

A Message from the Chair

Spring is finally here! It's a welcome respite after our cold winter, especially for many parts of the country where new snowfall and temperature records were set. Spring is a time of re-birth, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) is working on the "re-birth" of its national office. With this quarterly newsletter, I hope you share my excitement with all the activities happening at LDAC as we work together to support the great work undertaken by our amazing provincial/territorial LDA network.

Thealzel Lee
Chair, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

A Message from the Executive Director

I have spoken with many members in the provincial/territorial LDA network over the last few months, and I will continue to connect with you as the national board and I become more settled and our strategic plan unfolds. The great work within the provincial/territorial LDAs has been instrumental in guiding me in my role. I've learned of many successful programs and initiatives, and I'm proud to work with each and every one of you.

Developing a quarterly newsletter, which will be distributed to several thousand individuals across the country, will be an important tool for LDAC to share information amongst our community. Below are some of the projects I've been focussing on the last few weeks, with updates from LDAC's committees and provincial/territorial LDAs further down. If you're reading this newsletter and have something you would like to share with Canada's learning disabilities community, I encourage you to contact me so that LDAC can include it in our next newsletter scheduled for late June 2015. There are many success stories out there, and everyone wins by sharing information from all corners of the country. I hope you will consider sharing your stories with us!

Claudette Larocque
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Position Paper on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)

In the autumn of 2013, LDAC's board tasked the Research and Education Committee to review the new criteria of the DSM-5 and its impact on LDAC's official definition of learning disabilities. The DSM-5 Ad Hoc Committee, chaired by Dr. Christina Fiedorowicz, was established with other professionals from across the country. After much work, discussions, research and input from the provincial/territorial LDAs and other professionals, a position paper was presented at the March 2, 2015 LDAC board meeting.

Entitled "*To Revise or not to Revise: the Official Learning Disabilities Association of Canada Definition of Learning Disabilities Versus DSM-5 Criteria*," the [position paper](#) was unanimously adopted by the board. The document is being translated and will be distributed to all provincial/territorial LDAs and professionals in the coming weeks. A sincere thank you to Dr. Christina Fiedorowicz and the members of the DSM-5 Ad Hoc Committee for their work, as well

as to everyone who provided feedback on this important position paper. Members of the Ad Hoc committee include: Mr Gordon Bullivant, Ms Judy Craig, Dr Marjory Phillips, Dr Anne Price.

At the same meeting, the LDAC board of directors re-endorsed the official definition of learning disabilities (LD) which was adopted by the board in 2002, with a commitment that it continues to be regarded as the official LD definition from LDAC.

Scholarship Program

The Carol Thomson Memorial Scholarships for Students with Learning Disabilities and the Donald Cummings Apprenticeship and Training Scholarship for Students with Learning Disabilities are no longer administered or available through LDAC. At the request of the funders, these scholarships have been transferred to other local charities in the Vancouver and Ottawa areas.

The Joanna Townsend Applied Arts Scholarship and the Doreen Kronick Scholarship for graduate students, whose program will lead to a field that will assist persons with learning disabilities, have yet to be reactivated. The funds remain fully reserved. LDAC's goal is to have these bursaries dovetail strategically with the future of the organization. Therefore, LDAC's board has opted to wait for the completion of the strategic planning process before proceeding with any changes with respect to these scholarships.

Stock Donations

As reported in the December newsletter, LDAC has closed its investment portfolio account with a full service broker and moved it to the BMO Discount Broker. The shares in this portfolio will be sold and reserved against the amounts in the two remaining bursary accounts.

The BMO Discount Broker account is now operational and allows LDAC to accept donations of stocks and other securities, which will be sold into the market with the resulting funds to be transferred to LDAC's operating/special project account.

Advocacy Activities

The Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) Directorate of Human Rights and Diversity is conducting a policy review on the CAF's Duty to Accommodate regarding employees with learning disabilities. LDAC was invited to be part of this working group, with the initial meeting taking place on February 12. As the number of CAF members with learning disabilities continues to increase as a result of awareness and diagnosis, the CAF is becoming more aware of the need to offer programs and services. Once this review is completed, the working group will develop a draft policy in order to propose policy solutions.

Phoenix Project

This two-year project is scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2015, with the goal of developing a Strategic Plan, a Business Plan and a Fundraising Plan for LDAC. Final reports and recommendations will be reviewed by LDAC's board at its next meeting in April.

Additional Government Funds

The federal government's Office of Disabilities Issues will be providing LDAC with one more year of funding, which is intended to support activities that are related to ongoing operations, as well as activities that are complimentary to those undertaken through the Project Phoenix.

Direct Mail Campaign

As part of its Fundraising Program, LDAC develops three direct mail campaigns a year: spring, autumn and Christmas. The Spring Campaign will be sent to LDAC's donors by late April.

Committee Reports

Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee is spearheading the "re-birth" of LDAC, and has laid some groundwork through conversations with many stakeholders in the provincial/territorial LDA network last year. Building on this feedback, the Committee held web conferences and teleconferences to help define a future direction and role for the national office. With continuing progress, the Committee is pleased to report that results are being realized, including an internal re-organization and the coordination of several projects that are (or will be) implemented in the provincial/territorial LDA network. These include:

- Organization of LDAC's committees (Operations, Governance, Education & Research, Legal Consortium, Communications and Fund Development)
- Engagement with external consultants to help with Strategic Planning (Emotus Operandi) and Fund Development (Good Works)
- Completion of Phase I of the Phoenix Project with Emotus Operandi
- Identification of three Rally Projects (Phoenix Project Phase II with Emotus Operandi)
- Facilitation of the Rally Projects with assistance from LDAC's committees

Governance Committee

The Governance Committee has completed the development of new by-laws for LDAC. The next task will be to work on board governance policies and procedures, including a process for nominations to the national board. Please note that under the new LDAC by-laws, each board member of a provincial or territorial association is automatically a voting member of LDAC.

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee has been reformed and has held regular monthly meetings since January 2015. The Committee has identified three priorities for the coming months:

1. Develop a quarterly newsletter
2. Ensure that LDAC's website is updated with fresh content
3. Reactivate social media channels

Provincial/Territorial Updates

Alberta

The Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta's (LDAA) Right to Read Project is gaining traction. The project, entitled Catching Children Before They Fail, is aimed at Kindergarten and Grade One teachers. It's designed to screen all children for their readiness to read and offers interventions for areas of weakness that may become an impediment to reading. It will also help flag children in the earliest grades who may be at risk for a learning disability.

The project consists of two workshops: 1) the Reading Readiness Screening Tool (RRST), which introduces teachers to a short, simple-to-deliver screening for each of their students and 2) Assessment Informs Instruction, which discusses interpretation of the RRST results and provides appropriate interventions for each of the RRST subtests. These workshops are delivered at least a month apart to allow teachers to screen their students. At the conclusion, participants are given two intervention activity packages – one to use in the classroom and the other to help parents support their work at home. These workshops are currently on offer across the province.

LDAA is now in the process of developing an on-line version of the workshops, which is anticipated to be live by the end of May. The on-line version will enable teachers across Canada to access the project without having to participate in the face-to-face workshops currently on offer in Alberta. Fees are anticipated to be \$150.

New Brunswick

The Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick (LDANB), in collaboration with LDAC, has just completed a review, update and translation of the Screening for Success (SFS) Instrument, which screens adults at risk for learning disabilities. The updated SFS Instrument is now open in both English and French in a pilot phase, and is available to all provincial/territorial LDAs. Requests for the SFS Instrument can be sent to LDANB, and any feedback during this pilot phase would be welcome. LDANB has begun delivering training sessions on the SFS Instrument to the Government of New Brunswick's Department of Post-secondary Education, Training and Labour, and is in talks with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to offer training to High School Specialists. Screening could be done with students from Grades 11 and 12 who are at risk for learning disabilities, which would minimize the transition challenges as they enter post-secondary institutions and request accommodations without having any formal diagnosis.

LDANB is also undertaking a new initiative, in collaboration with several stakeholders, including the Government of New Brunswick, to study, evaluate and establish a provincial standard for psychoeducational assessments, which will look at format, content, expectations, description of results, diagnostic criteria and the framework for a more efficient service delivery model. LDANB will also manage the delivery of approximately 150 psychoeducational assessments during the pilot phase of this study.

LDANB has also launched a new subsidized literacy service for school-aged children and adults who demonstrate low literacy levels due to reading difficulties or disabilities. The BARTON Reading and Spelling System will complement the successful LINKS Literacy Program already offered free of charge by LDANB within the school system.

Planning for the 2015 Symposium on Learning Disabilities – *Literacy, Learning Disabilities and Cognitive Strategies: Facilitating the Learning Process for All* has commenced in collaboration with the Government of New Brunswick's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. LDANB welcomes all provincial/territorial LDAs who would like to offer a session or attend.

Newfoundland and Labrador

The Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (LDANL) is having a busy and productive year with several partnerships that have been developed, highlighted by their partnership with LDANB in the creation of the Atlantic Learning Disabilities Executive Network (ALDEN). The main focus of ALDEN is the Atlantic Canadian Symposium on Learning Disabilities, which has been alternatively hosted by the two LDAs, and has provided an excellent forum to share knowledge with the community.

Another important project for LDANL has been working with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Education to discuss and implement changes to the service delivery in schools based on the new definition of learning disabilities. LDANL has developed a strong partnership with the Department of Education and has helped form their policy, as well as disseminate these changes to members and the general public.

Prince Edward Island

The Learning Disabilities Association of Prince Edward Island (LDAPEI) has gained agreement from the English Language School Board to offer the Barton Reader and Spelling Program as an after-school program across the province. Previously, the Program had been delivered at LDAPEI's offices. This initiative allows parents one-to-one tutoring with more local access. LDAPEI currently has agreements in place with 14 schools, and employs B.Ed. graduates who may be substitute teachers, which will allow them to use their training and increase their knowledge and ability for working with students with a learning disability.

LDAPEI will be offering JUMP Math from their offices, which will support up to 30 students for them to understand and enjoy math. This program will be offered with a ratio of one tutor to four students, which will allow for positive student interaction and focussed enthusiastic support from the tutor.

Stay informed of current issues and events by signing up with LDAC's email list! Go to <http://www.ldac-acta.ca/> and fill in your email address in the box on the right-hand side.