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Megan's Mission: Empowering Others with Dyslexia

Early intervention is critical for children with dyslexia. I know this firsthand because I was diagnosed at a young age with dyslexia. When I was beginning to try to learn to read in kindergarten, my parents noticed that something was a little different. I could not recognize the words that were repeated from one page to the next as is common in children's books. My school did not have an early screening program for dyslexia. In fact, my parents had to hire a reading coach to help me learn to read. That coach helped my parents find someone to test me for dyslexia. That led my parents on a journey to find resources that could provide therapy to help me. Without that intervention, my story could be much different than it is now. I genuinely like school and have good grades.

For many children, their story turns out differently. According to the International Dyslexia Association, dyslexia affects approximately 1 in 10 individuals. When left undiagnosed, children struggle to learn to read and often end up disliking school. This can lead to many problems in school and cause the child to have a poor self-image. Sometimes children are even labeled as lazy. But there are many people with dyslexia who are brilliant and successful, including Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, and even Tom Cruise. Dyslexia is a neurological condition and the brains of people with dyslexia are wired differently. My therapy showed me different ways of learning to read. I don't know how I would have learned to read without these alternate methods of teaching.

One step has been taken to help our state's children. Governor Ivey signed the Alabama Literacy Act in June 2019 which mandates that all K-3 children in Alabama public schools be screened for literacy deficits including dyslexia. Additionally, students whose screening shows that they may have dyslexia must be provided with dyslexia-specific intervention. A literacy plan must be developed by the student's teachers (along with their parents) and the parents must be provided with regular reports of the child's progress.

But this is not enough! Children with dyslexia need phonics-based reading programs. Often, our schools do not have the needed resources to provide reading coaches and teachers are not given enough training. My goal is to raise awareness for the issue of dyslexia for children who are just beginning to learn to read. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) provides many resources to educate parents about this important issue and even has a free screening test on the website. Our state also has a branch of the IDA.

As a representative for the Miss Alabama Outstanding Teen organization, I have partnered with Better Basics in the greater Birmingham area and my town of Westover to install a Book Nook at my local park. I have written an informative flyer to include in the Book Nook. I would also like to partner with the local IDA Alabama organization and potentially with local providers of dyslexia services to help spread awareness of dyslexia in our community and provide resources to parents with young children. My mission is to empower others with dyslexia to be courageous and to know that they are more than their hidden disability.