

REPORT

1st NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

22ND SEPTEMBER 2014



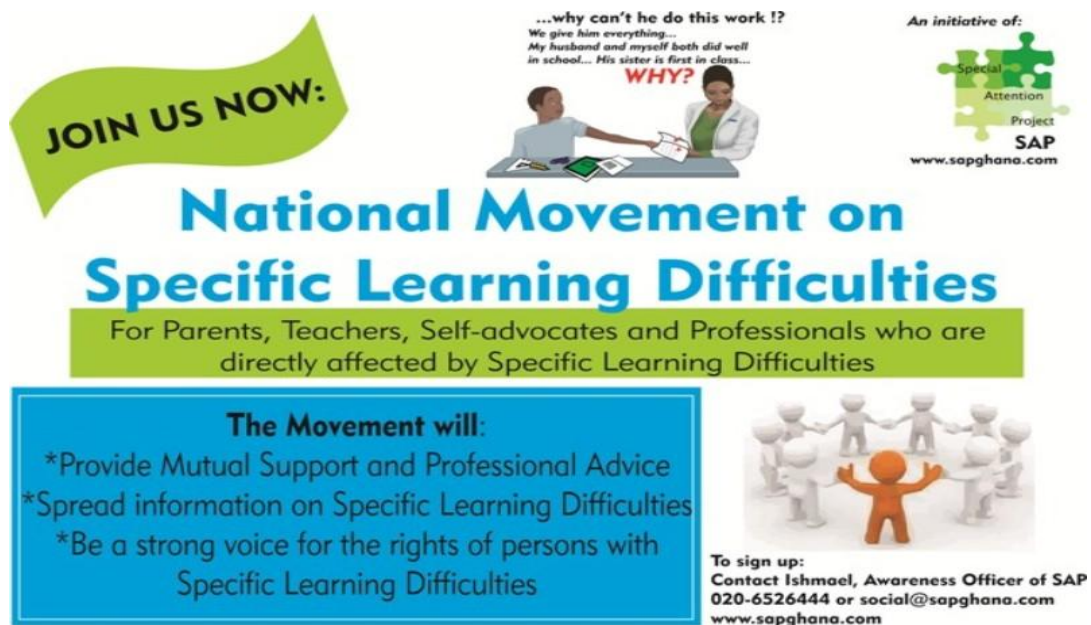
GHANA NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS'S HALL, ACCRA

Background

The National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties is an initiative of Special Attention Project (SAP), a Ghanaian Non-Governmental Organisation that improves the lives of children with Specific Learning Difficulties by spreading information to the public, advocating for better learning support for pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools, doing research and training on Specific Difficulties as well as providing practical support to out-of-school children with learning difficulties in the streets of Accra.

The first ever national conference on Specific Learning Difficulties was therefore to create awareness on Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and to call on parents, teachers, self-advocates and other professionals who are directly affected by this condition to come together and take action in the interest of persons with the condition, especially children.

The Movement, established in 2013 with support from Inclusion Ghana is to provide mutual support and professional advice; spread information on Specific Learning Difficulties and to be a strong voice for the rights of persons with Specific Learning Difficulties in Ghana.



The poster features a green banner at the top left with the text "JOIN US NOW:". In the center, there is an illustration of a man and a woman sitting at a table, with the text "...why can't he do this work!?" above them, followed by "We give him everything... My husband and myself both did well in school... His sister is first in class... WHY?". To the right, there is a logo for "An initiative of: Special Attention Project SAP" with the website "www.sapghana.com". Below the illustration, the main title "National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties" is written in large blue letters, followed by the subtitle "For Parents, Teachers, Self-advocates and Professionals who are directly affected by Specific Learning Difficulties" in a green box. At the bottom left, a blue box contains the text "The Movement will:" followed by three bullet points: "*Provide Mutual Support and Professional Advice", "*Spread information on Specific Learning Difficulties", and "*Be a strong voice for the rights of persons with Specific Learning Difficulties". To the right of this box is an illustration of a group of white figures holding hands, with one orange figure in the center. At the bottom right, there is a "To sign up:" section with the text "Contact Ishmael, Awareness Officer of SAP 020-6526444 or social@sapghana.com www.sapghana.com".

JOIN US NOW:

...why can't he do this work!?
We give him everything...
My husband and myself both did well
in school... His sister is first in class...
WHY?

An initiative of:
Special
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Project
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National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties

For Parents, Teachers, Self-advocates and Professionals who are
directly affected by Specific Learning Difficulties

The Movement will:

- *Provide Mutual Support and Professional Advice
- *Spread information on Specific Learning Difficulties
- *Be a strong voice for the rights of persons with Specific Learning Difficulties

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Programme Outline

The programme started at 10:40am with an opening prayer by Ms. Abena Amod-Boahin. MC for the day was Ms. Lilly Mensah who then introduced members of the high table to take their seats. They were: Dr. Kingsley Nyarko- a senior lecturer at the University of Ghana, Mr. Bernard Boaheng, Executive Director of SpLenDiD and Ms. Bernice Juliet Adu, Deputy Director-General of Ghana Education Service.

Chairman's opening remarks

The chairman for the day was Dr. Kingsley Nyarko, a Senior Lecturer at the Psychology Department with the University of Ghana, Legon. In his opening remarks, he stated that Learning Disabilities (LD) are disorders that impede the academic performance of people who are not mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. The National Centre for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) has indicated that about a third of all children with LD have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which makes it difficult for them to concentrate. Intervention is most effective when the disability is identified early.



Dr. Nyarko addressing the participants

In addition, almost 30% of students with learning disabilities drop out of secondary school. Other children often victimize children with learning disabilities because they struggle in school. As a result, LD can affect children socially as well as academically. Drug and alcohol use can also cause learning disabilities for young adults, and if a woman uses them during pregnancy, they can affect the baby. Low birth weight, lack of oxygen at birth, and prolonged labor often are associated with learning disabilities. Poor nutrition

and exposure to toxins also can result in learning disabilities; however, often there is no apparent cause for LD. He added that there is the need to identify how a child learns best and to focus on life's success rather than the academic success. Parents and teachers also need to emphasize on the strength of the child among others.

Welcome address and purpose of gathering

Mr. Ishmael Hammond, National Coordinator for the National Movement of Specific Learning Difficulties addressed the participants present. He welcomed all present and informed them that this was the first ever national conference on specific learning difficulties. The aim of the conference was to mobilize parents, teachers, self-advocate and other professional who are directly affected with SpLD to join the National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties. When this has been achieved, the group will put together an action plan and educate the general public through specific activities on the need to support children with learning difficulties in Ghana. He entreated all to sign the movement form to ensure their commitment.

Specific learning difficulties, myths and realities - Mr. Bernard Boaheng

The Executive Director of Splendid introduced participants to the various myths and realities that people have about specific learning difficulties. Some parents attach their children's' inability to perform remarkably in class to witchcraft, laziness on the part of the child to learn, among others. While other parents send these children to prayer camps for deliverance, others give up on them and desist from caring for their wards. He mentioned that there are various kinds of learning disabilities which affect children. It is the responsibility of the parent and teachers to focus instead, on the child's strengths and not weaknesses. Furthermore, he advised parents to desist from comparing their children with their own siblings or other students since this lowers the self-esteem of the child. Mr. Boaheng added that every child is unique in their own way therefore parents and teachers should make time for them in order to find out their strengths and build upon them. If this is done, the children will be able to stay in school and not become truant so far as they get both support from home and school.

Keynote address: 'Awareness creation, key to supporting children with learning difficulties in Ghana' by Mr. Ahetor-Tsegah Director-General, Ghana Education Service

The keynote address by Mr. Charles Ahetor-Tsegah, Director-General of Ghana Education Service was read on his behalf by Madam Bernice Juliet Adu, Deputy Director-General of Ghana Education Service. His address was centered on "Awareness creation, key to supporting children with learning difficulties in Ghana". According to him, more children in Ghana today are going to school than ever before, but many drop out before grade 5 of primary school or graduate without mastering even a minimum set of cognitive skills. He said currently, there are still about 2000 schools under trees, which do not promote effective learning, especially for children with learning difficulties. The average pass rate of under 60% of BECE , and 47% dropout rate from basic school to secondary school is unacceptable. In 2011, for instance, out of the 375,000 BECE candidates, only 202,339 were able to transit into Senior High School. According to him, the above trend in our education sector confirms that much is desired and government alone cannot do this. We need to collaborate with all

stakeholders to ensure quality education for all children in Ghana. The GES Boss said that about 10% of every population worldwide has some form of Specific Learning Difficulties. In Ghana, survey done by Special Attention Project indicates that about 40% of children at juvenile centers in Greater Accra and Central regions have Specific Learning difficulties. A child with Specific Learning Difficulty has a problem in a particular area of learning like reading, writing and spelling (Dyslexia), paying attention (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or doing mathematics (Dyscalculia), among others. These children are more likely to become 'spectators' in the classroom because they usually do not receive the help they need. For instance, a child in primary three (3) with Dyslexia may still be struggling to write his/her name properly or write the English alphabet. A child with Dyscalculia finds it difficult to do basic mathematics at their own level after being given repeated instructions by their class teacher.

In concluding, he said that what Ghana needs is a collective approach to finding a lasting solution to help these children. What is needed to break the barrier of Specific learning Difficulties in Ghanaian children is to create more awareness, do more research in the area of Specific Learning Difficulties and on the part of government, fully implement the Inclusive Education Policy.

Introduction to groups and themes

The MC for the day, Ms, Lilly Mensah, divided participants into groups of 5. These groups were to come up with an awareness and advocacy action plan for one of the following areas;

- 1. Education of parents and general public on Specific Learning Difficulties*
- 2. Inclusion of training on Specific Learning Difficulties in Colleges of Education*
- 3. Implementation of classroom support strategies for learners with Specific Learning Difficulties*
- 4. General Implementation guidelines for Specific Learning Difficulties in Ghana*
- 5. Provision of specialist support to learners with Specific Learning Difficulties*



Group Work

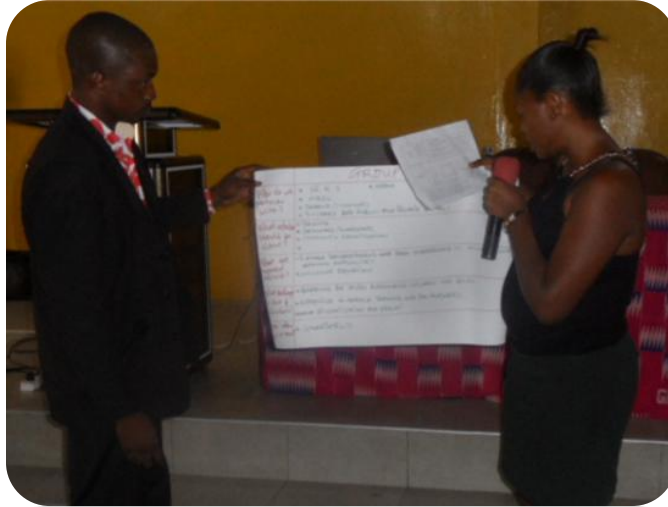


After, each group made presentations to the house on what transpired in their groups.



Group presentations





Group presentations



Summary of discussions

A summary of the conference's statement and action plan was done by Mr. Prince Gyebi. This included the way forward for the National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties. As part of the action plans, participants agreed to mobilize more members to join the National Movement. These will include parents, teachers, the media, Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service and other Non-Governmental organizations in the country. The movement also agreed to meet quarterly.

Vote of thanks & Closing prayer

The vote of thanks and closing prayer was given by Ms. Bridget Okyere. This was followed by lunch and a group photograph.

Prepared by: Lilly Mensah, "Curious Minds"