



## A matter of SPEECH

Not sure if your child has a speech problem? Don't worry. You can now check it out in a book written specially for multilingual Malaysians, writes RACHAEL PHILIP

**J**ENNIFER Eileen Peters is a speech-language pathologist, or an SLP, for short. Her job involves bringing a person's speech or language skills up to the level of their peers.

She sees only children — normal as well as special kids — and helps them to better vocalise and communicate with others. More importantly, she helps parents to help their children.

"Parents are the best people to help their kids," she says ushering me into her small and cosy home office. It's a child's dream playroom, with a large basket filled with soft furry toys on one side. Across the room, games, toys and books dominate a low blue writing table. And when the door shuts, a picture collage of her many young clients light up the area.

It is here that she assesses the children and their speech and language skills, all done through play as children respond best this way.

"It is important that parents sit in. These weekly sessions don't add up to much if parents do not continue doing what was done here, at home," she says.

Sometimes parents believe that their child understands simple commands. But through observation, Peters reveals that what the child has picked up is actually the visual cues accompanying the verbal instructions.

"This is important because parents can pitch themselves correctly when communicating with their kids," she explains.

Peters graduated from the University of Reading, UK, 14 years ago. Her four-year course is a mixture of linguistics, psychology and medical science. Undergraduates go for two-year clinical placements in which their ability to practise is assessed.

Sitting in with her is also a tutorial for the parents who learn why their child reacts in a certain way and how they (parents) should respond to this.

She treats her clients in English and Bahasa Malaysia. With Mandarin-speaking clients, she uses an interpreter. But, she explains, "it's not ideal and it's rare for me to do it."

Some four years back, Peters felt the need to write a book to reach out to more people.

"The book was borne out of frustration actually. A client of mine was misdiagnosed. For seven years, the parents had paid for seeing a therapist but there were no results. They were not even allowed to be in the room with their child," she recounts.

"The child was already 13 or 14 when they came to me. They finally decided to migrate because of better intervention and continuing programmes abroad.

"Lots of parents don't go out of the way but here are those who do. It made me realise that people need more information. They need to know where to go, what to do, what could go wrong and what to expect. The book is not an answer to all problems but it's a start."

More importantly, the book encourages parents to ask why and to always question the therapist or doctor.

*Making Chatter Matter — Understanding Language Impairment Within a Multilingual Environment* was launched yesterday in Kuala Lumpur. "It's your right to ask. Use the professional help available to you as guides. They are not God," she says.

Her book may be a little too heavy on theories but she strongly believes that parents want in-depth answers rather than just be told what do.

It also has a comprehensive list of websites and resource centres that parents can visit as well as simple activities they can carry out with their young ones.

*Making Chatter Matter* also addresses an important issue — our multilingual society. "A Malaysian child is equipped with at least two or three languages," she says.

Peters has other projects in the pipeline. She plans to write a book, for parents with autistic children and a children's storybook for the language-impaired.

■ *Making Chatter Matter — Understanding Language Impairment within a Multilingual Environment* is available in all major bookstores.

rachael@nstp.com.my

### HOW TO CONTACT US

EDITOR: Theresa Manavalan,  
Sunday People, 31 Jalan Riong,  
59100 Kuala Lumpur.

Tel: 03-2056 9391  
Fax: 03-2282 1434  
E-mail: theresam@nstp.com.my

ADVERTISING  
Siti Salwah  
Mohd Yasin

Tel: 03-2056 9525  
Fax: 03-2284 3079  
e-mail: sitisalwah@nstp.com.my