See: *Understanding and Managing Behavioural and Emotional Issues in Students with Learning Differences*" with Dr. Maggie Mamen Ph.D. Registration info at:

[www.learningoutsidethebox.ca](http://www.learningoutsidethebox.ca)

### Donation / Membership Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tell: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Annual Dues: Family/individual \$50; S

tudent \$20; Professional \$75

I am interested in making a donation: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or volunteering:

### Membership Advantages:

Awareness and advocacy efforts on behalf of those with learning disabilities or ADHD at the local, provincial and national level, subscription to local and provincial newsletters, information on learning disabilities and ADHD use of local resources and support services.

Please mail this form and cheque to: Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario  
365 Bloor Street East, Suite 1004, Toronto, ON M4W 3L4

# Tax Tips

## *Recent Changes That Affect People With Disabilities and Their Families:*

### **Registered Disability Savings Plan**

The Federal Government has created the Registered Disability Savings Plan which is intended to create a long term savings plan for people with disabilities in Canada. The plan, which can be set up by the person with a disability or their parent or guardian allows for contributions of up to \$200,000 to be made now, for use in the future. Depending on family income, the Federal Government will provide Canadian Disability Savings Grants up to a maximum of \$3500 for a contribution of \$1500 each year up to a maximum of \$70,000 or until the beneficiary of the plan reaches age 49. For low income families, they will provide a \$1,000 Canadian Disability Savings Bond without any contributions to the plan up to a maximum of \$20,000 or until the beneficiary of the plan reaches age 49. The income figure that is used in the calculation of grant and bond eligibility is the income of the parents if the person with the disability is under 18 years of age or the person himself if he is over 18 years of age.

In order to qualify for the RDSP, a person with a disability must first qualify for the Disability Tax Credit. The information contained below on how to apply for the DTD is therefore even more important. If a person wishes to take advantage of the Canadian Disability Savings Grants and Bonds for 2008, they must have qualified for the DTC in the 2006 taxation year and must have filed a 2006 income tax return; even if they have no taxable income to report. The deadline for applying for 2008 grants and bonds is March 2, 2009. After March 2, 2009, the 2009 grants and bonds can be applied for using 2007 income as the basis for the calculations.

An important feature of the RDSP is that it will not affect people's entitlement to Disability Benefits in most Provinces. Check with your benefits program administrator to see if your Province has exempt the RDSP from claw back.