



Fall 2012

HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

# COMMUNICATION MATTERS

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS AND CAREGIVERS OF PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.



## Speech and Language Services the **Good News**, and the **Bad News**

*NOTE: some child and family names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

The **GOOD NEWS** is that preschool speech and language (PSL) initiatives exist across the province to support preschoolers and their families. The Haldimand Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language Program consists of a team of speech-language pathologists (SLPs), support personnel (SP), clerical support and a program coordinator. The program offers initial assessment (IA) to families of preschoolers age 0-5 years. The **BAD NEWS** is that presently, there is a waiting time of four months to access IA by an SLP. Recently, SLPs have been cut from 3.7 to 2.7 across the two counties. Support personnel time has also been cut due to funding constraints. As a result, wait times are on the rise.

More good news, is that, after IA, a family whose child is experiencing language or speech delay has access to many different interventions, including: parent training; home programming; monitoring/parent consultation; weekly or twice/weekly individual sessions; weekly or twice/weekly group sessions; and regular re-assessment.

Many parents struggle with the decision about whether or not to access PSL services. When they learn that their 18-month old should have 20 words, they wonder if their well-meaning family members are right: they should just give him time. They should wait and see. However, they do not want to risk their child's future. Parents want what's best for their child, and if they can do something

that is no cost to them, that will spare their child the agony of entering school without good language abilities, they will do it.

The good news is that 218 families accessed IA last year, despite having misgivings about whether they should WAIT AND SEE.

**Nancy:** *While waiting, I was asking myself: Should I be doing more? What do I do to help? I want the best for him how do I make it happen? It was nerve racking, stressful, annoying and frustrating.*

**Jared's mom:** *We had no idea at that time how much life would improve for our whole family after his initial assessment.*

# Stuart's Story

as told by Lori Holstein, Speech-Language Pathologist

In November 2009, I had the pleasure of meeting Stuart. He was 2 years 10 months old, and was referred for a language assessment by the family's doctor. His mom Nancy stated "he talks a lot just not words everyone can understand." He only used 4 words, including *mom*, *dad*, *hi* and a nonspecific word *ssya* (sounds like *see ya*). Most children this age use more than 350 words, and are combining them regularly into short phrases. Nancy felt that Stuart could understand what was said to him most of the time. He was "sometimes" effective at getting his needs met through communication; usually, he just went and got what he wanted without interacting with parents.

## ***The initial assessment revealed:***

- Questionable receptive language skills: he did not always respond to questions/instructions, especially if engaged with a toy. Continued testing was recommended.
- Severe expressive language delay: Stuart had far fewer words in his vocabulary than expected for his age, and he used them much less frequently than expected.
- Expressive language disorder: Stuart sometimes vocalized or jabbered. He rarely made requests or protests. He seemed to imitate a couple of words.

Stuart and his mom registered for the "It Takes Two to Talk" Hanen® parent training program. The program ran from November 2009 to May 2010. Stuart was referred to H-N REACH in the spring 2010, and began receiving services from an Infant Child



Development worker. Developmental screening indicated no other areas of concern besides expressive language. The worker met with the family at home, and helped them to plan a smooth transition to junior kindergarten the next fall.

Stuart attended a re-assessment in September 2010. A severe expressive language delay secondary to an articulation disorder was identified. His social use of language and receptive skills appeared to be within the normal range. A motor speech component was suspected, so the Sound Play program (10 weekly group sessions) was recommended. Stuart and his mom attended all ten sessions of Sound Play, which ended in December 2010.

Since February 2011, Stuart has participated in regular re-assessments, and two blocks of individual treatment

sessions with one of our program's support personnel. The targets of his sessions were: medial and final consonants "p", "b", "m", "t", "d" and "s". He usually deleted these sounds, so much of his speech was still difficult to understand. He displayed other patterns and errors consistent with a motor speech disorder.

Stuart also benefitted from caregiver consultation. As his SLP, I participated in case conferences at home and at his school with parents, infant child development worker, teacher and educational assistant. Stuart had been exposed to Signed English as well as pictures to augment his verbal communication. In addition, visual schedules and social stories were used to help him understand routines and difficult situations. Prior to the start of JK, Stuart was also referred to the Technology Access Clinic (TAC) in Hamilton to investigate whether an assistive device, such as an iPad, would be useful in augmenting his verbal communication. I attended meetings with the TAC SLP.

Stuart starts senior kindergarten this fall, so he will be discharged from our program. He is eligible for services through his school board. But the bad news is that, last spring the Catholic board announced they would be letting go of two full-time SLPs. They will be left with 1.5 to provide services to Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk counties.

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## Parent Training

**Nancy:** You need it... Lots of it... Just when you think you have it, you don't. I was always asking too many questions or used way too many words which was confusing. This caused Stuart to lose interest and limit his responses. Home visits were also helpful because they taped you in action. It showed you what you were doing and then they explained how it could be better. I remember thinking how nervous I was and thinking was my house clean enough. Then I realized it wasn't about me it was about Stuart and his needs.

**Andrea:** The biggest benefit of the Hanen program was that both my husband and I were able to attend the (evening) sessions. This meant that we were unified and consistent in our approach and really incorporated the practices into our daily family life.

**Jared's mom:** We interact with our children differently now. We have learned very helpful strategies to help our children at home. In fact, we have become allies in ensuring that our children have a voice.

## Group Therapy

**Nancy:** We learned proper pronunciation of letters f, s, n, m, t, g, b, h, w, sh, and c-k. We learned some sign language and some syllables. Lori and Shauna taught the kids and taught parents at the same time so they could practice at home. The more you worked on it the more your child got it.

**Jamie:** We saw an immediate change in James after he started attending Sound Play. He started to open up and communicate. He was excited and looked forward every week to attending his group. Sound Play gave James the opportunity to interact with others his age with the same difficulty. They had wonderful activities and games designed to help with his needs. They were always friendly and caring and made all of the children feel special. James had always been very shy and seemed very frustrated at his inability to communicate. He has gained a new confidence since attending Sound Play and his speech improves more and more every day.

**Jennifer:** We attended Word Play from September – December 2008. We met once a week with other parents and their children with similar issues. The staff taught us how to encourage and teach words at home. By his next assessment, he knew many words, too many to count! It was fun for him and Joel didn't realize we were actually working on words!

**Andrea:** After my son began attending group therapy (Sound Play and Sound Blast), his speech really began to explode. He loved attending and looked forward to the games, activities and songs all week. As a parent, I loved the take-home packages that were individualized and came complete with all the materials required to implement them. The homework packages were so cleverly designed and thoughtfully prepared that my son would regularly ask if we could do some "word work" today.

“ It is a tragedy that there are not enough of these programs for kids that need help communicating with the world. ”

With colourful stickers, and interactive games, the homework was a joy to work on together, and his speech improved rapidly through the targeted activities. I cannot say enough about how helpful this program was to me and how much of my son's improvement is directly linked to the sound-based activities we accessed through these programs.

## Individual Sessions

**Nancy:** I really appreciated having the chance to apply what we learned in sessions to everyday talking. It was great to be given all the materials and strategies each week, and to see the progress he made. Shauna made the sessions fun so your child wants to do it! She had the coolest toys and activities, and he didn't even realize he was practising. I could contact Shauna or Lori

any time I had a problem. Lori shared our approach with the school too!

## Visuals and Sign Language

**Nancy:** In the beginning, Stuart learned sign language, which really helped to decrease his frustration. In the end, he only needed it for a short time. Later, he benefited from the pictures, schedules and stories Lori made, especially in difficult situations like going to the doctor, and meeting new people. The schedule helped him know when sessions were finished, and made it more fun. He learned to associate events with picture symbols. He was able to point to a picture if his point was not being made.

## Cuts to Service

**Nancy:** It makes me cringe to consider cuts to services, and the effect that will have on my child's learning. Why? Why must they do this? Children are the future. Now Stuart

won't get what he would have had, and we will have to pay for extra help for him. I would like to think the squeaky wheel will get the grease, but it doesn't seem to help.

**Jennifer:** I am relieved sending Joel to school knowing he is not behind the other children in terms of speech. It would have significantly delayed Joel's progress if he had to be put on a wait list for this program. We cannot express how grateful we are to the Preschool Speech and Language program.

**Jamie:** I am so very thankful for this program and for the wonderful professionals. It is a tragedy that there are not enough of these programs for kids that need help communicating with the world. The few that do exist take far too long to access for a child to receive the help that they deserve and need. I would despair to see another child suffer as James did. There needs to be more



publicly funded programs dedicated to our children as they are our future.

**Andrea:** *I am so grateful that, through the preschool speech and language program, we were able to help my son, but I'm alarmed by the fact that these programs may be in jeopardy due to continued budget and staffing cuts. From both of my older children's experience, I know firsthand the importance of accessing services, and the frustration of not being able to secure them. I also know that I am lucky to have been able to advocate for my children, and if I hadn't they would have slipped through the cracks of an overworked, overwhelmed and underfunded system. It saddens me to think how many children may have done that already, and how many more children in the future may not receive the help so necessary for them*

to become the confident articulate persons they might otherwise be.

**Jared's mom:** *I am not about to let my kids slip through the cracks. If a professional recommends we see someone else, I don't wait for the referral, I start making phonecalls.*

*Early intervention, flexibility and accommodating programs that work with my schedule have made a huge difference in our lives. We are given encouragement and respect every time we go. I worry about the families that will not experience this due to cuts in programming and funding. What a cost, not only to them and to their children, but to our community. We all want all of our children to be the best they can at what they want to do. I really hope that the powers-that-be will listen and hear us.*

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The Grand Erie Chapter of the OAFCCD can help parents access services, advocate for services and provides tips on how to help your child at home.

We are also pleased to inform you of the OAFCCD DVD: **The Power of Parents: Supporting School Success for Students with Speech and Language Impairments.** The DVD features interviews with local parents, and our own Becky Pow (Parent Program Assistant and OAFCCD liaison) and Lori Holstein (SLP). For more information, contact Becky at 519 426-6170 ext. 3451 or [becky.pow@hnhu.org](mailto:becky.pow@hnhu.org)



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*Communication Matters is published biannually by the Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language program. It has been developed to increase awareness for services available and tips on the prevention of speech, language or hearing disorders in the preschool population. This newsletter is intended for parents, teachers and caregivers of preschool-aged children. You are invited to contact the Health Unit with your articles and ideas.*