

It Takes a Village to Give Children with Hearing Loss a Voice for Life

The past 45 years has not only witnessed monumental advances in hearing technology, universal newborn hearing screening, the evolution of supports and services for children with hearing loss who are learning to listen and speak, BUT greater recognition of the auditory-verbal (AV) approach throughout Ontario.

Not so long ago, many families of children with hearing loss tripped over the AV option for their child. And once they did learn of it, it was most likely unavailable or unfunded in their community. Today AV is one of the funded communication options discussed with parents of newly diagnosed babies and it is the recommended intervention for children who become cochlear implant recipients.

Years ago, the educational options for children with hearing loss were limited to segregated settings. Today increasing numbers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are learning to listen and speak, enter and succeed in their neighbourhood schools.

School board personnel are becoming familiar with the terms “auditory-verbal approach,” “auditory-verbal educator,” and “auditory-verbal therapy” as these have materializing in special education documentation and increasing numbers of boards are seeking teachers of the deaf with AV knowledge and skill.

The VOICE Auditory-Verbal Program has continually expanded to keep pace with the changing Ontario landscape and the needs of the growing numbers of children with hearing loss who are learning to listen and speak. The VOICE Therapy Program grew from AV intervention provided to a few families in two main centers to its current caseload of over 100 children receiving services province-wide from seventeen (17) **VOICE Certified Auditory-Verbal Therapists**. For the past 16 years, it has been my pleasure to work alongside the talented and dedicated team of VOICE therapists who provide outstanding support to VOICE families.

The shortage of skilled and certified AV professionals has been of great concern since the McGill graduate program in auditory/oral habilitation closed in the late 90s. VOICE has worked closely with Ontario universities, the College of Teachers, and the AGBell Academy for Listening and Spoken Language to ensure that professionals have the skills needed to support this growing population of students.

A number of recent developments aim to ameliorate the need for

specialized professionals:

- In 2006 The AGBell Academy began offering an additional certification track – **Auditory-Verbal Educators who are Listening and Spoken Language Specialists** supporting school age students
- The Ontario College of Teachers is currently developing a specialization program for teachers of the deaf to enhance their skills in supporting student with hearing loss that listen and speak
- The University of Ottawa is launching a certificate in auditory-verbal studies in the summer of 2010

In the early 90s, to ensure that every VOICE chapter had access to local AV therapy by a certified professional, VOICE actively fundraised and launched the AV Training and Mentorship Program.

Today, the Ministry of Education has recognized the outstanding outcomes of children who have learned to listen and speak through an AV approach as well as VOICE’s expertise in training professionals who provide services for these students. As a consequence, the ministry has provided VOICE with funding to train teachers of the deaf or speech-language pathologists, towards certification as auditory-verbal educators, in 23 school boards throughout Ontario.

In addition, VOICE mentors are providing AV training and supporting the development of skills of speech-language pathologists who provide services through the Provincial Infant Hearing Program in three different regions of Ontario.

VOICE has expanded its professional development offerings which include a yearly conference as well as workshops for professionals in the field of deafness, school teams, classroom teachers, and support staff.

Results of studies conducted by The University of Ottawa and the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario identified the factors which

contribute to the success of students with hearing loss who are mainstreamed in their neighbourhood school. These included

- Early identification of hearing loss
- Access to auditory-verbal therapy
- Parental and community involvement
- Trained teachers of the deaf

Over the years VOICE has focused on ensuring that these programs

are in place so that children with hearing loss can realize their potential alongside their hearing peers.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing require the collaboration of a dedicated team to help them succeed. In Ontario, VOICE families and professionals have developed a strong coalition which has laid the foundation for the development of highly regarded AV intervention and training programs. It does indeed take a village to **give deaf children a voice for life.**

feature

VOICE Programs Featured in Two New Publications

The VOICE Auditory-Verbal Training and Mentorship Program is recognized as a prototype program for successful mentoring in the upcoming *Volta Review* monograph titled, “**Professional Preparation for Listening & Spoken Language Practitioners.**” This journal highlights a critical issue facing the field – the shortage of well-qualified professionals who can facilitate listening and talking in children with hearing loss. The purpose of this monograph is to showcase the excellent training programs currently available as well as to emphasize the critical need for more well-trained professionals. The VOICE training program is featured in the article: “**A Survey of LSLS Cert. AVTs Who Mentor: Fostering Independence to Endow the Future**” by Helen M. Morrison, PhD, CCC-A, LSLS Cert. AVT, Christina B. Perigoe, PhD, CCC-SLP, LSLS Cert. AVT, and Anita Bernstein, Sp Ed, MSc, LSLS Cert. AVT

This resource will be available in the VOICE library in August 2010

Families who learn that one of its members has a hearing loss will experience varied reactions. To best serve these families, practitioners must provide family assessment, support, and information. In a newly published text entitled *Auditory-Verbal Practice: towards a Family-Centered Practice*, editors Ellen A. Rhoades and Jill Duncan examine the theoretical and practical bases of family therapy models and the importance of providing support to all members of families. The editors present essential family therapeutic strategies that are needed to effectively work with families and objectively examine current auditory-verbal practices and various ethical issues. Varied family-based intervention models are discussed, with the family-centered approach considered the ideal to which practitioners aspire. Chapter

10, *Supporting Families*, written by **Anita Bernstein**, VOICE’s **director of therapy and training** and **Alice Eriks-Brophy**, **associate professor at the University of Toronto and past VOICE board member**, identifies the specific needs of varying family and extended family members and provides tips for supporting them and encouraging their collaboration in raising a child with a hearing loss. VOICE’s parent support programs, including weekend camp, educational conferences, on-line chat group for parents and teens, multicultural outreach, etc. is featured as one of the models of comprehensive family support networks.

This resource is published by Charles C. Thomas publishers, www.ccthomas.com and a 20% discount is being offered if ordered on line before October 1, 2010 with the order code: **RHOA-0610; ISBN 978-0-398-07925-3 (hard copy) or ISBN 978-0-398-07926-0 (paperback).**

This resource will be available in the VOICE library in July 2010.

