



Dyslexia support group forming



1 You are helping convene a support group for families affected by dyslexia. How did the idea for this group come about?

“Over the years, I have listened to individuals and families, [when] they themselves or their children have dyslexia, share their experiences of successes, frustrations, highs and lows, and their journey stories.

“The recurring themes from these stories made me aware of the sense of isolation that exists for many who have dyslexia and those around them.

“Dyslexia is often referred to as an ‘invisible disability’. For many people, unless you have personal experience with dyslexia, either through a family member, friend, associate, it is difficult to appreciate exactly what a dyslexic person experiences.

“The aim is to bring people together who share a common interest/need/purpose and help build a community,

and ultimately enhances the social well-being within a community.”

2 What do you see the function of such a group being?

“I guess that is yet to be decided. The invitation is for people interested in being part of a local support group for families affected by dyslexia or similar learning difficulties to come together on Monday, August 26, between 7pm and 8pm at the Wanaka St John rooms.

“The aim of this gathering is to consider if a family support group would be useful, desirable or achievable and if so, what form it would take.

“The group could provide an opportunity to share ideas, network, educate, advocate, share useful resources, build relationships, provide general support, be a stepping-stone for guest speakers on related topics and hopefully remove the sense of isolation families often feel.”

3 How important is a support group for families with mem-

ber(s) affected by dyslexia?

“From what I have heard from families and comments made in response to the idea, just having the conversation is a step in the right direction. The idea will evolve into what the community feels it needs. Hopefully, this will be intergenerational. Dyslexia doesn’t go away just when you leave school.”

4 Are there significant numbers of people affected by dyslexia and other similar learning disabilities in the community?

“Over 250 people, here in Wanaka, attended the first screenings of *The Big Picture* — *Rethinking Dyslexia*. This was part of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand’s (DFNZ) introduction of the documentary throughout New Zealand.

DFNZ estimates 1 in 10 New Zealanders are dyslexic, including 70,000 New Zealand school children. (American experts claim this figure is closer to 1 in 5.)”





5 In the past, adults affected with dyslexia have said that as children the condition flew “under the radar”. Do you think that is still the case for many people?

“Yes, unfortunately, that is often the case. Historically, people with dyslexia do not have good stories to tell about their school years. Dyslexia has been called a “learning disability” because of the impact this alternative way of learning and thinking has on literacy. The school years can be the hardest years for dyslexics. Fortunately, modern teaching practices go a long way to allowing those

with the ability to perceive the world from different perspectives to do so. Even so, self esteem is often the greatest casualty in a dyslexic’s life. Successful dyslexics are those who draw on their strengths and hit their targets in life. (Thirty percent of American millionaires are dyslexic.) Family support is a big part of such successes. Building relationships between school, families, specialist support helps achieve this, as does gaining a clear picture of what challenges and strengths a dyslexic faces through an assessment.

Effective action and great classroom

teaching can unlock the potential and allow dyslexic individuals to use their talents. However, children still slip under the radar in our schools today. Dyslexic children are average to above average intelligence, and therefore develop great “coping mechanisms” in the classroom. They therefore do not often register at “the bottom of the pile”.

“It has been said: if everyone was treated as though they were dyslexic, i.e. alternative thinkers, what a colourful world we would live in.

It is definitely something to ponder.”