



The Macaulay
Child Development
Centre

Macaulay Today

Spring 2014



1 Play it Up!

Literacy and language: a partnership built for success

Through a unique partnership with Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services, Macaulay's Early Literacy Specialists have developed a specialized program that supports the development of language and literacy skills in children, ages 0-6, with special needs.

Play it Up (it's the name of the program and it's also a key message for families) reaches out to children on the wait list for Speech and Language Services. Macaulay's Early Literacy Specialists offer stories, songs, rhymes, and play with a purpose - the purpose of promoting language development. Parents get support from both the Early Literacy Specialist as well as the Speech Pathologist; they learn helpful strategies they can apply in the program and at home.

Play it Up has many benefits – it can reduce wait lists for Speech and Language Services; it increases early identification of more complex needs, and provides strong support for parents. Most important of all, the program's rich interactive language experience is sometimes just the boost that is needed to get the child's development on track. In many cases, the child's need for more specialized interventions is greatly reduced after participation in Play it Up. This program is a great example of Macaulay's collaborative, comprehensive approach to working with families. One size never fits all.

2 Message from the Executive Director

From the first moment an infant cries and a parent responds, language is developing. The importance of language and literacy for life-long happiness and success cannot be over-emphasized. And children who struggle with speech, language or literacy in their early years may

be affected in many areas of their development, including their mental health, self-esteem and academic achievement.

This edition of Macaulay Today highlights some of the ways we address this important aspect of development. From speech and language therapy to consultation, from parent education to storytelling,

multiple strategies are used every day to ensure children find their voice.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our work. Please tell us what you think.

*Sincerely,
Sharon Filger, Executive Director*



3 Speech & Language Support

A chance to succeed

James was 3 years old when he came to Macaulay for speech and language therapy. He suffered from severe delays in communication. His mother was very upbeat and supportive but struggled with her child's behavior. Mom was hesitant to accept that James' needs were significant and that a full assessment might be necessary; naturally she was worried about the outcome and what it would mean for James and the family.

Macaulay's Speech and Language therapist worked with James directly; she also advised James' mother on strategies she could use at home to promote language. As part of the treatment plan, James' mother was encouraged to attend one of Macaulay's Ontario Early Years Centres where James would be exposed to a language-rich environment. Staff at the Early Years Centre reached out to James' mother and, over time, helped her accept that a developmental

assessment was needed. This assessment opened up new doors for James and his mother and they began attending additional programs. As James gained new skills, his mother gained confidence and the progress has been immense.

James is now attending his final intervention cycle with Macaulay's Speech and Language therapist. He now speaks in short phrases, spells words when he is not understood, and reads! His mother tells us that James' teacher has praised his adjustment to school. Just as importantly, she talks about her new confidence as a parent. Mom beams with pride when she talks about her son and the progress he has made. James continues to have areas of need but with appropriate supports in place, he has been given a chance to succeed in school, in his community and in his life.

4 Community Literacy Leaders:

Enriching language and literacy

The evidence is clear: a child's language and literacy skills will increase the more that child is read to by a caring adult. Macaulay's Community Literacy Leaders program promotes these important interactions between adults and children. This exciting initiative trains and matches community volunteers with Macaulay children's programs. In fun and playful ways, "Literacy Leaders" talk, read and sing with children to help nurture their love of songs, rhymes, stories and language. Literacy Leaders receive additional training in creative storytelling, learning through play, and choosing the "right" book for a child. The result is a team of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers.

Most volunteers are newcomer parents themselves, some have experience working with children and others are seeking to develop new skills.

Our program helps volunteers gain confidence while finding a sense of belonging in a new country. One volunteer, Elsa, was so inspired by her experience at Macaulay that she wrote a Tip Sheet on "Things I learned from my first volunteer assignment". Elsa says "Reading with children is a most rewarding activity; you learn so much from the kids, and hopefully they get to be excited about books!" Her concluding tip: 'Finally... expect to fall in love!'

Another volunteer writes: "I also love the fact that you are so invested in providing support for the volunteers. This is an amazing perk of volunteering with Macaulay." – Jennifer

Through the Community Literacy Leader program both adults and children develop a love of reading that lasts a lifetime.

5000 Words

Preschool children need a vocabulary of 5000 words in their heads before they begin school. This is what research tells us will help children make a strong start towards academic success when they enter the classroom.

This issue of Macaulay Today highlights how every day Macaulay weaves language and literacy development into programs, activities and interactions so that every child has a foundation for success.





Special Needs Consultation:

5 Building Language, Building Relationships

Macaulay’s consultation team is part of Every Child Belongs, a Toronto initiative that helps child care programs provide safe and developmentally appropriate care for children with special needs. The team works from the premise that every child can belong... and thrive... in their neighbourhood child care program, provided that program is effectively supported. Macaulay consultants provide training, advice and mentoring so that caregivers can succeed in this important work.

Many of the children who need special support in child care have a communication delay of some kind. Children who cannot express themselves experience great frustration that often leads to other challenges such as aggressive behavior, tantrums, or social isolation.

Macaulay Consultant Toni Giovane describes one such situation. Sara’s child care teacher and parent were

both concerned about her language development and in particular her pronunciation. They tried to help Sara by correcting her words and having her repeat the correct pronunciation. When Toni asked how that was working, both parent and teacher admitted that Sara was actually showing more frustration and avoided conversations with them.

Toni modeled a different approach: instead of correcting Sara, Toni repeated what Sara said, using the correct pronunciation and without asking the child to repeat it. That way, the child heard the correct pronunciation and, equally important, didn’t experience the anxiety or shame of being constantly corrected.

Both Sara’s parent and teacher agreed to try this new approach and were excited to see how Sara’s language skills and attitude improved.

6 A Story Just for Me...

We know that stories can be used as an effective tool to help children become comfortable with new situations and routines, such as starting school for the first time. This is especially true for children with special needs.

One example of this comes from our Special Needs Consultant Brenda Disher-Silano. She explains that for most children, getting on a bus and going off to school is an easy routine to learn. But for some children with special needs, learning and accepting this routine can be a challenge. Parents and caregivers may become overwhelmed when every morning is a trial. This is where bringing in a personalized story that sparks the child’s interest, motivation and learning can really help.

Disher-Silano explains: “When Sam, a four-year old with autism and aggressive behavior, was about to start school, I created a simple story – with Sam as the main character. I used simple words along with pictures and photos of the child, the adult, the school bus, and other important details such as the child’s backpack and seat belt. I made a booklet that showed all the steps the child would take.

Because the book is so personalized, it encourages the child to pay attention.” This type of story, known as a ‘social story’ is very powerful as an incentive because it’s all about the child’s own world, it’s his own story. With repetition and the warmth of shared reading between the adult caregiver and child, the result is a calmer morning and a child able to accomplish this basic routine. In addition, because of this positive experience with a book, the child understands in a new way that words, books and stories contain important and useful information. Long after the school bus has gone, that learning lasts a lifetime.





Repetition,
repetition,
repetition...

When Macaulay's Early Literacy Specialist Dave Page asks, "What do the 3 Rs stand for?" the answer is - repetition, repetition, repetition! Repeat, repeat, repeat! Through the repetition of words, songs, rhymes and stories, infants and young children not only learn new vocabulary they also absorb the sounds and rhythms of language itself. This helps set the foundation for lifelong reading and literacy skills.

7 Helping Kids Grow

Did you know that nearly one-third of Toronto's children are living in low-income families? In fact, more than 60% of the families supported by Macaulay earn less than \$30,000 annually. Macaulay has launched its first ever Spring Campaign: Helping Kids Grow. This campaign will raise much needed funds to support critical programs and services for children and families in need.

This spring help plant the seeds for a bright and vibrant future! You can Help Kids Grow by making a donation to the campaign.

For example, a gift of \$150 could:

- Send a child with special needs to Macaulay's summer program
- Provide a healthy snack and nutritional counseling throughout the school year at Macaulay's After School Program
- Provide child development advice for a high risk parent in their home
- Provide books, puppets and literacy materials at Macaulay's community literacy programs

Please visit our website to make a donation: www.macaulaycentre.org or mail in your gift to our head office at 2010 Eglinton Avenue West.

*Together we
can help
kids grow.*



The Macaulay Child Development Centre
2010 Eglinton Ave West, Suite 400, Toronto, ON M6E 2K3
T. 416.789.7441 www.macaulaycentre.org

Writer: Susan Gowans

Contributors: Brenda Disher-Silano, Sharon Filger, Shana Gelbart, Toni Giovane, Susan Gowans, Joanne Long, Bixi Lobo-Molnar, Maria Velasquez, Dave Page, Sasha Delgado