

# Inclusive Literacy Learning in the Eastern Caribbean



During the 2022-23 school year, Hands Across the Sea participated in a regional Special Education Needs (SEN) Survey which was led under the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States' PEARL Initiative. This multinational, multi-stakeholder effort is a major step in education reprioritization under the overarching goal: "Improve the quality of access to Early Childhood Education and Special Education by increasing access to quality pre-primary services, improving services for vulnerable children, and enhancing teacher professional development."

Results from the survey illuminate challenges, circumstances, and opportunities for addressing education equity gaps in the region:

International researchers have estimated that 12.6% of children in the Latin America and Caribbean region have moderate-to-severe disabilities. Based on a student population of approximately 120,000, this translates to the possibility that as many as 15,000 students have Special Education Needs.

Because of the limitations in diagnoses, the majority of school-aged children in the OECS who reportedly have SEN have not been formally diagnosed. This makes the provision of services for these vulnerable children very difficult. While diagnoses are limited, stakeholders have indicated that they believe that the three most common SEN in the school-aged population of the OECS are Learning Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The research indicates that these three SEN are far more prevalent in boys than girls and that they often co-occur with other SEN, such that a significant number of students who have SEN may have two or more co-occurring conditions.

The four most common types of Learning Difficulties, based on stakeholder perceptions, occur with Oral Reading, Reading Comprehension, Writing, and Mathematics, with almost 6 in 10 Secondary Students who completed the survey reporting that they have Learning Difficulties.

We know that inclusive education is the most effective way to ensure all children have the fair chance they need and deserve to develop the skills to not only succeed but thrive. Hands Across the Sea is committed to making sure children see themselves in the stories they read, and that they have access to vital books and resources that are targeted to their interests, needs, and reading level.

Through a harmonized approach to inclusive education, Hands Across the Sea is collaborating with schools throughout the Eastern Caribbean to build targeted book collections and recommended reading lists that support all students. These books will be available in school libraries and resource centers and are an accompaniment to new policies and educational trainings that are being implemented across the islands.

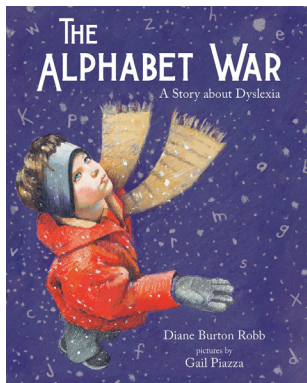
**"Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all."**

**-UNICEF**

# Selected Books for Children with Disabilities

The following are highlighted series, titles, and tips for launching disability-inclusive library and literacy programs. A full curated starter-collection can be found at the end of this resource.

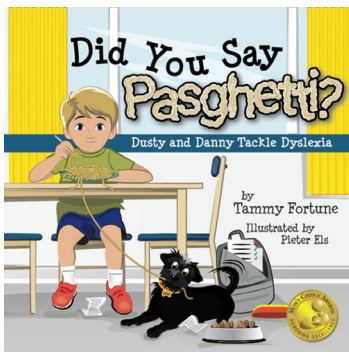
## Books for Children with Dyslexia



### *The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia*

by Diane Burton Robb & Gail Piazza

Adam struggled with learning letters and reading in kindergarten, first, and second grade, but with the right kind of help in third grade, he was able to start excelling in other areas giving him the confidence to take chances with reading. By fourth grade Adam's newfound confidence gave him the ability to read a book all by himself.



### *Did You Say Pasghetti? Dusty and Danny Tackle Dyslexia*

by Tammy Fortune and Pieter Els

Dusty and Danny go on an adventure to learn about dyslexia and how to overcome their learning challenges. With the help of Dusty, Danny learns to develop a positive mindset and realizes that everyone learns differently, and that's okay.

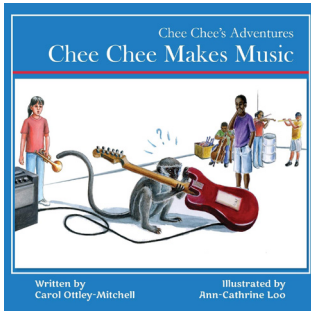
## TIP!

Early identification and treatment are key to helping students with dyslexia achieve their goals. With proper support and intervention, people with dyslexia can learn to read and write well and apply their talents and gifts without limitation. Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory, systematic, structured language approach in order to build necessary skills and processes. Students with dyslexia must be taught by methods involving several senses simultaneously (seeing, hearing, touching), which provides multiple ways to understand, remember, recall, and apply information. These may include writing in sand, finger plays, arm tapping, using flashcards, and blending games (just to name a few).

– Palsy Wilkin, Hands Across the Sea Literacy Link

# Books for Children with Attention Disorders

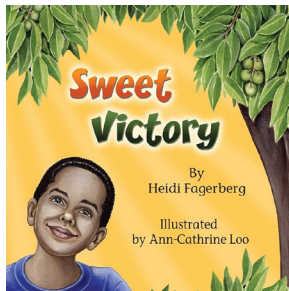
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## *Chee Chee Make's Music*

by Carol Mitchell and Ann-Catherine Loo

Can monkeys make music? Find out the answer as Chee Chee, the vervet monkey, gets creative and gives music-making a try. This delightful story will make you laugh out loud as you follow Chee Chee on his latest adventure.



## *The Little Ones Series*

by Heidi Fagerberg

The Little One series by Heidi Fagerberg uses an engaging rhyming style that will develop your "Little One's" appreciation for the beauty of various aspects of our Caribbean islands.

### TIP!

Books that feature repetition provide an essential opportunity for students to practice reading words for decoding, thus they are able to comprehend the text even if they cannot attend to every word. We also recommend lively and engaging books (including humor, novelty, graphic-forward, and variety-rich) to capture students' attention.

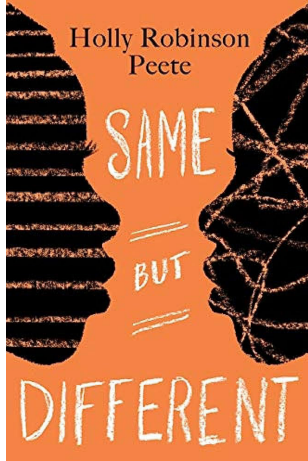
Reading tips for students with attention issues:

- Have students use their fingers to track while reading and have teachers use their fingers to track with Read Alouds.
- Break tasks into manageable chunks and clearly communicate expectations and sequence of events.
- Space out information and use a variety of mediums; provide visuals with writing or displays on chalkboards, etc.
- Use humor, voice inflections, and movement when teaching to keep students engaged.
- When giving directions, use less language and provide fewer steps at a time.

– Jessica DeRosa, Elementary Special Education Teacher;  
Hands Across the Sea Book Consultant

# Books for Children with Autism

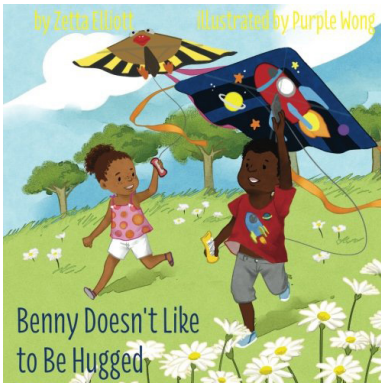
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## *Same but Different: Teen Life on the Autism Express*

by Holly Robinson Peete,  
Ryan Elizabeth Peete, and RJ Peete

With insight and humor, *Same But Different* explores the many aspects of teen autism, while daring to address issues and feelings nobody talks about. This powerfully rendered, timely book is the only one of its kind. It paints an important story of hope for teens and families living with autism-and lets us see that everybody's unique rhythm is worth dancing to.



## *Benny Doesn't Like to be Hugged*

by Zetta Elliot and Purple Wong

A little girl uses rhyming verses to describe the unique traits of her friend with autism. Benny likes cupcakes without sprinkles, and he likes clothes without wrinkles. He doesn't often smile and can be fussy once in a while. The narrator depicts "true friendship" as friends accepting each other just the way they are. A gentle story that encourages children to appreciate and accept our differences.

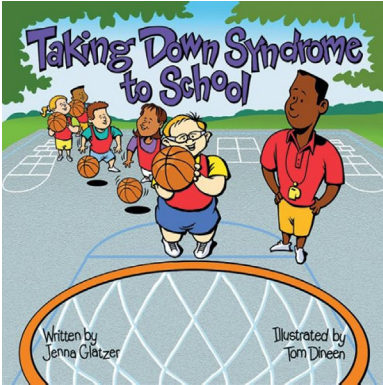
**TIP!**

"As teachers and parents, we must acknowledge the gifts children with autism share with the world. Books where children can interact with words, symbols, familiar images, and characters can encourage young learners to build confidence while developing their love of literacy."

– Eleanor Phillip, [Hands Across the Sea Literacy Link](#)

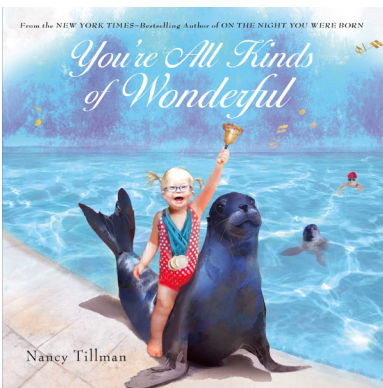
# Books for Children with Down's Syndrome

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## *Taking Down Syndrome to School* by Jenna Glatzer

These beautifully illustrated and fun-to-read storybooks simplify and normalize complicated childhood conditions, like down syndrome. When read aloud, other children can identify why a peer may be treated differently and begin to empathize with them.



## *You're All Kinds of Wonderful* by Nancy Tillman

You're All Kinds of Wonderful shows us that part of growing up is discovering and embracing what makes us unique. From different abilities to different personalities, we are all wonderfully made with our own bells and whistles. Author and artist Nancy Tillman takes a universal truth and makes it accessible in this illustrated book, for readers young and old.

**TIP!**

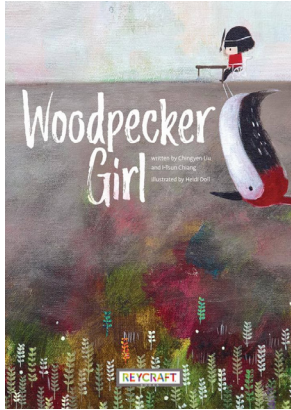
Since children with Down syndrome have relative strength in visual processing but relative weakness in phonological processing, it is best not to dwell on word decoding. Rather, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension can support higher skills development such as expressive language and working memory. The Down Syndrome Resource Foundation recommends leaning into a visual approach for sight word acquisition and to support learners with Down syndrome so that students have the greatest opportunity to understand "the purpose of reading is to make meaning."

**-Amanda Sherlip, Hands Across the Sea Executive Director**



# Books for Children with Physical Disabilities

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## *Woodpecker Girl*

by Chin-yen Liu, L-tsun Chiang, and Heidi Doll

Based on an actual story, a girl with cerebral palsy feels trapped in her body and unable to communicate. It causes her to grunt in anger, scaring off children and making it impossible to make friends. When her art teacher straps a paintbrush to her head, the children nickname her “Woodpecker Girl.” But the girl begins to paint her thoughts and feelings and her talent bursts through.



## *Hoops and Hopes*

by Jake Maddox

Autumn has high hopes that a week at Blazing Hoops wheelchair basketball camp will be her ticket to making friends and connections in the adaptive sports community. But Autumn struggles to fit in with her wealthier fellow campers. It takes a chance encounter with the campus custodial staff to help Autumn realize that, no matter where she’s from or how she speaks, she belongs at camp—and on the court—just as much as anyone else.

### TIP!

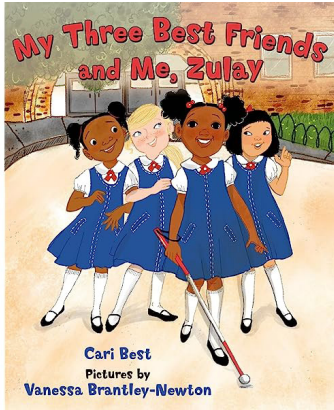
“For some kids, those temporary fleeting relationships constructed on the pages of a beautifully written book can be just as important, albeit in a very different way, to the real-life ones they experience in the schoolyard.

Books are a wonderful way to help kids understand that people with disabilities are often just like them – with the same dreams, ambitions, passions and sense of humor. At the same time, there also exists an unmissable opportunity for children living with disabilities to view themselves reflected out there in the world.”

**-Gus Alexiou, Journalist and Physical Disabilities Advocate**

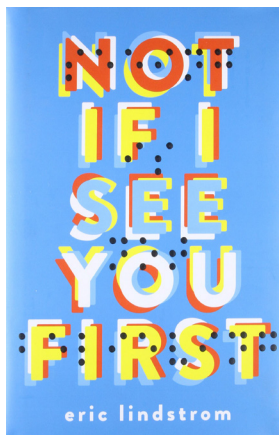
# Books for Children with Visual Impairments

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## *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay* by Cari Best and Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Zulay is blind and just learning to use her cane. She does not like to stick out among her peers but is determined to accomplish her goal of running in a race at school. Zulay works hard to overcome the odds and achieve success. This story is inspiring and inclusive. Zulay is portrayed as a happy, well-rounded first grader, and the author pays the perfect amount of attention to her special needs.



## *Not if I See You First* by Eric Lindstrom

Parker Grant doesn't need 20/20 vision to see right through you. That's why she created the Rules: Don't treat her any differently just because she's blind, and never take advantage. There will be no second chances. Just ask Scott Kilpatrick, the boy who broke her heart. Combining a fiercely engaging voice with true heart, debut author Eric Lindstrom's *Not If I See You First* illuminates those blind spots that we all have in life, whether visually impaired or not.

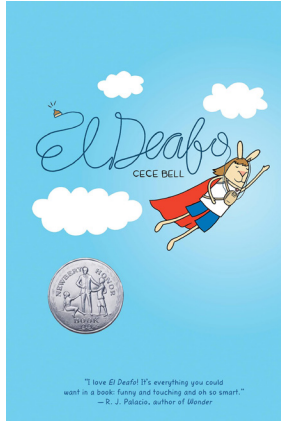
### TIP!

Literacy happens throughout the day in both formal and informal ways. Create a literacy-rich environment where children can observe print, braille and other formats in use, participate in routines and functional tasks, and communicate with others to develop literacy skills at home, school, and community.

Often, a single student will use different strategies in particular settings or for specific materials or content. Just as an adult may use a computer for work, a smartphone for email, a pen or pencil for lists, and a book for leisure, individuals with visual impairments typically also use a range of devices and formats.

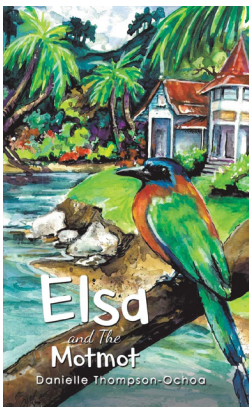
# Books for Children with Hearing Impairments

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## *El Deafo* by Cece Bell

Starting at a new school is scary, especially with a giant hearing aid strapped to your chest! Cece is sure the kids are staring at the Phonic Ear, the powerful aid that will help her hear her teacher. Then Cece makes a startling discovery. With the Phonic Ear she can hear her teacher not just in the classroom but anywhere her teacher is in the school. This is power. Maybe even superpower! Cece is on her way to becoming El Deafo, Listener for All.



## *Elsa and Motmot* by Danielle Thompson-Ochoa

Elsa Toussaint is excited to be staying with her grandparents in Toco, Trinidad for a month, where she re-unites with an old friend Nora and makes a new one in the form of an adopted parrot, Simon. The trio of friends then work together to rescue a baby bird that has fallen from a mango tree and gain another friend, a Motmot bird which Elsa names Motty. Nora also enlists the help of one of her friends, Colin, who is a nice but immature boy who makes fun of her for being deaf.

### TIP!

Deaf readers will often add clarifying context which makes implied aspects of a story more explicit. This intuitive process allows the reader to model healthy comprehension and derive meaning from the text.

It is especially important in the first reading of a story for deaf readers to have the opportunity to elaborate on the text and to engage in dialogue that supports building background knowledge and connections between a story's concepts and the outside world. Much like working with emergent readers, each subsequent reading will require less elaboration as the story moves more closely toward the finite text. As such, it is of high priority to work with deaf readers on first understanding and conveying a story rather than fixating on their capacity to follow the text formulaically.

– Amanda Sherlip, Hands Across the Sea Executive Director



# Books for Children with Special Needs

As of the 2023-24 school year, Hands Across the Sea will provide curated collections that support schools and learning resource centers throughout the Eastern Caribbean as they work toward more inclusive library and literacy programs. These collections are being implemented in harmony with the region's ongoing education and curriculum goals.

"There are an estimated 240 million children with disabilities worldwide. Like all children, children with disabilities have ambitions and dreams for their futures. Like all children, they need quality education to develop their skills and realize their full potential."  
- UNICEF

## Books for Children with Dyslexia

### *The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia*

by Diane Burton Robb  
& Gail Piazza

### *Did You Say Pasghetti? Dusty and Danny Tackle Dislexia*

by Tammy Fortune  
and Pieter Els

### *Ben & Emma's Big Hit*

by Gavin Newsom  
and Ruby Shamir

### *Here's Hank: Bookmarks are People Too!*

by Henry Winkler, Lin Oliver,  
and Scott Garrett

### *Fish in a Tree*

by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

### *Brilliant Bea: A Story for Kids With Dyslexia and Learning Differences*

by Shaina Rudolph,  
Mary Vukadinovich,  
and Fiona Lee

## Books for Children with Autism

### *Lucy's Amazing Friend: A Story of Autism and Friendship*

by Stephanie Workman  
and Tim Raynes

### *The Boy in the Bubble*

by Zetta Elliott

### *Benny Doesn't Like to be Hugged*

by Zetta Elliott and  
Purple Wong

### *Chicken Wonders... Why?*

by Zetta Elliott and  
Purple Wong

### *Same but Different: Teen Life on the Autism Express*

by Holly Robinson Peete,  
Ryan Elizabeth Peete,  
and RJ Peete

### *Rules*

by Cynthia Lord

## Books for Children with Attention Issues

### *Chee Chee Makes Music*

by Carol Ottley Mitchell

### *The Little Ones Series*

by Heidi Fagerberg

### *The Captain Underpants Series*

by Dav Pilkey

# Books for Children with Special Needs (continued)



## Books for Children with Down's Syndrome

***What's Inside You  
Is Inside Me, Too:  
My Chromosomes  
Make Me***

by Deslie Webb Quinby,  
Jeannie Visootsak MD,  
and Michael Johnson

***You're All Kinds  
of Wonderful***

by Nancy Tillman

***Taking Down Syndrome  
to School***

by Jenna Glatzer

***I Have Down  
Syndrome and God  
Made Me Juuuuust  
Right!***

by Bethany Douglas

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## Books for Children with Physical Disabilities

***When Charley Met Emma***

by Amy Webb and Merrilee  
Liddlard

***Awesomely Emma***

by Amy Webb and Merrilee  
Liddlard

***Emma's Awesome  
Summer Camp Adventure***

by Amy Webb and Merrilee  
Liddlard

***Hoops and Hopes***

by Jack Maddox

***Lucas Makes a  
Comeback***

by Igor Plohl and  
Urska Stropnik Sonc

***Woodpecker Girl***

by Chin-yen Liu, L-tsun  
Chiang, and Heidi Doll

***Arnie and the New Kid***

by Nancy Carlson

***Best Day Ever!***

by Marilyn Singer

***Zac's Mighty Wheels  
and the Giant  
Problem***

by Andrea Kurth  
and Braden Kurth

***Zac's Mighty Wheels  
and the Case of  
the Missing Grannies***

by Andrea Kurth  
and Braden Kurth

***Hello Goodbye Dog***

by Maria Gianferrari  
and Patrice Barton

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## Books for Children with Hearing Impairment

***El Deafo***

by Cece Bell

***Elsa and The Motmot***

by Danielle Thompson

***Sign Language My  
First 100 Words***

by Michiyo Nelson

***Moses Goes to  
a Concert***

by Issac Millman



# Books for Children with Special Needs (continued)

## Books for Children with Visual Impairment

### *Keep Your Ear on the Ball*

by Genevieve Petrillo  
and Lea Lyon

### *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay*

by Cari Best and Vanessa  
Brantley-Newton

### *Not If I See You First*

by Eric Lindstrom

## General

### *Happy Dreamer*

by Peter H. Reynolds

### *The Dot*

by Peter H. Reynolds

### *What Do You Do with an Idea?*

by Kobi Yomada

### *Willow*

by Denise Brennan-Nelson  
and Rosemarie Brennan

### *The Big Orange Splot*

by Daniel Pinkwater

### *Wonder*

by R.J. Palacio

### *Marcelo in the Read World*

by Francisco X. Stork

### *Benji, The Bad Day, and Me*

by Sall J. Pia and Ken Min

Hands Across the Sea is a US-based international not-for-profit dedicated to raising children's literacy in the Eastern Caribbean since 2007. Recognized as the most effective literacy non-governmental organization in the region, Hands delivers grassroots programs, critical resources, mentorship and professional development training for students, families, and educators throughout the countries of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada.

Hands Across the Sea holds a Memorandum of Understanding with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and is a Development Partner on the Regional Education Group working to support education reform and policy implementation across the Eastern Caribbean. Hands Across the Sea has placed more than half-a-million new, world-class, age and culturally appropriate books into the hands of more than 200,000 children and has established more than 940 school and community libraries across the region.

**hands**<sup>®</sup>  
across  
the **sea**

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[handsacrossthe.org](http://handsacrossthe.org)