

Dyslexia PSA – additional information

Created by award-winning documentary filmmaker [Roger Ross Williams](#), who himself is dyslexic, and filmed at Atlanta's Spelman College, the PSA aims to raise awareness about dyslexia, especially among educators. Students with dyslexia need more Mrs. Bennewitzes in their classrooms, detecting their decoding problems, referring them for proper diagnosis, and helping them in their regular education classrooms with accommodations. Those accommodations can be quite simple: extra time is the most crucial, but other accommodations include shorter versions of tests, and the use of technology like smartpens, and audio versions of text to read along with books. But the first step is having the awareness and understanding of dyslexia so that students with dyslexia can get the identification and corresponding help they need to succeed.

The Making of the PSA...

In the fall of 2013, the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity produced a town hall tour featuring its co-directors, Drs. Sally & Bennett Shaywitz, presenting information on dyslexia and the achievement gap. The tour kicked off at Yale and stopped in five cities and touched over 1,000 influencers and stakeholders. The number one issue that was voiced during the tour was that there is a lack of awareness around dyslexia. The Drs. Shaywitz decided that they would address that issue by creating a PSA designed to introduce teachers to dyslexia and to the robust Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity website filled with credible, evidence-based information for deeper study.

The Drs. Shaywitz turned to Williams's and his colleague and producer Jennifer Brunetti to produce the PSA. With Williams's gift for telling authentic stories on film, using real stories, and real people—not actors—you see unfold in the PSA a real letter that Patrick Whaley wrote to his sixth grade teacher, reading it to her for the first time on camera. Additionally, the film crew traveled to Yale University to have the Drs. Shaywitz share their wealth of knowledge about dyslexia on camera as well.

About the People

Mrs. Wanda Bennewitz, Teacher

Mrs. Bennewitz taught in the Metro-Atlanta public schools for thirty years, most of it teaching middle school students in Gwinnett County Public Schools. Her understanding of dyslexia came in part from advocating for her own son, and her own research on “hidden disabilities” like dyslexia. A dedicated teacher, she wanted to be able to meet the needs of her students, as well as of her own child. It was during her tenure at Richard Hull Middle School, where her dedication and knowledge spotted Patrick's struggles—and his potential. While Patrick was getting his dyslexia diagnosis, Mrs. Bennewitz worked on building his confidence in his abilities and trust in her so he could learn and succeed. While she is now retired from teaching, Wanda Bennewitz still has education in her blood, and spends some time advising a few teachers.

Patrick Whaley, Former Student, Founder/CEO, Inventor

Much has happened since that fateful year in Mrs. Bennewitz's classroom. While still in school, Patrick developed a weighted shirt that utilizes a form-fitting gel to create comfortable sports apparel that can be used to increase intensity of workouts, gain strength, and even assist in rehabilitation efforts. He graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in engineering, and while there as an undergrad won Georgia Tech's InVenture Prize in the nation's largest undergraduate invention competition. Patrick Whaley is Founder/CEO of TITIN, the weighted compression gear he developed as a student, and was recently featured on Shark Tank, where Patrick was successful in negotiating for a new partner for TITIN. Read more about Patrick's dyslexia journey [here](#).

Dr. Sally Shaywitz and Dr. Bennett Shaywitz, YCDC Co-Directors

YCDC Co-Directors, physician-scientists and elected members of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, Drs. Bennett and Sally Shaywitz are internationally recognized experts on reading and dyslexia. Bennett Shaywitz, M.D., is a leader in the neurobiology of dyslexia, especially the application of functional brain imaging that for the first time has made dyslexia—a hidden disability—visible. Sally Shaywitz's research provides the basic framework: conceptual model, epidemiology and neurobiology for the scientific study of reading and dyslexia. Together, the Drs. Shaywitz are passionate advocates for the translation of scientific findings into policy and practice. The Drs. Shaywitz originated the widely accepted Sea of Strengths model of dyslexia that emphasizes the strengths seen in people with dyslexia. Dr. Sally Shaywitz is also the author of [Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level](#) which is the most comprehensive guide to assist educators and parents in understanding and overcoming reading problems.

Roger Ross Williams, Director

A history-making director, producer, and screenwriter, Roger Ross Williams has already garnered many accolades and awards for his amazing storytelling talents, including the 2010 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Subject for his film *Music by Prudence*. Williams is the first African-American to win an Oscar for directing and producing a film. His latest film, *God Loves Uganda*, premiered at the 2013 Sundance Festival to rave reviews. Before striking out on his own, Williams was a producer of political satire for Comedy Central and Michael Moore's Emmy Award-winning series *TV Nation*. His news credits include NBC Nightly News, MSNBC, The Today Show, ABC News, CNN, and the highly rated Barbara Walters specials for ABC. He is also the recipient of the NAMIC Vision Award and the National Headliner for Best Human Interest Feature. Roger Ross Williams is himself dyslexic—read his story [here](#).

Jennifer Brunetti, Producer

Jen Brunetti has produced an assortment of media from PSAs to TV segments to films, winning more than 30 international film festival awards. She has worked with a wide-ranging and international group of organizations, including Fortune 500 corporations, NGOs, nonprofits, and government agencies. She has worked with such luminaries as President Bill Clinton and Paul Kagame, president of Rwanda. Jennifer Brunetti attended Berklee School of Music and currently lives in New York City with her daughter and her husband, a noted guitarist and record producer.