



Learning Disabilities Association of York Region

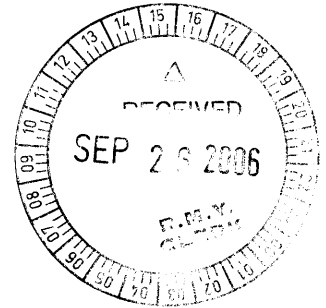
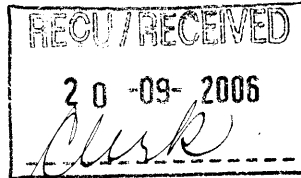
REGION OF YORK
CLERK'S OFFICE

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Celebrating 30 Years in York Region

September 5, 2006

Regional Chair Bill Fisch
The Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1



Dear Regional Chair Fisch:

October is Public Awareness Month for Learning Disabilities across Canada. This year's campaign theme, *Learning Disabilities and Mental Health: is there a higher risk?*, will illustrate how mental health issues are not the cause, but rather the consequence, of academic frustrations and continued failures.

The Learning Disabilities Association of York Region (LDAYR) recognizes that with an understanding of the social and emotional challenges at hand, parents and teachers can help children with LD develop positive self-esteem, useful social skills and traits that can lead to success. Learning disabilities are life long and with early interventions and appropriate supports, children with LD can become competent, content and independent adults who reach their full potential and lead satisfying lives.

Founded in 1976, LDAYR is the regional voice for persons with learning disabilities and those who support them. LDAYR is dedicated to promoting leadership in learning disabilities advocacy, research, education and services and to advance the full participation of children, youth and adults with learning disabilities in today's society.

As Executive Director of the York Region Chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association, I am asking The Regional Municipality of York to declare October Learning Disabilities Awareness Month.

Sincerely,

Lynn Ziraldo
Executive Director
905-884-7933, extension 22

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Learning Disabilities Fact Sheet

Learning Disabilities (LD) are a neuro-biological disorder that affects the way in which a person takes in, remembers, understands and expresses information. People with LD have average to high intelligence; because they have difficulties with specific forms of information, they are able to learn and succeed if information (including coping strategies) is given in an appropriate mode.

School's attachment to certain favoured modes of learning can lead to repeated failure and social ostracization, and result in low self-esteem and learned helplessness. Mental health issues, substance abuse, relationship difficulties and underemployment can develop as fallout from LDs that go undiagnosed and/or untreated.

Up to ten percent of the population is estimated to have some degree of learning disability; approximately three million Canadians.

90,000 students in Ontario were identified as having learning disabilities in the 2001-2002 school year.

Dropout rates among individuals with LD are as high as 35%; this is twice the rate as among the general population.

48% of adults with LDs are out of the workforce or underemployed, almost twice as many as the general population. Of those adults with DL who are employed, the average income is \$14,000. Among the general population, the average income is \$23,000.

Individuals with LDs represent a disproportionately large segment of the correctional population; estimates in Canada are as high as 40%.

Learning Disabilities are due to genetic, congenital and/or acquired neuro-biological factors. They are not caused by factors such as cultural or language differences, inadequate or inappropriate instruction, socio-economic status or lack of motivation, although any one of these and other factors may compound the impact of learning disabilities.

Together, we *can* make a difference.

Let's focus on ensuring advances and positive change through education, advocacy and research. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if we achieved equal opportunity for everyone?

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Success Attributes Across the Life Span

Children with learning disabilities grow up to be adults with learning disabilities (LD). Many of the difficulties experienced in childhood continue into and through adulthood. In spite of these challenges, some individuals with LD are able to lead successful lives while others are barely able to 'keep their heads above water' emotionally, socially or financially.

Why, despite similar backgrounds and learning disabilities, does one individual end up with a rewarding career, longterm friendships, while another, experiences a life of loneliness, isolation and financial stress?

Research has shown that a set of personal characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours help lead persons with learning disabilities to successful life outcomes. Successful persons with learning disabilities are much more likely to have these characteristics than unsuccessful individuals.

What is success?

According to the Frostig Centre in California, the agency that conducted over 20 years of research in this area, success means different things to different people, at different times in a person's life. However, there seems to be a number of things that most people include when they think of success. These include good friends, positive family relations, being loved, self approval, job satisfaction, physical and mental health, financial comfort, spiritual contentment, and an overall sense of meaning in one's life.

The Frostig Centre has identified the following 'success attributes' and offers recommendations for how to help children develop them. These success attributes include: self-awareness, the presence and use of effective support systems, emotional coping strategies, pro-activity, goal-setting, perseverance.

Self Awareness

Successful people with learning disabilities understand their learning disabilities, are aware of the impact of their disabilities, including academic problems like reading and writing, academic-related problems such as attentional or organizational difficulties and non-academic difficulties such as motor deficits, social skills, or emotional/behaviour problems. They are open and specific about their difficulties and understand how they affect their lives and are not afraid to use strategies and coping skills. They are able to see their LD as only one aspect of themselves. They recognize their talents along with accepting their limitations. In addition they are also able to find jobs that provide the best 'fit' or 'match' with their abilities.

Presence and Use of Effective Support Systems

Guidance, support and encouragement come from family members, friends, mentors, teachers, therapists and co-workers. As successful individuals move into adulthood, they attempt to reduce their dependence on others. However, they take the initiative and seek the support of others rather than wait for someone to come to their aid. They are willing to accept help when it is offered. In many instances, they are able to switch roles with people who had provided them with support in the past, finding themselves assisting and encouraging those who once helped them.

Emotional Coping Strategies

The daily struggle of living with learning disabilities and coping with its symptoms often result in individuals experiencing stress in their lives. In some cases, the stress can be so significant that it can lead to psychological difficulties such as anxiety and depression. However, successful

individuals appear to have developed effective means of reducing and coping with stress, frustration, and the emotional aspects of their learning disabilities. Researchers have identified three components of successful emotional coping:

1. Awareness of the situations that trigger stress;
2. Recognition of developing stress;
3. Availability/access to and use of coping strategies.

These coping strategies can include:

- seeking counseling,
- asking others to do unmanageable tasks on the job,
- finding a mentor
- changing activities periodically so stress does not build up,
- expressing feelings,
- asserting oneself,
- utilizing peer support and encouragement,
- learning to ask for help,
- planning ahead for difficult transition,
- keeping away from negative or critical people,
- working out differences with friends, family and/or co-workers,
- using meditation/yoga,
- doing physical activities or exercises.

Pro-Activity

Successful adults with learning disabilities are generally actively engaged in the world around them. They believe that they have the power to control their own destiny and affect the outcome of their lives. They often step into leadership roles at work, in the community, and in social and family settings. They demonstrate creative self advocacy and initiative and have a willingness to consult with others while making decisions. When acting upon these decisions they also assume responsibility for their actions and resulting outcomes. They generally take responsibility for the outcome and do not blame others when things don't work out.

Goal Setting

Successful individuals set goals that are specific, realistic and attainable yet flexible so that they can be changed to adjust to specific circumstances and include a strategy to reach their goals. They have an understanding of the step by step process for obtaining their goals.

Perseverance

Many persons with learning disabilities show great perseverance and keep pursuing their chosen path despite difficulties and may be heard saying 'I am not a quitter' or 'I never give up'. However, successful individuals demonstrate an additional important ability – knowing when to quit. They may change the way they go about achieving their goal, thereby improving their chances of success. Often they try several strategies until they find one that works. Successful persons with learning disabilities appear to learn from their hardships and mistakes which they found to be necessary for growth.

How Can A Child Develop Success Attributes?

Fostering these six success attributes is one of the ways that parents can help their children with learning disabilities grow up to be more successful throughout their lives. These attitudes, behaviours and characteristics require exercise, practice and review just like any other skill children learn. At different life stages, new developmentally appropriate challenges may require

parents to recycle and revisit with their children the success attributes they had worked on earlier.

To date no research tells us exactly how to teach these attributes. However, research does suggest a number of key components and areas that need to be considered in fostering success attributes at a young age.

Unfortunately, we concentrate our efforts primarily on the academic/educational areas, paying little attention to the development of these attributes in promoting positive life outcomes in persons with learning disabilities. If we remind ourselves that research has shown that learning disabilities persist into adulthood, and that children with learning disabilities must function in settings beyond school, then it is reasonable to direct greater efforts toward fostering the development of these success attributes, at least to the same degree that we strive to improve academic skills. Although the extent to which these attributes can be taught to, or learned by students with learning disabilities, is not completely clear, we do know that they are critical to attaining life success.

To obtain a free copy of *'Life Success for Children with Learning Disabilities: A Parent Guide'* please visit the Frostig Centre website at <http://www.ldssuccess.org/> The guide includes checklists and suggested activities to foster successful attributes in children with learning disabilities. The specific approach to developing these attributes is dependent upon the age, abilities, experience, interests and living environment of a given child.

Also available is a guide for teachers designed to help teachers of students with LD understand the six success attributes, provides seven guiding principles for fostering the success attributes in students and offers checklists to help determine the presence or absence of the success attributes in students. Activities and resources to assist in developing success attributes are also offered.

Adapted with permission from the Frostig Centre www.frostig.org in California, a non-profit organization that specializes in working with children who have learning disabilities in the area of research, teacher training, direct instructional services.

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