

Sean Connery's legacy helps dyslexic children and young people in Edinburgh

An innovative educational programme funded by the Sean Connery Foundation designed to help dyslexic children and young people in Edinburgh has reported showing positive signs of making a difference.

Interim results from the three year project, which is targeted at those having difficulties in reading and writing, has shown that individual children are making significant progress in their reading.

While Sir Sean, who was born in Edinburgh, was not himself dyslexic, learning to read was life-changing for him, and he was passionate about sharing his enthusiasm for reading with others.

The partnership between Dyslexia Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Council's Literacy and Dyslexia Support Team and the Foundation began last August. The work builds on the council's support (which was already in place) to deliver intensive programmes to more pupils than were previously provided.

In the first year 15 primary and two secondary schools have been provided with specialist teachers and pupil support assistants trained to develop the capacity of school staff

supporting children/young people with dyslexia or literacy difficulties. This has resulted in 215 pupils benefitting from the extra support and the wider training programme reaching 175 teaching staff.

An analysis of the work found all teachers and pupils involved were positive about its impact, with data suggesting “individual children are flourishing as a result of the initiative”. Even in just nine weeks of intervention, it was found that individual children were making “significant progress in their reading” and the report said: “If such improvements are sustained longer term it is highly likely that the impact of the project will demonstrate statistical significance.”

Another positive development from the project has been the setting up of parent/carers groups which helps parents with strategies to support literacy at home and practise these with their children.

Cllr Joan Griffiths, Education, Children and Families Convener for the City of Edinburgh Council, said: “Thanks to this funding from the Sean Connery Foundation and our longstanding partnership with Dyslexia Scotland we have been able to significantly increase support for learners who benefit most from this targeted work. Although we’re still in the early stages of this ground-breaking project the early results are really encouraging and building on the excellent work already taking place around literacy and dyslexia in our schools.

“In this first year we carefully selected 16 schools, offering group or one to one input to learners. We delivered intensive staff training and support for parents and carers, so that they felt more confident and informed about how to help at home. Children who had difficulties with reading are now showing significant progress. The work also helps build their self-confidence making them feel more motivated and engaged in learning.

“This is a wonderful partnership which shows real promise for learners with literacy difficulties. I can’t wait to see how the programme develops over the next two years and the positive impact it will have.”

Cathy Magee, Chief Executive of Dyslexia Scotland, said: “We are delighted that this initiative has started so well and that the hard work of everyone involved in the first year is having such a significant impact on the learners’ literacy skills as well as on their confidence and wellbeing.

“Early reports show that the generous investment by the Foundation, combined with the excellent partnership between Dyslexia Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council are delivering encouraging results. This is evident in the positive feedback from learners, parents, teachers and pupil support assistants.”

Stephane Connery, Chair of The Sean Connery Foundation, said: “The single most important event in Sean’s life was learning to read. It opened up his world. Sean was very conscious of the stigma that people with dyslexia endure. It does a terrible number on their confidence despite the fact that many dyslexic people are truly gifted with fresh, original perspectives. Our hope is that the Sean Connery Dyslexia Initiative helps to unlock this genius, helping students to grow in confidence and thrive in school.”

