

THE ODYSSEY PROJECT

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE. The primary purpose of the Odyssey Project is to teach multisensory structured language (“MSL”) and other research-based methods to teachers, tutors and other educators who work with students with dyslexia and other struggling readers in Hawai‘i. Another purpose is to increase the availability of reasonably affordable MSL tutoring for students in Hawai‘i and to provide MSL tutoring scholarships to financially disadvantaged students.

STATEMENT OF NEED. An estimated 195,000 people in Hawai‘i suffer from dyslexia or other reading disabilities. Dyslexia is a learning disability caused by neuro-anatomical and neuro-chemical differences in the brain. Persons with dyslexia are intelligent, yet they have great difficulty reading, writing, remembering, organizing and expressing their thoughts clearly. Children with dyslexia struggle. They often fail in school and frequently drop out altogether. Their difficulties can be overwhelming - dyslexic teenagers are more likely to withdraw from friends and family, or attempt suicide, than those who can read and write. There is no cure. However, children with dyslexia can be taught to read, write and spell with multisensory structured language (“MSL”) instruction and other research-validated teaching methods. While MSL instruction achieves results, it is generally not part of a Hawai‘i teacher’s undergraduate curriculum. Thus, there are far too few MSL trained teachers and tutors in Hawai‘i to teach this large population of students with reading challenges. MSL instruction also helps children without reading disabilities learn to read more proficiently. With thirty-seven percent of fourth graders and twenty-six percent of eighth and twelfth graders unable to “understand what they read,” having more MSL trained teachers in classrooms will have a tremendous impact on the literacy of Hawai‘i students in general.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ODYSSEY PROJECT.

- ▶ **MSL Teacher and Tutor Training.** The Odyssey Project offers comprehensive training in MSL instruction (such as Associate and Certified level Orton-Gillingham (“O-G”)) and other research-validated teaching methods to teachers in Hawai‘i. Each O-G training course consists of sixty to one hundred hours of intensive training over a minimum two week period, and is taught by highly trained, accredited instructors. The Odyssey Project also offers supplemental MSL courses such as LETRS Early Childhood Module (strategies to assess the sequential development of early literacy skills in pre-kindergarteners), Mini MSL Modules (strategies to teach word decoding, reading comprehension and written expression), MSL Math (training to teach mathematics to students with dyslexia) and Project Read (strategies to teach word decoding, reading comprehension and written expression). These courses, which run between one and ten days, supplement the O-G training courses. With the support of grants and other HIDA fundraising, HIDA is able to offer these courses to teachers at affordable prices, and in some instances, with scholarships. Teachers who complete the MSL training courses can have an immediate impact in their classrooms on struggling readers.
- ▶ **Professional Development.** The Odyssey Project offers bi-annual symposia which feature nationally renowned speakers and address current topics in developing literacy and the latest developments in reading research. The symposia run for one to two days, and are attended by educators, parents, physicians, and other persons concerned about dyslexia and literacy. At the April 2009 Symposium, presented in Hilo and Honolulu, keynote speaker Eric Tridas, M.D., of the Tridas Center for Child Development, discussed the diagnosis, treatment and teaching of students who have both dyslexia and

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). His presentation was followed by break-out sessions led by local experts on topics such as early assessment and recommendations for at-risk children. At the Fall 2008 Symposium, renowned cognitive neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf discussed recent studies on the impact of computers, the internet, and a high-tech world on reading and learning. At the Spring 2008 Symposium, a representative of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development addressed the needs of adolescents with learning disabilities as they transition from middle to high school, and from high school to college or work. With the support of grants and other HIDA fundraising, HIDA is able to offer the symposia courses to teachers at affordable prices, and in some instances, with scholarships.

- ▶ **Tutoring Practicum and Scholarships.** The Odyssey Project also manages a tutoring practicum in which teachers who have taken courses in MSL instruction or other research-validated teaching methods can develop their skills by tutoring students with dyslexia and other struggling readers, with some oversight of, and assistance from, more experienced tutors. Priority is given to persons who have recently completed one of HIDA's comprehensive MSL training courses. Students are tutored in small groups, using MSL instruction, in phonology, grammar and spelling rules, in one-hour sessions two times a week throughout the school year. HIDA makes available qualified instructors and experienced tutors to periodically review teaching materials, lesson plans and students' work product, and observe tutoring sessions. The practicum provides tutors with a support network available to address questions and concerns about MSL tutoring. An exciting addition to the program is a three week "camp," which will be held this summer in Hilo, at which students will be tutored daily. Similar camps, which will be held during school breaks, will continue as a regular feature of the program.

Prior to commencing tutoring, each student undergoes an assessment to identify the "gaps" in his or her literacy skills. This assessment permits the tutor to structure and focus MSL tutoring for the student. Throughout the tutoring sessions, the tutor monitors and reports to HIDA the student's progress and, when the sessions are completed, the student undergoes another assessment to determine the improvement in his or her literacy skills.

The practicum not only helps teachers, it makes available affordable, qualified MSL tutoring sessions to the Hawai'i community. Many parents see their children struggling with language, but cannot afford to send them to independent schools which offer specialized education for learning disabled students. Nor can they afford private MSL therapy, costing from \$60.00 to \$75.00 per hour. Since dyslexia often runs in families, this expense is compounded if there is more than one child with dyslexia, and is often completely impossible for parents who may, themselves, have dyslexia and be in low-paying jobs because of their disability. Teachers who have recently completed an O-G training course are asked to contribute back to the Odyssey Project by tutoring in the practicum at significantly discounted rates. Other qualified tutors may also participate in the practicum if they agree to the discounted rates. With the support of grants, scholarships are also available to pay tutors' fees for students who are financially disadvantaged.

- ▶ **Collaboration with Schools.** Wherever possible, HIDA collaborates with public, charter and independent schools in operating the Odyssey Project. Schools are asked to encourage their teachers to take MSL training courses and participate in the tutoring practicum, to identify their struggling readers to receive MSL tutoring in the practicum, and to provide a site at the school to conduct MSL training courses and tutoring sessions. These collaborations reduce the cost of the Odyssey Project and permit schools to better assist their struggling readers.

The Odyssey Project is systematically increasing the number of MSL trained teachers and tutors and the availability of reasonably affordable MSL tutoring for students. Given recent budget cutbacks for public and independent schools, the Odyssey Project is critical to education in Hawai'i.