



**The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and
Training**

Inquiry into Adult Literacy and its importance

**Submission by
Dear Dyslexic Foundation**

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Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF) is a dyslexic-led organisation. Our mission is to empower young people and adults with learning disabilities to reach their full potential. DDF gives young people and adults a platform to share their lived experience of SLDs and other learning disabilities. Our service model is built on peer-led support principles, and we use storytelling to give dyslexic individuals, their parents, and carers a voice as a means of empowerment and self-advocacy. DDF operates under a social model of disability, whereby dyslexic individuals are properly supported according to their individual needs.

We actively seek to address the many challenges that dyslexic individuals face, including barriers to diagnosis, lack of visibility, acceptance and inclusion in school and employment, and access to support services. Through collective dyslexic voice, we produce regular podcasts, host a peer-support helpline, and have a growing online community. The online community increases inclusivity, in respect of differing levels of confidence, preferences and safety whilst increasing capacity to access and learn from peers.

Specific Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia and dyscalculia are neurobiological-based specific learning disabilities, which affect around 10% of the Australian population (Wilson, Andrewes et al. 2015). Dyslexia can significantly impact an individual's ability to learn how to decode and read words, with impairments in processing the phonological aspects of language (Lyon, Shaywitz et al. 2003). When reading, speed, fluency, comprehension and spelling are compromised (Berent 2017, Nation 2019). Secondary difficulties are less obvious to identify but will co-occur with dyslexia. These difficulties include working memory, motor skills, organisation skills, expressive language skills, mathematics and left and right confusion (Alexander-Passe 2018).

Dyscalculia can significantly impact on an individual's ability to learn maths. It's an impairment of core numerical tasks which continues into adulthood (Wilson, Andrewes et al. 2015). Individuals with dyscalculia usually have trouble with maths at many different levels. They can



struggle to do basic and abstract math problems and mathematical concepts (Kucian and Aster 2015, Ansari 2021).

Dyslexia and dyscalculia show a high rate of co-occurrence with around 40% of individuals having both disabilities, which are permanent despite excellent teaching (Wilson, Andrewes et al. 2015). Like other disabilities, they are on a continuum from mild to severe. They are not related to one's intelligence (Aaron, Joshi et al. 1999, Wilson, Andrewes et al. 2015).

Over the last twenty years there has been an increase in acknowledgment of dyslexia within the education sector, including awareness of the impacts this disability can have on the learning and development outcomes of a child and young person. However, support for dyslexia is insufficient and does not include dyscalculia. Compounding this, when a student moves from education to employment there is almost no recognition or support for these disabilities in the workplace.

For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to dyslexia and dyscalculia as specific learning disabilities (SLDs).

1. The relationship between adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills and socio-demographic characteristics, particularly migrant status, First Nations status and individuals living in households that have experienced intergenerational unemployment.

Under UNESCO literacy and numeracy are basic human rights because they are fundamental for success in the areas of education, employment, health and wellbeing. Additionally, they are also important for a person's ability to participate effectively within society (Adult Learning Australia 2021). In Australia there has been limited drilling down into the causes of low literacy and numeracy. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) are two examples of categories that have been overlooked. SLDs are two of the most prominent disabilities within our society, yet there is a significant lack of awareness and understanding of the conditions. This lack of awareness and understanding has led to institutionalised barriers and stigmatisation due to poor attitudes towards people with SLDs, prohibiting them from fully participating as equal members of the community. We know that those with SLDs face emotional challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, poor self-concept, lack of confidence, frustration and anger (Ridsdale 2004, Carroll and Iles 2006, Mortimore and Crozier 2006, Madriaga 2007, Burden 2008, Tanner 2009). Many studies support the view that those who have poor reading and mathematical skills suffer from low academic self-esteem as children, which can continue into adulthood (Fairhurst and Pumfrey 1992, Humphrey and Mullins 2002, Kucian and Aster



2015) and cause eventual negative consequences where mental health issues seriously impact on the individual's view of themselves.

SLDs can present a significant challenge to the individual, his or her family, educators and society, and for some, can result in a lifelong battle with literacy skills and numeracy. It has also been linked to intergenerational disengagement with the education system and, for some, leads onto a criminal trajectory (MacDonald, 2012). There are limited studies into the impact of low numeracy skills caused by dyscalculia on mental health and wellbeing, however there has been a significant body of research undertaken looking at the impact of low literacy skills caused by dyslexia on mental health and wellbeing. Those with dyslexia face:

- Significant levels of depression and anxiety (Wilson, Deri Armstrong et al. 2009)
- Self-harm tendencies- Males predominantly self-harm with alcohol, followed by food and then rarely with bodily harm. While females predominantly self-harm with food, then bodily harm and lastly alcohol (Alexander-Passe 2015).
- 46% are more likely to have attempted suicide, which is much greater than the average population (Fuller-Thomson, Carroll et al. 2018).
- Research tells us that shame is one of the strongest feelings that those with SLDs face (Bohdanowicz 2015).

Research also tells us that there those with SLDs are, in particular, highly represented among youth justice and adult prison populations in many developed countries (British Dyslexia Association 2013, Caire 2013). Figures cited range from 14%-47% (Samuelsson, Herkner et al. 2003) and more (Kirk and Reid 2001).

2. The effect that literacy and numeracy skills have on an individual's labour force participation and wages:

The literacy and numeracy challenges caused by SLDs have a direct correlation with an individual's ability to participate in the workforce. Productivity outcomes are a vital function of many workplaces. Organisations tend to be driven by factors such as market force need and can be less suited to accommodate the workplace needs of individuals with SLDs (Bell, 2009). In Australia and overseas there are now federal and state legislative policies and Acts to ensure those with learning disabilities are covered (Bell, 2009; Tanner, 2009). Yet, despite the ratification of such Acts and disability policies aimed at reducing discrimination, a commitment to the inclusion of individuals with diverse needs such as SLDs is not as well established or understood in Australian workplaces (Graham 2020).

Once individuals with SLDs leave the education system and enter the workforce, any previous formal support received vanishes (Winters 2020). Despite the range of jobs available, the workplace will usually involve various and often conflicting demands on the individual but more often than not there is no appropriate support for workplace expectations to be met (de Beer, Engels et al. 2014, Carawan, Nalavany et al. 2016, Nalavany, Logan et al. 2018). Effective literacy and numeracy skills are essential requirements within most workplaces and those with SLDs may battle to meet these particular demands. They may encounter overly complex tasks that increase their workload stress (Beetham and Okhai 2017), or face challenges related to their physical working environment, such as background noise and other distractions (de Beer, Engels et al. 2014). This can be further exacerbated by the discrepancy between the employees' abilities and the employers' expectations (Stacey 1998). This discrepancy can lead to a heightened risk of undue stress and anxiety, not meeting performance work-based expectations, limited career prospects and compromised psychosocial wellbeing (Morris and Turnbull 2007, de Beer, Engels et al. 2014). Additionally, there seems to be a lack of understanding and recognition among employers, managers work colleagues as to how the characteristics of SLDs can affect workplace functioning (Morris and Turnbull 2007). Those with SLDs can feel stigmatised and face discrimination in the workplace due to misconceptions about SLDs and what they are (Morris & Turnbull, 2007). The cost of extreme work strain, such as feeling overwhelmed and emotionally fatigued, may have considerable consequences for individuals and their organisations (Wallace & Lemaire, 2013).

Research undertaken by Herrera-Araujo, Shaywitz et al. (2017) in the U.K found dyslexic individuals are less likely to go onto higher education and are underrepresented in undergraduate or graduate diplomas. The difference in educational attainment may be correlated to a large pay gap between those with and without dyslexia. Dyslexic individuals earn an estimated 15 percent less per year (around \$8000) than non-dyslexic individuals and have about 30% smaller net worth by age 33 compared to the rest of the population (around \$60,000). Furthermore, dyslexic individuals have worse self-reported health than non-dyslexic individuals (Herrera-Araujo, Shaywitz et al. 2017).

SLDs can bring many strengths to the workplace such as creativity, analytical and critical thinking, innovation, big picture thinking, strong problem solving, high emotional intelligence and are stronger leaders and social influencers (Earnest and Young 2019) these strengths are generally overshadowed by the day-today challenges of their disability. In much the same way the Federal Government has, over the past 30 years, streamlined and brought the states into alignment on education standards, road safety and licencing, and elements of the criminal code, there is a need now to lead the states and territories in ways to address the needs of people with SLDs in adult education, the workplace and, unfortunately, the highest need area, criminal justice and corrections.

3. Links between literacy and social outcomes such as health, poverty, ability to care for other family members and participation in civic life:

It is well recognised that there is a strong link between low literacy skills and quality of life outcomes. Those with SLDs generally have lower life satisfaction leading to overall poor mental health and wellbeing across their life span resulting in poor life outcomes (Livingston, Siegel et al. 2018). Secondary to their 'invisible dyslexia', it is also acknowledged that a high proportion of those with SLDs live with psychosocial disabilities and the associated barriers to be effective citizens. Individuals with SLDs have expressed feelings of stigma, discrimination, alienation of peers and the need to disguise their challenges, using coping strategies to hide their authentic self, creating a second persona (Alexander-Passe 2015).

Parents who have an SLD have reported how they have struggled to support their children as they progress through their education (van Bergen, de Jong et al. 2012). Parents describing feelings of trauma when revisiting schooling (Booth and Booth 1998, van Bergen, de Jong et al. 2012). Many individuals with SLD will rely on support from their partner to help support their child/ren through the education system (Boetsch, Green et al. 1996, Alexander-Passe 2015).

As mentioned, the social impacts of SLDs are far-reaching for young people and adults. Those with SLDs are more than 'twice as likely to report high levels of distress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicidal thoughts and are 46% more likely to attempt suicide compared to persons without disabilities' (Fuller-Thomson, Carroll et al. 2018). Besides the distress and often trauma families, friends, and communities can face when someone has a mental health condition (e.g. depression, anxiety and suicide) there is a high economic cost to society. The burden of mental health costs the Australian economy 1.3 billion dollars annually and will continue to rise (Teager, Fox et al. 2019) if early identification, prevention and interventions are not accessed early.

For young people and adults who are from disadvantaged communities, the risk for them is even greater. They are faced with intergenerational trauma, unemployment and socioeconomic disadvantage. This population are less likely to have the skills and financial capacity needed to access assessment and early interventions services, leading to disengagement and disconnection from the education system and employment opportunities. In Victoria, 40% of those in juvenile has a learning disability (Spyce Project, 2014). Our current systems are failing these young people.

4. The relationship between parents' literacy skills and their children's education and literacy skill development from birth to post-secondary education:

Without identification of SLDs, teachers, peers and/or parents are more likely to attribute difficulties with reading and writing to low intelligence and/or lack of effort. A number of studies have emphasised the important role parents play in helping their children make sense of dyslexia, particularly in relation to difficulties with learning to read. This role is vital prior to the identification of dyslexia, when it is not clear what is going on, as well as following identification (Burden, 2005, Griffiths *et al.*, 2004, Ingesson, 2007). Studies have also found that parents who were not supportive of dyslexic children were in the minority. One study by Barbara Riddick and colleagues (Riddick *et al.* 1997) identified and categorised three types of unsupportive parents as 1) parents with children in school before information about SLDs was readily available, who did not understand the nature of their child's difficulties; 2) parents unwilling to challenge the authority of teachers and 3) parents with lower levels of education.

This last category is the most significant one here, and primarily because the particular lower socio-economic groups where parents may be characterised by low literacy levels and possibly themselves dyslexic but not identified. Often this group of parents may be characterised by; likely to have left school with less, or no, formal qualifications, who often did not complete education beyond year 10, but were often more likely to have completed a vocational training and/or apprenticeships as opposed to formal education. Such a finding as this was repeated in MacDonald's (2009) more recent study.

5. Whether changes to schooling in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 will have a disproportionate impact on the skill development of those children of parents with lower literacy and numeracy levels, and consider appropriate remediation programs which might address this;

The global pandemic from 2020, and the world's response to Covid-19 in terms of education, are already presenting information about teaching methods, instructing remotely, and using technology to facilitate remote contact and learning. It has been a period of unprecedented innovation, and studies are already in print that have investigated short-term effects on children, parents and teachers. Longer term effects to investigate hypothesised attainment gaps will undoubtedly be the subject of much research in the future, but the impact of school closures to date has produced a limited number of publications already in one Norwegian province, in Northern Ireland, and in the UK (Blackburn and Ludgate 2020, Bones, Bates *et al.* 2020, Bubb and Jones 2020). Surveys online have shown that adaptation to home schooling happened very quickly and was well received by parents and children. Positive attributes reported include: children being more creative, better progress and useful feedback from teachers, and school leaders reported as wanting to implement changes based in the positive experiences of remote learning enforced by the lockdown.

In student opinion 79% of pupils from Grades 1 to 4 strongly agree that they learned a lot of new things at home school, many students reported that they were getting better at reading, could concentrate better at home-school, and produced more work than in the classroom. The issue of 'vulnerable children' reportedly received 'closer follow up' than in the classroom. Other reported advantages have included, greater sense of ownership and increased motivation, and children taking greater control of their own learning. Parent engagement has been found to have increased during home-schooling and parents reported they had a more insightful view of their child's learning and skills, and even skill levels.

Proposed Research

The *Dear Dyslexic Foundation* has a research arm that we are hoping to build upon, through collaborations, and through the awarding of research funding to undertake specific projects. We are currently looking at a proposal to survey parents who either have SLDs themselves, or have been home-schooling throughout the pandemic 'lock-down' periods in Australia. Collaborative partnerships have been investigated with the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, who have undertaken a similar project but not specifically with SLDs as a focus.

Digital communication has provided new opportunities for all students to be heard, and teachers have reported feedback that helped more than usual. So, in some instances, the pandemic crisis has become an opportunity for grassroots innovation. Little research is yet available about the widening of skill development of those children of parents with a lower literacy and numeracy, or of lower economic families who had little or no access to essential digital hardware. In the UK, millions of computers have been donated by businesses and benefactors, to enable disadvantaged children to access the internet in households without essential technology to support on-line home-schooling. Australia is well placed in terms of distance education, and has an advantage on many other countries globally, Australia should be ahead of the field. Further research, and particularly longitudinal studies will give educators greater insights into how Covid-19 has impacted on the skill levels of children whose parents have lower levels of literacy and numeracy skill development. But the early signs are, for the majority of children and young people, the impact of home-schooling and on-line learning has generally been reported as positive.

6. The availability, impact and effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy educational programs in Australia and internationally

The Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF) runs several different training programs that support literacy and numerous skills of those with SLDs.



Individual interventions

Tutoring: DDF provides group and individual tutoring service that specifically support the literacy and numerous needs of individuals with SLDs. The tutors have academic qualifications and are registered as teachers, who have specialised in dyslexia. They provide individuals with support strategies and skills for learning and managing at TAFE, university and workplaces. These services are delivered through an online, secure platform from anywhere in Australia.

Mentoring: DDF provides one on one peer mentoring for individuals. The peer mentoring program has been specifically designed to support young people and adults with SLDs who might be studying, transitioning into work or are already working. The mentoring is provided by an individual who has SLDs and who is a successful and experienced individual who has received specific training in dyslexia. A peer mentor is available to provide support and guidance according to the individual needs.

To date these programs have been effective for individuals in increasing literacy and numerous levels and increasing confidence. Individuals feel a sense of achievement when completing these programs.

Group interventions

Hampton Park Community House (HPCH) – DDF works with HPCH to provide specific community pre-accredited numeracy and literacy training for adults. This program has been rolled-out within the local community. DDF was recruited by HPCH to develop and facilitate two courses to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of the local community. HPCH works with the local primary school where the literacy levels of their students are very low and not improving year on year. One of the observed problems is that many of the parents have low or no education levels themselves and are not able to support the children's literacy at home. There are also parents who were not successful at school and do not expect their children to be a success at school either. Talks are also about to held with the local high school who experience similar problems to the primary school. Social-economic index for advantage/disadvantage indexes- **SEIFA** are a good place to start to get a general view of the relative level of disadvantage in one area compared to others. In terms of both employment and economic outcomes, potential opportunity is reduced through inequity of education and lack of higher education (Elkins, 2000; Hall & Belch, 2000; Nunan, George & Causland, 2000). Hampton Park's **SEIFA** – disadvantage score is 926.6 and is in the 15th percentile. The area



where HPCH covers, has a predominantly socially disadvantaged demographic and low literacy and education levels are prevalent, if not the norm.

The courses have been built using universal design principles that aim to build the literacy, numeracy, and financial literacy skill levels of people from age 16 years to the elderly. The courses are built around the levels in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) and include the relatively new area of digital literacy. The objective of this universal design is to support discovery of how best individuals learn, and uses aids to enhance their LLN (Learning, Literacy & Numeracy). The courses are designed around personal goals of the participants, to meet the current needs in their life. For example, it may be to be able to read a book to their child or to write a card for their grandchild or, to develop skills to get a job or improve work skills to maintain their current job.

Our financial literacy course '*\$'s & Sense*' is tailored to individual learning styles. It is designed to help people understand money and how it works in our society, and include such topics as, earning, spending, budgeting, saving, different types of credit, managing debt, insurances, investing, and superannuation. This course is structured around ASIC's '*Be money smart*'.

www.moneysmart.gov.au The course provides blended learning and is facilitated in a virtual classroom. The aim is to roll out these courses to other community organisations nationwide.

26Ten Tasmania

Tasmania has the most regional and dispersed population of any of the states in Australia, and 58 per cent of the population live *outside* of the capital city area of Hobart. Many Tasmanians lack the literacy and numeracy skills they need for life and work. 48% of Tasmania's adults are illiterate up to even functional literacy level, and do not have the literacy and numeracy skills they need for life in a technologically rich world. As well as the lowest socioeconomic status (SES), lowest student-school-retention rate across Australia, the state reportedly (Smith 20.02.2014) also has the lowest adult literacy levels and highest levels of intergenerational illiteracy.

In 2020, around a quarter (24.3 per cent) of Tasmanians aged 25 to 64 years (the working age) had completed year 11 or below, another quarter (23.9 per cent) had completed a certificate III or IV and almost three in ten (29.2 per cent) had completed a bachelor's degree or higher. The working age population is deemed to be those aged 25 to 64 years to account for both the completion of school and any further education undertaken. The **Index** of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, including both relative advantage and disadvantage measures, and scored scales of Tasmania's SEIFA are also consistently lower than any other state. Entrenched socio-cultural issues and deeply held cultural views found in the population of Tasmania underpin what

collective data shows. **26Ten** is a network of organisations and individuals working together to improve adult literacy and numeracy. The programs that are offered, allow flexibility to direct adult literacy and numeracy resources, and each community will train people to help others, to lift adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania. In addition, DDF has developed, and undertaken, professional development training with Tasmanian FE Colleges and High School teachers.

Literacy interventions in the Justice system

- **Spyce Project youth justice literacy intervention program in Victoria** Speech and Language therapists devised this program of intensive one to one language intervention therapy, working with incarcerated young offenders. The efficacy of this program was tested through a series of empirical, single-case studies. Findings supported positive effects, and gains in language and literacy skills and addressed communication skill deficits identified pre-intervention. The study results support the current moves to include Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) services in the youth justice system.
- **‘Just Sentences’- Tasmania** - Rosalie Martin’s project *Just Sentences* developed in 2015 (Tasmania) found a connection between speech pathology and literacy. This program involved working with inmates at Risdon Prison, Tasmania for 16 months to improve literacy skills. Efficacy of the intervention was found to be positive, and her work has continued since, helping prisoners to ‘crack the reading code’. Through the founding of Connect42, the literacy and communication skills of those with difficulties, are benefitting by such interventions.

Vet Development Centre Melbourne LLN Training for VET Trainers. There is one LLN course for trainers that concentrates on the rules of LLN paperwork. VET Trainers have no formal training in what practical learning strategies or adjustments would be beneficial to students who score low in certain areas. There is no mention of SLDs or the other associated learning disabilities/difficulties. The possibility of a student having a learning disability is often not considered. Staggeringly, at least 1 in 10 in their class probably has this problem.

Vet Development Centre Melbourne SLDs training. This training for trainers, unfortunately, most of the resources and references are from overseas. There is very little research done in Australia in this field. Shae Wissell the CEO of DDF is undertaking her doctorate with La Trobe University researching the impact of SLDs on mental health and workplace experiences. We need the Australian context as the overseas experience is very different with different government interest and investment and



cannot be translated to the Australian situation. As vocational training is dealing with workplace jobs or careers it is imperative, we understand what is happening in Australia so we can help our students to gain employment and be successful in employment, particularly if they have an SLD.

ASIC Be moneysmart This is a financial literacy resource for learners and teachers from primary school to adult learners and educators. www.moneysmart.gov.au The ASIC be money smart course for teachers is a good online course and may also benefit from being delivered to Adult educators with a facilitator to gain a greater insight on how to use the resources in their setting.

Adult literacy & numeracy practitioner PD program funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the ACFE Board and was developed by ALA and ACE Vic in conjunction with the project’s Steering Committee as well as sector experts and practitioners for Learn Local Adult Educators. This programme was run in 2020 and has gained funding to run again this year. The broad programme is excellent, and it does contain one section on SLDs and other learning disabilities. Unfortunately, most of the resources and references were from overseas. There is very little research done in Australia in this field. We need the Australian context as the overseas experience is very different with different government interest and investment and cannot be translated to the Australian situation.

7. International comparisons of government policies and programs that may be adapted to the Australian experience.

International Programmes-UK

Adult Literacy statistics-by four UK countries

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Adults - with very poor literacy skills	16.4%/ 7.1 million people- 1 in 6	17.9%/256,000 people 1 in 5	26.7% / 931,000 People 1 in 4	12% /216,000 people 1 in 8

Source: National Literacy Trust <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/>

Adults can get literacy support as parents, through family learning activity provided by colleges, libraries, schools and other organisations including:

- Read Easy recruits, trains and supports volunteers to give one-to-one tuition to adults who struggle with reading
- The Learning and Work Institute aims to improve access to learning for adults
- The Reading Agency provides a number of free resources to help improve adult reading skills

- Learn Direct provides online courses and a network of learning centres. Advice and information on their adult literacy courses available on-line
- English My Way is a resource for tutors who support and teach adults with levels of English, providing free teaching resources and tools to manage classes.

In Summary

The DDF is committed to advocating for change for young people and adults who have the neurodiverse specific learning disability, SLDs, and to devise programs, strategies and initiatives that will raise awareness in the public arena. We have outlined some of these projects in this submission.

As the third largest English-speaking country behind the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), Australia lags behind in the identification and educational treatment of SLDs when compared to other countries. (Armstrong & Squires, 2014). In both of the above-mentioned countries, laws exist to promote equity in education and employment that safeguard legislative obligations. Disability legislation in states and territories in Australia do not extend such powers and at best, only serve to prohibit active discrimination (Australian Government, 1992; Tasmania Government, 2011; Victoria State, 2006; Western Australia, 1993). Anti-discrimination legislation can offer some redress for anyone who believes they have been discriminated against in their education, but with insufficient clarity around the terms 'learning difficulty or learning disability', and an inability to even established that the nature of an individual's difficulties concur with World Health Organization (WHO) terminology of a 'disability' (Elkins, 2000), action has rarely been demonstrated through Australian law.

The current debate regarding the state of literacy and literacy teaching has revealed the need for organisations such as DDF. Australia's Standards of literacy have declined year on year for the past 15 years, on international measures such as those from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Australia's overall performance in the survey of adults



skills (PIAAC) found three million adults, representing one-fifth of the working age population, have low literacy and/or numeracy skills (OECD 2017).

While Australia's reading performance in PISA 2018 was similar to levels scored in 2015, since Australia first participated in PISA in 2000 the mean performance in reading has been steadily declining, from initially high levels. Performance in mathematics has been declining too since 2003, and in science, since 2012.

SLDs is given context here within a popularised model that takes account of, cognitive, behaviour and biological descriptors, and importantly, contextualised within factors present in the individual's environment. SLDs can present a significant challenge to the individual, his or her family, educators and society, and for some, can result in a lifelong challenge with literacy skills and frequently, numeracy.

As mentioned in our submission, SLDs has been linked to intergenerational disengagement with the education system, from the perspective of the parent and this can impact on the child, and the child's own eventual learning and educational outcomes. This has another dimension, particularly if the child, or children, also have SLDs that has either been diagnosed, or has dyslexic type learning needs but undiagnosed. Because of the educational failure of (some) people with dyslexia, it is easy for this group to become alienated from training courses, further or higher education and this is one such group where the focus for our work can be usefully directed.

Educators have been in conflict about reading instruction ('the reading wars') and there has been much reported public debate. Currently the profile has been raised publicly (<https://www.theage.com.au/national/kids-in-the-crossfire-it-s-not-just-that-they-can-t-read-it-affects-every-minute-of-their-day-20201203-p56kf6.html>). Using a 17 year-old boy, Callum, as a case study- vignette, his school experience and his disengagement with education demonstrated only too well the psychosocial impact of not being able to read has on his life. Typically, Callum would represent many of the *Dear Dyslexic Foundation* helpline callers, or referral clients.

It is our mission, that we empower young people and adults with learning disabilities to reach their full potential. As a young adult, the opportunities in terms of employment as a functionally illiterate person are very limited. There are few jobs for unqualified individuals, and even TAFE courses require a literacy test before acceptance. The importance of mastering rudimentary skills cannot be overstated, as is the need for effective functioning in the labour markets and for the economic success and social advancement of both individuals and societies.

The effect of SLDs upon the individual and their family cannot be overstated. Some of the costs in terms of social, emotional and psychological consequences have been presented here, and we draw attention to the work that this foundation has achieved since the inauguration of the



Foundation in 2015. We are a not-for-profit organisation that generates funding through donation or income generation through innovation.

Sadly, struggles begin as early as Year 3 and anxiety kicks in at this very early age. Schools are ill prepared and educators are poorly informed about identifying and addressing reading difficulties, particularly if the individual has SLDs type learning needs. Children should be taught reading (literacy) and numeracy, with instruction that is evidence-based, tested and efficacy established by research studies. The research arm of the DDF hopes to share research projects globally, that will be disseminated in Australia and lead to better informed policies and practice serving those who have dyslexia, or those who are educators, parents, employers or trainers. The wider society needs to be more aware and understand SLDs and our organisation has at its core, a commitment and responsibility to further this mission.

In conclusion we hope our submission brings attention to the social benefits of the *Dear Dyslexic Foundation* in working to achieve the stated aims of our organisation.

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- Dr Judith Hudson Board Director, DDF
- Christine MacJouvelet Chair, DDF

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