



Dyslexia  
Scotland

# Sean Connery Foundation Dyslexia Initiative Annual Report

September 2023

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## Executive summary

This is the annual report of the Sean Connery Foundation Dyslexia Initiative, marking the conclusion of the first full year of classroom interventions.

The report describes the structure and the aims of the Initiative, the training of teachers and support staff and their subsequent deployment in participating schools.

More than 300 learners with dyslexia participated in the Initiative during this first year, in 17 schools.

More than 300 teachers and Pupil Support Assistants received training in how to help learners with dyslexia.

The report presents quantitative data from pre and post intervention assessments; and qualitative data from a range of feedback mechanisms.

Evidence is presented of statistically significant improvements in learners' reading ability scores, resulting in the judgement of the City of Edinburgh Council's Principal Educational Psychologist that the first year of the Initiative has been a great success. Analysis of qualitative, subjective data from the feedback of learners, staff, parents and carers demonstrates almost universal high levels of satisfaction with the work of the Initiative.

## Programme overview

The Sean Connery Foundation Dyslexia Initiative is a unique partnership between the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC), Dyslexia Scotland and the Sean Connery Foundation. The aim of the programme is to enable more learners in City of Edinburgh schools to reach their full potential by benefitting from high-quality, targeted interventions which enhance literacy and build personal confidence, thereby improving life chances.

The support from the Sean Connery Foundation enables the City of Edinburgh's established Literacy/Dyslexia Support Team (L/DST) to provide intensive tailored programmes to an increased number of learners. Teachers and Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) benefit from bespoke training courses before being deployed on secondments to schools across Edinburgh. This is leading to a significant scaling up of identification and support for individuals and groups of learners with dyslexia.

This report covers a period of over a year, from commencement of the programme preparatory phase in April 2022, to the completion of the third block in June 2023, the end of the academic year.

Training for the Initiative commenced in August 2022. L/DST staff had developed programmes for the three L/DST teachers, and for the three PSAs. The programmes were developed to operate in parallel, with plenary sessions bringing teachers and PSAs together. The newly deployed teams offered training to staff in their designated schools to help groups of teachers and PSAs to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies in supporting learners with dyslexia. Deployed teams operated over three blocks: September to December 2022; January to April 2023; and May to June 2023.

During the academic year 2022/23 the programme worked in 17 Edinburgh schools: 15 primary schools and two secondary schools. Teams from the Initiative have worked with 305 children (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 below for a breakdown and explanation). Additionally, 50 children attended lunchtime clubs (some of whom are included in the total of 305.)

Learners were assessed at the beginning and end of each intervention in order to provide a basis for objective evidence of the impact of the programme.

Some of the earliest interim analysis clearly showed that learners were benefitting significantly from individual interventions, but that involvement in group sessions over a single block may not have demonstrated statistically significant improvements (although it should be noted that subjective feedback of involvement in group sessions was overwhelmingly positive).

The following areas were identified by tutors as benefits of the funding which would not otherwise have happened. The headings are accompanied by quotes from parents/carers.

## Governance

Organisations involved with the Initiative during 2022/23 were as follows:

- Sean Connery Foundation
- The City of Edinburgh Council
- Dyslexia Scotland
- Education Scotland
- University of Glasgow
- Educational Consultant
- Parental representatives, Dyslexia Scotland South East
- NoticeAbility
- Mission Dyslexia

Interactions between the different organisations supporting the Initiative have been very effective. The Steering Committee has met quarterly, producing a well-documented action log. Frequent operational meetings between individuals and between participating organisations have been held as required by the programme.

A series of documents has been produced to facilitate the programme and to provide update reports. These have all been agreed by the Steering Committee and shared with the wider educational community to help drive change. Documents included the following:

Initiative Introduction/Brochure

Training Report

Interim Report (Impact Report, January 2023)

Interim Report (Impact Report, June 2023)

Thematic Analysis (Blocks one and two)

**NoticeAbility** is a non-profit organisation whose stated aim is to help children and young people with dyslexia identify their unique strengths, and to build self-esteem by introducing tailored curricula at the point where they have achieved a level of reading proficiency but their negative self-image lingers. The aim is not to address literacy difficulties per se, but to build on a young person's strengths in order to prevent poor self-esteem and to encourage independent learning, self-confidence and a greater understanding of what their dyslexia means to them.

As part of the Initiative, the CEC were able to offer the Noticeability programme to teachers in all 23 secondary schools in the City of Edinburgh. The intention is to commence training from the beginning of the 2023/24 academic year. It is intended to provide the 20 lesson programme by means of two lessons per week over a 10 week period. The training is provided online, with video content, and with follow-up lessons in the form of practical exercises linked to the video content. A key element of the programme is that every learner must create a presentation celebrating what they have learned. The presentations are assessed, and this can be used to evaluate whether objectives have been met.

**Mission Dyslexia** is a highly regarded book/resource for 7 to 12 year olds, based on characters developed during a pilot programme, 'Mission superheroes'. These workshops are now delivered throughout Scotland. The CEC offered the opportunity to Edinburgh primary schools to participate in tailored Mission Dyslexia workshops. The overall objective of the workshops was to work with the Edinburgh City Council Sean

Connery Foundation L/DST to help support children within the learning environment. Workshop aims were to: highlight the positive aspects of dyslexia; build confidence in children with literacy difficulties in an identification (or in assessment process) of dyslexia; work on innovative and creative ways to overcome challenges learners face in school; create the start of a coping strategy that can be used in school and at home.

Ten workshops were completed during Year 1, along with two webinars. All 130 children who participated received a copy of Mission Dyslexia.

## Training

Before the Initiative programme started, the CEC (The City of Edinburgh Council) provided a specialist team to support learners with literacy difficulties: the Literacy/Dyslexia Support Team (L/DST), staffed with a range of highly experienced specialist teachers.

Three teachers and three PSAs were initially funded to work on secondment for the Initiative. These staff received a bespoke training programme, which commenced in August 2022. Numbers are to be increased to four of each within Year 2.

Seconded staff undertook 6 weeks' initial intensive training followed by training input throughout their term of deployment, building up teacher/PSA skills as they worked in schools.

Training aims for teachers and PSAs included the following:

- familiarisation with the national education context and the CEC's processes and procedures for supporting learners;
- knowledge of effective use of the CEC Literacy and Dyslexia Guidelines;
- literacy difficulties/dyslexia strengths and areas of need;
- assessment process for identification of literacy difficulties/dyslexia;
- knowledge and skills in use of supports and strategies;

- understanding of how to work with staff in different school contexts.

Supplementary training aims for PSAs included:

- familiarisation with the specialist support team from the L/DST;
- familiarisation with working in the classroom context;
- equipping them to assess, support and develop learning of children and young people with severe literacy difficulties/dyslexia.

There were separate training sessions for teachers and PSAs, with some plenary sessions bringing teachers and PSAs together.

Training made use of a blended learning approach, with online modules, face-to-face teaching, practical assessments, and opportunities for PSAs to shadow staff, and coaching and mentoring from specialist staff. This all represents a fresh new approach to staff development in the CEC.

Both staff teams completed a feedback exercise seeking views on how the training prepared them to undertake their new roles. The evaluations were positive, with an 81% grading from teachers and 70% from the PSAs. All feedback is being used for continuous improvement and to improve the training programme in the future.

This training model is being developed so that it could be replicated in other areas of Scotland, albeit in a reduced format, and it is hoped that it will attract favourable attention from local authorities.



## Communications and publicity

All primary and all secondary schools in Edinburgh have been offered the opportunity to participate in Mission Dyslexia or Noticeability. The work of the Initiative has been widely shared on the CEC and Dyslexia Scotland websites and social media, so raising awareness within the CEC educational and wider dyslexia community.

Following the extensive media publicity about the launch of the Sean Connery Foundation, national press expressed an interest in the Initiative itself, and in June 2023 the Scotsman newspaper ran a two-page story with the headline 'Connery dyslexia scheme success hailed.'

Stephane Connery was quoted as saying that for his father learning to read was the single most important thing to happen in his life. This news item raised awareness of the impact of the Sean Connery Foundation nationally.

## Who benefits from the initiative?

**Table 1: Numbers of learners participating**

| Stage of intervention  | Numbers of learners | Description of support  |
|--|---------------------|---|
| Learners with significant delayed progress in all aspects of literacy.   | 31                  | Intensive individual interventions from both the teacher and PSA during the block on all aspects of literacy.   |
| Learners not making the required progress in a targeted area of literacy (termed 'Hotlisters').  | 220                 | Targeted shorter individual intervention for specific reading spelling or writing difficulty, delivered by the PSA but overseen by the teacher. Learners could be added to or removed from the list during the block. |
| Groupwork  | 54                  | Groups of up to 6 learners with similar profiles work together on spelling skills, reading or cursive writing. Delivered by the teacher and /or PSA.  |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>305</b>          |   |
| Learners attending the Lunchtime club. (This number is not included in the total because many of the Lunchtime club attendees are included in the categories above.) | 50                  | Learners are able to socialise with friends and develop new skills and build their confidence. Run by the PSA.  |

**Table 2: Numbers of schools participating**

| <b>Schools</b> | <b>Number</b> |
|----------------|---------------|
| Primary        | 15            |
| Secondary      | 2             |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>17</b>     |

**Table 3 - Numbers of Teachers, PSAs and Parents Participating**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Number of teachers worked with/ trained in school   | 30  |
| Cooperative teaching – number of in-school teachers   | 8 (4 Support for Learning teachers; 4 Classroom Teachers) |
| Number of in-school PSAs trained while working directly with the teams  | 25  |
| Standalone whole school training – number of staff trained  | 231   |
| Dyslexia assessment training – number of staff advised/ supported/ trained  | 13  |
| Parent/Carer group – number of participants   | 60  |
| Number of parents/carers meeting L/DST teachers for individual discussions of their child's assessment outcomes, etc. | 22  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>389</b>  |

## Outcomes, indicators and measures

At the commencement of the Initiative programme, a series of desired outcomes and targets was identified, together with indicators for each one and identified means of measurement. These are shown in tables in Appendix 1, which also display progress statements against each.

## Challenges

The Initiative has faced a number of challenges. The calibre of the professional learning delivered by the L/DST specialist staff to the seconded staff was of the highest quality, as evidenced in the feedback from the staff and PSAs. However, this proved to be demanding on the time of the team delivering the training. In order to minimise this issue in future, digitalising some elements of the training is being explored in partnership with Education Scotland (the Government agency that inspects schools in Scotland).

One of the main challenges to the programme has been retention of PSA members of the teams. Two of the PSAs acquired promoted posts in special schools as a result of their newly-acquired knowledge and skills. As this is a peripatetic role, PSAs found travelling to schools further from their homes time-consuming. As each team consists of just two members, a teacher and a PSA, if a member leaves the programme at short notice the programme for that team is placed in jeopardy because of the lead time required to recruit and train a replacement.

The teaching staff have all remained in post since the commencement of the programme. They are due to return to their substantive posts in February 2024, with four replacement and one additional PSA to be recruited this autumn, dependent on funding. When team members leave to return to their normal jobs, their skills and experience are lost to

the programme. However, they will use their highly attuned knowledge, skills and experience of supporting dyslexic learners to build capacity in their own schools and potentially across the CEC schools and beyond if they change local authorities.

As discussed elsewhere, outcomes for learners receiving group interventions have been less successful than those receiving one-to-one interventions because of the diverse profiles of learners put forward by school staff. However, this has been addressed by working with smaller groups of learners (2-3 where possible) with more similar profiles.

A continuing challenge has been recruiting participating schools. There are many interested schools but they find it difficult to free one of their own PSAs to observe and learn from the team to undertake support once the team depart. L/DST are continuing to work collaboratively with schools to address their issues and concerns.

The Initiative has proved successful for primary school and younger secondary school learners, but during Year 1 there has been limited involvement with older learners. This issue is being explored for Year 2.

## Quantitative data

### Analysis by the CEC Principal Psychologist

#### Statistical Analysis of Year 1 Data

The Initiative worked in five or six schools in each of the three terms of the academic session 2022-23. In total the initiative worked in 17 schools.

In each school, learners either worked in groups, or in 1 to 1 scenarios. The group work shows good qualitative data suggesting the learners benefitted from being involved in this work. Statistical analyses have been restricted to the 1 to 1 work, as it is in this work where we can far more clearly show the additional value created by the initiative.

In a minority of cases it is not unjustified to assert that the added value of this project's 10 week 1 to 1 intervention is that children have learnt to read because of this project's additionality. Statistically these children have moved from scores in tests of reading ability **below** the average range to **within** the average range in the ten week period. Numbers are not sufficient to generalise more widely but the gains are meaningful for these children.

In Term 1 the initial results across all children receiving 1 to 1 input were promising. Again numbers were too small to generalise.

Combining Term 1 and Term 2 scores gave sufficient numbers of learners to allow statistical analysis to take place. Gains on phonemic awareness and sight reading tests were both statistically significant. Term 2's separate results were also strong but without sufficient numbers to allow analysis.

These gains continued in Term 3, both separately (though again not in sufficient numbers for statistical analysis), and when Terms 1, 2 and 3 scores were combined.

For the whole of the first year (Terms 1, 2 and 3) data were analysed for 28 learners. The total for the year is a very respectable number to allow statistical analyses to occur.

The gains for the 28 learners are very statistically significant for all 3 measures; i.e., Overall TOWRE score, Sight Word scores and, most impressively, Phonemic Decoding. This makes sense as Phonemic Decoding is what is explicitly taught in this intervention.

In conclusion, in statistical terms Year 1 of this project has been a great success. In Year 2 it is highly likely that this success will be replicated. What is not quantifiable at this point in the Initiative is whether gains made by individual learners will be consolidated over time. However, the L/DST intend to revisit participating schools to assess whether improvements have been consolidated.

## Qualitative data



— Mean score before  
— Mean score after



The Wellbeing Web diagram provides a pictorial representation of learners' responses to a series of wellbeing-related questions, before and after their involvement with the Initiative. The diagram shows that for 45 responses from learners at 11 schools there was a very significant improvement in every category.



## Thematic Analysis and Thematic Map

A comprehensive and detailed analysis was carried out of parent group focus data, individual parent feedback forms, learner wellbeing webs, and online staff feedback surveys. Three strong themes were identified, each with two or three sub-themes. These are represented pictorially in a Thematic Map, shown in Appendix 2. Appendix 2 also presents a description of the themes and sub-themes, with many representative and illustrative quotes from learners, staff and parents/carers.

Responses were almost universally positive. Those that were not positive mostly described a desire for more sessions and longer-term sessions; suggestions have also been taken from some comments regarding timetabling, and the adequacy of venues and facilities.

## Conclusion

This report has shown the scale and impact of the programme during its first year, the substantial numbers of learners, teachers, PSAs and parents/carers who have benefitted through their participation.

More than 300 learners have participated in the programme, and this represents an additionality provided by the Initiative.

More than 300 staff have benefitted in varying degrees from high-quality specialist training in how to support dyslexic learners and their parents. This is especially valued as it enables the work of the Team to impact more fully on the in-class experience of a greater number of learners and creates that very important link between intervention and what happens in the classroom.

More than 80 parents/carers engaged meaningfully with the parental group sessions offered by the team, or through individual sessions.

The table of Outcomes, Indicators and Measures in Appendix 1 records the successes and progress of the Initiative during Year 1.

The CEC's Principal Psychologist has concluded, based on his robust statistical analysis of reading ability scores, that Year 1 of the Initiative has been a great success. He considers it highly likely that this will be replicated in Year 2.

Analysis of subjective feedback from learners, staff and parents has demonstrated almost universally positive reactions. Appendix 2 provides a thematic analysis of these responses together with many illustrative quotes from participants.

Across the CEC there is a heightened awareness of how the Sean Connery Foundation is benefitting many of Edinburgh's children and their parents/carers. The article in the Scotsman newspaper has extended that awareness outside the world of education.

In conclusion, Year 1 of the Initiative is judged to have been successful across all its planned Outcomes/Targets. There is every reason to expect that this success will be continued and built on during Year 2.



**Dyslexia Scotland**  
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