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Leslie Dale tutors a group of students enrolled in a summer math class sponsored by the Blosser Center for Dyslexia Resources. Instructional aides standby as Miles Kelly (from left), Elizabeth Hwee and Mya Cyr listen in at the round table.

PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Learning for Dyslexic Minds

Summer program gets kids ready for fall

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

S-c-a-b "Scab," says Kiara Liebo aloud, sitting across from her reading and spelling tutor, Suzette Kamm, who gives her the okay to jumble up the paper letters on her desk and form a new, bigger word.

Upstairs in quiet, sun-lit rooms of the Rose City Park Presbyterian Church, other young students like Liebo are taking month-long summer tutoring lessons from non-profit Blosser Center for Dyslexia Resources to better their reading, writing, spelling, and math skills before the next school year.

Dyslexia, an unexpected difficulty learning to read, write, and spell is a neurological and most often genetic trait that one out of every 10 people struggle with, the International Dyslexia Association reports,

The association estimates up to 20 percent of the population demonstrates

signs of dyslexia; inaccurate reading, poor spelling, trouble "sounding out" words, reversal of letters or symbols, and "childish" handwriting.

Cathy Wyrick, parent of a dyslexic college

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— Cathy Wyrick, parent of a dyslexic college graduate and director at Blosser Center

graduate and director at Blosser Center, says dyslexic children are often at a disadvantage in our public school system because few teachers have the knowledge, tools, and time to understand and address kids experiencing severe difficulties in reading and spelling.

"Parents call us up when they are really frustrated," said Wyrick. "A child

will be failed 3rd grade and parents and teachers don't know what to do." A mismatch in reading approaches is the problem.

Whole language, a reading program widely used in schools since the 1960s encourages children to memorize words

as whole parts. If somebody reads to them, they pick up the language skills out of the air, supporting the idea that learning to read should be as easy as learning to speak.

"While this method works for 35-40 percent of the population, it does not work for dyslexic children," said Wyrick. The Blosser Center tutors all ages and

trains teachers using the Orton-Gillingham approach, an alternative curriculum designed specifically for dyslexic readers and those struggling with literacy skills.

Based on multi-sensory sequential phonics, the approach is sequential; starting with small, 3-letter-words, those learning to read are encouraged to gradually build up longer and longer words, and multi-sensory; everything a student reads, they also write and speak.

"The reading is getting easier," said Sam Records, a familiar summer student receiving tutoring at the Blosser Center. "I've learned a lot of new things and new, harder words."

With a mind that thinks three-dimensionally, people with dyslexia often have spatial talents in art, drama, sports, music, science, creative writing, mathematics, mechanics, computers or aviation.

Many high achieving people are dyslexic. Albert Einstein and John Lennon

continued ▼ on page 23