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'The black hole of learning disabilities'

(by Christine Bryant, Eastside Editor - October 04, 2008)

One in 10 people reading this article will struggle.

The core difficulty will be with word recognition and reading fluency, though the reader also may in general have troubles with spelling, writing and expressing himself clearly.

Ten to 15 percent of the U.S. population has dyslexia, yet only five out of every 100 dyslexics are recognized and receive assistance, according to the Dyslexia Research Institute.

Reynoldsburg resident Debra Demarco first noticed a problem with her daughter's reading when she was in first grade, but it wasn't until when her fourth-grade teacher recommended that Renee be tested that she knew something was truly wrong.

But even after testing showed Renee had dyslexia, Demarco was not able to find affordable help for her daughter until representatives from the Dyslexia Institutes of America visited Renee's school.

In January, Joel Greff opened the Institute, located in Gahanna, after his son went through a similar experience.

"His preschool teacher first noticed something wrong and thought he should be tested," he said of his son, who is now 10. "The diagnosis was a pervasive development disorder, but they didn't know specifically which kind of problem it was."

Throughout his early elementary years, his son had difficulty focusing and with reading and writing.

After struggling throughout his second-grade year, his son began school at Marburn Academy in Columbus, where he was diagnosed with dyslexia.

"We're fortunate the teachers picked up on it early," Greff said.

Greff knows, however, not every family has the means to send their children to private or specialized schools where they can get more individualized instruction.

Renee Demarco began working with Dr. Linda Condron, director at the institute's clinic, in May for two hours once a week, and her mother already has seen progress.

"Renee's self confidence has improved and so have her grades," Demarco said. "She's reading better and better



Messenger photo by Rachel Scofield

Reynoldsburg resident Renee DeMarco, a fifth grader at Grace Christian Academy, writes sentences dictated by her instructor Shawn Schmittgen at the Dyslexia Institute of America located at 676 Brook Hollow, Suite 101 in Gahanna.

thanks to what the Dyslexia Institutes has done for her. Linda has done a great job teaching Renee and I think what helps is she can relate to Renee. They hit it off on day one and it hasn't stopped."

Like with Renee, dyslexia can affect a person's self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling "dumb" and less capable - leading to students becoming discouraged about school.

"The impression is they are lazy or aren't trying," Greff said. In reality, he says, dyslexia is the "black hole of learning disabilities."

"A lot of kids ends up in special education programs, and they kids have average to above average intelligence," he said.

It isn't only children, however, Greff sees struggling.

"They masked it all their lives because as children, there wasn't a diagnosis," Greff said.

In fact, 15 to 20 percent of the population have a language-based learning disability, according to the International Dyslexia Association. Dyslexia is the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties.

About 60 percent of individuals diagnosed with attention deficit disorders also are dyslexic, but because only the behavioral aspects of ADD are addressed, their learning and language differences are often unrecognized, according to the Dyslexia Research Institute.

Without the proper diagnosis and help, many of these dyslexics and ADD individuals are only functionally literate, and are part of the 44 million adults with only the lowest level of literacy.

This limits their ability to find jobs, or to advance in their current positions, Greff said.

"We've tested adults who got promoted and now have to write reports," he said.

The institute has tested more than 25 people so far, he said, ranging in age from 1st grade students to adults in their late 50s.

As part of the testing process, the institute conducts a diagnostic battery of 11 tests.

"The combination of the results helps us with our diagnosis," Greff said. "If they do have dyslexia, they receive therapy that is individually tailored."

Therapy usually consists of visiting the institute once a week for a two-hour session, as well as home therapy, he said.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing and pronouncing words.

Who does dyslexia affect?

Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations or extra support services.

What causes dyslexia?

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions. Moreover, most people with dyslexia have been found to have problems with identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods, dyslexics can learn successfully.

Source: The International Dyslexia Association

Where to find help

Dyslexia Institutes of America

676 Brook Hollow, Suite 101
Gahanna, OH 43230
www.diaohio.org
(614) 340-5592

International Dyslexia Association

8600 LaSalle Road
Chester Building, Ste. 382
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
info@interdys.org
www.interdys.org
(800) ABCD123

National Center for Learning Disabilities

381 Park Avenue South
Suite 1401
New York, NY 10016
www.ld.org
(888) 575-7373

Learning Disabilities Association of America

4156 Library Road
Suite 1
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349
info@ldaamerica.org
www.ldaamerica.org
(412) 341-1515

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

National Institutes of Health, DHHS
31 Center Drive, room 2A32 MSC 2425
Bethesda, MD 20892-2425
www.nichd.nih.gov
(301) 496-5133

Signs of dyslexia

General

- o Reading, writing letters in wrong order
- o Difficulty learning to speak
- o Difficulty organizing written and spoken language
- o Difficulty memorizing number facts, spelling and reading
- o Incorrectly doing math operations

Adults

- o May hide reading problems
- o May spell poorly
- o Avoids writing; may not be able to write
- o Often very competent in oral language
- o Relies on memory; may have an excellent memory
- o Often has good "people" skills
- o Often is spatially talented

- o May be good at "reading" people
- o In jobs often working well below their intellectual capacity
- o May have difficulty with planning, organization and management of time, materials and tasks
- o Are often entrepreneurs

Young children

- o A slowness to add new words
- o Difficulty rhyming
- o Has trouble following multistep directions
- o Difficulty reading single words, such as a word on a flashcard
- o Difficulty learning the connection between letters and sounds
- o Confusing small words, such as "at" and "to"
- o Letter reversals, such as "d" for "b"
- o Word reversals, such as "tip" for "pit"

Source: The International Dyslexia Association

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