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## **Follow your passion to success, dyslexic man urges**

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Special to The Telegram

Shawn Stratton has long admired Toastmasters' members who share their inspirational stories with others.

Listening to others open up about their personal struggles helped Stratton find the courage to speak publicly about his own learning disability.

"Most of my friends had no idea growing up that I had dyslexia. I was very embarrassed about it. I didn't want anybody to know. It really brought me down as a child because I used to think that it was only people with dyslexia that had insecurities. I thought everybody else was fine."

Like others with dyslexia, Shawn had problems learning to read, write and spell.

Also, like others with dyslexia (Leonardo da Vinci, Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, Whoopi Goldberg, Walt Disney and Thomas Edison are among the famous people diagnosed with dyslexia) Stratton is intelligent, creative and curious about life.

Stratton was diagnosed with dyslexia at age nine.

Born and raised in St. John's, he feels fortunate the diagnosis came sooner rather than later as it helped him get the assistance he needed.

"There are so many adults out there that have this and they don't know. They struggle with it every day, in their job and in their home life."

Stratton has proven that with help, support and encouragement from other people with dyslexia can reach for the stars and likely attain their goals.

"My parents (Ed and Judy Stratton) really helped me focus on my strengths and I did really well. And growing up in the Boy Scouts, my leaders were very intellectual. Jim McGrath was actually my Grade 5 teacher (at Vanier

Elementary) and ended up being my Venture leader for four or five years. He was awesome for me as a kid growing up."

### **Focusing on strength**

Stratton also credits his Booth Memorial teacher John Elkins with helping him reach his full potential by focusing on his strengths.

"He actually started an outdoor club the year I was in Grade 11. I really enjoyed that and he went on for the next 15 years running outdoors clubs."

Inspired by the outdoor life, Stratton completed a degree in outdoor education at Dalhousie University in 1998.

"That was a (bigger) time for my parents than even me because of all the struggles we'd been through with schooling," Stratton says.

Much of his university studies focused on learning by doing.

"We'd go into the wilderness and we'd use the wilderness as a classroom to promote personal growth and development," Stratton says.

Over the past decade, Stratton's work has taken him to over 25 countries including Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, India, Nepal, Ecuador, Thailand, Kenya and Iceland.

As a senior instructor with the U.S.-based National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) he's led mountaineering, backpacking, kayaking and canoeing trips in remote wilderness locations of these countries.

"Most of my clients have been American university or high school students," he says.

After living out-of-province for the past 13 years, Stratton recently moved back to Newfoundland and has opened a company named LiveMore Adventure where he'll continue his **passion** for nature by giving presentations on self-discovery through life-changing adventure travel experiences.

Based in St. John's, he'll also share his message of overcoming the adversities associated with his learning disability with students in local schools.

No matter what the disability, Stratton says, it can be overcome once you find and **follow your true passion** and utilize the supports around you.

While he'll focus all his presentations on audience need, his aim with every talk is to inspire people to get more out of life.

"It's not our weaknesses that matter most; it's our strengths that matter most," Stratton says.

For more information on LiveMore Adventures send an e-mail to [info@livemoreadventures.com](mailto:info@livemoreadventures.com) or visit [www.livemoreadventures.com](http://www.livemoreadventures.com).

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**Figure:**

Shawn Stratton poses with a village elder on the Kenyan Island of Lamu in the India Ocean. - Submitted photo

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