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I always appreciate the opportunity of going to conferences because these are places where new ideas are born, as well as places where previous ideas are shared with others. The 2009 Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities Research Special Interest Group (OADD RSIG) was a special conference for me for several reasons. First, this was the first conference where I presented parts of my work on the role of pets as social support for families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Second, because I received the 2009 RSIG Student Poster Award ... beginner's luck... Finally, another aspect that impressed me at this conference was the collaboration between researchers and practitioners. I think that a strong connection between them is beneficial to the field of developmental disorders. The values of Ontario Association on Developmental Disorders were perfectly summarized by Dr. Yona Lunsky, the Research Special Interest Group keynote speaker and receiver of the OADD RSIG Professional Award for Excellence in Research.

Dr. Lunsky presented, in a very vibrant and eloquent presentation, a holistic approach to the mental health needs of individuals with

developmental disabilities; an approach that includes not only the individuals, but also their caregivers, and the mental health services. Initially, Dr. Lunsky focused solely on individuals, their coping styles and mechanisms, and on the social support received. While working on this she realized that although it is important to listen to the people with developmental disabilities, it is also important to listen to their caregivers. Furthermore, individuals with developmental disabilities are influenced by the health system in general. As such, Dr. Lunsky's approach changed in order to include psychiatric hospitals and other mental health services. This collaboration revealed a high level of unmet requirements for individuals with developmental disorders and it led to changes in provincial policies.

In conclusion, I hope that the collaboration between researchers and practitioners promoted by OADD RSIG will have similar results to the holistic approach of Dr. Lunsky.

I am thankful to Autism Ontario for supporting my participation to RSIG, and I am looking forward to RSIG 2010.