SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

Produced as part of the ***Toolkit for Disability-Inclusive Education - Fiji*** Issued Sept 2015

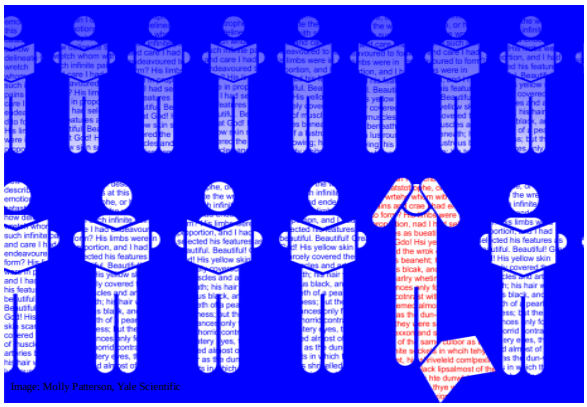

Image: Molly Patterson, Yale Scientific

Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education (Fiji Constitution)

All children should be given the opportunity to learn together wherever possible, regardless of difficulties, disabilities or differences (Fiji Ministry of Education Policy on Special and Inclusive Education)

Specific learning disabilities (SLDs) are problems the brain has in getting, remembering, understanding, organizing and using verbal and/or non-verbal information. Specific learning disabilities are due to the way the individual's brain is 'wired' and may affect listening, thinking, speaking, writing, reading, spelling or mathematical calculation.

There are three main categories of SLD, including:

- ***Dyslexia – impacting reading and writing (the majority of people with an SLD have dyslexia)***
- ***Dysgraphia – impacting hand writing***
- ***Dyscalculia – impacting mathematics***

Children with SLDs are often very bright and have average or above average intelligence. It can be confusing for parents and teachers and frustrating for the child, as the child may be extremely bright and good at many things, but the skills that are so central in a school setting (reading, writing and maths) are so difficult.

Children with SLDs often excel in practical and technical subjects such as woodwork, electronics, cooking, drawing, music, sport and performance. They are often creative, persistent, intuitive, empathetic, and have strong reasoning and problem solving skills.

Who can help?
Teachers, child psychologists, Fiji Dyslexia Association (contact via Mereoni Daveta mereoni.daveta@aqep.com.au)

Some indicators of SLDs:

- Verbally bright but with poor written performance
- Slow to develop speech as young child
- Difficulty organizing themselves in daily routines
- Difficulty pronouncing words
- Difficulty recognising and learning the letters of the alphabet and numbers
- Attention and concentration difficulty
- Learns well in practical activities

In order to read and write, a child has to link the sound of a letter with its written symbol (the letter). This process is known as 'phonological coding'. Dyslexia is a problem with the brain's ability to 'code'; this impacts most subjects in school.

Children with SLDs are frequently called 'lazy', which is untrue and unfair as they often spend many hours trying to do the same school work as their peers. SLDs can lead to poor self-esteem and a feeling of failure.

With the right support children with an SLD can achieve in life like any other person. Many famous people have SLDs, including: Einstein, Tom Cruise, Walt Disney, Richard Branson (Virgin airlines), and Steven Spielberg.

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