

New facts about dyslexia

By JOANNE BENNETT

joanne.bennett@fairfaxmedia.co.nz

Do you have trouble spelling? Was rote-learning your times tables at school impossible? Get your bs and ds mixed up when you're not concentrating?

Dyslexia is more common than we think. As a rule of thumb, one in five people have a degree of dyslexia.

Of course there are varying degrees – some may go through their whole lives unaware that they have the condition, yet for others such as Mary Burgess' son, schooling can become a real battle.

Mrs Burgess had been told by teachers that her son was lazy and naughty. He couldn't remember the months of the year in order.

"School wasn't easy. He was so frustrated at times because he couldn't get the words and thoughts in his head down on paper," she said.

Mrs Burgess said a disproportionate number of prison inmates have dyslexia, perhaps owing to the way they felt at school – unintelligent, unsuccessful, resulting in low self-esteem.

"If it's not picked up early enough it can lead to problems. It's a neurological issue, not a character flaw."

Harry is now 16, and since being diagnosed as a 12 year old has proceeded to do very well in the school system.

He passed his NCEA with merit, with the assistance of a reader-writer.

While the condition is an obstacle, it also carries some unique advantages and ultimately can be overcome. Harry is

very gifted with oral language, and is studying speech and drama through Trinity College, and is a South Island Under 18 representative for rowing.

According to Mrs Burgess, the key is getting teachers and parents to recognise the condition and create opportunities for success in other ways.

The Burgesses saw an advertisement for a new film about dyslexia that was being shown in Arrowtown.

Although they missed that showing, they did manage to see it at a later date, and "sat there with tears in our eyes".

With help from the Cookie Time Charitable Trust, the Burgesses are bringing the film *The Big Picture – Rethinking Dyslexia* to Geraldine..

"It is a wonderful documentary. James Redford [son of Robert Redford] directed it and there is great input from Drs Bennett and Sally Shaywitz. The myths, the stigmas, the truths, revealed.

"It provides personal and uplifting accounts of the dyslexic experience from children, experts and iconic leaders, such as Sir Richard Branson and financier Charles Schwab.

The award-winning documentary premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2012.

"It not only clears up the misconceptions about the condition but also paints a picture of hope for all who struggle with it," said Mrs Burgess.



The Movie *The Big Picture – Rethinking Dyslexia* will be shown at the Geraldine Cinema on Sunday, June 9 at 11.30am. Gold coin entry.

Common problem: Famous dyslexic Sir Richard Branson's experience with the condition is included in a film on dyslexia which will screen in Geraldine on Sunday