

Dyslexiability Inc. breaks the stigma

By Sonya Legault-Cesta

It's where children and adults are given the opportunity to express their views of the world, where the term 'ability' replaces 'disability'. It's where people with learning difficulties, eight and older, are given the necessary tools to succeed.

Renée Figlarz, 27, is founder of Dyslexiability Inc., a Westmount-based non-profit organization that seeks to help people with learning difficulties using the Davis Method, a one-on-one approach.

The Davis program runs for five consecutive days (30 hours) and highlights clients' personal objectives and strengths. Essentially, the method focuses on individuals' needs and helps them master the basic tools to overcome disorientation, according to Figlarz.

Dyslexiability Inc., is breaking away from the popular misconceptions associated with dyslexia. Figlarz believes that individuals with learning difficulties are often perceived as 'stupid' or 'lazy'. Rather, Dyslexiability Inc. underlines their talents. Dyslexics are usually curious, imaginative and insightful, Figlarz adds. They perceive reality with the five senses.

Herself dyslexic, Figlarz is the first licensed facilitator to have brought the Davis Method to Quebec.

"This is a wonderful method. It happens to be the one method that made all the difference to me," said Figlarz.

Highlighting the Davis Method, Dyslexiability Inc. perceives dyslexia as a gift rather than a disability, said Figlarz. She coined the term 'dyslexiability', which, she said, "explains that there are abilities that come along with dyslexia and learning difficulties associated with dyslexia. So we don't focus on the 'disable' part. We focus on the 'ability' part. When you give somebody a label, like a disability, it limits them because they believe that they cannot do certain things. If you focus on an ability, you empower them, and they feel that they can try and do better."

Marilyn Cooperman, Figlarz's mother, said that her daughter has struggled a lot with her learning difficulties. However, her tenacious personality pushed her to accomplish her goals and complete a higher education. Figlarz got her BA at McGill University and her MSc. at the University of Surrey in the UK. "Renée is a fighter," added Cooperman.

Figlarz said, "I always felt very isolated, alienated and different. I didn't know anybody else who had learning difficulties. I'm sure many people I met did, but nobody knew. And it was only after – when I was doing my bachelor's degree – that somebody gave my father the book called 'The Gift of Dyslexia' by Ron Davis."

“It’s a book that is written for dyslexics,” said Figlarz. “The writing is a bit bigger. So I read the book, and I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t feel weird or alone. I felt I belonged—that I was just like a lot of other dyslexics.”

Figlarz followed the Davis program at Dyslexia Solutions Canada in Waterloo which gave her the courage to apply for a Masters program. This “eye-opening experience” offered her the opportunity to have her abilities reflected in her marks, she mentioned.

The word ‘dyslexia’ which means ‘trouble with words’, encompasses many concepts and subdivisions, according to Figlarz. She explained that the term can be divided in different segments of learning difficulties like attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dysgraphia. However, disorientation is the common characteristic to these types of learning difficulties.

“Disorientation is when your senses are not giving you the correct information. What you see isn’t what is really there. It’s only what you think is there,” said Figlarz. Disorientation can sometime compel an individual to daydream or zone-out.

The tools provided by the Davis Program are invisible, adds the facilitator. “They are in ourselves. So we don’t have to worry (about) standing out in public, with our friends at school or at work, which is very important. And they give us the opportunity to go the root of the problem which is disorientation.”

Dyslexics sense the world visually, according to Figlarz. Instead of perceiving a word in its sequence – for example TREE: T-R-E-E – they perceive the word visually – TREE: roots, trunk, branches and leaves. Disorientation occurs when there is a trigger word, no image associated to a word, for example the word ‘the’. Therefore, Figlarz lets her clients use clay to create a word-picture in three dimension. The clients come to associate the trigger word to an image, adds the facilitator.

Marie Boulais, a mother who had her child follow the Davis Program, stressed the importance of voicing dyslexia in the public forum. “Dyslexia remains very mysterious in school systems. Children with dyslexia are often given a label—‘learning difficulty.’”

Dyslexiability Inc. offers clients a step-by-step service, starting with the initial consultation and assessment to the choice of the right program: Davis Dyslexia Correction, Davis Math Mastery or Davis Concept Mastery.

When asked about her future objectives, Figlarz emphasized that she wishes to create information sessions about dyslexia, once more individuals know about the organization. Forum for discussions are means to dismantle the stigmas associated with learning difficulties.

For more information concerning Dyslexiability Inc., call (514) 815-7827.