

28th October, 2004

Speech Made by Claire Webb, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of East Anglia, on awarding the Dominic Barker Trust an honorary degree.

"The Dominic Barker Trust was set in 1997 in memory of a young man called Dominic who stammered. The deeds of the Trust, which is a charity known colloquially as Dom's Fund, state that its purpose is to offer practical help for people who stammer. For people with persistent stammers it is a life long problem but some therapies can be very helpful and in some cases the stammer can almost disappear. Dominic's family wanted a way of raising public awareness of stammering, so that people are more understanding and tolerant.

Stammering is a speech disorder where it is not always possible to speak fluently. Whole words, parts of words or single sounds may be repeated, the speaker may seem to get stuck at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence and there may be unnaturally long periods of silence. For children who stammer it is sometimes easier not to participate in school life and avoid being noticed - for adults the disorder can lead to an accumulation of feelings about communication.

Helen and Alan Barker knew that the Principal of Suffolk College, Professor Dave Muller, had an interest in dysphasia (that's difficulty in speaking following a head injury or stroke). So after gaining his support and appointing some Trustees, the College appointed its first full time research fellow, Isobel Crichton-Smith. Isobel had been working as a community paediatric speech and language therapist in Ipswich for 4 years and had expertise in working with children and adults who stammer. Isobel and the research steering group agreed 3 clear aims for the research centre

- to undertake research into stammering
- to disseminate the findings to a local and global audience
- to provide a local resource for speech and language therapists and people who stammer.

The first piece of work undertaken was a project that formally gathered stories on the lived experience of people in the UK who stammer. This involved interviewing with 14 adults from varied backgrounds who had all

grown up with a stammer. A common theme to emerge was participants shared feelings of being limited in their education and employment and all felt their self-esteem had been affected by their experience of stammering.

How an adult perceives the therapist they are working with appears to affect the success of the therapy. Past research in the USA and the UK found that therapists held negative and stereotypical views of people who stammer and of the parents of people who stammer. The Trust's research showed that in general there was less evidence of negative stereotyping of the clients and their parents.

Following on from these studies, the research began focussing entirely on pre-school children as it is at this stage where therapeutic intervention can give the greatest benefit to children who stammer. The Trust and a BT bursary funded Isobel to visit the Australian Stuttering Research Centre based in the University of Sydney to look at the work they were doing and develop the next phase of the research which was to focus on five detailed case studies undertaken with children under 5 years old.

The most recent work of the Trust is a study to investigate the relationship between play and fluency in fluent and dysfluent children. The results, which are still being analysed, will inform the ongoing evaluation of current therapies and provide the foundation for the development of an innovative approach to intervention for pre-school children who stammer.

Running alongside the research activities, the Trust has fulfilled its other objectives by running two Open Evenings with special guest speakers such as the well known author Margaret Drabble and the Belgium filmmaker Erik Lamems. Three study days have been held to help local speech and language therapists develop their knowledge and expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of children who stammer. The study days have attracted high quality speakers like Alison Nicholas from the Michael Palin Centre, Dr Trudy Stewart from St Jame's Hospital in Leeds and Gail Smith who is a transactional analysis therapist who lives in Ipswich and works with people who stammer.

During the last six years Isobel and her team, the research Steering Group led ably by the Principal Dave Muller and the Head of Higher Education Christine Dobson, have planted and nurtured a development,

which has the potential to make a real difference to the way people who stammer, are diagnosed and treated. The project has met its objectives and brought the topic of stammering into the consciousness of local speech and language therapists. The publications by Isobel in international peer reviewed journals are also spreading the word and the work of the Trust to a wider audience.

Now, this work will move to the University of East Anglia and form part of the new Speech and Language Department in the School of Allied Health Professions.

The Trust will continue to support research and the development of more effective interventions for people who stammer. In its new home at UEA the aim of the Trusts work will remain to make a lasting and important contribution to our knowledge of stammering, its aetiology and treatment."