

My Interview with Tracy Fawdry from the LDAO

by Hope Clark

1. What is your job title and what organization do you work for?

Tracy Fawdry, Executive Director
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario – London Region

2. Briefly explain what it is you do:

As the LDAO-London Region is quite a small organization, my responsibilities are quite broad. I manage the general operations of the agency, solicit funds, write grant proposals, report to funders, oversee HR functions, liaise with a board of directors, and set programming, service and strategic direction for the agency. I also work in direct service with clients through facilitating our Support Groups, doing agency/LD awareness and training in the community, and also providing individualized support to clients at various times.

3. How long have you been working with clients with Learning Disabilities?

I have been working in the literacy field for 17 years which has included adult literacy, developmental and family literacy in the traditional school setting, literacy as social justice and ESL/Literacy. A more concentrated focus on learning disabilities has been present during my time with LDAO-London Region over the past 3 years.

4. What kind of clients do you work with most often?

Through my work in the Support Groups at LDAO-LR, I assist both parents of children with LD and AD/HD, and adults living with AD/HD.

5. When it comes to your clients, how easy or difficult do you find it is for them to disclose that they have, or suspect they have, a Learning Disability?

Since our agency's name makes the issue quite an open one, I find that most people have been through a phase of realization and disclosure with at least a few people in their lives. Acceptance and management of their LD and/or AD/HD are usually the areas of focus once clients connect with us at the office.



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6. How important is it, do you think, for clients to disclose a Learning Disability?

I think the issue of disclosure of one's learning disability is a very individualized, personal decision. Important factors such as life stage, situation, reasoning, level of trust, and potential life impact should all be considered in making a decision as to whether or not to disclose an LD, and whether a benefit would be gained in a given situation.

7. Do Learning Disabilities tend to run in families?

My understanding is that the research has shown there is a genetic link related to learning disabilities. Further, AD/HD as a disorder causing learning difficulties is also highly genetically linked based on current research.

8. How do you accommodate Learning Disabilities at the Learning Disabilities Association?

In a staffing, volunteer or client situation the following approach and types of accommodations would be negotiated and implemented should an LD be disclosed to us:

- Anonymity if requested
- Extra time for tasks, breaks
- Use of visuals or strategic supports
- Use of assistive technology/devices – i.e. Dragon, Premiere, Personal Organizers
- Adapted supervisory/management structure

9. What kind of follow-up should a client expect?

We negotiate the follow-up format individually with a client. If intervalled check-ins are negotiated based on a plan of specific goal attainment, a client can expect us to follow through with them. The oneness is put on the client to maintain appointments although understanding the nature of particularly AD/HD and certain LDs, some rescheduling and re-working of a client's support plan is accommodated.

10. Could an LD affect one's employment options or opportunities?

Yes - with certain types of LDs, a deficit area may be severe enough that certain skills are too difficult to complete satisfactorily. Sometimes it makes more sense to

- (1) avoid the necessity for that skill area or
- (2) utilize assistive supports or alternative methods to complete given tasks. In some workplaces, the second option may be possible and in others it may not.

Some extreme job scenarios follow to make this point by example.

- An editing job when reading is a difficult task, at which the person works quite slowly and has trouble with short-term memory or comprehension.
- A job customer service job at which composing email replies is a core role; the person has real difficulties with spelling, main idea identification and word recognition.

* Please see #11 for guidelines when choosing a job or career.

11. What would you say to a person with a LD who is looking for work?

Some generic suggestions would be:

- Know your strengths & weaknesses well
- Understand what supports/modifications you can independently implement in a new workplace
- Choose a job that will play to your strengths
- Pay attention to the atmosphere and attitude of your potential new workplace – does it feel supportive; if a larger company, do they have a reputation of supporting those with disabilities – is this backed by any policies
- Consider disclosing your disability when/if (1) you've developed a level of trust/respect with your supervisor and (2) you feel strongly that you'll be supported with any new accommodations needed or job flexibility

12. What would you say to the employer or potential employer of a person with an LD?

See # 14

13. Do you think that all levels of education should be implementing practices to accommodate people with LD?

Yes – Elementary and secondary schools do this through the IPRC/IEP process whereby along with a formal diagnosis comes mandated recommendations for accommodations and/or modifications to the school program. Luckily post-secondary institutions in Canada are also mandated to provide support services to people with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities.

14. Do you see any value for businesses to implement practices to accommodate people with LD?

Yes – I see a huge value! Through my experience working with many people having LD and AD/HD, I feel employers would be missing out on a huge contribution of intellect, creativity, and passion by denying an LD individual an understanding, flexible job environment. As with younger students, education around what LD is and is not, is also important for employers. Skill-based or processing deficits do not infer intellectual deficits, and certain areas of weakness do not infer a general lack of strengths/creativity. More resources and opportunities to educate employers on LD and AD/HD are very much needed.

15. What kind of assistive technology is available for people with LD at LDAO?

LDAO-LR has a large selection of both newer and older assistive technology supports and software. We have a total of five computer workstations with assistive software available to children, youth and adult clients of the agency. Some of the programs we have include: Dragon Naturally Speaking, Kurzweil, Inspiration, Kidspiration, Read & Write, Word Q, Speak Q, Spark Space, Phonics Tutor, Reader Rabbit and Premier (mutli-program package).

16. We know that Assistive Technology can help people with Learning Disabilities. Are there any recognized or recommended non-technical methods that can help individuals?

The types of non-technologically based methods that can assist individuals with learning disabilities are as varied as the types of multi-layered diagnoses that we see in our clients. Some general strategies that are shared/taught by our staff and volunteers at LDAO-LR are as follows: memory-focussed, organizational, visual supports, systematic, multiple intelligence-based, learning style-based and many others. There are many learning and study strategies that can be beneficial to both average learners and those with learning difficulties. Understanding ones areas of deficit, learning and applying new strategies, and identifying those that work best for an individual can be an ongoing learning process. This process will also be affected by developmental, intellectual and life stage changes. Staff at LDAO-LR is skilled at interpreting assessment results and assisting individuals and families in finding corresponding strategies as a first step.

Learning the Differences

By: Mary Rushe

It is understood that learning and many of the barriers to its acquisition can be complicated and often misunderstood. Such is the case with a condition known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). While the symptoms of ADHD can and do often interfere with the learning process, it is not considered a learning disability. The Learning Disability Association of Canada makes a clear distinction between a learning disability and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder stating that, "Each is a distinctive neurologically based disorder. Each is recognized and diagnosed differently. And each is treated in a different way. The treatment for ADHD will not correct an LD. The treatment for an LD will not help ADHD. About 30% to 40% of people with an LD will also have ADHD, so if one disorder is found it is important to look for the other."

The high co-morbidity of ADHD and LDs and the common overlap of symptoms experienced by each condition contribute to the confusion and the complexity of the disorder. For example both ADHD students and LD students can experience difficulties with social perception and/or organizational skills.

For example:

- ADHD students and LD students both may experience difficulties w/social perception and/or organizational skills...also:

ADHD

LD

Weak Executive Functioning

Weak Executive Functioning

Confusion

Confusion

Medications

No Medications

Disorganization

Disorganization

In order to address an individual's needs and improve their quality of life, careful consideration is required to help develop strategies and provide treatment that will identify learning challenges, modify behaviours, and control the symptoms of the disorder. The first step to finding a solution is to correctly identify the problem.

The Proper Diagnosis

There is not a definitive test that can be given to determine the presence of ADHD. The diagnosis requires an evaluation that is comprehensive and involves input from many sources in a person's circle. The first step is the observation of possible symptoms that point to the disorder. Symptoms of inattention, impulsiveness and sometimes hyperactivity typically are present in a person who has ADHD. The degree and the incidence of these symptoms must present and occur in more than one setting, i.e. at home, and in a social setting. In addition, the observer needs to ensure that they are not typical symptoms for the developmental age of the person. The following points will help you to prepare effectively for an appointment with a physician and prepare the visitor for questions the doctor will ask.

A more detailed list of questions that pertain to ADHD can be found at:

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/mentalhealth/adhd/index.html>

under "Preparing for your appointment"

Speakers Bureau Update...

Our **Speakers Bureau** is off and running with presentations being made to community groups and employers. Each of our current speakers has a 30-40 minute presentation that they can bring to your workplace, meeting or event free of charge. Each speaker has their own unique presentation that shares their personal experience of living and succeeding with a Learning Disability.

To book your presentation, please call us today at 519-433-7950 ext 372.

ATN Access Inc. would like to thank the London Community Foundation for their generous support of the Speakers Bureau initiative.



- List any symptoms seen at both school/work or at home this list should include all concerns even if they appear unrelated to the visit
- Note any key changes in the person's life, i.e. a recent incident that caused stress or a major life change
- Ensure that all medications are listed this includes all vitamins and supplements as they all interact with each other
- Address any other concerns you might want to ask your doctor.

The diagnosis of ADHD begins with concerns that prompt a visit to your family Doctor. After reviewing concerns, a thorough physical examination is conducted to rule out other possibilities for the symptoms, e.g. mood or social disorders. After the initial assessment is complete and all other possibilities have been ruled out the doctor will referral to a psychologist or a psychiatrist with a specialization in ADHD. This stage will include a battery of psychometric tests and a review of all of the data gathered from all sources. A diagnosis of ADHD must meet specific criteria outlined in the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders – DSM-IV. CHADD offers tools that outline the criteria in the DSM-IV. To view the criteria that must be met for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual for Mental Disorders DSM-IV see the website: <http://www.behavenet.com/capsules/disorders/adhd.htm>

References:

Reviewed on 30/03/2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.caddac.ca/cms/page.php?53>

Reviewed on 30/03/2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.help4adhd.org/en/about>

Reviewed on 30/03/2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.ldalondon.ca/default.asp?id=902>

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We hope you have enjoyed this month's issue of the LD Edge Newsletter and that you are looking forward to the next issue.



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**If we give them an edge,
They may give us one!**

Important Announcement:

Distinctive Learning Centre



Dear Supporter:

When ATN initially began pursuing funding for the Distinctive Learning Centre (DLC), we believed it was a goal we could achieve in a short time. We assumed, naively as it turned out, that the demonstrated need for this type of special school, together with our reputation for delivering high quality services to people with disabilities, would be enough to make this dream a reality.

Though we were intensely committed to this endeavor over the past three years, we were equally committed to creating a strong foundation for the school prior to its opening; therefore we sought a stable and sustainable funding base which would ensure the DLC's existence for more than just a year or two.

It is with a great deal of regret, that we are announcing we have not been successful in establish such funding, and the DLC project will not go forward as was originally envisioned.

However, over the past three years, a number of generous donors, who also believed in the value of the DLC, contributed to this dream. The good news now is that we are planning to use these funds to offer summer and evening programs that we will be offering free of charge to assist young people with significant learning needs.

More information about these activities will soon be sent to you.

In the meantime, thank you so much for your support and interest in this process. Please contact me by phone, (519) 433-7950 or via email, vicki@atn.on.ca

Vicki Mayer