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Providing support to people with learning disabilities so they can develop to their full potential.

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The provincial newsletter is published three times a year as an Alberta supplement to the **National**, newsletter of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. It is distributed to all members of the LDAA and its chapters.

**Contributions are welcome. Deadline for the next issue is April 30, 2004. For writer's guidelines, visit [www.ldaa.ca/Newsletter](http://www.ldaa.ca/Newsletter).**

## New Disability Tax Credit Form Available

Canada Revenue Agency has announced a 2003 version of Form T2201, *Disability Tax Credit Certificate*. Old versions should be discarded.

People with a disability, or their caregivers, who wish to claim the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) on their income tax return must have Form T2201 completed by a medical doctor or other qualified person. If the Canada Revenue Agency has already confirmed your eligibility for the DTC, you don't have to submit another form unless the period of approval has ended. They also advise that it's better to submit Form T2201 before you send in your income tax return.

For more information, visit [www.ccra.gc.ca/disability](http://www.ccra.gc.ca/disability) or call 1-800-959-2221.

## Learning Disabilities Awareness Month

March is celebrated across Canada as Learning Disabilities Awareness Month. This year's theme is "Transition Points for Adults with LD". LDAC has prepared four fact sheets for distribution: "Traditional Life Stages for Adults with LD", "Transitional Steps for Successful Employment", "Attributes to Success" and "Learning from the Past". You can download them from [www.ldac-taac.ca/english/whatsnew.htm](http://www.ldac-taac.ca/english/whatsnew.htm).

Calgary Chapter has planned a full month. Activities include a March 2 workshop on the Calgary Public Library's assistive technology program and a March 16 parent's workshop on teen suicide and learning disabilities. They are holding a Teen Rec Week March 17 to 20, and having a booth at the CHADD Resources Fair on March 7. Most exciting is the March 13 movie-house premiere of a film created by seven teens as part of the LDAA-CC's "Picture This" social skills program. Titled *Welcome to My Brain*, the film captures what it is like to have a learning disability. For more information on Calgary's events, call (403) 283-6606.

## National Consultation Comes to Alberta

On Saturday, January 17, representatives of the LDAC met in Calgary with representatives of the LDAA to discuss the restructured governance model for the LDAC. All active chapters were invited to send representatives to the consultation. Carol Mairs, LDAC president, and Dale Rempel, LDA of Saskatchewan Executive Director, facilitated the meeting, aided by LDAC Project Officer Diane Sullivan.

This meeting was one of a series of consultations national office was holding with the provincial/territorial associations in January and February. Feedback from these consultations will help form the recommendations presented to the LDAC board of directors at the 2004 AGM in May.

The project, called Renewing Our Collective Structure (ROCS), developed from the LDAC strategic planning session held in February of 2001. The participants all felt that the governance structure of LDAC was not as effective as it could be. A task force, of which Harvey Finnestad was a member, then researched various governance models and surveyed all provincial/territorial senior staff and volunteers. They consolidated the feedback and composed the first ROCS draft. This is the draft the facilitators presented for our input on January 17.

Some exciting and positive changes should come out of the process to help us all work together within a collective vision and mission.

## Internet Sites for Children with Learning Disabilities

Visit the Links & Other Resources section of the new provincial web site at [www.ldaa.ca](http://www.ldaa.ca) for more sites of interest. If you know of good sites, please e-mail your suggestions to [egredley@ldaa.ca](mailto:egredley@ldaa.ca).

### **SparkTop.org**

[www.sparktop.org/intro.html](http://www.sparktop.org/intro.html)

Terrific site for children ages 8 to 12 with learning disabilities. Movies, games, creative activities and message boards provide a fun and supportive learning environment for children to learn new ways to succeed in school and in life. Try it out yourself. Developed by Schwab Learning, part of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation.

### **KidsHealth: Learning Disabilities**

[kidshealth.org/kid/health\\_problems/learning\\_problem/learning\\_disabilities.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/learning_problem/learning_disabilities.html)

Information geared for kids doing their own research into their learning disabilities.

## Odds & Ends

### **Mark Your Calendar**

This year's provincial conference, hosted by the Red Deer Chapter, will take place in Red Deer, November 18-20. Set aside those dates now. Check [www.ldaa.ca/Conference](http://www.ldaa.ca/Conference) for the most recent information.

### **Old-New Person at Provincial Office**

David Barnum is currently the acting executive director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta. He is filling in while Dr. Harvey Finnestad is in South Africa enjoying beach life, and will be here until the end of April.

David is an old hand. He was the provincial coordinator of the Learning Disabilities Association from 1996 to 1999 and was a team participant with Alberta Learning when it produced the *Parent Advantage* and *Make School Work for You* guidebooks.

# Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level

Reviewed by David  
Barnum

Written by Sally Shaywitz,  
MD  
416 pp  
Alfred A. Knopf, New York  
ISBN: 0375400125  
List Price: \$38.95

This book is also available in audiocassette and audio CD. Check for it in your local library or bookstore. You can also buy it online from amazon.ca. Amazon prices are usually discounted from the list price. Link through from our web site, [www.ldaa.ca/Other\\_Resources](http://www.ldaa.ca/Other_Resources), and the LDAA receives a percentage of the purchase price. Every little bit helps.

Today a reader,  
tomorrow a leader

W. Fusselman

Reading is an extraordinary ability. It is peculiarly human and taken for granted by most of us. However, our assumption that reading is an easily acquired skill for everyone is wrong. A substantial number of boys and girls—including very intelligent ones—experience significant difficulty learning to read. Without reading skills, a child starts to falter in our education system and eventually fails. When students leave the school system without reading skills, their career options are limited because most work today requires an ability to read.

Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a neuroscientist, wrote *Overcoming Dyslexia* “for anyone who cares about reading and wants to understand and help those with reading difficulties.” The route map given by Shaywitz’s book is clear, comprehensive and well organized. It is in my opinion the best book currently available about dyslexia.

## Why some people struggle to read

Shywitz’s research indicates that more than 10% of our population have struggled to learn how to read. Her work identifies one major underlying cause: dyslexia.

For more than 100 years, dyslexia has been recognized, but the exact nature of the disability has not been known. We knew certain children would have great difficulty learning to read even with good teaching and average or above average intelligence. We knew also that there were many signs. These children would have difficulty in reading single words. They would have trouble with function words such as *that*, *is*, *an* and *for*. They would be slow readers and they would be poor spellers. We thought these children just didn’t work hard enough. We could not imagine what it was like not being able to absorb what is printed on a page. We dismissed these students as lazy or really not as smart as we thought they were.

## Why we didn’t take dyslexia seriously

There were two underlying reasons why we didn’t take the plight of those with dyslexia seriously.

One was that we really didn’t understand that reading is a function of how words sound. In 1997, the United States Congress created a National Reading Panel of experts to come together to objectively and comprehensively review existing research relating to the teaching of reading. The panel produced the most thorough report ever undertaken in the USA. Shaywitz was a member of the panel, and *Overcoming Dyslexia* gives findings of its report so that before selecting a reading program, parents and teachers can ask the critical question: “What is the evidence that it works?”

The second reason was that we didn’t understand medically

why certain children had dyslexia. Over the last decade, brain-imaging techniques have shown that neurologically, a dyslexic person does not learn to read the same way as others do. He or she uses different parts of the brain. The research shows that people with dyslexia have difficulty with reading because they can't refigure their visual and speech processors. They don't easily link the letters on a page to the sounds they represent. Normally, the brain pulls words apart into their constituent sounds or phonemes. Part I (The Nature of Reading and Dyslexia) gives a good medical understanding of the dyslexia phenomenon.

## Overcoming dyslexia

The verb in the book title, *Overcome*, is carefully chosen. If you recall the civil rights song "We Shall Overcome," it speaks not only of community activities (such as sit-downs and marches), but also of knowing the problem, accepting it and taking action.

Often, we back away from doing something because we do not understand it and are afraid that what is before us will test us and find us wanting. We need to be equipped before we undertake the task. We need a toolbox that will help guide us through the next part of our journey. *Overcoming Dyslexia* is such a toolbox. It is a book you will go back to again and again to gain new and refreshed understanding of this very puzzling human phenomenon.

The first step is to determine whether the problem you are dealing with is dyslexia. Part II of the book (Diagnosing Dyslexia) provides the diagnostic details. Chapters include extensive and deep coverage of the topics of early clues, later clues, evaluation questions, identifying at-risk children, and bright adults.

In a recent New Yorker cartoon, two ants are on one side of a big rock. One says to the other, "The other side of the rock is supposed to be beautiful at this time of year." We know what reading opens up for us as readers, but what is the nature of the "mountain" dyslexic people face before they become readers? What tasks, strategies do they have to undertake? Before we tackle the mountain, we need the motivation to make the climb.

Part III (Helping Your Child Become A Reader) suggests tasks and action strategies that parents and teachers can undertake. Part IV (Turning Struggling Readers into Proficient Readers) provides advice and understanding of how struggling readers can be turned into proficient ones.

May we search and find opportunities to give dyslexic children the confidence, the courage, the determination, resilience and resonance to succeed!

*Overcoming Dyslexia* offers us opportunities to advocate for people with learning disabilities. Literacy is not just our problem; it is one for our province and all its citizens.

- The book is based on recent research and therefore can be used as an effective authority to open eyes and broaden perspectives in conversations with officials. Chapter 23 on accommodations provides excellent guidance.
- It is a book that should be on your public library shelves, in multiple copies. All you need to do is ask your local library.
- It is a resource that should be available to teachers and professionals. Simply ask your school principal if they have the book. (It helps to have your own personal copy when you visit the school.)
- It is a book that could easily be used to start up a parents' support group in your area. One could hold monthly sessions to discuss sections. The result can be increased awareness and development of a small group that can help its community become a community of readers. You might also think of a tie-in with a local library.

**The LDAA needs you. Become a member and show your support for adults and children with learning disabilities. Please join through your local chapter or directly with the provincial association.**

**Parents need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem so high that the rest of the world can't poke holes in it to drain it dry.**

Alvin Price

## **LDA: The Big Picture**

Working in our own organizations, we sometimes forget that we are actually pieces of a much bigger picture. How do individual members, chapters, provincial and national all fit together?

Chapters are members of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (LDAA). Being a member of a chapter automatically makes you a member of the LDAA. Albertans living in areas without a chapter can take out a membership in the LDAA directly. The LDAA is a member of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC). As you can see, joining your local chapter makes you part of a Canada-wide organization.

### **What do the different levels do?**

Chapters are the front-line, hands-on, service and support providers of the LDAA. They work with people affected by learning disabilities by providing resources and information, holding parent and educator workshops and seminars and providing valuable programs to children and adults that help them to understand and adapt to life with a learning disability.

As the provincial organization, the LDAA works on the wider perspective while providing support for local chapters. We work directly with Alberta Learning and are represented on various provincial committees such as the Alberta Disabilities Forum and the Alberta Learning's Special Education Advisory Committee. Partnering with Alberta Learning, we develop such resources as *Make School Work for You*, which are then distributed through Alberta Learning channels. LDAA also represents the interests of the Alberta LD community at the LDAC.

Although education comes under provincial jurisdiction, learning disabilities have nothing to do with provincial borders. The LDAC is the umbrella organization working at the national level on issues concerning the impact of federal policy changes and programming on Canadians with learning disabilities. With an office in Ottawa, it is well-positioned to influence public policy. LDAC publishes a number of manuals, self-help guides, and reference books to meet the growing needs of both professionals and individuals with learning disabilities. It encourages and monitors research in the field of learning disabilities, creates public awareness and supports the provincial/territorial associations.

We are all bound by a common mission: to support people with learning disabilities. As a whole, we are stronger than the individual parts, but each part plays a vital role. Working together at the local, provincial, and national levels, our organization can more effectively advance the cause of people with learning disabilities.

## Provincial Web Site Focuses on Alberta Information

The aim of the new provincial web site at [www.ldaa.ca](http://www.ldaa.ca) is to provide Alberta-based information about learning disabilities with links to relevant information from elsewhere.

The web site, which is still actively growing, is divided into four sections.

### About the LDAA

Look here for information about the Alberta organization: contact information, chapters, membership, provincial conference, awards and scholarships. You can also download the electronic version of this newsletter.

### About Learning Disabilities

The internet already contains a great deal of information on learning disabilities. Rather than repeating what's available elsewhere, articles in this section will originate in Alberta or be of particular interest to Albertans. Visit the links section for worldwide information. Watch for more information to be added to this section over the next few months.

### Links & Other Resources

From this section, you can jump to other internet sites. All the links are annotated so you have an idea what information the external web site offers. You will find links to government and organization sites, post-secondary institutions, other sites with good information, and specialized sites for children with learning disabilities.

This is also the place to read reviews of books, videos and other resources. If you would like to suggest a resource for review, there's an online form. Where possible, the reviews are linked to [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca) for convenient online shopping.

### Community

Share your comments and suggestions in the guest book, participate in the online forum or sign up for the members-only e-mail list.

The web site is part of the communications project made possible by a grant from the Wild Rose Foundation



## A Look in The National

This issue of *The National* contains two very interesting articles. One offers further understanding of learning disabilities themselves, the other explores the history of the LDAC and the progress made over the last thirty years.

“What are the Causes of Learning Disabilities” on p. 3 looks at the research that shows that learning disabilities are neurobiologically based. For example, research shows that the brains of people identified with learning disabilities are different in both structure and function from those of people without learning disabilities.

“Learning Disabilities...Canada/ US Perspectives and Accomplishments 1977–2003” on p. 12 is a personal overview written by retiring LDAC staff member Barbara McElgunn. It's fascinating to read about the journey and realize how far we have come.