

## Beanie's Story: Vision and Learning

It wasn't until our last CST Coordinating Committee Meeting that I learned we have the most inspirational story right here in Florence County. There is an amazing woman that is known in our community for her great heart and the gigantic strides she's had to take in life. Throughout her school years she struggled with reading. She was held back in first grade and not allowed to move on to the next grade with all of her friends. Everyone told her, "The more you read, the better you'll get." She struggled throughout the rest of her elementary and middle school years. They weren't sure if she was going to graduate but she was allowed to slide through her high school years by taking electives like art, home economics, and shop class. When graduation came, all her classmates went on to college but she knew she wouldn't be able to make it at the college level due to the high reading level needed and all of the work. So she decided to go to beauty school instead; there was no reading involved with that right? Wrong. Her heart dropped when they handed her a stack of books on her first day. One week into beauty school, the teacher asked everyone to trim one inch off of their mannequin's hair. She was embarrassed when the instructor brought her to the front of the class and displayed that she had cut three inches off of the mannequin's hair instead of one. That day she left beauty school in tears and went back to her small hometown. She worked at a local factory, married her high school sweetheart, and had three children. She'd sit them down when they were little and try to read those little Golden Books to them but struggled to make out the stories. She kept trying to read the books as her children were growing up until the day that her oldest child reached elementary school age and looked up at her and said, "My teacher can read better than you." Her heart was broken.

She wanted to be able to read to her children. She decided she wasn't just going to struggle anymore, she was going to learn how to read! She took every class offered. She even went to GED classes even though she already graduated. Everyone kept telling her, "The more you read, the better you get." She practiced and practiced and practiced but she wasn't getting better! She had been practicing her whole life and she still could not read. She was fed up with being told to keep practicing. It wasn't working. At this point in her life she had lost her job at the local factory and was referred to Job Services. At age 52, she was referred to a Social Worker and Psychologist by the Job Service representative. It took 52 years of struggling before someone referred her!! The Psychologist ran a bunch of tests. After all the tests the doctor said, "No wonder you haven't been able to learn how to read! Did you know that you have severe dyslexia?!" This came as no surprise to her. She knew something wasn't right but was always told to keep practicing and she'd get better. She now knew why practicing was not increasing her reading level. She also understood why she spatially could not tell the difference between one inch and three inches when cutting hair. When she asked the Psychologist what she can do about it, he said, "Well that's the hard part at your age" and walked away. She never saw him again. She wasn't going to let that stop her.

Her tutor brought her to see a reading specialist and the reading specialist referred her to take a vision-perception test. She replied, "I've had glasses since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade." The reading specialist explained that sight and vision are different. Vision was what was perceived between the eye and the brain. She explained that if your muscles are not strong enough, your eyes can't control what is happening on the paper. She went to Dr. Johnson in Marquette, Michigan and completed a three hour vision-perception test. The Doctor let her know that she did have a vision problem and there were options to help her. She told us, "That was the first day that I didn't feel like a dummy." She started going to vision therapy and actually started to work on the underlying problem to her reading.

Jumping forward through rigorous and challenging therapy, she now has a children's book about her journey. It encourages children to never give up. Her book has been published and she reads it to young children here in our community. She hands them out for free all the time (even though she spent

a lot of money publishing them). She said, "I don't care if I make any money off of my book; I will be happy if I can raise awareness to help at least one child not go through the suffering I had to."

**Her name is Beanie Leffler and she is truly a champion.**

She has given me permission to share her story to help her promote the awareness of vision and the effect it has on learning. 1 out of 4 children struggle with reading and learning because of undiagnosed vision problems. It may present itself as a problem with attention, reading, and learning. By educating yourself and others, we can avoid missing a vision and learning diagnosis.

For more information or to purchase her book, please visit her website at [www.beanieleffler.com](http://www.beanieleffler.com).

~Breanna Thompson-Florence County CST Coordinator