

# Investing in our children's health & development

A holistic approach to treating children's learning disorders may offer superior results, as osteopath and founder of the Sunflower Trust, Mark Mathews explains.

About one in five children in the UK is reported to suffer from a learning difficulty of some kind. These vary from dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit, hyperactivity, through the autistic spectrum, to name just of the few of the labels used. It must be noted that these terms are not in themselves definitive diagnoses, like having a disease caused by a particular bacteria or virus, but are symptoms of a nervous system that is not fully functioning.

There are no clear lines dividing these different classifications; each child will have his or her own unique mix of some or many of all these symptoms. They are not conditions that only affect a child's ability to learn or behave normally, but are very often associated with a whole host of other health related issues; in particular, auto-immune problems such as asthma, eczema, glue ear, digestive problems and allergies. Children suffering from these problems often have a history of difficult birth, developmental delay and retained primitive reflex responses.

Despite the vast investment that has gone into the educational system, special needs and medical assessment and treatments, the number of children suffering from these conditions is increasing year on year – and this is not just the result of better screening. There is usually no single reason for any of these conditions; every child is different, as are their environments, parents and personal histories. Evidence suggests that a combination of stresses – including the health status of the parents at the time of conception, improper diets, lack of exercise, inappropriate learning experiences and unhealthy lifestyles – are a major contributing

factor.

Let's go back to first principles: human beings have not fundamentally changed in thousands of years. Once you have food, warmth, shelter, health, a loving and secure environment, nature has its own inbuilt tendency to keep us healthy. After that, the way you feel and behave is mostly dependent on what is going on inside your own head. We still have the same range of feelings, needs and desires that human beings have always had. There are only certain ways in which we can live together successfully, and this means that we first need to acknowledge these facts and find ways of working with them.

Health is the natural state of being. It is the result of having a harmonious relationship between all aspects of what it is to be human. Healing is something that nature is designed to do. We cannot change our genes, we can only express a tiny bit of their potential at any one time. That expression is constantly modified by the environment in which we live; there are physical, mental, emotional and cultural aspects to this. Happily, most of these are factors over which we do have quite a lot of personal control.

The greatest investment that you can make to secure your own future, and that of your children, is to stay healthy. Health is by far the best defence against disease. To stay healthy, the body has the same requirements that it always had. Some contemporary developments in our modern industrial society, which are designed to make life more convenient, do not necessarily provide the best conditions in our patterns of work and leisure to provide these essentials:

- Pure clean water
- A balanced mix of nutritious natural foods
- Adequate good quality sleep
- Regular exercise
- Quiet time
- Good relationships based on mutual respect, honesty, fairness, sensitivity, care, communication, understanding, co-operation, responsibility, discipline, love of family, friends and fellow beings
- Avoidance of toxic chemicals, thoughts, feelings and beliefs
- Sustainable ways of living within the bounds of the rich array of natural resources provided by this amazing planetary environment from which we evolved, of which we are a part, and which forms the life support system for everything on which our future on earth depends.

These are the real currencies that have sustained all viable civilisations, in one form or another, throughout history. They are the

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factors that have been shown to facilitate long, happy, productive, healthy, fulfilling lives. They do not only apply to children, they apply to us all.

People may not have changed in thousands of years, but our environment has changed substantially; our food, activities, lifestyles, social malaise, communication systems and economic activities have changed beyond recognition within a couple of generations. The resulting accumulative stress from physical, mental, emotional and biochemical factors is affecting many more people in ways that cause functional neurological confusion to many systems of the body. There is no one solution to these problems, as all the systems are interconnected by many communication pathways on many different levels. Like the intricate workings of a watch, this sophisticated, dynamic living matrix is constantly regulating billions of necessary life-supporting activities, at an atomic level, a sub-cellular level, an intercellular level, between tissues, glands, organs, the internal and external environment of all of these systems, and the human being, within the greater sustaining ecosystem of the world and the greater universe.

Each person will have inherited their own

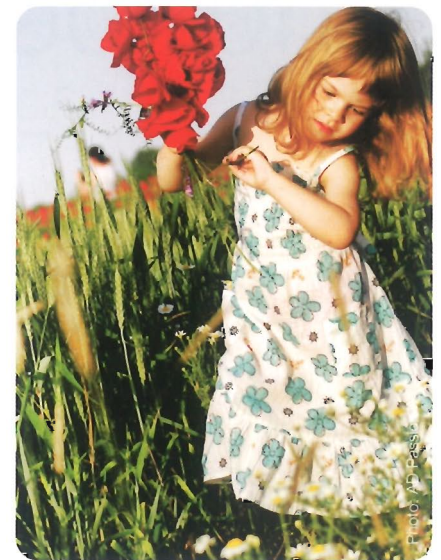
unique set of genetic propensities. Even for identical twins, the environment and developmental history will differ from one person to the next. The resulting imbalances may display themselves in many different ways that vary from person to person. For example, allergies, sensitivities, hyperactivity, attention deficit, dyslexia, dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorders are all symptoms of functional imbalance.

Within the sphere of natural medicine there is a whole tool-kit comprising non-invasive, gentle approaches for assessing and treating many of these imbalances, which are important contributory factors to the issues of learning difficulties. The knowledge is contained within different disciplines of natural medicine including Clinical Medicine, Osteopathy, Chiropractic, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Acupuncture, Nutritional evaluation and prescriptions based on an understanding of biochemistry, Herbal medicine, Psychology, Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), Visualisation and Life Management systems. Each of these

disciplines has its own theories and approaches to healing, and cater for one aspect or another of the human condition. But none of them can be regarded as a panacea. There is usually no need to shunt patients from one professional to another, each of them just dealing with one aspect or another of a multifaceted problem as if they each existed on their own. The Sunflower Programme uses the knowledge from many of these separate disciplines in a uniquely integrated way that is determined by the individual responses of each patient to hundreds of individual tests.

A Sunflower Practitioner is trained to assess and treat each child using a unique programme of assessments and treatments, using knowledge from all of these disciplines, in an individualised way that is determined by the patients themselves. This programme has been developed by, and is exclusive to, The Sunflower Trust.

The Sunflower Programme investigates, in measured ways, hundreds of factors that contribute to the difficulties that an increasing number of children experience with regards to learning, health, confidence, behaviour and self-esteem. With a contact time between the practitioner and the patient which is normally not more than five to six



hours, spread over a period of 6-10 months, a practitioner investigates and addresses many elements that may be significantly involved in holding children back from normal developmental benchmarks. Applied Kinesiology (AK) and Manual Muscle Testing (MMT) are used in conjunction with more conventional methods to evaluate the functional neurology as it affects the structure, feelings, behaviours, dietary and nutritional factors. The mental and emotional aspects of each child, as they are mediated via the nervous system are, in our view, inseparable. Appropriate treatments are applied at each stage of the programme in ways that are clearly monitored.

The purpose of The Sunflower Trust is to help children with learning difficulties to become balanced, integrated and well. Children who are balanced, integrated and well feel better, perform better, experience more confidence and self-esteem, and get on much better with others. In this way, they are able to make much better use of the help and assistance they receive from their parents, teachers and other helpers.

Our mission is to enable many more children to experience much more of their own potential through the Sunflower Programme. Our aim is to increase the number of children who can benefit from the Sunflower Programme.

By Mark Mathews BSc. Hon DO, Proprietor of the Rêve Pavilion Natural Health Clinic and Director of The Sunflower Trust for children with learning difficulties

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