

THE FIRST STEP...



Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure I present to you the new edition and the new Director of the Cabss Newsletter, Doctor Ilaria Banni, whom we warmly welcome to the team.

The staff and I are working hard to expand CABSS to be able to support many more children.

In this issue you can read about CABSS' participation at the conference on Deafness of the Ente Nazionale Sordi in Calabria, at the Deafblind International Conference held in Canada and at the World Federation of the Deaf Conference in South Korea, where my father received a prestigious award in his memory.

There is an article dedicated to the commemoration of my father, a year after he passed away where many of my Dad's friends and many of you readers were present.

You will also find an article that highlights one of the fundraising events that we organized on the Terrace of the Hotel Hassler to raise funds for Deaf and Deafblind children: *CABSS - Sotto le Stelle*.

Before I leave you to read the newsletter, I would like to take this opportunity to kindly let you know that donations can be made in a variety of ways: from bank transfer to online donation, from check to cash. You can find all the information about donations on the last page of the newsletter.

Kindest Regards!



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SCIENTIFIC AREA

CABSS and the Rights of Deaf and Deafblind Children at the 19th WFD Congress

The Director of CABSS, Stefania Fadda, flew to South Korea to participate in the XIX World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Congress, which took place at the International Convention Center on Jeju Island. Organized by WFD, with the collaboration of the Korean Association of the Deaf. The theme of the event was "Securing Human Rights in Times of Crisis". Associations, scholars and professionals from all over the world were invited to discuss how they can guarantee the well-being and human rights of Deaf individuals in the face of the health, socioeconomic, political and environmental crisis, a theme very prevalent and pertinent around the world.

The theme was divided into in various areas. CABSS chose to contribute to the Technology, Accessibility and Use and Inclusive Education area and presented on the "CABSS Bilingual Storybook Apps in Italian Sign Language (LIS) and Written Italian" (S. Fadda) and offered a scientific poster about "The CABSS Model of Early Multisensory Intervention for Children who are Deaf and Deafblind in Time of Crisis" (S. Fadda, G. Caravello, M. Cidronelli, L. Harripersad). The Apps and Early Multisensory Intervention Programs were specifically linked to the crisis caused by the pandemic in 2020. Both the presentation and the poster were presented by Dr. Stefania Fadda and were received with great enthusiasm.

The Director illustrated the project at

CABSS which led to the production of two Storybook Educational Apps designed for deaf children up to 8 years of age: "I Capafiori" and "Forme che si Formano". The project was launched in the midst of the pandemic and, for this reason, represents an example of how technology can overcome territorial borders and communication barriers, in particular moments such as those experienced during the national lockdown. Precisely thanks to technology and its tools, CABSS' deaf and hearing professionals had the opportunity to communicate, discuss and work together, even at a distance. They were able to gain a professionally enriching experience and at the same time through the creation of the Apps were able to generate social/educational benefits in the lives of deaf children. The Storybook Apps, in fact, aim to encourage visual bilingual learning, in LIS and written Italian, promoting the right of deaf children to an accessible education, capable of meeting their communicative and linguistic needs.

Dr. Fadda explained during the poster presentation how CABSS, during the 2020 lockdown, readjusted its early intervention programs to continue to support deaf and deafblind children online. In particular, the Center provided parents with consultation regarding strategies and program planning that would ensure that their children could calmly face the sudden upheaval of their daily routines during the pandemic. CABSS also offered its help in the initial phases of the medical emergency and when chil-



Dr. Fadda, third from left, together with other speakers on stage of the 2023 WFD Congress

dren made their way back to regular activities and "normality". The later phase, in fact, represented a further change to adapt to, considering the many months children spent inside and the new rules that they had to adhere to in all social contexts to avoid COVID-19 infections.

Participation in the WFD Congress offered Director Stefania Fadda and CABSS the opportunity to share information and practices with other



Stefania Fadda next to the scientific poster dedicated to the CABSS Model in times of crisis



Stefania Fadda during the presentation on the storybook app's



Accessibility Days 2023: How to use CABSS' Storybook Apps and the Benefits

This year CABSS could not miss another opportunity to participate at the Accessibility Days event, which aims to raise awareness of disability, accessibility and inclusion among



Giusy Caravello during the CABSS' presentation

those who develop digital technology. The latest edition was held on the 18th and 19th May at the "Marco Polo" building of the "La Sapienza" University of Rome.

CABSS, on this occasion represented by Giusy Caravello, partici-

pated at the workshop "Accessible Multimedia Materials for Deaf and Hearing Students at Primary School", together with the ISTC CNR, the LaCAM Laboratory, the ISS A. Magarotto integrated schools of Rome, I.C. of Cossato (BI), la Coop, il Treno, la Coop and CREI.

During the workshop, Dr. Caravello illustrated the benefits and how the staff at CABSS uses its interactive and bilingual Storybook Apps (LIS and Written Italian) with deafblind children. Storybook apps are normally used by deafblind children via iPad, shared with CABSS staff and in a way that allow children to access the visual and/or auditory information provided during the activity. When young deafblind children interact with storybook apps, it has been noted that these tools promote shared attention, concentration and an increased attention span. Furthermore, thanks to the possibility of

interacting with the stories, children have the opportunity to improve fine motor and hand-eye coordination skills, understand how an object works, strengthen their ability to choose - for example by selecting or asking for the scenes they like in the stories - and learn new signs and words. Storybook Apps can also be used in the school context and are accessible to all children.

The tools presented by CABSS are an example of the many self-built multimedia products described during the workshop by the organizations that attended. All the speakers stressed the importance of teachers and educational personnel deepening their knowledge about new educational technology and adapting them to the specific needs of children. In this way, technological learning tools will be ready to welcome children with sensory deficits or other disabilities in the classroom.

XVIII Deafblind International World Conference: CABSS' focus on Italian Deafblind Children

For CABSS it was an honor to participate at the Deafblind International World Conference, now in its 18th edition. The conference was held from the 22nd to 28th of July in Ottawa (Ontario, Canada), but it was also possible for speakers and the public to take part virtually. CABSS was represented by Director, Stefania Fadda, who chose to present on "The CABSS Model of Early Multisensory Intervention for Children who are Deafblind in Italy" (S. Fadda, L. Harripersad, G. Caravello, M. Cidronelli).

Dr. Fadda opened her presentation by speaking about the history of deafblindness in Italy, starting with its legislative recognition as a unique and specific disability, which occurred only in 2010. Six years later the first ISTAT statistical data on the deafblind population was done while LIST (Italian Tactile Sign Language) was recognized by Italian law in 2021. Despite the progress

that has been made, there is still a long way to go towards a society capable of fully responding to the needs of deafblind people of all ages.

CABSS, for almost 20 years, has



Logo and theme of the 2023 DBI World Conference

contributed to the well-being of deafblind children aged 0 to 6 and their families. In 2010, the Center launched an innovative model of multisensory early intervention programs and, since then, has welcomed many deafblind children.

The Centre's early intervention model is unique in Italy and includes the Principles of Multisensory Therapy, Canadian Intervention for Deaf-

blind Children, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Sensorimotor Therapy. Deafblind children can benefit from early intervention programs, from the very first months of life. They have the opportunity to: learn in a positive and stimulating environment, accessible and adaptable to their needs; make the most of their visual and/or auditory residual senses and tactile sense; learn to integrate the senses to process and understand the information received; develop concepts and communication skills; learn to make choices and develop their personality. The CABSS model also thinks of parents, who are actively involved in early intervention programs designed for their children. CABSS believes it is crucial that parents receive all the necessary information that allows them to understand childhood deafblindness, that they learn specific communication strategies and receive the right motivation to promote the rights of their children.

CABSS at the 5th National LIS Conference of ENS

"Italian Sign Language (LIS): Cultural Heritage or Human Capital?", the title of the 5th National Conference of the ENS (National Deaf Organization) which was held on the 11th and 12th of May at the "B. Andreatta" Congress Center of the University of Calabria.



Stefania Fadda during CABSS' presentation

The conference was organized by ENS, in collaboration with the University of Calabria and the CR ENS Calabria, with the aim of outlining current studies on LIS. The topics included research on various sign languages to socio-cultural aspects, from health to school and university education for young deaf people, from interpreting to technology and accessibility. In the various fields of interest, professionals and experts, at a national and an international level, proposed interdisciplinary approaches and perspectives that have strengthened awareness of the linguistic heritage of the Italian Deaf Community.

CABSS had the pleasure of offering its contribution thanks to the Director Stefania Fadda and colleague Giusy Caravello. Together, they presented on "Interactive tools within the CABSS Early Intervention Programs" aimed at supporting

deaf and deafblind children in all areas of development. These programs are carried out in the "First Step Laboratory...", a multi-sensory environment, adaptable to the needs of each child, accessible and equipped with interactive tools, many of which are technological.

The interactive tools used by CABSS in motivating children to use all their senses to access external information. Children are then able process and understand information thus stimulating the development of concepts and communication skills.

Deaf and deafblind children benefit from these tools in a context of total communication, which includes different communication and linguistic modalities: Sign Language, Tactile Sign Language, Spoken Language, Written Language, AAC, Pictures, Tactile Cues. During the presentation, Dr. Fadda dedicated a space to total communication as it offers children the possibility of choosing the communication method that best meets their needs in full compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention, in fact, in articles 2

(Definitions), 21 (Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information) and 24 (Education) draws attention to the signatory States of the need of guaranteeing a plurality of communication opportunities and possibilities, in the areas of education and training.

The National LIS Conference was sponsored by the Ministry of Disabilities, in the Region of Calabria, the Regional Council of Calabria, the Province of Cosenza and the Municipality of Rende with over 800 participants. Since the last national conference in Rome, in 2018, LIS has undergone profound changes. In particular, on the 19th of May 2021 the government recognized LIS, allowing Italy to bridge the serious setback as compared to the rest of Europe and has given a boost to institutions and society to be able to fully respond to the needs of Deaf individuals.



Stefania Fadda (third from left, in the second row) together with some former scholars from the Deafness Fulbright Italy - U.S.A. Program



ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

“International Solidarity Merit Award” in Memory of Roberto Wirth

The President of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), Dr. Joseph Murray, presented the prestigious "International Solidarity Merit Award" in memory of Roberto Wirth, founder of Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi Onlus- the Assistance Center for Deaf and Deafblind Children (CABSS). The award ceremony took place in July, on the fourth day of the XIX World Congress held in Jeju, South Korea.

Roberto Wirth, who was profoundly deaf since birth and who sadly passed away on June 5th, 2022, received the award for his lifetime success and achievement in the area of hotel hospitality and for his mission of supporting the Italian Deaf and Deafblind Community.

Raffaele Cagnazzo, President of the National Deaf Organization (ENS)

and WFD advisor, and Stefania Fadda, Director of CABSS and Scientific Manager of all services and projects carried out by the Center since 2008, received the award on his behalf. At the Congress, the President of ENS and the Director of CABSS expressed their profound gratitude to the WFD for recognizing Roberto's Wirth's great commitment to his profession and passion for education in the area of early inter-

vention for Deaf and Deafblind children and of Deaf students in Italy and abroad.

Our founder often said: "My biggest dream is that Deaf and Deafblind children will have the opportunity to steer their life towards a successful future, supported by aware parents, who are able to understand and support them with love."



From left to right: Joseph Murray (WFD - President), Raffaele Cagnazzo (ENS - President) and Stefania Fadda (CABSS - Director)

In Memory of Roberto Wirth, One Year Commemoration

In June, the commemoration of the passing of our President took place, who, suddenly, left us in 2022.

Roberto Wirth was well known in Rome, but also throughout Italy and abroad; he was a citizen of the world, a great entrepreneur and a man involved in social and charitable causes. The fifth dynasty of hoteliers, he managed to add Hotel Hassler, Il Palazzetto, Parco del Principe in Tuscany, Borgo Bastia Creti in Umbria and Hotel Vannucci in Città della Pieve to the family dynasty.

Brilliant, attentive and a visionary, he never stopped being committed to the city of Rome where, as president of the Via Sistina - Via Crispi Association has always fought for the redevelopment and decorum of the

historic center. From the top of Trinità dei Monti he observed carefully the dynamics and changes of the city where he was born and where he returned after his studies to start his prestigious career.



Roberto E. Wirth

Roberto Wirth, for us, was above all the founder of CABSS, the father of CABSS as we often said. He strongly supported the association, and helped it grow with love and sometimes with tough love, just like a father would do. "What happened to me must not happen to other children: I felt like a castaway in life, pervaded by a strong sense of abandonment, communication barriers and misunderstanding from my parents of my needs and potential. They were all obstacles that were often impossible to overcome. (...) My biggest dream is that deaf and deafblind children will have the opportunity to steer their life towards a successful future, supported by aware parents, who are able to understand and support them with love."



What you just read is a passage from the book written by Roberto Wirth "Silence was my first playmate", an intense, moving and truthful autobiography which tells the vicissitudes of a child, and then of a man, born deaf in a family where disability was not immediately accepted.

On June 5th, 2022, Roberto Wirth suddenly left this earthly world, throwing everyone into despair and his funeral was held at the Church of the Holy Trinità dei Monti. On the next day a commemoration was organized in his

The birth of the non-catholic cemetery in Rome dates back to around 1716, when Pope Clement XI granted burial to members of the Stuart Court in exile from England, the permission was later extended to other non-Catholic individuals. Today, as then, the cemetery is close to two ancient monuments: the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, dating back to around 12 BC, and the Aurelian Walls which form the backdrop of the cemetery. It is the burial place of many artists, writers, scholars and diplomats, many of whom had moved to Rome, or had chosen to live in Italy or died due to illness or by being in an accident while they were visiting the city.

A large group of deaf people paid homage to the tomb of Roberto Wirth which is located at the non-Catholic cemetery. Violante Nonno and Giulia Peracchio acted as the group's tour guides who provided explanations in Italian Sign Language (LIS).

After the visit at the cemetery the group moved to the State Institute for the Deaf (ISSR) where others joined them for the seminar dedicated to Roberto Wirth. Mrs. Anna Folchi, a dear childhood friend of Mr. Wirth's who talked about his life, career and social enterprises.

Roberto's children, Veruschka and Roberto Junior, the Director of CABSS Stefania Fadda and the extraordinary commissioner of the ISSR Isabella Pinto were present at the seminar.

Almost all the participants wanted to tell an anecdote or leave their testimony, and/or memory, about Mr. Wirth. The day ended with everyone enjoying dinner together.

June 6th, 2023 was a very emotional day for everyone and we are sure that Mr. Wirth was there smiling down on us.



Some of the people present at the visit to the non-catholic cemetery

honor. The Deaf community came together to pay tribute to one of their dearest friends. In the morning there was a visit to the non-Catholic cemetery in Rome, where Roberto Wirth is buried and in the afternoon a seminar was organized in his memory by Mrs. Anna Folchi.



The room was packed for the seminar in memory of Roberto E. Wirth



From left to right: Anna Folchi, Veruschka B. Wirth, Stefania Fadda and Roberto B. Wirth

FUNDRAISING

CABSS Sotto le Stelle - Under the Stars

On June 28th, the "CABSS Sotto le Stelle- Under the Stars" event took place on the splendid panoramic terrace of the Hotel Hassler to raise funds for the early intervention programs for deaf and deafblind children at CABSS.

Going up to the top floor of the Hotel Hassler is literally breathtaking as you find yourself under the stars with a magnificent view of Rome that ranged from Capitoline Hill to St. Peter's to the tower of the church of the sacred Trinità dei Monti. A pleasant and graceful breeze was present that evening, the classic Roman Ponentino, "er ponentino", the protagonist of countless songs, films and theatrical pieces.

The guests were welcomed by President Wirth, Director Fadda and the Staff at CABSS. During the evening there were opportunities to dance, toast the arrival of summer and savor extraordinary Mediterranean dishes by Campania Chef Marcello Romano. He spent over 20 years as Chef of the Salone Eva and is responsible for all catering services for the Hotel Hassler.

Some of the dishes were fish based such as potato crostini with lemon flavored mousse and prawns or octopus salad with celery, novella potatoes and olives or meat based dishes such as beef tartare with mango cream and flakes of parmesan and chicken bell pepper meatballs.

Chef Romano is always attentive to the dietary needs of his guests also proposed vegetarian dishes such as gazpacho with mozzarella skewers, bell peppers and cucumber and orecchiette pasta with courgette cream and salted ricotta.

"Becoming President of CABSS, said Veruschka Wirth, presented me with a huge and important challenge, of guaranteeing deaf and deafblind children everything they need to become active protagonists of their lives, just as my father wanted them to. Today, together with my staff, I am committed to ensuring that these children have the opportunity to benefit from a positive environment like that of CABSS where deaf and deafblind children are supported by professionals who understand how to respond to their needs. It is our hope that they will have the opportunity to live rewarding lives, be able to express themselves and learn in a serene way with a smile on their faces!"

But charity and giving never stops.....Hotel Hassler being one of CABSS' biggest supporters, created the Purple Gin Cocktail. The idea came from Hotel Hassler's Bar Manager Stefano Santucci. The cocktail is made of a mixture of gin, lemon juice, basil, sugar syrup and purple soda making it the perfect summer cocktail. All proceeds from the purchase of the cocktail will be donated CABSS.

We warmly thank all those who participated that evening making it possible to raise funds for the early intervention programs at CABSS.



The Purple Gin cocktail created by bar manager Stefano Santucci dedicated to CABSS Onlus



Some of the guests present at the CABSS Sotto le Stelle event

Veruschka B. Wirth - President of CABSS



FUNDRAISING

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Donate Online at our website: eng.cabss.it.

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You can support CABSS by donating your 5X1000 by simply writing our tax code in the appropriate box and signing the tax return form.

Remember: the 5X1000 is a portion of your personal income tax form and if you do not express a preference it will automatically be allocated to the State.

The 5X1000 is not an alternative to the 8X1000 and the 2X1000: all three can be allocated simultaneously on the same tax return form.

Children need your support!

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Support CABSS directly from the U.S.A.!

American citizens can support CABSS by making a tax-deductible donation through the **King Baudouin Foundation United States (KBFUS)** in one of the following ways:

Online donation: on the www.every.org/kbfus website search for the "Assistance Center for Deaf and Deafblind Children" in the "search by name or location" bar. This will take you to the page dedicated to CABSS from which you can make an online donation.

Check: Write your check to KBFUS and send it to KBFUS, 551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2400, New York, NY

10176. **Important:** in the "Memo Section" of the check write "Assistance Center for Deaf and Deafblind Children".

Wire transfer: write to info@kbfus.org or contact them by telephone (212) 713 7660.

KBFUS is based in New York City and has served as a mediator between U.S. donors and hundreds of nonprofit organizations in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Canada for



Purchase your copy today!

A portion of the proceeds from the sales of the book will go to CABSS Onlus in favor of deaf and deafblind children

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