here is an emerging global change in awareness of the pitfalls and perks of being dyslexic. Career professionals and educators can be the pivotal people on a dyslexic client’s path to guide them from adversity to success, if the right support is given.

The dyslexic socio-economic landscape looks like this:

**• Mental Health**
More so than their neurotypical peers, dyslexic clients, especially if their dyslexia was identified later or not supported early, can be prone to regular feelings of low self-esteem and high levels of stress and anxiety. These are typically born with dealing with shame, denial, a sense of exclusion and negative experiences, which are usually school-related. They are more likely to have addiction problems, and are more likely to attempt suicide and self-harm than their non-dyslexic peers.

**• Homelessness**
In the UK, people with dyslexia are overrepresented within the homeless population.

**• Prison**
The incidence of dyslexia in the prison population is said to be anything from one fifth to one half. Even at the lowest estimate, research indicates that a person could be twice as likely to end up in prison if they are dyslexic, compared to non-dyslexic peers. This is thought to be even more likely where dyslexia is unaddressed and unsupported in earlier years.

It is not that being dyslexic in itself leads to criminal behaviour, but rather the lack of support, low literacy and numeracy, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, frustration, exclusion from school and poor employment chances that lead to criminal activity.

**• Unemployment**
Adults with dyslexia are significantly disproportionately represented among the long-term unemployed. One study carried out in 2003 showed that 41% of a sample of 1,000 unemployed people were dyslexic.

Within the unemployed, dyslexic/neurodivergent adults represent the largest group of unemployed disabled people and the ones most inhibited by recruitment processes. Neurodiversity is a term to describe those who are ‘differently wired’; an umbrella term for a range of different neurological challenges referred to as specific learning difficulties and development disorders, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, autism and ADHD.

An alternative future
Against this backdrop of disadvantage and poor employment opportunities, the irony is that, increasingly, businesses are realising the wider economic benefits of having people with dyslexia in their teams. According to Ernst & Young, “Dyslexic strengths align closely with business needs and can become part of the talent solution. A greater awareness of these strengths, neuro-diverse abilities, and skills needed in the future, can help educators facilitate and employers capture, untapped talent.”

The future of our economy will rely on people with dyslexic thinking skills. However, this requires the right career support and guidance to bring the people who possess these skills to the workforces that need them.

**Dyslexic career advantages – the core conditions for success**

“A high percentage of the prison population are dyslexic, and a high percentage of the architect population.” (Benjamin Zephaniah)

On the flip side of the negative career landscape, there are also disproportionate numbers of dyslexic art students, highly successful architects and entrepreneurs.

It seems that dyslexic people may walk a razor’s edge between harsh social deprivation and phenomenal personal and professional success. So what are the enablers of the latter?

“With self-understanding, self-advocacy, support, persistence and careful planning, individuals with dyslexia can confidently pursue any occupation which their interests and abilities otherwise suit them.” (Eide & Eide)

Dyslexia Scotland’s career development service recognises that these, combined with a growth mind set, are integral to the success, and self-perceived success, of clients. Often, though, dyslexic clients need the support of a mentor in their lives to activate these key elements.

In his book, The Power of Neurodiversity, Thomas Armstrong champions the role of a mentor in the dyslexic person’s life. He says, “A mentor can be a person...who made a difference in recognising and nurturing [the dyslexic person’s] neurodiversity.”

In fact, this is a common thread in the lives of career-successful dyslexic people. In her book Creative, Successful, Dyslexic, Margaret Rooke identified that “what united most...of those featured, from the poor to the privileged, is that they had a parent or teacher who encouraged them.”
Sally Shaywitz, in *Overcoming Dyslexia*, made the same observation. “In each instance there was someone – parent, teacher, coach – who truly believed in him and helped him to develop a passionate interest in an area in which he could find success.”

Who better than a career professional to be one of the few, if not the only, in some cases, professional to fulfill this role for the dyslexic client, to be the springboard to their successful career trajectory, and the catalyst in effecting wider social change?

**Careers Development – a different approach**

Dyslexia is classed as a disability and therefore as a ‘protected characteristic’ under the Equality Act 2010. As it is often characterised as a learning difference, dyslexia really requires a difference in approach from careers professionals, as recognised by Liane Hambly. “Tailoring to the client includes paying attention to how people process information...people with dyslexia...respond well to creative methods.”

“Career development should be individualised to meet the unique needs of people who have dyslexia.”

(Mcloughlin, D)

---

**Dyslexia Scotland’s top tips for engaging the dyslexic client**

(As recommended by Dyslexia Scotland’s Career Development Service and its clients).

- Hold sessions in a quiet, distraction-free space.
- Give the client extra time to think, process and formulate responses.
- Take a well-structured, multi-sensory, interactive approach to contracting, action planning and skills development activity.
- Follow up meetings with written, recorded or visual summaries as reminders of the session’s content.
- Role model processes such as what a good CV or application form looks like. Guide the client through the process in a way that supports their learning.

---

**References**


