

Name: **Michael Berry**  
Date of 30 Hour Correction Program: **April 5th 2019**

*It is one year ago since I went on this journey. It's been such a gift. I know the program is called an Education Program, however, for me it was more than that.*

*Annette's ability to combine practical solutions with a warm and supportive mentoring/counselling approach was imperative to the success. Her highly developed skill in walking me through the strategies was commendable.*

*As you can read below in my story, I was an anxious and desperate individual on my last chance. It took a unique person to hold a vulnerable person's complexity and provide restorative support alongside some very practicable skills.*

*My initial reasons for contacting Dyslexia WA were to identify strategies to assist with my work and I have tried where possible to refer to this. In reflecting my experience/outcome beyond the 'work issues' I have tried to label separately in an attempt to explain the magnitude of the impact.*

### **1. What major concerns and difficulties were experienced by you (and relevant others) before the Correction Program?**

I had come to this program late in life with an understanding that I was dyslexic/neuro-diverse. I was 38, and while I could always 'do part' of my job I became increasingly habitual at the non-completion of basis notes and record keeping.

I could do the intense parts of my role, however, there were one or two cases that my lack of recording had posed serious risk to my work place. The truth being is that I avoided recording on these cases appropriately because that was the habit that I got into. My approach to work was confounding to myself and my colleagues as I executed the complex parts of the role with high efficiency but regularly failed to do the usual tasks.

To my colleagues, I appeared lazy and non-committal about doing the 'real work'. I had become increasingly concerned about my professional reputation as I was not able to produce at a professional standard. I became increasingly fixated on trying to please work colleagues, so they would like me. The hope I had was that this approach would shift the focus on my non-completion of tasks. I took on extra and more challenging roles where I could overcompensate and explain that I was 'too busy' to do the daily tasks. I developed schemes to avoid my work place challenges.

These 'work arounds' led to significant withdrawal at work and I would become increasingly exhausted. I would also come up with great ideas, but not knowing the basics I was not able to execute and inevitably had to leave jobs. I was seen as 'nice' but ineffective.

In 2018, I had moved to a new job after failing in a previous role. This new "high pressure, high turn around" role in a crisis response service asked me to make complex decision in a short time frame and document it accordingly. I was writing a lot of child protection reports and my professional ability was questioned due to significant details missing and incoherence.

My inability to communicate in writing exposed the organisation to significant risk. The situation deteriorated and the management commenced a period where I was being performance managed. The more I tried to fix the situation the more anxious I got and inevitably the more useless my new solutions were. I began to spiral mentally as my ability to be employed became more tenuous.

By February 2019, I thought about all the other 'last chances' and previous attempts to 'fix myself' and I had no more solutions.

Reflecting now, there had been meetings arranged by managers or 'interventions' by work colleagues in an attempt to assist me in performing better at work. Nothing had worked and a pattern had developed where I would promise myself or my line manager that I would change my work practices. I would then develop elaborate schemes to work around a work issue (usually writing reports, completing statistics required for work and/or reading important documents) and inevitably it would fail. In these 'failure fallouts' I would have to leave the work place, shamed. I just didn't know what my problem was.

I felt useless and an idiot.

### ***Naming the Problem***

This time (in performance management) I began to deal with my avoidance in completing written work with the support of my boss. This process was galling and incredibly embarrassing. We looked at my written work and it was 'fragmented', 'incomplete' and 'basic' (my words). I was failing in my duties to communicate what was in my brain to my organisation and have them succinctly recorded. What I wrote/recorded would determine the treatment or care of a vulnerable person and the decisions that were made in coming to that decision. It was simply missing.

My challenge was that I could not identify the moment when I became 'distracted' and believed that I had completed the work, yet, when we reviewed the piece of work it was disjointed and inconsistent. My written work was not able to accurately record the severity of situations for vulnerable people or clarify how conclusions were formed. For me, it felt like the world needed to open up and swallow me whole.

My 'Depression Anxiety and Stress' (DAS) score was 17 (meaning that I had severe anxiety and stress), I had commenced medication and was having regular counselling to keep myself afloat.

My boss prompted me to investigate dyslexia and it was by sheer chance on a desperate Friday night that I emailed Dyslexia WA with my plight.

It was then that my story changed.

## **2. Did you identify noticeable changes during the program?**

My change commenced after the initial interview.

Firstly my problem had a name. People often under-emphasize the importance of an initial connection.

Annette was very sound in her approach. If I had not received a relevant treatment and intervention plan at my first interview I would have walked away. The dyslexic/neuro-diverse person that I am needs a picture/frame work to understand how a new skill will work for me. I was able to engage in the program because I understood that this would work for me.

Annette was able to be reassuring (at this point I was on the verge of losing my job, so she was able to hold my anxiety) however was honest about what the Davis Program could offer and what the next step would be.

***Initial noticeable changes in the first week:***

- The skills to identify when I was becoming disorientated and needed to 'take a break' from what I was doing.
- An ability to identify and use punctuation correctly (this was unexpected). I had no framework for using punctuation coherently.
- A positive 'unlocking' feeling. The sense that I was finally 'free'. I had finally found some answers and reasons for all the unfair labels that I had given myself.
- A framework for identifying a different narrative when I would make a mistake. When I made a mistake previously I'd internally scream at myself. I would start to self-talk myself into believing that I was lazy or idiot. By identifying the disorientation as an event that occurs and how to minimise it significantly diminished unhealthy self-talk.

The most exciting thing was that I was able to pick up an error and accept that this was an error. I began to minimise the stress with getting 'writing' and 'reading' incorrect and began to maximise an excitement in identifying when the episodes of disorientation occurred.

**3. What about the weeks or months (or longer) following the program?**

Firstly, I still had a job.

The skills I had learnt from the program had given me a tool kit of solutions to take to my work place. I was able to identify strategies where I would be able to manage my current work flow. I was able to adapt work practices. I stopped taking short cuts.

I was able to have difficult conversations with individuals and understood how my 'dyslexic/neuro-diversity' added value to situations. I also began to understand the breakdown in previous relationships and friendships.

One of the common experiences of dyslexia is that I believed that all people would see the world as I saw it. Understanding that my brain absorbed situations different to others was incredibly powerful and led to changes in my communication.

I had long term friends say that my verbal communication skills increased immensely following the program. I was now able to identify 'verbal thought tangents' that I had. With these 'tangents' I would often confuse and bewilder my family and friends by explaining complicated ideas on various subjects. I would continue to explain these events despite the confusion of the person that I was talking to.

The 'new' habit forming was central to the program's effectiveness. The ability to 'centre' and reduce distractions became exciting. As I became more able to complete the complex work in front of me I started to find a new joy in work.

I completed a mental health review in June 2019. *My anxiety has decreased considerably to three.*

This was two months following the program and five months of mental health medication. I had begun to feel less vulnerable at work because I knew when the work challenges were occurring and had the skills to combat issues

#### **4. Were there any unexpected or surprising consequences?**

- I understood the breakdown of my personal and work relationships.
- I was able to allow myself time to 'rest'
- I changed work practices and ceased over compensating in other areas. I stopped buying everyone coffee. The 'coffee buying' is a small anecdote of a series of behaviours that I did to make everyone like me. I learnt to be judged on the work. I like the effective me rather than the 'nice me'
- I found new strengths. I designed new forms for work; I also identified work strategies where all my colleagues would benefit.

I understood why I hadn't done my taxes in seven years and removed my feelings of inferiority around this.

The program encouraged me to source the skills in others rather than feel the shame that I was 'too stupid' to fill out a tax form. My new ability to identify the tasks that I would struggle with gave me a sense of empowerment and not feel shameful about asking for help.

The effect that the program had in alleviating my mental health was so impactful. For me, the previously unknown consequence of dyslexia was an anxiety. The ability to remove this and deal with dyslexia by a series of tasks ceased the triggers for my low mood. I no longer had the reason to feel worthless or 'less-than'.

The program's long term effect has given me a new passion for learning and engaging. It is possible for me now to engage with work in a meaningful way.

#### **5. Can you identify any big picture or life changing aspects of the program?**

There has been a real journey of self-discovery. I can see a future for myself in my field. I have taken on other roles and now feel more confident. I have been able to name my unique issue without fear. I don't have to hide.

I have always hated the deficit models of care in their approach to disability/neuro-diverse clients.

The Davis program was so upending in how it made me feel, it gave me this ability to understand my strengths for the first time. I no longer had the feelings I was an idiot.

The new sense of calmness has made me more agile in all parts of my work and personal life.

#### **6. Can you identify any long term effects of the program?**

I was reviewed in February by my General Practitioner. My depression, anxiety and stress score is now 3. I am off medications. I still go to a counsellor a couple of times per year but I use this more to monitor my mental health.. I work in a tough area. I have also allowed myself permission to think differently

I've become a better person; I know why I get excited about ideas and how to trust that process.

My ability to work and my ability to deliver projects on time has increased dramatically.

I've become better at alone time/restorative time for myself. In optimising myself I've found I don't need to work around friends, work colleagues and always appear to be the nice guy because I was covering up this 'unknown' secret.

**7. Are you able to summarise an overall view or effect as a result of the one week program**

- 1) Life changing: I still have a job, a house and am still alive.
- 2) The future has become an exciting and real prospect full of possibilities

**8. Any other comments... positive or negative?**

I spend a lot of time with traumatised clients; the level of emotional intelligence that Annette brings to delivering this program is world class.

The framework that the Davis Program provides is the building blocks to rebuild your life. It is the exceptional skill of the practitioner, Annette, who helps you fly.

**Michael Berry**  
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