

Please note resources from this conference are available on our 'RESOURCES' page

The Texas Irlen Association had their Annual Conference on Saturday, 20th, January 2018, at the Embassy Suites, Dallas. This is always a well attended conference with current, relevant topics on the agenda. Many Irlen Diagnosticians, Screeners and those with Irlen Syndrome were present. Dr. Sandra Tosta (head of research at the Irlen Institute) even flew in from California and Clinic Director, Dr. Jeri LaVigne joined us from Atlanta.

Laura Woelfel (MA, LPC-S, Irlen Diagnostician & President of the TIA) started by welcoming us and introducing the topics of the day. We thanked her for organizing the conference and sourcing the speakers.

Our first speaker was Dr. Wes Center (PhD in Neuropsychology & Irlen Screener) and Kristen Elliott (LPC) who work at 'Brain & Behavior Associates' in Burleson, Texas. Their presentation was on "Understanding the Brain Through Imaging" and we were given some good tips on keeping our brains healthy: exercise, eat healthy, keep your weight down. Dr. Wes explained that the brain was a complex, fragile organ and brain injury or hereditary problems (both of which can result in Irlen Syndrome) affect many areas. For example, Irlen Syndrome can also affect mood and anxiety not just visual perception. The good news is the brain can improve with the correct intervention, though the wrong one can make things much worse. Dr. Center spoke about ADHD and Irlen not being cured but there can be a reduction of some symptoms after intensive neurofeedback therapy 2/3 times a week lasting 20-40 sessions. Dr. Center discussed a few case examples where Irlen symptoms were reduced for a few patients with traumatic brain injuries.

Nancy Gaudet (M.Ed & Irlen Diagnostician) expanded on her presentation from last year, "Dyslexia, Irlen or Both?" Nancy's experience in the Dyslexic field is widespread. She has acted in the position of Dyslexia Coordinator for Texas Region 4 and as been involved in performing State audits on Dyslexia/504 Implementation. In Texas, we are governed by definitions and advice presented in the 'The Dyslexia Handbook' (2014) by the Texas Education Agency. Nancy stated due to the the fact there is a wide overlap between definitions of Irlen and Dyslexia, dyslexia intervention will not be successful if the student cannot see the words clearly on the page. Therefore, Irlen Syndrome MUST be screened for first. Nancy highlighted key symptoms that differentiated Irlen from Dyslexia e.g. light sensitivity, visual stress and movement on a page or in the environment. Nancy stated that some symptoms seen in those with Dyslexia/Irlen can also occur in those with ADD/ADHD. Download a copy of this informative talk please go to the RESOURCES section of this website.

Carol Zuccone (Ed.D & Irlen Diagnostician) used her extensive experience of training Irlen Screeners to provide "Irlen Screening Updates" (which was requested last year through review of the evaluations). Dr. Zuccone stressed the importance of re-certifying every five years. If a Screener does not have the

updated 2010 screening manual, he/she needs to purchase it and attend a new training course. Dr. Zuccone highlighted new information in the Manual including asking clients their '3 wishes' for improvement and advice on how to adapt the screening for those showing severe symptoms. She also asked us to check our manuals. If the pages have faded or yellowed on some of the screening tasks it is best to order new manuals as to keep the black on white contrast. Marge Harris (M.Ed & Irlen Diagnostician), a high school Math teacher, also emphasized that the Math screening pages in the Manual should always be used as people may need a different number or color of overlays when looking at numbers/signs.

Regarding current Irlen research, Sandra Tosta (PhD), reminded us to visit the Irlen Syndrome Foundation website and Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/IrlenSyndromeFoundation](http://www.facebook.com/IrlenSyndromeFoundation)) to make sure we keep up-to-date. From the Facebook page it is also easy to create a Fundraiser to help those who would otherwise not be able to afford the Irlen Filters. Regarding the work of the Irlen Syndrome Foundation, Dr. Jeri LaVigne (Irlen Diagnostician) spoke at the conference about her recent visit to Ghana where she lived with a local family and trained Screeners who are going to work in over 50 schools in the country.

In Dr. Tosta's "Irlen Research Updates" she highlighted the research at Cornell University by neuroscientist Dr. Adam Anderson and his team <https://www.irlensyndrome.org/cornell-neuroscientists-explain-irlen-syndrome>. Dr. Anderson's team have found, using fMRI technology, that colors alter the speed with which visual stimuli are processed and perceived. The color of choice is different in each individual. Dr. Tosta suggested that this could explain why Irlen Filters have to be so uniquely and precisely chosen for each individual. A hypothesis as to why this may be is that the individuals are realigning their processing speed that is incorrect. The brain images during the Cornell research clearly show calmer brains when individuals put on their Spectral Filters and all the subjects reported less Irlen discomfort and physical symptoms when wearing their individualized Irlen Spectral Filters.

Rebecca Morell, PT, DPT, AT & Carrie Hoppes, PT, PhD, NCS, OCS, (both active Majors in the US Army), expanded on the topic from last year's conference "Irlen Syndrome and the Vestibular System". MJ Morrell discussed how her young son had eventually got an Irlen Syndrome diagnosis and how the Irlen Filters had calmed down his reactions to the environment so that now he has become a confident little boy. (She too wears the Irlen Spectral Filters due to a head injury while on tour in Iraq). MJ Morrell continued to explain how the vestibular system controls balance and spatial orientation and how symptoms of a malfunction can be similar to Irlen. Therefore, she feels it is important to screen for Irlen and for us to think about referring some of our clients for specialized vestibular physical therapy if, after wearing the Irlen Filters, some symptoms still remain. MJ Hoppes explained that in her PhD research she investigated visual stress and vestibular difficulty. She is still analyzing her results, but an interesting finding is that some people with Irlen Syndrome, when faced with extreme pattern movement, tend to have less brain activity. She hypothesized perhaps it was just all too much and the subjects were shutting down.

Margaret Cooper (MA), an adult who has only recently been diagnosed and received her Irlen Filters, talked to us about "Music and Irlen Syndrome". She has a Master's degree in Music, but always struggled with reading music. For example, she explained how she saw the bottom of the Staff disappear, or a line might be glowing, or notes could have a shadow. As is often the case with music, students with Irlen learn to play auditorily, and she did too. With her Irlen Filters, she is now able to play pieces of music that she couldn't even look at before. Her tips to us were to watch out for students who: have difficulty concentrating when there is 'too much light' or other people around, who play by ear, write numbers or letters under notes and don't progress, lose their place or repeat lines. She stated she was labelled as a child who was "lazy with a bad attitude" though her problems, including frightening environmental distortions, stemmed from Irlen.

Julie Yaxley (MA & Irlen Diagnostician) did not present this year at the conference but designed a brochure for delegates entitled 'Irlen Syndrome & Adults'. As a Diagnostician she finds in her practice that if a child has Irlen Syndrome it is highly likely that a parent has it too. Adults with Irlen Syndrome tend to have problems: with increased reading or re-training at work, working at a computer, with harsh lighting at work, driving at night due to tail lights/head lights. Sometimes adults also acquire Irlen from a TBI/concussion or other medical condition that results in increased light sensitivity/headaches. Three of Julie's clients kindly shared their stories in the leaflet and the difference the individualized Irlen Filters made to their lives. Download a copy from the RESOURCES section of this website to help promote Irlen Awareness among to adult population.

In conclusion, the TIA had a business meeting and election. By popular demand the current team of professionals were re-elected for another 3 year term. Well done and many thanks to them for keeping Irlen Syndrome in the public eye and arranging such useful conferences and events throughout the year.