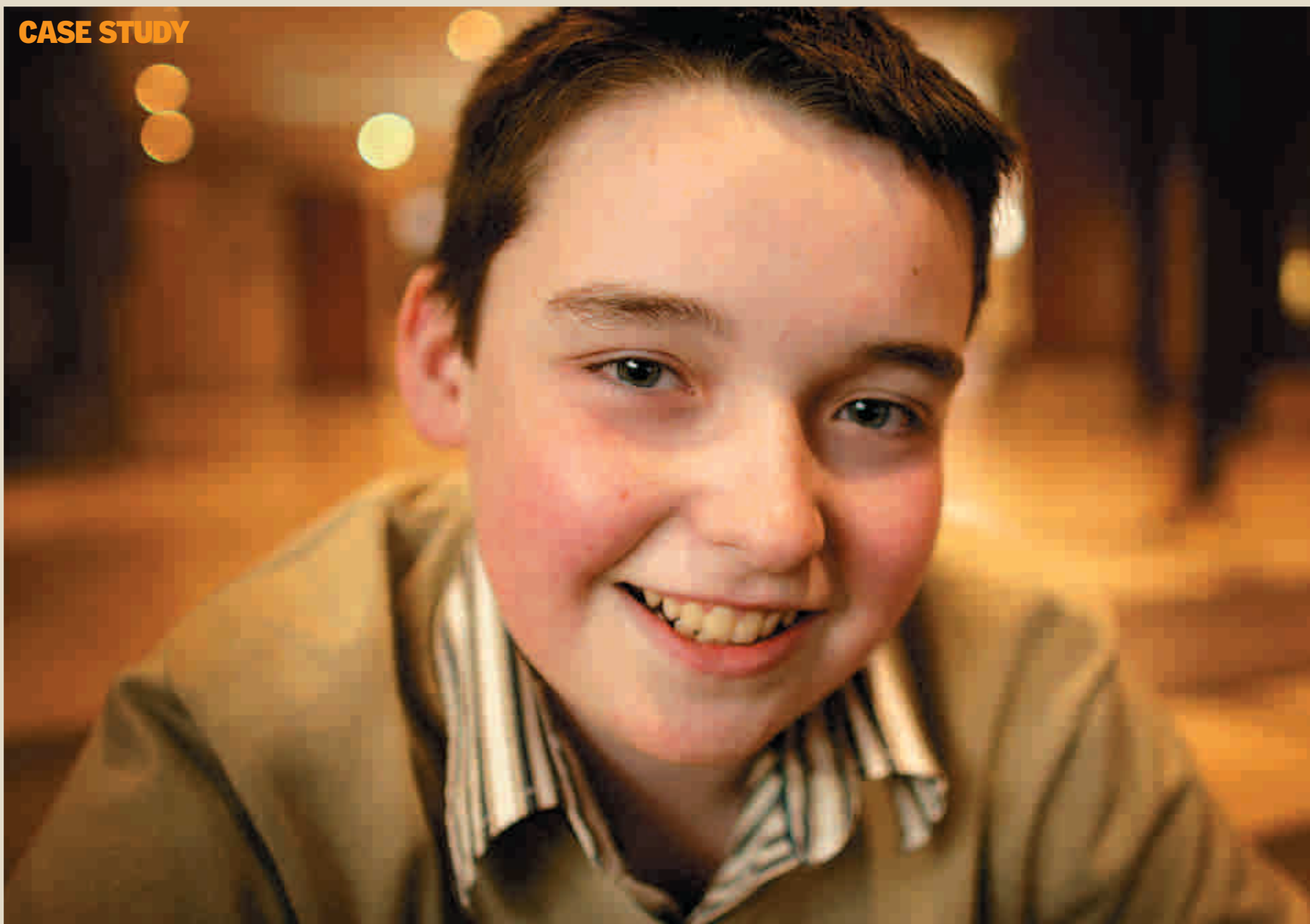


## CASE STUDY



GERRY MOONEY

# A WORD A DAY

Jordan McGrath was struggling at school and feeling miserable until he was diagnosed with dyslexia and put on an innovative new computer-assisted learning programme. His mother, Evelyn, tells **Joy Orpen** that she has been amazed at the transformation

**C**ommunication in this world is essential. So, an inability to trade messages and information — which is what communication is about — leaves a person vulnerable, frustrated and, in many cases, acutely and unjustly ashamed and embarrassed.

But what that person may not know is that there may be other ways in which we can talk to each other and that when one method fails us, another may work even better.

That would appear to be the lesson young Jordan McGrath has so happily learned. Not so long ago, he felt so incapable of keeping up with his work at school that he asked his mother if she could help him find a job. Now, this bright, outgoing 12-year-old has found a way of dealing with that most frustrating of conditions — dyslexia — and having discovered a different way of expressing himself, his world has turned around and he is positively thriving.

His mother Evelyn, who runs a pre-

**'His self-esteem plummeted. He even asked me to help him find a job. He just couldn't envisage struggling all those years [at school]'**

school, says it became apparent Jordan was really struggling to read when he started formal education.

Thankfully, the staff at St Mary's national school in Maynooth realised pretty quickly that there was a problem.

"The support teacher showed concern, so we sent him for a full assessment at the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI). We had to wait a year, even though we went privately," says Evelyn, highlighting the ongoing problems of getting crucial assessments done.

The tests confirmed their suspicions that Jordan did indeed suffer from a condition that prevented him from seeing, reading or writing words as most other people do.

Evelyn was advised by the DAI to talk openly to her son about the findings and was surprised he took it so well. In fact, it was a pure relief for him to have an explanation for what had been causing him so much angst in his young life.

"He said he knew something was wrong and so he was delighted it had a name," Evelyn said.

In the early years, Jordan would try to disguise his difficulties. For example, since he was pretty good at maths, he would use a sort of mathematical strategy to identify words — which one came second or third, say.

Once he had been assessed and officially diagnosed with dyslexia, the educational system was then prepared to guarantee him resources within the school. He got an exemption from Irish and was allowed to give oral rather than written answers in some exams. Plus, he now had the support and assistance of a resource teacher.

Evelyn says that Jordan's special-needs teacher was "brilliant and innovative". Meanwhile, the school did everything in its power to assist him. But in spite of everybody's best efforts, including his own, his struggle to keep up just got worse and worse.

"He was trying so hard that when I

**'When I would tell him he had done enough homework for one day, he would insist on continuing so he could complete it like the other children did'**

would tell him he had done enough homework for one day, he would insist on continuing so he could complete it like the other children did. I wouldn't have used the word 'stress' in relation to Jordan but in fifth class it definitely became an issue — he was using the word stress in relation to everything school-related," Evelyn said.

She is a very conscientious mother of four who puts her children's needs before anything else and in this regard, Jordan, her "very creative and exceptionally kind" youngest child, was no exception.

"Last year, his self-esteem plummeted. He even asked me to help him find a job. He just couldn't envisage struggling to write all those years [at school]. So I checked every avenue around the problem — it's my role to look at anything that might help him and I do try to nurture his talents," she says.

So, when she heard about a

programme called Touch-type, Read and Spell (TTRS), she decided to investigate and consequently signed Jordan up for a three-month stint.

The modules of TTRS are specifically designed for children — and adults — with difficulties and while Evelyn hoped Jordan would gain a few skills, she hadn't bargained on a complete transformation.

Wearing headphones, Jordan sits at a computer and hears words spoken: he sees the same words clearly displayed on the screen and he then types them on the keyboard.

"Using sound, visuals and touch, each student works at their own pace," explains Evelyn. "It's fairly new to Ireland. In fact, I think Jordan is the first boy to complete the programme here."

What she has learned is that her son is computer-orientated and now that he has grasped the rudiments of the programme, he has really come into his own.

"It was really frustrating for my son, who is really innovative and creative, that he had no formal way of getting his ideas out. One year and three months later, he is now touch-typing at a good speed. For a child who never got his spellings right, who was slow at reading or delivering his ideas through writing, this is great — it opens up a whole new avenue for him.

"And for once in his life, he can actually do something that most other children can't. I now feel he has some sort of

advantage," Evelyn says.

Jordan has gone from a situation where he couldn't even choose a book from the teacher's shelves because he simply couldn't read the titles to a situation today where he is reading quite well.

His proud mother is in no doubt that much has been gained by the TTRS programme and Jordan's commitment to it.

"He's reading well now and so his confidence and self-esteem have increased. Even his spelling has improved. He's much happier in school now he is supported by this learned [computer] skill that he finds he is good at," she said.

Jordan is a really nice, very honest young boy with a lovely smile and a wry sense of humour. His mother says most of the artwork around the house has been done by him, and that he is a whizz at designing living spaces using the Sims [life simulator] computer game or Lego.

He says he wants to be a guard when he grows up and laughs heartily when I suggest that he combine his interests and design buildings for the Garda Síochána.

One thing is certain, whatever he decides to do he will do to the very best of his ability and with his new-found skill, this very likeable lad will go far. ■

*For more information, contact Searsol, tel: (01) 630-3384, or Maynooth Computer Training, tel: (01) 627-0631*



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