

HOW I HELPED MY SON OVERCOME HIS DYSLEXIA

Picture: MARIA PLATT-EVANS

LOUISE JAMESON was in despair when her bright son Tom left school with minimal qualifications and a reputation for being the class clown.

For years, Louise, 56, who has starred in *EastEnders*, *Dr Who* and *Bergerac*, struggled with getting Tom, now 23, to learn anything at school.

"I was tearing my hair out," she says. "I knew Tom was intelligent but I had no idea how to bring it out," she says.

In fact, Tom was 19 and barely literate when the breakthrough came – a training programme which encouraged him to visualise words by creating them out of Plasticine.

After five days on the Davis Dyslexia Correction programme, Tom emerged with new found confidence and, four years on, is a budding businessman with a clutch of qualifications.

Tom was seven when he was diagnosed with dyslexia. According to the British Dyslexia Association, the condition affects up to 10 per cent of children and can include difficulties with reading, writing, spelling, numeracy and organisation.

This explained why, as a four-year-old, Tom had not recognised his name and letters of the alphabet. For Louise, who had assumed her son had learning difficulties, the diagnosis came as a relief. But, in fact, it was just the beginning of years of frustration.

When Tom struggled at school in their home town of Tunbridge Wells in Kent, she employed private tutors. But it didn't work. Battle lines were drawn over homework. "I tried everything from bullying, cajoling to rewarding but he was at rock-bottom," recalls Louise. "He was bored and fed up."

AT SCHOOL, this manifested itself in other ways. "I was the class clown," says Tom. "While I was popular with the pupils, I was labelled a naughty child and punished by missing out on sports – the only thing I enjoyed and was any good at."

Embarrassed by his dyslexia – he would rather be sent out of class than read aloud – he left school with an unimpressive record and an uncertain future.

Then, when he was 19, Louise heard about a book, *The Gift of Dyslexia* by Ronald Davis.

"It totally changed how I saw dyslexia," says Louise. "For years, I thought my son had a disability,



MOTHER'S PRIDE: Louise saw Tom blossom in 20 minutes using Plasticine literally to shape words

Actress Louise Jameson watched her son Tom suffer at school because of his severe dyslexia. Then at 19, he learned to read and write after following a revolutionary training programme. They tell MELISSA MURPHY their amazing story

now I realised it was actually a gift."

Louise then contacted dyslexia specialists The Learning People and through them she was able to enrol Tom on the Davis Dyslexia Correction programme. The programme has been used in the United States since 1982 and in

Britain since 1997. "We believe that dyslexia is not a problem to be fixed but a different form of intelligence, bringing gifts and weaknesses," says programme trainer Sara Creamer.

She explains that dyslexics often see things in three-dimensional terms making it hard

to read and write text. Because they see things from multiple angles, they can feel disorientated when trying to read or write. Text can seem like it is moving around and it can be hard to write the correct word shape.

"The course involves trying to stop the disorientation a dyslexic

feels," says Sara. "Imagine you are sitting in a stationary train when another pulls up next to you. This other train starts to move and your visual sense thinks you are moving yet your body tells you that you are not. This sensation is similar to what a dyslexic feels."

Dyslexics also associate words with pictures. So the word "hippopotamus" may be easier to read than the word "the" because there is no picture associated with the latter. As disorientation can be triggered by trying to read a word which is not "visual", dyslexics are encouraged to create words from Plasticine.

It was this technique which helped Tom to write and remember information. "We spent a lot of time doing physical and mental exercises so I didn't feel disorientated when I tried to read or write," he explains.

THE CHARITY Dyslexia Action supports the programme. "We believe that it has some valuable elements and positive aspects," says a spokesperson. "Such support may be effective in unlocking the ability to learn and develop the skills required to learn more effectively."

However, it stresses that, while this method might work for some, it shouldn't replace other more conventional treatments.

But for Tom, the course had an immediate impact. "I watched his handwriting change in just 20 minutes," says Louise. "It was very emotional as I remembered the 15 years we'd spent trying to drill into him how to write. His writing is now quite attractive whereas before it was totally illegible."

And it wasn't the only improvement. "He now reads for pleasure which he never used to and his confidence has come on leaps and bounds," Louise adds.

"I feel like the world is my oyster now," says Tom. "I'm now able to retain information. I've taken exams to become a personal trainer and I've just launched my own business."

"People need to stop seeing dyslexia as a disability. It really is a gift once you learn how to use it."

● To find out more on the Davis Dyslexia Correction programme visit www.thelearningpeople.co.uk

● For the British Dyslexia Association, contact 0118 966 8271/www.bdadyslexia.org.uk Dyslexia Action, 01784 222300/www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk