



# Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand

Recognition • Understanding • Action

20 February 2014

The Board of Trustees

Dear Trustees

Welcome to Dyslexia Advocacy Week 2014 [DAW], and many thanks in advance for supporting the week, and your students who learn differently.

We know your principal and teaching staff are busy, so we have designed the week to be easy and simple for positive action to occur. We have written separately to your principal and provided a number of free resources that we hope will be put to great use.

Please refer to the flip side of this letter for a "fact sheet" that sets out our objectives for DAW.

Importantly, we have also included a copy of the Ministry of Education publication "Effective governance – Building inclusive schools" which provides critical background information that we felt your board should be aware of (if you are not already) in order to be well briefed for any parent enquiries that might arise from the Advocacy Week.

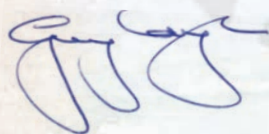
In addition to familiarising yourselves with this document, we would urge you to watch the highly acclaimed documentary; 'The Big Picture; Rethinking Dyslexia', which screens on TV3, Sunday 16th March at noon.

*The Big Picture; Rethinking Dyslexia provides personal and uplifting accounts of the dyslexic experience from children, experts and iconic leaders, such as Sir Richard Branson and financier Charles Schwab. Directed by James Redford, the film not only clears up the misconceptions about the condition, but also paints a picture of hope for all who struggle with it.*

*Shining a spotlight on the latest scientific and psychological research, the film also highlights the work of Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, co-founders and co-directors of the Yale Center of Dyslexia and Creativity to illuminate the hidden origins and implications of dyslexia. Proving that dyslexia is a neurological issue and not a character flaw, The Big Picture beautifully illustrates that while the condition is an obstacle, it also carries some unique advantages, and ultimately can be overcome.*

The Dyslexia Foundation of NZ was formed in November 2006 to provide a voice for, and services to, the estimated one in ten New Zealanders with dyslexia as well as those supporting them. Many thanks for your important role in supporting the 70,000 school aged students who still often struggle in the education system.

Yours sincerely



Guy Pope-Mayell  
Chair of Trustees



## DAW MISSION STATEMENT - Fact sheet for busy trustees!

**When?** 17-23 March 2014

**What?** Dyslexia Advocacy Week [DAW] 2014 is all about making clear the legal rights that dyslexic students' have in the classroom, and equipping parents to advocate for these rights to be met with appropriate teaching. If a child has a learning difference, a school has a legislative obligation to notice and adjust the classroom teaching to accommodate this. For schools, DAW will build on previous activities that were focused on equipping schools and teachers with knowhow.

**Why?** Since dyslexia was officially recognised seven years ago, policy development at the Ministry of Education and within schools has come a long way towards developing more inclusive classrooms. But this policy is not always being put into practice.

**Who is DAW for?** DAW is designed to provide parents with explicit knowledge about their child's rights and how these can be accommodated in the classroom. And to highlight simple, practical steps for teachers and schools to make this happen.

**How?** Our new DAW webspace sets out critical information for parents to aid the advocacy process, and we will also communicate to them through our databases. We're also doing a send-out to every NZ school and principal which spells out our mission and delivers free resources. And TV3 will be screening the acclaimed dyslexia documentary – The Big Picture; Rethinking Dyslexia – on the Sunday before DAW commences.

**Where?** On our website, and through information to parents and to each and every NZ school.

**Tell me more?** Conservative estimates are that one in ten New Zealanders are dyslexic – which translates to at least 70,000 schoolchildren. These children begin school full of curiosity and eagerness to learn but quickly become disillusioned by unexpected failure in the classroom. Action at an early age is the critical determinant in setting children on the right path.

Parents are the frontline for effective action. In knowing their child's legislative rights, parents can advocate for classroom changes that allow those with learning differences or preferences, like dyslexia, to reach their potential. Because dyslexic individuals are big picture/concept driven, they generally prefer working visually. Adjustments to accommodate this and introduce more inclusive classroom teaching can make all the difference.

Accommodations commonly include things like extra time for information to be processed, multi-sensory teaching and computer use, as well as acceptance of alternative evidence of achievement such as audio recordings and mind maps. These types of accommodations are supported by a wealth of neurological science and research, including fMRI mapping at Yale University, which shows that dyslexics receive and retrieve information in a different part of the brain to neurotypical, word-based thinkers. In simple terms – dyslexia robs a student of time, accommodations give it back.

For dyslexic students and their parents, the journey to success starts with knowing the student's rights. These need to be met with great teaching - which starts by creating classroom comfort for the student through empathy and understanding. This is the necessary foundation for teachers to provide learning challenges. With simple accommodations in place, competence can then be demonstrated. From this comes student confidence and self-advocacy.

# It's not rocket science...

