

Lifting burdens

Dyslexia can be overcome

Talk to members of the Dyslexia Society and they will tell you what a difference seven years can make. Back in 1987, a small group of concerned Prince George residents banded together to combat the perceptions surrounding the learning disorder; today the membership stands at over 100 members.

"The society started out strictly as parents complaining about inequities in the school system," says Larry Merritt, a founder and current board member of the group. "Its scope has had to keep changing. Now we have all kinds of different people as members, and we're doing something about a perceived problem, not just bitching about it."

The problem they perceived was their children not having their needs met by the school system, and the low self-esteem that caused. "For awhile we were at loggerheads with the school board. We had lots of angry parents. The amazing thing is the need for the society in the first place; it should be handled by the school system itself."

Instead, the society has taken it upon itself to bring reluctant educators up to speed by hosting an annual summer school. Teachers and tutors of dyslexic students come for the two week training session to learn the latest instructional methods. The school is well attended and draws world-wide participation. "We had one person fly in from the Philippines this

past summer; and two came up from California to focus on math techniques."

Local children with dyslexia also get the benefit of participating in the hands-on environment the society encourages.

The summer project has also helped break the ice between the society and the school board. According to Mr. Merritt, "If you talk to us today we say they have a better attitude, and if you talk to them they say we have a better attitude. Dyslexia is still a term educators don't like, but you can appreciate a child going through school, not doing well, and thinking he's stupid. We show that no, you're not stupid, and that lifts a burden from both child and educator."

The burden that persists, however, is misinformation about the disorder. Many believe dyslexia is merely reading letters backwards, but it also involves trouble with information retrieval, and sequencing problems such as writing 406 instead of 604. It isn't an isolated few living with it either; an estimated 20 per cent of Canadians live with dyslexia or a related learning disadvantage.

The society contends these barriers can be overcome through modified classroom practices, which would benefit all students. An example is the multi-sensory techniques of Project Read which encourages students to read, write, and speak what they are studying.

Information is available on Project Read at the society resource



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office. Reach them by calling 564-8011 or visit them at 490 Quebec Street. The society board meets monthly, circulates a newsletter, and

campaigns vigorously for funds and awareness. They also provide a comprehensive library, numerous videos, and the life experience of its

many members who, on a daily basis, not only deal with people who have dyslexia, but often live with it as well.

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