



MDA Newsletter

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Madras Dyslexia Association

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**Our next intensive teacher
training programme will be
starting on 3rd of February
2014. Last date for
registrations: 25th of January.
Contact MDA office for details**

*MDA wishes its readers
a
Happy New Year*

Samyukth 2013 - In Retrospect

The much awaited dates 7th and 8th of December arrived. The IC and SR Auditorium at the IIT campus was jam packed. We hated to send away people who had come in to register as we were already very full. Point taken is to arrange for a bigger auditorium next time! The audience had a cross section of people. For the sake of statistics about 35% mainstream teachers, about 45% special educators, and the rest comprising of occupational therapists, counselors, parents and doctors. It was good to see the heads of organizations/directors/coordinators there, representing their institutions. We were indeed happy to see a large representation from schools, as awareness there would help many children to be identified and supported. About 30% of the participants had traveled from afar and many were from within Tamilnadu. While Coimbatore topped the list, Madurai and Salem were close behind. The other states where we had delegates from were Pondichery, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal and Maharashtra. It surely tells us a lot about the growing awareness in the various parts of the country and the thirst for knowledge for people working in the field. The array of speakers were indeed impressive and each one had a lot to share. We are sure that these participants have taken back information and experiences shared by the speakers and will put it to good use.

An industrialist, educationist and philanthropist, Mr. Manickam Ramaswami, our chief guest, gave us an inspiring inaugural address. He talked about persons like him whose families have been associated for many years with education, yet are not aware of this condition. The teacher plays an important role and how compassionate she is to students with learning difficulties matters. Empathy and compassion supported by scientific understanding with techniques that help them will be the answer to many. He felt sensitizing schools about this condition will help many children.

Dr. Anupriya Chadha, Chief Consultant at the National Level for Inclusive Education, SSA, started her talk with a short film on the work of SSA in the rural areas made by a student who could be having a learning disability. It is crucial that teachers be empowered to realize that every child learns in a different manner. They need to be aware of the various conditions so that they can help and support. Learning support as well as speech and occupational therapy are needed to help children. She remarked no studies have been done in India about the incidence of LD. Inclusive education and classroom practices are the need of the hour.

Dissemination of information is important anywhere and especially in a field which involves understanding children and helping them. For the many people who wanted to but could not attend and for the sake of some who would like to go through what they heard, we have decided to transcribe the presentations of the various speakers with their kind permission.

This issue will carry a part of **Dr. Nandini Mundkar's** presentation on "**Enhancing attention span and listening skill among children**". This will give a neurodevelopmental approach to the child especially with an attentional problem.

Dr. Nandini Mundkur M.D is a developmental pediatrician based in Bangalore. She is currently the Director of the Centre for Child Development and Disabilities, Bangalore. The Centre funded by her family treats large number of children with developmental disorders with referrals from South Asian regions. She is the author of many books and is the recipient of prestigious awards. The centre can be contacted at ccdd@gmail.com

Dr. Mundkar started the talk by saying how Attention Deficit is an area of her passion apart from autism. She also understood the composition of the audience that there were more participants from private schools than Government schools, and more from urban schools than rural background.



"Learning is not in isolation of schools and teaching. It has to do with

the development of the brain right from the time of birth. Maximum brain growth is in the first three years of life; 90% of the brain is developed by then. The neuroplasticity or the adaptability of the brain to form neuronal connections is happening then. The remaining bit is the experience and environment. That's why, apart from schools we need to work with doctors for if they detect it early, majority of the issues can be addressed. An early intervention programme gives a lead to many children with LD to do well later on in life.

Nutrition also plays an immense role in the development of the brain. Importance is to be given to health of the child. What the SSA has been doing to look into the health as well is indeed a laudable effort. We are all aware of deficiencies of iron, thyroid,

zinc, vitamin E, selenium etc are important for learning. Unless health is looked into, it will lead to malnutrition which causes bad or difficult learning. There are so many issues in our country to tackle and what is affected in all these cases are attention deficits.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is an interesting condition and lot of research has gone into the subject. In the West where 60% of the children in schools are considered having some kind of attention problem and many of them are on medication. Like diabetes, it is considered a pharmacological diagnosis, benefitting more the industry than the individual.

ADHD is highly controversial and questions are raised if there is such a condition at all? Is it environmental? Is it educational? Is it behavioral? Is it something to do with the brain?

I have divided the session into the following aspects:

- ✓ Interesting aspects of how the brain learns
- ✓ Medical management
- ✓ Behavioural management
- ✓ Educational environment management
- ✓ Parental role
- ✓ Power of the mind to control attention and to learn

What is ADHD?

Some questions to be raised: Is it any child who is not able to pay attention in class? Is there a specific criteria? If so, what are these criteria? What will and will not respond to medication? What is the role of doctors and role of educationists? It is a big subject and extremely fascinating and interesting.

ADHD - What is new?

- ❖ Most common behavioral problem
- ❖ Influenced by neurological and genetic factor rather than social and environmental as believed.
- ❖ Initially the educationists recommended going for remedial services and not take a doctor's advice or medication. Doctors would recommend medication and so resulted in a controversy. Parents were caught between these 2 viewpoints and often did not take any action. Any problems in developmental paediatrics or developmental disorders is actually a partnership by all; by doctors, educationists, psychologists, and counselors. No underestimation or overestimation of any one's role, all of us work in partnership where

everybody has a role to play for the child's benefit.

- ❖ Why is there a role for the doctor? In the past 2 decades, understanding the roles of the brain and mind have played a part and immense research has gone into it. Evidence of neuropsychological studies show important findings in the fronto striatum region of the frontal lobe. The more we understand the neuronal pathways, more the solution can be thought of.
- ❖ Smaller cortical region especially on right side
- ❖ Lack of normal left to right asymmetry. We all have asymmetry, which is important for us to function. If you are right sided the left side of the brain dominates and vice versa and for these children no such asymmetry is seen and that is a problem.
- ❖ Many other findings in PET (Positron Emission Test) and MRI for scanning of the brain.
- ❖ Suggest it to be a executive functional disorder
- ❖ Dopamine type 2 gene implicated, it is genetic.

Prevalence

- Familial - 10 to 35% of immediate family. Observing the parents, it is obvious that some still have a problem.
- Risk of sibling 32%
- If a parent is affected, risk of offspring 5%
- Monozygotic twins 81%
- Dizygotic 29% (dissimilar twins)
- Males 3 times more affected than females.
- Seen in both children and adults
- Increased incidence in preterm infants (less than 37 weeks) more and more preterm babies -500 gm, 700 gm and 1000 gm babies are surviving. They could have problems later on.

ADHD

- ✓ ADHD is not a one time disorder. It affects the life span of the person.
- ✓ It is a highly prevalent condition, the most common neurological disorder in childhood.
- ✓ Prevalence varies from 3.5% and 11 to 12%
- ✓ Male to female ratio is 3:1 in children and adults
- ✓ It is a chronic condition - familial background 50 to 80 %
- ✓ Risk factors are prematurity, environmental factors such as smoking, alcohol and lead poisoning during early childhood. Lead poisoning occurs through wooden painted toys that a child puts it in the mouth. This is high especially in rural areas, we can try and control it.

The Core Symptoms

1. Inattention
2. Hyperactivity
3. Impulsivity

For diagnosis

Onset should be usually before 7 years of age. Accident or trauma is not included in this category. It may not be obvious till he needs to be attentive i.e. the school years. Parents come with 2 year olds and want a diagnosis. This is not an age to diagnose. Children have been put on Ritalin therapy at 2, which is terrible. The child should be atleast in LKG or 3 and half years before you diagnose. If you see a child's development, the first thing that develops is motor area as he starts sitting, crawling, walking etc. Then speech develops between 1.5-3 years and abstract thinking is later 3-4 years. It is important to understand the brain's development.

What is the attention span for a 1 or 2 year old? For a 1 year old is only 5 minutes, at 3 years can they have half an hour class? A standard 5 minutes per year of age so 15 minutes but can we see a session of 15 minutes anywhere? At 6 years is 30 minutes in Class1. Classes for a six year old (class 1) should be only half an hour, or 40 minutes. With age it comes down again. After 45 minutes the adult will also switch off. Let us first understand normality (15 minutes for 3 years) before deciding whether there is an attention problem with a child.

History must be reviewed. You will get children from 3 years to adolescence. Parents will bring a child in the 9th std and say he is not paying attention now. If you look at the history, it would have been there. Social promotions are common and the child keeps getting promoted from class to class without his basics. He is lost without his basics and he is promoted because he has to move on. The common belief is "As you grow up everything will be alright". Without his number concepts, he can't do addition and without addition he can't do multiplication. If you send him up the ladder and there is no support in the class to work at his level, what will happen to him? Teachers wash off their hands; they lose interest in the child, feeling that it is not their responsibility.

He gets neglected, he's at sea. Parents put pressure, hours of homework and hours of tuition, no play. With no empathy and compassion either by teachers or parents and with the peer group also making fun of what he can't do he can become withdrawn, isolated, and sometimes develop a Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) - "I will not open the book, I have a head ache, I have a stomach ache" or such psychosomatic complaint and doesn't want to go to school.

To be continued in the next issue



I consider myself fortunate to have heeded to my inner voice in attending Samyukth, a very well-organised program that exposed me to the nuances of being a special educator, despite my initial reservations about spending the weekend away from my family.



Samyukth 2013 was a wonderful experience. It has not only provided us answers to somethings puzzling us but has also set us thinking and finding solutions.

It was really pleasant to meet you all, and I enjoyed the delightful conference which is really useful in our field of work.



Snapshots of Samyukth 2013

SAMYUKTH 2013

IN

RETROSPECT

Thank you for the opportunity this weekend to display and share our work. We were truly glad to be a part of the event and meet with the delegates and friends who were there for the two days !!

It was such a great pleasure to attend the 2-day workshop on Dyslexia. Mindblowing presenters, brilliant organisers and great enthusiasm in each and everyone of your team. Thanks for your warm reception and wide arrangements. We have completely enjoyed the environment.

The Conference was very informative. We thoroughly enjoyed and learnt new things from it. We wish MDA and the team to organise such programs often and to keep posting the information to us so that lots of children and families can be benefitted.

ALUMNI NEWS

This is a section that is a voice of hope for many parents. We are happy to find more and more of our Ananya alumni successful in their pursuits and career and would like to present to you their experiences.

We managed to speak to Sashank, our alumnus from the batch of 2003 just before he left for the U.S. to do his M.S at the prestigious University of Arizona in Tuscon, Arizona State. He completed his Engineering from Misrimal Navajee Munoth Jain Engineering College under Anna University and worked at India Cements for 2 years. Having secured his M.S seat for the Fall semester we found a very confident and ambitious young man ready to go into the world of higher education to secure his second degree. Has this journey been easy and smooth? What was his state of mind and what kind of support did he receive? Read on... the success story of yet another Ananyaite!!!!!!.

Sashank's problems started as young as age 5. He was lucky he went to a school that was aware of dyslexia and also had a Remedial Centre. School spotted his difficulties in Class 2 and he was given help in the school Remedial Centre. His main difficulties were in Math and English. Looking back his mother feels that there was a lot of pressure on him from them, as he had an elder sister who was an above average student. There were pressures from school as well as his peers. The remedial classes that he attended during the Primary school years helped him tremendously.

When Sashank was asked: **Do you remember your early school years posing any difficulties? In what areas?**

"I had difficulties with languages and getting myself organized. Motivation and self-esteem was also low."

At the end of the 9th std, his performance especially in Science and Mathematics was poor and on the advice of the school, the family decided to pull him out of his mainstream school and to admit him in Ananya Learning Centre.

How did you feel when you had to leave your school and come to Ananya? What did you understand about yourself then?

"I was heartbroken as I was leaving a school which was close to my heart and which I had attended for eleven years. Then I thought a change was required for my betterment and accepted the decision."

Accepting the decision of a pull out, Sashank settled down very quickly in the new environment.

What was your experience at Ananya?

"My overall confidence improved and a special thanks has to be given to Mr. Kalyanaraman, my Maths teacher who really turned me around and brought back my confidence and self-esteem."

His mother reports the first change that they noticed in him was that he was slowly gaining back his self-confidence and getting out of the depression that he was in. From the child who was failing in his school Math exams, to getting 96 in Maths in his Board Exams... was the magic of Kalyanaraman Sir.

A self-confident Sashank went back to school for his Plus 2. As his mother reports he had no issues after he joined the mainstream. He blended very well and very quickly adjusted to the demands of the mainstream. Performing well in his Plus 2 examinations, he got to pursue his dream of being an engineer. After a B.E degree and some work experience, he felt he was ready for further studies. A very happy Sashank, setting out to get his American degree, is quite sure he will be able to manage with his studies. With the help he has got there is no looking back on those diffident and despondent days.

What is your advice to other children like you?

"Always share your problems with adults as they are more experienced in life."

His promise of "If I find a child having similar problems, I would slowly build the confidence of the child" speaks volumes of what he has undergone and what his resolve is for other such children.

Since then many Sashanks have crossed the threshold of Ananya to step into a new world of learning and education. What transformed them? The assurance that support is available, strategies can be taught and learnt and most importantly, that **'THEY CAN'**.

NEWS AT MDA/ ANANYA

Awareness

In the last month there has been awareness created around Samyukth in the print and electronic media.

To begin with it was the article in "The Hindu" on 22nd November 2013, in the Metro Plus issue that talked about children who are struggling in the system waiting to be discovered. Their reporter spoke to Mrs. Vilasini Diwakar about the work that is being done. Read the article at:

<http://m.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/waiting-to-be-discovered/article5408329.ece/?maneref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.in%2F>

Chennai Live 104.8 FM on 3rd December 2013, a live chat show with RJ Sano that had a segment on dyslexia awareness by Mrs. Subha Vaidyanathan and a young adult sharing his success story of learning to cope and to overcome his difficulties.

Hello FM 106.4 on 6th December 2013, in the breakfast show RJ Balajee addressed questions on dyslexia to Mrs. Geetha Raghavan.

Thanthi TV show on 14th December 2013, about children with learning disabilities included a short segment on dyslexia by Mrs. Geetha Raghavan.

Kumudam article on 25th December 2013 talked about basic awareness on dyslexia and interviewed Mrs. Subha Vaidyanathan and Mrs. Geetha Raghavan.

Building Reading Skills at a Corporation School

MDA is a member of Reading Skill Enhancement Network (RSEN). After an inaugural talk by the Online Editor of The Tamil Hindu newspaper, our teachers Geetha.R, Janaki.R, Sujatha.R, Meenatchi.A, Sasikala.R and Latha.V spent the afternoon in reading/story telling/activity sessions for the whole school in groups as part of the reading campaign programme on 8th October 2013.

Continuation on Samyukth

Felicitation

When we felicitate someone we reiterate our belief in the ideology. For us at MDA it is a reaffirmation that identifying, understanding and helping children with learning difficulties within the school is the best way to do it. MDA took great pride in honouring 5 city schools at Samyukth 2013. These schools have been running their school learning centres continually for more than a decade, some nearing 2, with a little initial support from us in training the teachers as well as setting up of resource rooms.

Short film on dyslexia by a young dyslexic

A slightly different segment was the screening of the short film titled, "Nothing More, Nothing Less" by Lucas Haynes, a 12 year old Australian filmmaker, which was selected to be part of the Little Big Shots film festival.

Our tryst with Tom Haynes and Lucas Haynes goes a long way. About 7 -8 years ago Tom Haynes visited Chennai as part of the environmental team from Australia and googled the words : dyslexia, Chennai . Not before long he visited us at Ananya. He was amazed that so much work was happening to help children with specific learning disabilities. It was a touching moment when the children at Ananya sang "Happy Birthday" to Lucas, Tom's son in Australia who was celebrating his 6th birthday on that day. Then again when we had our last Samyukth in 2009 we did a video conference with Tom Haynes who is himself a dyslexic and a successful one. Even now, he so readily sent us the CDs and loved the idea of having this segment in our conference.

The film, which Lucas both directs and acts in, explores the frustrations of living with dyslexia. He deals with a child who decides to take the miracle pill but realises too late that while it "takes away" his dyslexia, he also loses a part of himself. "It takes away his creativity and his inspiration and he's left like everyone else." More in the next issues.

MDA News Snippets

- 01.10.13 "Emotional aspects of a LD child" talk by Subha.V at Manochetna Academic and Research Centre (MARC), Kolkata for a group of mainstream teachers for a Certificate Course.
- 08.10.13 MDA organizes an activity as part of a reading campaign programme at the Corporation Middle School, Prakasam Road, T.Nagar.
- 19.10.13 Weekend Mainstream Teacher Training starts at MDA with participants from various city schools.
- 26.10.13 Second Remedial Circle Meet: 25 MDA trained remedial teachers attend a talk by Mrs. Usha Ramakrishnan, Chairperson-Vidyasagar on the holistic approach of remediation for children with learning difficulties at Ananya, Vijayaraghava Road.
- 23.11.13 Subha.V & Sujatha.R conduct sessions at the State Level Conference on "Learning Disability- An Eclectic Approach" organized by the KMCH College of Occupational Therapy, Coimbatore.
- 27.11.13 Sujatha.R conducts a full day training programme on "Orientation and training on Dyslexia" to teachers and staff at Rawattakuppam Hemerijckx Rural Centre. About 130 primary school and middle school headmasters and teachers participate from various Government schools in Villupuram District.
- 07& 08.12.13 Samyukth 2013, MDA Conference at IC & SR Auditorium, IIT, Madras.
- 10.12.13 Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles and their importance in a teaching-learning environment - a talk by Geetha.R to the teacher trainees of Vidyarambam Trust.

Our editorial team - Indu Ramesh, Kamala Ramaraj, Geetha Raghavan and Vilasini Diwakar

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