

ISA RESIDENTIAL INTENSIVE COURSE FOR ADULTS WHO STAMMER

The ISA is pleased to announce the running of another residential intensive course for adults who stammer. The full course includes a six – day residential course followed by a one day review day two months later. There will be a maximum of 10 places available, selection is based on ability to work and gel well together as a group. The course costs €620 which includes B&B, evening meal and the 6 days therapy.

The residential intensive course for adults who stammer is being held in the Greville Arms Hotel, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath from November 3rd to November 8th 2009.

Aims of the course

- To provide the foundations of long-term change.
- To help the person who stammers to become their own therapist.
- To enable the participants to cope with their stammer by
 - understanding how they stammer
 - coming to terms with their stammer
 - reducing avoidance
 - stammering more easily
- To work on all aspects of stammering – behaviour, attitudes, feelings, thoughts, strategies, reactions and the social impact.
- To work within the context of the whole person.
- To gain appropriate support from family, friends and work colleagues.
- To facilitate in-service training in stammering therapy for therapists.

For more information email
stammeringcourse@gmail.com

'Free to stutter... free to speak' HSE Adult Intensive Stammering Therapy Week: A Member's Perspective

After years of carrying the weight on my shoulders, I felt that I was eventually brave enough to tackle my stutter for once and for all. I was just after encountering an embarrassing experience in giving a public talk, and felt that I needed to do something about it. When I got in touch with a speech therapist in Cork, she recommended the 'Free to Stutter... Free to Speak' course (O'Dwyer et al, 2009 in press), and after some thought decided to sign up for it.

Not knowing what/who to expect from the course, I had hoped that the therapy would free me from this drawback. On entering the session on day one, an atmosphere of friendship and relaxation was created and that remained throughout the week. After the initial introduction, and observing what the other patients were like, I became less ashamed of my stutter and felt it was ok to stutter!

The course incorporated many exercises and techniques. One of the first things I learned was that it wasn't going to be a case of waving a magic wand and I would be clear, instead, I understood that a lot of it was accepting that I was a stutterer and that it was ok to be one. We practiced speaking using a technique called "sssssliding" where you would extend or draw out the first sound of a word (especially before a feared word). This was encouraged throughout the course and in exercises we had to do in real life situations. We went to the shop and had to ask a question to a complete stranger, a little daunting at first but wasn't so bad!

Another daily exercise was a one-to-one chat with one of the therapists, often recorded on camera. I found this to be a great confidence booster as I felt in control of the whole situation and hardly stuttered at all, as if the situation was entirely in my terms.

To date, I look back on the course as a source of inspiration and a knowledge that I don't care if I stutter sometimes. The colleagues, who became my friends, are now a form of motivation to me for what they are achieving in life and how brave they are!

However, I still stutter at times and get annoyed, but it's the acceptance of who I am that keeps me going. I even once told a girl, whom I met a few times, about my stutter, and felt no shame at doing so, it didn't bother her either!!!

John Paul O'Driscoll



Irish Stammering Association

Newsletter

ISSUE 2, 2009

Welcome to Irish Stammering Association's latest newsletter! We have lots of news and events to tell you about, so without further ado...

National Stammering Awareness Day 2009

Irish Stammering Association is proud to be involved with National Stammering Awareness Day in Ireland which will take place on Saturday 17th October in Wynn's Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin.

Michael O'Shea and Jonathon Linklater have organised a range of speakers to deliver their thoughts on stammering. The theme of 2009's International Stuttering Awareness Day (ISAD) is 'Stuttering: More Than a Tangled Tongue' 'Stadaireacht, nios mó ná teanga aimhreitithe'. The theme reminds us all that stuttering can have a massive impact on people's lives, more than merely having blocks, repetitions or avoiding.

National Stammering Awareness Day takes place on Saturday 17th October 2009 (9.30 a.m. – 5.30 p.m.), is open to all and free of charge to attend.

If you can't make the day itself, remember that there is an online conference that you can visit at www.stutteringhomepage.com

Forthcoming AGM

ISA will be holding its AGM in the next few months. If you would like to become more



ELSA Youth Meeting 2009, see pages 3-6

involved with ISA, this is the ideal opportunity to put yourself forward! Our committee meets several times a year, and there is also scope to become involved on a more local level. To paraphrase John F Kennedy, ask not what your ISA can do for you, ask what you can do for your ISA.

NB. ISA Conference Day will now take place in February 2010

ISA in the media

In 2009, ISA members have been appearing in a newspaper / parish newsletter / radio / TV near you. From Kerry's Eye to Capital D (RTÉ1), from West Limerick 105 to LMFM, ISA members have been expanding their comfort zones to speak out about stammering. One of the difficulties caused by stammering is that speaking out in itself can often be a challenge. By increasing public awareness of stammering, we create a more understanding environment for people who stutter. Look out for ISA in your local media, or contact us if you think you can assist.

Children's Drama Project

Following on from the resounding success of the drama workshops earlier this year the Irish Stammering Association and the Gaiety School of Acting teamed up once again to provide a summer drama camp for children who stammer.

The camp ran for the week of the 6th – 10th July in the Gaiety School of Acting, Temple Bar and 9 youngsters between the ages of 8 and 14 got the opportunity to explore the mythical land of Tale Town and try to stop the Thief of Happenstance Street before he created havoc. Each student had the opportunity to create a character in Tale Town and help develop the plot for their showcase performance at the end of the week. The camp was a complete theatrical experience incorporating acting, creative writing, stagecraft, music, singing, mime and movement.

The children got an opportunity to express themselves creatively among a group of their peers in an environment where they were not judged by how they speak. All of the participants threw themselves wholeheartedly into the experience and gave a very well crafted performance at their showcase. The appreciative response from family and friends was well deserved and the group got several rounds of applause. Like the children who participated in the drama workshops earlier in the year this group had a lot of fun as well as gaining confidence in their ability to express themselves regardless of how they speak.

The ISA would like to thank the Gaiety School of Acting for their wonderful contribution to this camp. We would particularly like to thank Seamus Quinn, who devised the concept of Tale Town, for

giving this group of youngsters the chance to explore that magical place. Thanks should also go to his dedicated team, Veronika, Michelle and Andrew.

Feedback from children and parents from previous groups has been very positive.

From the kids themselves...

- * "I can be myself"
- * "I was able to talk in front of an audience"
- * "Don't worry, it doesn't have to be perfect"
- * "I had a great time and met lots of new friends"

Parents said, my child learned...

- * "that she can do things and not to assume she can't"
- * "to take risks and relax"
- * "that he's not the only one and he's more confident in himself"

Our drama groups run several times during the year, please get in touch if you would like to get involved

The Irish Stammering Association was able to partly fund the camp with a grant from the Health Service Executive and is grateful for their support.



"Cast and Crew of Tale Town 2009"

combination treatments of under-8's to incorporate more family based programmes with increased focus on desensitisation and parent support.

The workshop received over twenty applications beyond the capacity and the thirty who did attend, participated enthusiastically throughout the two days with course evaluation forms indicating an increase in knowledge and competence in providing therapy for people who stammer. It is invigorating to see the number of SLTs with a special interest in working with this client group and the level of interest the workshop generated among the profession.

University of Limerick Speech and Language Therapy Students: Conducting Research in Stammering

Earlier this year, two Speech & Language Therapists from the University of Limerick collaborated with the Irish Stammering Association to carry out a research project entitled "Offering Support to Parents of Children Who Stutter: An Evaluation of an Innovative Irish Parental Support Group." The purpose of the project was to evaluate the experiences of parents who attended the first ever ISA parental support group in Dublin. Research undertaken for this project suggested that it is important for parents to have the opportunity to meet other parents in a similar situation. Additionally, group meetings could provide a secure environment for the sharing of worries, knowledge, ideas and questions. Feedback from the parents who attended the group showed that this was indeed the case, and the group was deemed to be a huge success.

Information for this project was gathered from two different groups of parents. The first group were made up of those parents in the Dublin area who attended the ISA parental support group. The second group were made up of parents from outside Dublin who have not yet attended an ISA

parental support group. Both groups of parents were given a questionnaire to fill in and the parents who attended the support group were also interviewed individually.

The results provided a lot of important feedback for the ISA. One of the most interesting findings showed that the parents who attended the group felt they gained more knowledge regarding: services their child may be entitled to, treatment options available to them and more information around how to help their child. Some other positive reports included: meeting other parents, feeling supported, hearing about parents' similar experiences and 'feeling that you are not alone'. One parent commented "Everyone is in the same boat, you can gain so much support". All of the parents from the group who attended the parental group interviewed acknowledged how they found the group very beneficial and would like to see more parents attending future groups being held. One attendee said, "I thought the group was brilliant, I'd have no hesitation recommending it to others".

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the parents who took part in the project and facilitated the provision of this much needed information to both the Irish Stammering Association and Speech and Language Therapists.

Anne Kinane and Sarah Franklin

!!The ISA would like its members to please note the following changes!!

From, October the **Parental Support Meetings** will be held on the **2nd Wednesday** of the month (and not the 2nd Monday as before) so the October meeting will be on **Wednesday 14th October** in the Belvedere Hotel, Great Denmark St (off Parnell Sq) Dublin 1, with everyone meeting in the foyer at 8 pm.

Irish Stammering Association are grateful to Bank of Scotland (Ireland) for their support in funding this project.

and which part of the iceberg sunk the Titanic? Raising awareness of the problems facing stutters is quite difficult, as most people either don't accept it as a problem, or don't want to talk about it. Thus an excellent point raised was to show the short film "To Speak" in classrooms across the world. We were shown this film, and I can be absolutely certain that all of us were moved by it, as it told a story all too familiar for a stutter, that school can be a very difficult time, and also that time can continue into adulthood if it is not changed.

However, there was also fun to be had during the meeting, with drama workshops, a presentation and an improvisation performance to occupy us for the week. I feel that these were the most important contributors in raising self-awareness of stuttering, as they offered an opportunity to do something that wouldn't ordinarily be appealing to a stutterer. These were led by some of the leaders, who also stuttered, so they knew what to expect of us. The group was split into 4 smaller groups, and we were free to choose whatever angle we wanted to take on both the drama presentation and the presentation of an idea to raise awareness of stuttering to "Bill Gates". Of course, they had to be about stuttering, but there was lots of fun and laughter as there was a spirit of being in it together, so there was no pressure, as everyone would have to do something at some point. A result of this was that there was an air of complete calm and understanding, as well as patience among the group. Everybody was encouraged to speak and give their input. Therefore it was very easy to make friends, most of which I will always be in touch with as a result of the meeting.

In conclusion, I cannot praise the efforts of the organisers, Edwin Farr and Anita Blom, indeed the whole ELSA organisation for their planning and efforts in creating such a wonderful opportunity. I would highly recommend attending these meetings to anyone who stutters as they are a fantastic opportunity to do something that you wouldn't normally have done, and make new

friends and have a lot of fun along the way. It will change your outlook on your life and open up new possibilities that you wouldn't normally have associated as something achievable, personally, I feel that once I accepted the fact that I stutter, but lost the idea that I thought I was shy, I realised that the future can't just be different, it has to be better. I don't know how to explain that, but I just have to go do it, stuttering and all. Thus I say, go forth and stutter, it's who you are, be proud of it and don't be afraid, because life is nothing more than one big epic holiday, go live it and don't let stuttering be a barrier to it!

Anthony Kennedy

"Managing Stammering: Children, Adults and their Families"

Workshop for Speech and Language Therapists

On September 24th and 25th last, Aoife McGuire and Mary O'Dwyer provided a two day workshop as part of Continuing Professional Development training for 30 Speech and Language Therapists (including three managers) at the University of Limerick. This was a joint University of Limerick and HSE Midwestern region initiative. Both Aoife and Mary are Senior Speech and Language Therapists (and members of the Irish Stammering Association of course!).

The workshop aimed;

- to provide SLTs with current evidence base around the multi-factorial nature of stammering onset and development,
- to identify principles on which to base assessment and therapy decisions,
- to develop knowledge and practice in the use of modification therapy (both stammering behaviours and feelings and attitudes), and in the use of avoidance reduction therapy
- to develop an overview of alternative and

Self-help groups

ISA's self help network now extends to nine groups: Dublin, Cork, Galway, Letterkenny, Waterford, Limerick, Midlands, Kerry, and Wexford. Self-help groups are designed for people who stutter and discuss issues around their stutter, as well as providing mutual support.

Who better to tell you about our groups, than those who attend?

"Before coming to the self-help group I very rarely spoke about my stammer, now I find it easier and it helps my confidence. It's so much better to have it out in the open.

Talking always HELPS!"

"I like going to the self-help group because it means I often meet people who stammer and I know I am not the only one."

"I was anxious about going to the meeting the first time but everyone there made me feel welcome and I realised I didn't have to feel powerless about my speech."

Of course, the groups are not working in isolation. Our group leaders attended a training and information day over the summer, giving an



Some of our Group Leaders after a hard day's networking: James McCormack, David Heney, Bryan McDonnell, Eoghan Murphy, Diarmuid Clifford (l-r)

opportunity to meet, discuss progress and share ideas. Through creating a stronger network of groups, we can create a stronger ISA, speaking out for people who stammer.

Telephone network – a self help group in your own home!

ISA is delighted to announce the launch of a new telephone support network for people who stutter. Not everyone is able to attend a self-help group, so what better idea than to attend a group from the comfort of your own home?

We realise that speaking on the phone can be difficult for some people, but in this case, all of the group will stutter, and be in the same boat. There's no cost to you, just be ready to take our conference call and we'll do the rest. There's no need to get dressed up as we won't be able to see you or your pink fluffy slippers. You will have to provide your own cup of tea and biscuits though, we can't do everything!

The group will be facilitated by a speech and language therapist, and a couple of experienced self help group leaders will also be talking. The group launches in October, so check our website, or contact our office for more details.

This year, two ISA members attended the ELSA Youth Meeting. "What is the ELSA Youth Meeting?" you may ask. Let Anthony Kennedy and Chris Maguire give you a flavour of what went on, from human rights to beds of nails...

ELSA Youth Meeting Giggleswick 2009

In July 2009, in the idyllic setting of Giggleswick School in North Yorkshire the 7th ELSA (European League of Stuttering Associations) Youth Meeting took place with the theme for the week being the "Right to Speak".

ELSA's main objectives are to

- promote self-help in European countries
- representation of interests for stammerers in the European Parliament
- exchange of Information and experiences between national Associations through seminars, newsletter etc.

It was with the last objective in mind that had 30 young people aged 18-26 from 13 countries in Europe, in this sleepily rural setting ready to do what they fear most, speak to a group of 30+ strangers. The first night was all about introductions and settling in to what would be our home for the week this involved introductions from the main leaders Edwin Farr and Anita Blom and what delights they had in store for us. Then it was the time we all dreaded... our introductions! Here, we had to get up and say our names and point out where in Europe we came from on a map and stating some small facts about the place, you could feel the tension in the room as we all waited in the green mile for our time in the chair. It would be the last time I would feel that fear for the rest of the week.

The next day was the start of seminars for the week, which would range from human rights and equality to performing arts. We started the day hearing about other associations around Europe, how the young people in the room were involved in their Associations and how we can do more to raise awareness in our own country. The experience in the room ranged from a 25-year chairperson to plain old members like myself but what the seminar did was give everyone the impetus to do more.

Our week was full of activities, one evening it was play-time with a drama workshop with Gouda which involved very little drama but a whole lot of childlike fun and it gave our group a great chance to bond. Another day, we made a visit to Bob Adams (British Stammering Association) in his

performing arts class. Activities ranged from learning to play the Didgeridoo to laying on a bed of nails and also expressing your feeling about your stammer using performing arts.

A seminar was given by Edwin in which we learned the workings of ELSA in International and European Disability Policy relating to stammering and the work that is being done on our behalf to protect our human rights.

On our day off (!) the group visited local caves and explored the nearby market town of Settle and that evening we had a few games of football. For a change the UK and Ireland team seemed to have the upper hand on mainland Europe!

As the week progressed, days were totally devoted to our project, which entailed each group working out a business plan for an initiative to provide a worthwhile service for stammerers throughout Europe. The groups then presented the plan to the leaders and other participants that evening. The fear that was so prevalent on the opening night was now gone as each group did a professional and passionate presentation. The ideas included a radio station and TV programme made for and by stammers, to a recruitment agency to help employers and employees to deal with stammering in the work place.

Thursday saw us deliver a drama project with a stammering theme. Every group performed at the leaving party which occurred on that our final night and was also attended by members of local stammering associations.

Friday was time to say our goodbyes and leave behind 30 new friends and return to the real world. It was an unforgettable week where I learned a lot about myself not only in relation to my stammer but to myself on the whole and the experience taught me that my stammer is very small part of what makes up a person.

Chris Maguire

ELSA Youth Meeting

Like my view of life, I would describe the 2009 ELSA Youth Meeting as an epic holiday that changed every thought I had about stuttering. What started out as an opportunity to go abroad and meet other people from all across Europe who stutter turned out to be a major turning point in my self-acceptance of the fact that I have a stutter.

It all started with an early start on the morning of the 25th of August, myself and Chris Maguire had booked a very early flight into Manchester, and as we boarded the plane we had no idea what to expect, but by that evening we were having a ball, making new friends and discovering ourselves more and more. The meeting kicked off properly with an interesting task; to stand up in front of a map and say a little bit about ourselves and where we had come from. I started out by saying I was shy and that people should come and talk to me rather than the other way around. Little did I know that as the course progressed, my apparent shyness would disappear, to the point where people were saying I definitely wasn't shy, thus proving a long standing ideal that I've always had; that if you truly believe that you can see yourself differently, you can affect the world around you, and if you can affect the world around you, then you can affect the world itself. In other words, being a stutterer should not be a stumbling block to anything a person wants to achieve, a point well raised during the meeting.

The theme of the meeting was "the right to speak."- Human Rights Education and Intercultural Dialogue. As we were all stutterers at the meeting, this was a very important aspect to discuss as we found out about the legislation that sets out the rights that we have as stutters. The major legislation can be found in the European Union treaties and Directives, however, one of the more important pieces of legislation can be found in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with

reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Thus, job interviews and job entitlements should not be discouraged just because a person stutters. People are all different, but this does not mean that one person can do a better job than someone else with the same qualifications, but is disabled. For example, I met a person at the meeting who worked in a tech support call centre for a phone company in Britain. This may shock some people as it is a common consensus that people who stutter cannot possibly do a better job answering phones as someone who doesn't stutter. This is absolute nonsense, as stereotypes rarely live up to their fictional fact, and to go against such a stereotype, and be successful is a huge step in the right direction towards a positive outlook for people who stutter. Another huge piece of legislation that was discussed was Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty. As a law student I was aware of the provisions that this treaty laid out; "...to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation." However I was not aware of the fact that by its definition, stammering or stuttering, is a disability, and can avail of this legislation where a person feels that they have been discriminated against. Thus in order to be in compliance with this Article, it is perfectly reasonable for a stuttering person to ask for extra time in an interview, or an oral exam, or not to be asked to do a job as a result of their stuttering. This is a huge relief to learn, as the above situations are daunting at the best of times, but for a stutterer, they can be incredibly stressful and may result in loss of sleep or other ailments.

Another aspect of the life of a stutterer that was raised is the raising of awareness of the problems facing a stutterer to the wider society of the world. It is widely known that 1% of the world's population stutters, but to use the iceberg analogy, the stutter is at the tip of the iceberg, but there are much bigger problems lurking beneath the surface,