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Dear Friends of children,

Please forgive me for writing just one letter to all of you together. But this is too emotional for me to write this more than once. I hope by speaking up about my experiences, I do not jeopardize my job or hurt my family. But, if I can make a difference, I have no choice but to try.

I am an early childhood special education teacher. I love kids and school. Several of us were asked if we would be willing to give up 2 weeks of our summer, go to a workshop all day for a total of 10 days AND do it for free. They would pay for the workshop but would not pay us for our time. I said YES, of course. It was at this workshop, at the Fundamental Learning Center in Wichita, on the second day, when I learned I have dyslexia.

This was heartbreaking, overwhelming, and enlightening. My whole life (I am 54) I just thought I was stupid and did not work hard enough. Even though, I knew I worked hard and for long hours. I work all day, go home to cook and wash dishes and then most nights I am up until 11:00 or 2:00 AM working as hard and as fast as I can with no breaks, day in and day out. I do know that everyone works hard. I tried as hard as I could, but still, every minute of my life I fell short. Some people, like me, thought dyslexia was just about reading. Trust me, it seeps into every inch of your existence. It makes you clumsy, forgetful, unable to spell, unable to focus, unable to think under pressure (just having someone look at you during a conversation), and leaves in it's place self-doubt, self-loathing, and self-hatred. None of which makes you feel good about yourself, as every human on the planet deserves to feel. I have a master's degree and have struggled my whole life, so you can see why I just thought I was stupid. Your classmates know when you don't understand what they know. This leads to bullying, name calling, shunning, etc.. My dad was in the Air Force so I was lucky enough to move every year or two, before my classmates were too mean. But, I was not saved from the self-loathing. I had to wear a sign around my neck printed with the alphabet while I played with my friends, knowing that at any moment I would be asked to say my alphabet, starting at a random place. My desk was always a mess (dyslexia also steals organizational skills from you). This has even affected my work as an adult. I am one of the lucky ones. Many of the people in the prison system are there because of dyslexia. I know in my heart that every person in person is there because we, as a society,

were not there when they were little children. We failed them, when they needed us most. By not serving children with dyslexia, we are setting up our society to have to deal with them when they are "broken" and full of hate. It's easier for the psyche to deal with hating others than hating yourself. I am lucky, I learned to hate myself, instead of hating others.

Please use your power for good. I see little 4 year old children that are already discouraged, having behavior problems, and who "don't fit in".

I am lucky enough to work in a school system that is going to be part of the solution. I can already see the pride in my little kids eyes with their new learned understanding. They were not getting it and now I see a light in their eyes. I will be forever grateful to the Fundamental Learning Center and the Downing Foundation. Not only for my students, but for the discovery that there is a reason why I am stupid. I am trying very hard to see myself through new eyes. I am paying to have someone help train my brain to work better, in spite of dyslexia, and for the first time in my life I feel hope. Hope is a wonderful thing. Please help me share hope.

By helping children, we will save countless amounts of money, by keeping grown up children out of prison. We may have already locked up the mind that holds the key to curing cancer or any number of our society's evils.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Together we will make a difference. And, I for one, want to help save children from such a devastating, brain difference. One in seven people in our country, are victims of such a vicious, undiscriminating thief. Look around at the people around you, someone you know is suffering. People with dyslexia are usually smart and creative, so you may not be able to see them standing right in front of you. I know you will do what you can.

I originally wrote this plea in February 2012. In May I lost my job as a teacher. I was unable to keep up with the demands of being a special education teacher. Again, dyslexia, has left it's mark on me. I am now working as a paraprofessional, which I love, because I am still able to work with children. However, I cannot pay my bills on a para salary. Where I work now is not as progressive regarding dyslexia as where I worked with the Fundamental Learning Center. But, maybe with your help every child, with dyslexia, in Kansas will be able to overcome this hidden thief.

Sincerely,  
Cindy Dyke  
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