

This edition of Educare will be devoted to the issue of educational support services. In the survey that was published in the last edition, one of the requests was for information on this issue, especially for help in knowing whether children are achieving up to levels that are appropriate for their age. This kind of support is essential for those involved in home education where the parents are the main teachers, but is also valuable to those using local schools in many countries and even to some of our children in specialist MK schools.

SHARE

SHARE was founded several years ago to support expatriate Christian families working in Europe, Russia and Central Asia. Their purpose is to provide information, advice, materials and support so that those families can meet the educational needs of their children. The main headquarters is in Budapest, but they also have an office in Prague and support workers or associate staff in a number of other countries. The need for an organisation like SHARE arose out of the very rapid changes following the end of Communism in Eastern Europe and the subsequent new openness to expatriate Christian workers there. Many new workers moved in, but the support infrastructure of MK schools was unavailable. Families were faced with limited choices in many cases because of the prohibitive costs of many existing international schools which were normally only available in the major cities anyway. This left the local schools, home education or some sort of correspondence system. The only other alternative was (and still is in some cases) to board the children, usually in a school hundreds or even thousands of miles away in another country. This option is generally only feasible for older children because of this. Given these options many parents took on the role of home teachers and many others chose the local schools.

One of the main issues for parents using both of these options was knowing how well their children compared with normal expectations for their age in their passport countries. What tests could be used to show whether their children were achieving what they should be achieving?

Another big issue for home educators is how to choose the right programme or mixture of programmes. There are a wide variety of them available and all of them seem to advertise themselves as **the** correct solution to children's educational needs, but which ones are the best and which of them will suit an individual child best?

Enter SHARE to meet these needs.

They provide help on the following

- Educational planning – this includes pre-field seminars on the subject, plus workshops and personal consultations on location
- Conferences and seminars across the whole region and in pre-field preparation
- Resource assistance. They have resource libraries with books, computer software, sample programmes from the various home education suppliers, teacher resources and AV samples.
- On-line education advice
- Achievement testing and assessment
- Learning needs assessment
- Planning for university and college
- Re-entry preparation
- Learning in a second language
- Assistance to agencies in understanding the role that they can play in supporting families using home education or local schools.

In addition they publish the book "Fitted Pieces", only available by mail order from SHARE and well worth the money as the themes in there are comprehensively covered in a well-balanced way.

SHARE has worked for some years across this region now and so is aware of the challenges and possibilities facing families educating children in Europe, Russia & Central Asia. They also know what options and resources are realistically available to families in different locations in their place of work.

SHARE staff also like to stay in touch with families and to follow up on any advice given. They have staff allocated to different countries who make regular visits there, so that this ongoing and regular consultation can be given.

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Website www.share-ed-services.org

AERC

AERC (Asia Education Resource Consortium) was set up in 2001 modelled on the experiences of SHARE to serve families in East and South-East Asia. This huge area is home to over one-third of the world's population and there are substantial numbers of expatriate Christian families working there. Many of these families are working in areas well away from the main cities and so have limited educational options for their children. There are also others working in cities where the only international schools charge exorbitant fees. As for families in the SHARE area, this means that many will opt to use local schools or schooling at home in some form, maybe with correspondence or a tutor, but more often than not with the parents as teachers. AERC has as its goal the following "We will partner with agencies and schools in providing services for Christian worker families in Asia to meet the educational needs of their children through a network of information, materials, counsel and support."

The range of help offered is very similar to that of SHARE i.e.

- Assist parents in evaluating options and in developing educational plans for their children
- They address home schooling issues and curriculum concerns, including how to choose, use and adapt any chosen programmes
- Help in choosing and using national schools successfully and addressing ESL/ second language issues
- Help in understanding the needs of children from families of all nationalities
- Help to understand the children's third-culture kid and transition experiences
- Help in understanding different learning styles and development
- Assist in using technology effectively in their children's education
- Conferences throughout the region and visits to other major centres without an office (Recent conferences held in Thailand and Korea with others due in Indonesia and Hong Kong)
- Testing and assessment services to monitor the child's progress and to identify learning disabilities or exceptional abilities. Some of the AERC staff are special educational needs workers; those who are general advisers will put families in touch with experts in the field of need.
- Individual visits to member* families for consultation and progress checks, plus regular follow up through phone and e-mail contact. (* family membership currently at US\$60/year)
- Access to resource centres stocked with teaching guides, resource materials (including books, AV and software), teaching programme materials and resource catalogues.
- A regular quarterly newsletter called "AERC Connection"

AERC is organised differently to SHARE in that they have resource centres spread across their area, each staffed by an AERC worker. This means that families should have relatively good access to one of the offices.

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Philippines homeskol@faith.edu.ph

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Thailand jan818@loxinfo.co.th

Also with AERC (no resource centre) in Singapore homeschool@psmail.net

North Star

On-line schooling has arrived and will probably grow in influence over the coming years. There are now quite a few Christian organisations offering on-line schooling, but the best known one at the moment is North Star. North Star offers 3 choices of system from Canada, the UK and the USA. Why include a section though in this edition about on-line schooling? The North Star system is flexible enough to be used in parts rather than just as the whole system. In this way it can be used alongside another educational system to complement and complete it. For instance

- It could be used to add necessary academic rigour and credibility to an existing home education system by making use of the option to gain some kind of externally regulated qualification.
- It could be used alongside a national school in order to gain a recognised standard of English to allow university or college entrance on re-entry. (This sort of system is generally recognised to be essential for non-Anglophone children in English language international schools, although the use of more traditional correspondence courses is still the main method of achieving this) The course not only provides the necessary paper qualification but also provides the opportunity to study to the much higher academic level of English that will be required for higher education.
- It can also be used alongside specialist MK schools that do not teach up to a high enough standard for university entrance in Europe and many Commonwealth countries such as Australia, Singapore & Hong Kong. To do this, students can study up to A level from the UK or AP from the USA. In the March 2004 edition of Educare the various A level and AP/SATII requirements of the different countries are highlighted. Typically universities in these countries require between 4 and 6 AP and/or SATII qualifications in different combinations with good grades as basic entrance requirements. Some countries such as Germany still generalise in the early years of university and so would not specify all of the subjects (although unofficially there can be some real difficulties in Germany when applying to university, despite the official policies of the Bundesländer), whereas others such as the UK & Commonwealth countries specify the required AP/SATII or A level subjects as students apply for a specific subject.
- Where students are in these schools, but come from countries where they will already achieve the minimum academic requirement for university entrance these A level or AP qualifications can offer real advantages in terms of saved time and fees at university. This is because many universities in these countries offer transfer credit and even sophomore standing if students apply with good grades in them. Other universities, such as those in Malaysia, offer generous scholarships to students with good A level/AP grades. Additionally, many academic students are not adequately stretched by existing programmes and are “treading water” in terms of academic development. Extra study at this level would provide the necessary academic rigour for these high-achievers who make up a sizeable proportion of most typical international school student bodies.

All of the courses are accredited; in the USA by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, in Canada by the Province of Alberta Ministry of Education and in the UK by the major examination boards providing GCSEs and A levels.

How would it work?

Apply to North Star to ask about the range of courses that they offer.

If the student is enrolled in a MK school, it would be good to work out a special timetable arrangement with them and also agree on the necessary study time required throughout the year (or 2 years in the case of an A level) and even more so on revision time and study leave around the time of the exams. Some schools have not understood this need in the past because of their preoccupation with attendance at other lessons as being essential in order to gain the credit for that class. This needs to be worked out in advance as the need to revise for these demanding exams is critical to success. In the case of a national school, they may be less accommodating, but if parents don't even ask then they will never know if the school may be willing to make some changes on behalf of the student. Even if they won't make any allowances, it is still better that they understand what the student is facing and the reasons for the course of study. Here is one advantage of home education – you will only have yourselves as parents to negotiate with!

North Star is willing for students to buy into the system on anything from an individual qualification to the full academic programme basis. This means that if necessary a student could study towards just one AP in English to provide the necessary academic English alongside a national system such as the Baccalauréat or to provide an externally regulated exam to bolster a home education programme.

Students could also study for several APs if they are looking to enter university and their MK school only teaches up to diploma level along with SATI. Alternatively they could enrol on one or more A level courses and gain the necessary qualifications that way. The A level is recognised just about everywhere in the world as a university entrance qualification with grades at the appropriate level. If a student is enrolled on A level courses then it is important to understand that it is a **2 YEAR** programme that should not be interrupted and it is equally important that the MK school should understand this too. Obviously, the more extensive the AP or A level programme adopted, the more accommodating the school will need to be. On the other hand, this could also provide a real service to schools who would like to have an academic programme of this type in the final two years, but who don't have the staff or the student numbers to justify it.

A levels and APs are demanding courses and study for the A level exams from Easter time to June leaves little time for leisure. It is essential that the students have the necessary ability to cope with this level of study and that they fully understand the work load necessary and the type of exam that they will face. Weak preparation will produce disappointing results.

This has to be an option for the future. One of the main problems for smaller US system schools is that the diploma and SATI is the ceiling for the moment. North Star offer an option that addresses one of the main issues on internationalisation – that of the mismatch in qualifications offered in small US system schools and the requirements for university entrance across Europe and Commonwealth countries. If the existing systems can be strengthened by the use of North Star in this way, then this problem can be addressed realistically.

Contact details

Websites & e-mail Canada – www.northstaracademycanada.org cdinfo@northstar-academy.org
UK - www.northstaruk.org info@northstaruk.org
USA - www.northstar-academy.org info@northstar-academy.org

Telephone Canada +1 403 335 9587

USA +1 406 257 8680 (Both the USA and Canada also have freephone/toll free numbers from within the country)

North Star USA also has a support service for home schooling called North Star Home School and Independent Study. Information about that is freely available from the website.

Special Needs Children?

I trained as a teacher in the early 1980s and received almost no input on children with special needs or learning difficulties during my course. Given the sheer numbers of these children in our classes, this was a very serious omission in my teacher training course. I spent a fair amount of time in one of my teaching practice schools with a class of slow learners, some of whom were on the borderline between ordinary and special schools and had one seminar about gifted children. Other than that I was unprepared for the dyslexic, dyscalculic, speech impaired, ADD/ADHD and Aspergers' Syndrome children that I was to teach. When I had to teach my first dyslexic child it was the school's laboratory technician who told me what the problem was as I had never seen dyslexia before. Thankfully, recognition and understanding of learning problems has grown over the past 20 years and most new teachers now will be better informed than I was. There has been a shift in educational policy in some countries like the UK too to include more children than before in mainstream schools, meaning that some children with major disabilities such as Downs Syndrome, profound deafness or blindness will spend at least some of their time in classrooms with the rest of their peer group. They will usually have special attachment workers to assist them (and the classroom teacher), although sometimes that worker may only be part-time depending on the severity of the disability. This means that many teachers will also have classroom experience of teaching children with disabilities.

The general estimates are that about 1 in 25 children has dyslexia severely enough to disrupt their literacy skills development, about 1 in 20 have speech problems and between 1 in a 100 and 1 in 20 have ADD or ADHD badly enough to impair learning (depending on definitions and thresholds of acceptance). Once the slow learners, dyscalculics and Aspergers children are

added in, this means that most of our classes in MK schools and many of our home educating families will have one or more special needs children.

Is it possible to properly cater for these children in missionary families and MK schools, or should parents accept reality and bring the children back “home” to the passport country where they can receive the expert help and education that can be provided there?

Here are a few points that may help if you are facing this issue.

1. Face up to the problem, don't deny it or ignore it. Recognition that there is a disability to be overcome is the first step in the right direction to help your children overcome it or learn how best to manage it. There is no shame in having a child with a learning difficulty of some description. Learning difficulties are far more common than many people realise, so a family with such a child is not alone, BUT even if learning disabilities were much rarer there would still not be any reason for shame. These disabilities are not the “fault” of the parents or of the children, whatever any ill-informed observers and critics may say or imply by attitudes. In most cases they are the result of the genetic make up of the child and that can't be changed. What can be changed is the way that we manage the condition and teach the children.
2. If you are concerned that your child may have a learning difficulty, consult with others and get some second and third opinions. Children learn at different rates; it may be that your child is just taking a bit longer to learn a particular skill, but that after that their progress will even out. This is where services like SHARE & AERC can be very useful. Their assessment programmes would indicate whether there is any cause for concern. If you are outside of their areas, the MK or international schools will normally be glad to help out if you are home schooling and will be indicating their own concerns to you if your children are enrolled there.
3. Get expert help as soon as you realise there is a problem. Profound disabilities are obvious from the start, but many of the learning problems such as dyslexia only become apparent after some time learning to read and write. There may be some early indicators of Aspergers Syndrome, but it often takes several years before it is fully recognised. What usually happens is that parents (and teachers if the child is in school) become increasingly aware that something is not quite right, but can't pin down what it is until that expert help is given. In many “home” countries there are networks of people willing to help in this area, and often state education and health authorities will advise. Make sure that you contact all of the relevant people in good time; don't just arrive back in the passport country and expect to get help and advice quickly as state educational support services are often overstretched and the process moves slowly because of this. In most cases, it will be you as a family that needs to travel for help, as there are very few travelling educational psychologists and special needs experts.
4. It may be that you have children that have already been assessed and are following some sort of modified curriculum to meet their needs. This could be equally true if you are setting out as a family for the first time or after a period of extended home leave. If this is the case, be totally open with the receiving school about the needs of the child and the extra demands that it will place on the staff there. No school will appreciate finding out that a child's learning difficulty is much more profound than they were first led to believe. If you plan to teach the child at home, be realistic about the demands that this will place on you all. Home schooling a child with special needs is not impossible, but is demanding.
5. Once any expert advice is given, be ready to carry it out and follow up the contact with the adviser. Many special needs workers in passport countries will be open to continued contact by letter and e-mail to follow up the child's progress and arrangements can be made for repeat consultations when on future home leave. The AERC advisers will want to monitor progress and have follow up visits if you take up family membership with them. Get hold of all of the recommended materials for the school to use and work out a suitable programme for the child. If you home school them, follow the **whole** recommended programme – partial adherence to a modified curriculum may do more harm than good in some cases.
6. Be realistic about your options. In some cases it may be that you will need to take a post with your mission in the passport country for at least a little while in order to best help your child. In a few cases that post may need to become permanent. However there are many cases where your special needs child will actually do better in

a mission setting. This is because your child will be less exposed to peer ridicule for “failure” when he or she struggles to read or speak properly or displays socially unusual behaviour as in Aspergers Syndrome. The care and nurture of a small MK school or of home education may be just the environment your child needs. In many cases too they will have small classes and much more teacher attention; something that state educated peers with learning difficulties in the passport country (along with their tutors) could only dream about and wish for. It is worth noting that one major reason why many parents are now opting to home school in the West is concern about special needs provision in overstretched state schools.

7. Prayerfully set about this task. What are the aims with special needs children? In many ways they are no different to our aims with any other child. We want them to be brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord. We want them to love the Lord with all of their being and to serve Him with all the talents that they have. In some cases, these children can be gifted in particular areas such as Aspergers children with maths and computing (Einstein was thought to have had the condition, as has Bill Gates), for many others the potential is more limited. Whatever the abilities of your child, we need to bring him or her up to use them for God; in the parable of the talents, Jesus praises people for using what they have, not for starting off from a more advantaged position.

What about the more profound disabilities? Is there any place in overseas mission for children with these? This can only be answered on a case by case basis, although any condition that requires special schooling in the passport country would almost certainly prevent overseas assignments. It may be possible to take children using wheelchairs to serve in Europe or more economically advanced Asian countries (a few of the MK schools there are geared up for them), but this would not be possible across most of the two-thirds world.

One of the main limitations to special needs provision for the mission community is that of personnel. Few MK schools have special needs teachers and most of them rely on ordinary classroom teachers doing their level best to meet the needs of these children. Most of the larger schools are actively seeking special needs staff, but many of the smaller ones don't have anyone qualified in this area. Given that there are few MK schools or support ministries like AERC & SHARE around the world that would not welcome special needs teachers, we need to pray more of them out there to help us all in this vital task of teaching our children with learning difficulties.

Your experiences please!

Do you have experience of bringing up and educating special needs children overseas? Your experiences could help others, even if you feel now that it didn't go well (or isn't going well).

Do you have experiences of any of the correspondence/internet support ministries?

How about those of you who have worked with SHARE, AERC or other similar ministries?

Your contribution can make a difference to others. Please e-mail them to us at

SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk

Or by post to 67 Budbury Tynning, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire, BA15 1QE, UK

If you want to write to us individually about your child with special needs, please do – we have some experience of our own now and have contact with others who are experts in the field.

If you wish to comment on any past editions of Educare as well please feel free to do so. If you are missing any back editions of Educare let us know and we can send them on to you. You can forward Educare on to anyone you like as it is distributed free of charge by e-mail, but check that the recipient wants it and that their server can cope with an attachment. We have had one or two cases of Educare being forwarded to people in countries where the download is very expensive at the moment. If you are working somewhere like that, we can send it to you for 3 Euros or USD 3 or GBP 2 a year plus postage. Let us know if you would prefer this.

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