

National Stammering Awareness Day, 18th October 2008.

International Stuttering Awareness Day was marked this year with a National Stammering Awareness Day held in Wynn's Hotel on the 18th October and was organised by Michael O'Shea and Jonathon Linklater. The theme of the 2008 International Stuttering Awareness day was: 'Don't be afraid of Stuttering'; with a secondary topic of: 'Yes, We Can All Make a Difference'. Both phrases influenced the talks given throughout the day. Over 120 people took part in the day including stammerers, parents of children who stammer, friends and family of stammerers, Speech and Language Therapists, Speech and Language Therapy students and children who stammer.

There was a similar format to last year with presentations and open discussion throughout the day and with the addition of a keynote speaker from the international stuttering community.

The day began with a brief 'ice breaker' exercise where the room split into groups of five or six people who then introduced themselves and explained a little bit about their background.

The first talk of the day was the first part of the keynote address by Anita Blom. Anita spoke about her experiences as a person who stutters, how it impacted on her life, and how it brought it to her current position as (among other things!) vice chairwoman of the European League of Stuttering Associations. A lot of people in the audience would have felt a kinship with her experiences.

There were presentations from the Samaritans and a Neuro-Linguistic Programming practitioner; both of talks were well received. Irish Stammering Association (ISA) members made presentations on a number of topics including the iceberg, the Internet as a source of information, self-help groups, voluntary stammering, a parent's perspective and a child's perspective. Thanks to ISA members Mirjana Radovanov, Stephen Patterson, David Heney, Brendan McGee, Noel Kenny, Veronica Lynch and the youngest presenter Bevin Murphy for their presentations on the day. Presentations drew interesting responses and debate from the audience, with speakers answering questions showing a working knowledge of stuttering and how it can apply differently to each one of us.

The Irish McGuire Programme also gave a number of mini presentations using specific graduates talking about their own experience. The lead presenter was Brendan O'Carroll. The other presenters ranged from the very recent graduates to seasoned veterans of the programme.

HSE Senior Speech & Language Therapist Elizabeth O'Shee gave a presentation about childhood stammering specifically for parents of children who stammer. The children were not forgotten either and took part in an art workshop after which they displayed their 'Don't be afraid of stuttering' posters to an appreciative audience. Later, Carl, a teenager who stutters, performed his 'Speech rap'.

HSE Senior Speech & Language Therapists Duana Quigley and Jonathon Linklater addressed the subject of fear and how fear is addressed on the DAS (Dublin Adult

Stuttering) program they deliver. Michael O'Shea, the author 'Why I called my Sister Harry?' gave the closing address and put forward some challenging comments which caused some lively discussion.

Altogether it was successful day and the good news is that the date has been set for third National Stammering Awareness Day. Mark your diary for Saturday 17th October 2009 - looking forward to seeing you there!

David Heney, Dublin Self-Help Group