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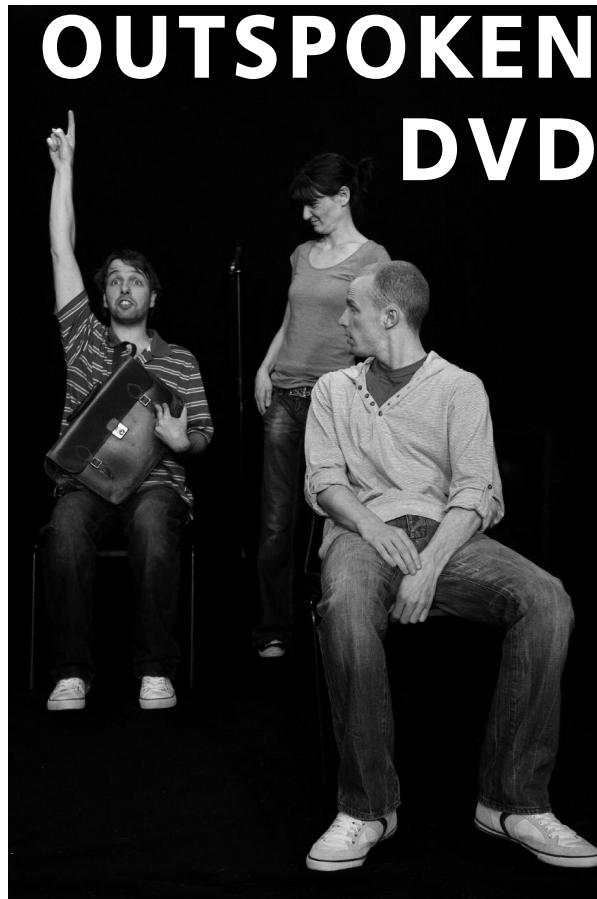
Outspoken, a new play about the challenges of stammering in adolescence, is the culmination and creative fruit of BSA Scotland's major collaboration with TAG Citizens Theatre.

The play, performed by professional actors (William Ruane from *River City*, Mary Gapinski and Steven Rae), toured secondary schools in Greater Glasgow, Lanarkshire and Edinburgh in Spring 2009. It will be distributed more widely as a DVD to Scottish secondary schools (Autumn 2009) with downloadable worksheets, consisting of structured classroom activities aimed at S1/S2 pupils.

The drama describes the experience of Danny (William Ruane), a first year High School pupil who stammers, and involves all actors playing more than one role. The story is fast moving, comic, and at times larger than life as we see the world through Danny's eyes. At the same time it deals with serious issues about stammering, being different, trying to fit in and bullying.

The play starts with Danny addressing the audience like a stand up comedian with a 'mic' and ends in the same way. There are few props – just a couple of chairs, the mic stand and a large leather satchel that signifies the identity of one of the main characters.

Danny tells his story, starting from when he began stammering, then moving on to experiences in High School. The script is essentially a string of pivotal



Cameron (Steven Rae) speaks out in class, despite stammering. Photo: Tim Morozo

scenes, brought to life, interspersed with narrative asides.

We see Danny encountering the 'hard nuts' on his first day in High School and find out how he becomes 'one of the boys'. We meet Sandra, the girl he likes, and see him in English class trying not to reveal that he stammers.

Everything 'hots up' when new boy, Cameron Montgomery, arrives. Cameron also stammers but deals with his speech in a much more open way. He doesn't 'know the rules' according to Danny. Danny feels Cameron is like a 'stammering shadow' reminding him of the difficulty he tries to hide.

In due course Sandra, who has no time for 'the boys', befriends individualistic Cameron and Danny begins to feel he is

now the 'shadow', as Cameron takes over his role. Things come to a head when Danny is dumped in the pond by his supposed friends after a confrontation with Cameron. He skulks home deciding its time for change. He then visits the speech therapist he saw when he was younger and, in telling her about his recent experiences, comes to realise he no longer wants to be 'one of the boys': He can see them for what they are. He reaches a greater acceptance of himself and now just wants to speak.

Feedback from the Outspoken schools tour:

Teacher: "The play and workshop sent out a very positive but realistic view of people who stammer and also raised awareness of bullying. Pupils found the experience fun and were fully engaged throughout, while taking the issues themselves seriously. I spoke to some of them afterwards who said they would now never bully anyone who had a stammer."

Pupil: "People who stammer are normal just like people who don't stammer. It doesn't matter the way people talk - it's how they are that matters."

Pupil: "I learned that if you stammer you have to be brave."

The Outspoken DVD will include the entire play (lasting 37 minutes) plus three nine minute clips that stand alone and accompany specific classroom activities. There will also be 'talking head' footage of participants from the original project describing their experiences of stammering; giving advice to listeners who don't stammer and offering support to viewers who do stammer. These sections are also accompanied by suggested activities for pupils. All materials raise awareness of stammering in a compelling way, but are also in line with wider themes addressed in personal social education, drama and other aspects of the

Curriculum for Excellence, hence we hope for good take up in schools across Scotland.

The project started with the establishment of a group of young adults who stammer in Spring 2008, led by Louise Brown at the Citizens Theatre, that met to explore the benefits of drama for developing confidence and communication skills. A second series of workshops in late summer 2008 introduced new elements such as writing and film-making.

In October 2008 an intensive week, led by playwright Davey Anderson, shifted the focus to eliciting participants' personal stories about stammering. The group thereafter became expert consultants to

the play.

The intensive week was joined by Taro Alexander, Artistic Director and person who stammers from 'Our Time' Theatre, New York (who is the subject of our main feature on pages 4-5 of this issue). Taro facilitated two days of workshops and his unique combined experience of theatre and stammering also inspired material that ended up in the final script.

Lynne Mackie, 17, who participated throughout the project, including co-facilitating workshops in schools during the tour of the play and featuring as a 'talking head', comments:

"It was a brilliant experience from start to end. From the original drama workshops, I

had no idea that I would progress to helping create awareness of stammering in schools. Being involved in the DVD and touring with the play was amazing and I loved every moment. It was also fantastic to work with all of the talented people involved in Outspoken."

Many people have expressed interest in buying a copy of the DVD so we hope to produce copies for general sale. At time of writing, details have not been finalised but if you do wish to obtain a copy, please get in touch with the UK office who will hold and distribute copies in due course via:

mail@stammering.org or 020 8983 1003.

Nineteen of us spent the summer solstice weekend, 20-22 June, at the Adventurers' Escape independent hostel at Weem, by Aberfeldy – a combination of friends old and new, people who stammer, speech and language therapists and a therapy student, from places far and wide. Everyone was made to feel welcome.

This year the majority climbed a less well-known Munro, Meall nam Tarmacham, which has a splendid ridge and fantastic views of the surrounding mountains, including better-known Ben Lawers. Carolyn Allen, main organiser of the event and aficionado of Munro climbing, led our entourage. We were fortunate to enjoy relatively good weather that made the views spectacular. Once more, Mrs McAleese's tablet came out tops in the walkers' poll on home baking though many other contributions were greatly appreciated as well. Richard Perry, co-organiser, should be congratulated on attempting more than one recipe! We were joined by Vince Rocks who came all the way from London for the fresh air and 'craic' he enjoyed two years ago at Glencoe. David Lilburn, a Scot, also made a homecoming visit to join us from the big smoke. The age range amongst Munro climbers was from eighteen to fifty-something and all made it to the top.

Alternatives on Saturday included white water rafting and a sponsored low-level walk in a frock, undertaken by Campbell Lauder.

In the evening we cooked and ate together, visited the local pub and sang and played silly drama games in the wee small



Carolyn Allen shares supplies of home baking on the slopes of Meall nam Tarmacham

hours. Those so inclined stayed up to witness the shortest night merging into a sunny blue dawn on Sunday morning: it seemed so shockingly bright that it sent us all packing to bed for at least a few hours.

On Sunday, in bright sunshine the majority overcame tired leg muscles and 'heids' to stroll up the wooded gorge known as the 'Birks of Aberfeldy', immortalised by Robert Burns in his eponymous ballad. We ended with lunch at the Weem Hotel, neighbouring our hostel, before saying farewells and making our homeward journeys.

This was our fourth 'Walk and Talk' weekend and we are gratified that

participants are adamant that this annual event should continue.

As one participant said: "Another great weekend which I enjoyed immensely. Well organised, nice people, good food and great craic. The views from the Munro were fantastic - and everyone on the weekend gelled together really well."

BSA Scotland would like to thank those who raised sponsor money by tackling the Munro walk, and to those who gave 'informal' donations during the weekend. To date we have received over £660, all of which will go towards supporting people in Scotland who stammer.

BREATH OF FRESH AYR

Around 80 participants gathered in Ayr for BSA Scotland's Spring 2009 Open Day at the Savoy Park Hotel.

The event was attended by adults who stammer, children who stammer and their parents, other relatives, friends, speech and language therapists and teachers. All joined to share knowledge and experience, give and get support in an informal, friendly setting.

The Savoy Park Hotel provided exceptionally luxurious space and comfort for our programme of plenary sessions, parallel workshops and the crèche.

The day was opened by Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years in the Scottish Parliament. He noted the importance of early intervention and explained the legislative framework for supporting children and young people in Scotland. This includes The Early Years Framework, Curriculum for Excellence in schools and the Additional Support for Learning Act. The Minister offered support for our work, noting that stammering "is a very important issue which has a significant impact on the lives of children and young people affected by it." Plans were agreed for a subsequent meeting between BSA Scotland and the Minister which has yet to take place.

As usual at our Open Days, upbeat testimonies from people who stammer, describing challenges overcome and lessons



James Stewart, Jan Anderson & Adam Ingram, Minister for Children & Early Years

learned, were a popular component of the programme. We heard about James Stewart's work in the Scottish Parliament, and Lynne Mackie, Outspoken project participant's love of drama. We also welcomed new voices to the platform: Simon Vaughan described his very particular experience of 'covert stammering', Stewart McDerment outlined his journey (which features as an article on page 7) and Martin Brough extolled the benefits of self therapy, based on a trusted single text that transformed his approach to dealing with his speech.

Workshops, all well attended, included games for children and young people who stammer, discussions about child and adult therapy, covert stammering and a presentation on Summer 'Scool. According to many, the highlight of the day was the screening of a draft version of 'Outspoken', the play.

The event flyer recommended fish and chips from Dino's as the perfect way to round off the day... so practicing what we preach, a carload from Edinburgh did just that before the long drive home...

Feedback:

Adult who stammers:

"I found the Open Day very informative and will recommend it to others. It provided a very supportive environment for people to speak."

Child: "I learned I'm not the only one who stammers."

Thanks... to all speakers; to the BSAS events sub-committee (Richard Perry, Liz O'Connell, John Mann and James Stewart); to local therapist Tracey Dailly and her colleagues; to Summer 'Scool therapists who ran a workshop and facilitated games; to Iain Piercy for the Outspoken footage; to Allan Wilkes and Tam Wilkinson for IT support; and to Cian Bell for photography.

BSAS Update

BSA Scotland has had a very busy year so far in 2009 – our achievements and priorities are shared here in this issue for your appreciation and enjoyment. It is five years since the Scottish branch was established and our programme has gradually grown in scope and confidence to the range of activities for all ages that you can see today.

The events sub-committee worked hard to ensure the success of our April Open Day for all ages in Ayr and the June 'Walk and Talk' weekend for adults who stammer, friends and therapists in Aberfeldy. The Outspoken project for

young adults has progressed near to completion and out third Summer

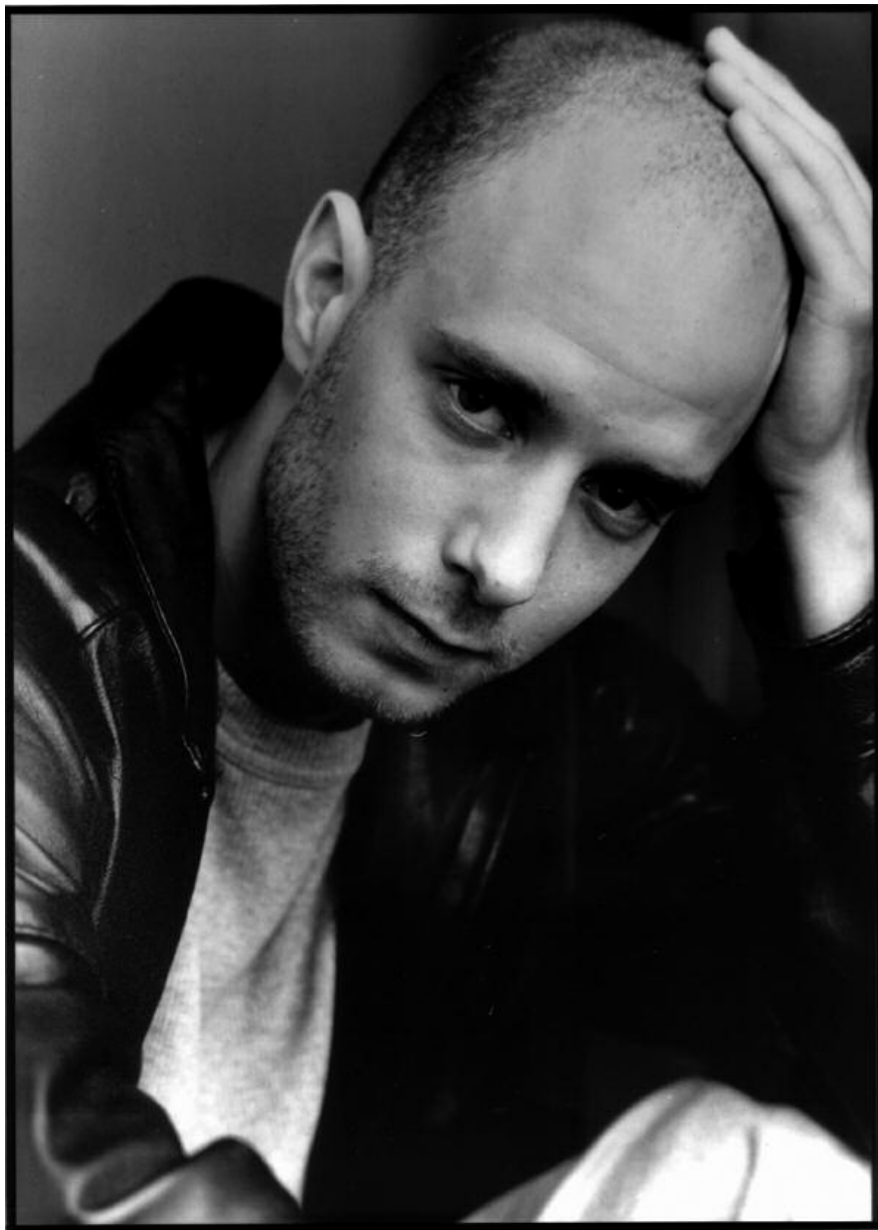
'Scool for 10-14s was successful as ever. We have continued to play a significant role in the Communication Forum Scotland, with Jan Anderson on the Management Committee of the Civic Participation Network project, Frank Geoghegan-Quinn acting as a representative of the network and Campbell Lauder joining the project reference group.

As everyone is aware, however, 2009 has been a very tough year financially for all dimensions of society, including the voluntary sector. BSA Scotland's revised business plan, commencing 2008, included the proposal to secure a second worker who would support our busy programme and focus on fund raising for the Scottish

branch. Unfortunately, in spite of some success with applications, we have not yet been able to secure sufficient funding for this second post and indeed, funding for existing resources is proving insufficient/hard to find. We have many applications for general donations out there, however, and plans to bid for specific projects on early intervention and self-therapy that may be easier to fund in the present climate.

If you are in a position to help BSA Scotland through these challenging times, whether by making a donation, conducting a fundraising activity, contributing your relevant knowledge and skills, or writing to your MP/MSP in support of the continuance of our work this would be much appreciated. We have achieved so much and there is yet much more to do...

'OUR TIME' WITH TARO



Taro Alexander is the Artistic Director of 'Our Time' not-for-profit theatre company for young people in New York who stammer, aged 8-18. In October 2008 Taro visited Scotland to inspire BSA Scotland/TAG Citizens' Outspoken drama project. In August 2009 BSA Scotland's Jan Anderson visited 'Camp Our Time' (self-funded and as a volunteer), to experience the similarities and differences between this and our own Summer 'Scool. This article is largely based on conversations that took place during Taro's visit to Scotland.

'Our Time' seeks to give children and young people from New York environs a

voice, confidence and an avenue to express how they feel in their own way. Alongside, is the desire to create great quality, compelling theatre that any audience would find moving.

'Our Time' participants meet in two separate age groups every Saturday from October – June to write their own play or musical, rehearse and ultimately perform it for substantial audiences including family, friends and the general public in a theatre. 'Our Time' also supports three older teenagers, aged 16-18, to write and direct their own one-act plays which are performed by professional actors. As well as the groups and the play writing, 'Our Time' participants have written and performed songs with professional musicians, and produced two CDs.

'Camp Our Time' is a relatively recent addition to the programme, first held in August 2008 with 27 participants, and recently repeated in August 2009 with 41 attending. It is a one-week residential for children and young people who stutter and their siblings, available to anyone in the world. People are welcome to attend as many times as they like while they are in the age range, becoming part of a growing 'Our Time family'. Taro dreams of a global community of up to 500 people coming to upstate New York from across the world in years to come! He commented, *"With camps, the bigger the better to get the feeling of power in numbers. Having people from all over the world who are 'similar to me' is just such an affirming notion. We live in a world where oftentimes we don't understand each other and the differences between cultures can create a wall. We don't often see eye to eye. Yet, when people who stutter come together, they come with a very open heart. It's a chance to gain acceptance and learn about what someone's life is like in another culture. I think that is really cool."*

'Camp Our Time' offers diverse activities including performing arts workshops (e.g., acting, writing, singing and dance) and arts and crafts activities. In the afternoon pairs/trios work together for a couple of hours to write and rehearse a five – ten minute song, dance or play. Then there is time for sports such as tennis, basketball, football and swimming. In the evenings there might be a film outside, a dance party or a campfire and sing song.

Taro's back story...

"According to my parents, I began stuttering when I was five years old. My first memory was at 11 when I was taken to speech therapy for a two-day intensive group programme. I was the only kid there. The rest were adults and a lot of them had very severe stutters. I wondered if I'd be like this when I grew up and was pretty freaked out. I feared this must be the way the world perceived me and it gave me a really negative image of myself. There were tons of speech exercises to do each day for 20-30 minutes into a tape recorder. You sent them in to the speech pathologist who would send comments back. I found it very impersonal and hated it. I wanted to be out playing with my friends. After four or five months I didn't see any improvement so I asked my parents if I could stop and they agreed ...

From then up until around age 26 my main goal was to hide that I was a person

who stutters. I changed words around, spoke in an accent, yawned ... Most effective was just not talking when I could sense it was going to happen. It was a very frustrating way to live. I had good friends and did well in school – though my participation centred around my stutter. When it was my turn to read I would ask to go to the bathroom. Or, if I had to read and there was a word I had trouble on, I would just skip over it. If the teacher said, “*You skipped that line*”, I would just apologise and keep going. One of the hardest things was that it became this big secret. I was successful in hiding it – but it was isolating.

I always wanted to be an actor. My father had a theatre company and my older brother became an actor but I never thought I could do it professionally because of my speech. I went to a high school for the performing arts and found that when I started acting, my confidence increased. For the most part my stutter was really controlled on stage.

I went to New York when I was 19 to act professionally, but from 19-26 my number one goal was still to hide the fact that I stuttered, particularly in the acting world. It was very tiring and I felt I wasn't being myself. There was part of me that no one knew. I felt I was fooling the world and not being honest. And I never just ... spoke. I was always editing myself.

When I was 26 I was doing a play in Colorado and for the first time I had a block. It really upset and scared me to lose control over my speech on stage. I thought I would be fired. The next day I was very anxious and obsessing about that part of the play. That night it happened again. I went to a very dark place. There was a guy in the scene with me and I told him I was a person who stutters – and it turned out that he stuttered quite badly as a kid and still stuttered from time to time! I couldn't believe it. We became really good friends and he is now the Associate Musical Director at 'Our Time'! Just meeting somebody else was an eye opening experience that started a journey of self-discovery. I started reading books, found out about organisations for people who stutter and interviewed my parents and friends about my stutter and what they thought of it. I learned more about the history of my own stutter.

I found that people either really did not care about it or they were fascinated – which was not the response I anticipated. I mean, some people said, “*Yeah, I know*”. They had nothing else to say: It was not a big deal. Whereas others, when I started telling them all the things I did to not stammer, were very compelled by it: they found my stuttering interesting. That was unbelievable – this thing that I passionately

hated, they found interesting! That made me look at things in a different way and was very liberating. And so this led me to discovering the stuttering community in New York City. I went to an open house and there were about 30 people, all speaking very positively about stuttering. I didn't say a thing but was very impressed, if a little freaked out. I thought “*Who are all these people who are so OK with this?!*” There was a slow process of wondering, “*Am I going to be part of this community?*”, as I had previously fought so hard to be separate from it.

“My hope for members of ‘Our Time’ is that they become more of who they are in every way.”

In the meantime, I decided not to act any more and started to teach full-time. I also auditioned for ‘Stomp’, my favourite show. The people in Stomp are the coolest – and the interesting thing is they never speak. They use percussion and comedy to communicate. It has a very multi-cultural cast with all sorts of people making all kinds of music. I thought, “*This is what the world should be about – everyone coming together, all kinds of people, without words, being as one*”. I loved the show when I first saw it. I never thought about being in it: I wasn't a drummer or trained as a dancer. But years later my best friend saw a flier about open try outs so I went. I didn't get in first time but was put on their ‘A’ list and a year later I auditioned again and got in. I was thrilled to be in a show I loved – and for the first time on stage professionally, I didn't have to speak. That gave me the confidence to stutter around my cast mates because it didn't matter. And to me I had reached the pinnacle of being ‘cool’, which I was obsessed by my entire life!

While on tour I met someone who later became my wife. The process of being in the show, doing something I loved and falling in love meant that in a deep sense I started to feel more confident in myself. I was open in my relationship about my stuttering in a way I had never been before and she was very accepting.

A wise friend said, “*Think about what you want to do for the rest of your life. What impact do you want to have?*” It came to me – a theatre company for young people who stutter – where people who find it hard to express themselves can create what they want in their own voice. In June 2001, back in New York, I wrote a four-page proposal about ‘Our Time’ and showed it to members of the stuttering community. I also

called three speech and language pathologists (SLPs), though I was wary because of my experience as an 11 year old. The response was amazingly positive. Everyone said, “*What a great idea – there is nothing like this out there.*”

My hope for members of ‘Our Time’ is that they become more of who they are in every way: in their stammering, how they look, how they dress, their personality. You have to begin to accept yourself in a very profound way to be a happy person. Of course there are bits that will feel challenging and frustrating, but when you're alone in your room and ask yourself, “*Am I content with who I am and my place in the world?*”, I hope most of them would say, ‘Yes’, or at least working towards that. I hope that the self-hatred goes away and the self-doubt goes away and those feelings are replaced by self-esteem, confidence and courage. All of us can choose to live out of the fearful part of ourselves or the courageous part of ourselves. I'm choosing to go down the courageous path and I hope the kids at ‘Our Time’ are choosing to do that too. I couldn't care less whether their stutter increases or decreases. I care that they become effective communicators. I 100% believe that you can be a very dysfluent person and be a very effective communicator. Most of the SLPs I've met agree that treating the whole person and being OK with who you are is most important. If you choose to work on your fluency you can. I have nothing against being more fluent. If somebody wants to work all out to become more fluent, I'm all for that. But if that's not what you really want, then why should you be forced to do that by your parents or society? It's your voice. Hopefully everyone can start from a place of thinking, “*I'm pretty great but there's some things I'd like to learn*”. I think I'm a good person but I'd like to have a stronger upper body so I might go to the gym, but it doesn't mean until your body is strong you hate yourself. And you know, people who go to the gym can be pretty serious about it, working out for 2-3 hours. It doesn't mean they think they are not a good person. It's the same as speech and language therapy. You can practice for many hours and won't achieve your goal immediately – but you are still a good person.

If pressure is put on kids to become fluent and they don't, they feel they've failed in the eyes of their parent or speech teacher. We run a really big risk of scarring them so that, even if they become fluent, their self-confidence is shattered. I really believe if someone believes in themselves and that they can do something, they can – you see it over and over.”

Visit: www.ourtimetheatre.org



BSA Scotland's third Summer 'Scool, July 2009, confirmed that group residential and intensive therapy is the option of choice for children and young people in Scotland who stammer, their enthusiastic parents and participating therapists who value this opportunity for specialist team working with colleagues from across the country. It's a no-brainer – Summer 'Scool is a winner for everyone!

This year's course comprised of 23 boys and girls at a ratio of 3:1. Our age range stretched from 9-14. Participants came from Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Glasgow, Grampian, Highland, Lanarkshire, Lothian, Tayside and West Lothian. Most were referred by their local therapist to benefit from meeting other children and young people who stammer – the strongest outcomes from the course are:

- increased self acceptance and confidence that comes from knowing you are not alone
- increased motivation to speak out and try new techniques, fostered while working intensively as a group.

The course programme involves three hours of 'Group Time' with speech and

language therapists every morning and outdoor activities every afternoon from 13.30-17.00. The latter included gorge walking and jumping into river pools (The Splosh), caving (The Squeeze), abseiling and a group climbing/ropes task that involves clambering to a great height (Jacob's Ladder). These activities build confidence in the physical, non-verbal realm and highlight how 'self talk' and positive thinking in advance of any kind of challenge can affect our capacity to perform.

Socially, the course leads to new friendships that long outlast the week and sustain the sense of security that comes from knowing you are not alone. New forms of social networking such as MSN and Bebo mean that our growing community has a safe, informal network they can tap into whether to have fun, like all young people, or to get a boost when the going is tough.

The last night of Summer 'Scool was celebrated with a party. We skimmed stones on the loch shore on a beautiful evening and some showed off break-dancing and singing skills during an informal variety show. Everyone returned home next day, exhausted by the busy schedule, ready for their own beds and the relative peace of home, yet with lots to say about all they had learned...

Here are some early comments from children and parents:

Child: "Being with people in the same situation made me realise I am not alone. I learned techniques to help when I am speaking. I like 'sliding' the best. I met some good people and had a great time. I especially liked the Splosh!"

Child: "It was funner than school – I liked the outdoor stuff. I was nervous but everyone was nice and I am proud of myself because I stayed away from home. I did Jacob's Ladder and I can control my talking if I concentrate."

Parent: "We have seen a great change in our son's attitude to his speech since he returned. He's even tried to implement some of the techniques at school. His teachers have been made aware of what he's doing and he's considering telling the class. We've seen a huge improvement in his confidence and the 'humour' just goes on and on."

Parent: "In 10 years my son had never met another person who stammered. I think he believed that he would never be able to control his talking and was nervous about moving into secondary school. He often talked about not being able to get a job when he left school because he couldn't 'do an interview'. Summer 'Scool allowed him to focus on his strengths (the physical outdoor activities) and he has grown in confidence and understanding of his stammer. He can now control, with effort, his speech and is proud of himself. He knows he has it within him to cope. I'm both delighted and a little surprised that five days could have such a profound effect after six years of speech therapy."

Thanks to BBC Children in Need for fully funding all places at Summer 'Scool. Thanks also to the speech and language therapy departments who released therapists to deliver/train on the course; to the therapy team who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to ensuring its success; and to the young adult volunteers who stammer who provide additional support and insight. (See website for more comments.)

Along came Summer Scool...

Weeek long events like Summer 'Scool are widely recognised as a fantastic opportunity for children and young people who stammer – but can their influence spread beyond the young course participants? Jacqueline Milton and Chris Curtis, speech and language therapists in Aberdeen, share their experience...

We are therapists who work in a community based team. The adult side of our stammering service has been lucky enough to retain the services of a committed and knowledgeable therapist. Paediatric stammering, however, as in many areas of the country, has always been dealt with by generalist therapists with varying levels of experience working on a 1:1 basis. Individual initiatives for children and young people (e.g., a workshop led by our adult

therapist) have taken place but there was no clearly defined strategy for children in Aberdeen City who stammer.

In 2007, I (Jacqueline) was lucky enough to attend the first BSA Scotland Summer 'Scool with my then colleague, Deborah McGonigle. This proved to be a fantastic opportunity, not only for the young people, but also for the therapists. Working alongside more experienced therapists in a dynamic way inspired me to work differently

in Aberdeen. Deborah and I set up an evening group, for young people aged 11-14, which ran for six weeks. The aims of the sessions were: to develop confidence in communicating; to develop a more positive attitude to speaking and decrease sensitivity to stammering; to develop strategies for managing stammering and increase the feeling of fluency control; to develop problem solving and self help skills; to develop positive thinking skills and to support parents.

We decided to work through a hierarchy of speaking situations, culminating in a challenge which we hoped would ultimately give the young people a sense of achievement and increased self-confidence. We also wanted to make this very motivating for the young people, hence, we approached various local television and radio stations and luckily BBC Radio Scotland kindly offered us the opportunity to come along and use their studios to make our own radio show. This was a wonderful experience for the young people (and therapists!), who participated fully and felt proud of their achievements.

Buoyed by the success of this and

mindful of the peer support that the group provided, we developed regular meetings. These now assemble once every two months under the direction of Chris and myself, while a social event, purely for the young people, is organised by the parents in between. The social events would not have been possible without the initial enthusiasm of parents of children who had already experienced Summer 'Scool. We are very fortunate to have an extremely supportive group of parents now who see the importance of these social events and will ensure they continue.

When Summer 'Scool came around in 2008 it was great to go again, this time with Chris, and to connect with other therapists deeply interested in stammering. It renewed my enthusiasm and confirmed the importance of tackling stammering in different ways at a local level. It also made us realise that ongoing peer support should happen beyond Aberdeen in the wider Grampian area – something we hope to address with Grampian-wide fun days.

In the meantime I have attended courses and increased my knowledge of stammering and Chris and I are part of a

working group in our department that is looking at how our service can best meet the needs of our young stammering clients. Would this have happened without the experience and confidence gained from at Summer 'Scool? I don't think so!

Our manager, Pamela Cornwallis, also feels the service in Aberdeen has benefited: *"I'd like to acknowledge the contribution that Summer 'Scool has made to how we support children and young people who are dysfluent. Jacqueline, Deborah and Chris have all come back to the team enthused about the experience and motivated to use what they have learned. As a direct result, we offer a wider range of more flexible therapy options to support children and young people and their families. We can identify children and young people who are most at risk of persistent stammer earlier, and so support them more effectively. Reflecting on practice needs to be a routine part of the job for SLTs and Summer 'Scool gave Jacqueline, Deborah and Chris the opportunity to do just that with colleagues and expert practitioners from across the country. I hope that other team members have the opportunity to benefit from the experience in future."*

Don't be hard on yourself

My most difficult days were at secondary school where I was regularly laughed at and ridiculed by other pupils.

None of the teachers noticed that I had a stammer or offered me help. I very rarely spoke out in class – and when I did I couldn't even say my name. To be fair, I didn't want any help as I didn't want to admit that I had a stammer. I was too embarrassed and just wanted it to go away. I understand that things have changed for the better now in education as my wife is a teacher – there is a lot more help and support available.

I couldn't wait to leave school. In hindsight, this was a big mistake as I didn't gain the qualifications I should have. So now, at the age of 38, I'm studying with the Open University which is much harder as I also have a full time job – but hey, better late than never!

A story that sticks in my mind is standing in the queue at the local chip shop so wanting a fish supper. There were lots of people in front of me and I kept saying over and over to myself what I wanted to order. Eventually I got to the front and found myself unable to say the word 'fish'. So instead, I asked for a sausage supper and walked away disappointed and frustrated.

I currently work for South Lanarkshire Council in frontline customer services. I have

always worked with the public, whether face-to-face or over the phone. It might seem an unusual career choice for someone with a stammer, however, I enjoy my job and I don't let my stammer interfere. I've been commended for my customer service on a few occasions, with customers writing in about the excellent service I have provided.

I have also trained as an auctioneer, been a police controller and have looked after the prisoners in the cells at Ayr police station!

I've only heard one person commenting that I shouldn't be working in customer services as I had a stammer. It's amazing that some people also think that you are deaf when you have a stammer – as she said this to a work colleague when I was sitting right next to her, talking on the phone. She said my stammer was really bad and that I must sound awful to customers. Well, of course, comments like this do a lot for your confidence but, while initially I felt low, I quickly picked myself up, as I knew I was competent at my job. The funny thing was, I was promoted above her.

Strangely enough, working down the cells helped me to deal with my stammer as I used to be called so many names that I became thick skinned and immune to people's mindless comments. It wasn't really a great move on their part as I was the one with the keys!

In my personal life I have not experienced any negative comments. I'm very happily

married. I have a lot of good friends and an extremely busy social life. No one cares that I stammer as it's just another part of me.

I have noticed a change in the help and support that is available to people like me with a stammer which is really encouraging. My mum took me to the doctor's when I was in primary 7, however, the doctor was unconcerned and told my mum I would grow out of it! This is obviously not the case – but speech therapy can be brilliant and my stammer has greatly improved using the techniques I have since been taught.

The best advice that I can give to young people in school is to let your teachers know that you have a stammer. They will then understand that you may not want to be picked to speak out and you can be in control of when you feel the right time is to answer.

For your career, choose the job that you're interested in and don't let the fact you stammer put you off. Having a stammer doesn't mean you should hold back from achieving your goals. Don't be too hard on yourself. Having a stammer is stressful and sometimes we all need to relax. So don't feel bad if sometimes you let others speak for you. It's not that I can't speak for myself but, when I'm on holiday, it's can be good just to have a wee break!

Stewart McDerment

Talk for Scotland

BSA Scotland is one of the founding members of The Communication Forum Scotland (CFS), Scotland's alliance of voluntary sector organisations supporting people with a broad spectrum of communication difficulties.

Since February 2007 the BSA Scotland office has been home to a Scottish Government funded CFS project to promote civic participation amongst people with communication difficulties.

In May 2008 the Civic Participation Network Project launched its 'Talk for Scotland' toolkit to help local authorities and other agencies approach public involvement in a way that is inclusive of people who find understanding language or expressing themselves difficult. The toolkit has been well received and the project was extended for a further three years to expand its scope and roll out awareness of its 'Six Communication Principles' more widely. BSA Scotland is actively participating in this process in a number of ways: Jan Anderson is on the management group of the project and will be more involved in actively promoting the toolkit and website in future. Frank Geoghegan-Quinn writes of his involvement below. Campbell Lauder has contributed his personal experience as a case study for the updated toolkit/website and has joined the Communication Support Needs Network. Network meetings are lively, supportive and challenging as people with diverse communication difficulties come together, find common cause and a strong voice and begin to identify where they most want to make themselves heard. These are exciting times for partnership working.

Having our say in the Scottish Parliament

BSA Scotland has recently been exploiting opportunities to get the message about stammering out to those who can really influence matters and make changes.

In the last six months, I attended the final two meetings of the Scottish Parliament's Disability Equality Working Group on behalf of both BSA Scotland and Communication Forum Scotland. These meetings discussed a variety of topics, including the physical changes recently made to the Parliament building to meet the needs of those who require speech, language and communication support, equality impact assessments and the progress the Parliament has made in making reasonable adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act for its staff

who are disabled. The most recent meeting concerned two very important matters: the provision of material to MSPs and their staff on the legal obligations they need to meet in order to comply with the full range of the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act; and the Scottish Parliament's biennial Equality and Diversity Week, which will take place in November of this year. Taken together, these initiatives should improve constituency communication by MSPs and make them better employers and will also raise awareness of the wider issue of inclusive communication. Good progress has been made on a number of fronts, but there is still a lot of work to do and this will be taken forward as the Parliament develops a single equalities scheme over the next couple of years. It is vital that people with speech, language and communication needs, and people who stammer form a vital part of those communities, play a full part in this process so that we can have a Parliament which we can all access equally and which takes us seriously as citizens.

In addition, I have been privileged to attend the most recent meetings of individuals and organisations involved in the Civic Participation Network (CPN). This initiative is overseen by Communication Forum Scotland, of which BSA Scotland, along with bodies such as Afasic, Speakability and I CAN, is a founder member. It aims to equip members of the SLCN communities with the skills, knowledge and information to

participate fully in our democracy and to hold our elected decision makers properly to account. I was able to update them on my recent attendance at the Scottish Parliament's Disability Equality Group and ask for their feedback. I have been able to pass on the many useful and practical comments and ideas to those involved at the parliament and hope to see these taken up in both the MSP factsheets and preparations for the Equality and Diversity week.

As I mentioned previously, it is very important that people who stammer take opportunities like this to influence the decision making process and increase the visibility of stammering amongst wider society. I would urge any of you reading this to think seriously about whether you can become involved, either in being a member of the Civic Participation Network on behalf of BSA Scotland or being part of the working group which the Scottish Parliament will be setting up to help write its single equalities scheme over the next 2 years. These are exactly the kind of activities which will help put stammering very firmly on the social and political agenda of Scotland. Some of you may remember this is what I encouraged you to do in my first Convenor's address on the front page of the first edition of Blether, some four years ago. So what are you waiting for?

Frank Geoghegan-Quinn

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