

**Release Communication Intervention Ltd**

speech and language therapy  
oral motor therapy  
early intervention  
occupational exercises

James O'Grady  
National Manager Disability Services  
32-33 Catherine St  
Limerick

22 February 2008

Dear James:

It gives me great pleasure to enclose the End of Session Analysis for the September - December 2007 session.

In another successful session we worked provided all the assessments for Irish Autism Action's Diagnostic Centre Solas, assessed and worked continuously with 14 children at Kilnamanagh ABACAS, and also continued our private practice, bringing our total of children helped to over 420 with over 5000 hours of therapy time since January 2005.

We are able to say without a doubt Release works when caregivers learn the necessary skills and devote their time to work with their children. But to give scientific proof to the disbelievers, Release has employed Dr Debbie Brassell, PhD, JD, EJD, MS, CCC-SLP, IASLT to conduct quantitative research on the program. We are conducting this research in collaboration with The George Washington University in Washington DC, with the goal to present our findings at the ASHA 2009 Convention. I look forward to giving you progress reports throughout the year.

We are still very interested in continuing our discussion about the potential of a government sponsored pilot of Release within the services.

Feel free to contact me directly on 087.247.3486 should you or your peers have any questions about the program.

Sincerely,

Tara Cunningham  
Managing Director

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**Release Communication Intervention  
Kilnamanagh ABACAS and  
Private Session  
Programme Analysis**

**September to December 2007**

CC:

Minister for Health and Children  
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Minister for Finance  
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## 1.1 Release Communication Intervention

Release is a proven, comprehensive Communication Intervention program, encompassing speech and language therapy, occupational exercises, oral motor therapy and early intervention to help children covering a full spectrum of communication disabilities. Our experience to date includes the full Autism Spectrum Disorder, Aspergers Syndrome, Down syndrome, stammer, articulation, rare chromosomal disorders, cerebral palsy, pervasive development disorder (PDD), and delayed speech. Our training is designed to focus on caregivers; parents, teachers, grandparents, older siblings and special needs assistants so they learn techniques and skills in order to enhance their child's communication skills on a daily basis. The program is taught in a group format, thereby increasing the number of people helped and introducing social skills, while starting a peer-to-peer network.

## 1.2 Release Achievements

Release has made a significant impact in service delivery because we are able to offer timely assessments followed by **continuous** speech and language therapy. Most crucial however is the inclusion of caregivers in the therapy—we teach the caregivers how to work with their children—and when the children progress, it's the caregivers who get the credit. Therefore, Release caregivers and teachers trust and have confidence in the program.

Since opening our doors in January 2005, we have provided over 5000 hours of speech and language therapy in both private and public arenas to over 420 students. These hours have been completed by only one speech and language therapist at hourly rates below Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapist.

The End of Session Analysis show:

- 100% of caregivers rated the Release At-Home Assessment© and the Release report at the highest level.
- 100% of caregivers who attended the classes and participated in daily homework are extremely satisfied with their child's improvement.
- Over 80% found each class promoted new skills acquisition
- Over 90% found the therapist used supports systems appropriate to their child's cognitive skills.
- Over 85% found the therapist spent an appropriate amount of 1:1 time with their child.
- Over 95% found the homework was well explained and backed by useful handouts.
- Over 85% found the therapist receptive to their ideas and made changes to the class as appropriate.
- Over 75% were able to find the time to work with their child on a daily basis.
- Over 95% finds the program well valued.
- 100% found the program "extremely helpful" to their child and themselves.
- The majority of Release families attend multiple sessions and refer their friends.

In November 2006, Irish Autism Action chose Release to provide for all of their speech and language assessments in their national diagnostic centre, Solas. Release will assess 185 children and adults annually for the IAA alone. New York University visited our school to observe the program—the result of which was to offer Jennifer Wetter, MS, CCC-SLP, and Director of Release, a full scholarship for her Doctorate if she chooses to attend the school.

Release strongly agrees and upholds the findings of the ASHA Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities position statement "Learning Disabilities and the Preschool Child"

*No single approach in intervention can be expected to serve as a panacea for the different needs presented by the child.*

*Identification of a disorder that is not followed by assessment, intervention and follow-up services are futile.*

### 1.3 Summary of the Release Program to Date

When Tara Cunningham, Managing Director, worked as a fundraiser with Down Syndrome Ireland, she realised the chronic need for speech and language therapy throughout Ireland. She had noted, through her work with charitable organisations, fundraising became the main focus for those organisations with those they should be serving coming second. Tara decided to develop her idea into a Social Enterprise (not for profit) as she wanted the program to run on its own merits and on efficient business principles. England's Department of Trade and Industry defines Social Enterprise as *"businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners."*

In July 2003, Tara left Down Syndrome Ireland to research world-wide best practice in speech and language therapy and speak to caregivers of children with disabilities to hear what they wanted and needed to help their children. The Release model was born--consisting of continuous speech and language therapy inclusive of caregivers. This program, in theory, would answer the critical shortage and allow the caregivers an opportunity to help their children.

To build credibility for her idea, Tara secured certification for Release from ASHA on day one (September 2003). ASHA (American Speech Hearing and Language Association) is the best respected credentialing association in the field internationally. Tara also developed partnerships with New York University, The George Washington University, Kennedy Krieger Institute and the Eden Institute at Princeton among others. These partnerships provided essential credibility to Release in the early stages of development.

Currently, Release is building an irrefutable fact base through its research partners that will facilitate the expansion of its methodologies internationally, initially through its University partners in the United States. The George Washington University and New York University are currently competing for the Release research rights. In Ireland, private one to one speech therapy sessions cost between €75 and €130 per hour. Release has a current break even point of €75 per hour. The caregiver and therapist enter a joint contract of work, where underperformance can result in dismissal for either party.

Caregivers are contracted to attend one hour of group therapy each week and complete an additional three hours of work with the child each week outside of therapy hours. The release methodology allows Release therapists and caregivers to operate at up to fifty times the productivity of their public service counterparts. Children with communication difficulties can expect over fifteen times more therapy hours per year with Release (140 hrs; 35 hours class, 105 hours at-home) than through the public service (avg. 6-9 hrs). If applied nationally, the Release methodology could eliminate waiting lists and multiply the number of hours of therapy delivered to each individual, at no additional cost.

To make this methodology a reality, Tara is building an entrepreneurial and creative team of experienced professionals with a strong work ethic and commitment to innovation and the release methodology. Each candidate must go through a rigorous four stage process to ensure quality control. The Release team will continue as service providers until the methodology is fully proven and developed. Ultimately, Release aims to become the standard, dramatically improving the productivity and impact of speech and language therapy across the world.

To date, Release has worked successfully with over 420 children and provided over 5000 hours of speech and language therapy (not including the at-home time). These numbers have been filled through the following arenas:

Private speech and language therapy classes (2005 to present)

Schools

Ballyowen Meadows, 2005 (ran out of private funding)

St Declan's Special School, 2006 - 7 (ran out of private funding; referred by Ballyowen Meadows)

St John of God's Menni Services, 2005, 2006, 2007

ABACAS Kilnamanagh, (September 2007 to present)

One-day workshops around the country

Night sessions for parents only (those that can not make weekly classes)

**The results of these classes have been extraordinary. All caregivers, whether parents, teachers or special needs assistants noted a significant improvement in each child's communication ability, and a marked decrease in caregiver stress levels!**

As Managing Director, Tara was recently awarded with an Ashoka Fellowship, the highest world-wide honour in social entrepreneurship. Ashoka Fellowship benefits include a three year stipend of €60,000 per annum, access to mentorship from high profile business men and women, free business consultancy with McKinsey Consultants both in Ireland and abroad--all culminating with the goal to make Release best practice world-wide over the next 10 years.

In order for the Fellowship to be awarded, the world-wide originality for the program had to be established and an international roll-out had to be viable.

In addition, Tara has been involved in Social Entrepreneurs Ireland as a Level 2 Awardee (2005), and in September 2007 was nominated and voted in as a member of their Board of Directors. Other Directors include Declan Ryan, CEO, Irelandia Investments, Mary Davis, CEO, Special Olympics, Julian Davis, Director, Fleishman, Hillard, Saunders and James Fitzsimons, Business Development Director, CoxFitzsimons&Wilkes.

#### **1.4 Best Practice**

Our private and public programs have the following consistent findings:

It is possible to assess every student in a school in a timely and efficient manner  
One month from assessment through report (three months maximum)

It is possible to provide consistent speech and language therapy

One hour per week

Caregivers must take part in the program and bring it into daily practice, whether at home or at school.

Daily work significantly improves the child's communication skills

**Moving Forward with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Education**

1. Speech and Language Therapy is not a stand alone programme, and should be part of an integrated approach, to afford continuity in the system.
2. We at Release would be in favour of further integration with State-run Services in order to contribute to each child's IEP – in order to create a holistic programme written specifically for each child.
3. With the successful private programme our success with Ballyowen Meadows, Kilnamanagh ABACAS, St John of Gods, St Declan's Special School and our work with Irish Autism Action, we have proved without a doubt the therapy works in both public and private arenas.
4. The HSE and DOE schools, mainstream and special, no longer needs to be without Speech and Language Therapy because Release is a proven available resource.

**With a Service Level Agreement in place with the HSE and / or the DOE, Release can:**

- help fill the huge vacancy for Speech and Language Therapy in Ireland
- through the capacity of providing assessments and continuous, weekly speech and language therapy.
- through the successful group therapy approach, which enables the child, parent, and school—i.e. teachers and SNAs to learn the skills they need to progress the child's communication.
- through a proven level of recruitment of Speech and Language Therapists from abroad, to increase rather than reallocate the scarce resource.
- close the gap State-run Services are facing on a day-to-day basis with regards to Speech and Language Therapy.
- both in the provision of services as well as recruitment
- help the HSE and DOE provide a better service to its clients, through an integrated approach, ensuring continuity in the system.

### End of Session Parent / Teacher Review Quotes<sup>1</sup>

1. "The session just completed definitely helped\*\*\* with conversation skills—he is making more effort to maintain a conversation now, and we "practice" informally all the time. Many thanks to yourself and the team!"
2. "When my son was diagnosed in May 1999, the first piece of advice I was given was he needed to learn to SHARE and TAKE TURNS. As an only child, we tried our best but did not have the peers at home to really implement it fully. In all the years of education, this was never targeted despite my badgering people to do it. Was I GLAD to find Release Speech and Language Therapy—they gave me the TREASURE I had sought for. Jennifer Wetter and SNA Clodagh showed me how to do it and present written and through the weekly class numerous opportunities to get all the children in the group to share and take turns!"
3. "As \*\*\* has no language at present he needs particular help with Lamh and Jenny included Lamh very comprehensively in the sessions...I found the session svery useful for finding more ways to interact with \*\*\* and to practice my own use of Lamh with him. Jenny interacted wonderfully with both the children and the parents. \*\*\* became more relaxed and interacted better as the sessions progressed."
4. "\*\*\* really enjoyed his group therapy and had great fun. I found there was a great fun element to learning in each session, i.e. through singing, dancing and games. I really enjoyed each session and I though Jennifer was just excellent—so patient and so good with each child. Thank you for coming to ABACAS Kilnamanagh and for giving of your time."
5. "Thanks for all the great sessions this term, Jenny and Michelle. I think \*\*\* is enabling good progress and enjoys the homework set up every week...The classes are very well organised and Jenny has figured out great ways to get around \*\*\*."
6. "At this time I feel \*\*\* is making ongoing consistent progress. He has progressed from using two cards to four cards, he can identify them on request. It is great we can converse with him now using his yes/no cards and this has become more reliable."
7. "I think the group session was great for teaching \*\*\* to take his turn. Although I felt \*\*\* benefited from the group session, I feel he would also benefit from a one to one session."
8. "Very helpful with starting the PECS programme."

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<sup>1</sup> End of Session original documents available upon request for viewing. Copies will not be furnished for data protection.

\*\*\* indicates child's name withheld

## End of Session Analysis, combined private / ABACAS Kilnamanagh

Private Sept - December 2007

Question	lowest				highest
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Assessments</b>					
I found the At-Home Assessment relevant and helpful for the Release Assessment					6
The Release therapist was well prepared for my child's assessment.					6
The Release therapist explained the tests being performed, and worked well with my child.					6
The Release Assessment Report was comprehensive and conclusions offered positive next steps helpful to parents and teachers (where applicable).					5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Classes</b>					
Did Release Classes promote new skills acquisition?				3	8
Did the therapist use communication and supports systems appropriate to your child's cognitive abilities?				2	9
Did the therapist spend time with you and your child for individual instruction?			2	1	8
Did the therapist implement plans designed to accomplish goals discussed at the beginning of each class?			1	1	7
The homework was well-explained and backed by useful handouts.				2	10
I was able to find the time to work with my child for ½ hour per day.			3	5	3
I found the therapist receptive to my ideas and made changes to classes accordingly.			2	2	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Overall Session</b>					
I feel the course is well valued.				3	8
I found this session to be extremely helpful to my child and to me.				2	9
I will attend another Session at Release				2	9
I will refer friend(s) to the programme				2	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>35</b>