

Children With Special Needs Have Value Too!

When as a parent one hears the diagnosis of autism, all the doom and gloom emotions come to the fore as one tries to come to grips with the horror of this 'life sentence' that has befallen this innocent. This was the situation I faced eight years ago after finally hearing the official diagnosis. Unfortunately at that time there was no Autism Society, no contact with parents in similar circumstances, no support groups of any sort. Fortunately for me, I was able to attend a one week seminar in Boston, USA to help me cope and to provide guidance on how to reach and engage my son who was quickly slipping away from my husband and me.

I am not sure what coping mechanisms are in place today for parents of children with autism. However, I believe that parents need to be empowered, so that they are able to help their children in the home, in the same way that we assist our normal children with homework and provide whatever guidance we can with school projects, for example. Therapists and specialists can only do so much in the time that is allotted to these children. However, as parents we know our children best and so we have a role to play in supporting the work of teachers and therapists. I believe that more could be done in this area for parents. Seminars and workshops can be conducted by the appropriate government agency, Parent Education for Development in Barbados (PAREDOS) in collaboration with other individual societies. In this way persons with the expertise can provide valuable information to parents who need to be better able to cope in the home with their children with special needs.

We put many resources behind the development of our normal or able bodied children. However, I must stress that our special needs children **have value too**, as much as those children who can fit into the mainstream in our society. Children with special needs must be able in this society to reach their fullest potential, whatever that may be. At the same time, there appears not to be enough specialist resources available to these children and this leads me to ask the following questions:

- Is there a need for more persons to be trained so that there is a larger pool of

specialists who are available to work with children with special needs?

- Should not there be personnel, specifically trained to continue providing therapy beyond school age?

These children grow up and become part of this society and whatever assistance they need should be provided to them and their parents or care givers. Children with special needs should not continue to be on the fringes of society, they **have value too**.

Written by Gillian Cadogan