

28<sup>th</sup> October, 2004

*Speech made by Eleanor Barker, Trustee of the Dominic Barker Trust, on receiving an honorary degree on behalf of the Trust.*

"Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of UEA, Principal and Fellows of Suffolk College, new graduates, ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to receive this honorary degree for the Dominic Barker Trust. On behalf of the Chairman, Sir Malcolm Pill, I want to say how much all 6 Trustees appreciate being invited to this special occasion here today and we wish to convey our thanks to Suffolk college and UEA for conferring this degree to the Trust.

It is an unusual accolade for a Trust to receive an honorary degree, and the Trustees are proud and grateful that the work of the Trust has been acknowledged in this way and by a university of such outstanding record. We are particularly grateful to Prof Dave Muller, for the opportunity he provided for research at Suffolk College, and we are especially grateful to Isobel Crichton-Smith, who unfortunately cannot be here today, for her research. And the Trustees would also like to thank not only the Principal and his colleagues for their support, but also the students of this college who chose to support the fund for their Rag Week's charity last year. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has provided help and financial assistance to the Trust... friends, local groups including Ipswich Town Football.

The underlying and main objective of the trust is to fund research into stammering, but it also seeks to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by those who stammer. We have heard already about the substantial outputs of the research undertaken by Suffolk College and are particularly proud of the national and international profile that has been attained by the Dominic Barker Trust-funded work and hope that this contribution will be built on in future years. The research has been published and well received, and has provided a good foundation for further research to be undertaken by the trust as you have heard at UEA.

In addition to research dissemination and publication, it has been a particular feature of the work of the Trust that it has supported local families, and we hope that this coverage will continue and will expand under the work at UEA. During the course of the research, speech therapy has been provided for children, who would not otherwise have

received it. The study days have provided an opportunity to disseminate the research findings as well as a focus of support and in service training for speech therapists. The work of the Dominic Barker Trust Centre is providing an opportunity to enhance therapy for young children so that stammering can be dealt with early in practical ways with the best possible therapies.

We know that the practical support in terms of therapy groups and sponsored games has had a positive outcome for the children and families involved and hope that these lessons can be incorporated and replicated elsewhere and truly make a difference to the quality of life and potential opportunities faced by those affected by stammering.

This issue is central to the origins of the trust and I would like to take a moment to give you an insight into the person whose actions started all this off, to describe his experiences and the way he was treated for being a stammerer, in the hope that it will give impetus to the work the UEA Team and you as graduates do in your future careers.

Dom was my older brother by one year. Although clearly I am biased, I would describe him as intelligent, good-looking, sporty and kind. He possessed a wonderful sense of humour and great wit and was fun to be with, yet was a loyal and sensitive friend and brother. He was one of those people you took to instantly on meeting but sadly, he is no longer with us as he took his own life on 30th September, 10 years ago, at the age of just 26.

He had stammered from an early age, but with people he knew well it was much less pronounced, and never seemed to be an issue - we all saw the person, not the stammer. However, under times of stress his stammer would become accentuated and his unspoken frustration at not being able to communicate as he wished would sometimes become more apparent.

This is how he described himself: 'Dom is a young man who stutters. He sees and feels barriers to the rest of the world, having to experience different reactions to other people. He does not ask for help. He believes that his stutter will help itself when he can reach a state of achievement. He finds it hard to visualise a future untroubled state, this being directly and indirectly related to the belief that he will probably always stutter. The other side to this is his high conviction that what is feared in the future could be overcome if a state of high personal achievement can be

attained.'

Dom had 2 degrees, one from Aberdeen in agricultural economics, and the second from Reading, and he applied for many jobs in the fields of agricultural consultancy and land management. Unfortunately, his stammer, rather than his ability to do the job, was often the focus of interviews. This is what he wrote about his experiences of job interviews: "I've not been sure how to find accommodation for my stammer; every employer sees it as a problem. It's galling to find that your ability is not in question but that the stutter is. 'go away and get something done about it and come back in 6 months and we'll give you a job' has been said".

Clearly such discrimination, the gradual erosion of his confidence, and the pressure of not succeeding as any 'normal' graduate would by getting a job, particularly for somebody who had gone out of his way to prove his ability, reduced his faith in his future when people only saw the stammer, and he saw the only option as taking his own life.

I am saying this to emphasize the fact that one of the aims of the trust is to raise awareness of the problems stammerers face. We as a family decided to make Dom's experiences more public in the hope that if greater understanding of stammering can be achieved something good and positive would come out of his death.

I am glad to say that, largely as a result of Dom's sad experiences, the BSA, the British Stammering Association, with which the Trust co-operates closely, has designed and distributed "guidelines for employers" in order to help employers understand the problems stammerers face in the stressful conditions of an interview, and to make employers aware that just because a stammerer has a problem with communication in some circumstance, it does not mean they are unsuitable or incapable of fulfilling a job. So to you new graduates, be encouraged, employers are now made aware that discrimination against those with disabilities is unacceptable.

And now we look to the future. As you have heard, the Trust will continue to fund a programme of research, based at UEA in Norwich, where it will be associated with the new school of Speech and Language therapy. We hope also to continue the strong links with Suffolk College and to work together to preserve the results achieved so far.

It will continue to aim to do research which is not being done elsewhere,

and which will have a practical bearing on those who stammer...in order that their problems and disability will be better understood and alleviated. There are no easy answers. Careful and thorough research, including long studies and evaluations, will continue and detailed knowledge that can influence the way therapy is provided will be built up. It is likely that information will be gathered which will influence the teaching and training of speech therapy.

Out of what is a tragedy for the Barker family, the Trust will continue to make a difference to stammerers and their families. Congratulations and good luck to those of you who are graduating today."