Champagne glasses clinking, countdown watches, party nibbles, party poppers, a cozy blanket and 2020 was bidden goodbye. The shift to 2021 was certainly a lot different from how we usually celebrate it, for many of us, or one hopes so! Alongside the many health advices, announcements and updates, life goes on. We still need to wake up, work and face all the daily challenges. With the new year comes along the inner urge to change, to grasp that opportunity once again to try and do things better. Many are those who resolve to the popular new year resolutions, with a few getting lost in the way because they were too unrealistically achievable. Yet, we still feel the need to change. Change can be as little as a warm smile to the grumpy neighbour, following more the traffic signs in the morning rush hours or even a nice word to the least favourite colleague. Whatever the change, it is a chance to evolve to the better and one should never miss the train! Regrets are harder to deal with than failures. Failures are a learning experience. Change occurs gradually, in small steps. So, while change can be scary, one must look at it with more courage and stamina. Let that daunting feeling be changed to adrenaline excitement, that uncertainty sensation shaped to thrilled curiosity. Let’s not be afraid of previous falls. Let’s be vivid and start this new year with resilience.

A webinar for SLPs, other professionals and carers.

The importance of parental involvement in Speech & Language Therapy

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Thursday, 18/02/2021
18.00 - 19.00
Members: Free
Non-members: €2.00
More info or bookings on
info@aslpmalta.org
Despite all that is happening around us, time keeps rolling by and here we are nearly one month down in 2021. It is quite a tradition that people set new year resolutions at the beginning of each year. Some are realistically set and are somehow achievable, others aim higher and may find it difficult to keep up with them in the long run. As Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) we may also go through this exercise, trying to set new goals to provide a better service or to invest in new materials, or to improve our time managements skills. Yet, somehow, we feel that we are going round in circles. What if we try and shift our focus? Would it help us to set more achievable goals? This article by Shayne Kimble, dating back to 2016 still offers very relevant points today, making us ponder on what our targets should be.

A message of hope to the struggling speech-language pathologist

Being a Speech Language Pathologist does not only entails that you study, keep yourself updated with current research, deal with clients, carry out administration work. Each one of us out there carries a luggage full of hopes, dreams and fears. In this uplifting article, Lisa A. Murray shares with us a message of hope to that struggling SLP, who can be easily my close colleague or even myself!
I feel what you gave me is beyond measure. I am still in tears as I write.

For some reason, your compassion and knowledge of stammering has released my self-forgiveness for the child in me. I understand now why as a child, I was so arrogant and self-determined. And why I felt so misunderstood all my life, even to this day. It is because I truly was misunderstood by almost everyone including myself.

(From an adult client’s letter)
Several attempts have been made to make stuttering therapy easier for the school clinician and some of us have found success. If you are one of the latter you are truly blessed because many others have found only failure and frustration. I have also experienced frustration, failure and success in fluency therapy.

I have been practising as a speech language pathologist since 1981. My highest ambition in my profession has always been to 'make a difference'. Shapiro (2011) notes that 'lightning does not strike twice' however 'magic in fluency intervention strikes at least three times'.

Magic also struck me three times during my clinical practice. The first time magic struck, just as in David Shapiro’s case, was when I stopped focusing on myself as a clinician and shifted my attention on my clients. This made sessions more rewarding and satisfying.

Magic strikes the second time when clients start experiencing the freedom to use fluent speech. I remember clearly the spark in their eyes as they expressed themselves fluently.

The third time magic struck was when I received a letter of thanks from a sixteen-year-old client who stuttered. She was given a copy of ‘A Way through the Forest: One Boy’s Story with a Happy Ending’, by D.A. Shapiro (2011) and was inspired to reflect on her feelings. She motivated me to continue my studies and specialize on fluency. Her letter was another breakthrough in my educational journey:

Dr. JOSEPH G. AGIUS, M.Sc. (Dublin), Ed.D. (Sheffield), is a Registered European Fluency Specialist and Speech Language Pathologist with special interest in fluency disorders and humour research. He holds a Master of Science degree in Clinical Speech and Language Studies from Trinity College, University of Dublin and a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Sheffield. As partner expert nominated by the University of Malta, Dr. Agius collaborates with experts from thirteen European Universities on the development and delivery of the ‘European Clinical Specialization Course in Fluency Disorders’ (ECSF). He is Executive Speech and Language Practitioner at the Speech Language Department, Ministry of Health, Government of Malta. Dr. Agius is Editorial Consultant for the Journal of Fluency Disorders and reviewer for the International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders. Visiting senior lecturer at the University of Malta he lectures on ‘Fluency Disorders’, ‘Language and Psychiatry’, ‘Public Speaking’ and ‘Legal and Ethical Issues’. He is Director of Practice Committee of the International Fluency Association (IFA), steering Committee Member of ECSF and member on the Fluency Committee of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP). He is author of the iOS application ‘Fluency SIS’ - Smart Intervention Strategy for school age children who stutter.
I decided to increase my caseload to include more clients who stutter. Working with school-age children who stutter continued to be the most satisfying aspect of my profession. I was moved when a child’s mum told me that when her boy who stutters was asked what he would like to become when he grows up, his response was ‘I want to be like Joseph’. He added that ‘Joseph understands how I feel’.

In 1995 I applied to participate in a workshop for fluency specialists at Northwestern University, Illinois. The workshop was being run by Professor Hugo Gregory who is an authority in this field. I had been using his textbooks and references for years and now it was my chance to experience observing him in the clinical situation.

As I specialised on fluency, I gathered more confidence in working with children and adults who stutter. Together with colleagues from 8 different European universities I became involved in developing and lecturing on the European Clinical Specialisation Course of Fluency Disorders. To date we have trained over 150 fluency specialists around the world. I was also involved in the founding of the European Fluency Specialist register.

My research led me to develop the iOS application ‘Fluency SIS’ - Smart Intervention Strategy for school age children who stutter. It is downloaded in over 28 countries and won the European Best Content for Kids in 2013. It has been an honor to be invited keynote speaker in over fifteen countries to share my views on the use of humour and creativity in fluency therapy.

For the past several years I have used my clinical skills and instincts to develop individualised treatments. I am delighted at the opportunity both the Speech Language Centre, Primary Care and the University of Malta presented to me. They gave me a chance to share my thinking and my findings on the attitudes and feelings of school-age children who stutter and also to work with children and adults who stutter. I am convinced of the impact we have on people who stutter. We all have a moral obligation to help them live their dreams and improve their quality of life. For that person who stutters who needs us, we can make a difference. And because we can, we must. And that person will say:

‘Thank you for changing my life, I am proud of who I am’.

(From a teenage client’s letter following therapy)
Name: Jessica Mifsud  
Status: in a relationship  
Children: No but we’re planning on getting some furry babies soon

Q. When did you graduate and how long have you been involved in ASLP?  
A. I graduated in 2015 and have been involved in ASLP since 2016

Q. What is/were your roles in ASLP?  
A. For 2 years I was a committee member offering help whenever and wherever possible. Since October 2018 I have taken on the role as Secretary - and have been the one emailing you all at 5 in the morning

Q. What is ASLP for you or what drew you to ASLP?  
A. Being involved in ASLP I am continuously learning new skills, about new topics and keeping up to date with current issues (which otherwise I would not have a clue about). The committee is made up of a great team of lovely ladies who are always ready to lend a hand or give sound advice - so unless I’m stressing about missing an important point for the minutes I’m taking, I really do enjoy everyone’s company and we have a good time whilst planning and providing opportunities for our fellow colleagues

Q. What is your area of special interest in SLP?  
A. I quite like Aphasia and Literacy. I like the management aspect too - currently keeping myself busy with a health management Masters

Q. What do you like most about being a SLP?  
A. This may sound cheesy but I like to know I’m making a difference in someone’s life

Q. What are your non-SLP skills?  
A. I am a qualified massage therapist. I am great at making lists and juggling 50 things a day

Q. What are your hobbies?  
A. Running - it keeps me happy, sane and healthy. Reading - I love entering a different world with each book. Then also the regulars: eating cheese and petting dogs
Visual aids can support many areas of a child’s language and communication development. They can enhance language comprehension and may also help the child communicate his/her wants and needs effectively. When incorporated within daily routines, visual aids provide clarity and predictability, thus reducing any feelings of anxiety. Some examples of visual aids can be choice boards, now and next and behaviour cue cards.