

THE FIRST STEP...



Dear Readers,

In this issue of the newsletter, I am pleased to announce CABSS' participation at the 24th International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED), the oldest and most prestigious scientific event dedicated to deafness and educational methods. This is a historic occasion for Italy which will host the congress after 145 years. Thanks to the participation of Stefania Fadda and Laura Harripersad, CABSS will have the opportunity to highlight the importance of offering deaf and deafblind children access to specialized education, the freedom of expression and active participation in all aspects of daily life utilizing the communicative modality of their choice.

I am also proud to share an important milestone with all of you: this year CABSS celebrated its 20th anniversary! 20 years of commitment and dedication to ensuring healthy growth, development and inclusion of deaf and deafblind children. What CABSS represents today stems from a profound story of courage, vision and love, a story that begins with my father, born profoundly deaf in 1950, and his desire to transform his life experience into an opportunity for others.

To honor my father's memory, last June we organized a seminar on bilingual education in the arts. Having equal access to education was an area that was close to his heart and one he devoted great attention to.

On the events front, CABSS is constantly engaged in wonderful fundraising activities that allow us to carry forward our early intervention programs such as the splendid ItaliaSquisita event: RomaSquisita. In the evocative setting of Il Palazzetto at Hotel Hassler, chefs, pastry chefs, bakers, masters of tradition and mixologists celebrated Italian gastronomic culture. It was a glamorous event that attracted many participants eager to support CABSS and who are passionate about the excellence of Italian cuisine.

Before leaving you to read the articles, I would like to personally thank all the sponsors and partners who made the evening possible and the chefs who generously donated their time and culinary expertise to support deaf and deafblind children.

Kindest Regards!

Venushka



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SCIENTIFIC AREA

CABSS at the 2025 ICED Congress

We are very proud that will take part in the 24th International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED), the oldest and most prestigious scientific event dedicated to deafness and educational methods. This year marks a historical moment for Italy who will host the congress for the first time in 145 years. ICED 2025 will be held on July 7th to 11st in Rome at the Centro Congressi Auditorium della Tecnica, welcoming thousands of researchers, educators and professionals from around the world. The congress will address the theme "More than Words" and provide a platform for sharing educational practices, promoting inclusive teaching methodologies that respect deaf language and culture and, above all, giving affirmation to the importance of having accessible and high - quality education.

Our Director, Dr. **Stefania Fadda**, will have the honor of being a keynote speaker at the congress, alongside other globally recognized voices in the field of deafness, such as Christine Yoshinaga - Itano (University of Colorado, USA; University of Witwatersrand, South Africa), Maartje De Meulder (HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Netherlands; Heriot-Watt University, UK), Thomastine A. Sarchet - Maher (National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology, USA), Gladys Tang (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Kate Rowley (University College London) and Deborah Chen Pichler (Gallaudet University, USA).

Dr. Fadda will present a lecture titled "*Fostering Well-being in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children: Understanding Risk and Resilience across Development*", which will be unfolded as a journey into understanding of the well - being and mental health of deaf children stemming from the question: what enables a deaf child not only to adapt, but to thrive?

To answer this question, Dr. Fadda will shift the focus from deficit to relationship, moving from the idea of a deaf child who needs to be "fixed" to one who has fundamental needs for safety, expression and belonging. Through an integrated approach - development, body and relationship - the lecture will explore six core needs that support resilience: Existence and Safety; Need

and Support; Power and Mutuality; Will and Freedom; Validation and Acceptance; Love and Understanding.

Each need will be illustrated through a clinical story showing how, through relational and emotional attunement, a child can feel fully engaged in their life and part of a meaningful relationship. The journey will then be concluded with a core message: deaf children do not need to be "fixed," but rather seen, heard and accompanied in safety by a bond.... that's where resilience is born.

CABSS will be also represented by Dr. **Laura Harripersad**, an experienced *Intervenor* in early intervention for deafblind children, who will present on "*Early Multisensory Intervention for Deafblind Children*" during the "Learning and Literacy" thematic session on July 11th, 2025. Her presentation will illustrate how deafblind children aged 0 to 6 can benefit from the early intervention program at CABSS and focus on early literacy with the premise that the ability to access, understand and produce language and meaning - can develop from the earliest years of life even in deafblind children, if supported through concrete and repeated multisensory experiences.

At CABSS, each child's individual learning journey is continuously monitored in regards to sensory access, learning style, and communication modalities. Dr. Harripersad will present a case study focusing on literacy of a student who attended CABSS from six months of age until primary school, showing how a positive, responsive and stimulating educational environment can foster communication and interest in books and stories.

Her talk will conclude by reaffirming the importance of upholding the rights of deafblind children to access materials and information in their preferred sensory channels and communication modality to be able to develop literacy skills from an early age.

In conclusion, thanks to Stefania Fadda and Laura Harripersad, CABSS will contribute to the theme of ICED 2025, "More than Words", of emphasizing the need to go beyond words to offer deaf and deafblind children the opportunity to express themselves, access education and actively participate in all aspects of daily life through their preferred communication modality.



The ICED 2025 logo

Literacy for deafblind children

If we look at the general definition of literacy it can be defined simply as the ability to read and write. Literacy for all children begins at birth and builds on relationships and experiences that occur during infancy and early childhood. Early literacy encompasses the activities that very young children do and the skills they cultivate to begin understanding reading and writing and how those activities fit into the world prior to receiving formal instruction. If we conceive literacy as the ability to read, write, and speak our conception will automatically exclude most children with deaf-blindness.

Literacy for children who are deafblind goes beyond print, braille, reading or writing and involves an array of skills and abilities. For children with deafblindness, early literacy is built upon communication and meaningful interactions, often involving tactile learning strategies and adaptations for their individual needs.

Many sighted hearing children grow up observing peers and adults reading and writing, listening to information as it is read and communicated, and sharing their own ideas through speech. Children with deafblindness need intentional access to peers and adults modeling these activities to them. Children with combined vision and hearing loss miss out on many of the experiences that happen incidentally for other sighted hearing children, but rich early learning experiences can be provided when families, teachers, and caregivers build trusting relationships with children who are deafblind, know what their favorite objects and activities are, provide personalized sensory adapted experiences and recognize their array of communication signals.

Children who are deafblind also need structured and specialized instruction. It takes intentional planning to provide meaningful early learning experiences on which to build literacy skills. Following a child's lead provides a wealth of information about what will be most interesting and motivating to a particular child. Incorporating familiar

and favorite objects, people and activities into early learning experiences is essential to achieving positive results.

At CABSS we believe that literacy plays a crucial part in the early years in the life of a child with deafblindness. The first thing we do at CABSS when we see the child is ready to address his/her literacy needs is complete our assessment and compile a literacy learner profile which gathers information about our student's sensory access, preferences and learning style and communication abilities. When the profile is completed, we then complete the literacy skills checklist which helps us to identify where the child is on the literacy continuum. Thanks to the Literacy Skills Checklist we are able to understand at what level our student is in his/her literacy development (Deafblind National Literacy Work Group, 2014).

tory that are concrete facilitate also skill and concept development something critical in being able to one day label words, comment and later on form sentences. When the child is ready, we introduce symbolic proto literacy which connects the symbol to activities and people in the laboratory. On a daily basis, we promote their awareness continuously through touch, vision (if present), hearing (if present) language and forming mental representations of people, objects, places and activities. As the child grows and develops a rich vocabulary in their communication modality, fine motor skills, hand eye coordination skills (if vision if present), attentive listening skills (if hearing is present), computer skills and conceptual understanding of people, places and things we move onto traditional notions of reading and writing.

We believe that children with deafblindness can develop literacy skills at a young age with concrete experiences, can develop an interest in books and stories (interactive, tactile, written, picture, verbal) and share those interests with others. We also believe they are able to learn a variety of communication modalities specific to their needs to access literacy resources.



A student at CABSS working on syllables

In the laboratory at a very young age we expose children to books/toys to provide children with the opportunity to explore, identify the function and use of books, to bond with their parents/therapists, stimulate their residual vision, hearing, tactile senses and stimulate communication at the child's level and communication modality.

Repeated experiences in the labora-

Sources

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Miles B. (2005), Literacy for Persons who are Deafblind. (2005), *DB-Link* (The National Information Clearinghouse on Children Who Are Deaf-Blind). <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/literacy-factsheet/>

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ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

CABSS: 20 years of commitment and love for deaf and deafblind children

What CABSS is today stems from a profound story of courage, vision, and love. It begins with Roberto Wirth, born profoundly deaf in 1950 and his desire to transform his life experience into an opportunity for others.

“What happened to me must not happen to other children: I felt like a castaway in life, overwhelmed by a deep sense of abandonment. The barriers to communication and my parents' lack of understanding of my needs and potential were obstacles often impossible to overcome.”

These words, taken from the autobiography *“Silence Was My First Playmate”* (R. Wirth and C. Ruggeri, 2015), which recounts the origin of Roberto Wirth's lifelong commitment of raising awareness about the needs of individuals who are deaf, especially children born deaf like himself and those who are deafblind. His international advocacy and determination led him to become an influential figure on numerous university boards and associations focused on deafness, where he was the recipient of prestigious awards.

In 2004, his desire to provide support to deaf and deafblind children led him to establish the Roberto Wirth Fund Onlus (RWF) that later on in 2012 changed its name to Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi Onlus (CABSS).

In 2008, with the arrival of Dr. Stefania Fadda, the current Director of the Center, a team of professionals trained both in Italy and abroad was formed and together they developed the very first early intervention programs designed for deaf and deafblind children and their families. Additionally, a multisensory environment was created: a welcoming, accessible, and stimulating space where children can explore the world through all their senses and learn concepts, skills and

communication methods.



The staff at CABSS. From left to right: Stefania Fadda, Marta Cidronelli, Giusy Caravello and Laura Harripersad

Over the past 20 years, CABSS has supported hundreds of deaf and deafblind children through its early intervention programs, inclusive projects - many developed in collaboration with schools - and initiatives aimed at promoting a culture of inclusion and awareness, such as seminars, conferences and fundraising events.

In 2022, following the passing of Roberto Wirth, the legacy was entrusted to his daughter Veruschka Wirth, the current President of the nonprofit organization, who continues her father's mission with passion and dedication:

“All deaf and deafblind children were a very important part of my father's life. I want to honor his memory by taking care of CABSS as

Thanks to this innovative approach, CABSS has strengthened its presence and reputation over the years in academic and scientific circles in Italy and abroad, presenting the results of its work at prestigious conferences and congresses.

“My greatest dream now is for deaf and deafblind children to have the opportunity to take the helm of a great ship - their life - toward a future full of success, supported by aware parents who understand and love them” - Roberto's Wirth's vision now fulfilled thanks to the work carried out by CABSS.



From left to right: vice president Roberto Wirth, director Stefania Fadda, president Veruschka Wirth, Marta Cidronelli, Laura Harripersad and Giusy Caravello

he always did - taking on the responsibility but leading with my heart. It will be a challenge but I know the staff will be by my side as we work together towards a bright future. I am truly honored to be part of this wonderful family.”

Today, under Veruschka Wirth's leadership, CABSS continues its journey with the same spirit that inspired its founding: to provide deaf and deafblind children with all the tools they need to grow with serenity, with self-awareness and the freedom to become the protagonists of their own lives.



From left to right: Marta Cidronelli, director Stefania Fadda, founder Roberto Wirth, Giusy Caravello and Laura Harripersad

Bilingual Education in the Arts

Three years ago, on June 5th, we lost the founder of CABSS, Roberto Wirth. Every since then we have been dedicating a seminar in his memory. This year on June 11th the theme of the seminar was “Bilingual Education in the Arts”. Having access to an education was something that was close to Mr. Wirth’s heart and one he consistently championed. He established the “Fulbright - Roberto Wirth” scholarship in 1992 to offer young Italian graduates and undergraduates, both deaf and hearing, the opportunity to specialize in areas related to deafness.

The seminar opened with greetings and a tribute to Roberto Wirth by Professor Isabella Pinto, Extraordinary Commissioner of ISSR Rome and Dr. Paola Sartorio, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, who manages the scholarship in collaboration with CABSS. The seminar then introduced the presenter of the seminar Dr. Carlo di Biase, a former 2004/2005 “Fulbright - Roberto Wirth” scholar.

As an art historian and middle school art and image teacher, Carlo di Biase pursued advanced studies in bilingual art education at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. He has been deaf since birth and he is among the very first in Italy to work as a native LIS (Italian Sign Language) museum guide. He actively collaborates with major Italian museums and cultural institutions to develop projects that improve accessibility to art. He has collaborated with many museums including the Pinacoteca di Brera (Milan), the Musei Civici di Roma (Rome), the Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence), the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore (Florence), the Palazzo Ducale (Urbino), the Palazzi dei Rolli and Civic Museums (Genoa), the Comune di Padova (Padua) and the Pirelli HangarBicocca (Milan).

Carlo di Biase’s presentation began with an overview of theories emphasizing the importance of bilingual education for deaf children and how bilingualism should be understood as the use of two (or more) languages in daily life, rather than the ability to use them perfectly. A bilingual person uses two languages - separately or together - for different reasons, in different life contexts and with different people.



Doctor Carlo di Biase during the seminar



Director Stefania Fadda during the seminar

The seminar highlighted the importance of early exposure to both languages, which provides deaf children with greater access to information, regardless of their future communication choices. Dr. di Biase concluded his presentation by sharing the many bilingual art education projects he has participated in, such as “The Museum Enters the Classroom and the Classroom Enters the Museum” - a pioneering initiative that forever changed the concept of museum accessibility.

FUNDRAISING

RomaSquisita celebrates Italian Gastronomic Culture and Solidarity

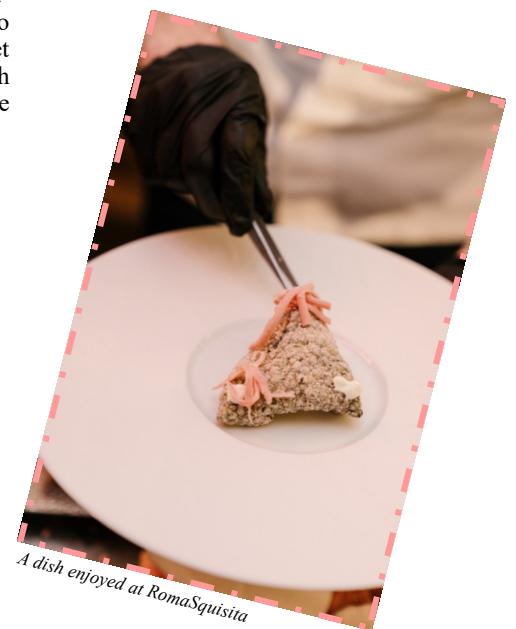
ItaliaSquisita's traditional spring event, Romasquisita, took place on April 14th at the evocative setting of Il Palazzetto at the Hassler Hotel. Chefs, pastry chefs, top - notch bakers, masters of tradition and talented mixologists showcased the gastronomic culture primarily from central Italy but also from various regions across Italy.

All proceeds were donated to CABSS to support our early intervention programs and to help us welcome new

Cristina Bowerman. The aperitif opened with new flavors and textures thanks to "Cozze alla marinara" by Lele Usai and "Spaghetto fritto" by Pierluigi Gallo. Sweet creations were also indulged such as "Strudel di mela-nzana, cacao e pinoli" by Antonella Mascolo.



The chefs taking part in RomaSquisita with Veruschka Wirth and Stefania Fadda



A dish enjoyed at RomaSquisita

children. Our daily mission is to provide deaf and deafblind children with the tools they need to fully express their potential, supported by aware and engaged parents.

The evening was enlivened by a selection of amuse - bouches offering a panorama of the current culinary art forms in central Italy and from other regions. Among the creations: "S'campo di primavera" by Heinz Beck, "Cetriolo di mare in salsa verde" by Andrea Antonini and "Friabile di alga nori, mortadella e rafano" by Carlo Cracco.

Tradition was reinterpreted with the famous "Maritozzo," revisited in a savory version by chef Marcello Romano, paired with guanciale and artichokes. Pasta took center stage with variations such as "Fusilloni" and "Penne ritorte" presented in a seafood revisit by Gianfranco Pascucci and with an Asian flair by Francesco Apreda. There were many plant - based proposals as well as carnivorous variations, such as "Manaqish di patate con pastrami di Angus" by Davide Puleio and "Waina con carpaccio di Wagyu Kaisan" by

Each tasting, capable of surprising even the most demanding palates, was carefully paired with BWT Diamond Water, wines from Bellavista and Frescobaldi - with special attention to the territorial expressions of Telleneae winery - and craft beer from the master brewers of Baladin. The creativity of the mixologists added further charm to the evening with cocktails such as "Gran Torino Negroni" by Alessio Giovannesi, "Interlude" by Patrick Pistoletti and "Hop Fizz" by Leonardo Leuci and Franco Antoniani.



Chef Heinz Beck



A special thanks goes to all the chefs, sponsors, partners and friends involved, who brought to life a great gourmet celebration for a good cause. We must also acknowledge our supporters, both long - standing and new, with whom this event has been a success and has allowed CABSS to welcome many more deaf and deafblind children to its center.

CHEF

Andrea Antonini - Imàgo* (Roma) • **Carlo Cracco** - Cracco in Galleria* (Milano) • **Cristina Bowerman** - Glass Hostaria* (Roma) • **Daniele Roppo** - Il Marchese (Roma) • **Davide Pulejo** - Pulejo* (Roma) • **Francesco Apreda** - Idylia by Apreda* (Roma) • **Gabriele Di Lecce** - Dogma Ristorante (Roma) • **Gianfranco Pascucci** - Pascucci al Porticciolo* (Fiumicino, Rm) • **Heinz Beck** - La Pergola*** (Roma) • **Iside De Cesare** - La Parolina* (Trevinano, Vt) • **Lele Usai** - Il Tino* (Fiumicino, Rm) • **Luca Ludovici** - Ristorante ConTatto (Frascati, Rm) • **Marcello Romano** - Hotel Hassler (Roma) • **Pierluigi Gallo** - Achilli al Parlamento* (Roma)

PIZZA

Luca Pezzetta - Pizzeria Clementina (Fiumicino, Rm) • **Luciano Monosilio & Matteo Carducci** - Il Maratoneta (Roma)

PASTICCERIA

Antonella Mascolo - Verve Restaurant (Roma) • **Luca Villa** - Imàgo* (Roma) • **Martina Emili** - Hotel Hassler (Roma) • **Orsetta Di Francesco & Anthony Genovese** - Il Pagliaccio** (Roma) • **Walter Musco** - Walter Musco Pasticceria (Roma)

MIXOLOGY

Alessio Giovannesi - Hotel Hassler (Roma) • **Leonardo Leuci & Franco Antoniani** - Jerry Thomas (Roma) • **Patrick Pistolesi** - Drink Kong (Roma)



From left to right: chef Marcello Romano, Veruschka Wirth, Roberto Wirth and chef Andrea



A dish enjoyed at RomaSquisita



A dish enjoyed at RomaSquisita

FUNDRAISING

Support us!

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Donate Online at our website: eng.cabss.it

PLEASE NOTE

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Supporting Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi Onlus is easy; make the decision to donate your 5x1000. You can allocate a portion of your income to a non-profit organization.

All you have to do is write down **CABSS' tax code** in the space provided and sign.

Remember that the 5x1000 does not replace the 8x1000 and you can donate to both. In the case that you decide not to donate be aware that the portion originally designated in favor of nonprofit organizations will go directly to the government.

Children need
your support!

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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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Via Nomentana 56 - 00161 Roma

Tel. 06 89561038 / Fax 06 89561040 / Mob. 331 8520534

www.cabss.org

E-mail: info@cabss.it

Tax Number: 97350450587

Director: Ilaria Banni

Editor: Stefania Fadda

Writers: Giusy Caravello, Marta Cidronelli, Laura Haripersad

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