

# right on target

## Roberto Wirth Fund newsletter

Dear readers

In our third issue of 'Right on Target' we are pleased to present our new logo:

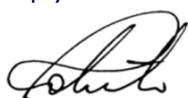


We have chosen this logo because it can be interpreted in many ways, for example, the image can represent a group of friends, a family, a hand or a growing plant. The family is the main reference point for everyone, but most of all for every child, the place where you can find protection and shelter; and, of course, the hand is the instrument through which many deaf and deafblind people communicate through sign language. We leave you to find your own interpretation...

In this issue we have tried to make it more accessible to read. In particular, the choice of font, the justification of text and pagination make it easier to read.

I am sorry to say that Dr Elena Radutzky has left her position as Director, happily, she will remain with us as a consultant. I am pleased to welcome Dr Stefania Fadda as the new RWF Director. Dr Fadda has many years' experience in the field of deafness in Europe and the States. Maria Marigliano Caracciolo, the public relations officer at the Hotel Hassler, is the new Communication Manager at RWF.

Enjoy our newsletter!



Roberto E. Wirth  
President



**AUTUMN / WINTER 2008**

Dear readers

I am writing you to let you know that I resigned in October as Director of the RWF, which I co-founded with our President in 2004. I had committed to guiding the RWF until we found the person who could guarantee that we would reach our goals. I am happy to announce that the new Director, Stefania Fadda, a psychologist focused on deafness, fluent in Italian, English, and Italian and American Sign Languages, is the right person for the job, and I am certain that you will join me in supporting her and wishing her every success.

*Elena Radutzky*

## The Deaf world

### **Deaf Community**

Many deaf people consider themselves to be part of a Deaf Community. This is often defined as a social group with a common identity based on a shared culture and having a common language - in this case sign language<sup>1</sup>. Language and culture go hand in hand - language is the way in which people make sense of the world around them and culture allows them to reflect their sense of identity and history.

### **A shared culture**

Deaf people, with their own unique history and identity, have a distinct culture through which they share common experiences. These common experiences are shared in various forms, whether it be films, storytelling, sign language poetry, painting, photography or sculpture. These, and other aspects serve to record and preserve the ideas and dreams of a people who are becoming increasingly integrated into general society.

### **Sports**

Sports offer social opportunities. In the Deaf community sports teams allow deaf people to compete together in an environment rich in physical communication and teamwork. Teams can compete at all levels ranging from regional to national, and also at the international level at the Deaf Olympics.



## Technology

Technology has allowed many deaf people to become further integrated with general society, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, which provide the possibility to understand people who do not know sign language. While communicative technology such as text messaging, emails and webcams, have increased opportunities for deaf people to communicate with hearing people, it has also allowed deaf people to increase contact with each other in world that is becoming increasingly integrated.

## A common language

Sign language is a language in its own right with its own grammatical structure and lexicon. Anything that can be expressed in a spoken language can be expressed in sign, from poetry to science<sup>2</sup>.

Most countries have their own sign language; Italian Sign Language (LIS), American Sign Language (ASL), French Sign Language (LSF) and so on. It is also possible that there are regional variations in a particular country.

Although there is no 'universal' sign language, there have been efforts by an international deaf community to develop an International Sign Language that allows deaf people from different countries to communicate<sup>3</sup>.

International Sign Language is mostly used for international conferences and official occasions. It does not have a full lexicon of signs and cannot be considered a true language.

## Bilingualism

Many deaf people can be considered bilingual. Deaf people move between two languages on a daily basis, sometimes even within the same context. As bilinguals, they use the signed language as a method of communication with other people in the Deaf community.

Outside their community, in the work place, in shops or schools, deaf people use the majority language, whether it be in written or spoken form.

<sup>1</sup> Schertz, B. & Harlan, L. 2000. Elements of a Culture: Visions by Deaf Artists. Boston, Mass: Northeastern University.

<sup>2</sup> Volterra V. (a cura di). 2006. La Lingua dei Segni Italiana. Mulino, Bologna.

<sup>3</sup> Sandler, W & Lillo-Martin, D. 2001. Natural Sign Languages. In Handbook of Linguistics. Aronoff & J. Rees-Miller (eds) 2001. pp.533-562.

## The deafblind population

Defining the deafblind population is not easy. In fact, if we consider that culture and language are shared by a deaf community, these are not aspects shared by deafblind people. This mainly due to the great heterogeneity of the deafblind population, which requires many subdivisions into distinct groups. The only currently accepted division is between individuals that are born deafblind and individuals who become deafblind during the course of their life.

Sense, a deafblind association in the UK, considers a person to be deafblind "when they partially or totally lose their vision and hearing, causing communication difficulties, access to information and mobility" ([www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk))

Difficulties created by communication, access to information and mobility can profoundly affect on individuals and their social relationships, consequently affecting their quality of life.

## Deafblindness and communication

Deafblindness is a distinct condition from deafness and blindness, but it cannot simply be considered the sum of both. In fact, the needs of deafblind people are more complex than those of a deaf or blind person. From a communication point of view, interaction will be based on what we normally consider as a secondary sense – that of touch. In Italy, the most frequently known forms of tactile communication are Malossi and tactile sign language.

Malossi is used by people who are born blind and become deaf in the course of their life. Different parts of the person's palm correspond to different letters of the alphabet. The hand of the deafblind person is like a 'computer keyboard', where light pinches or touches signify letters of the alphabet to create single words.

Tactile sign language is mostly used by people who were born deaf and used sign language and become blind in the course of their life. In



this method of communication, the deafblind person positions one or both hands on the hands of the person signing and can interpret the signs, position, movement and signing space through touch. Punctuation and visual expressions that cannot be seen are elicited through variations in the intensity of the sign.

Alliegro, M. & Micelisopo, M. 1996.  
L'educazione dei sordociechi. Phonenix editrice, Roma

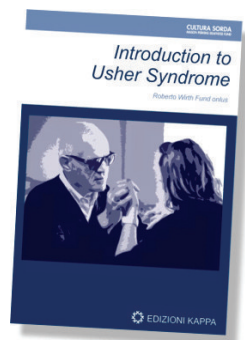
Edge, J. & Matsumoto, A. 2007. Introduction to Usher Syndrome. Edizioni Kappa, Rome

Collins, S. & Petronio, K. 1998. What happens in tactile ASL? Gallaudet, Washington D.C.

## Introduction to Usher syndrome

For a free copy of An Introduction to Usher Syndrome published by Kappa send a self-addressed A4 envelope with stamps to the value of €2.20. The booklet is also available in Braille.

Alternatively, you can download the booklet for free from our website in English and Italian.  
[www.robertowirthfund.net](http://www.robertowirthfund.net)



## Accessible Art

### Tactilism: an instrument to approach art

Access for people with visual impairments to the arts is very limited. Rarely do museums and arts spaces offer tactile tours or projects for blind and deafblind people.

Through touch and tactile representations, many aspects of one's surroundings can be made accessible which otherwise could only be made accessible by verbal descriptions, or tactile sign language in the case of deafblind people. This allows blind people create a mental image and remember objects and scenes represented.

Tactile explorations require time and concentration to explore and analyse objects through small movements of the hands and fingers. Perceptions are acquired through the hands and are progressively built up into a more complete and richer mental image.

**AUTUMN / WINTER 2008**

## Our fundraising events

### Solidarity flies on musical wings with the National Academy of Santa Cecilia

A great occasion for fundraising for the Roberto Wirth Fund thanks to two amazing concerts organized by the National Academy of Santa Cecilia, who offered some tickets in gallery 8 in the Santa Cecilia Hall, at the Auditorium Parco della Musica.

On April 5, the conductor André Previn directed the Orchestra of Santa Cecilia playing Rachmaninoff's opera No. 30, "Le Campanes", accompanied on the piano by Arcadi Volodos. June 7 saw the conductor Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos perform a compilation of Spanish pieces, accompanied by the well-known guitarist Pepe Romero.



Thanks to the Academy of Santa Cecilia's availability, we raised about €7.000, that has been assigned to our education projects.

We would like to thank a special partner who sponsored the event: **ZTE Italy** [www.zte.com.cn](http://www.zte.com.cn) ZTE is a company that provides network solutions and telecommunication systems worldwide, covering both land and mobile telecommunications.

### Lions Club "Circolo Accademia" of Rome

We warmly thank the Lions Club 'Accademia' of Rome for their generous donation of €1,500. This contribution will be used to support our future tactile centre for deafblind people.

### Postal Cheque Account

There is now another way to contribute to our projects! Send your donations to (Number c/c 88221536)

Roberto Wirth Fund ONLUS,  
Via Nomentana 56, 00161 Rome





## Via Condotti Association lottery

In May, Gianni Battistoni, President of the Via Condotti Association, organised a charity lottery with fantastic prizes from the luxury shops along Via Condotti. During the evening of the draw, held in the marvelous Hassler Hotel garden, the first edition of the sophisticated and elegant "Via Condotti" magazine was launched.

In this first edition of the magazine the famous journalist, Francesco Nuccioni, wrote an article, "A life at the service of others" dedicated to RWF and our president.



Roberto E. Wirth, Maria Marigliano Caracciolo and Gianni Battistoni

## Young Italian Nobility Ball

A warm thanks to Bruno Bontemps de Montreuil, President of the Young Section of the Italian Nobility Clubs, who supported our work by kindly donating the proceeds of their annual Ball. The Ball, held on Saturday 24 May, in a historic house just outside Rome, was attended by many young aristocrats from across Italy.

The proceeds will be used for the Integrated Athletics Project, organised with sports society 'Atletica dei Gelsi'. The objective is to make sports more accessible to deaf children and integrated with hearing children.

## Solidarity Derby

Rome, Wednesday 4 June, 8.30pm, solidarity takes centre stage thanks to the 19th Derby del Cuore. Actors, singers, athletes, and Rome, Lazio and Milan supporters gave life to soccer matches for charity. Animated by well known TV and cinema celebrities, such as Carlo Verdone and Maria Grazia Cucinotta. RWF was among the recipients of this wonderful event.

**AUTUMN / WINTER 2008**

## Swiss Premium Wine

Thanks also to our Swiss friends, who, on the occasion of presenting the 2005 Merlot "Quattromani" in Lugano, donated 10,000 Swiss francs to our projects. Roberto Wirth was invited as the guest of honour. Donations will be assigned to our accessibility department - "In Every Sense".



Claudio Tamburini, Feliciano Gialdi, Angelo Delea, Guido Brivio, Roberto Wirth and Marco Solari

## Rome Marathon 2009

### Run with us at the Stracittadina Fun Run

#### SAVE THE DATE

RWF will be one of the beneficiaries of the 4 KM Stracittadina Fun Run on the 22 March 2009.

Contact us to register: with a small donation, you can take part in an enjoyable event and make a contribution to our projects!

As per tradition, the Stracittadina Fun Run will complete the Rome Marathon in Rome's historic centre, with thousands of runners.

Call **06 4423 4511** or write to [info@robertowirthfund.net](mailto:info@robertowirthfund.net)  
[www.maratonadiroma.it/stracittadina.asp](http://www.maratonadiroma.it/stracittadina.asp)

### Roberto Wirth Fund Newsletter Autumn 2008 Number 3

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## **Childhood development in deaf children: relationships with family, friends and school. A psychological analysis**

*Stefania Fadda*

Deafness itself does not directly cause psychopathological issues. However, indirect consequences of deafness can have a negative impact on the psycho-emotional development of the deaf child, on their way of interacting with others, their self-image, their environment and on the development of personality.

To understand these risk factors it is important to remember that the deaf child analyses, understands, elaborates and transforms their own personal experiences through a series of psychological processes that involve linguistic capacity, personality traits and biological dispositions. These processes can lead to adaptive behaviours where the child is attentive, learns language, and develops good relationships with others, or to maladaptive behaviours, where the child is distracted or aggressive, does not participate in language learning and has poor relationships with others.

These processes are also interconnected with the relationship between the child and his or her parents, with education, and relationships with friends and school staff. For example, acceptance or refusal of classmates contributes to the building of the child's personality characteristics, as self-esteem, self-efficacy and a tendency for isolation represent a psycho-social risk factor.

Psychological disorders that affect individuals during childhood and adolescence, are often deviations from typical behaviour and cause difficulties for the child and people around them - principally parents and teachers. In this case, it is often more productive to find the cause of the disturbance and, where possible, change that rather than treat the disturbance itself.

Children with good mental health have appropriate behaviours at home, school and within their community, and they can enjoy a good quality of life. Mental health problems arise in the context of an interaction between the social environment in which the person lives and developmental processes; these are dynamic and can have a large impact on the development of intellectual ability, social skills and, moreover, on emotional maturity.

In particular, difficulties that the deaf child and his or her family faces in regulating and changing their emotional states: the alternating need for dependency and the pull towards autonomy of the child. Emotional instability can be expressed by aggressiveness, closed attitudes and withdrawal from social relations.

Adolescence can be a difficult period, when the child is under diverse pressures: to be liked by friends, getting parental approval, passing exams. Unfortunately, some develop mental health problems that require help from professionals.

Promoting good mental health, not only physical but also psychological well-being, means using models that allow the person to grow and develop. A bilingual education, total communication, an exposure to oral language, and sign was found to prevent conditions of stress, discomfort, and difficulties that cause suffering and problems of identity, but also more serious psychological conditions which also occur in the general population.

In short, protective factors are early exposure to an appropriate communication environment, an appropriate process of identification, the development of all potential

abilities and the construction of a culture of diversity. Whereas risk factors are the lack of an early exposure to an appropriate communication environment, persistent communication difficulties with parents and friends, and an inappropriate linguistic environment at school.

Negative factors, such as the denial of the deaf child's identity, bad quality relationships with peers, and a lack of attention to the emotional needs of the deaf child are the cause of the more frequent psychological disorders.

**Source:** *"Right on Target. Roberto Wirth Fund Newsletter", No. 3 Autumn/Winter 2008*