

CDA TEAM WORK

Susan Macdonald, Jennifer Lewis, and Dianne Aikman, a team of University trained professionals in the early intervention therapy program at the Comox Valley Child Development Association (CDA), assess the developmental stages of children with special needs and create individualized therapy programs for each of them.

They are also part of a bigger team, one that includes the children's parents and their daycares and preschools. "We all work together as a huge team here," says Susan. "When parents are involved there are amazing gains and progress."

Macdonald is the Occupational Therapist (OT), Lewis the Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP), and Aikman the Physical Therapist (PT). Each of their areas is unique and requires specialized education and practises. However, they use a holistic approach when creating their strategies and programs, and create a balance of therapies that will work best for each child.

Together this year they are consulting with families and creating integrated therapy programs for over 300 children. And there is a long wait list.

Macdonald has been with the CDA for twenty-one years. Her focus is on motor coordination, problem solving, behavioural, and sensory difficulties that interfere with a child's development and ultimately their ability to learn, play, and be part of a social group. A few examples would be working with a child who had a difficult birth which may have resulted in swallowing difficulties, extremely fussy eaters, a child who is unable to hold onto a pencil, the clumsy child, or a the child who simply cannot tolerate sounds or touch. Once a child can overcome these difficulties, they can go on to learn and participate in their preschool activities.

Lewis has been on staff for sixteen years. Speech delays, articulation difficulties, or the inability to express or comprehend language in a child are obstacles to communicating and interacting with peers and others. Lewis works with these speech and language issues and others and says that finding out how a child learns best and seeing the excitement of how that child progresses is very rewarding.

Aikman is the newest on staff, joining the CDA one year ago. She concentrates on the physical challenges of the children, such as those with Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, or Global Development Delay. Strength, mobility, typical movement, and balance are the basic goals of her program and are incorporated into play activities rather than traditional exercises. For example, a birth issue may be difficulties with neck mobility, such as torticollis. Physical therapy can improve neck mobility and strength, and ensure that this problem does not interfere with development of gross motor milestones. Aikman loves pediatrics physical therapy and says of her work at the CDA, "It's the best place to work... I get to play with kids all day."

All three therapists celebrate the accomplishments of the children in their program, and it is obvious that they love what they do.

The CDA facility on Third Street is very supportive to families in that the supported child development and the infant development programs are under the same roof. All three therapists agree that this is a great benefit to both families and staff as people and resources are together which makes for better and easier communication with one another.

The annual Telethon is on Sunday, November 7th from noon until 8 pm at the Old Church Theatre on Harmston Avenue. Every single donation assists the CDA to provide services, such as those in the early intervention therapy program, to children with special needs in the Comox Valley. And every dollar stays here. Join the telethon crew and our great Valley entertainers on the 7th.