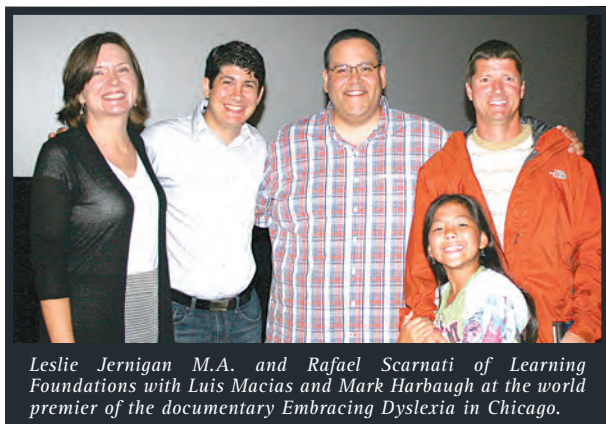


# Paving A Path To Become An Independent Learner

By Amanda Burris



Leslie Jernigan M.A. and Rafael Scarnati of Learning Foundations with Luis Macias and Mark Harbaugh at the world premier of the documentary *Embracing Dyslexia* in Chicago.

One of the hardest things to see is a struggling and discouraged child. While you know them to be gifted, creative and intelligent, their constant battle with school and their struggle just to get through each year is starting to make it harder for them to cope with being marked as lazy or unmotivated.

Around 30 percent of children in the U.S. are struggling academically despite having average to above average intelligence. At Learning Foundations, they focus on eliminating the pain of a smart child being wrongly labeled and work one-on-one with them to overcome the underlying issues are holding him or her back.

For over 40 years, Learning Foundations has been helping students in San Antonio address learning challenges by using researched based programs to identify the problems and help lead students to become independent learners.

Rafael Scarnati, Learning Foundation's Center Director, was previously a middle school Social Studies teacher, where he felt first hand the concern for students who were quickly falling behind.

"I wasn't equipped to deal with the children in my class that were struggling due to underlying conditions like dyslexia, attention and focus, and difficulties with reading, spelling and math," explained Scarnati. "When I approached more tenured teachers, they too were at a loss as to how to help them."

Schools tend to primarily focus on reading, writing, test taking and memorization, all areas that can be the most challenging for students with learning disabilities. With schools not always having the resources or time to identify particular difficulties in each student, many end up slipping through the cracks and falling behind.

Leslie Jernigan M.A., Program Director, also worked in the public school system before joining Learning Foundations in 2004. Through her studies, as she pursued a Master's degree in school psychology, she found that schools best serve the "typical" learner, which can make learning difficult for those who learn in nontraditional ways. Jernigan now evaluates and helps develop specific programs that cater to each child's needs.

"Each child is treated on an individual, case-by-case basis," said Jernigan. "The children we see here aren't dumb – they're actually quite intelligent – there is just something inhibiting them from learning properly. We have the ability to help identify and then work around that roadblock to help these children succeed."

Learning Foundations focuses on a variety of learning disabilities. Their programs encompass everything from reading and writing, attention and focus, sensory motor development and dyslexia.

"Children who seem lazy, unmotivated or are acting out in class are often just struggling and trying to cope with their frustrations," explained Scarnati. "Our sessions are intense yet full of stimulation and movement to keep children engaged. Working one-on-one helps them stretch their thinking while the trainer provides feedback in order to make significant changes in a short amount of time."

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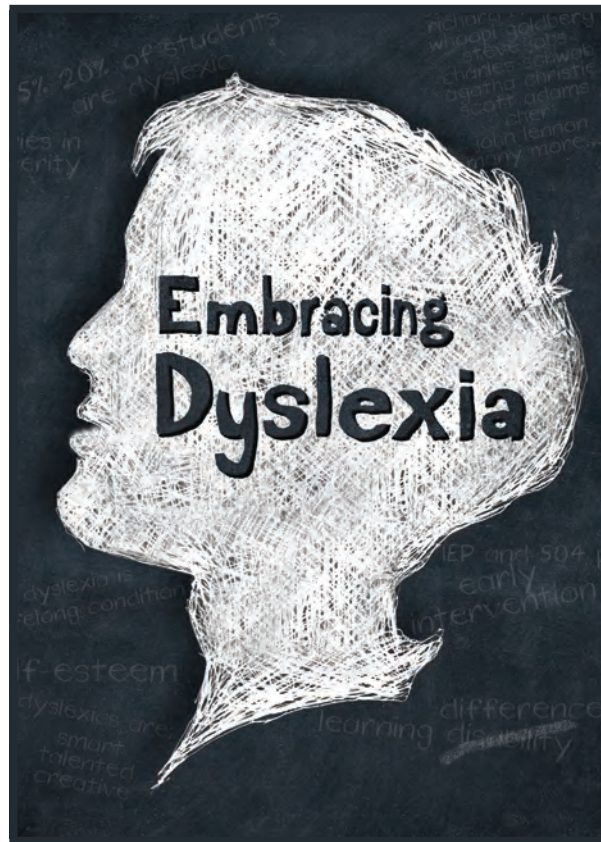
– Rafael Scarnati  
Learning Foundation's Center Director

While Learning Foundations can help their clients with these various types of learning disorders, they spent October with an extra focus on dyslexia. Around 15 to 20 percent of children have some degree of dyslexia, yet it may not always be caught and diagnosed or fully understood.

Learning Foundations teamed up with two non-profits, Marin's Mission for Dyslexia and Standing Strong for Dyslexia, whose mission is to raise awareness about dyslexia and provide resources to families affected by the learning disability, to present the film "Embracing Dyslexia" at Alamo Drafthouse – Stone Oak.

"Many parents are not aware of the warning signs and how important early diagnosis is," said Towanna G. Bazile of Standing Strong for Dyslexia, who, due to her son being diagnosed at a later age, found that awareness needed to be spread to other families. "Others desire to provide additional support for their child, however, they do not have the general knowledge or financial means to do so."

Both families from Standing Strong for Dyslexia and Marin's Mission have a child that went to Learning Foundations. Through the support and education provided, they have not only acquired a success story, but also a passion to spread the word and help other families with a dyslexic child.



"Embracing Dyslexia" allowed Learning Foundations and both non-profits to promote awareness, while also letting the public ask them questions about the learning disorder. This documentary helps to eliminate some of the misconceptions of dyslexia while also examining many of the challenges associated with the disorder.

"This film was inspired largely by watching my son struggle," said film director Luis Macias in regards to his eight year old son, Alejandro. "Prior to his diagnosis, Alejandro's dyslexia had a very negative impact on his academic achievements, as well as his self-esteem. As a parent, witnessing my child go through these difficulties I felt helpless. It was only after Alejandro was actually diagnosed with dyslexia that I began to understand how widespread the problem is."

Teachers, parents and the community were invited out to further educate themselves about how those with dyslexia can overcome their difficulties. Director Luis Macias even came down from Chicago and made a special introduction to the film. There were resource booths for parents, teachers and professionals available and all of the proceeds from the event went to the non-profits involved.

Learning Foundations helps those with dyslexia by using a program influenced by the Orton-Gillingham Approach. This approach is a method developed from years of practice and scientific evidence that evaluates how individuals learn to read and write, as well as the difficulties they face, and the practices that have proven to be successful. Through this method, Learning Foundations has implemented the Barton Reading and Spelling System, which is multisensory, systematic and cumulative, with explicit instruction in synthetic and analytic phonics.

"In this 20-week process, we noticed that our son was happier, more focused and willing to do his homework," explained Jack and Belinda Hodge about their son who went through the Auditory Stimulation Training and the Dyslexia Reading and Sound Therapy programs at Learning Foundations. "His teachers also shared with us that they noticed these positive changes in his attitude at school."

Many parents and students have seen life-changing improvements through Learning Foundations. Due to learning disorders being so prominent in children, with many even having more than one, it is imperative to remain aware and seek the help that can make all the difference.

"It is a pleasure to watch [our son] grow into this wonderful, happy, confident person we also knew existed inside of him," said the Hodges.

If you know a child who struggles in school more than they should or just has so much difficulty with learning that they remain discouraged, Learning Foundations may just be the solution. If you would like to find out more about Dyslexia, the documentary "Embracing Dyslexia" or other learning disorders contact or visit Learning Foundations. Initial consultations are free of charge and support groups, open to the public, are held each month for parents who have children with learning disabilities.

Learning foundations aims to better educate parents, teachers, professionals and the community about learning disabilities. By fully understanding the problems behind a child (or even an adult's) struggles, the easier it is to get them on track to becoming confident, independent learners.

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