

## Resources on Stuttering Available for School-Based Clinicians

By Alice M. Forsythe, MA, CCC-SLP/A

The field of speech-language pathology covers a vast and varied number of areas. Speech-language pathologists provide services for newborns to geriatrics and may need to provide services from swallowing to effecting success with job interviews. Of all the settings and areas of treatment one may find a speech-language pathologist, it is certainly the school setting where a speech-language pathologist is expected to be a multi-area expert. But is it possible to be an "expert" in so many areas?

The school-based speech-language pathologist is expected to evaluate and execute a plan of treatment covering practically the entire scope of the profession. With the vast array of issues that the school-based speech-language pathologist needs to address, it is virtually impossible to be an expert in all areas.

It is the nature of our profession that we continually educate and inform ourselves, but there is the constraint of time. And what speech-language pathologist isn't consistently hard-pressed for time? Although the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) recommends a caseload of 40 students for a school-based speech-language pathologist, those of us in the trenches know that a typical caseload is most likely to be double that or more.

An area historically given the least em-

phasis in most of the training that occurs within speech-language programs is that of stuttering. The disorder itself is elusive, probably due to the fact it appears in individuals in various ways, degrees and forms. There are so many treatments for it floating around, and none of them is able to "fix" the problem. To top things off, of all the types of disorders seen within the schools, stuttering is the least common; just 1 percent of the population at large stutters.

The bigger dilemma still is that ineffective or improper treatment can do more damage to an individual who stutters than perhaps no treatment at all. Ask any adult who stutters about their experiences with therapy as a child.

Not only is it not within the nature of the speech-language pathologist to decline treating an individual due to lack of appropriate background or knowledge—because, after all, we enter the field to help people—but the school expects us to treat all speech-language disorders.

Faced with these multiple dilemmas, I believe the best solution is for the school-based speech-language pathologist who hasn't had proper training in stuttering treatment to get informed by the experts or refer to a speech-language pathologist who has had solid training in treating people who stutter.

Where do most of the experts in the field publish their ideas? The Stuttering Foundation of America (SFA) is a nonprofit organization with a wealth of low-cost materials authored by some of the most renowned experts in the field. You're guaranteed to get the biggest bang for your buck with the SFA, and who doesn't have to be creative with budgets these days?

The fact that ASHA has begun to recognize fluency specialists certainly speaks to the fact that not all speech-language pathologists are trained adequately in treating stuttering. Currently, there are about 300 speech-language pathologists who are Board Recognized Specialists in Fluency Disorders (BRS-FD) by the Specialty Board on Fluency Disorders. That is a small percentage, considering there are 86,439 speech-language pathologists with their certificate of clinical competence (CCC) from ASHA in the United States. (Granted, there are many speech-language pathologists trained to work with these individuals who have not obtained specialty recognition.)

There are so many resources available for the individual who stutters and the clinician asked to treat them. If you are a clinician

who is expected to treat a person who stutters, it would be well worth your time obtaining some of the gems SFA has to offer. As a clinician who treats adolescents, I have seen firsthand the empowerment that can occur by the children knowing they are not alone and there are many other children who feel the same way they do. This is what happens when I have shared *Do You Stutter? Straight Talk for Teens*, a book and video for teens published by SFA. Other resources are available on its Web site at [www.stuttersfa.org](http://www.stuttersfa.org).

For younger students I highly recommend the program *Easy Talker* by Barry Guitar, PhD, CCC-SLP, and Julie Reville. *Fun with Fluency*, by Patty Walton and Mary Wallace, is an excellent tool for the younger child.

Dr. Guitar, a professor of communication sciences at the University of Vermont, makes a statement in the forward of the book that sheds additional light on the dilemma faced by the speech-language pathologist asked to treat children who stutter.

"Stuttering therapy for young children is sometimes viewed as difficult and even dangerous," he writes. "Parents are warned not to call attention to the child's stuttering, and clinicians are cautioned not to confront stuttering directly for fear of making it worse. Clinicians who are not put off by fear of stuttering are often beset by confusion because the air is thick with theoretical disputes, and competing camps of stuttering therapy make conflicting claims about their approaches. *Fun with Fluency* is an antidote to this fear and confusion. Here is a book that gives a compelling rationale for clinicians and parents to be open about stuttering with children who stutter and, when appropriate, to work directly on fluency and stuttering."

Another nonprofit organization that offers worthwhile information and support is the National Stuttering Association, formerly known as the National Stuttering Project, at [www.nsastutter.org](http://www.nsastutter.org). The organization publishes newsletters for various levels of school-age children, as well as articles, stories and artwork submitted by children who stutter. *Stutter Buddies* is for children ages 6-12. *Letting Go* is for adults, with an insert *Our Voice* for adolescents.

*Care* is a new newsletter for parents of children who stutter. The more these children feel accepted, the closer they are to accepting their stuttering. Being open about it brings

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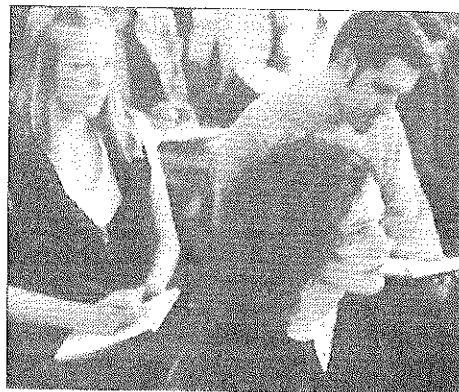
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make the best decisions about accommodations for the student. It is important that the DSO know the following:

- How does the student best receive oral communication?
- How vital is speechreading to the student's ability to understand what is being communicated?
- Under what circumstances would the student perform/not perform well with listening tasks?
- How will noise impact the student's ability to hear in the classroom?
- What technology needs might the student have beyond the classroom but within the purview of the educational institution?
- Does the student best receive oral communication via speechreading alone, speechreading and residual hearing, or text?
- Would the student be able to understand comments from other students spoken from across the room without seeing their faces?
- Would videos be understood with ALDs alone if off-screen narration is occurring so that no speechreading is possible, or is captioning required?
- Would the student perform well with

listening tasks involving recorded audio material, small groups, one-on-one interaction, large class discussions, lecture or field trips?

Scores from speech recognition tests without background noise do not provide



information about how the student will perform in the classroom. In fact, they may be interpreted incorrectly as meaning that the student does not need an accommodation.

Technology needs that should be considered beyond the classroom but still within the purview of the educational institution include the dormitory, counseling center, administrative offices, library, theater and health center.

Providing information to prospective students and service providers can be very helpful—or it can be overwhelming. Be sure to pass on resources they can take with them that will enable them to continue developing their knowledge base.

These packets should include resources for the development of coping skills, assistive technology and vendors, consumer organizations, relay services and the Internet, including Web sites and listservs.

The resources mentioned below will help you get started.

The Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) is a federally funded nationwide network of programs that provides technical assistance to post-secondary institutions about accommodating students who are hard of hearing or deaf.

The PEPNet Resource Center has many free materials available directly from its Web site, including 25 two-page Teacher Tip Sheets on a variety of topics related to hearing loss. PEPNet also has a listserv (PEPNetwork) for service providers.

The Western Region Outreach Center & Consortia (WROCC) Outreach Site at Western Oregon University is one of the more than 50 PEPNet field sites. Its Web site includes free training modules on ALDs, job and classroom accommodations, and Internet resources, including a list of companies

selling assistive equipment.

Many times individuals with hearing loss do not know others who share their experiences. This is unfortunate since those who already have experienced post-secondary classrooms can provide a wealth of information about how to deal with them. Organizations such as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH), the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA), and the Cochlear Implant Association International (CIAI) can help put people of similar backgrounds in touch.

There are several e-mail listservs that are wonderful for helping to connect individuals. Beyond-Hearing and the Say What Club are two examples.

Finally, don't forget to connect student with vocational rehabilitation and state equipment distribution programs for contact information in your state. These agencies may be able to provide them with amplified telephones or alerting devices.

Susan's audiologist recognized that an ALD might be very beneficial to her. When he had her try the FM system, the student was visibly moved, saying it was the first time in many years she had been able to hear anyone speak without seeing the person's face. She was thrilled to find something that would be extremely useful to her in many situations.

Susan left her audiologist's office with the necessary documentation to apply for services from the DSO, resources to help her learn more about assistive technology, coping strategies, information for connecting with others who have hearing loss, and a new-found confidence that she would be able to conquer her classroom problems.

Always focus on the auditory tasks required of students in educational environments and the impact hearing loss will have on their functional ability to perform these tasks. Suggest a range of options for the variety of needs they might face and include resources on locating equipment, such as catalog companies. Being a resource yourself can greatly facilitate the process for your client and future students.

*Cheryl Davis coordinates the Western Region Outreach Center & Consortia Outreach Site at Western Oregon University in Monmouth.*

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them that much closer to recovery.

One of the most important aspects of assisting people who stutter is getting them to be open about their stuttering. Often the first step to that is to network with others who stutter. There are a number of support groups that meet in person or network through e-mail and/or the Internet. One worth checking out is [www.friendswhostutter.org](http://www.friendswhostutter.org). This Web site also offers a guide to giving a presentation to a classroom about stuttering. What better way to empower these students than by having them do a classroom presentation!

If you are faced with the task of helping people who stutter but haven't had adequate training or lack a sense of confidence with stuttering treatment, I urge you to be proactive about doing the right thing! Get informed and inform those you are working with. Knowledge truly is power. The school-based clinician is a jack of all trades and the master of many; but if fluency isn't one of those, make it one of the areas you're a master in by tapping into the plethora of available resources.

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