

# **Dyslexia Assessment and Support Services**

**Consultant: Karen Starkiss**

I have been involved in education for several years, in England and latterly Australia. My school experience has been as a class teacher, learning difficulties consultant, School Improvement Officer and School Principal. I have worked in inner city and rural schools; primary and secondary schools and I have taught teenage 'school refusers.'

## **About Me**

As a parent or an adult, looking for answers and support for learning difficulties, it's very important to know that you are making the correct choice. As a parent, myself, of children with learning disorders I can understand how the whole process must be very difficult and how you may be concerned about making the wrong decision.

Of my children and grandchildren two are dyslexic and have ADHD, two have ASD and one has undiagnosed ADHD. My two daughters who have dyslexia had trouble organising themselves and as they progressed through school, the older they got the less support they received. I tried to help them and explain their problems to the teachers. Unfortunately, being in education myself, I knew there was a good chance I would be labelled an interfering mum who couldn't accept that her children were "Lazy" (a common label given to dyslexics) could do better if they made more effort.

As far as my experience of dyslexia is concerned, I have assessed and taught children, teenagers and adults. It has been an extremely fulfilling experience for me, sharing their successes. But it has also been upsetting and disturbing to hear how their difficulties have affected, not only their learning but also their confidence and self-esteem.

One of the first teenagers I worked with was a very bright girl, the youngest of a family of four children who were all excelling at school. When I asked her what she hoped to gain from me working with her; I thought she would say that she would like to be able to read the same books as her peers or write confidently but she said, "I just don't want my mates to think I'm stupid."

Many students I see are talented in one or more areas. They can be highly articulate, imaginative, creative, they can design and build without using plans and they appear to be able to see what the finished product should look like. They can problem solve, can think outside the box. There is nothing wrong with their intelligence, they just can't learn the way that we teach them therefore we need to teach them the way that they can learn to enable them to reach their true potential and raise their self-esteem and confidence. My role is to discover their personal strengths and weaknesses, then I can advise schools and parents/carers how to teach and support them.

My achievements include:

- Special Needs Consultant for 3 years
- Principal for 4 years of a school recognised as one of England's best primaries for standards even though we had the highest number of students with severe learning difficulties in our county
- Royal Society of Arts Diploma for Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia).
- Run workshops and provided training, both locally in Victoria and ACT, Northern Territory, WA and Tasmania. Workshops for schools and Tafes about identifying students with dyslexia and other LDS and creating an inclusive workspace.
- Invited to Buckingham Palace in 2007 in recognition of my "Outstanding contribution to education." for promoting inclusivity and significantly raising standards in our lowest ability students not just the ones with high ability.
- Registered teacher with the Victorian Institute of Teachers.
- Director of Learning at Speld Vic
- Invited by Department of Education Vic to train psychologists, school principals and speech therapists throughout Victoria about assessment and intervention.