



RESOLVING LEARNING ISSUES: ADINA'S STORY

By Shaindy Weiss

Last year, I again decided to forego our upstate summer vacation. What for most mothers was a time to relax, for me was filled with tension. My daughter, Adina, labeled with “auditory processing disorder”, had been so belligerent and unhappy during the summer months that it was easier to stay home and at least avoid peoples’ insensitive remarks.

Adina as a toddler seemed mildly “spacey,” but her pediatrician assured me that she would “grow out of it.” Although her speech was a bit delayed, it did not worry me. In order to buy a little more time to mature, she repeated kindergarten. Although she was given various therapies, her improvement was minimal. Her speech improved, but she still didn’t “get” conversations as quickly as did her friends. Because she was unable to take a message properly, we asked her not to answer the phone. Children can be insensitive, and after some playful teasing, she announced that she decided not to talk

anymore so that she would not be made fun of when she asked, "what?" three times in a row. Two years of this frustration turned my sweet daughter into an angry and discouraged child.

With the help of remedial reading specialists, visualization programs, vision therapy and specialized tutors,

nized and forgetful and by the end of the third grade, she couldn't tell time and had trouble with basic math. We modified her program, eliminating some subjects completely and faxing home tests in advance. This improved her grades but lowered her self-confidence.

A diagnosis of Attention Deficit

handle, but flattened her personality. Her sparkle was gone and I felt that I was between a rock and a hard place.

In January of '06, an article about the Arrowsmith Program was published in the *Jewish Press*. It was described as "cutting edge", the latest science dealing with strengthening the brain and eliminating learning disabilities. It seemed too good to be true. No one up to now had actually worked on strengthening Adina's memory. Rather, they had simply downgraded the materials to help her cope. The testimonials I read on Arrowsmith's website raised my hopes. There was evidence that children's scores on cognitive measures shot up during the program. Independent studies confirmed these results. Math and reading comprehension and speed scores on standardized tests also increased significantly after just 10 months in the program.

"The brain can be modified and learning disabilities are not an unchanging fact of life"

she eventually learned to read but with little understanding. Because of her poor memory, she would forget the first paragraph of a story by the time she was reading the second. She was disorga-

nized and forgetful and by the end of the third grade, she couldn't tell time and had trouble with basic math. We modified her program, eliminating some subjects completely and faxing home tests in advance. This improved her grades but lowered her self-confidence. Increased medicine made her easier to

Handwriting Change: Time Difference Two Years

When you read this
you will see what I remember
I remember Mother's Day
card.

There once was a boy who was weak and small
He had many difficulties such as writing
He also could not play sports.
His name was Moshe Shlomo he took
arrowsmith.

This program apparently could be implemented in any school. Children would be taken out of class for cognitive exercises until they were brought up to average functioning. Thirty years of the program had solid science to back it up. But this Canadian program had only recently become available in the United States, so rather than waiting for my own school to set it up, I enrolled

The exercises work the brain as if it's a muscle

Adina at the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, which entailed a longer commute and a period of difficult transition and adjustment to the new environment.

After four months in the program, we began to see concrete changes. Adina became wittier and more able to defend herself. She began understanding punch lines and sarcasm and didn't require repetitions. She became a reader. She functioned as never before, counting change from a purchase and writing down telephone messages. She showed increased self-reliance, preparing for school by herself each morning. But the decrease in her anxiety was the greatest gain. By succeeding where she had once failed, the pressure she had been living with had been relieved.

Seven months later, she was making friends in the new school. An exercise which strengthens a person's ability to read non-verbal cues, helped her in social situations. The belligerence was gone, and we now have our sweet Adina back.

This year, we are definitely taking our summer vacation upstate! ☆

THE ARROWSMITH PROGRAM

Knowledge of the causes of learning dysfunctions has been rapidly changing over the past century. Groundbreaking work by neuro-psychologists demonstrated that the brain can be modified and concluded that learning disabilities are not an unchanging fact of life.

Barbara Arrowsmith Young has identified 19 specific learning dysfunctions and designed ingenious exercises to fire up parts of the brain that are underperforming and considered weak. These computer and auditory exercises work the brain as if it's a muscle; it is likened to mental Olympic training. When the weak areas of the brain are strengthened, the learning disability is reduced or removed. Her methods have been achieving spectacular results for over 25 years and the program has been adopted by public and private schools throughout Canada.

The Hebrew Academy of Long Beach in NY was the first school in the U.S. to implement the Arrowsmith Program. HALB's students are working on reading, writing, mathematics, comprehension, processing speed, logical reasoning, visual and auditory memory, non-verbal learning, and attention deficit. Within two months of starting in the Arrowsmith program, parents at HALB began reporting astonishing changes they were noticing in their children's academic and social performance. After one year in the program and after years of struggling in school, two children have gone on to the enrichment program. In other results, reading comprehension scores have risen to 1.5 years to 5.2 years of improvement, reading speed scores show .9 to 3.8 years of improvement. Math scores improved from .8 to 3.3 years of improvement.

Due to these results, the Maimonides Academy in Los Angeles and Toras Emes Academy of Miami are implementing the program starting in September 2007.

Recently, author Norman Doidge, M.D. published his neuroplasticity research in his book, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*. He describes the Arrowsmith Program's success in chapter two of his book. He explains that, as the exercises change the brain's abilities, children begin to learn at the natural rate of their peers; they no longer require remedial support, program modification or other forms of compensation.