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Julie Hermansen

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I would like to submit these letters as evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in government and non-government schools in NSW.

In September and October 2016 the 'Make it a Red Letter Day for Dyslexia' national campaign was created by Dyslexia Support Groups Nationally to encourage Children and families touched by Dyslexia (diagnosed or otherwise) to write a 'Red Letter' to someone they believe can influence change and create greater awareness for dyslexia.

The letters were published (in red) via the blog myredletter.com.au, and the original letters were posted to their intended recipients.

The colour red has been chosen to signify the 'taking back' of the colour, which is so often used by teachers to mark spelling and grammatical errors.

The following letters are just a few of those from NSW that were submitted during the campaign.

Julie Hermansen Dyslexia Support Australia June 8 2017.

### NSW Mum's Red Letter

13:16:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

I see you five-years-old kindergarten big smile, lunch box, back-pack too large counting to 20 seems impossible all is still right with the world...

I see you six-years-old year one tries to read not clicking? why can't he remember page to page? 'Never mind, he'll catch up' everything still seems okay...

I see you
seven-years-old
year two
who still persists
I am told
'He
can't
read.
It's okay... More reading at home.'
Is there still time?

I see you
eight-years-old
year three
'refusing' to write
testing, reading programs, no answers, eye checks, tutoring, hearing check, IQ
assessment... no answer
could it be dyslexia?
'NO!
just not bright'
things are starting to crack...

I see you nine-years-old year four disliking school hiding, crying, under the desk work never finished - if started Teacher life line: 'dyslexic signs' but where to now?

#### self-esteem is plummeting

I see you ten-years-old year five struggling everyday speech therapy An answer then? 'No, definitely not dyslexia' something is at least working

I see you eleven-years-old year six almost whole again amazing teacher adjustments, understanding, encouragement best year

I see you twelve-years-old year seven excited are you prepared, please be prepared more testing I see you weary, anxious, down, done phone call, meeting, email... nothing I tell them diagnosis: dyslexia, dysgraphia, anxiety phone calls, emails... nothing I tell them diagnosis: dyslexia, dysgraphia, anxiety, underlying depression phone calls, emails, meeting... nothing I tell them diagnosis: dyslexia, dysgraphia, anxiety, underlying depression, self-harm...

now can they see? now have they heard? now will they learn? now will they listen?

### NSW Mother's Red Letter

13:29:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 1 Comments

This NSW mother wants to remain anonymous.

My son is now 15 and his daily struggles at school have caused him to want to take his own life. He talks about this regularly, and it's terrifying.

My son has an invisible disability. He has dyslexia and ADHD. Invisible disabilities mean that people expect him to be the same as everybody else, when he can't meet their expectations he is penalised. This constant daily struggle has now meant that he has developed anxiety. Another invisible disability and now more problems.

It wasn't always this way. My son was an enthusiastic preschooler bursting with enthusiasm for learning, and couldn't wait to go to kindergarten. His enthusiasm rapidly declined as he struggled to keep up with his peers. His self esteem declined too. We watched our enthusiastic boy become sad and miserable. He would come home from school and disappear. We would find him hiding in his cupboard wrapped tightly in a blanket crying, calling himself dumb and stupid. No child should be left to feel like this, school should be a time for happiness, learning, achieving and growing in confidence.

The school didn't offer any answers, and he just slipped further and further behind. We weren't given any direction and we wasted valuable time with irlen lenses, behavioral optometry and countless other dead ends. We spent a fortune trying to do what the education system could not.

Unfortunately, my son's situation is not unique. There are many children out there just like him. He is a beautiful boy with many talents that he's struggling to show because of his disabilities. Teachers should be given the strategies and the knowledge to understand reading disorders and learning difficulties. They must know how to screen children early, so they can be given effective intervention, so these children can flourish. If they are supported early, their self esteem is left intact. All children have the right to an effective education.

We know this is possible. Without the support of the Australian Dyslexia Association, and the support of parent advocates in the Facebook group, Dyslexia Support Australia, I'm sure my boy and my family would be completely lost. School is still a daily struggle, but we have learned that it is possible to help struggling readers learn to read, but we have had to go outside of the school system to do it. Parents should not be forced outside of school to get what school should provide. What happens to those who have no money for outside help?

The cost to the health system, the communities and the families is incalculable. Ministers and policy makers can no longer remain oblivious to this educational and social crisis. They can no longer deny the reading research and evidence for what works. Children with invisible disabilities such as dyslexia can no longer be ignored.

Yours Sincerely Mother, NSW

### 003 - Lewis's Red Letter

19:35:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 003 Name: Lewis

Age: 16

Recipient: Catholic Education Commission NSW & Department of Education NSW

11<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Catholic Education Commission NSW Department of Education NSW

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am dyslexic. I am currently in Year 11 at a Catholic School in New South Wales. My entire schooling has been an absolute nightmare.

In my primary school years I couldn't read. If you can't read, you cannot participate fully in any subject. I always felt different from my peers. I was the butt of a lot of teasing and bullied frequently. My teachers did not know what was going on with me. They did not understand me at all. I became invisible in the classroom. If I was quiet, hopefully no one would notice me. If they didn't notice me they wouldn't ask me any questions. I endured Reading Recover which does not work for dyslexic learners.

I was taken out of class constantly and made to work on programs which did not work for me. I developed severe anxiety around going to school. I was a broken child. It was my mum who pursued answers and even when I was identified as dyslexic, the teachers were not convinced dyslexia was even real. It's hard to hear that it doesn't exist when you are living with it every day. I couldn't read, I couldn't spell, I couldn't write and I was in year 6.

It was my mum who taught me how to read, how to spell and how to write not school. She educated herself on how to best help me.

High school has not been any better. The difference is, I will now stand up and advocate for myself but this has taken years to be able to do. I still have difficulty accessing the curriculum and demonstrating my knowledge. I am entitled to provisions, but do I always get them......NO!

During assessment time the school needs to constantly be reminded to give me my provisions. Sometimes they forget, sometimes when they do remember, I am given the wrong exam question etc.

A couple of my teachers have been supportive and understanding, but then a new year rolls around and the same set of problems occur. Most of the teachers I have had have had no idea of what dyslexia is or how to teach me.

A sub-teacher strikes fear into the heart of any dyslexic learner. Information about kids with learning differences such as dyslexia are not passed on, so again, leaving me exposed and open to bullying from both students and teachers. Dyslexia is invisible so it is easily forgotten. The fear of being called out to answer a question or worse still, to read aloud in class, is a real everyday fear.

My family are my biggest supporters. My mum has been my fiercest advocate. She has had to fight for my rights and my provisions. She is the one who finds audio books for me so I can access the curriculum. She has been bullied herself by teachers but will not stop fighting for me.

I have worked harder than most kids. I have basically gone to school and been home schooled all at the same time. I have done extra programs for years with my mums help to be able to read, spell and write.

I am smart. I know that now, but for years I did not. I did not understand why my peers could do easily the things I found to be the hardest. You are made to feel stupid, worthless and so much shame.

I am now finishing Year 11 and about to begin Year 12. I still suffer anxiety around my learning. I will get my HSC, but not because of the school system but rather in spite of it.

I cannot wait to finish school and find my place in the world where I will be treated with respect. If it wasn't for my mum, I still may not be able to read and write. I say shame on the education system. This has to change, dyslexic kids deserve so much better.

Thank you for reading my letter.

Yours sincerely,

Lewis Age 16

### 011 - Charlise' Red Letter

19:59:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness O Comments

Entry ID: 011

Name: Charlise

Age: 10

Recipient: Senator Murray Watt

Paraglish (South Old) Charice and 10 yrs Hellow my name is charlise and aways tindi had to do my School work and from my texche aways need help my teacher can't aways come I sit in my chair feeling

Sad because I don't know how to do the work. The others kids in my class get mad at me because I ask them to help me too they to me 'I can't help you the time try it yourself. So I get sail again. It's not right to get angry of me if im those prople who needs think its why don't hely till it hard. I like is school some times and feel sick in my stomuch. I tell Mum I hate not being smart. I relly have so much trouble doing my moths and my spelling.

Say all the time why can't My Mum and Dad heetins pricpril my Mum won'ts me to nak ne hapa and make me smart. The pricing help me and Mum and Dad are Canc I have no Mobilers. wort ne to SO NU I ladil KNOUS

know I can do Some Much

ucnt me and Stop Making Mum and Pricpils knew more about dislikely we could all feel proud of ourselfs little so changes in a class room can make this come true for all of WS. \S. So please tell then people who can make this shag changethank you love chartise

### 025 - Nathan's Red Letter

13:55:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 025 Name: Nathan

Age: 12

Recipient: School Teachers

to my high school teachers 7/10/16

#### dear high school teachers

everyday at school is frustrating. I can't keep up because I am stuck on writing and trying to understand the qustion and don't get fustratied when I don't understand to question. don't pick me for reading It makes me feel nervus and I am scared that I when say the wrong word or add one In

tests and asingments do nothing to help me learn. because it is repeating stuff that i don't get. i fell pressured to do them but i don't learn anything form it

i feel sick and my stoumit turns. some theachers say that i need to learn better and stop avoiding learn your best and i am trying my best and the expect more but i cant

i feel horrable in class and i want to leave and don't tell me to learn to wright and spell or pucucate it isn't helping and when i need help please help me and not eggnor me

-nathan

### 042 - Maisie's Red Letter

23:04:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 042 Name: Maisie

Age: 11

Recipient: The Hon. Simon Birmingham

Dear Mr Birmingham,

My name is Maisie I'm 11 years old and I'm in year 6. Im wrighting to you because Im dislecsic. I think that there is not enoth support at school for kids like me.

Being dislecsic makes me feel out of place because every one eles understands what the teacher is saying. Having to ask my teacher to explain it again is embarrassing and it makes me feel annoyed of myself for not understanding in the first place.

My teacher tries to support me but he dose not have enoth knowledge about dislecsicia to help me properly. If the teachers know about dislecsicia they could still not help much with the lack of resorses in the school.

In a ideal school the teachers whould have knowledge of dislecsicia, the school would have lots of resorses for maths and english to teach us in a multisensory way, class groups whould be smaller, and no coping from the board.

Spelling homework is not being torght properly. Coping a word four nights in a row dose not teach me to spell the words. How can we learn the spelling when we haveen't even been taught the meaning of the word? My tutor has taught me a way that helps me. When we brack down the word in to sillablies we learn how to spell it and she told me the meaning of the words. I will be happy to do homework if I know it will help with my spelling.

When the teachers use the white board it is too hard to copy off it because of the glair and coping from paper next to me is easier because it is closer to my book. It would be better if we were given the infomation and we highlighted the important parts. Coping from the board makes my eyes sore and tried.

I don't like that the teachers just repeat the same things over again when I haven't understood it the first time. They need to change the way they explain something so it makes more sense to me.

I feel really sad when they cross out everything on my work with red or pink pen. I work hard and their explainations aren't clear so I make mistakes. They don't care that I work hard. They don't explain properly so no wonder I make erors.

"Please listen more" and "Try harder" are comments that the teachers write on my work makes me feel like my best isn't good enoth for them. They make me feel like a falur because I can't do it the way they want. The way I have been torght to do my maths by my tutor actually helps me learn and remember my times tables. Repeating times tables doesn't help if you are dislecsic. Writing it down in a times table grid and saying it at the same time helps me remember the order they go in and most of the answers.

I wish teachers would explain things like maths in more than one way. And I feel frustrated because they don't check in with me until the end of the class and then they tell me that I have done everything wrong. When I put my hand up, it is like they leave me until last to help.

I wish that my teachers would follow the suggestions from my tutor. The teacher and mum made a plan for me called an Individual Plan. I wish that the teachers would actually use it. I need more hands on activities in maths. I need understanding from the teachers. I need teachers to learn what dislecsia is and I need them to care that some of us are dislecsic.

I feel like teachers think that I don't work hard enoth. I work as hard as I can. I try to work it out in my brain and they tick it wrong.

I am really good at Little Athletics and my best event is long distances and high jump. I love to ride my bike after school and on the weekends. I love spending time walking our dogs with my family. I like to read if it's a good book even though it takes me a while to read it. I am a creative writer if given the right amount of time and help with spelling. I can write good stories and I enjoy it as I get lost in my own story using my imagination.

Please give more funding to all schools so dislecsic kids like me won't have to grow up not knowing how to do everyday activities at school. Thank you very much for reading my red letter.

Yours sincerly

Maisie

### 044 - Bethany's Red Letter

19:18:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 1 Comments

Entry ID: 044 Name: Bethany

Age: 9

Recipient: The Hon. Adrian Piccoli, Mr Greg Whitby - Exec Director of Schools Catholic

**Education Parramatta** 

Dear Mr Whitby and Mr Picolli,

Hi my name is Bethany. I am 9 years old and I'm in Yr 4 and I live with dyslexia.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia half way through Yr 2 term 2. Since then I have struggled with writing, spelling and putting my thoughts down onto paper. I have not received a lot of help through school with these problems, I have had to bring my own iPad because I could not always access the ones in class when I needed. I am lucky for my mum who has helped me find the support I need through speech pathology and OT, which I attend outside school. I have to get done heaps of homework just to keep up with the other kids in class.

Changing to a new teacher or having a substitute teacher means that they don't understand me, this is one of hardest things of all. They think I am dumb and not paying attention. Some of the things these teachers say are so bad that they feel like they stick forever. When I started school I thought it was going to be a fun and happy place not a place I would find scary and unhappy mess. I don't know if either of you have felt this feeling before but it is not a good one. Just having a teacher understand you makes school life so much easier. Having a teacher understand me is a basic need for me and this is why you should support dyslexia and make school a happy place for me and others with dyslexia.

There are some good aspects of school too. Like the two teachers who have tried to help me and understand me in the best way possible. These 2 teachers have done an incredible amount of work just for me and tried to support me through my school work. These 2 teachers will have a special place in my heart.

As I have written throughout my whole letter, children with dyslexia need more support, we need teachers in schools with specific training in their uni degree because there are so many children across Australia with dyslexia who have teachers that make school so much harder than it needs to be. I would like dyslexia to be in a category to get funding and support, just like kids with autism. I would like the speech pathologists, OT or tutors that help dyslexic kids outside school be able to come into school and co-operate with our teachers so that they know what is in our lessons is getting into our books. I would also like proper teaching of how to type and use technology—I had to get my mum to type up this letter because I just find it too hard and stressful.

Thank you for reading this letter, it would mean a lot to me if you would take what I have said in this letter and try and do it.

Yours truly

Bethany

### 068 - Tiera's Red Letter

00:28:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 068 Name: Tiera

Age: 9

Recipient: The Hon. Adrian Piccoli

#### Dear Mr Piccoli

Hi I'm Tiera and I am 9 years old. Mum is typing this letter for me so I can tell you what has happened to me.

I couldn't wait to start school. When I started Kindy I felt confused and alone because I couldn't pick up how to read because the letters didn't stay in one position and kept moving around. My teacher was nice but he didn't understand what was happening to me even though he told me later after I had left that school in year 2 that his daughter had dyslexia. I use to tell mum that I was dumb because I couldn't learn to read as quickly as the other kids. Even though mum would tell me that I wasn't dumb I thought that I was. I hated school and I didn't feel safe because some of the kids teased me and my new year 2 teacher had fly swatters in his room and he threatened to smack us with them and I got worried because I wasn't good at school work. I changed classes but I still felt scared so mum let me move to a new school. My New Year 2 teacher at the new school was lovely because he understood what I needed and what I wanted and that year was easier for me.

In year 3 I had different teacher who thought I wasn't worth it. I would try my best but she would say things to me like, "you haven't done enough" "you aren't good at this" and when I tried my best she would say "that's not good enough" When I was in her class I felt alone and scared. The other kids started teasing me and would say "Oh my gosh you can't read and write" and I would feel stupid and dumb. My mum told this teacher that she thought something was wrong and that I might have dyslexia and she helped mum to find someone to test me. After that mum tried to get me some more help at school but it still was not enough and this teacher would still keep me in at lunch time and treated me like I was not trying, I felt scared of her and would cry most days because I didn't want to go to school.

I felt horrible about myself and going to school. Even though she knew I had dyslexia it didn't seem to make a difference to what she expected from me

I have a tutor who is helping me now. I have started a new school and things are a lot better even though it is still hard for me the teachers are much nicer to me and the kids don't tease me. This is the third school I have tried. I am in year 4. Please help dyslexics kids so they don't go what I have been through.

Tiera Aged 9

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXPk7GskD8Y

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

### 096 - Lucas's Red Letter

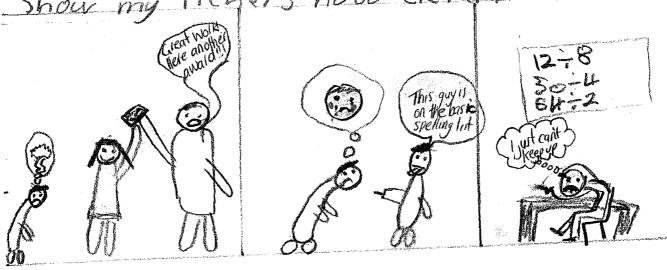
02:09:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 096 Name: Lucas

Age: 9

Recipient: Principal, Teachers and Ryan Park MP

my name is Lucas. I am ninner I have dislexed at scool I strugl whith mathes and spelling. Some some days my dislexed fills so hery I fill allown at scool like nowar and stans have hard it is. It is frastrating wen I can't show Show my tickers how cleref I am



But I am more then disterier lograte at codei.

I love to make strop motion

animashin. I am terming to serrer.

tslexearill I whish I codede you's technology at shoot so my spelling do:

not distrat from my idils.

## 090 - Emily's Red Letter

23:43:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 090 Name: Emily

Age: 13

Recipient: Principal

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cand sover again. Sometimes to
they think it there is to a
difference between listening and
understanding. They keep.
Saying that I take
for too long to do my
work they after say that
to me. Sometimes I have
to stay in the or
come laich at low to
the same to sometimes. lunch times this such stupies.

Me feel sach and stupies.

Almost every class is like this

It usally takes me half the. lesson sometimes more just to reach a few sentances. It makes me feel like giving up. But d want because to d want because to dearn. the other kiels clan't understand and they say try harder! and trying my harder! It such makes me feel realle It such makes me feel really mad because and solot and how hard of try and dan't how how hard wither dyslexics try.

But don't just think of me as someone who has dyslessia. I This to are some illess that Would be helpful to me and with alyslexic. A Sess reeding and Writing than man dysteric students to Exeta time to finish work lent most honors to miss time with My friends at lunch and that help spelling reading, writing and moths four free A Deachers that understand and moses also about objection so that It it is not so A that's Work sheets that are understand but still challenge Thank your for taking some of your time to read this letter. I hospe it makes a leit of a difference

Emily age 13 year 7 leich wu dyslessi me of the autside Heferently.

### 085 - Menindee's Red Letter

20:52:00 My Red Letter Dyslexia Awareness 0 Comments

Entry ID: 085 Name: Menindee

Age: 13

Recipient: The Hon. Adrian Piccoli

# My Red letter

I knew a girl, she was only little, but she was brave.

So brave that everyday when her teachers put her in a cluttered room, smaller then a cubicle, with two ladies, a timer and a book full of letters the size of Mount Everest, she would smile and pretend she knew what the letters C.A.T spelt.

This girl's name is Menindee and she is now 13 years old.

The truth is, when I first started to write this letter I was going to be strong, like the rest of my "special Dyslexic speeches", but really I need to be truthful.

Writing this letter brought up memories that I forced myself to forget, they were far too painful.

I only found out that I was Dyslexic in early year 6. After many schools and far more reading support programs, including "Multilit", which was only supposed to be a 6 month boost. I was on it for 2 years. You would think that that should have been an indicator.

From almost being destroyed in years kindy - 2 , I was homeschooled for a year, which build my confidence and I was then able to do basic maths and read a proper sentence. I went back to school (a different one) forgetting my past years of torture. I began a new journey, still with appalling spelling and even worse maths. With half finished work books at most, being very easily distracted and generally overwhelmed in class, I got through with below average report cards.

I remember one day in year 6, I pulled my teacher out of the classroom to tell her that I really couldn't do a math problem and she walked back into the room, full of quiet kids and almost yelling said "well you should, this is kindy stuff," leaving me humiliated and holding back tears once again.

I always felt dumb and stupid, like I wasn't good enough. And even though I don't feel like that any more, there will always be a nudging voice that sticks around in the back of my mind saying, " well what's ever told you you're smart."

I have a lot of great friends, but when ever I try to explain what Dyslexia feels like, they look at me with a blank, confused expression. So for all the Non-Dyslexic's, it feels like you're constipated in the head, whenever you try to read, write or do math.

Dyslexia Education Minster Hi Im Lili and I have dyslexia, I Imin 1200 stressf Eciends Who and terrible teacher Wella all. Sh e did -didn't foun class really Suffered my old \_5Ca be seen at was aging to 9 · BUF 00+ Busle CER IN musel and am goin à Juho sare abou a biateacfor the ber if you have dyflex in believe , Reme Typo