

# SPELD NZ Connections

Volume 91 - April 2026



## Embracing the Challenges



**Dave Begg and daughter Maggie  
SPELD NZ students a generation apart**

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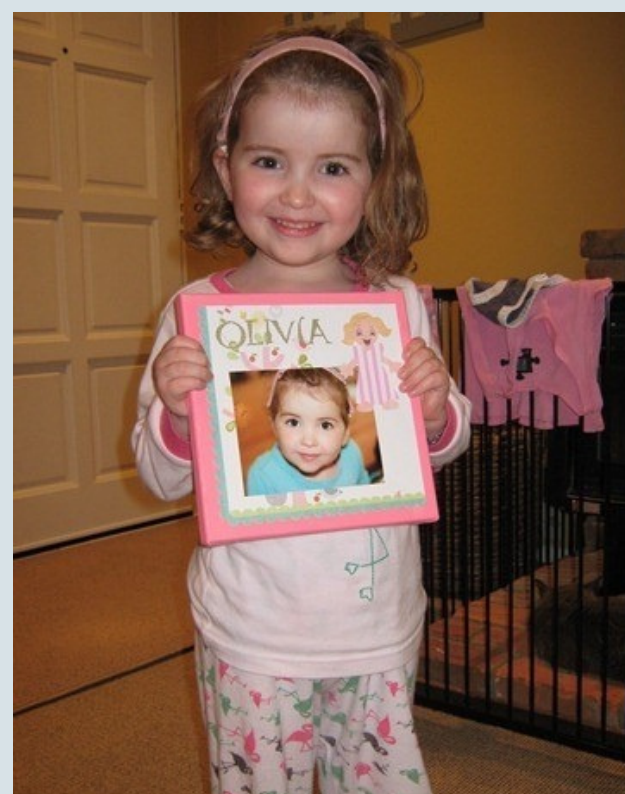
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## Connect with SPELD NZ



[www.speld.org.nz](http://www.speld.org.nz)

0800 773 536



# Our People

## Word from the Chair

A very warm welcome to *Connections* – SPELD NZ's new online magazine.

We're excited to step into a digital format, giving us greater flexibility and the ability to share live links to helpful resources at the click of a button.

At the same time, we farewell *The Record* with a touch of nostalgia – an incredible 90 issues published since 1977.

Our heartfelt thanks to the many contributors over the decades. *The Record* has been an invaluable way to support and inspire our neurodiverse community, while showcasing the creativity and achievements of our wonderful students.

*Connections* continues this proud tradition, so please keep sending in your thoughts, ideas for stories, writing and artwork. We love hearing from you!

Ngā Mihi  
Dale Bailey  
SPELD NZ Chairperson



Our first issue in 1977

# Our People

## Board Profile - Jenny Weeks

I come from Manchester in the United Kingdom and have called New Zealand home since 2003.

After 20 years in Dunedin, I recently made the move to a lifestyle block near Gore. Two of my adult children and four grandchildren are close by, and more family are still in the UK.

I have a strong personal interest in neurodiversity with several of my grandchildren on the autism spectrum and one with ADHD.



Over the past 35 years, I have worked across health, education, disability and social services in both New Zealand and the UK. I graduated from the University of Otago with a BA in Education and Psychology (2008) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (2010). I then went on to support students for a decade as the university's Disability Student Advisor before becoming a SPELD NZ Assessor in 2022.

These days, I feel incredibly fortunate to work with people of all ages offering assessments, advice and practical support to help them thrive. I'm passionate about creating positive, empowering pathways and advocating for more equitable access to education.

When I'm not working, you'll usually find me with my grandchildren, in the garden, preserving what I've grown, travelling or connecting with my local community.

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# It's Your Time to Shine

## We need the help of our students to design a SPELD NZ bookmark.



This is your chance to let your creativity run wild!

There's just one rule: It needs to be bookmark dimensions (around 16cm high and 5cm wide) and your original work. We'll add the SPELD NZ logo and your name later.

Your mission:

- Take a clear photo of your masterpiece
- Send us your design by 19 July 2026. Email it to us as a high-resolution JPEG (or similar image file) to [nationaloffice@speld.org.nz](mailto:nationaloffice@speld.org.nz)
- And yes... there are prizes! Winners will receive a book voucher or Holey Moley family pass.

We'll choose the winning designs to be professionally printed in time for Dyslexia Awareness Week in October and be shared in SPELD NZ's *Connections* magazine and on social media.

Winning bookmarks will also be handed out at expos, book fairs, conferences and other events – helping raise awareness about the amazing work of SPELD NZ and its students.

How cool would it be to see your design out in the world?

We can't wait to see what you create – give it your best shot!



Books  
are my  
*happy*  
place



# SPELD NZ Training

## **SPELD NZ Kōwae Ako/Learning Capsules**

Our online knowledge hub is designed to help educators and families seeking skills and wisdom to better support those in our neurodivergent community. Our latest capsule is *Navigating Neurodiversity in Primary School*.

**See full details on all our Kōwae Ako.**



## **Introduction to Specific Learning Disabilities**

Our signature two-day course delivered via Zoom and face-to-face. A great way to learn why specific learning disabilities (SLD) occur and what it's like to have dyslexia or other SLD. It also offers evidence-based, constructive, practical tools and strategies to help learners in the classroom and at home.

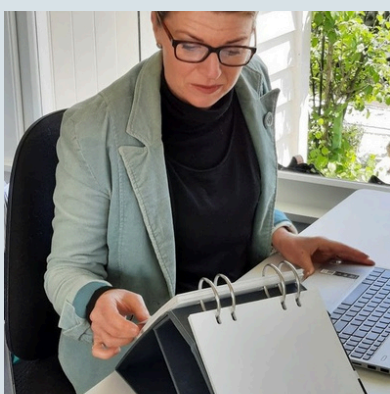
**Find out more.**

## **SPELD NZ Certificate in Teaching Individuals with Specific Learning Disabilities 2027**

*"This has been the most valuable PD I've ever had the opportunity to undertake. I have loved all of it."*

This mainly online programme is the pathway to become a SPELD NZ Teacher. It's also open to others wanting to extend their knowledge and expertise in teaching or supporting people with specific learning disabilities (SLD).

**Learn more.**



## **SPELD NZ Assessor Training**

Could you be the one to uncover why someone is struggling to learn and show them the pathway to success?

**Find out how to become a SPELD NZ Assessor**

# Feature

## Why Our Business Needs Dyslexia

When former SPELD NZ student Dave Begg wrote to us, his message was refreshingly honest.

“Hi. I run a business with branches throughout New Zealand. I am very dyslexic and employ a good number of people around the country with dyslexia and we want to grow our team. Hence the reason for my email - we are on the hunt for more quality team members across the country.”

It's not often employers say this so openly - and with such conviction. But for Dave, dyslexia isn't a barrier - he sees it as a powerful advantage within his business.



### **Problem solving differently**

Dave is the founder of Pure Services, a company providing specialist cleaning and restoration services for industrial, commercial and residential properties. Over time, the business has grown to become one of New Zealand's largest private-owned flood restoration companies, responding to major weather events and helping communities recover. With branches in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Central Otago and Dunedin, Pure Services operates in high-pressure environments where problem-solving skills are essential. These are exactly the strengths Dave sees in his dyslexic employees.

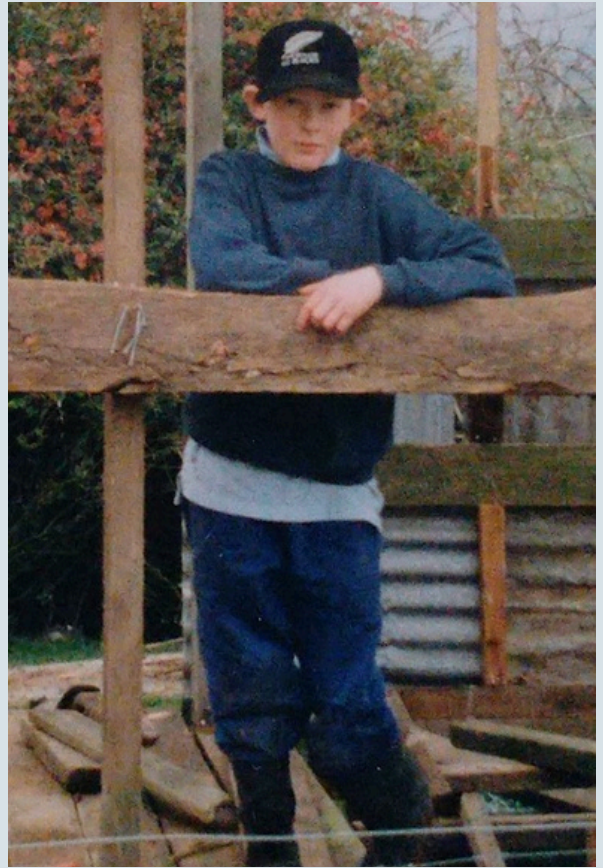
“People with dyslexia think differently,” he says. “They think outside the square and solve problems creatively, and that's much of what our company deals with every day. We look at dyslexia as another tool in the toolbox. In order for the business to thrive, we need a vast array of skill sets. Our dyslexic team members are a great complement to other team members. Without a good mix it wouldn't work.”

# Why Our Business Needs Dyslexia (continued)

## From struggling student to business leader

Dave's journey hasn't been straightforward. At school, reading, writing and maths were a constant struggle. At the age of 14, he was finally diagnosed with dyslexia through SPELD NZ. His SPELD NZ Teacher, Heather Bell, helped him understand how he learned and showed him how to manage his challenges. While he benefitted from the support, Dave says leaving school was a huge relief.

"Looking back now, once I got out of the schooling system and got on with life, everything fell into place."



Dave went on to do a two-year Farm Management Diploma at Lincoln University, using a reader-writer throughout his studies - and successfully passed everything. "The difference was that the topics resonated. I could understand what I was learning and see the relevance," he says.

## Building a business around strengths

Dave worked in farming, then went on to build his own business, Pure Services, in a way that plays to his strengths and minimises the impact of reading and writing demands.

"I don't want to spend my life emailing." Dave says his team does all the things he can't do well. And he ensures the company has systems in place to support dyslexic employees. For example, making sure note-taking is kept to a minimum and setting up a support office to provide admin assistance to the technicians in the field.

# Why Our Business Needs Dyslexia (continued)

Technicians can also train via videos so they can bypass big written manuals. Soon Dave's technicians will be able to use AI assistance to record notes via speech-to-text. "Pure Services has its own dedicated training house that can be flooded and set on fire," says Dave. "This allows for hands-on, real-world training, which really resonates with dyslexic thinkers."

## A message of hope

Dave and his wife Sarah have a 9-year-old daughter, Maggie, who was recently diagnosed with dyslexia through SPELD NZ - and they couldn't be more optimistic. She's getting support much earlier in life than Dave did, plus she has a family that champions dyslexic thinking in the workplace and creates an environment that enables the neurodiverse to thrive.

"In today's world, I see dyslexia as a massive advantage and something that should be explored and celebrated," says Dave. "As a parent, I absolutely recognise the challenges it brings during the schooling years but outside of that, it can open up incredible opportunities.

"From my early experience as a parent of a child with dyslexia, the best thing you can do is talk openly about it, embrace the challenges it poses and don't lose sight of the positives!"



# Profile

## Bella's Big Heart

### Her mission to change the story for dyslexic children

At just 11 years old, Bella Murdoch is determined to make a difference in the lives of other children across Aotearoa. She has raised an incredible \$2,214 for SPELD NZ through sausage sizzles, support from her family and sharing her story on her YouTube Channel and [SPELD NZ's Facebook page](#).

And she's not stopping there. Bella has set herself an ambitious goal of \$5,000 to help subsidise dyslexia assessments for other children. She is planning more fundraising activities, including raffles and car washes.

For Bella, this mission is deeply personal.

"I am dyslexic and I know how hard it is when people do not understand your brain," she says.

"My diagnosis helped my family finally understand what was going on and it changed everything for me. But some families cannot afford an assessment, so kids sit in class thinking they are dumb when their brain just works in a different way. I want to help change that."

Even as a preschooler, there were signs that Bella's brain worked a little differently, her mum Danielle recalls.



***"It is a message to a child that they are worth investing in."***

While other children brought home simple stick drawings, Bella was sketching detailed plans, like intricate layouts of a cinema.

# Profile

## Bella's Big Heart (Continued)

But when Bella started school, things became much harder. Reading was a daily struggle and slowly her confidence began to slip away. Bella was teased by other children and often felt misunderstood.

Everything changed when she was diagnosed with dyslexia at age seven. With a clear understanding of how Bella learns, and with the right one-on-one tutoring support in place, things began to shift quickly – academically and emotionally.

Bella's confidence grew and, instead of feeling alone, she started reaching out to others. She began helping classmates who were struggling, gently reminding them that their brains simply worked in different ways.

Now in Year 7, Bella's literacy skills are in line with her age. Spelling remains a challenge but these days Bella is a lot more resilient and simply shrugs and says, "That's just spelling."

It's this confidence, empathy and determination that inspired her fundraising journey.

"Donations are not just money," she says. "It's a message to a child that they are worth investing in."



*Bella at her sausage sizzle with step grandad Leo Van Dijk*

**To support Bella's fundraising to help families afford SPELD NZ assessments, check out her [Givealittle Page](#)**

# Reaping the Rewards



**Jacob with his SPELD NZ Teacher Linda Milne**

**Photo: Alexa Sanders**

**Congratulations to SPELD NZ student Jacob Kerapa, winner of the 2025 Dr Jean Seabrook Scholarship. This annual award recognises a promising Canterbury student heading towards tertiary education.**

Jacob plans to use the \$500 scholarship to support his training to gain a forklift licence and pursue a career in scaffolding. He'll be proudly following in his father's footsteps.

Jacob began working with SPELD NZ teacher Linda Milne in 2016, as a six-year-old needing support with literacy and numeracy. Over the years, Linda has continued to guide him through to high school, describing Jacob as a conscientious and industrious student.

The scholarship is named in honour of the late Dr Jean Seabrook, a founding figure of the SPELD Association (now SPELD NZ).

In 1972, Jean led SPELD's first teacher training courses in Christchurch and went on to play a pivotal role in shaping the organisation – running parent support groups, advocating to government, conducting research, and serving as SPELD's first National Director.

# Student Contributions

## The Little Things by SPELD NZ Student Olivia Strang (17)



*We forget about the little things.*

*For me sound is a gift, but often taken for granted.*

*Here are my cochlear implants, the tiny devices that help me hear.*

*The lines of my hands symbolise my family history and are holding my implants, in the shape of a heart. This is because these tiny devices enable me to hear the people that I love.*

*The colours in my hands, represent sound. Without these devices my life would be without colour.*

Olivia has had bilateral cochlear implants since she was nearly two years old. She is a talented artist and creative writer. Olivia says she gets inspiration for her art and writing through feelings and memories.

Her painting above is designed to remind people that hearing is a precious and unique sense that shouldn't be taken for granted.

“My purpose was also for people to stop and be in the moment and to think about their favourite sound and the things that they're grateful for in their lives,” says Olivia.

**Olivia's story continues on page 14.**

# The Little Things by Olivia Strang (continued)

Olivia's beautiful painting "The Little Things" reflects her cochlear implant journey.

"The colours in the painting represent sound and the different shades represent the differing emotions within sounds," she says. "The cochlear implants are shaped like a heart to represent my love for sound, hearing and communication. The heart also represents the love that I have for my family.

"I would hope people also connect with the hearing elements of the painting and the fact that these small devices are amazing. They can allow all of us to be able to connect and communicate."

Olivia's bilateral implants were fitted in Christchurch in 2010, in the aftermath of the city's devastating earthquake. Surgeons performing her implant had to endure aftershocks and the hospital closed shortly after her operation.

Olivia was one of the first paediatric patients in New Zealand to receive devices made by Austrian-based company MED-EL. When she was nine years old, Olivia won a children's global inventors' competition run by MED-EL with a smoke alarm detector patch that connects to her implant when her processors are off at night. Her prize was a trip to Austria. Along with her family, Olivia visited MED-EL and spent five weeks travelling around Europe, meeting other young cochlear implant recipients and their families.

***Our thanks to contributor Roz Edwards (Olivia's SPELD NZ Teacher )***



***Olivia with her parents Alice and Richard. Olivia won her school's Year 12 Diligence Award in 2025***

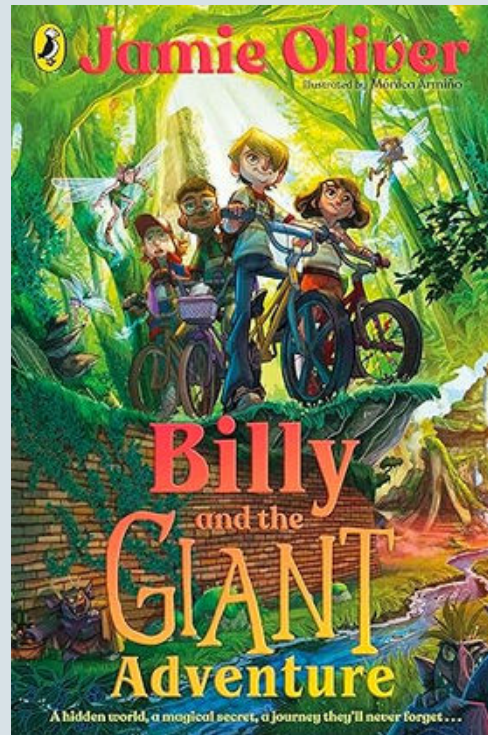
# Student Contributions

## 'Billy & the Giant Adventure' by Jamie Oliver Reflections by SPELD NZ Student Mikaela Davis (13)

I discovered this book at my school library through my friend. She just happened to pick a random book off the shelf that ended up to be the highlight of my year. For the past few years, I haven't been able to find a book at my reading level that has an intriguing story line.

*Billy and the Giant Adventure* is a magical creative book that matches my creativity. Being dyslexic myself makes it hard to keep up with fast detailed story lines, but this book's story moves at a slow gentle pace, meaning I can more easily process what's happening while reading.

The book is all about four friends who discover a magical forest and they end up trying to save the forest from disaster. Billy, the main character, is also dyslexic and throughout the story challenges come up where he doubts himself, but he always remembers the Billy Boy Way. This is when he doesn't listen to what other people tell him to do or what they think he should do. Instead he does it the way that works for him, the Billy Boy Way.



The author, Jamie Oliver, being dyslexic himself means he has put a lot of thought into the dyslexia friendly features in the book, such as having an easy-to-read font, and big spacing between the words and rows of words. The pages have a yellow tint so my eyes could focus on the page. In a regular chapter book the number of pictures are minimum, but *Billy and the Giant Adventure* has plenty of pictures, which I used as a marking point. These pictures helped me understand what the author was trying to tell me.

# Student Contributions

## Mikaela's Book Reflection continued: 'Billy & the Giant Adventure' by Jamie Oliver

Throughout the book there were challenging words that pushed me, those words were dotted around the book and helped improve my reading. By the end of the book I got more skilled at reading and am definitely more confident in reading since I started.

You may recognise the author's name as a famous chef. Jamie Oliver has incorporated his own recipes at the end of the book. In the story, Billy's parents are also excellent chefs and own their own business.

I have only read a few books in the past few years, most of them being comics, but *Billy and the Giant Adventure* was the first chapter book I have finished. For me this is a great achievement and a big milestone. I can't wait to find another book as good.

### **Mikaela's SPELD NZ Teacher Louise Hayne writes:**

*Mikaela is an enthusiastic and independent learner who was very keen to share her experience reading this book. During lessons we have been working on Phoneme Grapheme Knowledge and applying that to improve reading accuracy, fluency and spelling.*

*For this article, Mikaela knew what she wanted to say, and how to say it. She dictated her plan and used the plan to independently write the article on her device. Proofreading and editing were done by using spell-check and reading aloud. I was thrilled to discover Mikaela's engaging and infectious way of expressing herself in writing.*



# Student Contributions

## How I Sense Dyslexia

By SPELD NZ student Samantha Emmer (11)

### **Dyslexia is**

*words changing, letters flipping,  
grumpy teacher, hard reading,  
tired eyes*

### **Dyslexia is**

*sweaty clothes, flavoured water,  
plastic squisheys, squeezed to pop*

### **Dyslexia is**

*clanking laptops, banging desks,  
teacher talk changing tone, stomping  
feet, quiet whispers to friends*

### **Dyslexia is**

*people's breath, bitter sharpies,  
butterflies in my tummy reaching my  
mouth*

### **Dyslexia is**

*fiddling fingers, feeling hot, worry  
rising, aching head and swinging feet*



**We always welcome SPELD NZ student and teacher/assessor contributions!  
Please keep sending your stories, poems, photos and art to  
[nationaloffice@speld.org.nz](mailto:nationaloffice@speld.org.nz)**

# Thank You!

*SPELD NZ is a not-for-profit charity and receives no government funding. We're continually fundraising to maintain our daily operations and help subsidise services for those who would otherwise struggle to afford them.*

*We are immensely grateful for the grants, donations and other assistance we have received over the past 12 months:*

*Acorn Foundation, Ailsa Barr, BDL, Bear Trust, Bernard Chambers Charitable Trust, Central Lakes Trust, Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGs), D.V. Bryant Trust, E.B. Millton Charitable Trust, ECCT, Flying Phoenix Trust, Frimley Foundation, GABBS Great Auckland Bargain Book Sale Trust, JN & HB Williams Foundation, Julie Goodyer, Kingstone & Associates Ltd, Lindsay Foundation, Lottery Community Grants Board, L.W. Nelson Charitable Trust, Mary Lloyd SPELD Auckland Trust, Otago Community Trust, Rata Foundation, Susan Gerred, TECT, TG Macarthy Trust, The Lion Foundation, The Phillip Dallow Dyslexia Trust, The Sage Trust, The Sir William and Lady Manchester Trust, The Trusts Community Foundation, Toi Foundation, Victoria Clare, WEL Energy Trust, and the many others who have given donations or volunteered their time.*



## **Give the Gift of Literacy and Numeracy**

Your donation could provide the precious opportunity for someone to be assessed and receive the one-on-one tuition that could transform their lives. Here's what one parent told us about the impact of financial assistance:

*"We're truly grateful for the amazing support this foundation has helped our family. We've found ourselves struggling a little financially, so when we heard about SPELD offering a donation towards an assessment and that our application had been approved, it filled us with great relief knowing we've been supported and can act quickly to give him the help he needs."*

**All donations are tax deductible. For more information, visit [www.speld.org.nz/donate](http://www.speld.org.nz/donate) or email [fundraising@speld.org.nz](mailto:fundraising@speld.org.nz)**