



## **Services and Program Provided at the Learning Center for the Deaf Beirut - Lebanon**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the “Learning Center for the Deaf” is to provide a quality program to respond to the urgent needs of deaf persons in Lebanon, i.e., physical, emotional, intellectual, and social. However, the LCD’s primary objective is educational with specific emphasis on children, their families, and young adults.

The team in the LCD believes in the empowerment of the Deaf in general, including the family of the deaf person. The program therefore also responds to the needs of deaf adults through further education and literacy classes. It reaches out to the world of the hearing with information that helps spread awareness about deafness, how to deal with the deaf and on prevention of hearing loss.

### **Introduction**

The LCD has been established, in 2002, with the dream of providing a proper program for young deaf children and their families, which will enable **the deaf child to have a good start in life and a better future.**

During a preparatory phase of the programs, Hussein Ismail, who is a deaf man himself, achieved his Doctorate Degree in Educational Administration. The Association of Parents for the Deaf, who saw in Hussein hope for the future of their children, since education for deaf children terminated at the Brevet level (9<sup>th</sup> grade), asked the President of Lebanon to decorate Hussein with a “Medal of Deserve” in recognition of his achievement.

The decoration ceremony allowed Hussein to be seen by many of the young deaf people who came from different schools and saw in him a role-model. One of the deaf students, Wissam, told him: “I used to be certain that obtaining Brevet Diploma was the highest goal to reach, but now I ask myself why can’t I become like you, Dr. Hussein?” In fact, Wissam was the reason Hussein felt the responsibility to give young deaf people the chance which he was given by his foster-father the late Rev. A. Andeweg (Father Andy) and the organization that supported him, to reach the same level of Education that he has achieved.

Due to the absence of classes beyond Brevet (High School Program) in the schools for the deaf in Lebanon, Hussein found it necessary to personally establish a special High School setting for the Deaf which will accept students from all the schools for the Deaf who wished to continue in the academic realm. It was a courageous decision, knowing that such an intervention for a High School is much more expensive than that of Primary and Intermediate education. But God is fairer to His children than people and He made this event possible for the deaf young children in Lebanon; and today Wissam, who has

completed his education at our high-school program, is studying at a university in Medical Laboratory.

Similar challenges have faced the Early Intervention Program. The difficulty was due to the fact that the concept of Early Intervention in Lebanon was thought to be limited to having the child fitted with hearing aids early, and having him/her go to a speech therapist one to three times a week. No one appeared to wonder what would be the use of the hearing aid if the parents are not taught to check it on a daily basis and are shown how to help the child to make use of a proper listening environment. Nor did they appear to think to teach the family how to make use of the natural situations at home to provide rich communication, language and listening possibilities. No one considered the fact that families need to deal with their feelings by discussing them with a counselor and by providing them chances to see other families and learning at first hand from their experience. No one thought of the needs of some families to be taught Sign Language to have better communication with their child. No one believed that families deserve to be instructed in subjects such as hearing tests, modes of communication, etc. And finally no one thought the families need to have a reference library to refer to whenever they panic due to all the new matters they have to deal with. All these missing services are an important requisite for a proper Early Intervention Program.

We learned that the best people, who can inform families about the importance of our program and the richness of our services, are not the professionals, but the families themselves. We get thrilled to hear from the families that they feel very good to be at the LCD; while still being professionally treated. The number of families is growing and families are coming to us from a far distance.

The LCD has also launched the initiation of a Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program in order to help the families in distant areas, where help is greatly needed because of the neglect of the children which is due to poverty and lack of awareness of many families. This program is moving very slowly due to the fact that the LCD does not have enough employees to do many trips to the distant areas, but again there is faith that everything comes in the right time.

An awareness campaign on the importance of Early Detection has initiated. The campaign became possible after two years of waiting for funding. It will be spread throughout the country encouraging families to detect hearing loss as early as possible. LCD will help inform the families about the steps they need to make in case of suspicion. Once hearing loss is confirmed, the Early Intervention Program at the LCD has many services that can help families from distant areas such as follow up tests, continuous guidance, John Tracy Clinic Correspondence Books which are followed through distance learning, lectures in distant areas, and the support group.

The Integrated Nursery also has been started. The next setting for the Nursery will be a special class for the deaf babies and young children who will later enter schools for the Deaf. The Bilingual/Bicultural Approach will be applied in this part of the Nursery with one deaf teacher who will promote Sign Language and one hearing teacher who will promote the spoken language. This class will be important since the aim of the Nursery is to be a diagnostic Nursery where we can study the best placement for the deaf child.

The ideas for development and improvement in the future are many, such as providing an audiological section, subtitling of videos for families in Arabic, and adding a Sign Language corner for deaf parents, translating important books to Arabic as such sources are almost non-existent, and providing professional training for the approaches used in therapy, etc.

But looking back, we realize that the support of people who believe in the work of the LCD has already helped realize many accomplishments, which took place during the past years. Therefore there is no doubt that the LCD will be able to improve existing services and provide other needed ones in due time.

There is a strong feeling that God is surely behind this project because of all that has been provided until now. Buying of the LCD's premises (the building), which is a big proof of His presence in times of financial difficulties world-wide, allowed us to accommodate a number of programs within a loving and caring atmosphere, created by the staff, the students and the families.

## **The Project's Main Objectives (*programs offered*)**

### **1. Early Intervention Program**

The most important aspect of this program is that it establishes a place that provides objective information, and services on any subject related to the deaf child, for parents who already know or have just discovered that their infant or young child is deaf and consequently feel lost and do not know what to do. Objective information is put at their disposal from educational references and research as well as from personal experiences about the best possible choices for their child. These choices are also reviewed in the context of what is available in Lebanon and what really meets their needs and priorities.

The LCD's role is to provide emotional and cognitive support for parents to overcome their grief and to supply them with all basic information. Therefore besides the continuous guidance (talks, following tests needed, advise for whom to contact, searching possibilities for schooling, etc), the Early Intervention Program is offering parents two services for these purposes and these are **1) the Support Group** where families gather in the presence of a qualified and experienced psychologist in the field of deafness, and **2) the Course** for families of young children with Hearing Impairment where a number of intensive lectures is given to them concerning subjects related to deafness or the young child.

Parents come from distant areas and from closer areas. The ones from closer areas can bring their child once a week, or twice when needed for **sessions with the therapist** who works with the child, but also with the family. While parents coming from distant areas usually bring their child once a month for evaluation and follow up.

All parents benefit from the **John Tracy Clinic sequential lessons**, which are translated and adapted to the Arab Language and Culture by our LCD with the authorization from the clinic. These lessons help parents in a gradual manner to enhance their child's whole development with stress on language development and listening skills. All families are enjoying these lessons because of their simplicity and their content which is written with

a lot of consideration to the feelings of the family and the abilities of each individual child.

The LCD's **Resource Room** provides intensive information, as well as links through the Internet; so that answers are always available to parents' questions related to any subject concerning their child as a child and as a deaf child.

In the year 2004, the LCD initiated a specialized **Integrated Nursery**, Montessori oriented, for hearing and hearing impaired children where both benefit from a very rich environment in all means of development with a special focus on language. There is a special care to have special activities for the families of both hearing and hearing impaired children to support the growth of the child at home.

The Early Intervention Program supports parents until their child is settled in a proper school that meets his/her needs. These differ from one child to another. But even then parents may still want to benefit from some of our services.

Due to lack of awareness for Early Detection the LCD is working on a national campaign where brochure will be distributed with simultaneous interviews on the media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc). The brochures have been published, and we had a collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Health for the distribution in health care centers of the government. Further, the brochures will be distributed to clinics of Pediatric doctors, nurseries, and especially dispensaries. This distribution will require more coordination and cooperation. There is also a plan ready to support all the families who may contact the LCD for information, guidance and support.

## **2. Outreach Program**

Due to the need, the LCD is starting **a program in the rural areas** in cooperation with other associations and professionals. Outreach Program is services for deaf children and their family members in remote, rural areas, such as North of Lebanon, Bekaa Valley, and South of Lebanon.

In April 2007, the LCD has initiated its first branch in the South of Lebanon, Aita El Chaab, as part of its Outreach Program, with the collaboration of the local school of "Children with Special Needs. This branch will serve deaf children and their families conducted in their own environment.

## **3. High School Education for the Deaf (HSED)**

This program is unique in Lebanon, since presently there is no program for further education beyond the Brevet studies (Junior High School), towards Baccalaureate level (Senior High School)—from Grade 10 to 12 - for the Deaf in Lebanon. In the past, many young deaf adults who have obtained their Brevet diplomas wished to continue their further academic education. Now they can fulfill they dream since the High School has opened its doors for students from different schools for the Deaf. This will enable the young deaf people to be able to go to College or University in their own country.

As testimony, in July 2006, for the first time in the history of Lebanon, seven deaf students have presented their official Governmental Baccalaureate Examination, and as a result, fortunately, they all have passed. Now these students are enrolled at their colleges and universities in Lebanon, and one of them is currently studying in England, majoring in Computer Literature. The rest of these students are studying Medical Laboratory, Computer Graphic Design, Animation, TV Production, Physical Education, etc., and are all doing remarkably well.

#### **4. Educational Activities for the Deaf**

This program is designed to promote adult deaf people to learn and improve specific subject matters, such as:

- Languages: English, Arabic
- Subject Matters: Book-keeping, etc.
- Computer Literacy
- Home Economics for deaf mothers
- Cooking lessons
- General Knowledge
- Sign Language Courses for parents of deaf children and other concerned individuals

Educational Activities for the Deaf is also a program of socialization as well as a chance to empower the deaf.

#### **5. Awareness programs about deafness and deaf people**

This program which has as an objective to promote the image of deaf people incorporates activities such as:

- Talks through media
- A book about deafness, written by Dr. Hussein Ismail, founder of the LCD, deaf himself, which is being distributed to the public for free (by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Association for the Rights of the Disabled)
- Activities in regular kindergarten and primary settings (experiment, telling a story interacting with a deaf puppet and introducing a deaf adult teaching some signs).
- Brochures: the LCD is working on the implementation of a National Campaign for awareness on Early Detection and the quality of Early Intervention. There is a mis-concept about Early Intervention for the few people who know about EIP that it is the sum of sessions with a speech therapist who works directly with the child at an early age, with little carry-over at home. Early Intervention should offer much more than simple therapy sessions.
- A hardcover book on Lebanese Sign Language, written by Professor Roumanos and Dr. Ismail, to be sold at a low cost (\$10 each). This Sign Language is also inserted into CD's and distributed for free, as well as can be found in the Internet.

## **6. Consultation**

Many families come for consultation especially because the Director, who is Deaf with a doctorate degree in Education, is highly regarded by them. Also deaf adults come for advice since Hussein is also highly regarded by the deaf and therefore has been chosen to represent the deaf at the National Council for the Rights of the Deaf during 2003-2006.

It is estimated that during each scholastic year, 100 cases of consultation is taking place. While some cases take some minutes through the phone, most take few hours of our time. Others require weeks and sometimes even months of follow-up.

On the other hand gatherings of deaf adults to socialize and share ideas, include consultations cases. These gatherings take place almost every month.

## **7. Sign Language Classes**

In response to the need of parents we found it essential to give courses on Sign Language so that they can also be able to communicate with their own deaf child(ren). The parents are also enabled to communicate with other deaf people to learn more about their language and culture.

Courses are also given by Dr. Ismail, deaf himself, director of the LCD, at different settings (schools, universities, as well as in the LCD)

Lebanese Sign Language is fortunately documented and published in summer 2006. The hardcover books are sold at a low cost, which is only US\$ 10. It is also inserted into CD's and distributed to interested individuals free of charge; supported by the UNESCO in Lebanon. Also Lebanese Sign Language has been launched into the Internet. The authors of this first-phase book are Professor Roumanos of the St. Joseph University and Dr. Hussein Ismail, based on a three-year research and study.

Meanwhile, Professor Roumanos and Dr. Ismail are working on a second-phase book, the implementation of Sign Language in educational settings. This, in the future, will provide the possibility of teaching and learning Lebanese Sign Language to deaf students, their families, interpreters, or any interested individual wishing to learn a different language of a different culture.

## **8. Seminars, Training, and Workshops**

Besides the Lectures for the families of deaf children, and Sign Language Classes for families, professionals, and interested persons, the LCD offers seminars, workshops, and training sessions for teachers and professionals working with children with hearing loss of all ages, and/or with their families.

Training sessions are mainly in the area of Early Intervention. Subjects of studies for Seminars and workshops are mainly focused on:

- Early Intervention – program of the LCD
- Teaching techniques, and importance of link between school and home
- Modes of Communication
- Listening and Speech
- Communication and Language
- Play
- Basic Audiological Matters
- Basic Psychological Matters

According to request from families of older children (older than 6 years), the LCD also offers awareness sessions for parents about the main needs of their child(ren) with hearing loss (psychological, communicational, linguistic, and so forth.)

## **9. Speech and Language Therapy**

This service is designed for deaf children who are older than 6 years as well as deaf adults who wish to enhance their speech and language skills. The Speech Therapist, working with deaf persons, helps them in two main areas which are as follows:

- A. Speech and Articulation:** This area includes working on the production of speech sounds and improving speech intelligibility.
- B. Language:** As it is known, deaf persons have several difficulties in understanding and using spoken language in its multiple dimensions. Therefore, improving linguistic skills includes different objectives, such as:
  - Expand vocabulary (acquire specified and rich vocabulary, synonyms, different meanings for the same word).
  - Enhance the production of correct sentences, from simple to complex structures.
  - Improve conversational skills.
  - Work on the pragmatic aspects of language (i.e.: social language and expressions, adapting language to the situation of communication)
  - Work on the abstract aspects of language (i.e.: proverbs, expressions and idioms of spoken language)