

WHAT I DO

VIVIENNE CARSON, 61, is a facilitator for Davis Dyslexia. She lives in Remuera with her husband Chris.

AS TOLD TO: SARAH MURRAY
PHOTO: LAWRENCE SMITH

I work from home – my clients come to me. I get up at seven o'clock and have breakfast, then make sure my house is perfectly tidy, because it's part of the working environment.

Before I start I do the Sudoku in the paper. It just sort of settles my head before my client arrives at nine.

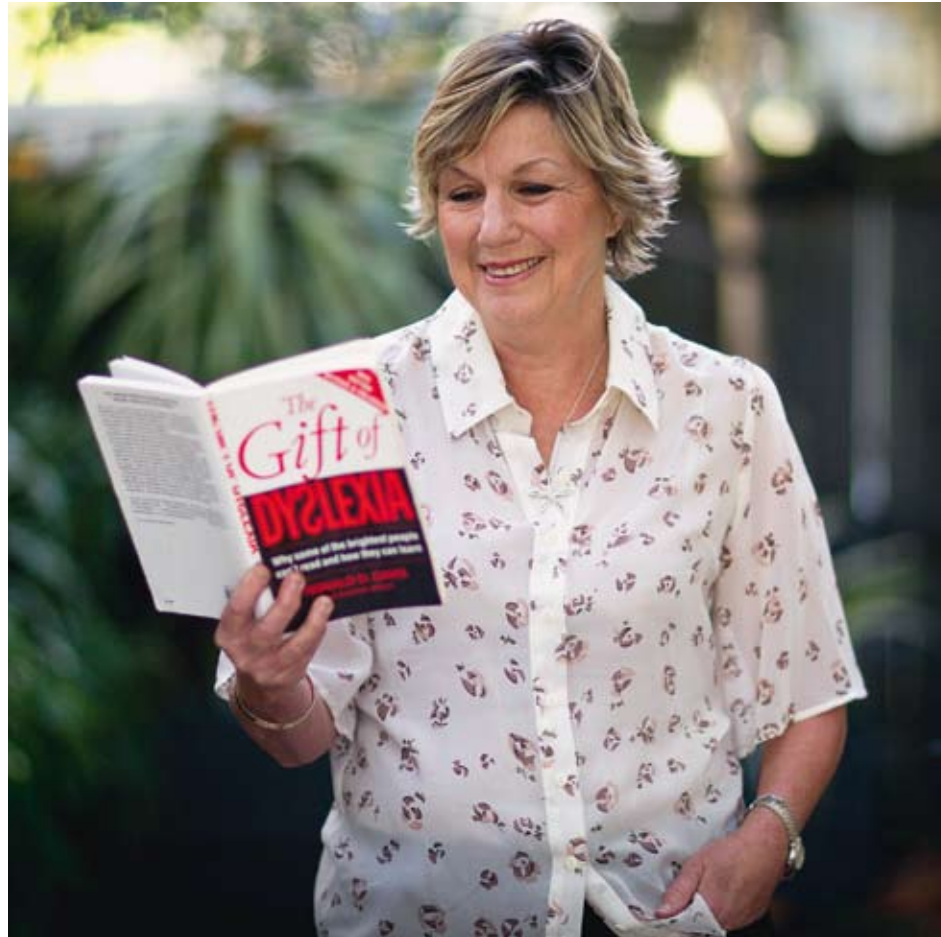
People with dyslexia often have negative feelings about their abilities. The purpose of my job is to show them that they are clever – that they can learn in ways that are more suited to their thinking style.

Dyslexia was only officially recognised in New Zealand in 2007, which wasn't very long ago. It's a term we use to describe a wide range of difficulties in reading, writing, spelling and maths.

People with dyslexia tend to think primarily in pictures rather than the sounds of words, and when we are taught at school we're taught with the sound of words. Most correction programmes are called phonic programmes – they're to do with the sound of words. The programme I do is the Davis programme, which was developed by Ron Davis in America. He wrote *The Gift of Dyslexia* and was sort of the first person to put the word 'gift' with it. It is a gift.

The youngest I've worked with is five and the eldest is 64. I only have one client a day. I work one-on-one with them for a programme of 30-plus hours, so it's about six to eight days. It's done intensively.

I have a waiting list which is two months at the moment. There are only three of us in Auckland and



26 people in New Zealand who do what I do.

In the morning, we'll chat and review goals. The goals are nearly always to read better and to be able to spell. Some clients I work with can't spell where they live; they can't spell their wife's name – things that would blow you away if you're not dyslexic. But there are people who aren't dyslexic who can't spell either.

Today I saw a young boy who's on day five of his programme, so near the end. What we do is look up a word in the dictionary. We talk about the word and put it into sentences. Then he has to make it in clay. He's done the words 'spider', 'climb' and 'tyrant'. For 'tyrant' he made a

wonderful clay model of a man with a mean look on his face, his hands on his hips, sitting on a throne with people bowing to him. Then he spelt the word in clay as well. We then take a picture of that model and word, and that word is mastered.

Why is clay used? For dyslexics, to master something they need to make it in the real world. A bit like riding a bike – no matter how much you understand about riding a bike or can figure out what people are doing, you've got to get on it yourself to master it.

We have lots of little breaks and have lunch about 12. Children's parents come and get them and take them away for lunch for an

hour. I tidy up and have lunch.

At 1pm the client will return. We might do trigger words. In our reading we've got two different sorts of words: picture words that we can picture in our heads, like 'tyrant'; and non-picture words, which we call 'trigger words'. These are words that trigger confusion like 'a' and 'or'. The little words in our language that don't have any pictures. There are 217 of them. For someone with dyslexia, these are the words that can cause blanks, so they'll guess what they're reading, skip them or change them.

For the word 'there', my boy today made Dan Carter out of clay, and a football which is about to be kicked over 'there'. It has a big arrow pointing through the goal posts, showing 'there'.

It sounds a little bit left field but if you pick up some writing, 60 to 70 percent of what we read are non-picture words.

It's a big step to come through that door and say, "I've got a problem" to someone you don't know. A lot of people with dyslexia hide it from their family or employers. It still has a stigma and it shouldn't have.

In my downtime, I read. I belong to a book club – 11 wonderful women who meet at each other's houses. We have rules – we have to talk about our books, otherwise we'd mostly talk about our grandchildren.

Yes, at night I do dream of words. Sometimes I make words in my sleep.

The Best Bit

Often children will come in here with their heads down but they'll leave with their heads up and a smile on their face. Just to see the difference in self esteem – that's the best thing.