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## Literacy council says quarantine doesn't have to close book on learning

Ettie Newlands [ettie.newlands@myhorrynews.com](mailto:ettie.newlands@myhorrynews.com)

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Michelle Jaruwannakorn had never heard of dyslexia when her son was diagnosed with it back in Ohio.

Dyslexia is a general term for disorders involving difficulty learning to read or interpret letters and other symbols, and does not affect general intelligence.

Since being tutored at the Palmetto Literacy Council [PLC], 9-year-old Aaden has started to actually enjoy reading.



Aaden's Seaside Elementary School teacher told his mother the literacy council could help with his problem, and that's exactly what happened.

"At first, Aaden would only read with me, but now he reads to his younger brother and sister and he'll read with his Dad too," Jaruwannakorn says.

When the Palmetto Literacy Council closed on March 17 because of COVID-19, there were 20 students between the ages of 5 and 55 matched with tutors. Eight were about to be matched, and there were about 30 people on a waiting list.

Since the closure, about three or four of the current students were willing to be tutored online.

Only one of those is an adult.

Executive director Dodi Hodges says the other adults don't have access to the internet.

The literacy tutors had been meeting with students in area libraries, but that stopped when the libraries closed.

The school-age literacy council students were doing schoolwork online, and adding reading tutoring to that would have been too much for them, Hodges says.

The result is that when things pick up again, students who were already behind will very likely be even further behind.

But there are a few things parents can do with their quarantined children to help them stay on track.

Reading to the kids just 20 minutes a day, switching off to have the kids read also, can be a real game changer, Hodges says.

Also, whether it's a book, a newspaper, a kindle, or the back of a cereal box, when the kids see the parents reading, it reminds them that reading is important.

Another suggestion Hodges has is to contact the literacy council.

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The council's monthly newsletter will help parents learn strategies that include games and fun things to encourage children to want to read.

Another thing parents can do, Hodges says, is just talk to their kids about words.

"Ask them what a word means and ask them to use it in a sentence. Ask them to give that word back to the parent during the week in conversation."

"Nobody learns the same way and everything we do at the Palmetto Literacy Council is individualized for each student's needs," Hodges says.

"Some kids need a personal dictionary, some need index cards to keep them focused on words. Sometimes they need a reading guide."

Aaden Jaruwannakorn had been tutored twice a week for an hour each time, and he made tremendous progress, his mother says.

“When he reads, sometimes the letters jump around and sometimes he reverses letters, but now he’s reading more and definitely reading better.”

The rising fourth-grader particularly enjoys comic books and will read them out loud to his siblings now, and then draw the illustrations.

Aaden, who lives in Murrells Inlet, had been tutored at the Surfside Beach Library, and Hodges says when the libraries open fulltime again, literacy tutoring will begin again.

For Jaruwannakorn, that can’t be soon enough.

“He has the confidence to read now, he picks out books he wants to read and sometimes he’ll sit by himself and read them. That’s something new.”

When tutoring does start up again, tutors, volunteers and students will be required to wear a mask, and instructions will be given on how to wear and clean the masks.

They’ll also be instructed to wash their hands often and avoid touching their faces. They’ll be told to cough or sneeze into their elbows and to stay home if they’re sick.

Social distancing will be enforced, and teacher and student will sit across tables, not side-by-side.



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