

Hist480 Research Essay

**A History of the  
Seabrook McKenzie Centre  
Christchurch  
1973-2013**

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2013

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA Honours in History at the University of Canterbury.

This dissertation is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of other historians used in the dissertation is credited to the author in the footnote references. The dissertation is approximately 9,800 words in length.

# Abstract

The history of the Seabrook McKenzie Centre is closely connected with a thirty-year campaign by parents and professionals for official recognition of specific learning disability as a category and for a remedial service to address the needs of children affected to be provided within mainstream schooling in New Zealand. This paper focuses on the contribution of the two professional women, Dr Jean Seabrook and Mary Cameron-Lewis who stand out, along with the patron and benefactor Sir Roy McKenzie as making a substantial contribution to the development of the Centre. Inadequate recognition by the Department of Education of children with specific learning disabilities led to the need for a separate, private, facility. This essay discusses the significance this played in contributing to the opening of the initial Centre, the subsequent expansion of the Seabrook McKenzie Centre, and the eventual opening of a school. It argues that the lack of official recognition and provision of support for these children's learning needs played a major role in the history of the Centre's establishment and continues to be a factor in its operation today.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Seabrook McKenzie Centre Archives (SBMCA)

Seabrook McKenzie Centre (the Centre)

Seabrook McKenzie Trust (SMT)

Jean Seabrook Memorial School (the School)

# Introduction

The Seabrook McKenzie Centre (the Centre) grew out of a campaign by professionals and parents to have children with specific learning disabilities recognised within mainstream education in New Zealand. The disabilities may include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and non-verbal learning disorders. This campaign faced unforeseen obstacles, which drove the development of a Centre designed to meet the remedial needs of the children outside and in addition to the mainstream school system.

At the end of a Department of Education meeting in the 1970s about children with reading disabilities, two women who spoke the same language met.<sup>1</sup> They were both psychologists, Dr Jean Seabrook was trained in speech therapy<sup>2</sup> and Mary Cameron Lewis had worked in neuropsychology.<sup>3</sup> This led to a long association, both in a professional and volunteer capacity, working jointly for the recognition of learning disabilities. Stimulated by their joint understanding of how children learn, and more importantly by their shared belief that children learn in different ways, they wanted to ensure education services provided a learning environment to meet all children's needs. They worked with others to create a centre designed to provide a wide range of services for the children with learning disabilities and their families, all through volunteer work. Under its auspices they initially conducted teacher training and administered tests to individual children that were used to develop individual learning plans that would enable each child to learn. This evolved into the Seabrook McKenzie Centre in 1991,<sup>4</sup> which eventually saw occupational, and speech language therapists working with

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis interview 2013

<sup>2</sup> Halina Ogonowska-Coates, *Invincible Women, A collection of herstories commissioned by the Christchurch College of Education*, (Christchurch: Christchurch College of Education, 1995), 15

<sup>3</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis interview, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Trust Board Inaugural Meeting Minutes, February 21 1991, and Sir Roy McKenzie letter to Seabrook McKenzie Trust, 6 March 1991, Seabrook McKenzie Centre Archives (SBMCA)

children. Systems were developed over time to train and support parents, awareness seminars for teachers were introduced and study skills and self-esteem courses were established for children. Eventually the Centre grew and a specialist school was started in 2005.<sup>5</sup> Seabrook and Lewis's work was different from that offered in mainstream education because the Department of Education had not recognised the category of specific learning disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Centre has its roots within the organisation called the New Zealand Federation of Specific Learning Disability Associations (incorporated), which is commonly known as SPELD.<sup>7</sup> In SPELD's view the learning odds were stacked against children with learning disabilities, so the volunteers worked to provide services designed to address the children's needs, while at the same time they conducted a campaign for the recognition of specific learning disabilities by the Department of Education and for the provision of these services within mainstream education.<sup>8</sup> This lack of recognition of specific learning disabilities is a theme running through the history of the Centre and served to place pressure on the volunteers to find new ways of delivering services. It was recognised in 1980 that 'New Zealand is a late starter in this specialised field',<sup>9</sup> and the existence and need for the Jean Seabrook Memorial School<sup>10</sup> in 2013 demonstrates that in New Zealand there continues to be a need for this specialist learning disability centre outside the mainstream education system. Funding for the work of SPELD and the Centre was provided by one of New Zealand's leading

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<sup>5</sup> 2004/2005 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

<sup>6</sup> Allan Marshall, *Dyslexia: Quick fix or hard slog?* Sabbatical report 2008, [www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/context/download/406/2802](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/context/download/406/2802),

<sup>7</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Trust Deed of Assignment of Copyright April 1993, SBMCA

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Jean Seabrook "Paper Prepared on Request for Mr J A Ross, Assistant Director-General of Education" (Christchurch: McKenzie House, 1980), 1

<sup>10</sup> Jane Dunbar, "Because you are Special," *The Press* October 15 2009, GL6, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/314921809?accountid=48718>.

philanthropists Sir Roy McKenzie.<sup>11</sup> In addition, he provided personal support to the key players in the decision making required to develop the Centre until his death in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

This essay is a short history of the Seabrook McKenzie Centre. Chapter one introduces Dr Jean Seabrook and Mary Cameron Lewis and looks at the early beginnings and development of SPELD. The endless campaign to convince the Department of Education to recognise specific learning disabilities and the establishment of the SPELD Centre which was later to become the Seabrook McKenzie Centre are included in chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the separation of the Centre from SPELD and the ensuing problems between the two organisations and goes on to shine light on Sir Roy McKenzie's involvement. Chapter four consists of the Centre's development over the years, starting with the process of moving to new premises and their subsequent renovation. It will also look at the new services the Centre introduced such as speech language therapy and occupational therapy. The eventual ability to be able to open a private primary school in 2005, called the Jean Seabrook Memorial School (the School), for children with severe specific learning disabilities and emotional problems unable to learn in the mainstream system will also be covered in this part. Finally, the paper concludes that the combined dedication of the volunteer professionals, the failure of their campaign to convince the Education system to recognise specific learning disabilities, together with the financial backing of their patron Sir Roy McKenzie, resulted in the establishment of the Centre in 1991.

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<sup>11</sup> Mike Crean, "A solvable Problem" *The Press*, September 28 2002, D4, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/314481904?accountid=48718>.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Dekker, "A hands-on helper," *Dominion Post* September 4 2007, B5, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/338305523?accountid=48718>.

The sources for this essay are chiefly primary documents from the Centre's archives including correspondence, minutes of meetings, yearly reports, conference papers and decision-making reports. Other sources include the official monthly newsletter of SPELD and research papers. Further, sources include interviews with Mary Cameron-Lewis, one of the founders of the Centre, Anne Stercq, the current director of the Centre and Dorothy Hutcheon, former director of teacher training at the Centre. Secondary sources include various research papers, newspaper articles and books on the topic of specific learning disabilities.

# Chapter 1

## Setting the Scene and Early Beginnings

The story of the Centre was born from the enthusiasm of Dr Jean Seabrook so it is important to explore her background as a first step in setting the context. Dr Jean Seabrook was born in Rangiora in 1914 to a farming family from Cust. Her father was Scottish and her mother was one of 14 children. At 16 she was required to leave school and work at home on the farm. She later spoke of this time in the following words, ‘I had to go home and I simply loved school...I absolutely loved it. I really missed the school.’<sup>13</sup> After a period learning dressmaking and cake icing skills she worked for a glove maker followed by a time as a governess. It was working in the teaching governess role, which she really loved, but realised that there was little future in this work. She took the initiative and contacted Rangiora High School and returned to school to complete her higher qualifications.<sup>14</sup> In 1936 Dr Jean Seabrook arrived at Canterbury College to attend Teachers’ College, when she was twenty-two years old. After teaching for several years she was approached by Mr Cartwright, the headmaster of the Normal School<sup>15</sup> who suggested that she would make a very good speech therapist. She eventually trained in England during the late 1940s<sup>16</sup> gaining further speech therapy qualifications and finally writing her PhD under Professor Neale at Bristol University in 1954,<sup>17</sup> on the relationship between speech disorder and psychological disorder.<sup>18</sup> She had been trained in England to diagnose dyslexia at a time when the word dyslexia was not accepted in New Zealand, ‘It was like a red rag to a

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<sup>13</sup> Ogonowska-Coates, *Invincible Women*, 13

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 15

<sup>17</sup> Mike Crean “Leader in Therapy”, *The Press* 2 August (2003): D17,

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/314541314?accountid=48718>

<sup>18</sup> Ogonowska-Coates, *Invincible Women*, 17

bull to talk about dyslexia.’<sup>19</sup>In due course Dr Jean Seabrook became the Director of the Speech Therapy training Programme at the College of Education in Christchurch. She remained in this position from 1964 until 1972.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on her life story Dr Jean Seabrook told Halina Ogaonowska-Coates she recalled the swaggers who turned up seeking work in the early 1930s, one in particular had a terrible stammer, Dr Jean Seabrook felt terribly sorry for these people. She recalled an inventor in Rangiora who took out patents on his inventions but could not read or write and how she could not understand this but realised later on that he was dyslexic. At the time of her retirement in 1972,<sup>21</sup> several events merged together around specific learning difficulties, which were the important forerunners in the eventual establishment of the Centre.

An important meeting of minds was when Dr Jean Seabrook met Mary Cameron-Lewis and the two women became interwoven with the history of the Centre from the 1970s forward. Mary Cameron-Lewis achieved a Masters of Science and worked as a neuropsychologist with the head neurosurgeon Phillip Wrightson at Auckland Hospital.<sup>22</sup> In the mid 1970s she became involved in SPELD due to her teacher daughter, telling her about children in her class who suffered learning disabilities.<sup>23</sup> According to Mary Cameron-Lewis they attended a meeting with the Department of Education where she expressed her view that the current Marie Clay method of teaching in schools did not cater to children with specific learning disabilities. Following this meeting Mary Cameron-Lewis describes how she met Dr Jean Seabrook, ‘I was leaving

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<sup>19</sup>Ogonowska-Coates, *Invincible Women*, 19 and Mike Crean “Leader in Therapy”

<sup>20</sup> Canterbury University, Department of Communication Disorders, Guide for Students 2010, ‘Awards and Scholarships Available in Communication Disorders,’

<http://www.cmds.canterbury.ac.nz/documents/2010%20Handbook.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Lois Wells, *I’m not Stupid, Lazy or Dumb. Aspects of specific learning disabilities* (Auckland: Fraser Books Masterton in association with SPELD NZ, 2004), 2

<sup>22</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview 2013

<sup>23</sup> “SPELD’s work outlined for Ashburton people,” *Ashburton Guardian*, June 15 1989, SBMCA

when a little woman about five feet tall with grey curls and blue, blue eyes came rushing up and said “who are you? You speak the same language, come and have lunch with me,” that was Dr Jean Seabrook.’<sup>24</sup> In addition Mary Cameron-Lewis had experience with her own children when she was told one of them was not very bright,<sup>25</sup> and later she found her stepchildren had learning problems and these factors also motivated her to become involved. Mary Cameron-Lewis was the president of SPELD between 1982 and 1984, and became the director of the Centre following the retirement of Dr Jean Seabrook in 1990. The two remained firm friends until the death of Dr Jean Seabrook in 2004.<sup>26</sup>

A significant event occurred near the time of Dr Jean Seabrook’s retirement from full time work in 1972.<sup>27</sup> She had been working with Brother Damien Keane at Maryland’s School in Halswell when she noticed that ‘some illiterate special class boys were very intelligent and how their emotional disturbance was merely secondary to an underlying learning problem.’<sup>28</sup> At this time Brother Keane learned of the work of a Scottish woman and her cause to advance the education and welfare of children who failed to learn at school and those with dyslexia.<sup>29</sup> In 1971 Brother Keane invited all professional people<sup>30</sup> interested in learning difficulties to attend a public meeting at the Christchurch City Council Chambers. The extent of public concern was demonstrated by the attendance of 500 people.<sup>31</sup> Out of this meeting the Dyslexia Association of New Zealand was born which later became known as SPELD.<sup>32</sup> In 1972 Dr Jean Seabrook

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview 2013

<sup>25</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview 2013

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Wells, *I’m not Stupid, Lazy or Dumb*, 2

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Ogonowska-Coates, *Invincible Women*, 19

<sup>31</sup> Wells, *I’m not Stupid, Lazy or Dumb*, 2

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

travelled to Australia to study the country's response to children with learning disabilities and upon her return set about establishing a library base for SPELD, and began a process of training teachers to work with children with specific learning difficulties. This trip was a further key event that merged to motivate her to establish a specific learning disabilities centre. The McKenzie Education Foundation awarded the travel grant to Dr Jean Seabrook, which was the beginning of a long relationship with this fund, and its director Sir Roy McKenzie, who played a central role in the success of both SPELD and the Centre.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Peggy Buchanan *Breaking Down the Barriers – Aspects of the first 25 years of SPELD in New Zealand* (Wellington, SPELDNZ Inc, 1996), 14

## Chapter 2

### Campaign and Development

SPELD quickly developed under the leadership of Dr Jean Seabrook beginning events, which would result in the establishment of the Centre. National conferences and branches were established throughout the country, training of teachers commenced and work with children spread throughout New Zealand. More broadly the organisation aimed to ensure that the mainstream education system addressed the needs of intelligent children under performing in school. SPELD worked with children to diagnose and help with their learning difficulties, while at the same time it campaigned for the Department of Education to recognise specific learning disabilities as a category and to provide access for the affected children to special learning services in school time.<sup>34</sup> In 1979 SPELD decided to adopt the United States Congress Public Law 94-142, section 602 of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 definition of specific learning disability as follows:

Children with Specific Learning Disabilities means those children who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. Such disorders include such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. Such terms does not include children who have learning problems, which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, mental retardation, of emotional disturbance or environmental cultural or economic disadvantage.<sup>35</sup>

Addressing the needs of children who came within this definition of specific learning disability became the main struggle of the organisation, the very reason for its existence, and the reason why the Centre was required and a school was established in 2005. From the very beginning of SPELD meetings were held with the Department of Education to get recognition of specific learning disabilities and the work of SPELD.

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<sup>34</sup> Dr Jean Seabrook, "Future Policy of SPELD." Paper presented to SPELD National Council, 'SPELD in the Future', Wellington: November 1982, SBMCA

<sup>35</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 29

In 1972 a SPELD delegation of professionals including academic experts in education, clinical psychology and paediatrics meet with the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Norman Kirk.<sup>36</sup> The meeting discussed dyslexia and specific learning disabilities and that the needs of these students were not related to low intelligence.<sup>37</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting Mr Kirk advised, 'I think that some steps have got to be followed through. First of all there has to be some formal link between the Association and the Education Department',<sup>38</sup> he went on to outline that a survey was needed to measure the incidence of dyslexia and endorsed the principle of extra teacher training for specialist tuition.<sup>39</sup> It became clear to SPELD that without hard data no government funding would be provided so the professionals within SPELD organised the survey to assess children 'with problems fitting the description of learning difficulty.'<sup>40</sup> Regular meetings followed between SPELD and the Department of Education officials.<sup>41</sup> According to Peggy Buchanan in *Breaking Down the Barriers*, the Department of Education responded by providing some additional remedial resource to address the needs of the many children who were not attaining basic skills, 'however, in spite of this substantial recognition of a national need, there was no clear acknowledgement of the needs of those children who would still fail to respond to general remedial methods.'<sup>42</sup> Buchanan notes:

It is hard to express the passion with which the early crusaders fought their cause with the Department. They were led by parents whose children desperately needed help in reading, writing and spelling and frequently had behaviour problems at home and school.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 29

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 16

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 17

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 17

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 19

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 19

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 22

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 23

The survey known as “Project Child (Children having Individual Learning Difficulties)” provided evidence of children with specific learning needs however, by 1978 additional resources had not been provided by the Department of Education to address the needs of children with specific learning disabilities.<sup>44</sup> In 1979 SPELD produced a booklet entitled *Interim Statement on Education for Children with Specific Learning Disabilities* and encouraged all parent members to contact their local Member of Parliament with details of their child’s difficulties in the hope that all 2000 members would pressure their Member of Parliament to support the needs for ‘specific learning disability to be recognised and catered for within our educational system.’<sup>45</sup> Reading Recovery was underway in schools in the late 1970s but the problem for SPELD was that its concern was ‘with a different child and a different problem; the child who could not and would not learn from even the best teaching through conventional methods.’<sup>46</sup>

The relationship with the Department of Education varied over time, according to the records, but overall there was general resistance to recognising the category of specific learning disabilities. Dr Jean Seabrook acknowledged the intent of this relationship with the Department of Education from the very beginning in an address to the national Council of SPELD in 1982 she said:

When the first SPELD Branch started ... (the members) were bent on full co-operation with educational officials and the teaching body as well as the presentation of a very low profile. To this end members met with the Headmasters’ Association, the Superintendent of Education, the District Inspector and they had the Inspector supervising special education as well as the Professor Emeritus of Education on the committee.<sup>47</sup>

There is clear evidence that the organisation as a group of parents and professionals attempted to provide a service which complimented that provided in schools, they

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<sup>44</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 27

<sup>45</sup> “What Parents Can Do.” *NZ SPELD Record*, National Newsletter of the NZ Federation of Specific Learning Disabilities Association Inc. 331, December 1979

<sup>46</sup> Buchanan *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 34

<sup>47</sup> Dr Seabrook “Future Policy of SPELD”, 3, SBMCA

‘wanted to get alongside and help’,<sup>48</sup> while at the same time they worked to achieve recognition of specific learning disabilities to ensure provision of teaching services within school time.<sup>49</sup>

To this end SPELD campaigned publicly for recognition of specific learning disabilities. For example, in March 1983 Mary Cameron-Lewis wrote to the editor of *The Press* supporting a plan to undertake research into the causes of literacy and learning problems but pointed out ‘Would it not be more practical and economic for the Government and the Department of Education to investigate the causes of specific learning disabilities in intelligent children at primary school level and to provide for remediation at this stage in their education?’<sup>50</sup> Developments within SPELD at this time are documented in a letter written in March 1983 when the SPELD President Mary Cameron-Lewis wrote from the Mainland SPELD to the national SPELD organisation advising them that through the ‘generosity of Roy McKenzie and his Education Foundation’,<sup>51</sup> they were now able to set up a professional national SPELD Centre in Christchurch ‘to try to convince the Education Department, that the category SLD is indeed, a valid one requiring specific assessment and remediation.’<sup>52</sup> The Centre was established in Christchurch in 1984, as there was nowhere else in New Zealand where the expertise of Dr Jean Seabrook was available and where standards could be set and monitored.<sup>53</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis provided a graphic picture of the new Centre premises, it was ‘simply a rather old one and a half story house badly in need of repair

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<sup>48</sup> Dr Seabrook “Future Policy of SPELD”, 3, SBMCA

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis, National President SPELD, letter to the Editor, *The Press*, March 1983, SBMCA

<sup>51</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Mike, National SPELD, 18 March 1983, SBMCA

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Rae Mckeown letter to SPELD, 16 September 2000, SBMCA

and renovation’<sup>54</sup> The plan was for herself, Dr Jean Seabrook and Mrs Dorothy Billcliffe to assess children for a small donation which would be used to administer the Centre. It was hoped to recruit graduates to assist with collecting data so that they could ‘come up with some hard, cold facts concerning this enigmatic field.’<sup>55</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis noted that they had established that ‘no professional support will come from the Dept. of Education and that we will be on our own professionally until such time as we do acquire recognition as a result of research - which is fair enough I suppose.’<sup>56</sup> The ‘freehold property was given to National SPELD [by Sir Roy McKenzie] to establish the national centre for research, assessment remediation and teacher training. The Centre has been named McKenzie and Sir Roy McKenzie has agreed to be the patron’.<sup>57</sup> Dr Jean Seabrook acknowledged the work of Mary Cameron-Lewis in achieving the establishment of the Centre in a speech to the national SPELD conference in 1983:

I would like to record the efforts of our National President, Mrs Mary Cameron Lewis, who was the right person in the right place at the right time, finding a suitable building centrally situated and making the necessary negotiations for its establishment as our national centre.<sup>58</sup>

The ongoing refusal of the Department of Education to recognise specific learning disabilities continued to fuel the determination of the two women and SPELD.<sup>59</sup> More importantly in 1984 the Centre was born.

Dr Jean Seabrook built on earlier research in the field and delivered papers as part of the struggle to have specific learning disabilities recognised. Letters were written to the Department of Education and follow up meetings were held to discuss specific learning

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<sup>54</sup> Rae Mckeown letter to SPELD, 16 September 2000, SBMCA

<sup>55</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis, letter to Mike, national SPELD, 18 March 1983, SBMCA

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Dr Jean Seabrook, “How the S.L.D Child in NZ presents in the home and at school” (paper presented at Communication Difficulties conference held in Wellington, August 1983), 13, SBMCA

<sup>58</sup> “The New Centre - a long-awaited dream come true.” *NZ SPELD Record*, 81, July 1983

<sup>59</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 37

disabilities. For example, in correspondence to the Minister of Education in 1980 requesting information as to why SPELD was not funded to teach children in schools, the Minister's reply was full of praise for the work of SPELD but did not agree to provide funds.<sup>60</sup> A further example can be seen in a paper, which Dr Jean Seabrook delivered to a national conference, entitled *Communication Difficulties* held in Wellington in 1983 in which she focused on children who fail to learn and reach their potential in the mainstream classroom. She emphasised that:

These atypical children have an intelligence adequate for learning – many are bright children their senses of hearing and sight are unimpaired, their emotional upsets and poor self-image are secondary deficits in their personality and result from their inability to learn in the mainstream class. They have an environment and experiences conducive to learning well, but nevertheless they cannot make the grade with ordinary classroom teaching. These are the children who are called “dyslexic” in the United Kingdom, and in Scandinavian countries “word blind”. In the United States there are numerous terms depending upon the State in which the child lives...In Australia they are known as “specifically learning disabled”. In N.Z. the concept of specific learning disability is not as yet educationally acceptable and therefore no term exists for the category. The characteristic patterns and learning behaviours, which these children demonstrate, are thought to be the same as those demonstrated by children at the lower end of the learning curve and because of this they are classified as “slow learners”.<sup>61</sup>

Dr Jean Seabrook articulated the crux of the problem was that, the Department of Education failed not only to recognise specific learning disabilities, but also failed to recognise that not all children can learn given the manner in which education is delivered in the mainstream classroom. The Centre continued its work and in 1988 Dr Jean Seabrook released a document entitled, *Introducing Children with Specific Learning Disabilities: Guidelines to Identifying the Specifically Learning Disabled*. This book included guidelines for teachers and provides examples of children's work with specific learning disabilities.<sup>62</sup> Despite these continual research efforts and discussions with the Department of Education, there continued to be no provision for children in mainstream schools with specific learning disabilities. Further, the lack of

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<sup>60</sup> Marilyn Waring, Minister for Education, letter to SPELD, September 1980, SBMCA

<sup>61</sup> Dr Seabrook, “How the S.L.D Child in NZ presents in the home and at school”, SBMCA

<sup>62</sup> Dr J. A. Seabrook, *Introducing Children with Specific Learning Disabilities: Guidelines to Identifying the Specifically Learning Disabled*, McKenzie House Monograph Series No.1, McKenzie House Publication, 1988

remedial funding resulted in the situation which Mary Cameron-Lewis described in 1984 as requiring ‘SPELD teachers...to train at their own expense and work outside the education system by tutoring...children outside school hours.’<sup>63</sup> SPELD had endeavoured to overcome this lack of recognition from the beginning and it was the main reason for the establishment of the Centre in 1984.<sup>64</sup>

The campaign to have specific learning disabilities recognised resulted in the Department of Education disagreeing with SPELD regarding definitions of learning and learning difficulties. In 1980 Dr Jean Seabrook was requested to prepare a report for the Department of Education on specific learning disabilities. In that report she outlined the nature of specific learning disabilities and provided research evidence of this special category.<sup>65</sup> This category she pointed out was ‘distinct and different from the learning disability of children who form the upper part of the continuum of the “slow learners” or “non-learners.”’<sup>66</sup> Further, in this report she provided a plan for teacher training, detailed how a teacher should work with children with learning disabilities in schools, provided a list of resource material and set out how new teaching methods could be introduced.<sup>67</sup> The following year in May 1981 the Assistant Director-General of Education J. A. Ross gave an address to the national SPELD conference, held in Christchurch, in which he presented the Department of Education view on specific learning disabilities. The Department of Education believed that the definition should refer to children with learning difficulties not learning disability. This was because the Department of Education considered that the use of the word “disability” might result in

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<sup>63</sup> “Mary Cameron-Lewis on Reading Recovery.” *NZ SPELD Record*, 92, July 1984

<sup>64</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 37, concludes that Dr Jean Seabrook was frustrated for years by the downturns suffered at the hands of bureaucratic officials and as a result vowed to establish a learning centre for children with severe learning disabilities.

<sup>65</sup> Dr Seabrook, *Introducing Children with Specific Learning Disabilities*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

<sup>67</sup> Dr Seabrook, *Specific Learning Disability*

parents and teachers of the children labelling them as unable to learn.<sup>68</sup> SPELD considered that the Department of Education had missed the point, as a hand written comment from a SPELD member written on a copy of J. A. Ross's speech paper shows. SPELD was arguing that children with specific learning disabilities can learn and that it is the Department of Education and their teachers who label them as slow learners.<sup>69</sup> The frustration of SPELD is shown in further hand written comments on the paper. For example, where J. A. Ross states "I am sure that both SPELD and the department share the same goal of giving the maximum help to all children with educational problems, until a final remedy is achieved,"<sup>70</sup> a hand written comment on the paper states, "No, we do not. We are concerned for a specific group."<sup>71</sup> Mr D. F. Brown, the Director of Special Education in a speech to the 1983 SPELD conference stated that the Department was 'not willing to draw a distinction between youngsters whose learning difficulty is said to result from some form of deprivation or lower intellectual capacity and those who have a complex and categorised defect such as one labelled dyslexia.'<sup>72</sup> The Department of Education choose not to categorise children into those with a specific learning disability.<sup>73</sup>

The frustration of not achieving acceptance of specific learning disabilities as a category<sup>74</sup> concerned Dr Jean Seabrook who told the national conference in 1982 that the many meetings with the Education Department over the past 10 years have occupied

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<sup>68</sup> J. A. Ross, Address to SPELD National Conference in Christchurch, May 1981, 9, SBMCA

<sup>69</sup> J. A. Ross, Address to SPELD National Conference, SBMCA

<sup>70</sup> J. A. Ross, Address to SPELD National Conference, SBMCA

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

<sup>72</sup> D. F. Brown. Director of Special Education Department of Education, A contribution to the SPELD Conference 1983, 4, SBMCA

<sup>73</sup> Ross, Address to SPELD National Conference, 24, SBMCA

<sup>74</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 37

‘a lot of time, money and mental energy’<sup>75</sup>, but have achieved little. She went on to show her annoyance and frustration in the following words:

The members of the education department have been cordial (mostly) in their meetings with us, but what we have looked upon as progress in our relationships with the Department, in my opinion, have turned out to be stalling tactics. In fact, we are being used in a subtle fashion. We have been naïve and, in colloquial terms, have been taken for a ride.<sup>76</sup>

The members of SPELD were evidently affected by the Department of Education continuing not to provide remedial assistance in schools and were particularly frustrated following meetings with the Department. This is reflected in a letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis in January 1984 from a former committee member of a North Island branch of SPELD. She writes, ‘I trust your meeting at the Department just before Christmas was reasonable and that you were not left feeling the whole thing has been a waste of time.’<sup>77</sup> This situation was recognised outside the SPELD organisation, as shown in a letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis from a senior research fellow from the Department of Psychiatry at Auckland University in March 1983. He responds to her comments about the Department of Education with the following words, ‘It sounds like, if anything, the Education Department has become more entrenched in its rather archaic views.’<sup>78</sup> The position adopted by the Department of Education in not recognising the category of specific learning disability was maintained over a long period of time in New Zealand during which time numerous educational and psychological researchers commented. For example, in 1981 Dr Sylvia Richardson visited New Zealand recommending that schools need teachers who are trained to pick up children with specific learning disability and ‘you do not have enough specialised educational personnel to meet your needs’.<sup>79</sup> Further, in 1983 a ‘notable Canadian educationalist Professor Doreen Kronick

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<sup>75</sup> Dr Seabrook, “Future Policy of SPELD”, 3, SBMCA

<sup>76</sup> Dr Seabrook, “Future Policy of SPELD”, 2, SBMCA

<sup>77</sup> Kay Gilby letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 1 November 1984, SBMCA

<sup>78</sup> Michael Aman letter to Mary Cameron Lewis, 22 March 1983, SBMCA

<sup>79</sup> “Dr Sylvia Richardson – A Stimulating Speaker.” *NZ SPELD Record*, 44, October 1981

visited New Zealand'.<sup>80</sup> She said that the main difference between the New Zealand situation and the current situation in Canada was that specific learning disabilities were recognised within the mainstream Canadian education system with provision provided for teacher training and remedial sessions provided in schools.<sup>81</sup> In addition, a visiting English teacher from the United States of America in 1988 described how many schools provide programmes for children with specific learning disabilities and some students go on to attend University as a result of the assistance they have received.<sup>82</sup> By 1988 the reading recovery programme, which was in operation in schools in New Zealand, found that a number of children were not responding to this programme.<sup>83</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis had pointed out in 1984 at a SPELD conference that, 'the programme [Reading Recovery] was picking up learners...but it was not going to help children with specific learning disabilities',<sup>84</sup> due to the remedial methods being used.

A major change occurred in the delivery of education in New Zealand at the end of the 1980s with the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools. This resulted in the responsibility for school learning and programmes being placed with local schools Boards of Trustees,<sup>85</sup> elected from school parents. This meant that individual school programming was no longer the sole responsibility of the Department of Education. In 1990 the Minister of Education, Dr Lockwood Smith wrote to SPELD advising that schools would be able to release students for outside tuition during schools hours and 'to receive assistance from organisations such as SPELD'.<sup>86</sup> While this appeared to be a

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<sup>80</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 43

<sup>81</sup> "'S.L.D. in Canada' – Doreen Kronick." *NZ SPELD Record*, 81, July 1983

<sup>82</sup> "Learning Disabled Students in Universities in U.S." *NZ SPELD Record*, 131, March 1988

<sup>83</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 51

<sup>84</sup> "Mary Cameron-Lewis on Reading Recovery." *NZ SPELD Record*, 92, July 1984

<sup>85</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 51 and "Educational Changes Relevant to Children With Specific Learning Disabilities." *NZ SPELD Record* 143, October 1989

<sup>86</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 54

step forward, with the opening for SPELD to deal directly with schools it soon became apparent that there was to be no extra funding for diagnosis or remedy for children with specific learning disabilities.<sup>87</sup> Buchanan noted in 1996 that New Zealand was behind developments in other countries such as Denmark, Norway and the United States of America in taking responsibility for the needs of those children with specific learning disabilities.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand Chapman noted that SPELD's use of a psychological approach was out of step with the ideas of New Zealand educationalists such as Marie Clay and he considered this hindered acceptance of learning disabilities.<sup>89</sup> Danella Smallridge in her paper *Delving into Dyslexia* in 2008 comments that 'there is a lot of current interest in the field of specific learning disabilities with dyslexia receiving lots of publicity. Until recently the New Zealand Ministry of Education has not recognised the term "dyslexia"'.<sup>90</sup> It is widely acknowledged that until 2007 the Ministry of Education (formerly the Department of Education) official stance was:

The Ministry of Education does not wish to develop an education system, which defines and categorises students in terms of their learning disabilities, but prefers a system that makes assessments on their needs for additional support. In this regard, the Ministry of Education does not specifically recognise the use of the term dyslexia in the school context because of the issues associated with labelling students, and instead, individual needs are identified and appropriate interventions across a range of learning difficulties are implemented.<sup>91</sup>

In early 2007 the Ministry of Education announced that it would commission a literature review on international definitions, causes, diagnoses and treatment of dyslexia.<sup>92</sup> Fiona Bradley noted at this time that New Zealand was well behind other nations in providing specialist services for children with dyslexia within schooling.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 51-59

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*, 44

<sup>89</sup> James W. Chapman, "Learning Disabilities in New Zealand: Where Kiwis and Kids with LD Can't Fly." *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 256 (1992): 368. <http://ldx.sagepub.com/content/25/6/362>.

<sup>90</sup> Danella Smallridge, *Delving into Dyslexia*, 2008, [http://www.4d.org.nz/school/report\\_casestudy.pdf](http://www.4d.org.nz/school/report_casestudy.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> Marshall, *Dyslexia: quick fix or hard slog?* 9

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> Fiona Bradley, *Dyslexia*,

[www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/content/download/394/2742/file/Fiona%20Bradley-Artis%20Sabbatical%20Report.pdf](http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/content/download/394/2742/file/Fiona%20Bradley-Artis%20Sabbatical%20Report.pdf).

Finally, in 2007 the government formally recognised dyslexia<sup>94</sup> but no reference was made to the other specific learning disabilities, such as dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and non verbal learning disabilities.<sup>95</sup> The Department of Education's failure to provide educational support for this group of children led to SPELD establishing the McKenzie House Centre in 1984 and this evolved to become the Seabrook McKenzie Centre in 1991 and eventually to the opening of a school within the Centre in 2005.

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<sup>94</sup> Angela Gregory "Government finally accepts Dyslexia" *New Zealand Herald* 7 April 2007  
[http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10435159](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10435159)

<sup>95</sup> The Jean Seabrook Memorial School notes these disabilities under the umbrella of learning disabilities  
<http://www.seabrookmckenzie.net/index.php>

## Chapter 3

### Separation and Strife

In February 1991 the inaugural meeting of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust (SMT) took place. This saw the conversion of the McKenzie House Centre under the control of SPELD into the independent Seabrook McKenzie Centre for specific learning disabilities, a long held dream of Dr Jean Seabrook.<sup>96</sup> Together with Mary Cameron-Lewis, Seabrook had worked within SPELD for almost twenty years to achieve mainstream schooling provision for children with specific learning disabilities but the Department of Education continued to not recognise the needs of these children and therefore did not fund special remedial services. The two women also faced difficulties within SPELD, the move of the Centre from under the auspices of SPELD was fraught with internal difficulties and caused a period of ‘division and controversy between the professional committee and the national body’.<sup>97</sup> For that reason the SPELD professional committee that was running the Centre had to conduct a long campaign to remove itself from the auspices of SPELD. This move was enabled through the personal support of this change of direction by the main funder, Sir Roy McKenzie. The chain of events leading up to this move is important because the separation enabled the new trust to pursue better funding and to concentrate on service to children with specific learning disabilities without being hampered by the wider national campaign aims of SPELD.

Disquiet hindered the separation plans as shown by Mary Cameron-Lewis’s letter to Sir Roy McKenzie in December 1990 seeking his further support for the separation. First, she outlined her opinion that the dream of Dr Jean Seabrook to establish a professional service delivery centre was partly achieved by using SPELD as a ‘convenient vehicle

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<sup>96</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 13 December 1990, SBMCA

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*

for your donating ...the property early 1983.’<sup>98</sup> Further, Mary Cameron-Lewis wrote that she recalled that as the President of SPELD at the time she was worried that the Centre’s operation may be curtailed by changes in the membership of the SPELD organisation committee.<sup>99</sup> She noted that Dr Jean Seabrook had started to move towards a separation of the Centre from SPELD in 1986–87. At that time according to Mary Cameron-Lewis there was support from the National SPELD Council for this move, which established a centre management committee in 1988.<sup>100</sup> However, this support eventually dissipated and deep division within SPELD hindered the separation. This division included allegations contending that the Centre had financial problems, but this was refuted by the professional committee who pointed out that the Centre had run successfully for seven years.<sup>101</sup> In early 1990 Sir Roy McKenzie maintained his long held view that, ‘it is better if I am kept in the middle position until things are sorted out so that if any decision is required by me later it can be seen that I was not supporting one group against the other.’<sup>102</sup> However, after a year of negotiations to transfer financial support to the new Centre<sup>103</sup> division was still all-embracing leading Mary Cameron- Lewis in her December 1990 letter to seek Sir Roy McKenzie’s strong support for the move as a means of driving the separation forward. She wrote, ‘We would appreciate your taking an even more resolute stand as regards your “intent” for the Seabrook McKenzie Centre so that we can prepare for a fresh, untrammelled start to the new year.’<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 13 December 1990, SBMCA

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*

<sup>101</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis, letter to SPELD branches, 9 February 1990, SBMCA

<sup>102</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 2 February 1990, SBMCA

<sup>103</sup> Sir Roy A McKenzie letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 20 February 1990, SBMCA

<sup>104</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, December 13 1990, SBMCA

The immense quantity of correspondence between Sir Roy McKenzie and the key players of the Centre shows the deep level of involvement he had in the decisions. With regard to the separation of the Centre from SPELD, Sir Roy McKenzie was kept fully informed of developments and his replies indicate his support for the separation and that his level of involvement was a persuasive factor in bringing about the final separation. In April 1990 a letter from Sir Roy McKenzie to Mary Cameron-Lewis demonstrates this deep level of involvement and his courage to express his personal view about the future direction of the Centre, he wrote, 'I feel long term the centre will be better run as a separate Trust and I know June [National President of SPELD] is at present against this so it may need patience and careful handling to sort this out.'<sup>105</sup> In May, Sir Roy McKenzie as Patron of SPELD acted on his belief in a separate Centre, writing to the national president of SPELD, June Bennett that:

I am convinced now is the time for a separation to take place. This would be the most appropriate means of resolving these tensions which seriously detract from both parties working for their first and mutual concern, the overall welfare of S.L.D. persons in the community.<sup>106</sup>

In the same letter he tied a future grant to both SPELD and the new autonomous Centre to achieving the agreed separation. The involvement of Sir Roy McKenzie was set to continue in the work of the Centre.

The successful separation of the Centre from SPELD was achieved at the SPELD National Council meeting held on 2 February 1991. There was 'no opposition in the final steps of separation'.<sup>107</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis wrote to Sir Roy McKenzie advising him that all legal matters have been completed, and she acknowledged with thanks all the 'time, energy and expertise you have given so willingly over the past 3

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<sup>105</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 12 April 1990, SBMCA

<sup>106</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie letter to June Bennett, 9 May 1990, SBMCA

<sup>107</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, February 18 1991, SBMCA

years.’<sup>108</sup> She advised that the inaugural meeting of the new SMT would be held on the coming Wednesday evening and summing up her feelings she wrote, ‘Vicki Montgomery and I come to work with light hearts and renewed energy now we are relieved of all the controversial exchange of correspondence with the National Council of SPELD.’<sup>109</sup> On the 20 February 1991 Sir Roy McKenzie replied stating, ‘I had to read your letter 18 February twice to really take in the fact that our combined efforts over the last two or three years have finally resulted in a satisfactory conclusion with the transfer of the property and shares to the new Trust Board.’<sup>110</sup> It was acknowledged that the new president of SPELD, Rae McKeown was a supporter of the separation of the Centre from SPELD and was viewed by some as a “secret weapon”<sup>111</sup> which enabled the final smooth vote of support from the National Council early in 1991. In the SPELD report to the seventeenth annual general meeting held in May 1991 the patron Sir Roy McKenzie records his ‘delight to learn last month, following SPELD’s agreement, that the inaugural meeting of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust ... I feel that the Centre will stand to gain greater community support from this move and the two organisations will be freer to work together on common interests.’<sup>112</sup>

The question as to why Sir Roy McKenzie was so involved and funded work on specific learning disabilities is an interesting one. Some light can perhaps be shone upon this question. Sir Roy McKenzie acknowledged that he was not one of the “brainy ones” at Timaru Boys’ High School and through the McKenzie Education Foundation he funded

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<sup>108</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, February 18 1991, SBMCA

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*

<sup>110</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 20 February 1991, SBMCA

<sup>111</sup> Vicki Montgomery Administration Secretary, Seabrook McKenzie Centre letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 26 February 1991, SBMCA

<sup>112</sup> SPELD report to the seventeenth annual general meeting, May 1991, SBMCA

a number of charitable organisations working with learning difficulties in education.<sup>113</sup>

The *Dominion Post* noted in an article in 2007 that Sir Roy McKenzie held:

close to his heart...several special schools that owe their existence to him, including the Seabrook McKenzie Centre in Christchurch for children with learning disabilities...He believed their confidence could be boosted by being exposed to an area in which they could excel.<sup>114</sup>

Additionally, a 2013 interview with Mary Cameron-Lewis revealed that she had known Sir Roy McKenzie because, ‘he and my brother were at school together.’<sup>115</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis revealed that she had a further connection to Sir Roy McKenzie through the neurosurgeon Phillip Wrightson with whom she worked at Auckland Hospital. She stated that the two men ‘got together’<sup>116</sup> around the time that SPELD was acquiring a property for the Centre as a base. Certainly Sir Roy McKenzie’s acceptance of the position of patron of SPELD and his letters show that he was personally committed to achieving a better education for children with specific learning disabilities. It was only due to his dedication that the Centre could be established.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Dekker, “A hands on helper”

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*

<sup>115</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview, 2013

<sup>116</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview, 2013

<sup>117</sup> Buchanan, *Breaking Down the Barriers*, 14

## Chapter 4

### Maturity and Growth

The Centre underwent a further change with the setting up of the SMT in 1991. The name changed from McKenzie House, to the current name of Seabrook McKenzie Centre. In a letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis in December 1989, Sir Roy McKenzie declares his pleasure with this change, he writes, ‘I am certainly pleased to see the name Seabrook McKenzie Centre.’<sup>118</sup> According to Mary Cameron-Lewis the use of Dr Jean Seabrook’s name in the title arose from discussions at the Board about the need to use the Seabrook name to show the Centre’s purpose.<sup>119</sup> While it is clear that progress was under way for the future of the Centre the relationship with SPELD continued to be problematic and deteriorated as covered above. Following a mediation process in 1993 new communication arrangements were put in place for better communication between the two with the Centre continuing in its role as a testing and referral Centre. The relationship was still a concern to the national SPELD organisation in 2000. This is shown in a letter from the vice president to the director of the Centre requesting information to clarify ‘the relationship of the Seabrook McKenzie Centre with SPELD New Zealand’.<sup>120</sup> In particular the letter indicates that there is no longer a formal relationship between the two organisations and seeks to understand why this is no longer the case. The reply makes it clear that there had been ongoing relationship issues since the commencement of the Centre in 1984, which is well documented in the records of both organisations. However, the main bone of contention, from the Centre’s perspective, evolved around the professional standards related to testing of children with specific learning disabilities. The Centre used professionally trained psychologists

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<sup>118</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie letter to Mary Cameron-Lewis, 14 December 1989, SBMCA

<sup>119</sup> Mary Cameron-Lewis Interview, 2013

<sup>120</sup> Susan Schweigman Vice President SPELDNZ letter to Anne Stercq 10 September 2000, SBMCA

who worked under a code of ethics and were not prepared to compromise these standards by being connected with SPELD work without a quality control plan, which was agreed to in the mediation but failed to be instigated. The letter makes it clear that at this point in time the two organisations offer service in the same area and from the Centre's perspective:

Since separating the Centre has enjoyed a very good public image, has gained respect in professional circles and has been able to go forward and assist their clients in a much more efficient manner. From past experience, dealing with SPELD takes an inordinate amount of time and effort for very little visible results.<sup>121</sup>

The Centre's reply opens with an indication that they were 'astonished to receive your letter and having to visit these old grounds once again.'<sup>122</sup> However, the letter concluded they are open to ongoing communication because they have a common interest in the betterment of the education of children with specific learning disabilities and it will be of no benefit for the two organisations to engage in further public disagreement.

When the Centre became independent from SPELD different services were developed, such as student self-esteem and parenting courses. Counselling was another service that the Centre started providing as, 'a lot of the parents find that a lot of counsellors do not understand about learning disabilities and obviously it needs to be taken into account when you do counselling or when you do any sort of intervention.'<sup>123</sup> The Centre wanted to develop further courses and programs as Anne Stercq, the current Clinical Director of the Centre, said in an interview in 2013 they were keen to establish speech language therapy and occupational therapy services. There was a strong need for these services because according to Stercq, 'at the time it was very difficult to get that help in

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<sup>121</sup> Anne Stercq letter to Susan Schweigman, Vice President SPELD NZ, 25 October 2000, SBMCA

<sup>122</sup> *ibid*

<sup>123</sup> Anne Stercq, Clinical Director of the Centre, Interview, 2013

private practice because there were very very few'<sup>124</sup> available. Additionally it was proposed that more teachers would be using 'the Centre as a base to work from [so] there will be a need for smaller, teaching rooms,'<sup>125</sup> of which the current premises did not have. In order to carry out these services sufficiently a bigger building for the Centres base was needed.

Apart from the current premises being too small for the amount of services and people it catered too, there were many other factors that led the Centre to want to relocate.<sup>126</sup> According to a Management Committee Report to the SMT on the 16 May 1994, there were a number of aspects that would bring the issue of relocating to a head, apart from the size. These included the lack of parking in the street that would increase with the building of town houses in the neighbourhood and a petrol station nearby, which would result in more noise and disruption. Furthermore, the 'current premises [did] not currently comply with the building code standards of commercial buildings'<sup>127</sup> and extensive and expensive maintenance work to the premises was needed.<sup>128</sup> An additional reason for the move was that there was discussion over the possibility of 'developing a full time teaching unit attached to the Centre...The main rationale for this proposition [was] the number of children with severe SLD [specific learning disabilities] who are not catered for by the education system,'<sup>129</sup> but in 'order to set up such a unit the Centre needs bigger premises.'<sup>130</sup> In the proposal to relocate and establish an integrated teaching unit the rationale for extending operations included the following explanation:

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<sup>124</sup> Anne Stercq, Clinical Director of the Centre, Interview, 2013

<sup>125</sup> Management Committee Report to the Seabrook McKenzie Trust Board on 16 May 1994, 4, SBMCA

<sup>126</sup> *ibid*, 5

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*

<sup>129</sup> Report to the Seabrook McKenzie Trust Board of 18 June 1993, 1, SBMCA

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*, 4

The building has become too small for its present activities, as the client demand has increased. Social and economic problems caused by illiteracy and poor learning skills are increasingly coming to light in our very competitive, market driven economy. Access courses and Department of Justice statistics highlight the prevalence of these problems, both of which establish a link between illiteracy and unemployment or deviant social behaviours. The present direction of the Special Education Reforms [mid 1990s] is sending conflicting messages concerning students with specific learning disabilities...very few local schools refer pupils to the Centre for assessments.<sup>131</sup>

The proposal to relocate the Centre in 1993 cited Professor Chapman of Massey University who argued that the new special education reforms would result in children with more obvious disabilities being allocated the additional resources with children with specific learning disabilities missing out.<sup>132</sup> It was because of this need that the Centre planned to establish a teaching school, the first in New Zealand. He argued that there is unlikely to be any other schools of this nature established under the special education services proposal, 'However, SLD/Dyslexia schools and Centres are in operation in both the states and the UK.'<sup>133</sup> This evidence shows that the lack of acceptance of specific learning disabilities and provision of services within mainstream schools continued to be the driving force behind the need for the Centre.

Consequently, the Centre started looking for other properties. It took 18 months to find premises that would be suitable and affordable. Before procuring this new property the current one needed to be sold generating enough money to help purchase the new property. Stercq said that they 'talked to Sir Roy about it because obviously he had given us the house so we needed his permission to sell it,'<sup>134</sup> which he said was absolutely fine. In addition Sir Roy McKenzie personally provided a large amount of

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<sup>131</sup> Proposal to relocate the Seabrook McKenzie Centre and establish an integrated teaching unit 1993, SBMCA

<sup>132</sup> Chapman, "Learning Disabilities in New Zealand" and note that Professor Chapman's research was also published in *NZ SPELD Record* 103, 1984

<sup>133</sup> Proposal to relocate the Seabrook McKenzie Centre and establish an integrated teaching unit 1993, SBMCA

<sup>134</sup> Anne Stercq, Clinical Director of the Centre, Interview 2013

funds for the procurement of the new premises. In late 1995 the SMT bought the property at 68 London Street and moved there in November 1996. There were two buildings on site, one was an old villa, which was used for testing, and the other was a relatively new building that had been used as a Montessori school in the past. The building was very tall, with an open plan layout and a mezzanine floor.<sup>135</sup> Initially the buildings were used as they were but eventually renovations and extensions were needed to help it run more efficiently and cater for the expansion of a therapy wing and the establishment of a school in 2005.

The work of the Centre continued to be funded by Sir Roy McKenzie with other Trusts supporting its work during the 1990s. A small sample of the type of ongoing support from other funding sources included the Todd Foundation grant in 1997 to enable the provision of early learning intervention services ‘comprising assessments, early intervention clinic, term intensive courses for five to seven year olds and speech and language therapy.’<sup>136</sup> Further, in 1998 the Community Organisation Grant Scheme gave a grant towards the salary of an occupational therapist,<sup>137</sup> and the William Toomey Charitable Trust<sup>138</sup> gave a grant in 1996. In 1998 the Canterbury Community Trust granted \$15,000 to be used towards subsidising tuition for children with specific learning disabilities living in under-privileged families.<sup>139</sup> In addition, Dr Jean Seabrook herself donated \$10,000 in the year 2000, ‘to establish a fund whose income will subsidise staff attendance at courses and conferences.’<sup>140</sup> This demonstrates that Dr

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<sup>135</sup> Anne Stercq, Interview 2013

<sup>136</sup> Anne Stercq, letter to Todd Foundation, 19 December 1997

<sup>137</sup> COGS (Community Organisation Grants Scheme) letter to The Seabrook McKenzie Centre, SBMCA

<sup>138</sup> Trustee’s Executors William Toomey Charitable Trust, letter to Ms Kay Rainey, Seabrook McKenzie Centre, 5 December 1996, SBMCA

<sup>139</sup> Canterbury Community Trust letter to Anne Stercq, Director Seabrook McKenzie Centre, 6 July 1998, SBMCA

<sup>140</sup> Anne Stercq letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 5 September 2000, SBMCA

Jean Seabrook not only continued to have an active interest in the future of the Centre but also that she continued to strive for the Centre to have high levels of professionalism. It is important to note that correspondence continued with Sir Roy McKenzie keeping him well informed of developments at the Centre.<sup>141</sup>

In the year 2000 work to expand the Centre began, this was to create more space and to provide room for the possibility of establishing a primary school. The idea of a school had been a constant over the years. It is interesting to note that Dorothy Hutcheon, a past director of teacher training at the Centre, while talking of the move and the expansion, in a 2013 interview spoke of ‘Dr Jean’s wish...that eventually we would have a school.’<sup>142</sup> Significantly, Anne Stercq noted that many parents, at least since she started in 1989, had asked, ‘when will you have a school? My child really needs a school.’<sup>143</sup> Before the move to the London street property no serious consideration could be given to establishing a school because the property was not big enough and there were insufficient funds but in 2000, the Centre started looking at whether it would be possible to expand and ‘started looking at feasibility studies’<sup>144</sup> and fundraising. There was also discussion over whether or not to set the school on the current premises or find another site, which would cost more. Running the school along with the Centre would lessen administration costs for the school, which was favourable as the idea was, ‘to try and keep it as cheap as possible for the parents.’<sup>145</sup> It was decided to keep everything together with the idea in the background that if the school expands a bigger

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<sup>141</sup> Anne Stercq letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 5 September 2000, SBMCA and it should be noted that the SBMCA contains dozens of letters exchanged between Sir Roy McKenzie, SPELD and the Centre.

<sup>142</sup> Dorothy Hutcheon Interview 2013

<sup>143</sup> Anne Stercq, Interview 2013

<sup>144</sup> *ibid*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid*

place may be needed but ‘that is a long way down the track.’<sup>146</sup> It was decided to progress in two stages, building a therapy wing extension, including an occupational therapy room and a speech language therapy clinic first, followed by renovating the existing buildings to provide space for a future school.<sup>147</sup> Sir Roy McKenzie’s continued support enabled the Centre to take on the new building projects. In a 2001 letter to him the Centre outlined that the Board has decided to ‘allocate \$30,000 of our reserve funds to the building project, giving us a little over \$40,000 to start with. The rest should be raised during the first 6 months of the year by our fundraising team.’<sup>148</sup> Further, it indicated that the work on an extension to the buildings would be finished early in 2002, the letter concludes with the acknowledgement that the new work would not have been possible without Sir Roy McKenzie’s support.<sup>149</sup> With the building for the therapy wing finished in 2002, fundraising took place in order to fund Stage Two of the building project, which was the testing, administration and schooling block. The fundraising team raised over \$350,500 between 2002 and 2004 through different grants and donations including a substantial donation from Sir Roy McKenzie himself.<sup>150</sup> Building started in April 2004 and the administration team could move back in by August and testers by September.<sup>151</sup>

The demands by parents for the establishment of a school were fuelled by the continuing problems parents faced within the mainstream school system. The issues that parents faced in schools due to the limited provision for children with specific learning disabilities is demonstrated in the following letter. A letter from the Principal of

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<sup>146</sup> Anne Stercq, Interview 2013

<sup>147</sup> *ibid*

<sup>148</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Centre letter to Sir Roy McKenzie, 11 December 2001, SBMCA

<sup>149</sup> *ibid*

<sup>150</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Centre Fundraising and Building Project, Stage 2: Update July 2004, SBMCA

<sup>151</sup> 2004/2005 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

Redwood Primary School in 2001 to parents indicated the additional pressures that were placed on parents of children with specific learning disabilities who attended special sessions at the Centre. The Principal advised parents that under the Education Amendment Act 1989 the school must be satisfied that any specialist remedial learning undertaken by students is appropriate and the school must agree that the extra sessions are necessary otherwise the additional assistance must be undertaken outside schools hours. This is despite schools not providing special assistance for children with specific learning disabilities.<sup>152</sup> This illustrates the additional pressures placed on parents by the mainstream education systems lack of recognition of specific learning disabilities and the consequent lack of funding for their children's learning needs. At the same time the Centre continued its work becoming a recognised leader in the field while the Department of Education still had not formally recognised specific learning disabilities, 'Many Canterbury schools used the Seabrook McKenzie Centre...to access SLD [specific learning disabilities] services', Primary Principals' Association President Sue Ashworth is reported to have said in 2002.<sup>153</sup> At the same time the Director of the Centre, Anne Stercq, reported that 'successive governments have shrunk from the issue [specific learning disabilities] because the problem is so widespread the costs would be huge...She says 7 per cent of the population has a severe disability, while up to 12 per cent have mild disabilities.'<sup>154</sup> New Zealand continued to be out of step with the western world in recognising specific learning disabilities and providing support for their learning needs.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Andrew Morrall, Principal Redwood Primary School, letter to parents, 24 June 2001, SBMCA

<sup>153</sup> Mike Crean, "A solvable Problem" *The Press*, 28 September 2002, D4

<sup>154</sup> *ibid*

<sup>155</sup> *ibid*

In early 2003 Brenda Nisbet was appointed Project and Development Manager. During 2003 and 2004 she led a subcommittee that worked on the preparative work needed to start a school. Nisbet communicated with other Canterbury special character schools, worked on a curriculum and gathered resources.<sup>156</sup> By December 2004 it was resolved at a SMT meeting that an application was to be completed and sent to the Ministry of Education for the registration of the new school.<sup>157</sup> The official opening of the Centre's new wing 'took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November [2004] and coincided with the Centre's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.' Sir Roy McKenzie was in attendance to cut the cake. On this day the naming of the new school as the 'Jean Seabrook Memorial School, in recognition of the inspiration and leadership provided by Dr Jean for so many years'<sup>158</sup> occurred.

In February 2005 the Jean Seabrook Memorial School (the School) was opened, it was the 'culmination of years of planning, sparked by frequent requests for this type of service from parents.'<sup>159</sup> The aim of the School is to help the children develop 'strategies to deal with their specific barriers of learning,'<sup>160</sup> with the focus being 'remediation rather than accommodation, with the goal of reinsertion in the mainstream whenever and as soon as possible'<sup>161</sup> The School is private and in 2009 the fees were \$6750 per year.<sup>162</sup> However, to ensure a range of children from different backgrounds could attend, scholarships and subsidies were established so children with specific learning disabilities from low socio-economic families could attend.<sup>163</sup> Further, the School is split in two levels, the first has the younger children aged around six to eight,

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<sup>156</sup> 2003/2004 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

<sup>157</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Trust Board meeting minutes, 16 December 2004, SBMCA

<sup>158</sup> 2004/2005 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

<sup>159</sup> 2005 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

<sup>160</sup> *ibid*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid*

<sup>162</sup> Jane Dunbar, "Because you are special", *The Press*, October 15 2009, GL6

<sup>163</sup> Developments Planned 2004, SBMCA

with the second upper level involving the older children who are aged from around nine to eleven. The programme for the children includes social skills, speech language therapy and occupational therapy, which are given either ‘individually or in small groups as appropriate,’ music and art classes are also given once a week by specialist teachers. The classes have a maximum of 12 students. The School proved its worth after the first year with the 2005 annual report of the Centre stating:

The School has been open for a year and the difference in the children after such a short time exceeds all our expectations. Seeing their growing confidence, happiness and pride in their progress makes all the work that went into establishing the school seem very worthwhile.<sup>164</sup>

At the end of that first year the children were reassessed and it was found that many of the children had learned and made more progress in that year than ‘in all their previous years of schooling combined.’<sup>165</sup> The School caters for the emotional needs of the children as well as their learning needs but this proves challenging ‘particularly in the upper class where many children showed well entrenched, maladaptive coping mechanisms’ that would only get worse if not caught quick enough. At the time of opening the School, the Centre was assessing 700 students each year.<sup>166</sup> The staff of 15 provided psychological support, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and reading tuition to mostly eight to 12-year-olds.<sup>167</sup> In 2007 demand for the Centre’s services was so high that the waiting list had to be closed.<sup>168</sup> The need for the Centre and School continues to be strong, evidenced by the ongoing enrolments. Strong praise from parents whose children attend the School is the strongest evidence of its success, for example ‘Seabrook was our lifeline...they saved our boy from a very uncertain future,’<sup>169</sup> and ‘we had been worried about his future, but now we feel really positive.

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<sup>164</sup> 2005 Annual Report of the Seabrook McKenzie Trust, SBMCA

<sup>165</sup> *ibid*

<sup>166</sup> Crean, “A solvable Problem” A4

<sup>167</sup> *ibid*

<sup>168</sup> Seabrook McKenzie Trust Board meeting minutes, 3 August 2007, SBMCA

<sup>169</sup> Dunbar, “Because you are special”, GL6

The school has given him a lot of skills that should help him back in the mainstream,' are typical comments from parents. According to the Centre Director, Anne Stercq, the 'new school would easily meet Education Minsitry criteria, although the ministry steadfastly refused to recognise the work of the centre for funding... This was in spite of many referrals coming from state schools and mental health services.'<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Dunbar, "Because you are special", GL6; the school received a successful ERO reports in 2008 and 2012

## Conclusion

The Centre was established against a background of the non-recognition of the category of specific learning disabilities of children in schools by the Department of Education and the consequent lack of remedial funding to address their needs. The volunteer members of SPELD started out hoping that international precedent, research and evidence from around the country as to the need would convince the Department of Education to provide services for children with specific learning disabilities within mainstream schools. They were mistaken. Consequently after ten years of campaigning they adopted a two pronged approach continuing the higher level campaign to change the delivery of mainstream education while combining a practical level strategy which saw the setting up of a Centre to deliver the needed learning resources themselves.

The specific learning disabilities testing and training Centre grew over the years and as time went by and the mainstream system failed to respond, the Centre changed direction to meet further needs, providing additional services such as therapy, self-esteem training for the students, additional teacher training and support for parents and finally establishing a school. This was all made possible by a combination of dynamic factors.

Firstly, Department of Education's failure to recognise and provide for specific learning disabilities in mainstream schools drove the determination of a small group of people within SPELD and the Centre to succeed in creating a centre themselves. Secondly, the setting up of the Centre was only made possible because one professional woman had the skills and vision to use her expertise to work with other volunteers to drive the

change. Dr Jean Seabrook worked with many people but one stood out and that was Mary Cameron-Lewis, another professional woman. Mary Cameron-Lewis was able to provide both professional expertise and background practical support such as writing letters seeking support and locating suitable premises for the first Centre. Dr Jean Seabrook focused on establishing the testing of students, education of teachers and doing research to back up the learning strategy. They were both driven by a desire to use their professional backgrounds to provide professional support for children with specific learning disabilities. Dr Jean Seabrook remained involved with the Centre until her death in 2004. Mary Cameron-Lewis recalled in 2013 the significance of how their joint concern for these children resulted in a meeting of the two women in the early 1970s, which led to their long work period of voluntary work in establishing the Centre. Many other people assisted this work through SPELD and continue to do so within the Centre today. The third dynamic factor was the involvement of the patron Sir Roy McKenzie. Without his personal involvement, and funding the Centre would never have never been able to become a leader in the field of services for the specifically learning disabled that it is today.

The Centre plans to continue offering its services into the foreseeable future and continue to highlight the need for specific learning disabilities in general, not just dyslexia, to be recognised by the Ministry of Education, and for programmes to help those with specific learning disabilities to be funded within mainstream education. Finally, it is worth noting that there is a certain paradox in the campaigners seeking mainstream, state recognition of specific learning disabilities and ending up providing a private segregated Centre and School.

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