

## Special Needs Assistants Group

### Fifth Annual Conference

#### Hotel Kilkenny

#### The Wow! Factor in Education

Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> May dawned bright and early as SNAs, principals, teachers and therapists travelled from all over the country to Kilkenny for the Fifth Annual Special Needs Assistants Group Conference. Excitement was high in Hotel Kilkenny, and the line-up of speakers for the day was truly amazing. As always in the Annual Conferences we strive to bring together exceptional speakers who will provide something varied and different, yet appealing and meaningful to all, and this year was no exception!

First to speak was Gerri Geoghegan, a dynamic and vastly experienced Art Therapist and Art Teacher. Gerri shared with us some of her experiences and learning, and helped us to further understanding the role of art as therapy in working with special children. She spoke of the history of Art Therapy in Ireland and the current training opportunities as well as proving in a very practical and enjoyable way the creativity that was at the fingertips of the audience.

**Art Therapy in Action** was an illuminating presentation which also colourfully illustrated a case study centred on a particular child that Gerri had worked with. She finished with some practical ideas on the use of art as a means of better understanding ourselves and our children. We will be including an article by Gerri in the next newsletter.



Flo  
Longhorn  
addressing  
delegates  
at the  
Conference

Dera Mulholland, psychotherapist and play therapist, gave an entertaining and highly informative presentation on the role of the play therapist, based on a specific case study – **How Hatti hated kindness: the story of a child stuck in rage**. Dera spoke with passion and humour, giving the overview of a play therapist's approach and role, and illustrating how and why certain children can benefit from play therapy.

Hotel Kilkenny served a light lunch of soup and sandwiches and a break to take stock of the morning's work. All there were relaxed and enjoying the atmosphere, and soon ready to be Wow!ed by our afternoon presentation from the world-renowned speaker Flo Longhorn. Flo is a principal Consultant in Special and Multisensory Education and had travelled from her base in Belgium. She brought with her a wealth of experience, resources and common sense and truly engaged with the delegates as she empowered us all with her **Wizz! Bang! Glow! The Wow factor in engaging any child**. We are delighted to also include an article by Flo in the current newsletter, and for anyone who would like to share a session with Flo again, or who missed her before, we have exciting information about two Saturday seminar days to be run by Flo Longhorn on Multisensory Education in October- see back pages of the newsletter for further information.

The energy radiating from Flo had everyone wanting to rush home and make a 'sensory umbrella' or a 'magic glow box'. She was truly inspirational! So with heads already full, it was time for our final speaker of the day, Hannah McDonnell. Hannah has addressed the Special Needs Assistants Group Conference in the past, but her message of living with-, battling with- and overcoming Dyspraxia and Dyslexia was truly moving and emotional. She is a very active advocate for disability, and **Dyspraxia- knowing no limits** is a telling of her life story, the adversities and the victories. All present were significantly moved in the realisation of how challenging life can be for children and young adults with special needs.



Karen and Maria with  
Gerri Geoghegan

Hannah is an inspiration in her achievements to date, and her drive to recognise no limits on her potential. She was married in June, and we wish her all happiness in her future life. We have no doubt that she will be back to talk again on her many roles including that of professional actor, facilitator of drama workshops, and promoter of a more positive social model for people with disability.

By 5 o'clock all were ready to wend their way home, full of motivational ideas put there by highly motivating people. Certificates were distributed, and delegates began their travels back to their own corner of Ireland. The feedback has been amazing, and more positive than ever. We are including some comments for all to see. So for now, until our 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in 2011... we look forwards to seeing you there.

**Just some of your comments:**

*"Excellent day, great speakers, good variety!" (SNA)*

*"Excellent. Flo Longhorn especially was very engaging and full of energy." (Parent)*

*"An excellent conference. A great 'learning' day." (Therapist)*

*"Very inspirational and memorable day. Excellent, practical and passionate speakers." (Teacher)*

*"Excellent. The programme was great, all the different experiences, all the examples of things we can make and do with the children we work with. The play and art therapy was very interesting. Well done." (SNA)*

*"All I can say is 'WOW' What a day!! Excellent motivated speakers. Really reinforces what has kept me working with Special Needs Children/young adults for 29 years." (SNA)*

We have had a number of enquiries recently from SNA's concerned about their future and their employment rights and entitlements. Regarding redundancy entitlements, the Department of Education & Skills issued a circular on this matter. The circular can be found on their website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) **Circular 0058/2006 - Redundancy Arrangements for Special Need Assistants in Primary and Second Level Schools.** The trade union IMPACT can provide advice and information for sna's as well as local contact names. Their number is 01-8171500 and their website is [www.impact.ie](http://www.impact.ie). This website contains a special section for SNA's.



**NO SUPPORTS NO EDUCATION – THE SNAP CAMPAIGN**

The impact, for parents and their children, of the cutbacks in special education, as announced in June, is very real e.g. not having access to an SNA for a child may mean that a school cannot enrol a child or a child with significant challenging behaviour may be at risk without an SNA to provide support. So, it not surprising that the cuts and capping of employment numbers in the educational system are perceived by parents as threatening their children's future development and well being. Nor have parents had to contend with just the recent decisions, there are any number of special education issues that have been the source of unhappiness over the years e.g. the nature of the application/allocation/review process for supports, the lack of an independent appeals process, the lack of an individualized education plan as envisaged in the EPSEN Act and the lack of an integrated assessment of health and education needs for children up to five years of age, which the Disability Act provides for.

The timing of these announcements to coincide with the school holidays could be interpreted as a cynical exercise to minimize negative publicity and to put the recipients of these decisions – parents, SNAs and school principals – at a disadvantage in relation to an organized response. However there have been a number of meetings held around the country during the summer under the campaign banner of SNAP (Special Needs Assistants & Parents) to protest against these cutbacks. This campaign held a national rally outside Dail Eireann in July at which over 700 people attended. One key player in this campaign is the Special Needs Parents Association. The Special Needs Parents Association exists to support all parents of children with special needs, irrespective of age or diagnosis. It does this by providing information and guidance based on the personal experiences of other parents, through a network of representatives based in each county of Ireland, so that the advice is locally specific. The Association also advocates on a national level for improved treatment, education, welfare and acceptance of our children. Full details on this campaign and the Special Needs Parents Association are available from:

[www.specialneedsparents.ie](http://www.specialneedsparents.ie)  
email: [info@specialneedsparents.ie](mailto:info@specialneedsparents.ie)  
[www.facebook.com/SpecialNeedsParentsAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/SpecialNeedsParentsAssociation)  
Twitter @SpNeedsParents

'I look with my nose, my mouth, my movements, my ears,  
my skin and my eyes:

A multi sensory approach to vision for very special  
learners'

**Flo Longhorn Consultant and Author in Special  
Education and Multi Sensory Education**

[flocatalyst@aol.com](mailto:flocatalyst@aol.com)

Dear reader, what do you see below?



If you looked and saw a green and a red apple ( or a black and grey apple) well done!

That was easy wasn't it? But just think about the range of information you had to collect from your brain's memory to make sense of what you saw in the images. Your brain had to collect information from the body's seven sensory systems to recognise the images.

The brain went to

- The visual system to scan and transport the visual image to the memory bank to identify what the image was and give it a name.
- The sound system held the memory of the chewing and biting noises when eating the apple.
- The smell system retained the apple smell.
- The vestibular and proprioceptive systems ( movement) recalled how to pluck an apple from a tree or a bowl.
- The touch system reminisced about the textures, temperature, weight, shape and firmness of an apple.
- To find stored memories of what an apple is'.

The brain needed more information than just an image of the apple.

The visual system also relied on all the other senses sending pertinent information to make sense of what was being viewed. By just isolating vision and working on this one sensory area is a mistake, vision must be seen a part of a complex multi sensory network of sensing, perceiving, learning and understanding for any learner. The brain needs many connections using all the senses to make sense of the world around.

To make sense of what we see, there needs to be an awakening of not only vision but all the other senses for the very special learner. It is essential that sensory approach is used for learning to sense, perceive and read the visual world that surrounds the very special learner.

The seven sensory systems are

- vision
- touch
- sound
- proprioception ( movements and body maps)
- vestibular (balance and position of body parts)
- smell
- taste

When we use two or more senses together this is called 'multi sensory.' We 'see and touch' or 'look and listen.'

### **The visual system**

Vision is the major coordinating system and a large part of the brain is taken up with seeing, looking, understanding and memorising what is seen. It is the quickest and most efficient way of investigating and discovering the world around. The visual information is channelled through the eyes, along the optic nerve to the major areas of the brain dealing with vision. Each visual image we see is constantly analysed for information such as depth, colour, movement or 3D viewing.

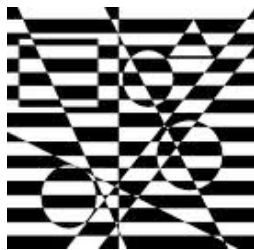
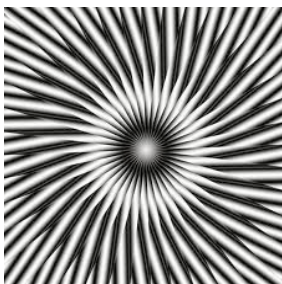
The main function of vision is to collect information such as:

- observing objects near and far away
- viewing in depth
- seeing at the edge of vision-out of the corner of the eye
- seeing colours in all their changing hues
- viewing shades of contrast and lighting
- seeing fine details
- getting the whole picture, not just a fragment
- understanding what is being viewed

If you are sitting in a darkened room and put the light for example, the brain has a bustle of activity because, even though the room has not changed, all the visual aspects have. The floor has changed colour, the table is in shadow, the trinkets on a table have a different depth, the windows change colour, perspectives have changed.....a busy brain!

So, why does the visual system depend on a multi sensory approach? Here are a variety of reasons, backed by the research of the neuroscientist:

- The brain is always looking for faces, this is because we are born with a face reflex that lasts all our lives. Babies look for faces so they can emotionally engage and bond with their carer. The baby moves their head to seek faces and they also smell their carer, matching with the face before them. So vision is linked to emotional development.
- As vision develops in early days, the brain enjoys and seeks moving, vibratory pictures and 'light and dark images'. Again, a combination of senses are required to do this successfully. Look at these illusions and feel visual vibrations, see the lines 'move' and vibrate.



- The brain also becomes more animated and concentrates more when looking at fluorescent materials, especially those experienced under black light. The hands will reach out to touch and feel such exciting materials, engaging other senses in the activity of seeing, reaching and grasping.

Here are a selection of materials that will engage not only vision, but other senses to develop a range of skills needed for seeing and understanding for a very special learner:

- small intense led light torches
- revolving colour light toys
- vivid uvl materials
- black and white images of faces
- photos of faces
- a stick with a piece of dangly ribbon attached
- Ipad with specific apps of intense light programmes
- mirrors, including concave and convex
- a trail of battery run fairy lights
- glitter gloves, nail varnish and gold tinsel

Now use these materials in to develop visual skills together with other senses, for the very special learner who requires an awakening of their visual system. For example, using lights and torches to:

- Track slowly from side to side.
- Up and down slowly.
- Across the body midline.
- Try a wobbly line of light.
- Illuminate your face.
- The child's hands.
- Look in a mirror with the torch.
- Try faster movements of the torch.
- Make a slow figure of 8-vertical and horizontal.
- Try the activities with different beam colours and in different room lighting.
- Now use face images illuminated by torchlight to gaze and fixate upon.
- How about regarding some intense visual vibratory images together.
- Use gold gloves to highlight hands, tinsel around fingers and highlight nails with polish.

[Flocatalyst@aol.com](mailto:Flocatalyst@aol.com)



# Special Needs Assistants Group Seminar

## Understanding and Managing Challenging Behaviour



**Kirsten Conroy**

Kirsten is a graduate from Trinity College, Dublin, and has worked as a behavioural specialist for over 15 years with children with special needs and challenging behaviours. She lectures for the School of Progressive Education and Kildare VEC in Special Needs Assistants Skills. She also provides home tuition for children with Autism, and has advised schools on managing challenging behaviour and bullying.

Kirsten's presentation will cover such topics as:

- The psychology behind behaviours
- Antecedents, behaviour, consequences and motivators
- Measuring behaviours
- The role of Self- esteem

**Karen Lowther**

Karen has been teaching in a school for children with Emotional and Behavioural Disturbance and children with ASD for over 15 years. She has had extensive experience in the implementation of TEACCH and structured teaching, IABA, ABA, Multi-sensory integration and DIR Floortime in the classroom. She has been involved in adult education for many years through presentations at seminars, conferences and workshops.

Karen's presentation will cover such topics as:

- Defining Challenging behaviour
- Understanding a major behavioural event
- Supporting positive behaviour in the school and classroom
- Recent publications on Challenging Behaviour and resources

**Maria Dollard**

Maria has had 15 years experience in adult education and currently works with Kilkenny VEC where she is a tutor on Childcare and Healthcare courses, including Special Needs and Disability Studies. For the past eight years Maria has served on the Board of Directors of the Irish Society for Autism, and was instrumental in setting up the first Autism Support Group in Kilkenny in 1999.

Maria will conduct a workshop on the writing of Social Stories as an aid to promoting positive behaviour, and aimed at improving social skills and social understanding in children with ASD.

**Bernadette O'Neill**

Bernadette O'Neill works as an adult education tutor in many areas, including healthcare, literacy, and holistic health. With a background in nursing she has also worked for a number of years as manager of the Carers Association for the Carlow/ Kilkenny region. She is qualified in Reflexology, Kinesiology, Educational Kinesiology, Reiki and Bio-Energy therapy. She also works in the areas of diet and nutrition, personal development, and stress management.

Bernadette's presentation will examine:

- Stress in the workplace
- Managing Stress
- Practical relaxation techniques

### **Contact details**

Special Needs Assistants Group Ltd.: email- [snagroup1@gmail.com](mailto:snagroup1@gmail.com)

Phone: Karen 0857716733 or Maria 0834169208

Website - [www.snagroup.ie](http://www.snagroup.ie) or see us on

## Understanding and Managing Challenging Behaviour

As part of our “**Eclectic Approach in Education for children with PDD and ASD**” series

Date	Venue	Payment in full to be received by:
Saturday 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2011	<b>Cork</b> Education Centre	27 <sup>th</sup> September 2011
Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> November 2011	<b>Portlaoise</b> Education Centre	8 <sup>th</sup> November 2011

**Seminar location: Please circle chosen venue-**

**Cork**

**Portlaoise**

Name: ..... SNAG Registration no.: .....

Address: .....

Phone/ Mobile: .....

Email: .....

**SNAs registered with SNAG- €90**

**SNAs not registered with SNAG, Parents, Teachers - €105**

Price includes seminar notes, lunch, tea/coffee and a Certificate of Attendance.

Please send a Cheque, Bank Draft or Postal Order to:

SNA Group Ltd.,  
The Old School House,  
Byrnesgrove,  
Ballyragget,  
Co. Kilkenny

Email: [snagroup1@gmail.com](mailto:snagroup1@gmail.com) / website: [www.snagroup.ie](http://www.snagroup.ie)

Telephone: Karen 0857716733, Maria 0834169208

## 'Multi sensory approaches to sensing and learning for the special child'



### **Flo Longhorn, Principal Consultant in special and multisensory education**

Flo Longhorn has worked in the area of special and multisensory education for over forty years and brings a wealth of experience, resources and common sense to her Master Classes. She has Master Class knowledge in multisensory approaches to education, curriculum and resources across the age span, to ensure delegates will gain an in depth knowledge.

Flo has written 18 books on multisensory approaches to learning for very special learners and she is the Editor of the international magazine 'Information Exchange'. She works abroad in many countries with diverse settings, recently returned from South Africa, New Zealand and Ireland.

Her Master Class will dazzle with hundreds of practical materials to see and explore, sparkling presentations, video clips and fun!

Here is a unique opportunity not to be missed: a Master Class with one of the most respected special education practitioners in the UK and Ireland.

Flo will inspire delegates to become brilliant at making learning exciting, meaningful, realistic and relevant at the earliest levels of access.

The Master Class takes place from 9.30am to 3.30pm. Registration will include refreshments, lunch and notes for the day. A selection of Flo's publications will also be available to view or purchase.

The intended audience includes all those who live with- and work with- young children, teenagers and adults with complex needs or significant autism.

Check out more about Flo and her inspirational work at:

[www.multi-sensory-room.co.uk/](http://www.multi-sensory-room.co.uk/)



## Booking Form

### Multi sensory approaches to sensing and learning for the special child:

### A Master Class with Flo Longhorn

Date	Venue	Payment in full by:
Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> October 2011		10 <sup>th</sup> October
Saturday 22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2011	School of the Holy Spirit, Kilkenny	18 <sup>th</sup> October

Please circle chosen venue:      **Dublin**                      **Kilkenny**

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

SNA Group Registration number (if applicable): .....

Phone.....Mobile: .....

Email: .....

**Registered with SNA Group €55 : Professionals/ Others - €70**

**Parents/Group Bookings (Min. 5 persons) -€65**

Price includes notes, lunch, refreshments  
and a Certificate of Attendance.

Please send a cheque or postal order to:

SNA Group Ltd.,  
The Old School House,  
Byrnesgrove,  
Ballyragget,  
Co. Kilkenny

Email: [snagroup1@gmail.com](mailto:snagroup1@gmail.com)

Telephone: Maria 083 416 9208 or Karen 0857716733