

Report on ADHASA (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Support Group for Southern Africa) Conference 5th and 6th JUNE 2009

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Gifts Waiting To Be Unwrapped

The conference that took place in June was a really happy and meaningful experience. Here are some highlights from the talks that we listened to.

Our Meaningful Purpose

Mrs Yvonne Johnstone put it so well. We were all present with one focus – the needs of our children and parents and how to best assist them to cope with what is termed ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). We were all there in a caring and loving congregation, interested in learning and determined to make the most of the excellent presentations. It was very difficult for the organizers to stay within the time limits because there was so much interest in each topic.

The Body Equation

Prof CF van der Merwe set the tone for the day. How lucky ADHASA is to have someone so clear-sighted getting the groundwork right. The challenge we are faced with is **not about something being wrong in the person's brain**. It is not a neurological problem but a physiological, functional problem in the body. Prof van der Merwe is a gastroenterologist and is well placed to research and explore what has gone wrong in the gut (so to speak) and how to put things back in working order for the ADHD child and adult. He emphasizes that medication only helps the short term goal of controlling the child. Correct nutrition and supplementation makes ADHD manageable for life.

Emotionally Intelligent Discipline

Two wonderful young pupils joined Mrs Yvonne Johnstone to get people thinking about discipline. They spoke about the approach of Gordon Road Girls' School and most impressively about the Peace Monitors and Bibliotherapy. Children who have been in difficulties with each other are taken by the Peace Monitor to the Library during successive breaks and take turns reading aloud to the other children about some relevant topic contained in a story. Each child follows in their copy of the story and this constructive process continues for as many break times as necessary to finish the book. The children are then asked how they could have behaved differently and if they are ready to be friends. That is just a small sample of the many-faceted approach used by Mrs Johnstone.

Sensory Modulation and Self Regulation

Sonja Berry is an occupational therapist and took us through an amazing insight into the different approaches which help ADHD children to control themselves. Now this may mist your spectacles over, but some children are transformed by wearing a pair of glasses with a specific color! Sonja's enthusiasm transported us into an approach which offers so much that is positive.

Testing the Outside to See What's Happening Inside

It has all to do with what makes you weak and what makes you strong – muscularly that is. Gladys Quinn (Specialised Kinesiologist) asked for volunteers with whom she demonstrated a number of ways in which the body elucidates this principle. It is based on two important things – first the body does not lie (like the thinking brain can) and second, the answers the body gives are in binary form. That means there are only two possible answers, yes or no. It either makes you strong or it makes you weak. We can, for instance, test a person's reactions to specific foods through their becoming strong or weak muscularly. This is helpful because we know that specific foods can show up as a brain allergy – and once the person stops eating that food they no longer show the symptoms of ADHD.

Leading by Example

Dudley Forde (unable to be present) supplied a very moving video (edited by Stephen Covey) depicting the story of how Anne Sullivan (a young teacher) brought about the almost

miraculous change in Helen Keller – who was stricken with multiple handicaps when she became both blind and deaf as a young child. Anne's devotion of her whole life to teaching Helen to communicate is the story of how one person's inspiration has changed millions of lives.

We were then asked to share our reactions to the video and what we thought were the most salient lessons we had gained from this story. Delegates had a chance to discuss this together with others at their table – here are some of the points highlighted by the spokespersons from the groups:

1. That one person, by their devotion and courage, could change another's life by being committed and loving. This applied especially to our ADHD children.
2. One of the delegates shared the trauma that she had experienced when both her sons became blind when very young and how, now aged 11 and 9, she is able to rejoice in the wonderful work that she has done in creating a more fulfilling life for both of them
3. How important it is as a parent and teacher to find and work with the positive that exists in all of us – thus opening the door to changing lives
4. That Covey has given an excellent pyramid model for us to know where our priorities need to be – first the base is modelling the behaviour we want others to follow, then setting up a trusting relationship with the person and ONLY at this point does meaningful teaching become possible – this is reached at the pinnacle of the pyramid.
5. That we should think of the ADHD children in the class as special gifts that are waiting to be unwrapped
6. Most people reported feeling that the story was very moving and had the potential to change their lives.
7. Through adversity one can triumph

How to Build Self Esteem in Your Child

Jane Jarvis, Educational Psychologist, contributed enormously to our understanding of the link between consequences and rewards in bringing up our children with positive self-esteem. Many lucky people had been in her workshop the afternoon before, and benefited from her positive insight into how games make learning fun in any subject. For those who could not get to the conference, her excellent book "The Manual that never came with your Child" will bring her approach to life.

Memories that Need Working Through in the Brain and Spinal Fluid

Explaining the theory behind Craniosacral Therapy is the challenge that Wendy Nell took on. Unfortunately it was not possible to do a demonstration but those of us who have experienced this approach know that there is important release of painful and traumatic memories through this gentle manipulation. One person commented that their child would get a turn – after she had visited Wendy first!

20 Years of Service and Caring

Heather Picton is the founding Director of ADHASA. Started as her need to understand why her son could not concentrate and learn, Heather has helped thousands of us over the years. Her sincerity and generosity are to be found in her book 'Hyperactivity and ADD – Caring and Coping' and we will soon have a manual which has taken a number of years to put together – publishing date is September 14th 2009 to coincide with the first ever National ADHD Day.

Our Vision in a Nutshell

Stuart Wilson and Robin Vanderplank ended the day by asking those who would like a support group for ADHD in their school or their area to make contact, so that the vital information received during this exciting day can be shared with as many people as possible round KwaZulu Natal.