March 2010

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LD Connections

learning disabilities different paths.....same destination

Welcome

The preparation and lead up to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic games in Vancouver has captured our imagination and our pride! Read how Mencap Sports is working in partnership with governing bodies and sporting organizations to promote the inclusion of learning disabled athletes in the upcoming 2012 Olympics in London.

With the move towards accessibility in conforming with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (AODA), Leslie Holman, owner and operator of Adaptive Ability shares her thoughts and insight as she advocates for information accessibility for students with a reading disability. In the first of a series of articles by Doris Johnson, professor at Northwestern University in Chicago, she shares her tips for parents in assisting their learning disabled children at home.

Look for our upcoming events this spring. Louise Scott, neuropsychologist from Grand River Hospital, will deliver a workshop in May about sleep and its relationship to attentional, memory and regulation problems. Details of this event will be available on our website. Christina DeRoche, PhD student from McMaster University will make a presentation on April 27 titled, Learning Disabilities- Emerging Research, New Trends, and Social

Importance.

With income tax season fast approaching, be sure to follow the link to tax credits that may be available to you, depending on your personal circumstances.

On behalf of The Learning Disabilities of Wellington County, we would like to thank the Guelph Storm for the fundraising opportunity at the February 15 game vs. The London Knights. The amount of \$1850.00 went to Tom Jacobs of Guelph, the winner of our 50/50 draw. Thank you to all of those who purchased tickets in support the LDAWC and its ongoing work with those who have learning disabilities in our community. Be advised that tickets for the Friday March 5 game vs. Sarnia Sting and March 12 vs. Erie Otters are still available from LDAWC at the cost of \$12.00.

Be sure to check out our resources page at the end of our newsletter, which includes information about the IPRC and IEP processes, particularly LDAO's IEP online workshop for parents and students to help them understand the development, implementation and review of an IEP. Ontario publications offers access to a variety of Ontario documents on their website. On a local level, homework support is offered through the Guelph Public Library

Sharon Dills, Chair

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Income Tax and LD

There are many valuable personal tax credits programs and benefits available for individuals with disabilities such as the disability tax credit, infirmity over 18 credit, devices or equipment credit, the caregiver credit, and the Child Disability Benefit that should be investigated by families supporting persons with disabilities.

This article provides a brief summary of one such program - the Medical Expense Tax Credit and explores how you may qualify for it if you or your child has learning disabilities.

If your child has other physical, mental or emotional impairment, you may also qualify for other tax benefits that are not mentioned in this article.

Please consult with a tax advisor. Tax decisions should not be made simply on the basis of the information provided here. There is a full article on LD and Tax at http://www.ldac-taac.ca/indepth/taxes-e.asp

Things to consider:

The cost of a **psychological assessment** to determine if there is a diagnosis of learning disabilities.

- Tutoring services to remedy basic academic skills
- Talking textbooks.
- Cost for transportation to and from assessment, therapy and tutoring sessions.
- Fees for specialized camps (summer/winter) and specialized private school.
- Note taking services.

Again, you should not rely on this article alone to determine whether you should claim any of the expenses reviewed here under the Medical Expenses Tax Credit of the Income Tax Act. There are more than 60 different medical expenses available depending on the type of disability and/or co-existing disability you or your child may have.

Source: www.mencap.org.uk/sport

2012 A Reality for Athletes with a Learning Disability

After missing Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008, athletes with a learning disability can now begin their preparations for London 2012, following the decision at the IPC General Assembly to re-instate events in the Paralympic programme.

The classification was dropped following an incident of cheating at the 2000 Paralympics in Sydney. Various attempts to re-instate the events were made between 2000 and 2006, but it was only in 2007, when Dr Bob Price was elected to the INAS Presidency and the involvement of Mencap, that significant progress was made. A joint working group was set up between INAS and IPC to develop a robust system of classification. The group were supported by a large scientific research project involving a number of universities from around the world, which culminated in a research project held during the 2009 INAS Global Games in Czech Republic. The data from this, and other research opportunities, have enabled sufficient progress to be made to secure re-inclusion, though it is acknowledged by INAS and IPC that the project will not be fully complete until summer 2010. The sports of Athletics, Swimming, Table Tennis and Rowing have been shortlisted for inclusion, and the final decision will be made upon completion of the research. It has also been confirmed that the slots available for athletes with a learning disability are in addition to those already allocated to other classifications, and re-inclusion will not lead to a reduction in athletes from other classes.

Athletes with a learning disability face limitations in cognitive or intellectual functioning areas such as reasoning, working memory and learning, visual-spatial perception, reaction time and processing speed, attention and concentration, and executive function. These components can jointly be referred to as 'sports intelligence'. The new eligibility process is a 2-step process - assessing the primary eligibility criteria and then introducing new sports-specific criteria. This ensures that an athlete's impairment is relevant to sport performance, minimizing the impact of the impairment on the outcome of competition. Eligibility criteria can be found at www.mencap.org.uk/sport.

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Users Create the Demand, Publishers Respond

Recently, I had the honour of being the guest speaker at an Adult ADHD Support meeting for the London Chapter of the LDAO. I was asked to share anything with them which they might find useful. As an IT Professional with learning disabilities and ADHD, I believe very strongly in the advocacy of informational accessibility. I decided that "My Best Tips for Staying Focused," and an overview of the technologies I use to thrive, would be the best way to achieve my goal.

I was launching into the part about how we used to scan our books into an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) program, such as Kurzweil 3000 (\$1000 CDN), textHelp Read and Write (\$675), or even OmniPage 17 (\$199). Unfortunately, with OCR technology, graphics can be interrupted as letters, throwing the reader's attention and ending all comprehension that may have been taking place. However, instead of wasting time with scanning and correcting recognition errors, it is possible to obtain electronic copies of textbooks through the Disability Office at Conestoga College.

With this tidbit, the hands shot into the air! A couple of London college students were wondering when and how electronic books became available, as they don't have access to this service. I had to think back to my days of working in the Adaptive Technology Lab at Conestoga which ended 3 years ago when I left to go to start my own business. At this point, Conestoga was tweaking the process between student, technician, disability office and over 300 publishers. For every book that is requested, documentation is taken to record all the details of every transaction. The student has to promise not only to not share the files they are given, but also to delete them after they are done with the course.

The process for the most part works extremely well, and the student benefits from being able to get the original book in pdf format with perfect playback. Sometimes the books take a long time to become available, or simply aren't available in which case the book still needs to be scanned. The bottom line is the textbook is still not going directly to the consumer.

It is up to consumers who require accessible formats to tell the publishers they need this, as the Disability Office at Conestoga was able to do. If we look to our neighbours in the US they have BookShare (www.bookshare.com) for readers with print disabilities where you can access over 60,000 electronic books for readers of all levels and backgrounds. However this is just for US citizens. One day maybe Canada can manage to make the same kind of partnerships between publishers and their customers as well.

While I was preparing my presentation, I was cognizant of providing as much useful information as possible. I found it very refreshing and rewarding that the audience was able to identify their greatest need, and to advocate for the information they needed most – text book conversion. Being able to have timely access to electronic textbooks and knowing how to study with them is critical to success for a student with a reading disability. However, it isn't enough just to be able to obtain textbooks files. For a person to be truly independent, they need to be able to quickly create their own files whenever the need arises without relying on others to do the conversion for them. After all, independence and self-advocacy are essential skills, which we all need, in our journey to reach our potential.

Leslie Holtman is Owner/Operator of AdaptiveAbility.com, a Guelph based technology training business that focuses on helping individuals with invisible disabilities. 519-766-1969.

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First Paralympian to Compete in Winter Olympics

Visually impaired cross-country skier's dream comes true. Visually impaired cross-country skier Brian McKeever is about to make history.

The 30-year-old Canmore, Alta., native has been named to Team Canada, becoming the first Paralympian to compete in a Winter Olympics. "I think this is a really neat Opportunity for all of us, McKeever said in a press conference.

"The Paralympic world is not usually one that builds Olympic athletes, but it was a good opportunity for me ... and I hope it shows that Paralympic athletes are training at the same sort of level as the Olympic athletes, despite their physical disabilities," he continued.

The team includes six men and five women, 2006 Olympic gold and silver medalists Chandra Crawford and Sara Renner on the Roster.

McKeever has had his heart set on qualifying for the 2010 Olympic team since he came 21st at the ablebodied World Championships in 2007.

Tom Holland, high-performance director of Cross Country Canada, said McKeever accomplished his goal when he won the 50-kilometre race at the Canadian trials.

"This is truly one of the most talented Olympic Teams Canada has ever assembled, which is no only a testament to the continued strength and growth of the national program but also demonstrated what an incredible athlete Brian is and the enormity of his accomplishment," he said in a press release.

Helping Young Children with Learning Disabilities at Home

Many parents of young children with learning disabilities ask what they can do at home to help

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their youngsters. Generally, the first step is to try to understand the child's difficulties and to consider how these weaknesses might impact on self help skills, communication, discipline, play and independence; however, above all, we encourage them to focus on the child's strengths in order to build self esteem and to help them become an integral part of the family. Like all parents, they need to consider the delicate balance between providing too much or too little assistance for the child - a balance between under and over expecting what the child can do independently. Understanding the child's needs takes time because needs change with age and with expectations at home, in social settings, and in school. New and unexpected problems may arise as they do with all children. However, youngsters with special needs often require more understanding and support, not only from parents and teachers but also from siblings.

Early learning

The early childhood years are particularly important because learning typically occurs so rapidly. Children change from almost complete dependence to relative independence in a few short years. Much of the learning during this time occurs without formal instruction; however, most parents teach their children informally as they encourage them to notice things in the environment, as they label objects, and as they guide certain social skills, appropriate behaviors, and manners. Parents teach self-help skills such as dressing, buttoning, and tying. Often they teach their children how to throw a ball and ride a bike. And many parents provide the basis for early reading, writing, and mathematics skills by reading stories, reciting the alphabet, coloring, copying letters, writing simple messages, and playing counting games. Parents engage in these activities so naturally that they do not even think of them as instruction, and yet, this training, social interaction, and stimulation are crucial for learning.

Some children with learning disabilities find these seemingly natural, every day skills difficult to learn, even with good stimulation. They do not profit from the experiences and guidance provided by parents, preschool teachers, and others because they have difficulty processing certain types of information. Yet children with learning disabilities are not

delayed in all aspects of development. In fact, many do as well as, or better than their peers in certain areas. They have uneven patterns of development and perform below expectancy in one or more areas of learning such as listening, expressive language, pre-academic skills, nonverbal behavior, and/or perceptual motor skills. It is because of these uneven profiles and unexpected weaknesses that they are somewhat difficult to understand. Their learning and behavior is less predictable than normally achieving children, and perhaps different from children who are delayed in all areas of development.

Symptoms associated with learning disabilities.

The symptoms associated with learning disabilities differ. Some children have difficulty processing auditory information while others have problems with visual tasks. Some have difficulty processing language, whereas others have problems with nonverbal skills such as interpreting facial expressions, learning to play, or dress themselves. Some have no problems until they enter school, though indications of pre-academic weaknesses may be evident.

When problems persist, parents may discuss their concerns with physicians, educators, or specialists in fields such as learning disabilities, occupational therapy, or speech/language pathology. A comprehensive evaluation which includes a developmental history, tests for mental ability, oral language, pre-academic achievement, perceptualmotor skills, various cognitive processes and behavior is helpful in order to obtain an overall profile of strengths and weaknesses, and in order to make recommendations.

Help for young children

Some children may be placed in a developmental class where they can receive supplemental help, whereas those with milder problems may be seen individually for assistance. In other instances, a specialist might go into the class or kindergarten to assist the child with those areas of learning which appear to be most difficult. Others will be placed on a watch list and their learning will be monitored. In certain instances, families choose private intervention, particularly if the schools do not provide services in the early childhood years.

in the early childhood years.

Committee. These can be obtained by contact national LDA office, 4156 Library Road, Pitt PA 15234.

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Some specialists give parents suggestions for activities at home, depending upon the needs of the child. While we do not recommend formal lessons, parents are encouraged to take advantage of their daily routines to foster the development of certain concepts and skills that appear to be weak. Whatever parents decide to do, however, should be done in the context of a social relationship that is pleasant and non-threatening. Emphasis should be given to the child's strengths, not just the weaknesses. Parents may find it difficult to help children in the areas of weakness, and some children do not like exposing weaknesses to their parents. Thus, there is a delicate balance to be achieved. Children should feel loved and respected irrespective of any difficulties they may have. Too much emphasis on the weaknesses can destroy that delicate balance. Sally Smith's book (1994), Different Is Not Bad, includes many examples to highlight individual differences. Similarly, Jill Lauren's book (1997) contains stories from children and adults with learning disabilities who have achieved success despite their difficulties.

Because children with learning disabilities are unique, and because their strengths and weaknesses vary, parents often need help in understanding their difficulties. Indeed, many parents and teachers need to understand many of the typical behaviors of young children lest they view them as problems. Books such as Don't Push Your Preschooler by Ames and Chase (1980) and others based on the research of Gesell provide general guidelines and examples of behaviors that one might expect during the early childhood years. Chess and Thomas (1987) also discuss differences in temperament which parents and educators need to consider. They report that most parents can describe their child's temperament accurately (p. 37), but they often need help in dealing with their behaviors. Among other guidelines, they say that if a child behaves differently than you expect, do not assume you are a bad parent. Nor should you assume that the child is deliberately misbehaving. However, the temperament may require some special handling.

Parents may find it helpful to read books by Osman (1979), Silver (1998), and others, as well as the materials prepared by the LDA Early Childhood Committee. These can be obtained by contacting the national LDA office, 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234

Recommendations

It is important to remember that the population of children with learning disabilities is heterogeneous. The children are similar because they all have adequate hearing, vision, mental ability, and many strengths, but their specific disabilities and symptoms differ. Therefore, not all of the suggestions provided below are applicable, but we begin with general recommendations.

Focus on the child's strengths, not the weaknesses Every child is unique; all can contribute to the joys of family life. Find special times and jobs that allow the child to contribute to the group.

Set reasonable expectations

Try not to expect more than the child is capable of doing, but expect the best that he or she can produce, with and then without assistance. This may mean that the child will have to be taught simple skills, and that complex tasks will need to be taught step by step. For instance, learning how to button may begin with the last movement - just pulling the button through the button hole. Learning how to set the table for a meal might begin with putting a fork by each plate. Cleaning one's room may require showing which toys will fit on a particular shelf or in the correct box. Many of these skills are needed to help the child gain independence. Provide the initial assistance and then gradually reduce the supports as the child makes progress.

Provide the guidance needed for independence

Many children want to be independent, long before they are capable of doing some things on their own. Parents and teachers are often ambivalent about letting children perform certain skills independently. For example, climbing the steps on a sliding board requires some degree of sure-footedness, as well as visual and visual-motor skills. Crossing the street requires very careful visual scanning and time estimation. Some children with learning disabilities will need careful guidance and instruction in order to master these skills because of attention and processing weaknesses. Gradually the supports can be reduced so the child can perform independently.

Maintain consistent discipline

Give clear, simple explanations, particularly if

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children have language problems. They may not understand the vocabulary, lengthy instructions, and complex sentences used at home or in school. Our guideline is firmness with warmth, together with consistency.

Foster intellectual curiosity

One of our primary goals is to excite children about the learning process. Parents and teachers who enjoy learning themselves can convey such an attitude to their children. Many infants and toddlers seem to be naturally curious as they look at objects, explore them, turn them, try to move them, etc. By watching their eyes and hand movements, long before they can talk, children seem to be asking What's this? What can I do with this? How does it taste? Can I push it, roll it, bang it? As they sit in a high chair banging with a spoon, they become aware of the sound of metal against metal, or metal against wood. When taking a bath, they learn how to splash in the water, and, if given certain toys, they may acquire the rudiments of the concept of floating and sinking. As they play with pots and pans, they learn about shapes, sizes, and the beginning of seriation, an important concept for early mathematics supports as the child makes progress.

Some researchers in the field have found that children with learning disabilities are inactive learners. While the bases for this inactivity are not clear, adults can develop a spirit of inquiry by guiding the child's listening and looking, by showing excitement and wonder about even simple events in the world. Some parents do this automatically. I remember seeing a mother and toddler looking intently at something on the sidewalk, and as I approached, I noticed they were studying a caterpillar. Mother was guiding the child's looking and using words such as fuzzy, crawling slowly, etc. She, like many other parents, was fostering learning, language, and intellectual curiosity. One does not have to have fancy toys to excite children. Many children can be content with a pail, a shovel, some sand and water if we guide them to see what can be done with such objects. Take a walk around the block, look at the trees and the bushes, feel the bark of the tree, smell the flowers, look at the grass, the gravel, the cement and talk about what is hard, smooth, rough, and pretty. One of our goals is to provide the basis for life long learners as suggested by Calkins with Adellino (1997).

Help children classify and categorize objects

Many children naturally put groups of objects together because they are the same color or shape, or because of their use. If given blocks, toy cars, cups and saucers, they notice similarities and differences, a critical skill for all learning. However, some children with learning disabilities have problems with conceptualization (Lewis, Strauss, & Lehtinen, 1960). They do not notice similarities or observe the most relevant attributes. If given groups of objects they tend to sort on the basis of an insignificant detail (e.g., they all have lines on them) or they are inflexible which means that if given sets of blocks. they may be able to sort by color, but not shape. Because categorization is such an important part of learning, we include it in most of our lessons. We guide children to note how shoes, pencils, apples, coats, and other objects are alike because words represent concepts. In order to understand apple, children must note that they can be different colors and sizes, but are alike in many ways. Parents can help with this categorization process when they go to grocery stores, parks, zoos, and other places to note how things in certain areas are similar. The grocery bag can be used for many conceptual and language tasks. When putting things away, encourage the child to help and to note which things go in the freezer, in the refrigerator, and in cupboards. Note which things are in bottles, cartons, or cans, and call attention to foods that need to be cooked before they are eaten and which do not. The same type of classification activity can be done with the laundry, or objects in a workshop, and even in the child's own room. The important thing is to help them categorize, and reclassify objects so they become flexible thinkers. Later, we encourage them to note how words are alike.

Provide good language models and stimulation

When children have delayed language, some parents tend to talk less to them. While some reduction of language may be helpful, children need good stimulation. In his book, Talk with Your Child, Wiener (1988) emphasizes the importance of informal, unstructured conversation to guide children's learning. Although his focus is on normally developing children, he said that parents should talk while they are doing things with the child to enhance vocabulary and concepts. For

example, if the child wants something to eat, the parent might externalize his or her thinking - Let's get a banana; uh, oh, this one is not ripe; it is too green. How shall we peel the banana? I can't eat the peeling. What color is the peeling? It's yellow; what color is the part that we eat? - it's white. Wiener says that when carrying on such dialogues, even if the child cannot speak, parents should wait for some type of response. This kind of social interaction strengthens the interpersonal relationship as well as verbal learning.

Guide the child's language comprehension Many parents of children with delayed language are concerned about their lack of ability to speak or to put words together in sentences, but in reality, the first step is to make certain they understand language. We do not ask children to say words that they do not understand because they will not be able to use them for communication.

When helping children comprehend new vocabulary, we emphasize that words are concepts. As stated above, words are not simple associations. Often, normally developing children as well as those with language problems use overextensions. That is, they call all liquids juice. Others may use underextensions; all juice is orange. Gradually, with varied experiences, their word meanings approach those of adults. However, vocabulary acquisition goes on throughout life.

It is important to remember that in English, the same object can have more than one name (e.g., rug, carpet), and the same word may have several meanings (e. g., bill, back). Many children with learning disabilities have problems understanding words with multiple meanings, particularly those that change with the context. For example, children probably first learn the word letter when it refers to an envelope that is sent or received in the mail. Later, however, the word letter will refer to a part of the alphabet. Most normally achieving children seem to abstract these word meanings more easily than those with language learning disabilities. Therefore, when children start to school, teachers and parents need to make certain they understand word meanings in new contexts, particularly the language of instruction (Johnson, 1999). We have seen many 7 and 8 year olds with learning disabilities who did not understand the terminology used in reading instruction. For example, when asked to point to a

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letter or a word, they were confused. Many also have difficulty with words representing time and space (e. g., before, after, between). When this is the case, they might fail tasks they could otherwise master if the vocabulary in the instructions were clarified. Words representing time, space, and quantity are often difficult. Children may have difficulty comprehending words such as in, on, under, over, and between; some comprehend these words in three dimensional, but not two dimensional, space. Simple demonstrations while saying in the box, under the box, etc. may be helpful.

This article will continue in the next edition of LD Connections. Doris Johnson, Professor, Department of Speech and Director of Learning Disabilities, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois.

Guelph Public Library Live Homework Help

This free after-school service allows students in Kindergarten to grade 12 through the early university and college years, as well as Adult learners, to connect to tutors for one-to-one homework help sessions. Help is available in math, science, social studies and English. Students are immediately connected to a tutor in an Online Classroom. Live Homework Help is available seven days a week between the hours of 4 PM and 10 PM.

Use your library card to access the site: www.library.guelph.on.ca/search/homeworkhelp/login.c fm

Upcoming Event

Emerging Research, New Trends, and Social Importance

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

7:00 pm

ARC Industries, 8 Royal Rd, Guelph

Presenter: Christina Deroche, M.A., B.Ed., OCT,

PhD Student, McMaster University.

\$5.00 Members

\$10.00 Non-Members

Register at info@ldawc.ca or phone (519)837-2050

Upcoming Event

Dr. Louise Scott, Neuropsychologist with Grand River Hospital

Topic: ADHD Misdiagnosed

May 2010

Stay tuned for details.

Congratutions to 50/50 Winner Tom Jacobs of Guelph, \$1853.00

Thank you to everyone who supported the 50/50 draw at the Guelph Storm vs London Knights on Family Day, Feb 15th. Thank you Stormtrackers who donated sales from the sale of programs. A special thank you to the Guelph Storm Hockey Club for allowing our association to fundraise.

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Resources

IEP Online Program - Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)

IEP 101 for Parents and Students online program is now up and running on the LDAO Learning Platform through the LDAO web site. The two year project was sponsored by the Ministry of Education. It is free of charge to anyone. Visit: www.ldao

Ontario Publications website

https://www.publications.serviceontario.ca/ecom/

Examples of publications

- Making a difference for students with autism spectrum disorders in Ontario schools: From evidence to action: A report of the Ministers' Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group.
- Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Resource Guide
- Helping your Child with Reading and Writing: A Guide for Parents
- Helping your Child do Mathematics: A Guide for Parents: Kindergarten to Grade 6

Ministry of Education www.edu.gov.on.ca

The Individual Education Plan (IEP), A Resource Guide (2004)

Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation 2000

Shared Solutions – A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Needs

TVO Documentary - The View from Here

"My Different Lift" is about a mother in the Toronto area who is trying to get help for here three kids with learning disabilities and/or ADD. This documentary can be viewed at:

http://www.tvo.org/TVOsites/WebObjects/TVO.woa?b?7663951264995040000

If you require more information about IPRC, IEP, rights under the Education Act, please contact our Chapter.

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IEP Check Up

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a critical element in maximizing your child's success at school. A well-constructed IEP clearly describes the accommodations, program and services that your child needs and that the school will provide. In the best interests of your child, it is essential that you understand and are able to support the IEP.

- Does the IEP identify appropriate instructional, environmental and assessment accommodations, including the use of current technology?
- Does the program section, when included, demonstrate a developmental progression of skills? Are references to curriculum topics clear to you?
- Will the human resources listed in the IEP meet your child's needs?
- Does a Transition Plan, when required, reflect necessary preplanning?

In response to numerous requests, Boothroyd Dewar & Draffin, Consultants in Special Education, are pleased to offer a new service, IEP Check-up.

Send us your child's IEP. We will examine it against established criteria and provide you with written feedback. This feedback will include constructive recommendations for discussion and collaboration with your school. The cost for this service is \$100.00.

For more information contact Boothroyd Dewar & Draffin 38A Preakness Drive Toronto, ON M3B 3S1 - dboothroyd@sympatico.ca or 416 446 6990

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