

Pioneering treatment

PARENTS of young people with developmental disorders have seen improvements in their children's condition thanks to a pioneering treatment.

The improvement comes after Manx Mencap paid £20,000 for 10 young people to be treated by London specialists in July.

The charity has also pledged that any extra money raised by the charity over the next two years will be donated to treat more islanders.

Specialists from The Sound Learning Centre spent 10 days in the island treating young people, aged between five and 25, with a range of conditions including Asperger's syndrome, autism, dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Neurodevelopmentalist Pauline Allen said that improvements had been seen throughout the group.

'Among the changes reported were better sociability, relaxation, better communication and laughter replacing sadness,' she said.

'Faster processing was observed in many members of the group.

'While we do not expect to see changes during the treatment period, we frequently do, and changes can continue to take place for many months following completion of the programme.'

Glenda Quirk took her 15-year-old son Dean, who has ADHD and autistic spectrum disorder, for treatment.

'Dean is highly medicated for his ADHD and we are hopeful that, in time, we will be able to reduce this medication as a direct result,' she said.

Mrs Quirk, of Tynwald Road, Peel, said Dean had responded well to the treatment, with changes including big improvements in how he expresses himself, both emotionally and socially, and in being more aware of other people's feelings.

She has noticed that he is learning to cope and stay calm without reacting, when before he would get angry and frustrated.

His stammer has also improved and his speech is much clearer now.

Peter Taylor, 14, had sound and light therapy to see if it would help his Asperger's syndrome.

'His mum Michelle said the sound therapy had been a great success' and meant he was much less sensitive to noise.

'He used to put his fingers in his ears quite a lot as noise like dogs barking, babies crying and lots of people talking would really cause him distress,' she said.

'If we visited my mother, who has three dogs

who all bark quite a bit, I never used to be able to get him into the house to visit as he would start flapping his hands and dancing about in panic. Within a day or two of the treatment starting, this behaviour all stopped and now he loves the dogs!

'Going to social places, where there were a lot of people making lots of noise would be difficult as he couldn't stand being somewhere so noisy for long.'

'I took him to a fundraising pig-racing night, where the children and adults were shouting and screaming at their pigs to win during the races, and Peter was quite happy to be in this environment. In fact he joined in and was very comfortable being amongst the crowd.'

She said that following the light therapy, Peter has started to recognise words around him, such as on cereal boxes and signs on the wall and was actively trying to read them now.

Sally Mason, of Barrule Park, Ramsey, said both her and her husband Simon had seen improvements in their autistic son Ben since the treatment.

She said eight-year-old Ben, who goes to Auldyn School's specialist teaching and resource centre, was calmer, sleeping better and able to do more activities in the community.

'We have noticed a few improvements which all add up to make his life and our family life a whole lot easier,' she said.

'A big thing for us is his sleeping has improved - prior to the treatment we could easily expect one or two nights per week where Ben might only sleep for a couple of hours, then he would be up squealing in a very high pitch (he does this when he is excited, happy or sometimes over stimulated). As you can imagine, it is very uncomfortable to listen to and we certainly would not get any sleep on those nights.'

'We have only counted two bad nights since he finished the treatment on July 16.'

She added: 'During the summer holidays it has always been difficult taking Ben places where there are lots of people, as again he can get over-stimulated and very distressed and not behave appropriately.'

'This summer we have been able to take him to Ramsey swimming pool during normal session times, even when it is busy, and today he stayed in for 90 minutes, then we went into the cafe for 15 minutes and he was fantastic and obviously really enjoyed himself.'

'That, perhaps, doesn't sound like much but to be able to take him swimming with his brother and sister is the sort of family thing my husband and I have always hoped for.'

'We hope these improvements continue for some time and we will continue to monitor them over the next few months.'



SUCCESS STORY: Glenda Quirk and her son Dean, 15, who has responded well to the treatment

The centre aims to get behind problems such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and find the sensory problems — such as hearing or vision — which are the underlying causes.

Following individual assessments, the young people were given sound and light therapy to target the auditory and visual systems.

'They received auditory integration training, which involves listening to music that has been specially modified and filtered through an electronic device, the Audiokinetron.'

Ms Allen said: 'This process is designed to retrain the ears to hear in a more balanced manner, thus improving phonological awareness and listening skills.'

'It has been our experience that, following AIT, children and adults become more responsive and eager to learn with a corresponding improvement in both academic and social performance.'

'Improvements are also frequently noted in other areas, such as general behaviour, emotional stability, balance and co-ordination.'

Meanwhile, lightwave stimulation uses low-intensity, pulsed, coloured light to rebalance the sympathetic and parasympathetic sides of the autonomic nervous system.

Ms Allen said it had benefits for those with physical problems such as fatigue and tension, eating disorders, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and depression.

The parents found out about the centre after Ms Allen visited the island in February to talk about its work.

They urged the Government to pay for the treatment.

Education Minister Anne Craine MHK and political member of the department Dudley Butt MLC were invited to Mencap's headquarters at Centre 21, Homefield Road, Douglas to see how the treatment worked.

Mr Butt said: 'The treatments being offered by The Sound Learning Centre were very interesting and parents seemed pleased with the progress their children had made over a short period.'

'The practitioners stressed the need for early and better diagnosis of young children, particularly in terms of their hearing capacity.'

'Health and Social Services are both looking at the implications of what was demonstrated and to ascertain if there is proven potential to help the treatment of young people with profound autism and related problems.'

For more information about The Sound Learning Centre visit www.thesoundlearningcentre.co.uk or contact 020 8882 1060.



WORKING TOGETHER: Phil Stickland (left) and Pauline Allen (right) from The Sound Learning Centre, Mencap chairman Edna Ainge (front) and vice-chairman Di O'Brien and Dudley Butt MLC



PIONEERING TREATMENT: Peter Taylor, 14, and Michael Murphy, 24, receiving sound therapy