

**The Parent Support Project
(phase 3)
End of Project Report**

Run by the Cornwall Dyslexia Association
funded by the Parenting Fund
March 2009 to March 2011

Executive summary

**Full report available from:
enquiries@cornwalldyslexia.org.uk**

Introduction

Why is helping dyslexics and their families so important?

When dyslexic children meet failure and frustration they feel they are inferior, their effort makes little difference and they feel powerless, and incompetent. The effects are often overlooked by schools, parents and society. Without help dyslexic people may become disengaged with school, dismiss education, drop out and get caught in a vicious circle of worklessness, crime and prison. 70% of those permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy (Clark & Dugdale, 2008) and 50% of young offenders are likely to be dyslexic (Reid & Kirk, 2001).

Dyslexia also runs in families so parents may have similar problems.

"When faced with a child who is having school problems, dyslexic parents may... relive their failures and frustrations through their child's school experience. This can bring back powerful and terrifying emotions, which can interfere with the adult's parenting skills." (Dr Michael Ryan 2004)

In some areas of Cornwall over 20% of primary school children have special educational need. For example in Penzance, St Ives and Hayle, according to the school census in 2009, the figure was 22.1%.

Dyslexic people (and therefore dyslexic parents) often have not received appropriate help at school and now have poor literacy and numeracy skills, low self-esteem, and less opportunities for for life choices. (In a recent survey we undertook of adult dyslexics 83.3% told us they had not received appropriate help at school.)

Research, partly in Cornwall, for the 'No to Failure Project', 2009, revealed that the number of children with dyslexia or specific learning difficulties (SpLD) was 21% which equates to over 100,000 children in Cornwall. Also that 55% of children who fail SATS have dyslexia or SpLD. Yet with the right diagnosis and support,

dyslexics can do just as well as other children.

The Project

In response to feedback and consultation with parents and carers in 2006 the CDA identified the need for a practical, informative, community-based course for parents and carers of dyslexic children, to help them better understand and support their dyslexic children.

Research highlighted the impact of poor home-school communication, lack of independent parental support and the need for improved specialist intervention. Parents told us they struggled to help their child to read or spell using the methods instructed by school. Consequently parents felt powerless to know how best to support their child. These needs are reflected in the list of 'What Parents Want' (see appendix B) compiled by the CDA.

An additional list of 'Parents' Feelings' (see appendix B) provided an equally important and revealing insight into factors which are influencing the lives of both parent and child. As a result, the course design explicitly considered emotional issues along with the more practical, cognitive ones.

Following a successful bid to the Parenting Fund, the 'Supporting the Dyslexic Child' course for parents, grandparents and carers was designed and delivered, from September 2006 to June 2008. During this time 40 courses were delivered with over 550 participants attending and extremely positive results. (See evaluation report 2006-2008) Transitional funding was then provided by the Parenting Fund until March 2009 when the CDA was awarded funding for a further two years.

This work was managed by a Project Manager, who was also the lead tutor. A second tutor was engaged on a freelance basis to assist with course delivery and a number of different people acted as tutor support, usually drawn from the local area. A Publicity Manager was also employed to assist with course promotion and

advertising. The Project was overseen by a Project Steering Group and the CDA Chairperson. Meetings and reviews evaluated progress against agreed milestones and discussed project issues as they arose. Ongoing adaptation to procedure and practice were made accordingly.

Executive Summary

The Cornwall Dyslexia Association's Parent Support Project (the Project), funded by the Parenting Fund, was developed in response to an identified need to strengthen support services for parents of dyslexic children. By increasing access to understanding and skills delivered through a variety of accessible channels, the parents' confidence and skills were developed to the benefit of them and their families, along with improving the emotional and academic achievement levels of their dyslexic children.

Over 8,000 adults have accessed support provided by the Project between March 2009 and March 2011. 858 of those have attended courses and focussed workshops designed to empower adults with the ability to overcome barriers to home-based learning often precipitated by dyslexia, emotional isolation and a lack of appropriate resources and knowledge. This resulted in an average of 13 adults attending each of the 44 ten-hour 'Supporting the Dyslexic Child' courses (the courses), 15% of those being men. 257 dyslexic children also attended 'literacy and numeracy fun' workshops to widen their experience of strategies and resources specifically designed to support their learning needs, and 24 schools hosted reading and staffroom workshops.

A further successful outcome of the Project has been the inclusion of teaching professionals. This has raised schools' awareness of issues relating to family-centred learning to inform family-friendly policies, communication and practice.

The application of specialised learning strategies promoted by the Project has increased dyslexic children's confidence and development in literacy (average of 32% improvement); numeracy

(average of 23% improvement); and self-esteem (average 26% improvement), as reported by adults attending the dyslexia awareness course. 92% of these participants were extremely satisfied with the increased level of dyslexia understanding they had received; there was an average 35% increase in positive attitudes towards dyslexia; and 100% of service users applied most of the home-based learning resources delivered as home activities.

A survey of parents' needs, experience and research informed project design insuring accessibility and inclusion issues were identified and addressed as much as possible to engage all parents including the hard to reach (such as fathers, those in isolated rural communities and those with low literacy levels). Community-based venues increased participation as identified by schools who noted the unexpected attendance by some parents noted for their absence at school-based events. This factor, along with the ability of the CDA to engage service users through understanding and empathy borne of shared experience and knowledge enabled effective practice to achieve the Project's aims and objectives.

The Project has also used a telephone helpline, website, advice stalls, leaflets and DVD to promote its services along with CDA membership and networking with other service providers to ensure continued access to support. It has used paid staff and volunteers to monitor outcomes and evaluated services to guide present and future practice.

Feedback confirms that the Project has achieved positive outcomes. It has provided practical solutions in response to an understanding of, and response to, the needs of dyslexic children and their families. However, there are still plenty of opportunities to continue this work; increase the efficacy of support between home and school; and extend the understanding of dyslexia to those in the wider community.

The project was delivered on time and within budget.

This evaluation report has been produced by the Cornwall Dyslexia Association (CDA), March 2011. Its purpose is to:

- **Provide information** to assess achievement with regards to the aims and objectives of the course
- **Promote understanding** of how the project was undertaken and the factors affecting its design
- Identify opportunities for **future prospects**

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