



King's curse a common ill

STUTTERING

Cheryl Critchley

STUTTERING can be socially devastating and doesn't discriminate, as Britain's King George VI discovered.

Queen Elizabeth's father stuttered and *The King's Speech*, starring Colin Firth and Helena Bonham Carter highlights a problem affecting as many as one in 10 children.

Ballarat University IT and Mathematical Sciences lecturer Grant Meredith did not let a stutter stop him topping his university for the Unijob's Lecturer of the Year award in 2008 and 2009.

Mr Meredith says stuttering can be troublesome and frustrating for children and young people trying to develop social skills and friendship networks.

He has developed a Virtual Stuttering Support Centre where stutterers tackle the problem in an online world.

"Research is showing that children who stutter are

being identified, bullied and victimised because of their communicative problems at very young ages," he says.

La Trobe University Stuttering Clinic speech pathologist Simone Lees says a Victorian study found 8.5 per cent of three-year-olds and 12.2 per cent of four-year-olds have begun to stutter.

She says it is impossible to predict who will recover naturally and who will need treatment, so it is important to seek a speech pathologist's opinion within 12 months of onset.

"A significant number of adults who stutter have associated mental health problems, most commonly social phobia, anxiety and depression," she says.

The Lidcombe Program is effective for children, while adults can benefit from speech restructuring and cognitive behaviour therapy.

Most importantly, parents should not blame themselves if their children develop a stutter.

"We don't yet know what causes stuttering," Lees says. "But it's not caused by

bad parenting, anxiety or attention-seeking."

MORE INFORMATION

La Trobe Communication Clinic: www.latrobe.edu.au/hcs/lcc/stuttering. Australian Stuttering Research Centre: www.sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/asrc

IF A FRIEND OR RELATIVE STUTTERS

- * Listen actively and be patient.
- * Ask how you can support them; they may appreciate help with things such as asking directions or ordering at a shop — or they may prefer to persist themselves.
- * Friends, family and the workplace need to be supportive for treatment to progress well.
- * Encouragement is so important.

Source: Ballarat University IT and Mathematical Sciences lecturer Grant Meredith <http://www.ballarat.edu.au/ard/itms/staff/gmeredith.shtml>



Stutter: Colin Firth and
Helena Bonham Carter in
The King's Speech