

Manx Dyslexia Association Chairman's Report November 22nd 2016

A summary of the MDA's work over the past year.

In comparison to the previous year, last year's AGM was a quiet affair followed by a meal for the Committee. I think we were all disappointed that despite considerable effort the events we organised during Dyslexia Awareness Week were not well attended. Yet again a workshop seems to be our most successful way of attracting interest.

So, in March we held another one, again at St Johns where Tracey Willoughby went out of her way to support and help us. We had the usual format of sessions on Mind Mapping and ICT run by Dr Joyce Monroe and Dr Helen Newbery. We appreciate their time and support. The sessions were held at set bookable times and this flowed well although it was felt the Mind Mapping sessions needed longer time slots in the future. As well as these, there were book displays, maths tips and people available to chat to those with concerns or questions. It was good to see a mix of parents, students and some professionals. I would like to thank Jo for organising the excellent posters.

Our original thought had been to push the use of Audio books this year, but after Anne and Chrissie met with Jan Kneen at Ramsey Library this changed to buying Barrington Stoke Books. Attached to this report is an appendix explaining this and I will report more on it later.

Also in the early part of the year I made an application to the Celton Manx Recognition Scheme 2016. I asked for help in marketing events and help with technology. We did progress to the interview stage but I think they were more interested in helping with fundraising which we do not need at present. It was a useful experience!

One of the highlights of this year has been improving our website. I had an interview on Manx Radio prior to the workshop in March when I asked again for help with technology and mentioned the website. This was picked up by Dr Alastair Robertson at the Isle of Man college who runs the Computer Science Degree Course there. The second year of this involves an Experimental Learning Module. The students are all familiar with the Wordpress framework and web development. When I met with him he explained he had a team of two students, one very dyslexic, who would find developing our website an ideal project! As they say 'a match made in heaven'! This resulted in several meetings with Adam Cowin and Mark Directo who were a delight to work with and showed great enthusiasm. There are still things to do on the website and at a recent meeting they are keen to continue working with us. Following the report which we gave to

the college Adam and Mark received a good grade for their work which goes towards their final degree next year.

We decided not to hold any events during the summer term as it is difficult to fit anything in with TT taking out time as well as lots of outdoor events. At our February meeting the Claro App was first mentioned as a text to speech App the schools were bringing in. We were asked if we could help to purchase some of these for schools. Helen checked with the IT department who in turn checked the legal implications and it was cleared that the MDA would give £1,500 to purchase Claro Pen Apps. These have now been purchased and at present they are being used in primary and secondary schools, the Isle of Man college and the Education Support Centre. 250 copies have been put out and a third of Primary schools have accessed the app so far. It does however take time to train and embed its use. We have yet to receive an invoice and are disappointed about the lack of acknowledgement from the Department despite all Helen's hard work.

Going back to the Barrington Stoke books mentioned earlier, we gave Ramsey Library the go ahead to purchase the complete secondary set which we, as a Committee, helped Jan to label and cover during the summer. At present, they are just being used at the school, but depending on how things can be organised they may be loaned out on a termly basis to other secondary schools. Jan is very enthusiastic and has promised to keep us informed of how they are going. They also invite their feeder schools to the library which may of course bring interest from other schools. Manor Park now also have a set of Primary Barrington Stoke books and when I met with Claire Campbell the Senco there she said they were making a real difference. We have also just paid for the Primary set of the books at Victoria Road. We have had some excellent publicity from Ramsey Grammar school and hope to have more on the other two schools and the Claro App.

September brought the ManxLitFest once more. Having learnt that Sally Gardner was to be attending as one of the authors I offered the support of the MDA. Sally is very dyslexic and strongly fights the cause of dyslexia. We were lucky to be able to use the Henry Bloom Noble Library in Douglas as a venue and I would like to thank Jan McCartney for organising a poster and publicity. Sadly, all did not go to plan due to fog!! The original evening was cancelled and another one hastily arranged for the Friday. There were reasonable numbers there thankfully and Sally did go into schools over two days. I feel our sponsorship was justified as it raised our profile and that of dyslexia on the Island. Sally was certainly a colourful character in appearance and language I believe! Overall for a quiet year I feel we have achieved quite a lot!

The Future

The future for me is that I am resigning as Chairman at this meeting. I have been involved with the MDA for over 12 years and chairman for half that time. I have

seen big changes in what we do, going from one big event each year to more smaller ones doing different things. I still feel we have an important role to play mainly being there to advise and support parents. Technology is removing many of the barriers for those with dyslexia. This is an area I have not caught up with and it needs someone with more knowledge and confidence to take over. The website can certainly play a big role in how we help people and this must continue to improve and expand. Possibly this could involve a forum and monthly information tips. We have now abandoned the helpline as it was seldom used. We have a Facebook page which again needs to be put to good use. As far as events go, workshops do work and doing one or two a year if possible gives face to face contact. Things mentioned during the year which need to be followed up on are; a questionnaires for librarians, and possibly one for primary schools, a possible summer school in 2017, and an update on the MDA leaflet, if it is still considered useful. I have already talked to Helen about support for 'Units of Sound' for use in schools but that will be up to the Committee to discuss. I will be happy to be called upon if I am needed and will deal with emails even if it is just passing them on!! I am however taking a step away and I wish the MDA continued success.

In Conclusion

I would like to thank the Committee for their support this year and especially Chris Seaward who has constantly guided me and been very active helping organise things over many years. Chrissie took on the role of secretary which has been much appreciated. Anne did a great job at Ramsey and the link there is now established. Charlotte as an adult dyslexic gives a valuable insight into the workplace and is happy to share her personal experiences. Having Jo on board as a parent gives another invaluable element to the team, she is enthusiastic and has good ideas, (as well as having a useful printer on hand) - please thank Dave for his support and help. Finally, I would like personally to thank Helen. We met 7 years ago, when I first tried to work more closely with the Education Department. We clearly were on the same wave length and have continued to be so. I have worked with her on many things and have really appreciated her input and our shared commitment to working to improve the lives of many children by increasing understanding of dyslexia.

Sue Rutter