

The Bowen Technique Hydrocephalus and hemiplegia

by Janie Godfrey

Little Stephen was born 3 months premature and had the added complication of having hydrocephalus - 'water on the brain'. This condition is caused by the accumulation of an abnormally large amount of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the skull. He was treated with the most commonly used method, which was the surgical placement of a shunt system. The shunt system consists of the shunt itself, a catheter and a valve. These are most usually placed within one of the ventricles, which are fluid filled cavities in the brain. In Stephen's case, the mechanisms of the shunt can be felt under the skin of the upper right hand side of his skull and the catheter goes under the skin down behind his right ear and down into his upper right chest where the CSF can be absorbed as part of the circulatory process.

When Stephen was first brought for Bowen treatment, he was nearly three years old. As a result of the hydrocephalus, or perhaps the placing of the shunt, he had mild left side hemiplegia and a speech delay. The reason his mother brought him for Bowen was because she had heard from a friend that it might help calm Stephen down a bit, as he had a number of behaviour problems that weren't getting any better. He commonly reacted to interaction with siblings, friends and nursery school classmates by slapping, hitting, pinching and biting when he was frustrated or tired. He also had occasionally fallen over when playing with other children and this seemed to be a problem stemming from his mild left side paralysis. He had had a few weeks of physiotherapy as a toddler and at this point was only having occasional physio sessions.

Now how could Bowen Technique treatment help with this sort of thing? There has been some striking and well-documented evidence of Bowen's effect on conditions such as cerebral palsy and autistic disabilities that has come from some dedicated Bowen Technique therapists in Cardiff where they have been recording their results since 1999. Howard Plummer and Helen Watson have now treated hundreds of children and adults with Bowen and have built up an impressive file of case histories.

It would seem that the Bowen treatment is stimulating and accelerating an ability that the brain has to rewire itself to compensate for damaged areas. While no studies have been undertaken specifically on the effects of Bowen Technique treatment on the damaged brain, there have been several papers that point to why Bowen seems to be so helpful in these cases.

One of these studies (Eyre 2004) reported on a two-year research programme asked, "Can the brain be 're-wired' to help children overcome disability?" Funded by the charity Action Medical Research its findings show, remarkably, that where brain damage has occurred either before birth or at birth, the infant brain has a natural capacity to transfer vital functions away from the damaged area. The researchers were convinced that it is critical to act as early as possible, before the brain's plasticity diminishes.

Stephen's first four Bowen treatments were weekly between 16th June and 13th July. He was very wary

of any treatment (who can blame him after all he had been through), but would allow it if he was sitting on his mother's lap. During the week after the first treatment, he had a much better week with some improved behaviour. On the morning of the second treatment, he bit another child and his mother thought it was most likely the fastest reaction available to him when a classmate was moving in on his computer. Otherwise, no obvious change.

In the week after the second treatment Stephen's behaviour was still somewhat better and he was speaking more. And after the third treatment his speech was really coming along very noticeably and very well. This development was suddenly bounding ahead and was in marked contrast to the lack of any real development in his speech before Bowen. In addition, Stephen seemed much happier in himself and there were no incidents of biting or loss of control. This seemed to be in direct correlation to his greatly improved capacity for speech - he could verbalise his opinions and needs now and didn't have to hit and bite. He was also using his left side a bit more. His mother described him as a "contented little man" and he had had only a slight regression with speech and peacefulness over the few days before this Bowen treatment.

Most amazingly, about 3 days into the week following his fourth treatment, his mother reported, with tears of delight and amazement, that Stephen had reached up to a playground bar overhead with both hands, held on with both hands and swung there. He had never been able to do this before and this development was a real benchmark in the change that Bowen had prompted in him.

He continued to have Bowen treatment every few weeks for the rest of the year and he continued to use his left side more and more and his speech continued to blossom. He was able to put long sentences together and express a good vocabulary and even use more abstract thoughts to express himself. This treatment series was now a year ago and he continues to be a happy little boy.

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