

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF
ONTARIO— LAMBTON COUNTY CHAPTER

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FALL 2009

From the desk of the Executive Director

Because we love it so much, we have done a semi-move once again. This move was for the better, as we gained a few hundred extra square feet. Three tenants on the second floor of 560 Exmouth shifted at the end of August and the Learning Disabilities Association is now in one huge suite at the north end of the building—immediately next to Giant Tiger. We would like to thank Ontario Works who provided us with an excellent and efficient crew to help with our move.

Kids have been in school for a few weeks now and hopefully routines are being created and all is going well in homes everywhere. In my job I talk to a lot of parents—and I find constant encouragement and strength in their ability to persevere on behalf of their children. While I see and hear good things happening for many families, including my own in terms of my own son, I am often told things that simply make my blood boil. **Although in the minority by far, these negative traits have to be eradicated.** I have a wish list for this school year—however it is a bit of a reverse wish list. There are things I wish to cross off the list—things I hope never happen this school year.

1. *Exclusion:* I spoke to a parent this past spring whose child had been excluded from attending the end of year class trip for **six years in a row**. Because of an apparent inability to follow rules and/or behavioural challenges, the child has continually been banned from trips. Parent has offered to act as a chaperone but the response is continually

no.

2. *Negative comments/sarcasm directed at a child by an adult:* Case in point: “There are winners in the world and there are losers in the world. You are a loser.” These words were spoken by a teacher to an intermediate elementary student who has a learning disability. The comment has probably been long forgotten by the teacher, but the student and parents remember it well.
3. *Shortened Days/Time Spent Out of Class:* The Ministry of Education has mandated that each student shall have 194 instructional days in each school year. Yet, is anyone tracking the amount of time students who have special needs are not in the classroom? Many students spend too much time in the hallway, in the office or in send-out rooms. While shortened days can be necessary when it is in the best interests of the student, all too frequently these kids are sent out of class to benefit others.
4. *Ignorance regarding Rights:* While institutions such as schools are very good about informing people what the rules are, sometimes the important piece that is missed is what our rights are as citizens. All professionals working in a school setting should be aware of three things—of course *The Education Act*, secondly the Ontario Human Rights Code and thirdly the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Human Rights Code supersedes the Education Act. Disabilities including ADHD are covered under in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

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We do not endorse any particular method, therapy, treatment, institution, opinion expressed or the methods described through public meetings, guest speakers, Resource Centre library, newsletter or product. We do endorse your right to know about them!

From the Desk ... continued

Frequently students who are diagnosed with ADHD but not a learning disability (perhaps because they have not received a psych-ed assessment) are denied accommodations because they are told “ADHD does not qualify as a category under the Education Act”. However, it is clearly covered under the Human Rights Code, which supersedes the Education Act. Some months ago someone sent me a link to a letter from our Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, to Dr. Svec, a local psychologist. The letter is posted on Dr. Svec’s website and can be found at <http://www.drsvvec.com/index.php?0=document&1=40>

Someone should tell Ms Wynne that hundreds if not thousands of students and their parents are told that ADHD does not qualify for assistance at school and do not receive much-needed accommodations or understanding. While we are the Learning Disabilities Association, not CHADD, a large segment of the calls we receive are regarding ADHD. The disorder can go hand in hand with a learning disability. We know that children with ADHD (as well as children with learning disabilities) are more susceptible to developing other serious disorders—anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression, to list a few. If children with a predominant disorder of ADHD are not adequately served in a school setting and not accommodated as is their right under the Human Rights Code, who is responsible when the children develop serious secondary disorders that can debilitate them for life?

Undoubtedly teaching a classroom in today’s world is a challenge. I absolutely would not be able to teach—while I love children and have empathy and understanding and kindness, I can be impatient. I am not organized—and Lord knows, I am *not* strong in math. However, when my husband and I became parents we knew that we would have to step up our game—grow up in effect—in order to try to set good examples for our children. I don’t want my children to hear me badmouthing someone or being petty. My husband has worked hard to temper his sarcastic Scottish sense of humour. We want our sons to see

us as good people—kind, tolerant, inclusive and positive. Our sons are not little anymore—15 and 17—but they are still impressionable. Using sarcasm on my one son would probably fly right over his head—it would be a low blow and it would be beneath us as adults. I don’t believe it is too much to ask that others also think before they speak—especially when dealing with students who are not strong—academically or emotionally.

In spite of the many initiatives the Ministry has undertaken to increase parent involvement in schools, parents still feel that their voices are not being heard, their concerns regarding their children are met with resistance and that schools are not always welcoming to parents. I think it is safe to say that many parents I talk to feel uneasy when walking into their child’s school or when the phone rings and it is the school calling—it is not usually good news. I have been at school meetings for my child and others and been told “You are unique. Most parents don’t do the amount of work you do to help their child.”

My experience here has been directly opposite to this viewpoint. Most parents would do anything in their power to help their children and often feel stymied by a system that not only isn’t helping their child, but discriminating against them (see points 1-4). There is no question that regular classroom teachers are super busy—I fully believe this to be true. In spite of the incredible workload educators today have, it is absolutely no excuse for some of the negative comments or exclusionary behaviour that have been reported to us. **Keep the focus on the needs of the child.** Needs should drive a decision to develop an IEP, not endless diagnoses. If a child is struggling in school, help them. It really is that simple. It doesn’t take away from anyone else to help someone who needs it—helping raises us all up.

Annie

Fall Programming

Kids Positive Social Skills and Self-Esteem Building Program

Next 10-week program begins Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2008 from 4:30 to 6:00 pm.

Please note that although the program is designed for children with learning disabilities and/or ADHD, children do not have to be diagnosed in order to attend. The cost for the 10-week program is \$60.00 for members and \$125.00 for non-members. One-year membership is \$50. As always, financial help is available if required. Kids Positive is designed for children 6-13 who need help with social skills and self-esteem building. **Call 519-344-4919 for registration and further details.**

Parenting Program

5 weeks beginning Thursday, October 15. 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Our five week parent advocacy program will go over some of the following issues:

- individual education plans and IPRCs
- Co-existing conditions (such as ADHD)
- How to deal with challenges at home and school
- Supports for families.

While there is no charge for the Parenting Program, registration is required. Please contact the Resource Centre at 519-344-4919 or ldalc@xcelco.on.ca for registration information.

“Most people never run far enough on their first wind to find out they've got a second. Give your dreams all you've got and you'll be amazed at the energy that comes out of you.” **William James**

Homework Hub

Homework Hub now operates from different locations on different nights. Please see below:

Mondays and Tuesdays 3:00 to 5:30 – House by the Side of the Road, 454 Kathleen Avenue. Phone#: 519-332-0216.

Wednesdays 3:00 to 5:30 – Dow Centre for Youth, corner of Indian and Wellington Street.

Please note that Homework Hub is free and staffed by a qualified educator. Students need to bring work with them—either homework assigned by their teacher or something academic for them to work on.

Homework Hub was designed to relieve stress in the home around homework completion. Students do not have to be diagnosed with a disability to attend.

Funding for Homework Hub comes from a Venture Grant provided by the United Way of Sarnia-Lambton.

For more information or to volunteer with Homework Hub, please call 519-344-4919 or email ldalc@xcelco.on.ca.



IEPs are due Wednesday, Sept. 30 for schools that started on Sept. 1 and on Wednesday, Oct. 7 for schools that started on September 8.



Giving Thanks

Thank you to Giant Tiger and The Brick for allowing us to hold fundraising barbeques at the stores in August and September.

Thank you to Sarnia Community Foundation for a grant in the amount of \$2,250. The grant will allow us to recruit volunteer tutors to work one on one with students. We have over 50 children waiting for a volunteer tutor.

We held a Volleyball Tournament in June. The amount of work that goes into organizing an event of this size is monumental. Thank you to summer student Samantha Hunt for her hard work and dedication in organizing this event. Samantha was assisted by our second summer student, Elyse Duchesne. Thanks also to Frank Pinsonneault at Bluewater Funpark for allowing us to hold the tournament at the park. A more complete listing of the sponsors and donors will be in the next newsletter.

Collaborations

We believe in collaborations. We are too small on our own to make the kind of positive change we wish to see in our community. Therefore, we have partnered with other associations and initiatives in our community that we believe in. There are some things happening in our community that are so worthy of mention that we wanted to give a shout out to them.

Artwalk—First Friday. This summer's two day Artwalk event was simply the highlight of the summer for us—Bayfest notwithstanding. It was so wonderful to see the thousands of people enjoying themselves on Christina Street in June. First Friday has become an absolute highlight every month for many of us. From the beautiful art to the tasty martinis and ending the night at the Ups'N'Downs for excellent live music—there is the feeling that something special is happening in downtown Sarnia—thank you so much to Shawn McKnight and the rest of the arts community for bringing vibrant new life to downtown Sarnia.

Autism Society. Thank you to Cheryl Dart at the Autism Society for thinking of us earlier this summer for a funding source. Many small non-profits struggle big-time for funding and volunteers—and sometimes this dynamic causes challenges to collaboration. However, the Autism Society helped us obtain summer exchange students from Quebec this summer—so a giant thanks go out to the Autism Society.

Race to Erase. Last year we were a pitstop on the Race to Erase in Sarnia. Because we wanted to stay involved in this wonderful and fun initiative, this year a team of four from our chapter decided to enter the race. Our team—Annie Sheehan, Sue Bendall, Kathy Culverhouse and Denise O'Brien did our level best on September 19. We raised the \$500 we needed to and had a great time helping support the recipients of this year's Race—Goodwill Industries. Thanks go to the Race to Erase organizers—The Chris Dawson Foundation. This event is so well organized there was barely a hitch that we could see. However, we wish to dispute our placing 29th

out of 31 teams. There must be some mistake. Next year we intend to do better—but we couldn't possibly have more fun than we had this year. For more information on Race to Erase see <http://sarnia.racetoerase.com/menu.php?>

Volunteer Recruitment Night

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2009 6:00-7:30 p.m.

We are looking for volunteer tutors to work one on one with children. Tutoring usually occurs at local libraries on a schedule that suits the tutor and the family. Tutors receive training and a tutor bag filled with resources to use with student. Join educator Denise O'Brien on October 20 to find out how you can help a struggling student succeed. This event and support for tutors is made possible thanks to a grant received from Sarnia Community Foundation. For more information please contact the Resource Centre at 519-344-4919 or by email at ldalc@xcelco.on.ca. We have more than 50 children on our waitlist.



Things that impress us.....

- Parents Standing Together Tenant's Association, Kathleen and Walnut Ave., Sarnia. They can be found on Facebook by searching **Parents Standing Together Tenants Association**. Email them at pst.association@live.ca
- Circles—a hand's on action plan to end poverty in our community. See important event coming Oct. 27/09—insert with this newsletter.

Noteworthy Items/Events

People for Education Conference

Saturday, November 7, 2009

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., York University, Toronto. Cost: \$50

Keynote address: Dennis Shirley, Professor, the Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Workshop and Discussion Sessions include:

- *Panel Discussion:* Schools in the 21st century
- *Panel Discussion:* What *really* helps kids: what parents can do that actually works
- What's the difference between literacy and reading?
- School council challenges
- Special education: a parent's guide to negotiating IEPs
- ArtSmarts – how one art program has transformed schools
- Hot topics—you tell us!
- Testing: the pro's, the con's, and the alternatives
- Education in the recession: what will the new funding formula look like?
- Technology in the classroom: how is it changing education, the way we teach, and the way we learn?
- Who does what? Navigating the system to get the answers or the help that you need
- School health: a prescription for improvement
- Making technology work for parents
- Address by the Minister of Education

<http://www.peopleforeducation.com/getinvolved/annualconference>

Research Study—Sick Kids Hospital, Toronto

Genetic Basis of Reading Disabilities—current study requiring families and children between the ages of 6 and 16. For more information and to learn about more participating in other research studies, please see <http://www.sickkids.ca/CareersVolunteering/participate-in-research/index.html>

Results from the study may improve the understanding of how and what genes are involved in reading disabilities.

People for Education Annual Report on Public Schools 2009

<http://www.peopleforeducation.com/annualreportschools09>

Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Charles Beer has been appointed by the Province of Ontario to conduct a review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Charles Beer's review will involve consultations, meetings and submissions. The closest local meeting to us will be held in London on October 20, 2009. Mr. Beer is also accepting written comments. For more information, please visit

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/accesson/business/environment/index.htm>

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Learning Disabilities Association of Lambton County will be held Wednesday, December 2, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

Touch-Type-Read-Spell Classes

Oct. 1 new classes begin. Tuesdays and Thursdays 6:30-7:00 for younger students—and as late as 7:30 for older students. Cost—\$25.00 per session, or \$50 per week.

The Touch-Type-Read-Spell system is a multi-sensory approach that aims to develop literacy, keyboard mastery, confidence, success and progress at one's own pace. For more information contact Keys to Reading at 519-542-

Christmas Cards!

We once again have beautiful handcrafted Christmas cards for sale. Either drop by our Resource Centre or take some to display at your workplace. Cards have been made by children and volunteers of our chapter and help support programming in our community.