

# The Help Group SUMMIT 2008

## **AUTISM, LEARNING DISABILITIES & ADHD EXPERTS CONVENE AT THE HELP GROUP SUMMIT 2008**

The Help Group **Summit 2008, Advances and Best Practices in Autism, Learning Disabilities and ADHD** convened on Friday, September 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup> at The Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. This cutting edge conference featured more than 20 of today's leading experts and the latest information for parents and professionals. Generously sponsored by First 5 California and First 5 LA, this year's Summit was a great success, with more than 500 professionals and parents in attendance.

The two-day conference was co-chaired by Dr. Barbara Firestone, President and CEO of The Help Group, Vice Chair of the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism, Dr. Paul Satz, Professor Emeritus, Semel Institute for Neuroscience & Human Behavior and Dr. Peter Whybrow, Director, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at The Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

"The demand for the most current information regarding research and best practices in neurodevelopmental disabilities continues to grow at an exponential rate. The Summit is a unique forum that brings together an extraordinary group of thought leaders in the field to share their knowledge and expertise," said Dr. Firestone.

This year's Summit featured nationally renowned experts including, Michael Arnot, MPA, Margaret L. Bauman, M.D., Jan Blacher, Ph.D., Michael G. Chez, M.D., Glen Dunlap, Ph.D., Peter F. Gerhardt, Ed.D., Robert L. Hendren, D.O., Connie Kasari, Ph.D., Michele D. Kipke, Ph.D., Martin L. Kutscher, M.D., Elizabeth Laugeson, Psy.D., Alan M. Leslie, Ph.D., Philip Levin, Ph.D. Enrique López, Psy.D., Sandra Loo, Ph.D., Catherine Lord, Ph.D., Maureen W. Lovett, Ph.D., Areva D. Martin, Esq., Irene Martinez, MSW, Maja J. Mataric, Ph.D., Sara McCracken, Psy.D., Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, Ph.D., Janiece Turnbull, Ph.D., Derek A. Ott, M.D., Emily Rubin, MS, CCC-SLP, and Louis Vismara, M.D.

During the luncheon program, Dr. Louis Vismara, Policy Consultant to Senate President pro Tem, Don Perata was presented with *The Help Group's Autism Heroes Award* in recognition of his heartfelt commitment to children and families living with autism and his extraordinary efforts on their behalf. Dr. Vismara is the parent of a son with an autism spectrum disorder and is one of the 38 families highlighted in Dr. Barbara Firestone's highly acclaimed and award winning book, *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*.

"I'm humbly grateful to accept this award on behalf of my son, Mark, and so many other children and families," said Dr. Vismara. "What is incredibly empowering

about events such as this Summit is that for so many families it brings us out of the mode of being survivors – it brings hope, it brings opportunity, and it brings sunshine into our lives.”

The Help Group presented this year's *Champion for Children Award* to the Grammy Foundation in appreciation of its far reaching efforts to educate through music that have enriched the lives of so many children. The Grammy Foundation recently funded an innovative research initiative led by Dr. Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, through The Help Group – UCLA Autism Research Alliance to explore and better understand how the brain processes emotion in children with autism.

On behalf of the Grammy Foundation, Scott Goldman, Vice President, accepted the award and said, “Our foundation is utterly and completely privileged to support this kind of work. All of us know intuitively what music means emotionally to all of us. I know this research makes a tremendous difference to the Foundation - and we thank you all very much for this wonderful award.”

ABC7, the number one station in Los Angeles, received *The Help Group's Media Excellence Award*, for its outstanding commitment to building public awareness of issues that confront children with special needs and their families. The Media Excellence award was established to recognize individuals and/or organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to providing quality information to promote the public's understanding of autism and other neuro-developmental disabilities.

“During our newscast we reflect the community – we like to reflect the need that is out there,” said ABC7 Anchor, Phillip Palmer, who accepted the award on behalf of the station. “And there's a thirst for knowledge when it comes to autism and special needs and we love to be able to do our part. Thank you for the award, but more than anything thanks for the opportunity to work with you.”

Our thanks to all of the acclaimed speakers for participating in The Help Group Summit 2008, and for making it such an exciting, dynamic and informative conference.