Dyslexic child thrives with school's help

By Kelly Hanson Floyd

Gov. Mark Sanford has proclaimed October Dyslexia Awareness Month in South Carolina and encourages all residents to "recognize the benefits of early identification and effective teaching to the quality of life of dyslexic students."

Most people assume dyslexics struggle with mixed-up letters when reading, like S-A-W and W-A-S, for example. That is not the case.

Dyslexia is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store and respond to information. It has nothing to do with vision and everything to do with how the brain processes information. According to the National Institutes of Health, 1 in 5 people, or 20 percent of the population, is dyslexic. The severity varies as does its manifestations - reading, spelling, writing, and sometimes mathematics are difficult for a dyslexic student.

I am the mother of a dyslexic student. Getting my son to read was like pulling teeth. Spelling tests were just a futile exercise in rote memorization - he would memorize the words but minutes after his spelling test had no recall. He hated to write and used the smallest and fewest amount of words possible to convey his meaning.

After four years of special education in the public schools we were frustrated and angry with a system that refused to even acknowledge the term "dyslexia." That's a "medical diagnosis," we were told. "Education is the only treatment for dyslexia," we shot back. We were told by teachers that we expected too much from our son. Our son believed them and told us to stop wasting our money on tutoring - he knew he was stupid.

With his self-esteem in serious decline and a public school system content to see him fail, we relocated our son and his brothers to Mount Pleasant so he could attend a school specifically designed for dyslexic students. The progress was amazing. After only a year my son is able to read at grade level, his phonological decoding skills have increased from a second-grade level to a seventh-grade level, but most important I have my son back.

Reading is a learned skill. Children do not learn to read by observing - they must be taught. Public schools must be held accountable for teaching our children to read. My son got the help he needed and has transitioned back into public school. I continue to monitor his progress and am amazed at his resilience.

Parents, advocate for your child.

The writer lives in Myrtle Beach.

© 2009 TheSunNews.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. http://www.thesunnews.com