

Visual stress under the spotlight as tinted glasses help children and adults

Geraldine Scott reports on a little-known condition that is often misdiagnosed and can have a huge impact on children's education.

A Norwich woman who is passionate about tackling visual stress has spoken out about the importance of getting the correct diagnosis to ensure the right help.

Ruth Codling, who runs her business Clarity from her home in Hethersett, provides tinted glasses to help people suffering with visual stress, also known as Meares-Irlen Syndrome.

"50pc of dyslexic people suffer from visual stress," Ruth said.

"But a lot of people are misdiagnosed with being dyslexic when it's actually visual stress. And I want to make people aware of the condition because people just don't know."

Ruth, 41, said for people with visual stress, words can move around the page or become blurry - often leading to children thinking they are unintelligent and struggling at school.

But often the cure was through using tinted glasses, known as colorimetry.

Liz Maw, 39, from Norwich, took her daughters 14-year-old Holly and 17-year-old Ellie to see Ruth. She said: "Both my daughters have dyslexia and I was aware of the visual stress that the condition can cause, which makes reading both difficult and tiring."

While reading on a Kindle with a cream background had helped Holly at home, at school she could not use it.

"So I took Holly to Ruth to see if coloured glasses might help her with reading school textbooks and the whiteboard," Liz said.

"As a result Ruth recommended pink-tinted glasses for Holly - they transformed her reading. Ellie - who has always been an avid reader - was intrigued and tried Holly's glasses on and could

immediately see that while they weren't designed for her, they were of benefit."

Deciding which colour is needed is a detailed, step-by-step process and involved a machine which costs thousands of pounds.

But soon, Ellie got a pair of her own.

Sir John Leman High School student 12-year-old Jamie Bretton, from Oulton Broad, had been wearing high prescription glasses since the age of five - up until then his mother Denise had thought his eyesight was normal, and was reassured by opticians. But when he started school the nurse found he could not complete the sight test.

Denise, who runs a clay pigeon trap business with husband Mike, said they eventually saw a specialist at James Paget Hospital, in Gorleston.

She said: "By the time we got there the specialist could not believe that his optician had not noticed that he actually had major problems with his vision. Jamie had so many different tests and had his head in just about every machine they had there - he was so good, never once complaining. We then had a further appointment at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital where we had to sit in a completely dark room and

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Ruth Codling of Clarity Colorimetry, with customer 13-year-old Joel Bradley, and a selection of precision tinted glasses which help with visual stress.
Picture: DENISE BRADLEY

he had electrodes on his eyeballs and another load of tests."

After treatment at the hospital, and again being let down by his opticians, Jamie was struggling to read the whiteboard at St Felix Prep School, in Southwold - but with extra help he succeeded.

But when he moved to Sir John Leman High School in Beccles, in September 2016, the team there were "exemplary", Denise said.

After a number of different aids, they found a dark blue overlay helped Jamie - and after finding an optician they trust, he referred them to Ruth.

"Jamie needs four colours in his glasses and when he looked through these for the first time he was just absolutely amazed at how clearly he could see," Denise said.

"His speed of reading increased instantly. He's been using the glasses at school every since. Jamie tells us that they have made a tremendous difference to him."

She added: "We had never heard of visual stress before we met Ruth and wish we had known about it years ago."

For Ruth, these successes showed the importance of the glasses to some, even though

colorimetry was not widespread.

"I think because a lot of opticians don't do it or don't know a lot about it, and because the NHS don't fund it, it's not out there. If they funded it up to 16 like with a prescription it would help, but for children with visual stress they don't see it like that."

Now, Ruth is hoping to spread the word about colorimetry, and help more people gain their confidence with reading again.

For more information on colorimetry, visit www.claritycolorimetry.co.uk