



Graphic by Lorraine Rath

Free support group created to help people who stutter

By Carolyn Lamberson
Of the Emerald

Stuttering can be a traumatic affliction, according to Chris Caniglia, a graduate student in speech pathology at the University.

In order to help people deal with this problem, the Speech Pathology and Audiology department of the University Division of Special Education and Rehabilitation has developed a free support group open to students and the general public. Caniglia worked with the support group during fall term as a graduate teaching fellow.

"The group meets once a week for an hour to an hour and a half to discuss any problems, things that happened in the past week, either good or bad, life in general, and we even sometimes try to save the world," she said. "Often, our discussions would turn toward politics and current events."

The purpose of the group is to provide support for a stutterer from other stutterers, she said. Ruth Tiger, clinic co-ordinator for the Speech and Hearing Center, who heads the group, a GTF and Mark Christensen, a local psychologist, meet with group members, help lead discussions and give advice to those afflicted with the problem.

"If a person is having a problem speaking fluently that day, the other group members often tell him or her to slow down or try one of the other techniques of controlling the stutter," Caniglia said. Other techniques include breathing more slowly, talking more slowly, relaxing and a technique called easy flow, during which the person takes a deep breath and talks slowly as he or she exhales, she said.

Tiger stressed the fact that the group is not a strict therapy session.

"It provides the opportunity for people to discuss how their disfluency affects their life," she said. "That ranges from jobs, personal situations, meeting people and even ordering in a restaurant."

Tiger began the group two-and-a-half years ago.

"I was aware of several adult stutterers at the Speech and Hearing Center. In the past, I had worked with stutterers and was involved in a support group when I was a graduate student," she said. "That was a positive experience, and I thought that a support group here would be helpful here."

There are six people in this term's group, and although the numbers have been small, Tiger has been satisfied with everything that has been accomplished, she said.

Caniglia believes the support group is important because of the social stigma associated with stuttering.

"It often begins when kids are in school. Those children with a stutter often feel left out and many times are teased by the other children," she said. "This may blow up when the child becomes an adult and may affect the type of job that person may apply for. They may look for a job where they won't have to speak or deal with the public."

Stuttering is not a psychological disorder, Tiger said. It is a speech disorder where the repetition of speech sounds calls attention to itself, she said.

Research shows that about 1 percent of the population has a stuttering problem, and a large percentage of those tend to be male, Caniglia said. However, she added, the actual cause of stuttering is a mystery.

"Some people think (stuttering) is genetic. Others believe it is environmental, while some others contend it is a combination of both. At this point, no one knows for sure, although research is being done in the area of speech pathology," she said.

Working with a support group gave Caniglia an interesting outlook on the problems faced by stutterers, she said.

"I learned how these people feel in real life."

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