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Editorial: Learning Ally assists those with learning disabilities improve reading skills















A program at Learning Ally, participants in a simulated classroom environment learn what it's like to have dyslexia, through different exercises and activities. Learning Ally is a national nonprofit with a defined approach to help support students with learning disabilities and their families. Michael Mancuso/The

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(http://connect.nj.com/user/njottedit/index.html) By Times of Trenton Editorial Board (http://connect.nj.com/user/njottedit/posts.html)

on July 30, 2014 at 6:01 AM, updated July 30, 2014 at 6:30 AM

If you're contending with a learning disability such as dyslexia, the smallest chore can be impossible: writing your name, say, or reading a textbook.

Learning Ally wants people to know what that feels like.

The Princeton nonprofit, headquarters for a national organization working with educators, parents and students with learning disabilities, recently offered a workshop called "Dyslexia: Making It Personal," which featured hands-on activities designed to offer a window into a world many people don't understand.

And many more should, given the sheer number of people diagnosed with dyslexia and related disorders every year.

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Learning Ally provides help, both in terms of raising awareness among parents and teachers and in providing audio books for the estimated 1 in 5 students nationwide grappling with learning disabilities affecting their reading skills.

Formerly known as Reading for the Blind, the organization changed its name in 2011 to reflect its greater role in the community's life. And what an ally it has turned out to be.

Working predominantly with an army of volunteers an estimated 5,000 strong, the group records 6,000 audio books every year: fiction, non-fiction, textbook, manuals. Its vast library serves students from kindergarten to graduate school.

The range of readers is astonishing, among them teachers, doctors, mathematicians, scientists and engineers, all paired painstakingly with their subject matter. Memberships in Learning Ally run \$119 a year; institutional memberships are also available, as are grants from local and state programs and donations.

During the recent workshop, parents struggled with scenarios that simulated the environment in which their dyslexic children live every day. One exercise had them trying to write numbers while being able to see only the tip of the pencil in a mirror.

Many became frustrated, others angry as they failed at the most mundane of tasks. Some just gave up.

That's what it's like for your kids, Mark Brugger, senior program manager at the Princeton facility, told them. The emotional damage is as scarring as the academic limitations – think poor self-esteem, crippling confidence levels and vulnerability to teasing.

The world can be an unforgiving place for those who cannot read. Increasing awareness of both the scope and the collateral damage of dyslexia is a worthy goal, and we applaud Learning Ally for being up to it.

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Jul 30, 2014

 Ω Little more than a free ad for a non-profit, formerly doing business as Reading for the Blind. That mission was pretty much abandoned when the Internet and computers brought a vastly greater number of audible books to the public.

They've changed their purpose and ramped up their fund-raising, so they need a higher profile.

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