

Press release:

Stammering Helpline volunteer turned CEO

The CEO of the UK's national stammering charity is standing down after 18 years in the role.

Norbert Lieckfeldt joined the British Stammering Association (BSA) as a volunteer for their helpline nearly 25 years ago after being told his stammer would prevent him from ever getting a graduate level job. He is the first CEO of the charity who stammers.

Outgoing Chief Executive, Norbert said: "When I started in the role, stammering was an issue that not only couldn't be talked about – it wasn't even on anyone's radar. We had schools sending back our free information packs telling us "our children don't stammer".

"It's a completely different landscape now – stammering is recognised as a disability in the Equality Act. Exam boards such as AQA are specifying access arrangements for pupils who stammer. And using our website and social media, we are reaching tens of thousands of people each month while our helpline is supporting nearly 4,000 direct enquiries each year. All of this helps us to ensure that the needs of adults and children who stammer are recognised and taken into account.

"It's been a privilege to contribute to this journey and I'm hoping to continue to raise awareness as a BSA member and in my new role in the NHS. My first volunteering role will be as a mentor in our pilot employment mentoring project for young adults who stammer."

Stammering is a complex and widely misunderstood neurological condition that affects more than 700,000 adults and children across the UK regardless of background, profession, race, religion or politics. People who stammer often say that their speech makes them feel isolated and ashamed. Despite media attention over recent years with films such as the King's Speech and celebrities like Ed Sheeran, Ed Balls and Kelly Brown talking openly about the barriers they face, stammering is still poorly understood and people who stammer are openly discriminated against.

Tim Fell, Chair of Trustees of the British Stammering Association said: "Norbert has been the heart and soul of the BSA for many years. He has presided over the BSA, with his legendary passion and wit, at a time of unprecedented change. The fact that the BSA punches way above its weight is testament to his commitment. Under his leadership and with the use of technology and social media, the BSA delivers help,

information and advice to all people who stammer throughout the UK. Speech therapy can now be accessed live on the web to those who have no local NHS provision, a service provided by Airedale NHSFT which received the Guardian Public Service Award for Technology and Innovation 2017. The recently formed Employers Stammering Network mentoring scheme aims to help young people who stammer believe in themselves to make the most of their talents at work.”

“There is still much work to do to raise awareness of this misunderstood speech condition. We need to change the conversation around stammering from one of awkwardness to one of confidence. It’s only by talking about stammering openly, by all of us, that society will understand the issues around it.”

The British Stammering Association will be seeking applicants from across the charity sector and beyond for the post of Chief Executive. Further information on the vacancy will be available on the BSA website after Easter. www.stammering.org

Ends

Media contacts

For further information or to arrange interviews:

During office hours: Tim Fell chair@stammering.org

For urgent out of hours enquiries: contact Tim Fell 07711 681746

You will find helpful suggestions about how to talk about stammering [here](#).

About the British Stammering Association

The [British Stammering Association](http://www.britishstammering.org) (BSA), established in 1978, is a national registered charity. It is the only UK-wide charity which helps both adults and children who stammer. The BSA provides information, help and support to all whose lives are affected by stammering.

Stammering helpline

Contact us for any issue where you require confidential advice or support.

020 8880 6590 or info@stammering.org

Specialist support

For more specialist support for anyone (teachers, parents or students) concerning issues at school or in education, contact our education officer, Cherry Hughes education@stammering.org

Interviewees

People who stammer can make excellent interviewees. We can put you in touch with people who stammer and others who are happy to be interviewed. We can usually find someone locally where that is required. Please contact the Media Contacts above.

What is stammering or stuttering?

Stammering is a complex neurological condition that occurs in 1% of the adult population across the world. Men are four times more likely to stammer than women. People who stammer may feel more anxious or nervous about speaking because of their stammer, but this is not the cause of their stammering. However, they often have qualities that employers rate highly, such as resilience, empathy, listening skills and creativity. There is a huge stigma surrounds stammering as people inadvertently put a premium on smooth or 'fluent' speech.

What causes stammering?

Research using brain imaging techniques (MRI) clearly shows that people who stammer have brain anatomy and function that is different from people who don't stammer. Speech production is a hugely complex system of connections within the brain and, in people who stammer, the connections are arranged in a slightly less efficient way. These differences only affect fluency of speech, but no other cognitive function. People who stammer have normal intelligence, competence and ability.

Stammering can be audible or hidden, but both types can have an enormous effect on the individual's personal and professional life. Most people develop stammering in early childhood as they learn to speak. However, some people develop a stammer in later life through a brain injury such as a stroke.

Talking about Stammering

How we talk about stammering is important to people who stammer. There is still a stigma surrounding stammering, as well as many prejudices and misconceptions. All are exacerbated through the language we use to describe the condition and the people affected by it.

- Stammering affects 5% of all children and 1% of all adults across all cultures.
- Stammering affects many more males than females.
- Stammering is a neurodevelopmental disorder - latest research shows differences in brain structure and brain function in people who stammer. Its cause is not linked to temperament, personality, or intelligence.
- Stammering often disappears spontaneously in early childhood.
- Stammering in adulthood generally continues throughout life; there is no known 'cure' for stammering.

We hope you will find these suggestions helpful when writing or speaking about stammering:

Instead of:	consider:
sufferer. suffers from stammering	Person who stammers, stammerer, child who stammers, people affected by stammering etc
'overcoming' stammering, conquer stammering	Finding his voice, learning to live successfully with stammering, learning to overcome the barriers
'curing' stammering	there is no 'cure' for stammering and BSA doesn't use this term as it relates to a medicalised model of the condition. As a neurodevelopmental condition, stammering is not susceptible to a cure
Struggle with a stammer	living with the negative impact of stammering
bad/debilitating stammer	severe stammer
recover	Is very medicalised, consider instead "regain fluent speech"

The British
Stammering
Association