



@Kinark

News from Kinark Child and Family Services

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Message from our Executive Director

2011 is now in full swing and – as usual – there is a flurry of

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Teen with autism finds a world of communication through his iPhone

These days, it is not unusual to see a teenager with a smartphone in hand, thumbs flying across the keys, fingers sliding and tapping the screen. Chances are, many of these kids would say they couldn't live without their technology. For Thomas, a 14-year-old with the Central East Autism Program (CEAP), his iPhone is truly essential.

Thanks to a new technology application called Proloquo2Go, and with the help of his clinical team from

CEAP, Thomas is now able to use an iPhone to express some of his most fundamental wants and needs. According to his mother, Patricia, the introduction of this piece of technology has had a



Thomas, 14, pictured above with his iPhone.

activity at Kinark. We are currently working with our partners to prepare for the annual Krista Sepp Awards, which recognizes outstanding front-line child and youth counselors and workers in Ontario, while promoting awareness of child and youth mental health. We have also been busy developing innovative ways to better serve our clients through annual service planning and, of course, have continued our work toward eliminating the stigma associated with child and youth mental health.

Rapid advancements in technology continue to have a large impact on the way we help children and families move forward toward achieving optimum mental health. Stories like young Thomas's in this issue are inspiring and concrete examples of how new emerging technologies like the iPhone can improve the quality of life for a child who faces challenges communicating with those around him.

The impact of communications technologies also extends to our own work at Kinark and how we support the goal of improved mental health for children and youth. To this end, I am thrilled to announce that we have joined the ever-evolving social media world. You can now [like](#) us on Facebook or [follow](#) us on Twitter to receive instant updates on upcoming events, posts from our feature bloggers and news links relevant to child and youth mental health, autism, and youth justice. And, as you will

significant impact on his everyday life and added a new dimension to his relationships with others: "Through this phone, Thomas finally got his voice, and so much changed."

Thomas's ability to express himself and give an audible voice to his words through the iPhone app has made a big difference to the whole family, which includes an older and a younger brother as well as his mother and father. And, importantly, it also translates into a better social context for Thomas, as Patricia explains: "He looks just like any other kid, having that phone. Other kids come up to him to check out the iPhone, it really does help him fit in more."

Before the iPhone, Thomas relied on a communications booklet to express himself. An individualized picture dictionary of sorts, it contained a series of images that Thomas could refer to. The pages were put together by his clinical team and parents to include pictures of key items and activities. Without the ability to verbalize, Thomas kept this small, dog-eared booklet close at hand. It was a much less effective support than the ProLoquo2Go, since the options open to Thomas through the booklet were necessarily limited.

"Thomas couldn't tell us what he wanted outside of what we included in the booklet," Patricia notes. "The ProLoquo2Go opened up a whole world of possibilities for Thomas and we were surprised at what he was able to express, things we never would have expected. Things we never even thought to include in the communications booklet."

Unlike the communications booklet which can reach an unmanageable size, the iPhone remains a compact and powerful repository, with 7500 pictures as a starting vocabulary. Its built-in camera offers another integrated tool which allows for a picture to be taken and added to the dictionary.

In spite of Thomas's current ease in working with the device, getting there did take some work for him, his family, and for his CEAP team. To access the much broader world of communication that the ProLoquo2Go offered, Thomas had to learn to manipulate the screens of his iPhone correctly —and he had to begin with learning to point. Using the principles of ABA, his CEAP team — comprised of clinical talents from Kinark and subcontractor York Behaviour Management Services — developed a program to help him to do just that.

read about in this issue of @Kinark, the website speakingofkidsmentalhealth.ca continues to evolve as a hub for conversation around these topics. Please take a moment to visit the site and explore its many facets!

I hope you will take part in the important dialogue about child and youth mental health and I invite you to share your own stories and perspectives through the available mediums including this newsletter (via info@kinark.on.ca).

Best wishes and have a safe and enjoyable winter.

Peter



Peter Moore, Executive Director

**Kinark Foundation
makes programs a
reality for children
and youth**



Thomas sharing an embrace with his mother, Patricia.

Rebecca Godfrey, PhD, Associate Clinical Director at CEAP, credits Patricia for much of the success Thomas has experienced. "Thomas's mom has been right there, every step of the way," Godfrey explains. "When the IBI team is not there with him, the principles and approach we use with Thomas are still being applied consistently. This goes a long way in supporting his progress."

Thomas's CEAP team is now focused on helping Thomas's "joint attention," aiming to connect his communications with people in a more social way. Thomas's affinity for the iPhone makes it an important part of the programming around this goal. As Patricia explains, "He has to look up and make eye contact before using the phone to indicate what he wants." He has even worked on making physical contact, which is something that is relatively rare for Thomas. "The first time he tapped me on the arm before holding out his iPhone to show me what he wanted, I cried," she recalls.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, which replace or supplement speech to help a person communicate, are not new. In fact, a number of speech applications have been available on traditional computers and in other formats for many years. For children with autism who are unable to speak, as well as for those who have difficulty pronouncing words, AAC may be especially important.

The iPhone and other small touch screen devices offer advantages in size, cost and ease of use that make the more traditional devices so much less appealing. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Apple chief executive Steve Jobs expressed hope that the easy-to-use design of the iPad has helped children with special needs take to the device more quickly, but that its use in therapy wasn't something Apple engineers intended.

These tools are not for everyone, however, Godfrey cautions: "There are prerequisites to using an augmentative communication device, which means a child has to have mastered certain skills in order to benefit. There are also other considerations parents and clinicians need to keep in mind when deciding if a particular device or application is right for a child's specific needs.



Kids ready for adventure at the Kinark Outdoor Centre.

"I like Kinark because they gave me a home and help when no one else could. I have fun and learn lots here. I am happy. Kinark is a great place for kids! Thanks for helping us." — Arthur, age nine.

Arthur's words of appreciation offer a glimpse into how truly meaningful support for the Kinark Foundation is to real children and youth in our communities.

With a mandate to raise funds and awareness in support of Kinark and other Ontario organizations focused on child and youth mental health, donors' generosity makes a positive difference in the lives of children, youth and families facing mental health problems or autism.

Over the past year, financial supporters have helped to make many important programs, such as the following, a reality:

Most importantly, a back-up system is needed in case the technology fails."

Research is now underway at a range of sites, including the University of Toronto and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to further explore the potential of these devices to help children with autism and other special needs.

Editor's note:

If you are interested in attending a workshop on Augmentative Communication Devices and how they may support communications for a child with autism, please send an email to autism@kinark.on.ca.

Students take aim at eliminating stigma



Nancy Pereira from Children's Mental Health Ontario's *The New Mentality* program speaks to a crowd of high school students at O'Neill CVI in Oshawa.

Eliminating the stigma associated with mental health was the focal point of a week-long campaign by a group of high school students poised to make a difference in their school and community.

From Jan. 17-21, students from O'Neill Collegiate and Vocational Institute (CVI) in Oshawa distributed mental health posters, postcards, bookmarks and green ribbons to their classmates. Throughout the week, the group hosted mental health awareness trivia games and other activities. Students also sold green "Stop The Stigma" jelly bands to their classmates for \$1. Proceeds from the sales were donated to the Kinark Foundation.

On Jan. 20, the group invited three guest speakers to discuss mental health in front of their classmates.

Nancy Pereira from Children's Mental Health Ontario's *The New*

- Family Respite
- Mentoring, counselling and skills development programs for youth
- Camp opportunities and programs at the Kinark Outdoor Centre
- Healthy Families Collections in local public libraries
- Day treatment
- Community activities that promote greater awareness of child and youth mental health and reduce stigma

The children, youth and families who participate in these programs benefit in important ways. As 16-year-old Dennis explains, "Kinark has helped me to get my life on track. What was once a rough road is now a lot smoother."

If you would like to learn more about how you can help kids like Dennis and Arthur by supporting the Kinark Foundation, please visit www.kinarkfoundation.org.

Parents for Children's Mental Health spring conference

Parents for Children's Mental Health — together with the Ontario Association for Suicide Prevention — are thrilled to present the Together Strong Conference this April.

Mentality program enlightened the audience about the stigma of mental health and how certain barriers prevent children, youth and families from getting the help they need.

Teresa Scheckel, associate clinical director at Kinark, offered the students information about mental health and provided insight into services available for children and youth in Durham Region. She also shared tips to help students identify issues among their peers.

A teacher at O'Neill CVI capped the afternoon with an honest conversation about her son's struggles with mental health and addiction the impact this has had on her entire family.

The project was the brainchild of the Leadership Studies class at O'Neil CVI. All activities, games and events were organized by the students.

A year later, SOKMH making inroads



Just 12 short months ago, Kinark introduced a new website during the National Invitational Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health in Ottawa. The event, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and National Child Day, was the perfect launching point for Kinark's online resource.

Since its launch, www.speakingofkidsmentalhealth.ca has provided mental health resources and support to parents, youth, educators and professionals. Using an online marketing approach, the site

This two-day joint conference kicks off with the Friday Conference on April 15 at the University of Western Ontario and shuttles over to the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre for the Friday Evening Gala featuring Olympic Silver Medalist, Elizabeth Manley, as the keynote speaker. The Saturday Conference on April 16 will also take place at the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre.

With *Making a Difference* as their tagline, Together Strong is a unique event with the intention of bringing together like-minded audiences and encouraging them to build strong partnerships and work toward strengthening the mental health system through integration and collaboration.

For further information or to register for this event, please visit www.together-strong.ca.

APTALK offers a new resource for parents of children with autism

Autism Parents Talking (APTALK) is a voluntary group of parents from across Ontario that started in 2010.

APTALK provides a safe forum for parents to share experiences, have productive dialogue about autism, and influence decision makers on how to improve the integrated system of supports and services for families of children with autism.

Visit the website www.aptalk.ca to read inspirational stories of other

shares stories of children and youth as well as the latest mental health news for those looking for information, opinions, professional and peer support. Blogs and support forums feature current and relevant information to assist the growing needs of parents, teachers, professionals and youth.

Since going live, the website has steadily evolved and gained the trust of parents, youth and professionals looking for mental health information and insight online. More than 8,200 users from regions across the country have visited the site in the last 12 months. The mental health disorder guide, various blogs, and the mental health quiz have proven to be the most popular sections.

The website was created to foster a better understanding of child and youth mental health issues and to eliminate the stigma associated with them.

It's time to start the conversation; it's time to talk about child and youth mental health.

Be alerted to www.speakingofkidsmentalhealth.ca updates by following us on Facebook and Twitter:



Interested in supporting SOKMH?

Postcards and posters promoting www.speakingofkidsmentalhealth.ca are available on request from [Darryl Mathers](#).

Want to know what's happening at Kinark? Join our mailing list!

Join Our Mailing List!



children with autism. You can also send an e-mail to info@aptalk.ca to sign up for newsletters, issue-related surveys and other communications.

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