BC HANDS & VOICES

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BC Hands & Voices is a parent-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families with children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.

We are a parent/professional collaborative group that is unbiased towards communication modes and methods, believing that families will make the best choices for their child if they have access to good information and support.

Our goal is to support families in achieving successful outcomes for their children.

We are on the web at bchandsandvoices.com

A California Adventure with Benefits

By Anja Rosenke

"You're going to California for a whole month?!" We smiled at the looks of disbelief that accompanied that question. Yes indeed, we had been accepted to the last of the three international summer sessions for 2010 at the John Tracy Clinic in Los Angeles, California. An adventure awaited. As Louise Tracy herself said, we, as parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, are each pioneers embarking on a unique adventure in teaching our children. This particular adventure would take us over a thousand miles south from our home in Vancouver, BC. And that was just the beginning.

Our son Rylan had been born with profound sensorineural bilateral hearing loss in 2007. The kicker is that he was not diagnosed until he was 16 months old. He is little brother by 2 years to our naturally hearing daughter Michaela. Immediately following his diagnosis we were swept up in the services and community networking that are available where we live and are so grateful for this amazing support. Rylan received bilateral cochlear implants sequentially – at 19 months and 31 months old. He is well on his way to learning to listen and to speak. However, as other parents of late diagnosed children can attest, we are still playing a game of catch-up, and this is where the John Tracy Clinic figures in.

The grounds of John Tracy Clinic

We asked ourselves: What more could we gain from attending the John Tracy Clinic? It was a big commitment after all. As a family, we are quite well-read with regards to hearing loss, we are involved in various parent organizations in our community and we receive quality services for Rylan at home. But we felt that if we learned even one more thing that could help Rylan on his journey, then it was worth going. And besides, we were going on an adventure to California! At the very least we'd have a great family holiday.

With anticipation and a bit of trepidation (mostly about navigating those freeways), we entered the City of Angels in early July 2010. We certainly looked forward to meeting the approximately 20 other families who were also making their way to LA from various parts of the world. We knew to expect a full agenda of parent education classes covering the spectrum of hearing loss topics such as audiology, physiology, speech & language development, cognition, mainstreaming and more. The child with hearing loss (aged 2-5) would attend a daily preschool program and any accompanying brothers and sisters in grades 1-6 would attend the sibling program. Counselling, audiology and consultation services would also be available to families.

What we didn't know - what we couldn't have known - is how much our 3-week experience at the John Tracy Clinic would impact our lives. The team of staff at the John Tracy Clinic go to extraordinary lengths to not only to provide the comprehensive and relevant educational component to families, but are also dedicated to quickly identifying and addressing each family's individual concerns and needs. Whether your child needs additional audiological testing, specific language assessments or occupational therapy services, the professionals at the John Tracy Clinic help as much as they can. We sought out feedback regarding possible sensory processing issues and discussed behavioural and relationship concerns with a counsellor. Having so many specialists working as a team under one roof is ideal and enhances the family-centred approach. Their single goal is ensuring the 3-week visit is as beneficial and comfortable as possible for each individual family. Over and over again during the 3-weeks, we as parents were supported, recognized and validated.

Spending 5 hours a day in the parents classroom learning about a wide range of topics relating to hearing loss was immensely valuable. Lectures were given by staff in the various departments of the Clinic. On several occasions we were presented with panels of professionals in the field, panels of youth and adults with hearing loss. We shared our personal stories in support group and out on the green space in the evenings while the children played. With curiosity, compassion and empathy, our perspectives broadened and our understanding deepened. We learned from it all. Our binders are chock full of the information, practical tips and strategies acquired in the classroom and this will provide an invaluable resource as we move forward as teachers and advocates for our children. And the community that was formed between families from our shared experience will also fortify us with lifelong friendships.

What touched me the most at John Tracy Clinic was seeing how both of our children just thrived in that setting. This was Rylan's first introduction to preschool and to see his self-confidence and enjoyment grow as he connected with his teachers and peers, became familiar with the routines and activities, made the trip worth it for us in itself. He went to school each day like a regular kid - albeit with sound checks and lots of acoustic highlighting! It was reassuring to see him socialize and chat with the others, even with his somewhat limited verbal skills. The preschool teachers emphasize the importance of developing pragmatic skills - language and behaviour specific to social use - in addition to speech and language therapy. Michaela too thoroughly enjoyed the fun activities in the sibling program. At one point she asked me if we could stay there forever.

Morning Circle Time

As much as the sun and surf of the California coast enticed us, and as much support and inspiration we drew from being at John Tracy Clinic, the big picture always remained in the back of our minds: how we would remember and transfer what we learned to our regular lives back at home. Some parents talked about feeling empowered by the experience at John Tracy Clinic, many felt they gained a clearer focus on what the next steps would be. One thing was certain though. We all gained strength through the sense of community that emerged from sharing those 3 weeks with both the John Tracy staff and the other attending families. We learned together, laughed and cried together, and existed in a place where everyone was accepted, most of all our children, each in his or her own unique way.

We will benefit a lifetime from the memories, friendships and knowledge gathered there.

Visit www.jtc.org to find out more about the John Tracy Clinic.

Fall Parent Workshop:
Tips for Raising Happy, Confident Kids

by Teresa Kazemir

BC Hands & Voices was thrilled to have Dr. Janet Jamieson present at our Fall Parent Workshop. She started things off with an informative and encouraging talk about self-esteem in children with hearing loss. This was followed by a panel of confident, inspiring teens and young adults. They talked about their personal experiences growing up, and some interesting situations they have encountered. After a lunch break and a chance to socialize with other families, it was time for a panel of "veteran" parents, who shared their stories and some practical pointers for raising happy confident kids. Here are a few key ideas and tips from Dr. Jamieson's presentation:

- "Family is not just the group of people you're born with – it is also the people who understand you. You will find you are with family here." What a wonderful way to set the tone for our workshop!

- Research has shown that people who tend to have the best sense of social identity are those who are able to interact comfortably **both with people of similar hearing status and those with typical hearing**. This suggests it's good to provide social opportunities with both hearing peers and deaf/hoh peers.

- In general, mothers **tend** to handle stress by talking, and fathers **tend** to handle stress by doing. So it's not uncommon for husbands and wives to have different needs, and sometimes it might be helpful for a mom to turn to another mom for support, and likewise for dads.

- When parenting children with hearing loss (or any children, for that matter!) you need to think of the oxygen mask that drops down in an airplane – they tell you to put on your own oxygen mask first, and **then** help your children put on theirs. You have to take care of your own needs in order to be able to meet your child's needs.

- It's harder for children to join a social group (such as soccer, Girl Guides, etc.) after grade 2. When children join group activities by age 5 or 6 they tend to have an easier time.

- "Always remember – you are the expert on your child."

I would love to summarize all the stories and words of wisdom shared by the teens, young adults, and parents, but I have to admit I got too caught up in what they had to say, and didn't take notes after the first half hour or so (turns out I'm not the best person for this job!). Luckily, the entire workshop was videotaped, and will soon be available on DVD with captioning – we'll be sure to send out an email announcement and post it on our website when it is ready. For now, though, I can share one suggestion that came up again and again from both the youth and the parents:

- Children need to have opportunities to observe their parents advocating on their behalf so that they can learn how to do it for themselves. So bring your child with you when you explain to the swimming instructor that little Johnny won't be able to hear you in the water, and what he or she can do to help Johnny understand the instructions. As your child gets older, he or she will gradually do more of the advocating, until they are able to do it independently. Children learn by example, and a little explicit teaching and practice ahead of time never hurts either!

All in all, it was a great workshop – it was wonderful to see families using a variety of communication approaches come together to learn from the presenters and from each other. We would like to sincerely thank all of the participants and volunteers, as well as the following organizations for their support, financial or in kind:

- ❖ BC Early Hearing Program (presenters, filming & captioning, insurance)
- ❖ Provincial Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (sign language interpreters)
- ❖ Children's Hearing & Speech Centre of BC (venue)
- ❖ BC Children's Hospital (travel funds for families, childcare)

Member News

Happy 1st birthday, Hannah! Hannah celebrating her Bday with her Great grandma, big brother Connor, and Mom.

Rosalind at the Peak in Hong Kong. She is now studying at Hong Kong University as an exchange student from UBC.

Jesse performing with the North Shore Celtic Ensemble at the Aberdeen International Youth Festival, Scotland, August 2010! Way to go, Jesse!

December birthdays: Best wishes to Tracy Chow, Amy Ho, and David McGregor, whose birthdays all fall on the same day, December 28th!

Kristen Pranzl

Congrats to Kristen, one of our directors, on the birth of her baby boy in October, Quentin Jack Pranzl McPherson!

Teresa Kazemir

Congrats to Teresa, one of our directors, for being offered a position on the National/ International board of Hands & Voices. She will be representing the families of BC and the rest of Canada!

Ho Ho Huh?
Tips for Surviving the Holidays

Contributed by Lorna Irwin, Idaho H&V

You've done whatever you need to do to give your deaf or hard of hearing child access to communication at home through amplification, creating a good listening environment and/or employing some form of visual communication.Suddenly the holidays arrive; the extended family gathers, the noise level goes up, and it's enough to confuse any child, let alone one who can't hear everything that's going on. How can you reduce the stress of family events, and even turn them into something meaningful and memorable? We've gathered the following tips from Idaho Hands & Voices families and other sources.

It Helps to Lay the Groundwork. Talk to your child ahead of time; use books, family pictures and other visual aids to help explain what will happen. Involve your child in planning the event, if possible—let him help decorate, bake, and shop, plan the menu and guest list as age and ability allow. Not only will he better understand what is going on, he will be an important part of it.

Make sure that your child is aware of what is planned each day, and keep him/her updated when plans change. One mother finds posting a written schedule to be beneficial, and not only duringthe holidays. And it doesn't hurt to take some time each morning or the night before to make one-on-one contact and confirm that my girls understand what is on the agenda; sometimes we assume that they heard something when they didn't. This strategy has even wider applications: We knew that our deaf child would not be aware of what was happening unless we signed our conversations or took time to fill her in, so we were careful to make sure she got the information one way or another. To our surprise, we later realized that our hearing children, even when sitting right beside us as we discussed plans, weren't always paying attention and could benefit from the same kind of consideration!

Noise, multiple simultaneous conversations, relatives who don't know sign language or don't understand your child's hearing loss all conspire to make communication difficult. The deaf mother of a deaf child reports that in both the past and the present, she has hated large gatherings. I speak well, but one-way communication doesn't sit well with me. My son seems to be blamed for anything that goes wrong when other kids are at fault as well, because of communication issues. I cling to my mother and chase after my kid to keep me away from chatting with others .It helps to explain your child's specific needs to the rest of the extended family; still, it's not unusual for a parent to end up facilitating communication.The most important thing for us is making sure they're not left out of dinner table conversation, which means being patient about repeating things and explaining jokes, even though the point of the conversation or the humor of the punchline may be lost on the third or fourth re-telling.... We can't interpret everything that is said, but we try to hit the high points and recap what is going on.... When talking to someone else, I try to at least sign for myself; my daughter regards half a conversation to be better than none, and I pass on interesting stories and other tidbits of information. Remember, though,that this is also your chance to visit with friends and family; arrange times when you can enjoy the company of other adults on your own. As my daughter grew older, she came to understand that we needed "just talking" time, and developed coping strategies. She'd play with the younger children, who found her quite amusing and didn't care that she couldn't talk, or disappear with a book or other project. We'd have a break and be better able to interpret for everyone when she returned.

For the child who depends at least in part on his hearing, **do what you can to minimize background noise.** Turn down the Christmas carols! (Bah, humbug.)If your child uses an FM unit at school and you have access to it during vacation, pass the microphone around or set it in the middle of the table—hide it inside the centerpiece if your child is self-conscious about it. The mother of a child with a cochlear implant says that hearing with only one ear makes it difficult for her son to localize sound; group conversations are difficult for him to follow. Be sure to point out the speaker; we often name the person who is speaking and point. Another way to identify who is speaking, and get everyone to take turns speaking, is to pass around some kind of token. "It's your turn to talk if you're holding the reindeer."

Sometimes it may be possible to make holiday plans which reduce communication problems and stress. The deaf mother who has a horror of large get-togethers reports that she's chosen to have a small Thanksgiving dinner with a few family members rather than attend the big gathering. She suggests staying on the home turf as another option: I'm trying out something different for Christmas this year, a family gathering in my home. My son will feel more comfortable in his own environment; he can boss the other kids around, more empowerment to him. It's my home and a more deaf-friendly environment for both of us. Another idea is to employ strategic seating at the table, making sure that your child has visual and/or auditory access to people who communicate well with him and are willing to take the time to repeat or interpret what is being said, or just carry on a conversation with your child—and they don't always have to be his parents.

Merely surviving the holidays is hard enough; it's a special time of year, when we want to honor family traditions and build relationships. We've also garnered a couple of tips on how to make this time of year meaningful.

The holidays may be the one chance for children to get to know relatives who live at a distance. No matter what form of communication they use, one-on-one conversations are easier; do what you can to encourage these. One Christmas, my father had purchased a small wooden model for my daughter, intending to help her put it together. He thought he'd need my help as an interpreter, but I suggested that he try writing. Simple vocabulary coupled with a 'hands-on' type of activity resulted in smooth, independent communication for both grandfather and granddaughter; he was thrilled and she still remembers that afternoon. Not long after, my father suffered a severe stroke and died about a year later, so this memory is very precious to her.

Adapt family traditions to fit the needs of your children: In my family and my husband's, the father of the family always read the Christmas story from the Bible before presents could be opened. Instead of doing this, we enact the story using a sturdy Nativity set and sing "Happy Birthday" to Baby Jesus when we place Him in the manger. Our children understand the meaning of the holiday without fidgeting through something they find difficult to understand.

We Are Going To Crash Crawlies!

Coming up on Sunday, March 13th

Come join BC Hands & Voices, Family Network for Deaf Children, and CHHA Parents' Branch for a fun time at a huge indoor playground!

Children and teens of all ages welcome (they have laser tag, too) – a great chance for parents to mix and mingle while the kids have fun.
More information will be posted on our website and circulated by email shortly, but mark the date!

Donate Now

Your donations will go towards providing more support to families with deaf/hard of hearing children in B.C.

To make a donation, please issue a cheque to BC Hands and Voices, and mail to:

BC Hands and Voices
5513 Parker Ave
Victoria, BC
V8Y 2N2

A tax deduction receipt will be issued for any donation of $25 or above. BC Hands and Voices is a registered charity (Charity Registration Number: 83838-4428 RR0001).

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