

Dyslexia  
Scotland

# Sean Connery Foundation Dyslexia Initiative

Case study for Sarah Switzer (teacher)

Charity No. SC000951

## Introduction

The final report captures the significant impact and progress of the Initiative which was delivered across the City of Edinburgh in over 70 schools to hundreds of learners from the primary to the senior stage of education. However, the benefits of the Initiative are being felt beyond Edinburgh. This case study considers a teacher working in Falkirk, who has benefitted from other strands of the Initiative and input from Dyslexia Scotland, including Mission Dyslexia, Mission Superheroes and the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Recognition Programme in Dyslexia & Inclusive Practice.

## Sarah Switzer

### Background

Sarah (pictured on the cover of this report) is a teacher qualified in primary education with 18 years' experience within Scottish Education. She spent 12 years as a classroom teacher followed by 5 years as a Support for Learning (SfL) specialist teacher. She is now in a promoted post (acting) with responsibilities for enabling learners to succeed by addressing barriers to learning, and for promoting progress in literacy and numeracy.

**"I was disheartened to witness some pupils struggling to cope with an identification of dyslexia. There seemed an element of shame and embarrassment for these pupils and dyslexia had many negative connotations for them."**

On taking up her SfL role Sarah needed to develop her knowledge, skills and competencies in all aspects of support for learners.

## Developing Professionally

### Learning through research

Sarah turned first to the Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice modules, developed by Dyslexia Scotland and Education Scotland and hosted by the Open University. She also undertook courses run by her local authority. She found the professional development courses provided by Dyslexia Scotland for Scotland's educators "especially helpful and always brilliant."

Through her research Sarah began exploring how to use Mission Superheroes as a framework to help children overcome barriers to their own learning.

**"It was the opportunity to be involved with Mission Superheroes that changed things for me and for the pupils I worked with. It helped me to understand more about dyslexia and helped turn the focus from negative aspects of dyslexia to enabling pupils to talk openly about their experiences."**

### Applying new learning

The challenge for anyone undertaking research-based learning within the teaching profession is to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge in the context of a classroom setting full of individual learners with varying degrees of difficulties. Sarah was aware of the GTCS Programme through her previous involvement with Dyslexia Scotland and it was to them she looked for a systematic and meaningful pathway to reflect on her own practice.

### The role of Dyslexia Scotland

Dyslexia Scotland is an accredited provider of the GTCS programme, which is delivered in collaboration with Education Scotland. The aim of

this free programme is to help develop a body of expert teachers in dyslexia who can deliver inclusive practice in schools. The programme provides Masterclasses, monthly drop-ins, reflective support days and support to undertake a practitioner enquiry. There is a requirement for participating teachers to undertake 65 hours of study and to produce a creditable practitioner enquiry.

Sarah is a mother of a young family as well as being a teacher, and she was concerned about the additional workload. Her career was interrupted by a serious medical condition. On emerging from treatment she embraced the opportunity to undertake the programme as life affirming.

### **Which aspects of the scheme were the most helpful?**

Sarah found the modules, practitioner enquiry and connecting with other practitioners and supporters at the in-person sessions to be invaluable. Sarah chose Mission Superheroes as her approach to study her own practice through the vehicle of a practitioner enquiry, as “they are all about the pupils.”

She chose Phonological Awareness for her practitioner enquiry as there was a gap in knowledge from learners’ online lessons during Covid as a consequence of lockdown. Sarah realised that this gap existed not just for dyslexic pupils but for many other learners. She wanted to find a way to reach as many pupils as possible, so she tried things out with smaller groups and then developed a whole school phonological awareness progression.

### **What difference has it made in the school?**

Sarah started with Primary 7 Dyslexia Champions who helped deliver Mission Dyslexia workshops to Primary 4. This is the stage at which schools in her local authority may consider screening for dyslexia. The young champions enjoyed presenting to other learners but they also wanted to reach a wider audience so they created a presentation for the school website, and they wrote several articles for the Dyslexia Voice magazine. They became catalysts for change, which empowered them to take ownership of their dyslexia. Sarah sees this as a “unique and powerful driver”

of change being delivered by learners for learners.

Sarah and two of her Dyslexia Champions wrote an article on their experiences which appeared in the Spring 2022 issue of Dyslexia Voice, Dyslexia Scotland's magazine for members.

Sarah has continued to evolve her work year by year. She has continued involvement with the Mission Superheroes workshops, and has supplemented these with other dyslexia-focused workshops. The group of Dyslexia Champions has extended to include both dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners, and they have a new, crocheted mascot who accompanies the Champions on visits.

Parents and carers have been involved. Some have talked about their own experiences of dyslexia, and others have attended dyslexia information workshops.

Sarah wrote a further article, published in Dyslexia Voice in Summer 2024. This described the work of the champions in making their school more inclusive and dyslexia friendly.

## **Darcie - P7 Dyslexia Champion**

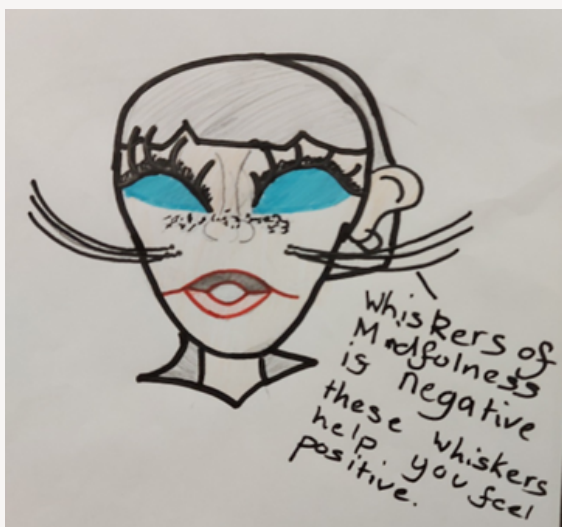
**"The Mission Superheroes programme has really helped me to be more confident with my dys-lexia, so I don't have to hide it from all my friends. I know I have support around me and I want to help others with their dyslexia by being a Dyslexia Champion."**

## Finlay – P7 Dyslexia Champion

“I tried to hide my dyslexia from everyone because I thought it was a bad thing. Now from doing the work with Dyslexia Scotland, I realise it’s not that bad and I have strengths.”

The Mission Superheroes resources (including lesson plans and videos from the workshops in the initial pilot schools) which Sarah used in her school are on the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit, for any school to use in helping to promote systematic change in other communities.

### Some examples of the work of the Dyslexia Champions



## Conclusion

It was clear from interviewing Sarah and from seeing the evidence of her work in the classroom that she has a passion for dyslexia. She reports that she has developed increased confidence in her professional abilities, and a deepening of her knowledge and aptitudes through her links with Dyslexia Scotland. This has led to opportunities to lead and develop new pupil-led approaches and interventions to improve attainment.

Sarah continues to develop her self-belief and professionalism within the field of inclusion specialising in dyslexia. She is now researching how to support neurodivergent learners.

Sarah's school now has a high level of awareness of dyslexia issues and the importance of developing dyslexia-friendly practice across the school. This case study demonstrates how one dedicated teacher has been able to make a very significant impact in her school, and how she has been supported and empowered by Mission Superheroes, Mission Dyslexia workshops, Open University modules and the GTCS Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice programme.



**Dyslexia Scotland**  
Charity No. SC000951  
[www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk)



**Sean Connery Foundation**



**City of Edinburgh Council**  
[www.edinburgh.gov.uk](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk)