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Learning Foundations helps dyslexic students attain success



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A passion for helping others and programs that make a difference in people's lives--phrases usually associated with nonprofit organizations. To be fair, these qualities can also be found in for-profit businesses. At Learning Foundations, programs specifically created to help children with dyslexia and other learning disabilities teach students how to succeed in school and, consequently, their lives. The Learning Foundations' staff is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the children whose lives they work passionately to improve.

In a relatively small, friendly office suite located at 2817 Thousand Oaks, Learning Foundations has been serving San Antonio families for 40 years by helping children with learning disabilities. In free, weekly seminars, Learning Foundations' directors Leslie Jernigan and Rafael Scarnati help parents identify their child's learning issues. Parents are encouraged to ask questions, and are given information about the comprehensive programming at Learning Foundations.

"When a parent becomes aware of their child's specific learning problems, they can begin to find an effective



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course of action to help the child," Scarnati said.

Scarnati also explained some of the characteristics of dyslexia. "A child who is dyslexic has a problem with auditory processing more than a visual problem. People with dyslexia do not "see" things backwards; their brain processes language information differently. You do not outgrow dyslexia. You can't "cure" dyslexia, but you can work to make permanent changes in the way students process information and learn."

The programs at Learning Foundations are based on the highly successful Orton-Gillingham approach of cognitive learning. It has been in use since the 1930's and defined in Wikipedia as a language-based, multisensory, structured, sequential, cumulative, cognitive, and flexible method. This system has been supported by multiple studies. Programming for students is customized according to each student's needs. To begin the process of developing an individualized program, research-based testing and parent input determines each child's strengths and weaknesses.

The combination of programs and strategies used, and the amount of training needed will vary for each individual student. While most of the current students are dyslexic, this method of cognitive training works with children who have attention challenges, math and/or reading disabilities, auditory processing delays and other non-diagnosed learning challenges.

A student's personalized program will include developing learning skills, tuning cognitive processing skills, helping the child with problem solving and time management skills and academic tutoring. "Research has shown, and the positive experiences of our students supports, foundational learning skills as the difference between success and failure in school," explains Scarnati. When a program is created, the student is matched with professionally qualified trainers who work with them one-on-one.

In the whole-child concept, trainers and staff also help build a child's self-confidence with extra activities.

When I visited Learning Foundations, I got to see the 2nd Annual End of Year LEGO Contest. "The LEGO contest is all about creativity, innovation, and hands-on learning," said Jernigan. "Dyslexic children are visual/spatial creative, which is demonstrated in their LEGO creations."

Learning Foundations also provides dyslexia expertise for the nonprofit Marin's Mission 4 Dyslexia. Its mission is to "raise awareness and to fight for early diagnosis and



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intervention of children who have difficulties with reading and writing." Marin's Mission offers parent support groups, and a Facebook page where they share information, resources and encouragement for parents with dyslexia.

Feature image: Students work on a community jigsaw puzzle which is framed and hung in the waiting room when done.



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