

Area clinic targets one form of dyslexia

By COLLES STOWELL

He was fatigued from the eight-hour trip the day before. But the journey could have been over a greater distance and he still would have come to the Irlen Clinic in Kendall Square.

Throughout his childhood, Don Khoury, 17, of Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, had to confront the often overwhelming and discouraging comments of his teachers, fellow students and educational specialists. They all thought the reason he could not coherently read out loud in class was because of lack of application, or that he was lazy. It was difficult for Khoury not to believe them.

But at 9:30 on a recent Friday morning, Don Khoury put on his violet-tinted glasses and began to read an article from "Newsweek" out loud. He didn't miss a beat.

Khoury is one of many people who suffer from "Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome," or "SSS," a form of dyslexia involving a reading disorder and considered a learning disability. "SSS" is a special category of dyslexia and those who are afflicted with it have difficulties with the appearance of a printed page in front of them. Only a few years ago, people with dyslexia were pretty much on their own. Often thought to be less intelligent than others, they were left to struggle to overcome the condition which made reading very difficult. More recently, however, educational specialists have learned to diagnose the reading disorder and have also learned it has nothing whatsoever to do with intelligence.

As for "SSS" itself, Helen Irlen, a California psychologist, has found what she and many others believe is an answer to help those affected read normally by altering their perception of printed words.

"Maybe the appearance of the page seemed to be such an obvious factor that no one bothered to really ask those people how they saw the entire page," says Irlen. "When I first started asking this, I found that several of the patients were complaining that the print was unstable, and quite often that the brightness of the white page was distorting the black print."

In 1983, Helen Irlen submitted a report to the American

Psychological Association documenting how she isolated this condition as one form of dyslexia. Her report detailed symptoms such as abnormal sensitivity to light, eye strain, poor focusing ability and problems with depth perception. Irlen also described how she found that by having the patient view the printed page through colored lenses or colored overlays, they could in fact read clearly.

Sarah Brill, an educational therapist and diagnostician at the Irlen Clinic in Kendall Square, says the problem lies in how the retina receives light or the intensity of light. It is the eyes' sensitivity to light that causes the perceptual distortions, and consequently makes reading very tedious, if not impossible.

Irlen reasoned that tinted eyeglass lenses could regulate the wavelength of light that reaches the retina, thereby eliminating the distortion. In effect, reading becomes easier for people afflicted with "SSS" since less energy is expended trying to focus.

There are about 150 different lens color combinations available that are individually prescribed through a two-hour process.

"While one person may read better with a yellow tint, Don reads best with the violet lenses," says Georgianna Saba, educational therapist and director of the clinic in Kendall Square.

About 15 percent of the general population in the U.S. has Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome. Nearly 40 percent of those considered learning disabled have SSS. According to Saba, the typical patient has an average or an above average intelligence, but is frustrated by a learning disability.

"The damage to the self esteem because one is unable to perform on a par with one's peers can be severe," she says.

Don recalls his personal experiences with SSS: "It was embarrassing in grade school because I could only concentrate on reading for one to five minutes."

Saba says the average concentration span ranges from 15 to 20 minutes.

"I found it easier to read in the dark but my parents used to come in and turn the light on claiming that it was bad for my eyes to read with the lights so dim," Khoury says. Saba reinforces his comment by saying that the intensity of fluorescent lights often creates problems for those who have SSS.

"I took every intelligence test in the book," Khoury recalls, "all of which proved that I had the mental capacity. All of my teachers and doctors thought that I must not have been applying myself."

Don's mother, Clara, also felt at first that he was stubborn, that he just did not want to read.

"We took him to an ophthalmologist who told us that he has 20-20 vision," she says.

(The clinic insists that all patients undergo a complete eye exam before being tested for SSS to ensure that the problem is not a result of imperfect vision.)

While in the fifth grade, Don was taken to a learning center where he was found to have a superior I.Q., but there wasn't enough evidence to classify him as learning disabled.

"Then we began to believe that it was no longer an attitude problem," says Clara Khoury.

Last spring Don saw an edition of "60 Minutes" involving a story on Helen Irlen's discoveries.

"At first I was a bit skeptical, but as soon as I looked through an overlay at some print, I could tell that I had the same problem," he says. "I had my glasses in three weeks, and my grades have improved ever since."

Mrs. Khoury adds that they were very thankful to find out what the problem was "because you can't deal with a problem if you don't know what it is."

Helen Irlen believes "SSS" is one of the major factors contributing to the large numbers of learning disabled today.

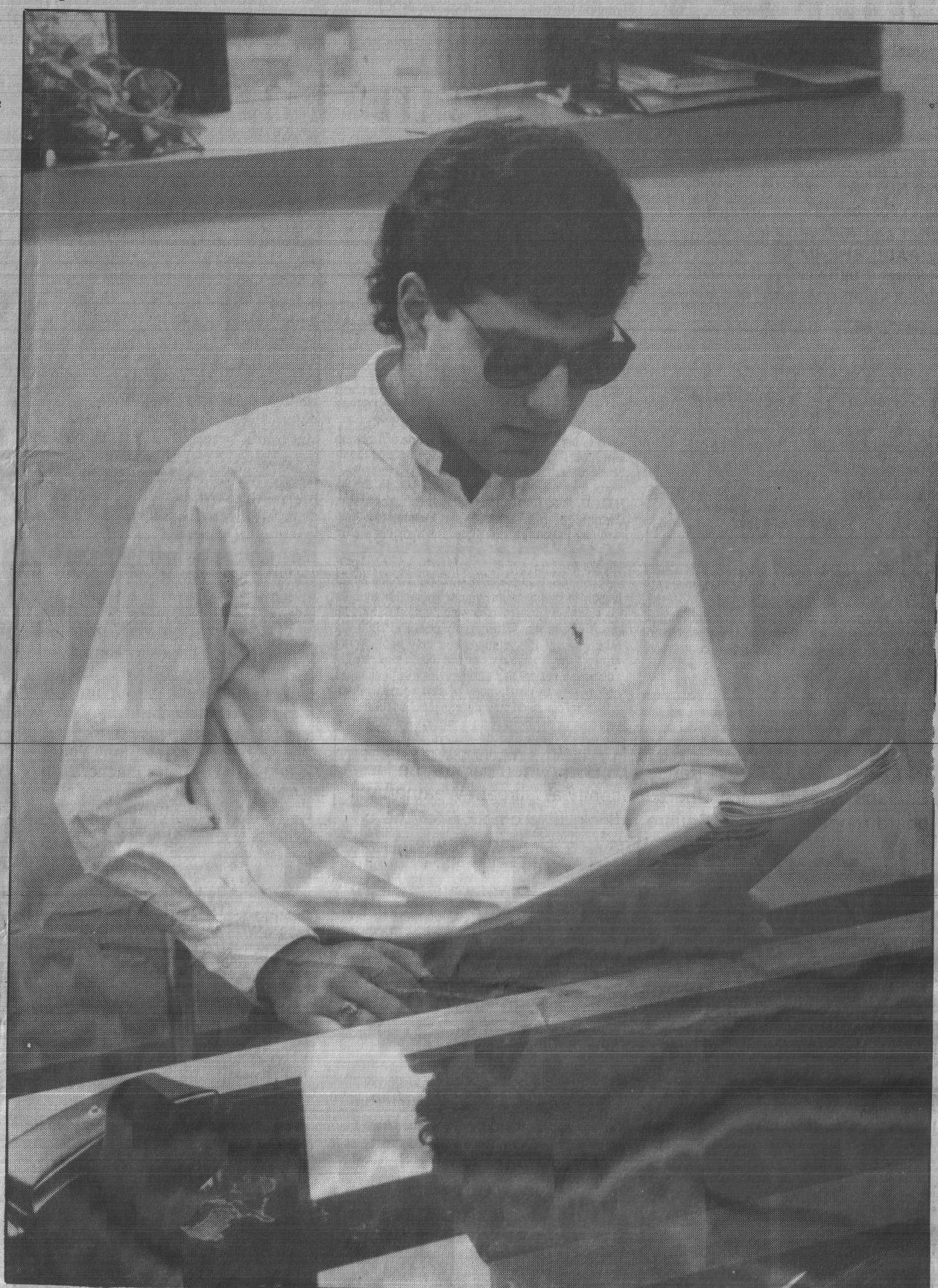
"When people suffering from SSS are told by experts that they are either lazy or they are dyslexic, they tend to feel helpless to try to correct the problem," she says. Their frustration intensifies and they begin to believe the experts, when in fact, there may be a possible solution.

Saba says another problem arises when people don't know of the clinic's existence.

"Although we see people from quite a large state-wide network, there are only a few from the Cambridge and Somerville area." The clinic in Kendall Square also offers frequent seminars to qualified educators, counselors and psychologists.

Helen Irlen claims her 35 worldwide clinics, some of which are in Hong Kong, Australia and Ireland, have experienced roughly a 95 percent success rate.

According to Irlen, there are still several unanswered questions about Scotopic Sensitivity Syn-



CLIENT Don Khoury has found that reading through specially tinted lenses is a whole lot easier because of a particular form of dyslexia called 'SSS' which is the specialty of the Irlen Clinic at One Kendall Square. At the right is Clinic Director Georgianna Saba. (Photo by Colles Stowell)

drome. Sarah Brill agrees: "That the tinted lenses work is fact; the reason that they work is still theory." The specific cause of "SSS" also remains a mystery.

Irlen says in order for the general public to effectively confront "SSS," individuals suffering from the documented symptoms will have to identify themselves as potential vic-

tims of this dysfunction. Most people think it's worth the cost of the office visit to possibly eliminate the anxieties of a learning disability. Ask Don Khoury, who is now the captain of his high school football

team and an "A" student.

For information about the Irlen Clinic, call 621-0830.

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by John H. Dyer

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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY HALL, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

(617) 498-9017

JOSEPH E. CONNARTON
CITY CLERK

JOHN E. FLYNN
DEPUTY CITY CLERK

January 24, 1989

Mr. Nat Mulone
Department of Revenue
Bureau of Accounts
200 Portland Street
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Mr. Mulone:

Enclosed you will find a copy of a loan order which was adopted by the Cambridge City Council at its meeting of January 23, 1989.

Your kind attention in this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph E. Connarton
Joseph E. Connarton
City Clerk.

JEC/d1

Enc. (1) Final Publication No. 2426.



City of Cambridge

Agenda Item 23

IN CITY COUNCIL

December 12, 1988

ORDERED:

That \$2,000,000 is appropriated for remodeling, reconstruction, or making extraordinary repairs to the Cambridge Hospital and that to meet this appropriation the Treasurer, with the approval of the City Manager, is authorized to borrow \$2,000,000 under Chapter 44, Section 7 (3A) of the General Laws.

In City Council January 23, 1989.

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:- Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 1.

ATTEST:- Joseph E. Connarton
City Clerk.

City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council

Jan. 23

1988

C. Dueha,

Unfinished Business #1

	YEA	NAY	ABSENT	PRESENT
Mr. Thomas W. Danehy			✓	
Mr. Francis H. Duehay	✓			
Ms. Sandra Graham	✓			
Mrs. Sheila T. Russell	✓			
Mr. David E. Sullivan	✓			
Mr. Walter J. Sullivan	✓			
Mr. William H. Walsh	✓			
Ms. Alice K. Wolf	✓			
Mayor Alfred E. Vellucci	✓			

C. Dueha
ms
14-

8

1

Loan order of \$2,000,000 for the
Cambridge Hospital



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CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

ROBERT W. HEALY

City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

December 12, 1988

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Attached is an order requesting the appropriation and authorization to borrow \$2,000,000 to supplement \$3,800,000 in funds previously appropriated for a complete overhaul of the HVAC system at the Cambridge Hospital. The original plan, which was included in the FY89 Capital Improvement Plan, called for the project to be completed in two phases with funding for the second phase to be included in the FY90 Capital Budget. However, it was determined that entering into one contract for the entire project would provide the most cost-efficient method of construction and facilitate the completion of the project. An extensive survey and analysis of the existing system, which is now more than twenty years old, provided the basis for drawing up of the specifications for the project. This appropriation will provide the anticipated funds needed to complete this project.

Passage of this order is recommended.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy", is written over a horizontal line.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mbf
Enc.

Re: propsoed loan order for the appropriation
& authorization to borrow \$2,000,000. to supple-
ment \$3,800,000. in funds previously appropriated
for a complete overhaul of the HVAC system at the
Cambridge Hospital.

In City Council,

December 12, 1988

*1/23/89 Loan order adopted
8-0-1*

1/26/89 - Published - Chronicle

*1/24/89 Copy sent to Dept of
Revenue @*