

Supporting Adults with Dyslexia and other learning differences to achieve in tertiary education and the workplace

Meeting the needs of those who think and learn differently

Alternative Title – Number 1

- Keeping dyslexic adults: -
 - out of prison,
 - off the benefit,
 - out of the mental health wards, and
 - off Prozac and anti anxiety medication

Alternative Title – Number 2

- Supporting the country to make the best use of the adults who:
 - Think differently
 - Have creative minds
 - Are known to see patterns and relationships that others do not see.
 - Are known to have visual, spatial and 3-D skills
 - Are known to be entrepreneurial and collaborative workers.
 - Are known to be great problem solvers
 - In short are the people who can make a real difference to the economy.

A special role for the ACE sector

- I have a challenge for you all today – that is to get directly involved in improving the lot for the 10 – 20% of people out there who are dyslexic.
 - Many of these people stay well away from formal education – because of earlier failures and frustrations
 - As the ACE sector you are much more closely connected to the community than are the formal tertiary institutions.
 - You are much less scary than the other parts of the tertiary education sector

A little about Dyslexia

- A learning difference where people struggle with text – but are intelligent in other ways.
- A genetic, inherited condition
- Lasts a lifetime
- Effects males and females equally.
- Occurs in all countries, ethnicities and cultures.
- Very different to “low intelligence”. To be dyslexic you must be of average or above intelligence.

The positive side of Dyslexia

- Great visual, spatial and 3-D skills
- Alternative thinkers
- Creative left-field types
- See patterns and relationships that others do not see
- Many are great entrepreneurs
- Known to be great at collaboration and co-operation.
- Often have strong oral skills
- Many known to have a great “bullshit” detector

Something for you to do

- Getting inside the head of the dyslexic person is a good place to start.
- A comparison between folk with dyslexia and left handed people is a useful starting point.
 - The number of people with dyslexia is similar to the number of folk who are left handed
 - Left handed people used to be persecuted and thought of as inferior.
 - Both left-handedness and dyslexia are genetically determined.

Time

- We know that dyslexia robs people of time. It does not matter how capable they are in other ways – time gets in the way. With persistence, effort and great teaching dyslexic people can become good readers – but the time problem remains.

A report on a major national research project on how best to support adults with dyslexia

- Conducted over a two year period.
- Funded by Ako Aotearoa
- Led by Primary ITO
- Four other parties involved
 - The Skills Organisation
 - Service IQ (both ITOs)
 - Whitireia Polytechnic
 - Capital Training Ltd – a Wellington based PTE

I am not going to tell you about the mechanics of the research

- Unless you are a research nerd – that would be very boring for you.
- What is important is what we learned from the research
- It is comforting to know that what we learned is in line with overseas research findings
- Here are the top 10 findings

1. A multipronged approach made a significant difference

- It is possible to make significant improvements to the lives and productivity of adults with dyslexia without major disruption, and for minimal cost.
- Doing a lot of relative minor things makes a big difference.
- Even the technology is relatively inexpensive – when considered against the potential it has to be transformative for dyslexic folk.
- Even small signs that you understand and respect folk with dyslexia goes a long way. Letting people with dyslexia know that it is “ok to be dyslexic” is a powerful thing to do.

2. Confirmation/identification (of dyslexia) is everything

- The majority of subjects we screened were not aware of their condition until we screened them.
- Many suspected – but were not sure.
- A positive screening is very empowering.
- Internationally there is a new focus on diagnosis being about highlighting what the person can do – as opposed to what they cannot do.

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- The majority of subjects we screened were not aware of their condition until we screened them.
- Many suspected – but were not sure.
- A positive screening is very empowering.
- Internationally the focus of an identification is based on: -
 - an explanation for the subject
 - Promoting self-understanding
 - what the dyslexia adult can or might be able to do – as opposed to what they cannot do

3. Information is paramount

- Both for dyslexic people and those who work with them.
- Mysticism surrounds dyslexia. It is a long journey to move beyond the myths.
- Providing adults diagnosed with dyslexia with research based and comprehensive information about dyslexia – including the positive aspects of dyslexia is very powerful in its own right.

4. Progress in the Dyslexia journey is very dependent on strong leadership

- Evidence of this exists at: -
 - international level
 - corporate level
 - within educational institutions.
- The Lee Kwan Yew story
- It is not enough to have in-house champions – leadership from the highest level is essential.

5. The power and influence of “significant others”

- Dyslexia is a issue too big to be addressed by researchers and educators alone.
- There is a place for:
 - Family members. - Partners - Volunteer mentors
 - Buddies in the workplace. - Advocates in the workplace
- We need to educate and support these people. They are our strongest advocates.
- Behind every successful person with dyslexia there is a “significant other”.

6. “Life is what happens when we are busy making other plans.”

- For adults, interventions and accommodations must fit around their busy lives, or they will not bother.
- This is where dyslexia in adults differs significantly to dyslexia in children.

7. Technology is the great leveller

- NZ most likely little different to other jurisdictions.
- Technology like:
 - Reading pens.
 - Smart pens/Live scribe.
 - Dragon software.
 - Phone apps.
 - Regular phone functions, like voice to text, all serve to level the playing field.
- There is a role for “techno-mentors” – to provide technological up-skilling for many dyslexic folk.

8. A public education campaign about dyslexia is long overdue.

- In New Zealand, ridicule of dyslexics is the last bastion of permissible discrimination.
- Ignorance of dyslexia both contributes to the ridicule and perpetuates it.

9. There is a strong need for a legislative or policy framework

- Without a legislative or policy framework there is a vacuum.
- The Ministry of Education finally agreed that “dyslexia does exist” in 2007 – but nothing else has been done.
- It is the ultimate case of cold calling – when you have to convince even highly educated people that “dyslexia is a thing”.

10. For adults money is not a deal breaker

- For adults a lot can be achieved for a relatively small amount of money.
- While some funding would be useful – money is not a deal maker or deal breaker.
- The greatest amount of progress can be made by:
 - Increased knowledge by all parties
 - Relatively inexpensive changes in behaviour by employers, tutors and the dyslexic people themselves.
 - Technology purchased by the dyslexic person themselves. Most of which involves minimal costs.

So – what next?

- We should work to regularize and normalise dyslexia.
“It is Ok to be dyslexic.”
- We should work to remove the stigma.
“Dyslexia is a difference – not a disability.”
“ There is no cure for dyslexia – that is because it is not a disease.”
- We should champion dyslexic people as the way forward.
“If we want to be as successful as Google– we need to employ as many dyslexic people as they do.”

Sowhat next

- Advertisement in a UK Situation Vacant column.
“Only dyslexics need apply.”
- That is the perspective we should have.
- Finally – us folk in the ACE sector can be the signposts.
We can point folk who could be dyslexic in the right direction to get support.
- We can recognise the tell tale signs.....