



Sophie Dow

In some ways the term learning difficulties applies just as much to society as to the children and adults involved. Our society seems to have a blind spot — its own form of learning difficulty — towards people with special needs. And its ability to meet their needs is both part of, and adds to, the problem. It is precisely because of lack of any coherence that I set up Mindroom. If you consider that at least five children in every school classroom in this country have some form of learning difficulty you soon realise that this is an issue that concerns us all. Whether you are a parent, sibling, spouse, teacher, head teacher, employer, social worker, landlord, GP, dentist, politician, scientist or in fact struggling yourself, learning difficulties affect most of us in one way or another. We need to work together to guide each and every one of those children, who then grow up to be adults with learning difficulties, in order to maximize their potential.

Hi! I'm Sophie Dow and I am the founder and chairman of Mindroom. I am also Annie's mum. Annie is the inspiration behind Mindroom. She is a child with special needs. She has DAMP — Deficit in Attention Motorcontrol and Perception. Annie will soon be 13 and can't read, write or count. She has no concept of time and would prefer to spend her entire life in a fantasy world. Living with Annie is like living with Mr Magoo and M Hulot – everything is quite often slightly wrong. She has a great sense of humour and her self-esteem is high. So life with Annie is never boring. I have a sister. Between us we have four children. All four children have some form of learning difficulty. For four different reasons. Helena has two sons. One of them is dyslexic and the other one has Asperger Syndrome. My son, James (16) is mildly dyslexic, has a rather short attention span and his organisational skills leave a lot to be desired. And Annie... well she has difficulties because of brain damage that occurred during pregnancy. No wonder I set up Mindroom. Falling outside the norm as Annie and so many of our children/adults do, places you in a multi-faceted and complex world. The facets include the mind, the soul, the environment, on-going medical research, the educational system, social services, your own innermost feelings, self-esteem and, of course, your fears. The complexities are the interplay between all of the above.

Founder's Column

2020 Vision
Mindroom's goal is to create such awareness and understanding that, by the year 2020, all children in this country with learning difficulties are recognised and helped. That's our 2020 Vision.



newsroom

The Mindroom Newsletter
March/June **04**

Conference explores Learning Difficulties, Empathy, Humour and Nutrition / Conference Dates set / Diagnostic Centres planned / Charity Shoe is runaway success

Learning Difficulties

Some of the more common conditions often associated with learning difficulties are:

Asperger Syndrome

Often referred to as "high functioning autism", meaning that a person with Asperger Syndrome can function fine on their own but may have difficulties relating to and communicating with others. Often have a special interest to the exclusion of everything else.

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder – not being able to concentrate very well, sit still and resist an impulse, is what it really means.

Autism

Difficulties relating to and communicating with others, resulting in social isolation. Often live in a world of their own.

DAMP

Deficit in Attention Motor-control and Perception is the medical term, but it means not being able to concentrate very well, perhaps not being very co-ordinated and having some difficulties interpreting what you see and what you hear.

Dyslexia

Specific difficulties with reading and writing.

Dyspraxia

Specific difficulties with co-ordination and motor-control.

Dyscalculia

Specific difficulties with maths and numbers.

Tourette Syndrome

Involuntary movements or sounds which may come and go and vary in severity.

It is very common for these difficulties to co-exist in various combinations.



Donations

If you would like to help us pursue our 2020 Vision you can send a cheque (payable to Mindroom) or make a regular donation. Please contact us.

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See The Bigger Picture, 2 and 3 April 2003 at the EICC

In a high profile start to its campaign Mindroom's inaugural conference, held in Edinburgh last April, became the biggest ever conference in the UK about living with learning difficulties.

See *The Bigger Picture*, attracted over 800 delegates from 14 countries. They saw 17 world experts take a comprehensive look at the various syndromes and learning difficulties, as well as emotional intelligence, empathy, humour, nutrition, medication and body language.

Since then there have been many steps forward:

- Senior academic scientists are exchanging research results on, in particular, studies on fatty acids – Omega 3.
- Mindroom is working together with one of the leading world experts in child and adolescent psychiatry to set up centres and organise the next world conference.
- A BBC producer has submitted two proposals for television series inspired by the conference.
- Several schools have set up committees to review their approach to learning difficulties, and many teachers say they are rethinking their teaching methods.
- Support groups have been formed.

Mindroom Centres

Standard Life has seconded a member of staff to Mindroom to carry out a three-month feasibility study into Mindroom Centres. It is expected that a final concept will be ready this summer.

The diagnostic centres are intended to be one-stop shops with multi-professional teams consisting of neuropsychiatrists, neuropediatricians, neuro-psychologists, educationalists, occupational and speech therapists with administrative support.

founder Sophie Dow says: "They will also be given advice on their rights, and what to do next. There will be courses, seminars and talks. "At the moment there are no such centres where professionals work together in such a coordinated way. We hope children will be referred by their GP or parents will be able to take them along privately.

The most important thing is that an early diagnosis is made so there are no lost years — years which are detrimental to a child's self-esteem and development."



Conference Dates

The Mindroom Masterclass 2004 will be held on 18 and 19 November at the London College of Fashion (who are generously allowing us to use their state-of-the-art auditorium for free).

Mindroom's second World Conference, *The Social Brain 2 – See The Bigger Picture*, is scheduled for March 2006. More than 2,000 delegates are anticipated. Venue to be announced.

Speakers are Dr Loretta Girocelli, Professor of Special Education at the University of Sydney and Sam Goldstein, PhD, Neurology, Learning and Behaviour Centre, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

A programme is being prepared in conjunction with Christopher Gillberg, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Goteberg, Sweden, and University of London.

Spaces are limited to 300, so contact Mindroom if you are interested.

Delegates fee £85 + VAT.

Beacon Prize tributes Dow

Sophie Dow, founder of Mindroom, was highly commended in the prestigious Beacon Prize 2003.

The Beacon Fellowship, a charity organisation set up to encourage individual contributions to charitable and social causes, received over 760 nominations for its inaugural award scheme.

"In an almost impossibly difficult process, with many hundreds of outstanding nominations, Sophie Dow's achievements stood out as exceptional," says Emily Stonor, chief executive of Beacon.

The Fellowship describes the winners as "an inspiration to others in the way that they give – be it time, money or expertise."



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Soled Out

Edinburgh shoe designer Helen Bateman says the second Mindroom shoe has been "flying off the shelf". The Vintage Mindroom shoe, available in two colours, was launched in November, 18 months after Bateman designed a highly successful mule to raise funds for the charity.



Mindroom Mule



Vintage Mindroom Shoe

She met Mindroom's founder Sophie Dow in her William Street shop. "Sophie was initially a customer, but her vision for Mindroom was so extreme that it blew me off my feet. Her enthusiasm is so extraordinary."

association with Mindroom's activities, so the brand keeps coming into people's consciousness." As stocks of the second shoe run low, Bateman is planning a third this summer.

Bateman knew she could support the charity while achieving her own commercial aims. "As a brand it is great to be linked with something so pressworthy. We are often mentioned in

"As a small business I believe we should support something — and this is an amazing cause."

Sponsor thanks

This newsletter was designed by Graphic Partners and printed by Standard Life.



Website
If you want more information on any of the activities mentioned in this newsletter, or about learning difficulties, log on to www.mindroom.org Mindroom's website has been redesigned and relaunched. "It's a completely new design, more sections, more information and more fun! We're sure that people from all over the world will start using it as a meeting point and key information resource," says account manager Nick Craig of Green Parka.

Leaflets of Hope

Three organisations have linked forces to create a series of leaflets to explain learning difficulties and suggest effective ways to work with people who have them.

Graham commissioned Mindroom to write six leaflets – describing various learning difficulties and ways to help and support individuals.

The leaflets, aimed primarily at employers, were commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway Council's Hope Service, written by Mindroom and funded by Jobcentre Plus.

"One of my colleagues went to Mindroom's *See The Bigger Picture* conference last year, and Mindroom then contributed to our conference *Bridging the Gap*. The links between the organisations are so obvious – we support employers and individuals while Mindroom has all the contacts and expertise within learning difficulties."

The project was initiated by Catherine Graham of Hope Service, a scheme which unites employers and people with physical, mental and learning difficulties. They have some 170 people in paid and voluntary employment and need user-friendly brochures to explain the range of learning difficulties involved.

Funding for the project came from Jobcentre Plus through the Work Step Modernisation Fund.

"Employers tend to put learning difficulties under one heading, when an individual can suffer from several," she says. "As part of our service to support both the employer and the worker, we need accurate information which can be understood by laymen."