

Toe by Toe by Telephone



At 82 years old, Keith Webster is teaching his son, Neil 54, to read and is succeeding.

As a baby, Neil contracted whooping cough and very nearly died. The harmful effects of this infection left Neil slow to talk and slower still to walk. "He entered school at five and was in a slow learners' class, where he learned awful behaviour and little else," says Keith. Later, he was cared for by Challenge Trust. His helpers frequently visited him, as required, and often tried to get him into a literacy class.

Nothing ever came of these attempts at teaching Neil to read, and Neil was too embarrassed to ask for help, for example, in reading his mail. This often resulted in Neil being landed in trouble financially.

Keith read the article 'Seizing the Day' (The Listener, July 5-11, 2008) and purchased a copy of Toe by Toe. As father and son lived apart, Keith in Orewa and Neil in Otahuhu, Keith came up with the idea of using the telephone. They followed the lessons strictly, the first one being at the beginning of August 2008. At the end of one month a very pleased and excited Neil rang to say he had opened a letter from the hospital, read its contents and acted on it to confirm an appointment! Recently, progress has been a little slower over several months due to spells in hospital for both of them. The only part of the program Neil could not do by phone was the exercises involving reinforcing difficult words by writing them out.

He has missed out on many job opportunities, often because he could not read. This situation is changing rapidly now but unfortunately so is the employment situation.

Check out www.listener.co.nz/issue/3556

Update...

After a period of missed work because of health issues, Neal has picked up the lessons again, still showing a pleasing keenness, and is now working on page 249. As an additional incentive, they are reading together from identical editions of Barry Crump's "A Good Keen Man" which is "most enjoyable for both of us, as well as expanding Neil's vocabulary." says Keith.

Keith has also taken on the job of tutor with a 69 year old retiree. Kent (not his real name) is still working his way to completing Toe by Toe and has decided to write a book. A dream he has held for many years, but never felt confident enough to undertake.

Thanks Keith, you are an inspiration!

