

## LEADERS' SYMPOSIUM 2019 – SPECIAL NEEDS

Voddie Baucham – *“We teach our children to read so they can read Scriptures, math so they can be good stewards, write so they can share – focus on what is important.”*

Diane Geerlinks – livestream to encourage each of us to be a support to families in need, and to encourage accessing assessments and therapies earlier rather than later

Jen Foy – shared from her position as a parent what is important

The following is a compilation of recent conversations held with various members and volunteers within & without OCHEC, with additional remarks from the Symposium itself.

### WHY THE FOCUS ON SPECIAL NEEDS?

- Increased calls for help / parents are in great need
- We don't know what to say / afraid of saying the wrong thing
- We don't know the experts or who to reference
- Public school system & health system are false hopes as they are failing to provide assistance,
- (services may be provided more easily in pre-school years)

### WHO DO WE INFLUENCE?

- parents, other OCHEC leaders, chapter leaders, support group members, our children, community
- Interaction with speech therapist re: home education impacted on one therapist's autistic client

### BIGGEST TAKE-AWAY

- 1<sup>st</sup> – compassion and support of others, 2<sup>nd</sup> – help to find resources
- One can find therapy online but can't find a friend online for you and your child
- Verbiage is so important – while labelling may help to troubleshoot, labelling can bring stigma  
Suspected learning challenges, scattered learners, etc.  
'parenting incorrectly' phrase will likely send the family away

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

**Biblical empathy/compassion – show Christ-likeness – teach children and yourselves acceptance**

**Recognize hard to accept support from someone who has not been in your shoes**

**Get to know the family –**

**listen to parents, ask about their day, concentrated effort to listen**

**are they responding normally today**

**give them a chance to open up**

**hard to be honest & vulnerable – stress of parent/mom/homeschooler/learning challenges**

**Disconnect the idea that my child is my report card – make it worse on mothers than on child**

**watch for depression**

**Loss of hope and expectation**

consider the parent's perspective – struggle for them  
Homeschool setting is so hard because we don't have special teachers  
Homeschooling is already hard – this is harder  
likelihood of another sibling with same diagnosis is very high  
our own homeschooling is so busy  
we tend not to allow ourselves to see the struggle in someone else's life  
pray

#### PHYSICAL/SOCIAL SUPPORT

Come for a play date –they also need social connections, and mom needs a break  
Behaviors – common to that diagnosis, triggers  
Outline appropriate coping/preventative measure for group  
Fostering appropriate inclusive behaviour in ourselves and in our children  
offer care of her child – she was exhausted, while others took care of mom  
implement a buddy system among the children, babysitting at events/meetings

EDUCATE to anticipate needs

Familiarize yourself with different diagnosis – READ, every diagnosis has a fb page

#### WHAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS AND CHAPTERS TO SUPPORT SPECIAL NEEDS?

Paralysis of self  
Lack of resources to offer or be familiar with  
Curriculum choices  
Fear of failure on your part  
Desire to not cause pain  
Don't know when or how to empathize

#### WHAT PERSPECTIVE WILL HELP US TO OVERCOME THIS PARALYSIS?

See the person behind the behaviour  
Inclusion versus adding to the long trail of criticism

- Non-overwhelming atmosphere
- Accommodation & time
- Let it be a place to belong
- Remember socialization is a muscle special needs children also need to practice
- Events need to be affordable as often there are other expenses incurred for therapies etc.
- Make use of ACCESS 2 card offered by EASTER SEALS that allows companion into events at 1/2 price

Avoid making statements beyond your experience such as 'I don't believe in meds'

#### OTHER

Parents have the right to inform their child of diagnosis or not  
If you notice a challenge in someone else's child it may/may not be the right time to share with parent  
Autism in a girl looks very different –they don't lack the eye contact as boys do  
Beware of division in your home school community

**If we don't 'do beside' we can't do 'sympathy'. We may not be able to carry their load, but we can pick up a part.**

## WHAT CAN A FAMILY WITH SPECIAL NEEDS DO??

### FAMILY RESPONSE to special needs identification

- Blame game – it's my fault, haven't put time into this child's needs
- Fear of assessment – feel it is an assessment of parent, fear of label for child although this might be the key to finding the right support and teaching strategies for the child
- Concern for cost of additional curriculum as likely can't share what worked for other children
- Find child's strengths/interests and work that into the rest of their studies
- Teach the child to love learning

### SETTING GOALS

- How to sift through what is available - past years of homeschool help
- Set realistic IEP goals
- Annually meet with each therapist – pay her – what goals for this year and set your own IEP
  - insurance coverage? have therapist teach you
  - Might have access to 10 blocks of therapy – you determine how to use it
  - Choose what you can work on
  - Have groups of SN parents together to see what you learned from each of your therapists
- May consider using PPM131 Appendix B Letter of Intent to access therapies through school board but not a guarantee of services

### AUTISM EXAMPLE

- Up to delay of 30% development by age in thinking
  - accommodation of time – 15 yr old acts like 10 year old
  - if your behaviour expectations are reasonable there is potential for joy – to participate in this progress
  - need person with compassion to come alongside and walk beside them at the speed they can handle
  - over expectation on expectation creates attitude of 'unworthy' in child
    - I am bad, there is something wrong with me, I can't fix it
    - think positively – distractibility = curiosity, impulsivity = creativity, hyperactive = energy !!
- ABA – communication program for children with autism – very expensive \$60000/child
  - Currently province allows parents \$5000 total even though this is a 5 yr program
  - Consider sleep/exercise/nutrition/sensory stimuli level
  - Pay yourself to learn therapies and then do the therapies with your child yourself
  - Search the internet, Pinterest
  - Create curriculum
    - Don't teach by book, but by what he needs – money, time, laundry life skills
  - Teaching life skills is important – consider scholastics as needful
  - Behaviour – example of "Ferrari brain with bicycle brakes" – difficult for parent to keep ahead

### Planning school year

- 'teachers pay teachers' website – numerous resources
- certain bloggers to follow
- internet has info at your fingertips –but it is time consuming – develop a plan – it will take time
- Videos purchased

## **HSLDA Special Needs General Information**

(as a member of HSLDA, with their permission, I include information from the member only page  
more info and many links are also available)

**Exceptionalities areas:** Intellectual, Communicative, Sensory; Behavioural, Physical, Multiple

### **Steps:**

- 1) speak to your family physician
- 2) hearing or vision test can easily rule out some of the most basic learning blocks
- 3) refer you to other specialists – a referral for some services will be covered by OHIP
- 4) ongoing learning difficulties that don't have an obvious physical root
  - may want to see other educational professionals
  - may see you without a referral, and may cost due to not covered, but are invaluable

### **Benefits of individualized educational program at home VS Public system**

- 1) pace, level, and style that they need
- 2) one-on-one teaching time, and repetition
- 3) Controlled Environment & Consistent Structure – routine and predictability of location/teacher
- 4) emotional stability
- 5) right kind of socialization – avoiding distractions, unsympathetic peers
- 6) array of possibilities

Membership with HSLDA entitles member to 1 hour free consultation with special needs consultant. This is not an assessment.

*End of HSLDA item*

## **STRATEGIES to go forward** **Within OCHEC and within our chapters**

Start out with leadership, then make information accessible to all members  
Put knowledge in the hands of the parents  
come together as a community

- more and more pulling out due to failure of school system

support for high school  
educate pastors on home education  
reestablish LENS Conference  
Maintain SN stream at convention  
Share with our young homeschool families on expectations  
Sponsor mentor group to attend support group meetings to share  
OCHEC check with Ministry of Education/ministry of Health re: use of letter of intent to request services  
OCHEC check in with access to therapies with CACC/LIHN  
OCHEC website resource page – include article, audios from conventions, links to resources

### Short articles for website

Heart to heart from a leader = from one leader to another – what I have learned  
Heart-to-heart with a homeschool mom – a glimpse into the life of autism – written by a hs mom  
TIP pages on “How can you help” i.e. a mom of a child with Tourette’s syndrome/autism/ teenagers  
Provide contact info to chapter leaders/area reps of mothers willing to share with others

## THERAPIES & REFERENCES

NOTE Once a reference is shared:

becomes no longer available due to excessive workload or perhaps health, maternity etc  
hence families may be loathe to share their contacts!  
service level may change hence need quick method to notify others

Homeschooling students that learn differently can be very daunting for families. They are often questioned and challenged. These families need a lot of encouragement to find good resources to support their child. It is very important for them to seek outside help because it can be overwhelming and because homeschooling a child with learning challenges can lead to investigation. Membership in HSLDA is recommended. And lastly, early intervention is so critical to get the child on the path to success! (Consultant)

### Potential service providers

(list is very limited, does not infer OCHEC endorsement, OCHEC appreciates your contribution to this list – please email to [info@ochech.org](mailto:info@ochech.org))

- Dr. Russell Barclay (YouTube)
- Carole Barnier – <http://www.sizzlebop.com>, [www.hi.com](http://www.hi.com)
- Trix Bradley – NILD – Edison Learning Centre (Waterloo) <http://www.edisoncentre.com>
- Suzanne Day – (Barrie) – [www.neuroclinicbarrie.com](http://www.neuroclinicbarrie.com)
- Diane Geerlinks – [www.geerlinkslearning.com](http://www.geerlinkslearning.com) – assessments, therapies, parent courses to learn therapies
- Dr. Ed Hallowell – (YouTube) talks about the amazing talents in autism
- Dr. Victor A Kuraitis O.D. vision therapy 905-935-1440 St. Catharines
- Ben Loveday – (London) psychiatrist 226-374-6545
- Dr. Coralee Mueller – (Oshawa) Vision therapy
- Matthew Turton (Kitchener) – Breakthroughs in Learning – [www.breakthroughsinlearning.com](http://www.breakthroughsinlearning.com)
- Barbara Arrowsmith Young (Toronto, Peterborough) – Arrowsmith School – <http://www.arrowsmithschool.org>
- Karen Uschold – (Hamilton) Vianney Academy of Learning, Inc. – mom with experience <http://www.vianney.ca>

### ORGANIZATIONS:

- Every disability has a Facebook page and a website – a good place to start your search
- CRA – RDSP – <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/registered-disability-savings-plan-rdsp.html> – savings plan that is intended to help parents and others save for the long-term financial security of a person who is eligible for the disability tax credit, contributions are not tax-deductible, withdrawals not treated as income. Government contributions to the plan (grants at the rate of \$1 - \$3 for every \$ contributed by others & unmatched bonds) are taxed as income when withdrawn.
- CRA – Disability Tax Credit to reduce caregiver's taxable income– need physician signed form
- HSLDA – members only site – has many links for many diagnosis in members only pages <http://www.hslda.org>
- Learning Disabilities of Ontario – webinars, workshops, self-advocacy, etc.
  - [www.ldao.ca](http://www.ldao.ca) [www.ldao.ca/introduction-to-ldsadhd/what-are-lds/](http://www.ldao.ca/introduction-to-ldsadhd/what-are-lds/)
- LHIN – Local Health Initiatives Network (previously CACC) – every town – this is the Ministry of Health
  - Closing the Gap program, very important for serious challenges for therapy acquisition
- McMaster Medical Centre – (Hamilton) autistic program run through them, get your paperwork in order first
- NILD <https://nildcanada.org/parents> – therapist, parent training
- YouTube videos on 'how to' for many therapies – be discerning but these can be helpful