



The Endless Benefits of Volunteerism

By Michelle Houriet, Executive Director
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If you're reaching retirement age or thinking about retiring, you may wonder – how will I fill my days? Volunteering is a great way to spend some of that free time. Retirees often say that volunteering for a meaningful cause that has a positive impact on others gives their own life a greater purpose. In addition, there are also positive, tangible side effects to volunteerism.

People who volunteer regularly have a much lower risk of depression. Volunteerism boosts self-esteem and provides a means to meet new people and apply the skills you've learned over your lifetime. It also slows cognitive decline by keeping your brain active, alert and always thinking. One example of a volunteer opportunity that can produce wonderful benefits is the act of mentoring elementary students in math or reading.

Volunteering can be a part of your exercise program as well. Participating in a walk-a-thon, working a golf tournament or helping out at a soup kitchen all require movement, resulting in improved balance, agility and flexibility. This extra movement and social interaction have been attributed to lower blood pressure.

"It makes you feel good in every way," declared one Independence Hill Retirement Community resident who volunteers to read with young elementary students.

"We have seen the positive results of setting up programs where our residents can interact with children," Martha Anderson, Communications Director at Independence Hill further explained. "Both the residents and the children enjoy the relationships that form."

There are many people throughout Independence Hill's campus that truly enjoy and have passion for volunteerism and giving back to their community. Volunteer activities that residents participate in include assisting travelers at the airport as airport greeters, participating in sewing groups that make baby blankets and caps for premature babies, and volunteering at the assisted living community next door. Retired residents from the medical field have even used their dentistry skills to provide dental care to the homeless at Haven for Hope. Independence Hill residents give back in many ways and it shows through their health and well-being.

At Independence Hill, our emphasis is on providing endless opportunities to residents



Independence Hill residents and members of the sewing group and Blue Bird Auxiliary show off some of their creations.

who want to continue to be active and independent. Volunteerism is just one of the ways. See what possibilities being a part of our neighborly community of volunteers is all about. Contact Sherrill or Laura at 210-209-8956, join us for lunch, a tour and share your interests with us.

Independence Hill Retirement Resort Community is located in Stone Oak at 20450 Huebner Rd., San Antonio, TX 78258. For more information, call (210) 209-8956 or visit www.independencehill.com



Independence Hill residents are active volunteers throughout the community, including resident George Workman, a greeter at the San Antonio airport.



Seven Early Clues To Dyslexia

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According to the National Institutes of Health, as many as one in five children are affected by dyslexia. Unfortunately, many of these children go undiagnosed and suffer for years in school without knowing why. And too many teachers and doctors have a limited understanding of what dyslexia really is or what it looks like. However, dyslexia can be detected as early as kindergarten.

So what is dyslexia? The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) defines dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Dyslexia is not a VISUAL problem, but rather a language processing problem. It affects boys and girls nearly equally, does not discriminate among class, race or socioeconomic background, and is independent from intelligence. Dyslexia DOES NOT mean "slow," "dumb" or "lazy." In fact, many dyslexic individuals

are bright, creative, out-of-the-box thinkers with a neurological difference that makes reading and spelling more difficult.

Signs of dyslexia typically are present before a child begins learning to read. According to renowned dyslexia expert Dr. Sally Shaywitz, "The earliest clues involve mostly spoken language. The very FIRST clue to a language (and reading) problem may be delayed language. A seemingly innocent speech delay may be an early warning sign for a future reading difficulty - especially if there is a history of dyslexia in the family."

Once your child begins to speak, look for the following additional signs:

Difficulty articulating words. By five or six years of age, a child should have little difficulty saying age appropriate words. Watch out for mild articulation difficulties (such as difficulties with /l/ and /r/) and for mixing up syllables within words (e.g., saying "aminal" for animal, "pasketti" for spaghetti).

Difficulty with nursery rhymes. Dyslexic children are less sensitive to rhyming. A child's early familiarity with nursery rhymes turns out to be a strong indicator of reading success.

Struggling to find the right words. In part, dyslexia is an expressive language problem, so your child might take a long time to find the right word she is looking for when trying to tell you something.

Difficulty learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make. Dyslexic children struggle with associating the "squiggles" called letters with their names and sounds. By the time a child enters Kindergarten he should know most, if not all, of the upper and lower-case letters. While dyslexic children have difficulty attaching appropriate names to letters and words and may sometimes reverse letters, there is no evidence to show that they see letters or words backwards.

Confusion of right and left and trouble learning to tie shoelaces. Dyslexics tend to struggle with the fine motor skills, directionality, and sequencing skills required to master show-tying.

Family history of reading problems. Dyslexia is genetic, and one of the biggest warning signs is having a family member who has difficulty reading and spelling.

Difficulty learning to decode. Decoding is a necessary component in reading well and requires the ability to focus on letters in a word, remember the sounds they make, then blend those sounds into a word. Children with dyslexia don't decode well without targeted training, so reading becomes slow and frustrating for them as they try to guess at words based on context or shape. (This difficulty with letter-sound association is one reason why spelling is even harder than reading. A dyslexic child may read a word many times, but struggle mightily when asked to spell that same word.)

It's heartbreaking to see a bright and curious dyslexic child who feels dumb and unable to learn. Many children with reading problems are not formally identified until third grade or later; however, research



shows that the best time to identify and help a child is during the first years of school. Remember, warning signs can surface before kindergarten. If you see these warning signs in your child, do not wait for him or her to "grow out of it." With proper identification and appropriate intervention, the dyslexic student can become a fine reader and speller.

Leslie Jernigan has a Master's Degree in School Psychology and is Director of Assessment at Learning Foundations Cognitive Training Center. To learn more about dyslexia warning signs, diagnosis, and intervention visit www.LearningFoundations.com or call (210) 495-2626 for a Free Consultation.