

Whispers Speech and Hearing Centre

LEARNING LANGUAGE FOR LIVING

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To whom it may concern

Please help save a little school with big heart

Hearing loss does not discriminate. It does not care what colour your skin is, how big or small your bank balance is, where you live or what you may believe. Human nature makes us believe: "It can't happen to me. It won't happen to my family". Something as simple as a virus can leave you or a loved one deaf tomorrow and often times it takes more than just your hearing. Did you know certain antibiotics, chemotherapy and viral illnesses can take your hearing overnight? A little dramatic you may say. Meningitis. A scary word, a healthy child becomes gravely ill, and *if* they come home, they can no longer walk, talk or hear anymore. It doesn't really matter, until it really happens to you.

For this reason we don't discriminate. We don't care what colour a child's skin is, how little or much their parents earn, where they live or what they believe. When young children find themselves in this predicament, they need help not discrimination; their families need support not recrimination. If someone believes in them, if someone does something, they have a chance at an amazing full productive life.

From this our mission was born. The children and families who arrive at the Centre have often been turned away from many other institutions. A deaf school sees a deaf blind child and says sorry you need to go to the blind school. The parent arrives at the blind school and they say sorry you need to go the deaf school. Where does this parent go? Not even the Department of Education is very helpful in these cases because they also don't know where to go with these children. We are therefore a very unique early childhood development centre, a one of a kind place.

If we close our doors tomorrow a total of 90 families (30 families in the school and 60 children in our visitors programme) who have already been turned away every-where else are back where they started, with nowhere to go. But here's the thing, every day that goes by in a hearing impaired child's life where nothing is being done, it takes away another little piece of that child's future success. Add to it conditions like cerebral palsy, autism, a language learning disability or a speech learning disability and the damage is that much greater. A child, who may have been able to hold down a simple job, becomes a dependent for the rest of time.

A burden. A harsh word but a harsh reality.

To get good results you need good staff. We are a staff of 12, many of whom are the breadwinners in their families. Teachers with degrees in special education who are earning less than a first year teacher with only a basic degree. Class assistant teachers who are

earning the salary of a domestic worker and working longer harder hours and have up to 15 years of experience. But they come to the Centre each day with a smile on their face and a real passion in their hearts. And it's this passion that gets the results, this passion that isn't found in everyone, that just cannot be bought. But everyone deserves to be rewarded for a job well done; everyone deserves to be able to care for their own families too. There are no words to explain or express what you go through as a manager when you have to tell your staff: "I'm sorry but we cannot pay you in December, but please come back in January". I also cannot tell you what goes through your heart as a manager when every single one, after a miserable Christmas, arrives back at work with a smile on their faces and the same passion burning in their hearts.

You may counter: 'Parents should simply pay more for the service'. A child with a hearing loss is already expensive. Bottom of the range hearing aids start at about R14 000 on state tender. A box of batteries that lasts two months is currently R350. Children deserve better than just okay if we are really going to use the plasticity of their young developing brains and make a difference. A cochlear implant costs around R390 000; with many many ongoing lifelong expenses, which medical aids never cover in full. Add to this the therapies just one additional disability will need: speech, occupational and/or physiotherapy. Even on the best medical aid parents will begin fitting the bill after about 3 to 6 months of any one of these therapies. Parents simply cannot afford to pay what it costs to keep a child in a programme like ours.

Why do we keep doing this?

Here is an excerpt from a notice letter from a family whose daughter graduated from the programme at the end of 2016: ***"We would like to take this opportunity to thank not only Brenda and Nicole for the awesome work they have done with our daughter but the entire staff at Whispers. You all have truly had a huge impact on our daughter's life. For this we will always be grateful and indebted to you and your school. The enthusiasm, passion for your students and truly caring attitude you have towards the children in your school is like none other we have ever seen or experienced. You have truly walked the past year and a half with us every step of the way. This part of our daughter's life has been such an important stepping stone for her to move on in her journey and we are really ever so grateful that our paths crossed and that you have been a part of our journey. So it is with great sadness and joy that we bid you and your team farewell at the end of this year."*** This is a child who had been referred to a signing programme because it was believed she had too many difficulties, despite the huge sacrifices her parents made to get her two cochlear implants. She is in Grade R in a mainstream school, knowing she has continued support from the Centre as long as she needs it, and even more importantly she is talking a hind leg off a donkey. It is because of children like this, who with love, patience and a little extra time can go on to achieve great things. To be the best they were meant to be. We want to continue to give hearing impaired children the wings and confidence with which to fly.

Will you join us?

Yours faithfully



Brenda Schmid
Centre manager