



mindroom
learning without boundaries

Policy Agenda



Introduction

Sophie Dow, Founder Mindroom

Mindroom is a Scottish charity dedicated to creating and raising awareness of learning difficulties as well as providing direct help and support for children and adults with learning difficulties and their families.

Our Policy Agenda, outlined here, highlights the challenge we face as a society in identifying and supporting children and adults with learning difficulties. We also put forward practical solutions, with a clear focus on early intervention and support.

Our solutions include support for the creation of ground-breaking multi-disciplinary centres – incorporating a diagnostic clinic, research and educational facilities, all under one roof; as well as greater public investment in medical and statistical research, and increased education and training of teachers and medical professionals.

To coincide with the launch of our Policy Agenda, we have also undertaken a survey of every school in the UK, contacting Heads of Learning Support to ask them to assess the number of children with recognised learning difficulties in their school. This survey indicates that over 17% of Scottish schoolchildren, more than 120,000 pupils, can be identified as having some form of recognised learning difficulty.

As we continue to learn more about the human brain, the numbers of people identified with a learning difficulty will continue to grow. At the same time, still too few are being effectively identified and supported.

If left undiagnosed or untreated, Mindroom believes that learning difficulties will become the big public healthcare problem of our time.

I hope this document can prompt a renewed effort from the Scottish Government, MSPs, local authorities and other relevant bodies and organisations to ensure we can tackle this crucial issue in an integrated and effective way.



Mindroom was founded in 2001 by Sophie Dow, journalist and mother of two. Sophie's daughter Annie has severe learning difficulties, and is the inspiration behind Mindroom.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sophie Dow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sophie Dow,
Founder, Mindroom

November 2008

Mindroom's Policy Agenda

The Mindroom Survey, involving more than 30,000 schools in the UK, indicates that 120,000 children in Scotland are affected by a recognised learning difficulty. That's 17% – or more than one in six school children.

This figure demonstrates the huge scale of the challenge we face as parents, teachers, support workers, doctors, researchers and policy makers to ensure that people with learning difficulties and their families receive the support they need.

At present, at most 4% of the Scottish school population¹ receive additional learning support. The Mindroom figures therefore point to a significant number of children in Scottish schools urgently needing help, but currently not receiving it.

Mindroom's belief is that people with learning difficulties are able to make a tremendously positive contribution to society, but they have to be recognised early and supported appropriately. The problem is that far too many of them are condemned to long term unemployment, or, worse still, to crime, because they are not diagnosed and don't get the help they so desperately need.

A Scottish Executive Survey in 2006 spells out that adults with a 'learning disability' are 10 times more likely to be unemployed than the general population.² That's a heavy burden on the economy and a heavy one for them to bear.

The Prison Reform Trust reported in 2007 that between 20% and 30% of the Scottish prison population has a significant 'learning disability'.³ The financial cost of keeping these individuals in prison is between £50 million and £75 million every year. The emotional cost to them is incalculable.

Mindroom is launching a major campaign to address learning difficulties. There are three principal goals:

1. **The Mindroom – a global first for Scotland:**

Government support is needed for the development of ground-breaking, multi-disciplinary centres. The centres will incorporate a diagnostic clinic, medical research, education and training. They will enable children and adults with learning difficulties and their families to receive integrated advice and support through a single, expert, point of contact. The creation of these centres will position Scotland as a world leader in addressing learning difficulties.

2. **Funding new Research and Development:**

Funding must be directed to comprehensive medical and statistical research to gain a much greater understanding of learning difficulties including causes, effects, rates of prevalence, suitable intervention and relevant solutions.

3. **Investment in Education and Training:**

Public investment is urgently needed to ensure that:

a) All teachers and medical professionals receive proper training to understand the specific needs of children and adults with learning difficulties and provide them with appropriate support and practical help.

b) All children with learning difficulties are matched to the type of schooling that best suits their needs – be that mainstream or specialist.

1. Pupils in Scotland 2007, Independent schools census, September 2007

2. "The same as you?" Scottish Executive annual survey 2006 and National Office of Statistics Labour market statistics November 2006: Scotland

3. "No One Knows: Identifying and supporting prisoners with learning disabilities: the views of prison staff in Scotland", published by the Prison Reform Trust, 2007

Mindroom's 2020 Vision

Mindroom's goal is to create such awareness, that by the year 2020, all children and adults in this country with learning difficulties, will receive the recognition and help they need.

We will work towards our 2020 vision by:

- Offering direct help and support
- Arranging high profile conferences
- Setting up multi disciplinary diagnostic centres – Mindrooms
- Setting up specialist schools

Since 2001 we have held a number of highly successful conferences, including:

- **Mindroom Masterclass with Dr Sam Goldstein**, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 2008
- **The Social Brain2 – See The Bigger Picture**, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, 2006
- **Mindroom Master Class**, London College of Fashion, 2004
- **See The Bigger Picture**, EICC, Edinburgh 2003

Launched in 2005:

- **Direct help and support** – This Mindroom service provides direct help and support for children and adults with learning difficulties and their families. It also offers tailored talks and presentations on request, allowing Mindroom to go into schools, businesses and communities to raise awareness about learning difficulties.

Other Mindroom activities include:

- **It Takes All Kinds Of Minds** – production of a highly popular support pack for teaching professionals on meeting and accommodating learning difficulties in the classroom. Supported and sponsored by Royal Mail Education, the pack is currently on its 4th print-run, with 80,000 already distributed.

- **Mindroom Information Guide To Your Essential Rights** – Booklet containing vital information to rights, services, education, mediation and more.
- **Camp Kasper** – we have facilitated summer camps for children with learning difficulties.
- **Royal Mail Social Inclusion Policy** – Mindroom has collaborated with the Royal Mail on recruiting staff with learning difficulties.

Mindroom continues to create awareness about learning difficulties by collaborating with universities, employers, schools, the medical profession, social services, the Arts world, professional organisations and, of course, families.

What are Learning Difficulties?

Well, quite simply a variation on normality. Not being able to concentrate for long periods of time, getting bored rather easily, acting impulsively, tripping over things, trying to make sense of what you read or write, living in a world of your own, losing track of time, forgetting what you have just learnt, being single minded or extraordinarily talented – perhaps traits we all have?

It is when these characteristics become prominent that they turn into 'learning difficulties'.

Some of the more common conditions associated with learning difficulties are: ADHD, ADD, autism, Asperger syndrome, DAMP, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, and Tourette syndrome.

Mindroom currently receives no statutory funding. Donations to Mindroom are very welcome and gratefully accepted.

If you would like more information on Mindroom, please email us at:
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