  

27/04/09

Dear

I am writing to tell you about a new research project that may be of interest to you. Down Syndrome Education International and the University of York have been awarded a £0.5 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund for research which aims to support the reading and language skills of children with Down syndrome in mainstream education. The research will develop and evaluate a reading and language intervention which combines highly-structured phonically-based reading instruction (including phonological awareness training) with oral language teaching to develop children’s vocabulary, grammar, and speech skills. Previous work has found this intervention to be effective for children with reading difficulties and it is expected that the programme will be highly beneficial to the development of reading and oral language skills in children with Down syndrome.

We have received funding to conduct a large randomised controlled trial involving 52 children. Half of the children (Group 1) will receive the intervention programme over 40 weeks (4 school terms). The remaining children (Group 2) will continue to receive their normal literacy teaching for the first 20 weeks, after which they will receive the intervention programme for the following 20 weeks (2 school terms). Children will be randomly assigned to groups following an initial screening phase. This design is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. It is important to note that all children will eventually receive the programme that is expected to be highly beneficial to their reading and language skills.

A research team will provide high-quality training to teaching assistants to enable them to deliver the intervention to children on an individual basis. Briefly, the intervention will involve one session each day of approximately 45-50 minutes using materials which we provide. The work involves activities which the children find fun to do, and which the teaching assistant will be fully trained to deliver. All costs associated with the training of teaching assistants will be covered by us. The research team will monitor the progress of participating children at different time points over the course of the intervention.

We are currently recruiting children to take part in this project with a view to starting the intervention in the Autumn term and we are writing to ask whether your school may be interested in taking part. This letter provides details of the anticipated timeline, as well as Teaching Assistant and school commitments. Details of funding are also included. I hope that all the information provided here is clear and accessible. However, if you have any queries about any of the information contained in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me (contact details provided below).

**Timetable**

Our project starts in April 2009. The timetable attached indicates when we will be visiting your school to assess the children and monitor their progress, and periods when the intervention will take place. Further details are provided below. Please note, while we will endeavour to adhere to the attached timetable, minor changes are sometimes necessary. We will inform you as soon as possible should any such changes be made.

* In the initial screening phase, we would like to see all children with Down syndrome who are between the ages of 6-9 years.
* We anticipate that children selected as suitable for intervention will be assessed at 3 separate time points in addition to the initial screening phase.
* Each test phase will involve seeing the children on an individual basis.
* Assessments will be carried out members of the Research Team from the University of York and/or Down Syndrome Education International. All members of the team will be fully trained and will have enhanced CRB clearance before entering school.

**Teaching Assistants**

The intervention programme will be run by Teaching Assistants (TAs). We ask that you select a TA who you feel is most suited to delivering the intervention programme and who can commit to the project. We will train and support all the TAs throughout the project.

**We will provide funding for the costs of training the TAs in the intervention programme, at a rate of £60 per day.** We will also provide reimbursement for reasonable expenses for travel to and from training sessions.  We encourage car-sharing where possible.

 **Training**

Teaching assistants from all participating schools will initially be invited to attend 2-days of general inclusion training specific to the learning needs of children with Down syndrome, delivered by Down Syndrome Education International. This will be held in July 2009.

The intervention training will be held over 2-days. Group 1 training will take place in September 2009. Group 2 training (also to be attended by Group 1 TAs) will take place in the Summer term 2010. This will be followed up by a further 1-day training session after the first 10 weeks of intervention delivery. Teaching assistants will be further supported by fortnightly telephone tutorials and one visit from a member of the research team per term during the intervention phases.

**Consent**

Should you be interested in taking part, parental consent will be sought for participation in the project. Children **will not** be seen at any point unlessthe research team have first received the parental consent form.

**General Information**

We are very grateful to all schools who have expressed an interest in taking part in the study. Unfortunately, if we are unable to identify children within a school who fulfil the criteria for participating in the study we will not be able to continue with the research in that school. We hope that this situation will not arise, but in the event that it does, we will invite the school to send a TA to the training sessions.

All the information contained in this letter is correct at the time of writing. You will be notified as soon as possible if any of this information is amended.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the information given above. I hope you that you and your staff are happy to take part in the project. We will contact you shortly to discuss the project and to answer any queries you may have. If you would like to contact us, please call me on 02392 855330, or email me at Kelly.Burgoyne@downsed.org.

I look forward to hearing from you and to taking this project forward in your school.

Yours

Kelly Burgoyne

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|  | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June-July | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
| Year 12009 |  | Identify children to participateTime 1 assessments (screening phase)Random allocation of children to groups General inclusion training (July) | Train Group1TAs | Group 1 Intervention runs for 12 weeks |
| Year 22010 | Group 1 Intervention runs for 8 weeks | Time 2 assess-ments | Train Group1 and 2 TAs | Group 1 and 2 intervention runs for 10 weeks | Group 1 and 2 training runs for 10 weeks | Time 3 assess-ments |
| Year 32011 | Group 1 and Group 2 unsupported intervention over 20 weeks | Time 4 assess-ments |  |

Timetable of Lottery Reading project