

inTown

Students recall life before Research ILLD came to help them

"Every Sunday night I would cry at the thought of all the impossible work that was ahead of me in the upcoming week."

So began Lindsey Brown, a 12-year-old student from the Stonybrook Middle School in Westford, as she described her frustrations and challenges as a child with learning differences to an audience of over 175 supporters at a recent Benefit for Children with Learning Differences held at the Bedford Renaissance Hotel.

The event was sponsored by Research ILLD, a Lexington-based, not-for-profit dedicated to helping children like Brown learn to be successful in school. The event featured keynote speaker Dr. Ned Hallowell, an internationally acclaimed psychiatrist specializing in ADHD and dyslexia and founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health in Concord, and four ILLD students who all shared their personal stories about living with learning differences.

The evening celebrated Research ILLD's work in conducting research and developing tools to help young people overcome learning differences and learn strategies for academic success. Founded in 1995 by Dr. Lynn Meltzer and Dr. Bethany Roditi, Research ILLD develops, evaluates and promotes strategies for successful learning and effective teaching. Its clinical arm, the Institute for Learning and Development (ILD) serves children and families in the greater Boston area through its individualized educational assessment and specialized tutoring services.

Research ILLD uses a scientific research model to convert the lessons from this practice into programs and tools that help a wide range of learners accomplish their goals. These include Drive to Thrive, its classroom-based learning program and tools such as Brain Cogs, an award-winning multimedia CD-ROM that teaches strategies for test taking and studying.

"Our programs help students develop learning strategies that foster effort and persistence, processes that are more important predictors of life success than IQ or skill level," said Meltzer.

Hallowell, widely known for his many books about ADHD and learning difficulties, delivered a humorous and heartfelt address, focusing on his own frustrations as a child who couldn't read, but was saved by his first-grade teacher who helped him overcome his fear and shame. He encouraged the audience "to help kids learn to accept their own brains as a blessing that take some work to develop." He advised parents and schools to take the fear and shame away from children who learn differently and "find places where their brain lights up. ... Kids that come to ILLD not only are getting the most state of the science and art intervention, but they are getting an arm around them."

Hallowell's talk was followed by a panel presentation from Brown and fellow ILLD clients Alison Lerner, an eighth-grade student at the Stonybrook School, Emily Rindler, a graduate of Tufts University and Ben Rogers, a student at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. All four described their struggles as students unable to compete with other children and learn in traditional ways. Brown remembered her difficulties with spelling, reading and writing and her initial diagnosis and ongoing remediation at ILLD. She described the many strategies her educational therapist, Kathy Caron taught her at ILLD and the difference this has made in her academic performance and her confidence as a student. An honor roll student and vice president of her class, Lindsey stated that "ILLD changed her life."

Lerner recalled being teased in third grade when she couldn't spell "snow." After a diagnostic evaluation at ILLD, Lerner learned she was dyslexic. Her ILLD educational therapist, Wendy Stacey, taught her new skills and strategies to help her work with her disability. Lerner spoke about her determination not to let her dyslexia hold her back. To prove herself to her classmates, she ran for student council in seventh-grade and won. This year she was elected class president. She thanked Stacey for "giving [her] the confidence to reach beyond the limits."

Rogers described his frustrations as a sophomore at Lawrence Academy in Groton when he began weekly sessions with Roditi, director of education at ILLD. He concluded that "If students work hard, find the motivation within and use these strategies and support then they can accomplish anything and do many different things both in and out of school. It's all about finding confidence in yourself." Rogers, now completing his sophomore year at St. Lawrence, has learned how he best processes information. He has learned to advocate for himself and work with the support systems at the university to get the education he needs to be successful.

Rindler discovered ILLD when she was a student at Tufts University. She reported how relieved she felt after an evaluation with Meltzer, director of assessment at ILLD, revealed that she had some learning issues, but that "through different approaches, she could accomplish her goals." Rindler described specific examples of ILLD strategies which Susan Tabor, ILLD educational specialist taught her including using a tape recorder to record lectures for review at a later time and receiving time extensions on tests.

The benefit evening included the announcement by Brianna Haber from the Staples Foundation for Learning that it has provided Research ILLD with a \$10,000 grant to support its Drive to Thrive program. Drive to Thrive will apply the ILLD practices to a school setting at the James Lowell School in Watertown. Research ILLD hopes this program eventually will be available to all schools so that all students learn to appreciate how they learn, end the shame and fear of learning differently, develop the confidence to advocate for their own learning styles and "find ways for their brains to light up."

For more information on Research ILLD, contact Meltzer, 781-861-3711 or email lmeltzer@ildlex.org.