

right on target

Roberto Wirth Fund newsletter

Dear Readers

Welcome to the Spring/Summer edition of our newsletter. We have had a busy year so far. In April, we co-hosted the Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting on Mental Health and Deafness with the European Society for Mental Health and Deafness (ESMHD), in Rome. Many professionals from across the globe joined us to discuss research and developments in mental health and deafness. As part of the SIG we held an Open Day to share information with health professionals working with Deaf people in Italy on these issues. See inside for more information about these events.

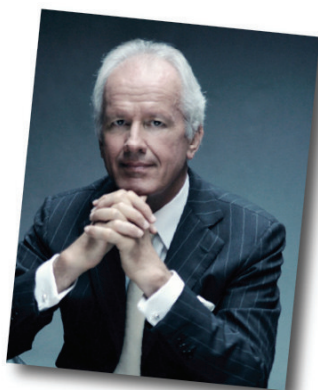
Over the past few months we have organised a couple of fundraising events. We held an auction of paintings, with Maurizio Costanzo as the auctioneer. We also had the Dreams Can Come True raffle of artworks and items kindly donated by galleries and jewellers in Rome. Thank you again to all of you who supported our work by getting involved.

As part of our commitment to support deaf children and their families, the Roberto Wirth Fund has been working with families who have a deaf or deafblind child, to provide psychological support. RWF has been giving a series of lectures to students on deafness, deafblindness and the psychology and deafness to increase their awareness for their future work.

Enjoy our newsletter!



Roberto E. Wirth
President



Honorary Doctorate for Roberto E. Wirth

Gallaudet University awarded an honorary doctor of humane letters degree, signed by US President Barack Obama, to Roberto Wirth on 15 May 2009 in Washington DC.



Gallaudet President Davila confers the honorary doctorate to Roberto Wirth

"Roberto Wirth is a role model for deaf people across the world. His successes demonstrate that deaf people can achieve anything in their lives."

Roberto Wirth is actively involved in many deaf organisations in Italy and internationally. He is a great supporter of deaf Italian students, enabling them to attend Gallaudet University.





'Roberto Wirth' Scholarship

On 19 May the 'Roberto Wirth' scholarship was awarded in Rome. This enables a deaf Italian student to spend one academic year in the United States at Gallaudet University – the only bilingual (American Sign Language and English) university in the world which is fully accessible to deaf students.

The scholarship, in association with the Fulbright Commission's Deafness Program for cultural exchange between Italy and the US was awarded to Vincenzo Speranza, a deaf biology student at Roma Tre University, Rome. Vincenzo sees this as a great opportunity for his future work to benefit deaf children. Thanks to this programme we can train educators of the future!



experiences, research and programmes to improve the quality of life of deaf children and their families.



Ines Sleeboom opens the SIG meeting in Rome

As part of the SIG we held an Open Day to provide training on childhood deafness and psychological health. At the end of the day the participants and experts discussed the development of services, practice and interventions that respond to the needs of deaf children in Italy.

Deafness and psychological health

Childhood deafness and psycho-social development

Parents can be faced with many different and difficult choices for their deaf child. Professionals and the Deaf community may be offering different and sometimes conflicting advice. For example, the medical model vs the cultural model, oralism vs sign language, cochlear implantation, and education are just some of the debated issues.

SIG 2009

From 15 to 19 April the first international conference on Mental Health and Deafness in Rome was held by the RWF and ESMHD, coordinated by Dr Stefania Fadda.

Specialists from all over the world, including Irene Leigh, Robert Pollard, Mary Hufnell, Lauri Rush, Ines Sleeboom, Tiejou Van Gent and Kerstin Heiling discussed the state of the art of mental health services for deaf people in their countries, shared



Mary Hufnell, Stefania Fadda, Irene Leigh, Robert Pollard, Lauri Rush, Ines Sleeboom, Tiejou Van Gent and Roberto Wirth



For every child there are a number of factors that influence their psychological development – biological, environmental, social, cultural and behavioural. There is also a critical age at which each child has the potential to process specific types of information. Any possible impact of deafness on the child's development can be influenced by a number of variables – for example, quality of family life, parental adaptation to deafness, coping strategies, school life, resources available in their community, characteristics of the child, and interactions between the child and their environment.

New influences in the field of deafness also impact the development of deaf children – neonatal screening, early interventions, technologies and innovative educational programmes. We have yet to see the long-term impact of these new technologies and programmes on deaf children's development.

During their development children learn about their environment, their culture and ways of behaving, and they start to show initiative and develop a positive perception of self. It is important for deaf children to meet deaf professional role-models throughout their childhood, who can promote a positive self-image and psychological health.

Deaf children have the potential to be as competent as their hearing peers, although they do not necessarily think, learn and behave equivalently. In fact, differences in the environment and their life experiences lead to different approaches to learning, ways of organising knowledge and various skills in different areas.

The importance of early interactions between caregiver and child

In the first phases of development babies regulate their emotional state based on the stimuli they receive. Therefore, it is important that the caregiver uses appropriate and positive facial expressions, tone of voice and physical contact.

The ability of parents to reflect the feelings and needs of the child and translating them into visible expressions and gestures makes up the first phase towards the child processing emotions independently and to construct mental processes. Between 6 and 12 months, mirror neurons in the cerebral cortex increase based on the amount and quality of emotional experiences. At around 10 months, the child develops the ability to process and memorise mental images that, when associated with emotions and experience, become 'internalised objects'.

According to studies from the 1970s, the origin of linguistic development starts with body movements, gestures and facial expressions. In fact, there is a correlation between hand movement and vocalisations in the first few months of life.



The possibility to use signs widens and increases the communicative repertoire. Also for deaf children with cochlear implants it has been well observed that sign language also facilitates the development of spoken language.

However, the most important factor for healthy psychological development is not the type of language used, but how it is combined with other activities and social games.

The mastery of a language widens the child's perception of feelings and emotions, allows them to give a name to objects and feelings, which build on past, present and future experiences.



Assessment and treatment for deaf children and adolescents

Providing services to anyone in mental health services requires training and the right attitude. When providing services to deaf people it is also vital that professionals have an awareness of deafness and the types of communication used by their clients. Lack of experience and skills in communication can lead to errors in assessments and misdiagnosis.

There are many factors for deaf children that are not related to deafness – personality traits, family background, intelligence etc. General background history should not be overlooked, such as birth order, religion, ethnicity or medical problems. There are a number of special factors to take into account when carrying out assessments with deaf and hard of hearing children. These include audiological factors (e.g. degree and age of hearing loss), use of assistive listening devices, familial factors (e.g. deaf parents), language and communication.

The problem with many psychological tests and measures is that they lack standardized norms to use with the deaf population and they are not adapted for use with sign language. Interpretation of such tests should be made with caution. Use qualified interpreters and varying communication needs should be taken into account.

It is vital to consult with professionals who work with deaf people and know about sign language and deaf culture.

Treatment options should vary with the characteristics of the child, diagnosis and preferred language. It is necessary that the therapist is familiar with deafness, oriented towards visual interventions and respectful of ethical guidelines. The therapist should communicate using the preferred method of the child and, when that is not possible, through an interpreter.

Psychosocial aspects of cochlear implantation

There are around 150,000 people who have cochlear implants (CI) worldwide today – compared with 35,000 in 2000. Between 50 and 80% of profoundly deaf children receive an implant, now viewed as “standard”. This increase also reflects the continued growth of deaf children in mainstream, rather than specialised, settings.



This growth has implications for language choice – spoken and signed languages. Professionals continue to push for an “either-or” rather than a “both-and” to parents of deaf children. Many parents choose spoken language, but a growing number recognise the value of bilingualism. Research shows that early sign language learning can also help the development of spoken language.

CIs can positively help deaf children socialise, but do not guarantee age-appropriate socialisation experiences with hearing peers. Classroom interactions can also be unsuccessful. However, with or without cochlear implants, spoken communication skills will increase acceptance by hearing peers.

Studies have shown that children reported a significant improvement in quality of life through using CIs. Contrary to earlier fears of the Deaf community, cochlear implantation does not automatically doom a child to psychosocial maladjustment. Other factors need to come into play for that to occur.



It is increasingly recognised that bilingualism and biculturalism can have a positive impact of the socialization and quality of life of people with cochlear implants.

Having access to spoken and signed languages gives you more communicative opportunities. CIs do not necessarily create children stuck between the deaf and hearing worlds; they can and do have a clear identity, and can shift between both. An ability to shift appears to be conducive to psychosocial health, as is a culturally Deaf identity.

Childhood influences on adult mental health

For any individual, there are many factors that contribute to psychological health or ill-health. The main factors from birth into adulthood include parent-child relationship, curiosity and exploration, language and communication, education, independence and contributing to society. These contributing factors can go well or poorly for deaf or deafblind individuals - with consequent positive or negative psychological results.

Early experiences can be instrumental - by adulthood a lot of your individual psychology has been determined. For example, curiosity and exploration can lead to positive or negative outcomes in adulthood. For example, over-protective parenting due to fears of danger can be very severe and debilitating. Parents, while naturally worried about their deaf children, who do allow them to learn to cross the street at a normal age, or go to the shops will have a more positive outcome. These are crucial developmental opportunities that all children need to develop positive psychological health into adulthood.

Looking at the research into interventions in childhood and adolescence can help identify and reduce the effects of these contributing factors. Being aware of the risk factors in early childhood can help prepare for the transition into adulthood, becoming independent and starting a family.

Fundraising events

Dreams Can Come True

Over 500 tickets were sold for the Christmas 2008 lottery – Dreams Can Come True. All the proceeds were for RWF projects supporting deaf and deafblind children.

The hostess for the event was Marquise Flaminia Patrizi Montoro, whose energy and enthusiasm made for a magical evening. The 700 guests gathered in the beautiful rooms of the Hassler Hotel under the lights of the Christmas tree.



Roberto E. Wirth and Flaminia Patrizi Montoro

Thanks to the Honorary Committee, including Minister Mara Carfagna, Minister Franco Frattini, Luca Pancalli, President of the Paralympic Committee, Anna Fendi, Virna Lisi and Princess Camilla di Borbone, who donated a precious bottle of champagne signed by Ranieri di Monaco.

The draw for the 20 wonderful prizes took place on 7 January 2009, which were donated by the most famous contemporary art galleries and historic jewellers in the capital. Among them was an authentic Monachesi donated by the Cortile e Archivio Sante Monachesi Gallery, a precious and original necklace designed by Delfina Delettrez, a broach made by Diego Percossi Papi, a gold bracelet made by Ludovica Andreoni Cordero di Montezemolo, a silver placemat by Federico Buccellati, and an antique ceramic table designed by Désirée de Michelis di Slonghella.



Christmas notes



Christmas songs and brunch was on the menu on Tuesday 9 December 2008 for the official debut of the new international Choir of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spouses' Association (ACDMAE). Special thanks to the choir leader, Nany Romano, wife of the head of the Farnesina Crisis Unit, and Ambassador Anna Visconti di Modrone, President of the ACDMAE, cellist and mezzo soprano, who generously donated the proceeds to our organisation.

Among the singers were Ambassadors' wives, Martina Scammacca del Murgio and Maria Ynes Felicani Robles, and Cecilia Perez de Cabrera, Ambassador of Chile to the Holy See. It was a moment full of emotion when the wife of Ambassador de Vito performed a solo.

Auction with Maurizio Costanzo

On 31 January 2009 we held an auction at the Hassler Hotel with Maurizio Costanzo, in aid of the Roberto Wirth Fund and to help reconstruct a school in Haiti.



Eighty artworks were auctioned by the friendly Luca Faccenda, artistic director of the Florence National Gallery, and the famous face of the Maurizio Costanzo Show, to raise over €30,000.

The beautiful hostess, Miriam Leone - Miss Italia 2008 - raised awareness to the VIPs present about the importance of protecting psychological well-being and the development of deaf and deafblind children.



Luca Faccenda, Miriam Leone and Roberto Wirth

Among the famous faces at the auction: Irene Ghergo, Flaminia Patrizi Montoro and Ada Alberti with her husband Franco Oppini. President Wirth contributed to the success of the evening by acquiring four artworks and providing the marvellous cocktail buffet. Also present were Ilona Staller, Beppe Convertini, Roberta Scardola and Patrizia Kunz d'Asburgo.

Roberto Wirth Fund newsletter

Issue 4 - Spring / Summer 2009

Via Nomentana 56 - 00161 Rome

T 06 8956 1038 | **F** 06 8956 1040

info@robertowirthfund.net

Codice Fiscale 97350450587

www.robertowirthfund.net

Newsletter Director Silvia D'Onghia Rogadeo

Editors Stefania Fadda, Maria Marigliano Caracciolo

Writers Stefania Fadda, Giuseppa Caravello, Marta Cidronelli, Riccardo Copat, Kate Groves, James Edge, Maria Marigliano Caracciolo

Printing C.S.R. s.r.l., Via di Pietralata 157

T 06 4182 113 | **F** 06 4506 671

Registration - Tribunale di Roma

N° 499 del 07/11/2007