



DXI Dyslexia & Innovation: Spotlighting the Strengths of the Dyslexic Mind

Jeffrey Conger & Sarah Pennington

This publication highlights the speakers from the 2019 Dyslexia & Innovation Symposium which took place at Montana State University on October 29 & 30, 2019.

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DXI Dyslexia & Innovation

SPOTLIGHTING THE STRENGTHS OF THE DYSLEXIC MIND

SYMPOSIUM OF CHANGEMAKERS

- SUPAMAN: Musician + Performer
- LYNSEY DYER: Professional Athlete + Youth Leader
- CLIFF WEITZMAN: Inventor + Entrepreneur
- LINDA SIEGEL: Educator + Author + Researcher
- MARLEY ROBB: Architectural Designer + Workshop Leader

DXI

Symposium of Changemakers

2021 | VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1

DYSLEXIA & INNOVATION
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
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DYSLEXIA & INNOVATION | SYMPOSIUM OF CHANGEMAKERS



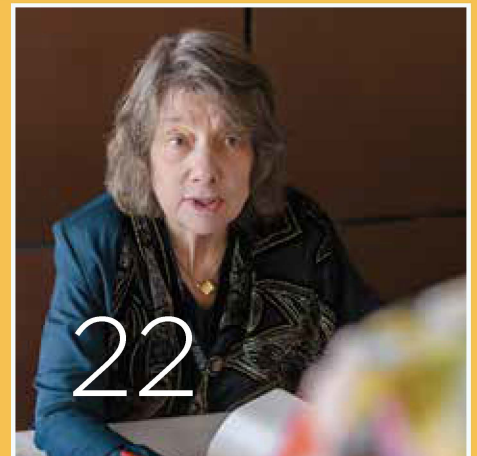
Christian Parrish Takes The Gun, known as Supaman, is an Apsáalooke rapper who was born in Seattle and grew up in Crow Agency.



Lynsey Dyer is a professional big mountain skier and has been honored twice by *Powder* magazine as Female Skier of the Year.



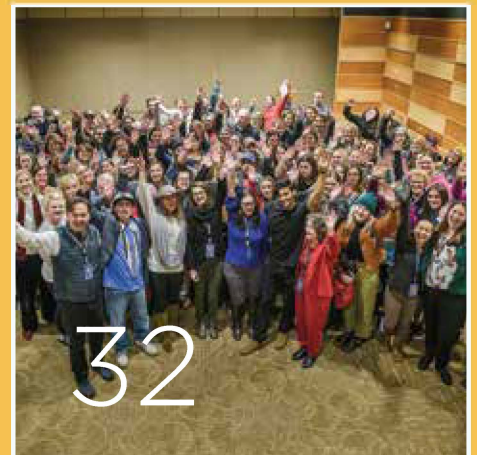
Cliff Weitzman is a successful entrepreneur and graduate of Brown University who was named by *Forbes* to the 30 Under 30 list.



Linda Siegel is a psychologist and academic known for her research into the cognitive aspects of learning disabilities.



Marley Robb is an Architectural Designer and an MSU alum with a BA in Environmental Design and a Masters in Architecture.



2021 Dyslexia & Innovation symposium will be hosted online in October so all can join. For more information go to www.montana.edu/dxi.



EDITORS LETTER

Welcome! Our dream is to spark a discussion about dyslexia that goes beyond the challenges of spelling and reading to focus on the powerful advantages of the dyslexic mind including imagination, spatial awareness, and creative thinking. We are pleased to share these thoughts and memories from the first Dyslexia & Innovation Symposium that brought together a variety of stakeholders. The inaugural event took place October 29 & 30, 2019 on the campus of Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana.

This publication offers highlights from this event through images and the words of our participants. If you attended, we hope this brings back memories and the desire to continue the conversation. If you were unable to attend, we hope this publication inspires you to attend our next virtual event that is scheduled for October 2021. Please visit the website www.montana.edu/dxi to learn more and join us as we redefine dyslexia in this century.

JEFFREY CONGER
SARAH PENNINGTON
CO-FOUNDERS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to add my voice to this publication highlighting the inaugural DXI: Symposium of Changemakers, and I'd like to offer my thanks to all of you—students, parents, educators, administrators, researchers and advocates – for your interest in this important event.

DXI is a truly innovative symposium that is working to shift the narrative around dyslexia. At the inaugural symposium in 2019, the event went beyond the challenges of spelling and reading to focus on the powerful advantages of the dyslexic mind, including imagination, spatial awareness and creative thinking. Research has shown that dyslexic individuals make up 15% to 20% of the population, yet many myths about dyslexia remain part of our society. With its spotlight on emerging technologies, DXI is poised to provide participants with not only new information but also with hope and purpose for the future.

You may know that here at Montana State University, we are focused on our historic tri-partite mission of excellence in teaching and learning, research and creativity, and service and outreach. Montana State strives to provide a quality, life-changing education for the sons and daughters of Montana. Fostering valuable discussions about the strengths of the dyslexic mind and supporting dyslexic individuals in achieving their dreams is one of the ways we achieve that mission.

Please join us in these efforts at the next DXI scheduled for October 2021. Together, we will serve as Changemakers.

With warm regards,
Waded Cruzado

President, Montana State University

**“UNDERSTANDING
DYSLEXIA IS
INTEGRAL
TO OUR
LAND-GRANT
MISSION”**

- WADED CRUZADO



DYSLEXIA IS A HIDDEN STRENGTH





DXI SYMPOSIUM PARTNERS

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The Dyslexia & Innovation symposium brings together a community of changemakers to implement cultural, systemic, and pedagogical change. The symposium spotlights the strengths of dyslexic individuals by showcasing innovation and ideas through an engaging array of powerful speakers, panels, workshops, and information from community partners.

This project is supported by a Montana State University internal grant through the Office of the Vice President for Research, Economic Development & Graduate Education.

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ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

- Decoding Dyslexia Montana
- Eye-to-Eye
- International Dyslexia Association
- Joseph James Morelli Legacy Foundation

CHANGING THE CULTURE

The conversation starts with all of us. Sitting in Norm Asbjornson Hall on the MSU campus, literacy expert TerraBeth Jochems and President of Bennett College, Suzanne Walsh, converse with symposium co-founder Sarah Pennington about the importance of understanding dyslexia at all levels of education including K through 12 as well as postsecondary.



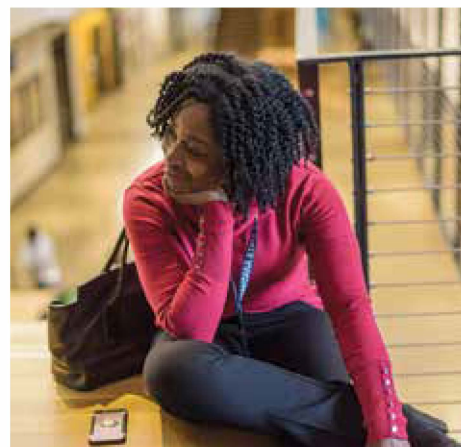
GRASSROOTS ENERGY

Decoding Dyslexia is a volunteer organization that has chapters in all 50 states. Through the efforts of dedicated individuals like speech pathologist Susan Stanford, shown here volunteering at the event, and the advocacy of chapter President Kelly DuBose, this grassroots organization is an excellent resource for parents and students. See a complete list of website resources on page 35 of this publication.



MAKE CULTURAL CHANGE

Award-winning hip hop artist Supaman integrates storytelling and humor for a message of change. He started as a Crow traditional dancer in fourth grade, and in junior high adopted the style called the men's fancy dance. Now inspired by rap music, he embraces the past while at the same time looking to the future for a better place where we all can live.



NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Connecting with national partners is integral to making new friends like Amanda Holder from Eye to Eye whose national headquarters is in New York City. Eye to Eye's mission is to develop a coalition of mentoring programs for students labeled with learning disabilities and to empower these individuals. This innovative organization fosters mentorship through partnership with 150 schools and 1350 mentees per year.



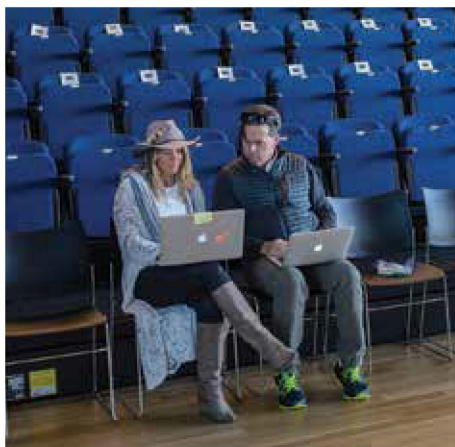
CONVERSATION TO REALITY

John Cech the President of Carroll College talks with symposium panelists about the challenges of dyslexia while standing in the lobby of Inspiration Hall. As a DXI board member, John's personal vision and extensive experience in higher education foster the evolving conversation around cultural and systemic change.



EMBRACE THE COMMUNITY

Listening to the voice of the community is vital to the DXI symposium. MSU alumni and Bozeman entrepreneurs Rita and Larry Merkel have dedicated decades to their family business Round House Ski and Sports in Bozeman. Now serving on the DXI Council of Twelve, Larry offers his insights as a community business leader and changemaker.



TELL YOUR OWN STORY

Making last-minute changes to her keynote speech, professional athlete Lynsey Dyer collaborates with symposium co-founder Jeffrey Conger to tell her authentic story of navigating education as a severe dyslexic. Driven by grit and tenacity, Lynsey explained her journey including sponsorships by GoPro, Eddie Bauer, and Jackson Hole resort and being twice named Female Skier of the Year by *Powder* magazine.



INSPIRE HOW WE THINK

Like so many, Rhonda Russell learned more about dyslexia through a public presentation to raise dyslexia awareness across Montana. That moment of realization brought a new understanding about dyslexia along with insights on how to leverage its strengths. Now as a DXI board member she brings that empowering perspective to others.





SUPAMAN

SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH MUSIC, DANCE & STORYTELLING

Christian Parrish Takes The Gun, known professionally as Supaman, is an Apsáalooke fancy dancer and rapper who grew up in Crow Agency, Montana. He utilizes his performances and workshops to foster cultural change. These are his candid thoughts from a recent interview.

When I'm dancing, when I first go out there dressed up and they are singing, I can see my relatives and my family around me, with the thought of this is who I am. I come from this earth, this land, and those songs. This whole culture is ancient and powerful, and it's all rooted in spirituality and the connection with the creator. Just that thought goes through my mind when I'm out there and makes my heart sing. It makes me feel good, makes me feel connected.

It's a positive, spiritual experience for me when I'm out there. So, when I dance, I try to be creative in how that music makes me feel. Inside I'm moving and it's just like, I'm staying

connected, I'm expressing myself. Some say, "It's a prayer. People pray when they dance or before they come out to the circle, they're bringing that good medicine." They say, "We're bringing that good medicine dance to the people who are watching."

Hearing hip hop for the first time being from Montana, you had to wait for it to be in the mainstream for us to really experience that culture of hip hop, and so it was becoming commercial at that time. And the sound and the rhythms, it's like, they always say it's rooted in African culture that comes from drum culture as well, stuff like that. I mean, they go really deep into the sound part as well as the dynamics and values of the drum.

We started B-boying, breakdancing, things like that, participating in this fun culture and then to be an MC, to be vocal and rap, we would play around with it and we'd freestyle. But in actuality, we never really thought we had the right, to be an MC or be vocal about it because we weren't from the city. We didn't have the accents; we didn't talk like them. We never really thought we had the right until I heard other Natives using that medium of hip hop to express and tell their stories.

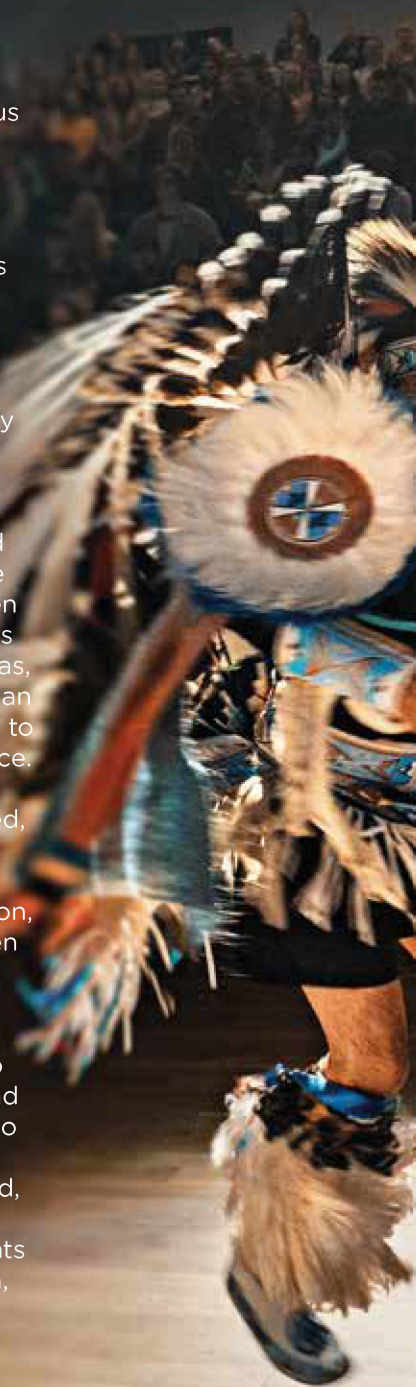
When I heard them doing it, I was like, "Yo, I can do this too." I'm like, "I can do this. I can tell my story. I can be just as good as any rapper on the radio." So, I was empowered to hear other Natives practice that culture of hip hop and tell their stories from a native perspective. So, from then, that's

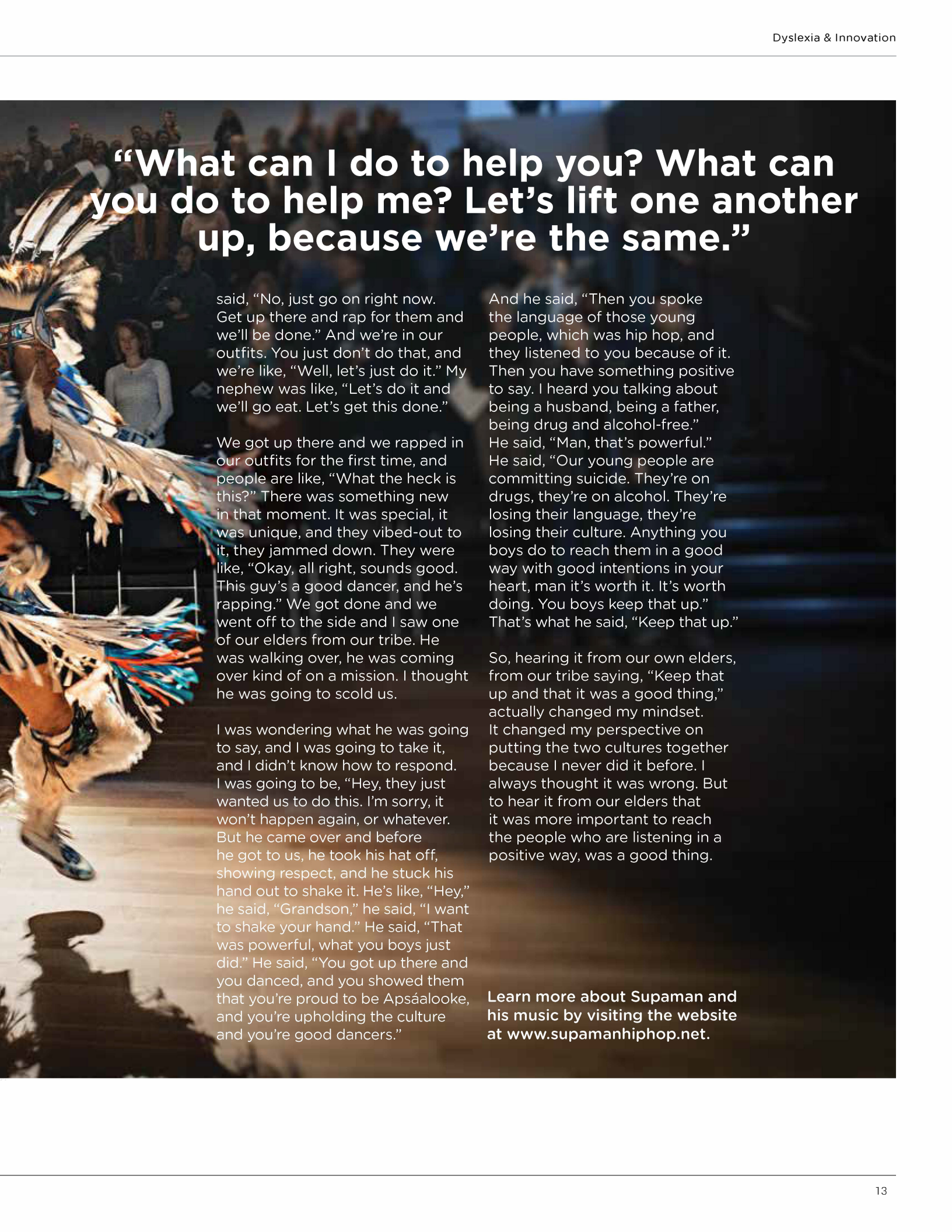
when I started being more serious about it, started creating music and being confident in putting myself out there.

Along the way, I never put drums into my music and never added the culture at all. For years, I never did that, because where we come from, you just don't do that. It's like, "Hey, what's this guy doing? Get this guy out of here. You can't do that." So, I knew that in my mind and never did it because I know our elders would have something to say. There are different protocols to follow when it comes to the culture and things like that. But how it happened was, I was in Bozeman, Native American Heritage Day, and we got invited to share culture on that day, to dance.

So, we showed up and we danced, we talked about the history of the dance. And there were some singers there, a tepee presentation, different Natives were there. Then we got done performing, doing our dance, culture dance, and then we went off to the side, off the stage, and then the lady who was running it, she came over and she goes, "Hey, don't you guys do rap music? Don't you rap?" And we're like, "Yeah, we do." She said, "Why don't you rap for all these kids here? There's a lot of students here." And we're like, "Sure, yeah, we'll do it."

Then we started walking back to our vehicle to go change from our dancing regalia, into whatever hip hop. So, we went, and she goes, "Where are you going? Where are you going?" I was like, "Well, we're going to go change." She





“What can I do to help you? What can you do to help me? Let’s lift one another up, because we’re the same.”

said, “No, just go on right now. Get up there and rap for them and we’ll be done.” And we’re in our outfits. You just don’t do that, and we’re like, “Well, let’s just do it.” My nephew was like, “Let’s do it and we’ll go eat. Let’s get this done.”

We got up there and we rapped in our outfits for the first time, and people are like, “What the heck is this?” There was something new in that moment. It was special, it was unique, and they vibed-out to it, they jammed down. They were like, “Okay, all right, sounds good. This guy’s a good dancer, and he’s rapping.” We got done and we went off to the side and I saw one of our elders from our tribe. He was walking over, he was coming over kind of on a mission. I thought he was going to scold us.

I was wondering what he was going to say, and I was going to take it, and I didn’t know how to respond. I was going to be, “Hey, they just wanted us to do this. I’m sorry, it won’t happen again, or whatever. But he came over and before he got to us, he took his hat off, showing respect, and he stuck his hand out to shake it. He’s like, “Hey,” he said, “Grandson,” he said, “I want to shake your hand.” He said, “That was powerful, what you boys just did.” He said, “You got up there and you danced, and you showed them that you’re proud to be Apsáalooke, and you’re upholding the culture and you’re good dancers.”

And he said, “Then you spoke the language of those young people, which was hip hop, and they listened to you because of it. Then you have something positive to say. I heard you talking about being a husband, being a father, being drug and alcohol-free.” He said, “Man, that’s powerful.” He said, “Our young people are committing suicide. They’re on drugs, they’re on alcohol. They’re losing their language, they’re losing their culture. Anything you boys do to reach them in a good way with good intentions in your heart, man it’s worth it. It’s worth doing. You boys keep that up.” That’s what he said, “Keep that up.”

So, hearing it from our own elders, from our tribe saying, “Keep that up and that it was a good thing,” actually changed my mindset. It changed my perspective on putting the two cultures together because I never did it before. I always thought it was wrong. But to hear it from our elders that it was more important to reach the people who are listening in a positive way, was a good thing.

Learn more about Supaman and his music by visiting the website at www.supamanhiphop.net.



LYNSEY DYER

PROFESSIONAL BIG MOUNTAIN SKIER AND FILMMAKER

Lynsey Dyer is a professional big mountain skier who grew up in Sun Valley, Idaho. Starring in films like Teton Gravity Research, Warren Miller, and Sherpa's Cinema, she has skied on six continents, won every big mountain competition she entered, and been awarded Female Skier of the Year by Powder magazine multiple times. This is her story in her words.

The skill needed most to be a professional athlete is persistence. I'd say the biggest thing that I encounter is being told no or getting zero response from people in power. In my case, the weather and snow dictate what is possible. My mantra has become, "Let go of expectations and continue to show up." You have to stay in the moment without judgment, continue to show up, work with what is, and be willing to step down, over and over, before the doors open.

By the time you're dropping in, you're fully focused and sometimes that's hours after you showed up due to weather and circumstance. I'm training in breathwork now. But before that, I've been using my breath as a tool to focus to either down-regulate my nervous system or up-regulate it, if this needs to be. By the time you drop in, it's nothing but full presence. And some of the biggest lines I've skied, have required the full check-in with all the cells in the body, to make sure all the parts are on board with my

decision. Because, oftentimes in scary situations, your soul wants to just jump right out of your body. And I've experienced that too, it's called "being gripped", where your body takes over and literally overrides everything else. You cannot move because it's so frightening for the body to be in the situation you've put it in. That's when I use my breath and take one step forward knowing it will bring my awareness back into my body.

I typically will look up at the mountain and there's always something that for a split moment looks fun or exciting. Or I simply think "I could do that." And then right behind that comes all of the doubts. Can you? Really? That doesn't work because of this," or there's a red flag here. And I'm always looking for the red flags, right? What's above it where I want to ski? Where could things slide? How are the temperatures? All of the things we're trained to look for in terms of the mountains and all the reasons to say no. When enough of those



“Showing up again, and again, that’s what separates the people that succeed from those who don’t.

are green, there’s no reason not to do it. Those moments, they don’t come too often. That’s why I have to show up again, and again, and again. Because I’d say less than 50% of the things you show up for you actually do. One has to be okay with failing a lot before things come together.

To find or cultivate courage in the moment, that’s where it comes down to wanting it. You have to really want it. You have to want the outcome, the goal more than you’re afraid. And I would say again, on the biggest things that I’ve done, the excitement of feeling the goal is maybe 51%... over 49% being scared. It’s right on the edge. And that’s where amazing things can happen. The more I study flow states the more I recognize the science behind these states. Where magic can happen, but it’s also really dangerous and that’s part of it, too.

As a young ski racer, I learned to get over all that superstitious luck stuff, because it didn’t work. I think ultimate presence, especially as a female, getting myself to a level of aggression has been the biggest challenge, as I’m not very aggressive in my natural personality. I had a coach that really nailed it. Teaching us that “as scary as the mountain is, you have to be scarier” to stay ahead of the dragon’s breath you’re awakening when skiing down these giant mountain faces. And so, ramping up is really needed in this arena.

Like any kid, I had challenges in school and with education. Primarily from a young age, second through third grade. That’s where you start to define yourself. I thought that I was stupid because like a lot of dyslexic kids, I struggled to read but was not diagnosed. I had to have special tutoring that took me out of class. It made me feel a lot of shame.

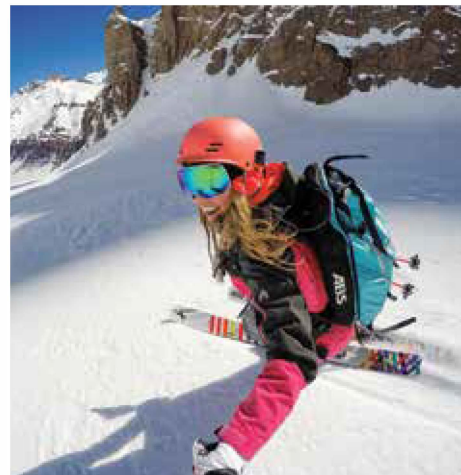
Numbers were also really difficult. I remember being so stressed every day when the teacher in third grade would say, “Turn to page 354,” for example, I didn’t understand how the symbols built on each other, and I was too ashamed to let anyone know. All I would do is flip through the 300-page book looking for the picture that I saw in my neighbors’ open book. That stress was a lot, just praying that I wouldn’t be called on to read when I couldn’t find the page.

Skiing gave me an outlet to express myself physically. Being out in nature and breathing fresh air, I’m so grateful to have that. And recognizing that my parents, by putting me in the ski programs, helped me build a skill. That skill has brought me far more than anything I ever could have imagined. And that’s in terms of the word privilege which comes up a lot these days. This silly skill on two planks has brought me the greatest privilege, and hope that I can do good with that now that it’s giving me a voice.

I think skiing is my workaround and it’s been my golden ticket. Warren Miller was a filmmaker who was just looking to ski for free as a young skier and did that in the late ‘60s. He started camping out in the Sun Valley parking lot. He found that if he told the resorts that he would be filming on these old cameras and making documentary films, that they would give him free tickets. He had this great personality and would narrate the ski films he made. He started the industry I am a part of today and made skiing relatable to the average person and continued the fantasy.

After ten years of being sort of “this doll” in films and commercials, I saw a lack of that relatability that inspired me as a young girl watching Warren

CREATE YOUR OWN PATH



Miller's work. One, I saw that women were underrepresented and two, the films were exclusively stunts. I wanted to make a film that was inclusive, funny, lighthearted, and welcoming. A film that touched on all of the real-life aspects that make skiing important to any kid. Whether it was skiing with family or friends playing pranks on each other versus just being, the bimbos at the bottom in films. I wanted girls to know they had a place in the mountains. Or just the fact that on our way to a big ski day we can pee on the side of the road, too.

Our film "Pretty Faces" was an example of making a million calls and being turned down or laughed at or ignored. No one had seen anything like it and I heard so many times "women's skiing is boring" or "you'd have to put a nude pillow fight in the film to make people watch."

I turned to Kickstarter and raised \$113,000. Put all of my money that I was making through skiing or sponsorships to bolster that number. That response validated that the

community wanted to see this film and then the industry was like, "Oh, we do want to get involved."

Then I got some big names like REI and GoPro to put in some support. "Pretty Faces" ended up winning all kinds of awards and sold out a grassroots tour of over 100 shows and raised \$65,000 for girls programming of the non-profit I co-founded, SheJumps. It was a wild success. Since then, the industry has absolutely shifted, and women's skiing is probably the most exciting thing in the industry. Now 40% of skiers are female, the industry is finally recognizing this and highlighting these stories while making more opportunities for other minority groups to feel welcome. Ski films today actually have female skiers in them, and it's been a beautiful shift.

Learn more about Lynsey Dyer and SheJumps by visiting the website at www.lynseydyer.com.

CLIFF WEITZMAN

INVENTOR AND ENTREPRENEUR

Cliff Weitzman is a graduate of Brown University and successful entrepreneur who was named by *Forbes* magazine to the prestigious 30 Under 30 list. Known as the creator of Speechify, the text to speech software, Weitzman is also an international dyslexia advocate. These are his candid thoughts from an interview at the DXI event.

Hey, my name is Cliff Weitzman. I'm 26 and super dyslexic. When I was in college, I built 40 different products, everything from attachable brakes for skateboards to payment companies, a bunch of iPhone apps, and websites. Those things did well enough that when I graduated from school, I had the freedom to decide where I lived, what to do. I was asking myself, "If I was a billionaire right now, what would I spend my time on?"

When I was young, I wanted to be prime minister of Israel, a billionaire, and a pop star. At least for two of these things, you need to know how to read. So, I would practice reading every day. And every day, I would fall asleep in the book because I read so slowly that it wasn't engaging or fun.

I was a precocious kid in preschool. I was the star of all the plays and sang all the songs. I made friends with everyone. My parents tried to teach me how to read and couldn't figure it out. They're like, "It's fine. He's supposed to learn that in first grade anyway."

I didn't learn it in first grade and didn't learn it in second grade and didn't learn it in third grade. I just couldn't make the sounds. It's so hard for me, other things came easy but not reading. My teachers figured, "This kid is...he's a talker, but he's not a doer, and maybe he's a little bit slow and maybe he's probably lazy."

The truth was I was outworking everybody in the room but wasn't seeing any progress. Eventually, I started fake reading. I would run my finger under the words, and it took me so much energy to decode the words that it was easier for me to daydream. And then my parents found out that I was doing this fake reading. This was right before my ninth birthday, so they canceled my party for faking.

I learned I was dyslexic in third grade. It was the best day of my life. I finally had an explanation. I could hang my hat on something and say: "I'm not broken. I'm not stupid. I'm not lazy. I just learn differently." If you look at the statistics, 17% of the population



**“On an exam I would spell the word squirrel
S-K-E-E-R-I-L-E. That would be the typical way
I would spell something completely phonetically.
Why would there be a Q there? It doesn’t make sense.
And to, too, and two...I would never use correctly.”**

has dyslexia, more than 250 million people in the developed world. Only 5% of kids in the public school system are diagnosed.

Dyslexia is a form of neurodiversity where your brain works a little bit differently than most people. One explanation is that the mini-columns in the brain that are in charge of conducting information for a normal person are a normal length and a normal distribution. If you have dyslexia, you have much longer mini-columns that are further apart. You may not be as good at minutia or short-term memory, but you are better at creativity, making connections, seeing patterns, and finding the bigger picture.

If you look at it, 30% of entrepreneurs are dyslexic, 40% of wildly successful entrepreneurs are dyslexic, 30% of MIT students, 30% of NASA engineers, many architects...the Governor of California, and the list goes on!

If you are dyslexic, usually the difficulties include trouble reading. Often, people read slowly. It’s difficult to spell or you have bad spelling. Sometimes people have trouble with math. Other people confuse their left and right, or it’s difficult to remember names.

I wanted to read. It was difficult for me to read. So, then my dad started reading Harry Potter to me which was the book I wanted to read the most. He would come home early from work and he sat at my bed. This is when I was eight years old, before books on tape. So, he would record himself

on a cassette tape, and then I would walk around the house listening to this cassette. I’d fall asleep listening to my dad’s voice reading Harry Potter and learned the story really well.

Right before we moved to the U.S., he found an audiobook of Harry Potter in English and so he got that for me. And though, I didn’t know English, I understood the words Harry and Hermione and Hogwarts and Alohomora and Hagrid. So, I knew where I was in the book and listened to that book 22 times in a row until I had the first chapter memorized.

The transition to English was really interesting because I had to learn another language all over again. It was really hard for me to learn the language the first time. Luckily, I am good with auditory, just from listening to Harry Potter, I could speak, and I could understand, but my writing and my reading were very, very poor.

I didn’t know anything about U.S. colleges because my parents did not go to school here. I knew that Harvard was a good school and Stanford was a good school and that was about it. I applied to all the Ivy Leagues and my top choices. I think they were Dartmouth and Stanford as well. But I got deferred from Dartmouth when I applied early. They rolled me into the normal applications. I thought, “All these schools could take 10 incoming classes of qualified kids.” It’s a lottery so I might as well buy as many lottery tickets as possible.



I wrote three really good applications and then duplicated them, and I applied to 26 schools. Brown was only on the list because it was another Ivy school and then I went to visit. Everybody was so happy, and it was so interesting and I got into conversations about how to increase ATP of the brain to have more energy to think and why did Napoleon succeed in conquering Continental Europe. And the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and communism versus capitalism and all these super interesting ideas.

When I was admitted to Brown it was because I showed a lot of perseverance and tenacity in the essay that I had written. I think the same type of thing was shown by my teachers and my recommendations. In retrospect, it was a terrible essay, so

bad, because I was trying so hard to compensate for being dyslexic in the essay. The entire essay was half apologizing for being dyslexic, half trying to show that I'm actually smart.

Fast forward to today, there's a piece I wrote about the same length as the college essay, and it explains my experience with dyslexia. It's a version of the story you just heard but it was phrased so much better. It has 2,000 shares from my personal Facebook account. I wish that I was a big enough man to be able to write an essay that was to that level of vulnerability when I was applying to colleges.

Learn more about Cliff Weitzman and Speechify by visiting the website at www.speechify.com.



LINDA SIEGEL

LIFETIME OF RESEARCHING DYSLLEXIA AND UNDERSTANDING LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Linda Siegel is a renowned scholar and Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia. Her most recent book titled *Not Stupid, Not Lazy* obliterates outdated stereotypes and explores the truths of the dyslexic mind. Here is the last chapter of her book about dyslexia titled “Final Thoughts” published by the International Dyslexia Association.

There will always be people who struggle with reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics, just as there will always be people like me who cannot carry a tune. This should not stop us from trying to help people with learning disabilities as much as possible. It is not an excuse for failing to identify the learning problem early, providing good teaching, and trying to understand the strengths of people with learning disabilities. Agatha Christie, William Butler Yeats, Winston Churchill, and many others were able to succeed despite learning problems, but they did so with help, with supportive families, and because they were given the chance to develop their abilities. So, let school systems and families search hard for each person's talents and make sure that he or she has the opportunity to develop those talents, in spite of learning difficulties.

The message is clear. Find the problems early and do not assume that children who have difficulty with reading, spelling, or arithmetic are merely being difficult. Teach them using a variety of strategies visual, kinesthetic, and verbal. Celebrate their talents. Never call

them stupid or lazy or emotionally disturbed. Educators who failed to understand and provide help for learning problems have ruined too many children's lives. Parents and teachers must learn to recognize the signs of learning disabilities. If a child is having problems learning to read or spell or print or do mathematics, then these difficulties are signs of possible learning disabilities.

Sometimes behavioral problems, such as aggression toward other children, defying authority or appearing to be unconcerned with doing homework, are signs of a learning disability. Behavioral problems often get misinterpreted. One young man related that for a long time his school referred to him as having “an attitude problem” rather than dealing with his learning disability. He ran into difficulties with peers and school staff. He got into numerous fights at school. He would often bring his anger and frustration home from school as well. Once he threw his lunch box against the wall after a particularly difficult day.

Learning difficulties cause problems with self-esteem, which can lead children to act out to get the

“Educators who failed to understand and provide help for learning problems have ruined too many children’s lives. Parents and teachers must learn to recognize the signs of learning disabilities.”

attention or approval of their peers. Sometimes children with learning problems can be easily led to do inappropriate actions to get approval. One girl whom I tested confessed that her “friends” urged her to shoplift some candy. When she was a bit older, she recognized how vulnerable she had been.

Parents should be alert for signs of school phobia. If a child has stomach aches on Mondays or weekdays but these pains disappear on the weekend, this may be a sign of a learning disability. Remember, however, that sometimes a stomachache is just a stomachache. One Monday morning my six-year-old daughter told me that she had a stomachache. She had shown no signs of a learning disability, but I was alert to possible behavioral signs. I asked her if she felt well enough to go to school and she said yes. Shortly after she entered the classroom, I received a call from the school telling me that she had vomited. I learned my lesson. The flu is not a sign of school phobia.

If children become withdrawn or have tantrums, these are possible signs of a learning disability. Be alert to bullying and teasing. Children may be ashamed to talk about it and feel that it is their fault.

What is the difference between individuals with learning disabilities who end up on the street or as criminals or committing suicide, and those who lead productive lives? Most often, the difference is having sensitive, helpful, non-critical parents, and schools and teachers who help them develop their strengths and make accommodations to help them learn and help build their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Self-esteem is fragile in all of us, and especially in people with learning disabilities, who often experience failure, scorn, and merciless teasing. Self-esteem must be fostered and developed, not destroyed.

Many of society’s serious problems, including antisocial behavior, homelessness, and suicide, can be reduced if we identify learning disabilities and provide appropriate help to people who have them. Lives are wasted, even ruined, by not developing the skills and talents of people with learning disabilities. Solving the puzzle of learning disabilities will not cure all the evils in the world, but it would be a giant step forward.

Learn more about Linda Siegel’s book by visiting the website at www.notstupidnotlazy.com.

This material from Linda Siegel’s book titled “Not Stupid, Not Lazy: Understanding Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities” is used with permission from The International Dyslexia Association, Inc. More info is found at www.dyslexiaIDA.org.



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**Not Stupid,
Not Lazy**

Linda Siegel

**Not Stupid,
Not Lazy**

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**Not Stupid,
Not Lazy**

Linda Siegel

**Not Stupid,
Not Lazy**
UNDERSTANDING DYSLEXIA
AND OTHER LEARNING DISABILITIES
Linda Siegel



MARLEY ROBB

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER & WORKSHOP LEADER EXPLAINS HER DYSLEXIA POWERS

Marley Robb is a graduate of Montana State University with a BA in Environmental Design and a Masters in Architecture. Here she discusses discovering her dyslexia while in college and how this inspires her professional designs and drawing workshops today. These are her candid thoughts from a recent interview.

I always describe dyslexia in the simplest of forms as a right-brain or big-picture bias, and for architects, this could be seen as an advantage. Often architects get characterized as designing buildings, but in all reality they design space. Architects design the habitable form of a building, that people interact with.

The long story short is I found out that I was dyslexic during my fourth year of architecture school. I was sitting in a furniture design class, typing notes, and typed the word "lamp". the little red squiggle came underneath and couldn't figure out why. After some time staring, right-clicked and realized I had written "lamb". This was around the same time my college roommate had realized she was dyslexic, so had been versed on the characteristics. Getting this simple four-letter word wrong kind of freaked me out, and I started flipping through all my sketchbooks and journals from architecture school. I'm really good at checking my work, but I'm not good at the first go, when I'm not

thinking about it or writing in my journal because you're just word vomiting or sketching ideas onto the page. This is when I noticed my Bs scribbled out for Ps, and my Es and Ss sometimes getting mixed up. I started noticing all these mistakes, and that's right about the time I discovered the MSU Visual Learners course. Again, a lot of things started to resonate, and I ultimately got tested for dyslexia and confirmed that I was beyond two standard deviations.

Being tested for dyslexia gave me some answers, but not just about my weaknesses. I tested in the 98th percentile for spatial comprehension. At the same time, I was being told I had a learning disability, I was validated with my choice of studying architecture—an extremely spatial field. If you are dyslexic, understanding that your weakness is your strength is huge. Also understanding that dyslexia is on a sliding scale. Even with myself, I find that it changes daily if I'm tired and I must accept that I'm not going

“I think a big component to success is learning that dyslexia is a biological difference. It’s not like you had a funky teacher growing up, or your parents didn’t read to you enough.”



to be good at spelling or checking errors that day. Understanding I need someone to double-check my spelling, or need to put this aside and look at it in the morning because it’s just going to frustrate me. Yeah, really understanding my boundaries set me apart in graduate school.

Lately, I’ve been doing a lot of drawing workshops. First, teaching in them, as cheesy as it sounds...that everyone can draw. Achieving this with a practice called blind contour. This is where an individual is looking at their subject, not at the page while they draw. It typically means not lifting your pencil while moving across the paper. The idea is you’re not drawing what you think you see...but you’re drawing what you actually see. You’re drawing what is in front of you, you’re drawing what you’re experiencing.



My own artwork feeds into blind contouring. It’s about letting go and understanding that you are in this moment, and what you’re experiencing is enough. One of my professors told me that we don’t sketch to make something look exact. We’re sketching for our own perspective and understanding. If you wanted it to look exact, you’d take a photo. I think ultimately that’s the benefit of the haptic perception. You’re able to document things that maybe a photograph couldn’t explain.

As a dyslexic, you can extend what you’re experiencing to drawings. So, if I’m drawing a building on a busy Main Street, I believe that the heightened noise affects the drawing. The details on a building you might not initially find significant, through drawing by blind contouring, you realize what is coming out as



significant. With the symposium workshop it was about removing people's guards, and the speculation they have about themselves, whether they were good at drawing or not. Breaking down this barrier so that they don't see drawing as this scary monster.

I think a big component of success is learning that dyslexia is a biological difference. It's not something like... you just had a funky teacher growing up, or your parents didn't read to you enough. Your differences can set you up for success. These differences allow dyslexics to see the world differently. I think that's a huge advantage.

Learn more about Marley Robb and her drawing style by visiting the website at www.marleyrobb.com.



QUESTION THE MYTHS

All learning differences, including dyslexia, are surrounded by misinformation. It's the mission of the DXI symposium to spotlight best practices and research that will take our understanding of dyslexia to the next level. Myths are simply half-truths that get re-told all too often. They start with a kernel of truth and quickly move to fiction. Dispelling these myths leads us to embrace new ideas and accurate information.



ASK HARD QUESTIONS

As changemakers, we must ask the hard questions. How can we focus the emerging conversation on the positive attributes of the dyslexic individual? How can we introduce successful role models in multiple fields? How can we create opportunities that will lead to success? How can we stop stereotyping learning differences?

LEARN TO BREATHE

Learning to breathe sounds so simple. It is a basic function that we take for granted. Professional athlete Lynsey Dyer leads a workshop to help participants stay in the moment. It doesn't matter if you're skiing off a 60-foot cliff or sitting in a ballroom, we all must breathe. Realizing this action is the first step in lasting change.

RAISE YOUR HAND

Often individuals are afraid to raise their hand, as some text-heavy teaching methods can be overwhelming to the dyslexic. As we reshape teaching practices, we all need to work to create a learning environment that is inclusive and understanding so knowledge can transfer easily, and new understanding is enjoyable.



FIND A MENTOR

We all learn from each other, so dream your dream and find a way to make it come true. Changemaker Cliff Weitzman saw Jackie Chan do a backflip in a movie when he was six years old. From that point onward, every time Cliff saw someone do a backflip, he would run over to ask them, "Where did you learn how to do this?" Then at the age of 14, Cliff discovered a local recreation center near his home where he had the opportunity to accomplish his dream.



LOOK FOR THE ANSWERS

There are many renowned researchers like Linda Siegel who have dedicated their lives to understanding dyslexia, questioning how to effectively identify and teach those with learning differences. Be sure to check out Linda's book *Not Stupid, Not Lazy* along with other resources found on page 35 of this publication.



PARTICIPATE IN CHANGE

We all can change. Whether you're a parent, student, teacher, administrator, researcher, or advocate, we need everyone to participate to create cultural and systemic change. Start simply by joining a grassroots organization, sign up for a conference, or volunteer to be a mentor. This is the foundation of how we re-imagine dyslexia.



USE YOUR AUTHENTIC VOICE

Everyone has an obstacle to overcome and a story to tell. Explore using your authentic voice to tell others how you created a successful workaround to a challenging problem. Speak from the heart to help others to navigate their journey. This can easily be done one-on-one or in a group. Everyone must speak up to make change.

2021 DXI Symposium **www.montana.edu/dxi** Register for October



Participate in the 2021 Dyslexia & Innovation symposium, hosted online in October so everyone can join. Be sure to visit our website regularly for the most current updates and registration information.

Visit the website www.montana.edu/dxi

This project is supported by a Montana State University internal grant through the Office of the Vice President for Research, Economic Development & Graduate Education.





SUPPORT DYSLEXIA

MSU Giving Day

givingday.montana.edu

OUR GOAL

Is to establish a dyslexia resource library containing texts in multiple formats, including audio when available, technology resources and other tools available for free check-out and use by stakeholders across Montana.

Research indicates that dyslexic individuals make up 15-20% of the population. Unfortunately, many myths about dyslexia remain within and outside education. These myths and a general lack of knowledge about the abilities and strengths of dyslexic individuals lead to a deficit view of dyslexia. Let's shift that conversation!

JUST IMAGINE

A group of teachers meeting to discuss how they can enact the supportive instructional practices featured in the book they borrowed multiple copies of from the DXI dyslexia resource library. A high school student with dyslexia listening to an audio version of a famous dyslexic individual's autobiography and seeing, perhaps for the first time, that dyslexia doesn't mean stupid or unsuccessful. A student with dyslexia using a Smartpen in a class to assist with note taking to pilot the technology and provide support for its purchase.

MAKE IT A REALITY

All these scenarios and more are possible, with your support! Donations will be used to buy quality resources to fund the DXI Dyslexia Resource Library and to support the costs of shipping resources to and from borrowers in order to keep the resource library a free resource for all Montanans!

DXI

BOOKS ABOUT DYSPLEXIA

Not Stupid, Not Lazy:

Understanding Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities

Author: Linda Siegel

Publisher: International Dyslexia Association

Publication: 2016

ISBN-13: 978-0892140695

The Dyslexic Advantage:

Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain

Author: Brock Eide and Fernette Eide

Publisher: Penguin Publishing Group

Publication: 2012

ISBN-13: 978-0452297920

Basic Facts About Dyslexia & Other Reading Problems

Authors: Louisa Moats & Karen Dakin

Publisher: International Dyslexia Association

Publication: 2008

ISBN-13: 978-0892140640

Beginning to Read:

Thinking and Learning about Print

Author: Marilyn Jager Adams

Publisher: MIT Press

Publication: 1994

ISBN-13: 978-0262510769

Overcoming Dyslexia

Author: Sally Shaywitz

Publisher: Vintage

Publication: 2005

ISBN-13: 978-0679781592

Reading Development and Difficulties

Author: Kate Cain

Publisher: Wiley

Publication: 2010

ISBN-13: 978-1405151559

Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers

Author: Louisa Moats

Publisher: Brookes Publishing

Publication: 2010

ISBN-13: 978-1598570502

Thinking Differently

An Inspiring Guide for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities

Author: David Flink

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers

Publication: 2014

ISBN-13: 978-0062225938

Unlocking Literacy:

Effective Decoding and Encoding Instruction

Author: Marcia Henry

Publisher: Brookes Publishing

Publication: 2010

ISBN-13: 978-1598570748

SUCCESSFUL INDIVIDUALS

Along with millions of successful individuals, the people listed below leveraged their strengths to overcome the challenges of learning differences.

Ansel Adams – Landscape Photographer

Laila Ali – Professional Boxer & Television Personality

Jennifer Aniston – Actress + Producer

Richard Branson – Entrepreneur + Adventurer

Erin Brockovich – Legal Clerk + Consumer Advocate

Pete Conrad – Apollo 12 Astronaut

Barbara Corcoran – Businesswoman + Author

Bill Gates – Software Developer & Philanthropist

Whoopi Goldberg – Actress + Comedian + Author

Wayne Gretzky – Professional Ice Hockey Player

Lewis Hamilton – Formula 1 Racecar Driver

Jay Leno – Comedian & Television Host

Jewell Loyd – Professional Basketball Player

Daymond John – Businessman + Investor

Keira Knightley – Actress

Joe Montana – Professional Football Player

Anne Rice – Gothic Fiction Author

Richard Rogers – Architect

Carly Simon – Singer + Songwriter + Musician

Steven Spielberg – Director + Producer + Screenwriter

Gwen Stefani – Singer + Songwriter + Fashion Designer

Florence Welch – Vocalist + Songwriter

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

Beating Dyslexia

www.beatingdyslexia.com

Decoding Dyslexia Montana

www.decodingdyslexiamt.com

Eye to Eye

www.eyetoeyenational.org

International Dyslexia Association

www.dyslexiaida.org

Made by Dyslexia

www.madebydyslexia.org

Montana Office of Public Instruction

www.opi.mt.gov

National Center for Improving Literacy

www.improvingliteracy.org



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DXI

2021 Symposium

www.montana.edu/dxi

Join us at the next DXI symposium in October 2021 which will be held online to allow more people to be involved in reframing the narrative around dyslexia. Our dream is to bring together a variety of stakeholders to spark a discussion about dyslexia that goes beyond the challenges of spelling and reading to focus on the powerful advantages of the dyslexic mind including imagination, spatial awareness, and creative thinking.

