CAMPUS

Learning disabilities common among Canadians, but few are diagnosed

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Cutline: Sarah Love works with a reading program at Student Accesibility Services. She was diagnosed with several learning disabilities in 2000, including dyslexia.

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Living with a learning disability can be a frustrating experience, and many people aren't aware they have one, says the Adaptive Technology Assistant at Student Accesibility Services.

Erin MacGregor said students with learning disabilities face many hurdles and her department is there to help.

About 10 per cent of all Canadians have a learning disability, but it can take years to be diagnosed by a pschologist.

MacGregor also said most people with a learning disability don't know it.

That's why October is Learning Disablilites Awareness Month. It gives organizations a chance to get the word out about learning disabilities, which is just what MacGregor is doing.

The department is a bustle of activities, with students continuously coming and going. The phone is always ringing. MacGregor accounts this to the department reaching out to students across campus through posters and information sessions.

Over the past year, the amount of students who visit the department has increased to over 100.

For the month of October, MacGregor and her colleagues are putting on a number of information sessions for education students, nursing students, as well as first years.

The Learning Disabilities Association of P.E.I is also planning Blind Date with a Star, where local celebrities are auctioned off to raise money for learning disabilities.

MacGregor encourages anyone, with or without a learning disability, to take advantage of the department.

It offers many resources, including a mentoring program for students who want to get organized. While mentoring is popular, the Kurzeil program is used most often.

Kurzeil is a reading program in which documents are scanned and a computer generated voice reads them to students.

MacGregor wants to stress the difference between the Student Accessibility Service department and the A.C.E. program, which deals with intellectual disabilities.

Learning disabilities can affect anyone, even people with average or above-average intelligence. They stem from learning comprension difficulties, including problems retaining information in class or while reading.

Sarah Love, who is in her final year at UPEI, has a number of learning disabilities, including dyslexia, as well as reading, writing, and math problems. These all link with a general learning comprehension problem.

Love said school was always frustrating, but when she came to UPEI, it was struggle to grasp the information she was learning.

"It's like you're thrown a whole lot of information and you just try to grab on to what you think you might understand, and then you do your best to simplify it."

Love, who began a psychology major in 1997, was diagnosed in 2000 after meeting with Joanne McCabe, who coordinates the department.

After struggling for another year, Love took a break from school, but returned in 2004 to complete a sociology degree.

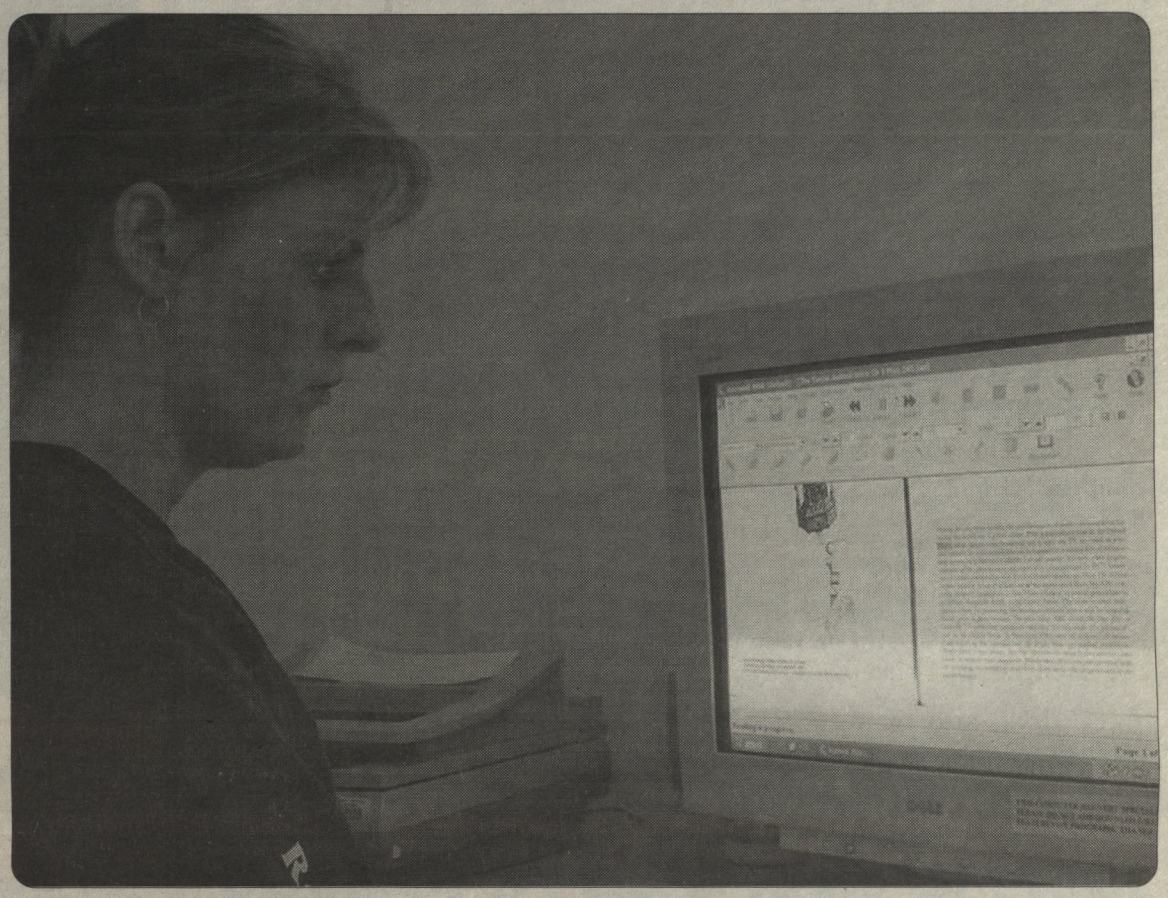
She says the student accessibility services really helped her through university.

"If it wasn't for this department, I would not have come back to school."

Love now works in the department as a student assistant. She said working there has helped her even more because she is learning new ways to help others.

Love will graduate in December with a degree in Sociology, and a sense of independence because of the department.

"The disability itself doesn't go away, but the difficulties go away."



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Student Accesibilty Services is located in the Robertson Library, room 214. Anyone who would like further information should contact Joanne McCabe, the coordinator. Also, check out www.upei.ca/disabilities for further information.

You may have a learning disability if...

· You speak well, but have trouble putting thoughts to paper

· You know what to say, but have difficulty saying it

· You learn well when shown by others, but cannot follow written and/or verbal instructions

· You feels constantly anxious, tense, depressed and have a very poor self-concept

· You have difficulty organizing belongings, time, activities, or responsibilities

· You understand most of what you read, but have difficulty listening

· You listen well, but have difficulty understanding what you read

Remember, most people struggle with something listed above, but if you answered yes to a few of them, or if one significantly hinders your learning ability, you may have a learning disability.

(Sources: www.ldac-taac.ca, www.upei.ca/disabilities)