

Hopelessness to Hopefulness

Have you ever looked into the face of a child as they told you "I'm stupid", "I hate myself", "I wish I would die" or "why can't I be normal?" I have, I have heard these words spoken by my own children struggling with reading and from others I've come in contact with while tutoring. Those children had become completely hopeless. Some of them are as young as 8 years old. Suicidal over reading! Imagine giving in to the fact that nothing awaits you in the future except failure. They expect to look forward to a daily dose of frustration as long as they are in school. We cannot knowingly sit by and watch them live in a world of utter hopelessness.

My name is Tammi Hope. I am the volunteer coordinator of Decoding Dyslexia-Kansas (DDKS). We are a grassroots movement driven by Kansas families concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia within our public schools. Today we stand here representing families in 65 communities in Kansas. Amongst those families are 735 signees of the Fact It! Manifesto.

We must provide Hope. We must start at the beginning. We need to just say what it is. Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin (definition: National Institute of Child Health And Human Development). A medical diagnosis is imperative in assuring that the child's needs are met. By calling it by name in all documents pertaining to the student, we remove the ambiguity of their struggle. Their intelligence is no longer in question. We liberate them from self loathing, doubt and fear when we are all forthright in our dealings. We do this by being able to implement a specific "prescription", if you will. That prescription is the researched based effective best practices for Dyslexics.

5th Grader David was reading at 2nd grade and spelling at 1st grade. When I met him he said "I cant wait until I turn 16 so that I can drop out of school". He had already concluded that there was nothing school could offer him, because he could not offer what was expected of him. He was identified as dyslexic, his parents paid for a private tutor. He received the aforementioned (prescription) interventions for one hour a day, three to five days per week winter, spring, summer, fall and even over holidays and breaks. He began to understand what his learning needs were, and how those needs could be met. Finally, as he entered his second semester of 7th grade, he shared that he was being moved into an *honors* Language Arts class. His future plans had change. He now plans on not only completing high school, but furthering his education to become either a park ranger or a geologist. He now has hope where there was once hopelessness.

This is no small issue. It will all take of us to determine how best to implement these changes for our children. Moreover, this is not an issue limited to Kansas. Both *Literate Nation* and the recently established **Congressional Dyslexia Caucus** are discussing these very issues on national level. My desire is that Kansas be at the forefront of this process. We already know what needs to happen. We, those who are the proponents of this bill, are counting on you today to begin to bring hope to all dyslexic children in Kansas.