

**PACFOLD Focus Groups –
Highlights from Discussions**

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

May 19, 2005

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PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

PARTICIPANTS

In attendance: 5 parents of children with learning disabilities

DIAGNOSES

I started to get concerned in grade 1. He was diagnosed in grade 3.

My child just started to read last year with the LDAS program. He's 15.

It took five years to get a diagnosis.

If we hadn't found the LDA, our son would never have been diagnosed. It wouldn't have happened in school.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

It costs \$500 per month for tutors for my two boys.

We paid for a private assessment when we heard how long the waiting period was for a funded assessment.

EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

The worst thing we ever did was let our child get held back in school. His friends moved on and he didn't.

The school system labels kids at a very early age.

Our school doesn't like labels. It would never use the term "learning disability".

I feel like I'm home schooling my son because he isn't getting what he needs at school.

My son has a "why bother" attitude toward school.

The problem with schools is the bureaucrats, not the teachers. It's all about the money. When someone is labeled with a learning disability, the school has to make accommodations.

I couldn't believe it when my son's grade 5 teacher — two years shy of retirement — said that she'd never taught a student with dyslexia before.

IMPACT ON FAMILY

He got bigger and louder and madder. Everyone was living in fear.

My child's behaviour was fine at school. It was bad at home.

My son comes home mad and angry from school and the family pays the price.

Home was my daughter's safe haven.

They take their frustrations out on the people closest to them because they know you're not going anywhere.

He comes home a broken kid every day. You spend time to try and mend them, but they have to get up every day and go face it all over again.

I got very depressed. I now attend a support group two or three times a week.

I knew my child was different from the time he was a baby. The hardest thing was that my husband thought it was all in my head.

I try not to favour my two children who have learning disabilities. I try not to take their problems inside of me and make them my own.

I have a cup of tea every day at 3:30 and I ask myself "What is it going to be like when they come home from school?"

I can cope because I have a personal network of close friends. And every day for the last 13 years I've taken the time to write down five things that I feel positive about. I can't give my kids the things they need if I'm full of self-loathing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

I wouldn't change a thing with my daughter. It's made my daughter who she is. And I'm a better parent for it.

My prevailing feeling is fear for the children; fear for what will happen when they become adults.

When I was told that my child would never read, it made me more determined and assertive. It made me a better parent.

My child wrote her first suicide note in grade 4. She was self-mutilating at 13. She was never invited to go anywhere. The phone never rang for her. She was very lonely.

My son also struggled with self-mutilation.
My son thinks of himself as stupid and mentally disabled.

I just want things to be normal. I don't want to have to deal with all of these extra things.

CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

PARTICIPANTS

In attendance: 5 participants; three in grade 8 and 2 in grade 10

DIAGNOSES

I was just diagnosed half way through this year.

I was diagnosed in grade 3 or 4.

I knew there was something wrong when I was in grade 1. I was never good at reading.

I was failing grade 7. I couldn't read much.

They started testing me when I was in grade 1. It took until I was in grade 6 or 7 for my parents to get a diagnosis for me.

I didn't really understand what was going on when I was being assessed.

Getting assessed meant taking another test where you either passed or failed.

My aunt told my parents that I might have a learning disability. She knew because my cousins had learning disabilities.

EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

Other kids in school say that I'm a dummy.

Everyone bugged me at my old school.

I think children with learning disabilities should get tutors. Teachers don't know what they're doing.

Teachers don't care.

If I interrupt the class, the teacher sometimes sends me to the principal's office.

I got really frustrated with my homework, so I avoid it.

I hate reading.

I don't like reading, but I've found an interesting book. It's the first book that I've every enjoyed reading.

The computer makes doing my homework easier. If something is on my computer, I'll read it.

I'd like not to have to go to school, but you have to get an education.

On every report card the teachers would say that I had to work on my neatness. They thought I just wasn't trying.

I don't like my parents trying to help me with my homework. It turns into a fight.

My parents help me with my school work.

Teachers are more worried about the strike than they are about teaching.

The people at the LDA taught me how to read.

IN THE FUTURE

I'd like to be a lawyer. I can argue about anything and I'm never wrong.

I'd like to work in construction.

I want to drive a truck.

I don't really like going to school, but I know you need to have an education.

TALKING ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

I don't usually tell anyone that I have a learning disability.

I told people about my disability, but they didn't believe me.

If I told my friends about my disability, they wouldn't care.

ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

PARTICIPANTS

In attendance: 9 participants

DIAGNOSES

Other kids always called me a dummy and I was embarrassed. Once I was diagnosed, I knew what my problem was.

When I see a word on the page, I see a totally different word in my mind. I've never learned how to spell.

I found the assessment process to be very comfortable. I heard about it from a counselor.

I always knew there was something wrong with me. It was very helpful to get a diagnosis.

EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

I was always in a special class in school. They kept moving me to the next grade.

It's hard to be in a special education class because everybody knows that there is something wrong with you. I didn't want to be there.

In my school, non-professionals taught the special education classes. Grade 7 was the first time I had a certified teacher teaching me.

I was teased when I was in school. I was very angry. I spent time in the principal's office, so I missed classes. I also had to stay in class during recess, so I couldn't play with the other kids.

Being in the resource room made me lose confidence in myself. I didn't really want to learn.

It's easier to learn when you know that you're in a class with other people who aren't going to tease you about your work.

I had one teacher who helped me when I was in school; his was the only class that I excelled in. I went to school for three years and I felt like I didn't come out any smarter for it.

Only one teacher in school knew that I had a problem and tried to help me. The principal took me out of that class.

I went to the resource room in grade 3. It was much easier for me there because I got one-one-one attention.

Some teachers were mean to me. They paid more attention to the students who they thought would succeed. They didn't teach me. They just let me sit there.

School was difficult because English isn't my first language. I speak Mi'kmaq at home.

I was always testing my teachers. If they got mad at me, I didn't like them. If they showed me some respect (even if I said something wrong), I would respect them and open up to them.

I couldn't believe that they let me graduate from school because I didn't know how to read to how to spell. I was only able to learn later when I was taught one-on-one.

I quit school in grade 9. I can't read or spell.

I quit school in grade 7. I went back, but it was hard. I quit again in grade 10 and only went back to school recently.

Learning is one of the best things you can do. Without this school, I would still be waitressing.

It was harder for me in high school. The classes were bigger and there was less one-on-one time with the teacher.

Most of my teachers liked me because I wanted to learn. I always paid attention.

I'm proof that this program works. When I got here I was at the grade 8 level; now I have my GED.

EXPERIENCES WITH WORK

After I left school (in grade 12), I worked as a teacher's assistant. It was there that I saw kids who were really struggling. That's what made me realize what my problems are. That's why I'm here today.

In the North there is always work you can get. You don't have to fill out an application like you do in the city.

I drove a semi. I had trouble filling out the paperwork that I had to do. I got other people to do it for me.

I could never move up the ladder at work. I have trouble expressing myself verbally.

I worked as a waitress, but the cook couldn't read my orders. They let me go. I had to find a job that didn't require any reading. I worked as a banquet server. I tried to take a course to become a bricklayer, but there was too much math involved.

I work as a cook. My dream is to open a restaurant of my own. I'm thinking about going back to school to take a business management course.

IMPACT ON FAMILY

I have four children. I used to not be able to help them with their homework; now I can. They understand that I have trouble learning.

I have two older sisters who didn't have any trouble in school. I always wanted to be like them. Both of my sisters ended up dropping out of school. I graduated; I was the first one in my family to do that.

Two children in my family were diagnosed with learning disabilities.

It's hard on my mother. She thinks it's her fault.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Learning is the best thing you can do.