

# Journey to Oslo

The European Academy of Childhood Disability meets in Oslo on October 2–4th.

Ronnie Mac Keith, founder of the Mac Keith Press and its major publications, also started what is now known as the Mac Keith Meetings. He ran two types of meetings, 'small' and 'large'. A small meeting for him had 25 people at it and a large meeting had no more than 80 people attending. This wasn't due to any insularity, indeed people from all over the world would appear at the meetings, but he felt that communication that led to profitable ideas could only be achieved with relatively small numbers of people, and new ideas were desperately needed in the field of childhood disability then as now. It was new ideas he was looking for. The Journal itself was already beginning to develop a reputation, and indeed a circulation, and through this medium it was able to communicate with more people. When at the invitation of our colleagues in the American Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine we became their official journal in 1963, shortly after I had joined the staff of the Press, Ronnie embraced this larger organization whose meetings were already attracting 300 or 400 people. Occasionally he had worries. He attended a large meeting in Japan of 2000 people but wondered whether the monies spent on travelling to and attending such meetings would not have been better spent by being given to families with children with disabilities. He was reluctant too to encourage the development of an international child neurology association, thinking it better for good national ones to be formed and affiliate, hoping to keep an intimacy about meetings.

Well that may be partially why in Europe the Academy of Childhood Disability was not formed until nearly ten years after Ronnie's death and only now celebrates its 15th birthday. Formed in the UK, its membership has grown particularly rapidly in the smaller European countries, probably reflecting the need and desire to communicate with a wider group of colleagues to discuss the difficulties of the work. The European Academy has grown steadily year by year and its meetings are attended by more and more people from many different countries. The English language, adopted by the Academy as its official language as ever, provides a gateway and a barrier to our relationships, a topic on which I could expand, but simply to note that the Academy has agreed that when we meet in a country where many professionals are more 'at home' in their own language, dual translation must be provided.

The Academy has largely developed in the European Union countries but there have been vigorous rappings on the door from countries formerly within the sphere of influence of the old Soviet Union. The problem for would-be members from these countries is that for many of them salaries are extremely low. Currently, for example, to my own knowledge in Russia,

Ukraine, and Romania salaries are around 50 dollars or 50 euros a month for doctors. This makes it extremely difficult for people to find funding for travel and registration to meetings often held in major cities where the costs of hotels and so on are often quite high. But things are bound to change as 10 or more countries in the next two or three years join the European Union. When this happens movement across borders and professional interchange will become much easier but this poses considerable problems, particularly within the health field. Training patterns and, for example, the development of evidence based medicine are very different in Eastern Europe from that practised in North America and the West. Learning is a two way process but quite a lot of basic information is not readily available in Eastern Europe due to the shortage of books, journals, and an understanding of how to use electronic access to solve some of these problems. Finance is clearly a problem but nevertheless NGOs such as the European Academy of Childhood Disability must be to the fore in meeting the postgraduate educational needs of all those who work in the health field with children with disabilities. Hence, as ever there are scholarships for our Oslo meeting this year.

The broad programme which our colleagues in Oslo have developed will provide members of the Academy from Eastern and Western Europe (and many other parts of the world) with a rich diet. There are some topics which will particularly be controversial. The role of the family and the 'participation' of families and young people with disabilities themselves in the process of understanding the special needs of people with disabilities are not well understood, in many countries professionals still dominate decision making about services, and it is important to recognize our need for research into these areas. I look forward to hearing the papers, for example, on 'Living with disability: from childhood to adult life', 'Sexuality for all' and the final talk on 'The health worker, a barrier to participation'.

These talks will be delivered to a far larger audience than those Ronnie Mac Keith envisaged but I believe that our wider world with its easy communication means that we can establish and develop relationships with each other arising out of the meetings where a large number of people are gathered. Such meetings are proving, by the increasing numbers attending, that they are a successful way of achieving the EACD's aims of teaching and educating about disability.

All this and more in Oslo where you could be very shortly after you have read this editorial.

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