



To many a SMILE is worth a thousand words

SMILE and make the world happy: Dal program reaches out to metro kids

BY GINA STACK

It's a crisp and bright Saturday morning. Light filters in the Studley Dance Studio from the windows across one side of the room.

On the hardwood floor, a little boy sits in silent concentration putting together a puzzle. Another is running full speed down the length of the studio, kicking a soccer ball as he goes.

Outside, the campus has yet to wake up, but inside the studio, 20 young children are having the time of their lives.

The children range from ages two to 12. While each chooses a different activity, they all share a common characteristic — they have a non-learning disability.

A number of dedicated Dalhousie students founded the Sensory Motor Instructional Leadership Experience (SMILE) society last September. The society pairs students in health education one-on-one with special needs children to improve their gross and fine motor skills, social interaction style and non-verbal (cognitive) abilities.

Since last summer, society president Megan Power and vice-president Jenny Swain have been working hard to develop the program at Dalhousie.

The group gained society status in the fall, and after canvassing for volunteers from the health professions, began operating on Jan. 31.

"If the child is scared to catch a ball, then we try to make the child catch it in a fun way, so that it's less intimidating," says Power.

Power says that it was easy to find volunteers. In addition, since most are in nursing or occupational therapy, minimal training was needed.

"The volunteers thought, 'hey, this will look good on my resume,' until they walked in [to the program] and saw the kids and realized that this wasn't about their resume anymore.

"The kids have changed their lives. This is about the best things I have ever done in my life — it's the best kept secret at Dal," said Powers.

Volunteers are all provided with a comprehensive handbook outlining the goals of the program, and techniques to help the children perform various tasks. Skills such as leaping, balancing on one foot and hopping are broken down into three stages — initial, elementary and mature — with common problems and recommendations described to aid the volunteer in teaching.

At the beginning of the session, children are paired up

individually for one-on-one instruction. They practice catching balls, doing puzzles and gaining confidence with their

experience for him. The program is aptly named. He comes in with a smile and he leaves with a smile — and you don't see that in gym

get involved.

"[Our professors] encourage us to get involved and do all the volunteer work that we can,"

can be expanded next year.

For this session, there are 20 volunteers paired with 20 children. Power says the waiting list for kids to get into the program is long, but the program is not yet ready to expand.

"We've been keeping track of all the people who want to come because we want the program to get bigger and bigger. It's so hard to say no, but there's no space to accommodate more than 40 people in the Studley Dance Studio."

The program is run completely by volunteers, and there is no cost to participants. As a result, the society is dependent on donations of time, equipment and space. The Dalplex donated the Studley Dance Studio and gym equipment, but the program is quickly outgrowing this facility.

"Saturday morning is prime time for recreational sports, and we'd like to rent out a nice space, but we'd need a grant to do that."

Dalhousie's program was inspired by a similar one that has been running at Acadia University since 1982. Today more than 140 children receive one-on-one instruction from an equal number of Acadia student volunteers, who are from all disciplines.

Power says that the program will continue to grow at Dalhousie, as space allows.

An aquatic component and an extension of the program to volunteers from students in all programs at Dal is also planned.

"If Acadia can do it, why can't we?" asks Power.

"I would love to see this go and go and go."



ABOVE: Dal volunteers and children get ready to put up the parachute at the SMILE program. LEFT: Jenny Swain (Vice-pres SMILE) with her friend Trevor. (Photos by Gina Stack)

abilities. The next half hour sees the children working in small groups and the final half hour brings the entire group together for larger activities like playing with a parachute.

The benefits of this kind of instruction are evident to both the children and their parents. One mother, who wished to maintain the anonymity of her child, praised the program.

"My son has trouble with visual motor skills. He knows that he can't do it, and he is reluctant to engage in motor games with kids in the community," she said.

"Here, one-on-one takes the pressure off. He is willing to try things that I've never seen him do in other venues.

"It's been a very positive

class or with other kids on the street.

"It's a wonderful program and I hope they keep it up."

The children agree.

"I like it," said Adam, summing up his feelings about the program. Adam added that he especially enjoyed playing basketball, soccer and making new friends.

"It's really education and good," added his pal Josh. "When I'm finished this I'm going to my grandma's."

Sami Crossman is a nursing student at Dal. She has spent her past two summer's working with children with disabled children at Dartmouth Parks and Recreation. When she heard about the SMILE program, she did not hesitate to

Crossman said.

"This is our third week and the program is really going well. It's really rewarding when you see something click with the child and they do something or mimic you. The child I work with follows me all around — it's so rewarding."

The program runs for eight Saturday's from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Society president Power says the program is still in its infancy, and hopes that it



David gives the SMILE program a big thumbs up.

Professor shares thoughts on the women of glass

BY LAURA GRAY

Our desire to have control over and completely understand our bodies has led individuals to desire a transparent body, devoid of mystery.

On Feb. 12, Elizabeth Harvey, an associate professor at the University of Western Ontario, spoke to a group of students on what she calls "Allegories of the Flesh and Transparent Bodies".

Her lecture spanned the era of the Renaissance and the early modern period focusing on how science has invaded the images of the female body and the "secrecy of the interior".

Allegories are stories with both interpretive and literal meanings. Harvey speaks of science as a thing

that has been sorting through the body looking at each individual part, examining the flesh and figuring out how it works. Scientists of the past recorded the image of the human innards as though they were sitting in the centre of the body looking around at all the parts as they functioned. Harvey talked of this as a human's desire to see the inner workings of the body as though the skin were transparent.

Essentially Harvey was proclaiming that the human fantasy was a body made of glass. This glass body would show all of the organs and veins to the naked eye — leaving no physiological mysteries.

This to Harvey is a negative goal. She explained that such an intricate understanding of the human body

changed how women saw and felt about their bodies.

She added to this idea that "the desire to see inside the body is also to desire to control it." By focusing on controlling their bodies, women begin to see their bodies as objects instead of entities. Women are no longer a mystical whole but a devalued set of parts.

Harvey added that science isn't all bad and that we should not ignore the good that has come from biology, physiology and medicine. Rather she emphasized that a balance needs to be found between scientific knowledge and the natural path of life. For example, should families be told the sex of a fetus or should it be left a mystery until birth?

Although extremely interesting,

the discussion was riddled with complex thoughts which were added to the main discussion without clear explanations.

"I found the topic as a whole very interesting. However, I found it hard at times to follow what she was saying," commented Lorna Morin, a student present at the seminar.

This lecture was part of a series that was organized by the Women's Studies Department. Sue Sherwin, the coordinator of the department, noted that the regular lecture series, given by local individuals, have not been well attended. However Harvey, a professor from afar, was well received. As to having more lectures from individuals like Harvey, Ms. Sherwin said "we'd love to but we don't have the budget for it."