

**GREATER MANCHESTER PROBATION SERVICE
DYSLEXIA PROJECT (2000)**

PAPERS FROM THE DYSLEXIA INFORMATION PACK

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INTRODUCTION: A WORKING DEFINITION OF DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a neurological condition which affects the acquisition and operation of certain skills. These skills include reading, writing, numeracy and personal management skills. The most useful general characterisation of dyslexia is that it is a **problem with information processing**. Estimates of the numbers of probation offenders with dyslexia range from 31% to 52 % with a local project recording an incidence midway between the two figures [see footnote]. All three studies of offenders have shown the percentage of those with dyslexia to be far in excess of the accepted figure for the general population (4% severely affected).

Dyslexic difficulties can include:

- a weak short-term memory
- problems absorbing and retaining information
- difficulty telling and estimating time
- poor sequencing and number skills
- confusion of left and right
- difficulties providing an accurate verbal account
- poor self-expression
- a tendency to misinterpret aspects of the situation
- a short attention span
- failure to recognise body language
- difficulties linking cause and effect

It must be emphasised that each individual has a different combination of dyslexic difficulties and that the severity of each difficulty varies from individual to individual.

Dyslexia often leads to **secondary problems** such as: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, frustration and behavioural problems.

Talents, associated with Dyslexia, include lateral thinking skills, visualisation, creativity, an untaught understanding of how things work and the ability to develop good compensating strategies. A chart, listing these skills, is included in the Pack as Info sheet 6.

Many aspects of court orders / probation service procedures cause particular difficulties for offenders with dyslexia. In the sections that follow, the impact of dyslexia is highlighted across three key skills, essential for the successful completion of a probation order. Appropriate strategies are suggested to minimise the difficulties experienced by offenders.

Footnote on dyslexic numbers in partnership projects with probation services

The **Dyspel project** (1995 - 1997) found 52% of their sample of young offenders to be dyslexic.

The **STOP project** (1996) found 31% of their sample of offenders to be dyslexic.

In **Oldham** the screening of offenders for dyslexia was undertaken as part of the ETE assessment. The resulting report 'Towards Identifying Offenders with Dyslexia' produced by the PDU Unit, December 1998, stated that 41.9% of the sample of offenders were found to have clusters of significant dyslexic indicators.

1. READING SKILLS

Offenders need to read and extract information from Probation Service letters, leaflets, appointment cards and maps.

Stages of a Probation Order where offenders may be at risk

- Receiving an appointment for a PSR
- Checking through a PSR
- Receiving an appointment for induction
- Induction sessions 1 + 2
- Signing a supervision plan
- START programme
- Appointments with other agencies
- 'Failure to attend' letters
- Breach warning letters
- Getting information from leaflets

Appropriate Strategies

- Introduce a standard 'appointment box' on all letters, cards etc.
- Use tinted paper (pale blue is probably best)
- Use icons to indicate the type of information contained
- Give an explanation of what a probation letter will look like
- Stress that the offender must not ignore official letters, explaining the consequences
- Aim at a reading age of no more than 10/11
- Use uncomplicated grammar and sentence construction, short sentences are easiest to grasp
- Omit any non-vital information
- Routine information could be taped

Reading & 'Visual Stress'

Visual Stress is common amongst dyslexic people.

Symptoms include the following:

- a glare from white paper so that text is hard to decipher
- frequently losing the place so lines are re-read or skipped
- difficulty following along a line of text
- the words on the page become distorted or lose focus

Read Regular is created without copying or mirroring shapes. Therefore the frequency of repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a minimum chance of visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interesting typography that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent them from getting bored or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations. We must understand the fact that typography for a novel is different from a magazine or a publication for education. Even so a novel has the potential to be clear and interesting. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking on type size, leading, the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper combination.

Example of Visual Stress

The physical features of text can greatly compound the literacy difficulties of dyslexic people.

Take account, therefore, of the following points when preparing or selecting written materials:

- Aim for a clear 'uncluttered' look
- Leave plenty of blank space
- Justify left, leaving a ragged right margin
- Use bold text and bullet points, but be selective
- Incorporate diagrams, charts, pictograms and graphics

Do not use:

- Small fonts (below size 12)
- Capital letters for whole words and phrases
- Bright white or shiny paper
- Fancy or unusual fonts and italics
- Printing in either red and green

On maps/street directions use well known landmarks plus directions e.g. turn left in front of Kwikprint.

For supervision plans give offender a simple list of what has been agreed. (Appropriate proformas can be devised)

2. SPEAKING & LISTENING SKILLS

Offenders need to be able to follow and act upon spoken information. They need to participate in interviews, explain themselves and recall information. They need to report details consistently.

Risky Stages

- **At court** receiving information about what a PSR is, the place and time of the appointment and what information they will need to give
- The appointment with the PSR writer
- Probation Induction sessions
- START Programme
- Reporting when they cannot attend

Appropriate Strategies

- Give any instructions one at a time
- Group information into topics
- Introduce the topic, give details and check for understanding
- Check that vital information has been retained e.g. "So what do you need to bring?" rather than asking "Do you understand?"
- Remind the offender about key details (e.g. what to wear for CS)
- Calmly repeat instructions or questions as necessary
- Allow 'thinking time' before expecting an answer
- Ask single questions rather than compound ones and avoid implied questions
- Be aware that a genuine misunderstanding can lead to a misleading or apparently evasive answer on the offender's part
- The interview may well be affected by a offender's short attention span (possibly only 5 minutes) and/or high levels of distractibility
- A offender who has mentally 'switched off' may appear indifferent
- Difficulties will probably arise in estimating the passage of time, references to left/right and sequencing of events, leading to apparent inconsistencies
- Encourage offenders to describe their movements by a sketch, if they prefer - this technique may reduce inconsistencies, leading to a clearer account
- There could be a weak link between cause and effect (this skill may need teaching)

3. WRITING SKILLS

The spelling and handwriting problems of people with dyslexia may well be more intractable than those of semi-literate people who do not have the additional burden of dyslexia.

Risky Stages

- Form completion
- Signing documents
- Participating in certain group work sessions on probation programmes entailing the use of questionnaires etc.

Appropriate Strategies

- Produce a card containing the offender's details that he can use for reference
- Submit a fair copy of important forms together with the original completed by the offender
- Print the offender's name alongside his signature if the handwriting is not legible
-

In group work sessions, requiring a written output:

- Always ask for volunteers for writing up in front of the group
- Suggest paired work so that an offender with writing problems works with someone who can write
- Where appropriate, writing can be replaced by a pictorial representation
- Bring out the diversity of talents and difficulties in group work sessions, e.g. X is good at ideas, Y is good at handwriting things up, Z is good at art or cartoons

Be aware: low self-esteem damages the individual's ability to learn

4. PERSONAL ORGANISATION

Offenders need to be able to prioritise, to plan their time, and know what to do when plans are changed or things 'go wrong'.

Risky Stages

- Keeping appointments: coming on the right day at the correct time and remembering what to bring
- Getting to a place with which they are unfamiliar
- Planning a day to include their order
- Coping with changes and emergencies
- Identifying if a no show is an 'acceptable' absence
- Using strategies suggested during START or supervision

Appropriate Strategies

- Give simple step-by-step directions
- Plan appointments and visits with the offender
- Go through the sequence of procedures by checking e.g. "What else do you need to do before reporting?"
- Explore possible appointment clashes and help the offender resolve them e.g. "When else can you get your giro?"
- Use the offender's own support structures, relatives, partners, support workers
- Provide a prompt card
- When a 'Failure to attend' occurs, ask why, then carefully plan a coping strategy
- Provide a document folder for all probation letters and leaflets
- Deliver individualised 'personal planning' sessions, gradually encouraging more input from the offender

Remember: 'user-friendly' for dyslexia is 'user-friendly' for all

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Ref: Probation info sheets

Info 5 DYSLEXIA & THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

by Melanie Jameson, Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern

It has been established that dyslexia is a congenital neurological condition (Orton Dyslexia Society, 1995) with implications for education, employment and social interaction. At least 4% of the population is significantly affected with a further 6% showing dyslexic characteristics.

Research in the States (Klasen, 1972) identified a high level of anxiety and frustration as the most consistent variation between the dyslexic and control group in a study to identify whether there is a "dyslexic personality". Further investigations have built up a picture of the dyslexic individual as one who does not easily fit in with others, prefers to work alone and often sees close participation in any group as an instance where his/her inadequacies will be shown up yet again (Hales, 1990). In employment, s/he is often performing at a level below his/her potential and has acquired an understandable defensive attitude.

By adulthood many dyslexic people have equipped themselves with an array of coping strategies, diverting some of their energy and ability (either consciously or unconsciously) into the operation of these systems, but thereby leaving themselves few extra resources to call upon when they have to deal with situations that fall within their areas of weakness.

Since dyslexia concerns the processing of information, both written and spoken, as well as expressive language, dyslexic people can clearly be at a disadvantage in conditions which place heavy demands upon them in terms of language and working memory: a prime example of this must be progress through the legal system.

How then can professionals within the justice system seek to redress this disadvantage? The first step must surely be to become fully informed about a condition that affects a significant proportion of the community amongst which they work. Once one is aware of the likely areas of difficulty, the appropriate responses can be put into place as outlined overleaf:

It should be stressed that dyslexic difficulties vary from individual to individual and that a degree of inconsistency on a day to day basis is also a feature of the condition. However it is generally found that **dyslexic difficulties are exacerbated under stress, making certain aspects of functioning almost impossible.**

References:

- Hales, GW (1990) *Personality Aspects of Dyslexia: Meeting Points in Dyslexia* British Dyslexia Association
Klasen, E (1972) *The Syndrome of Specific Dyslexia* Lancaster Medical and Technical Publishing Company
Orton Dyslexia Society (1995) *Member's Definition* Orton Dyslexia Society

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Info 6. SCREENING CHECKLIST for ADULTS with DYSLEXIA

Read through the list below carefully.

Mark the response for each item in the appropriate column: Yes / ? = Sometimes / No

	Yes	?	No
1. Do you ever muddle left and right?			
2. Do you sometimes read the time wrongly from a clock face?			
3. Is it hard to remember 2 or 3 instructions together?			
4. Do you trip over longer words?			
5. Do you sometimes confuse words when speaking?			
6. Is there any delay between <u>hearing</u> something and <u>understanding</u> it?			
7. Is it hard to follow the thread of a conversation or joke?			
8. Do you ever confuse number order e.g. when dialling telephone numbers?			
9. Do you mix up dates and times (and miss appointments)?			
10. Do you find it hard to organise yourself?			
11. Is it hard to work out money / sums in your head?			
12. Can you pick any month and state which months come before and after it?			
13. Do you have to think about getting letters the right way round e.g. b/d?			
14. Does your spelling get worse if someone is watching you?			
15. Do you have good ideas but find it difficult getting them down on paper?			
16. Do you only read when it is absolutely necessary?			
17. When reading, do you lose your place a lot ?			
18. When reading, does the print 'move' or the page become too bright?			
19. Did you have problems with spelling and reading at school?			
20. Do you easily get distracted and have difficulty concentrating?			
21. Do you have days when it is almost impossible to work things out?			
22. Do other members of your family have reading/spelling problems?			

Are you good at making things, mechanics, electronics, art, design, music?

Circle any of the above. Other skills?.....