



Dyslexia Association of Singapore  
1 Jurong West Central 2,  
#05-01, Jurong Point  
Singapore 648886  
[www.das.org.sg](http://www.das.org.sg)  
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*DAS is a registered charity under the Charities Act, 1994.  
Registered Charity No.: 1155*



# CLEARLY DIFFERENT

Dyscovering the Differences



## EDITORIAL NOTE

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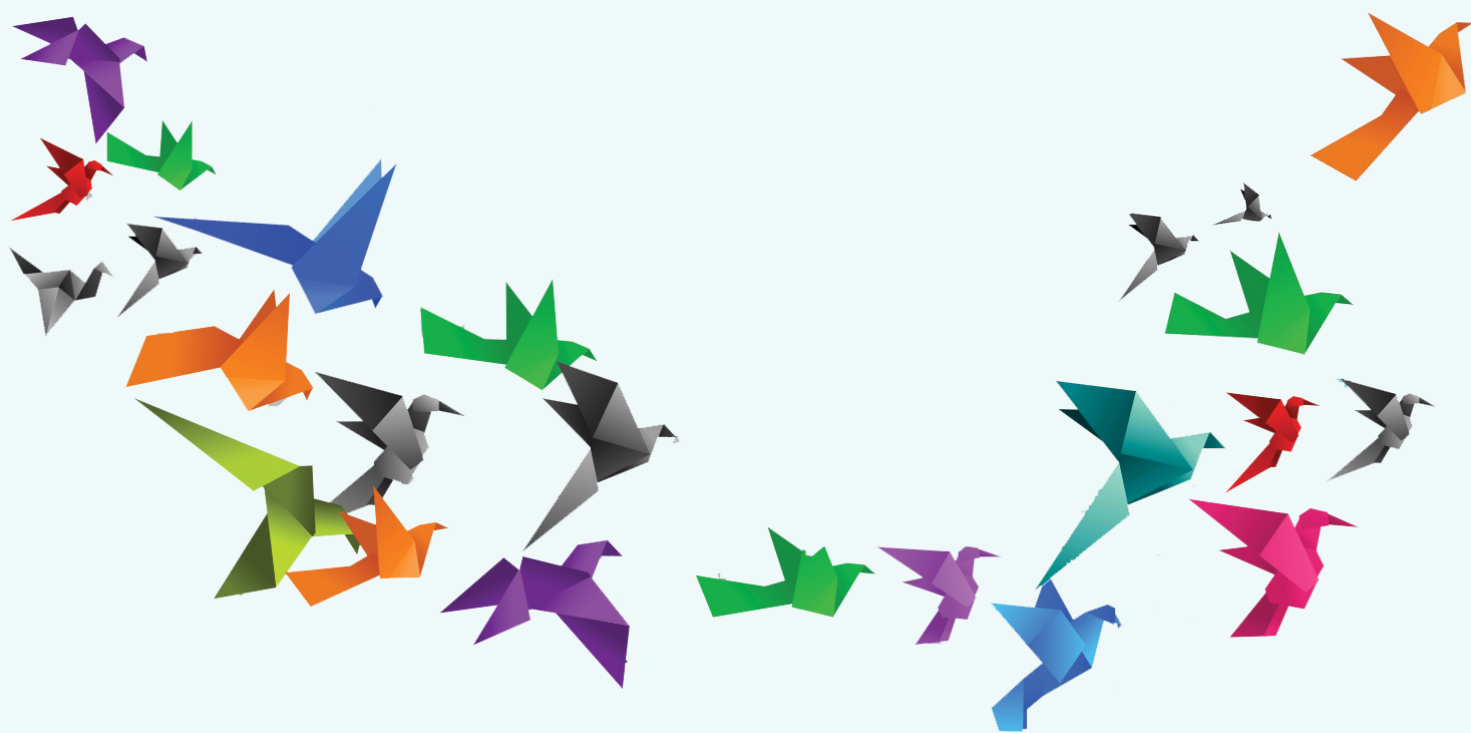
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a pleasure to work on this 25th Anniversary Book for the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS). Not unlike any other book I have written, this work is possible only because of the collaboration of a good number of wonderful people for whom I am much indebted. My research assistant, Ms Bernice Lee, fully supported by Mrs Deborah Hewes and her Publicity and Publications team at DAS, interviewed the pioneers, the beneficiaries of DAS and their parents who co-operated enthusiastically.

I would also like to thank the staff at DAS who helped to compile the DAS history, through photographs and publications. Special mention to long-term employees, Mrs Kharyati Kamsani and Ms Tey Ching Ching, whose institutional memory helped with the naming of individuals in the historical photos and the verification of important DAS events.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr K. Kesavapany, the Executive Committee Member of DAS, and Mr Lee Siang, DAS CEO, who supported this project in every way.





2015 Artwork by Kyler Lai, 12 years old



# CLEARLY DIFFERENT

Dyscovering the Differences

William Wan



*25 years of helping people  
with dyslexia achieve*





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# CLEARLY DIFFERENT

Dyscovering the Differences

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# FOREWORD

## Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social and Economic Policies

My heartiest commendations to the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) for your commitment and efforts in aiding an important group of children with special needs over the last 25 years. DAS has from inception been a wonderful reflection of civic action in support of an inclusive society. Your belief that no child should be left behind because of his or her learning difficulty has led to thousands of children being helped over the years.

It has been my privilege to witness the passion and energy of the individuals behind the cause. When I visited DAS in 2004, I was impressed by your network of learning centres across Singapore offering assessment and diagnostic services, a growing team of educational therapists, speech and language therapists and specialist psychologists, and a dedicated professional training team. In 2006, I saw the strengthening of early intervention through your preschool programme, and in 2012, when I attended your 21st Anniversary celebrations, the initiation of your efforts to help children with Chinese dyslexia.

We were all saddened by the passing of the founding President of DAS, Dr Jimmy Daruwalla, in July 2016. I am confident that DAS will under its new leadership team build on all you have achieved and continue to help every individual discover their potential and realise their aspirations.



*Mrs Goh Chok Tong at the official opening  
of Bishan Learning Centre in 2008.*



## MESSAGE FROM DAS PATRON

### Mrs Goh Chok Tong

No one likes to stand out for reasons that they don't comprehend. One can only imagine the enormity of frustrations endured by people with dyslexia in Singapore many years back, when it was rarely talked about openly. But DAS has turned the situation around quite significantly over the past 25 years. It has been no easy task. I compliment DAS for moving from strength to strength, expanding from a humble single-service set-up to a dynamic one-stop centre offering not just educational therapy, but psychological assessments, training for parents and teachers, and an array of other services.

In my years as the patron of DAS, I have looked forward to attending every activity – especially the annual graduation ceremonies. It is a profound joy to see DAS students beam with confidence and their parents with unbridled pride. Each cohort unleashes inspiring anecdotes characterised by courage, determination and love. Supporting people with dyslexia is an imperative endeavour. I am deeply grateful to the brilliant individuals and organisations for answering my calls to support DAS with generosity and passion. Each of you is like a beacon of light that has helped so many children with dyslexia cast their shadows behind them and march towards a brighter future. You have given them the precious opportunity to realise their full potential.

It has been a great privilege for me to be involved in an enterprise as valuable as DAS, and be part of a journey that transforms perplexity to illumination, from being awkwardly different to being clearly special. I urge everyone to embrace dyslexia and to help DAS to grow even bigger and stronger, for the benefit of those with dyslexia.

The inconceivable good that DAS has done is a collective effort of its Executive Committee, its staff and its supporters. But one man who has played an inimitable role is the late Dr Jimmy Daruwalla. His passion and vision have not only founded DAS but lifted the organisation to one great height after another. I believe that DAS will carry his baton and race forward with similar resolve and fervour.

Being clearly different is not a label for inadequacy or a passport to idleness. It is a badge of honour and an opening to making positive differences in the world. I wish DAS, its partners and all with dyslexia a rewarding journey of discovery ahead.



# MESSAGE FROM DAS PRESIDENT

## Mr Eric Lee

For an average person, facing challenges in a world that is designed for the majority is often an uphill yet manageable climb. But for people with dyslexia, dealing with these challenges can sometimes be insurmountable and overwhelming. While commonly misunderstood, countless people with dyslexia have proven to the world that it is not a disability, but a different kind of gift.

At DAS, we have spent the last 25 years attempting to unravel the world of differences that dyslexics face. From a small community service project led by our Founding President, the late Dr Jimmy Daruwalla in 1989, DAS has made great advances to become a significant charitable organisation with 13 learning centres across Singapore. It serves more than 3,500 students from preschools, primary and secondary schools, supported by a highly qualified, trained and dedicated group of 240 professional and support staff. For the thousands of students who have passed through our doors and graduated as confident individuals, we know that they will in turn become inspiring role models to others. In their own different ways, many of them have shown us the unique ways in which dyslexics think and perform. Instead of being consigned to a box that is often created for dyslexics, DAS works to unleash the varied ways in which dyslexics can contribute to Singapore and the world.

While we have come a long way in terms of providing identification and early intervention for dyslexics, the reality is that we are only scratching the surface. With many more dyslexic students in Singapore still requiring help, DAS will persevere not only to create greater awareness about dyslexia, but expanding and enhancing our efforts to provide more dyslexic individuals of all ages with greater support.

I am very grateful to Dr William Wan, ably assisted by Ms Bernice Lee, for putting together this outstanding book to celebrate the 25th anniversary of DAS. “Clearly Different: Dyscovering the Differences” reflects the paradigm shift DAS is influencing the way Singaporeans view dyslexia. We need to move ahead, not just as an inclusive society that is accepting, but one that truly acknowledges and helps each dyslexic individual achieve their full but often hidden potential. Let us continue to celebrate the successes of people with dyslexia, no matter how big or small, and just like how dyslexics try to understand the world made for the majority, perhaps the majority can attempt to view the “different” world through the eyes of dyslexics.



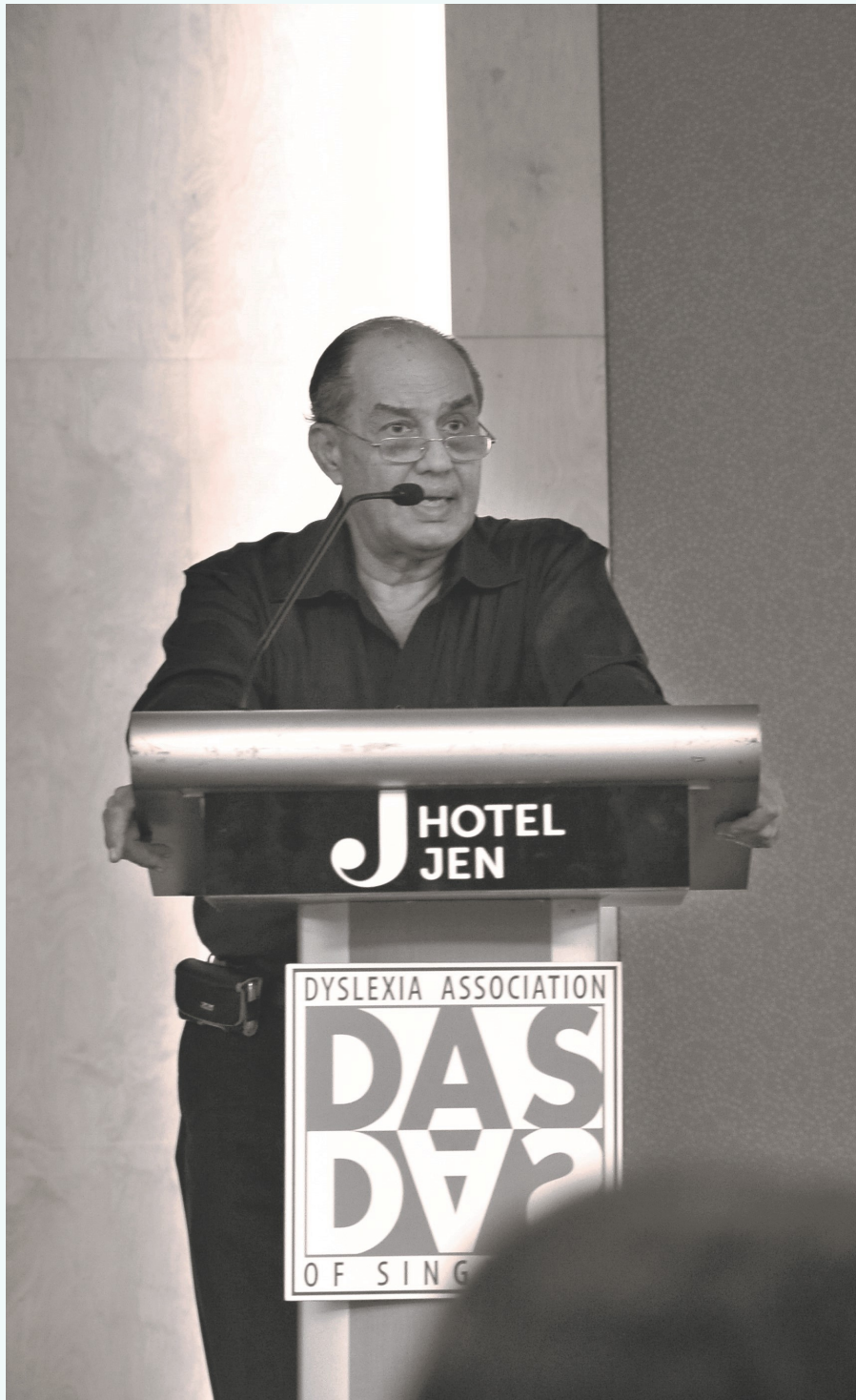
# HUMILITY AND GREATNESS

Dr Jimmy S. Daruwalla

*You cannot do a kindness too  
soon, for you never know how  
soon it will be too late.*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*





## CONTINUING A LEGACY

The innate kindness of Dr Jimmy S. Daruwalla spurred him to action. And because he heeded the call, tremendous changes were effected. Generations of dyslexics have grown up finding the help they needed to overcome their challenges because Dr Daruwalla cared and championed their cause. His vision is encapsulated in his speech given at the “Embrace Dyslexia” Dinner in 2014 when he was the President.

*We hope to change the way Singaporeans look at dyslexia and highlight the potential hidden and extraordinary assets of someone with a learning difference.*

*Dr Jimmy Daruwalla, 2014*



An orthopaedic surgeon by training, Mumbai-born Dr Daruwalla learnt early on from his father's example to be compassionate and caring — to share one's success by giving back to society so that the less fortunate can be helped. This character trait has been the motivational force for all that Dr Daruwalla has achieved in his career and community service.

He found a soulmate in his first wife, Roshen, who also had a soft spot for the underprivileged and who, as a member of the Lion's Club, regularly prepared food for residents of an old folks' home. From her example, he began to volunteer at the Spastic Children's Association of Singapore and the Red Cross Home for the Disabled.

Having lived in Singapore for 35 years, he felt that it was only right to do something for society, and so he joined the Rotary Club of Raffles City. Soon after, he was asked by his Rotary Club President, Mr George Abraham, to be the Director of Community Services. More specifically, to head up a project for dyslexia. He agreed, on the understanding that it would be a one-year commitment.

It didn't take much for Dr Daruwalla to be hooked. The one year turned into two and, with a growing realisation of how great the needs were, it wasn't long before a more organised association was mooted to help address the issues. The natural choice for president was Dr Daruwalla.



*The interest and wellbeing of DAS, its goals, the management, the staff, the parents, the children, were constantly on Jimmy's mind. He took a very strong interest in every aspect of the organisation and shared with us in the Executive Committee his innermost thoughts, frustrations and visions of what the DAS could achieve.*

**Mr Eric Lee**

DAS President

"Dr Daruwalla's Legacy"

FACETS, Apr–Jun 2016

Although he was a successful and sought-after surgeon by then, his quiet nature meant that while he willingly donated his time and effort, he was always conscious of the fact that he lacked the connections to deep pockets. His humility was to prove disarming time and again.

Financial help came from the most unexpected places, often as a result of some kind gesture on his or his wife's part. But, once the word went out among their friends and acquaintances, the funds began to come in and by 1993, the DAS was able to employ its first expat teacher.

In spite of constant frustrations over finances, staffing and bureaucratic challenges in the early days, his heart for the children and their challenges never wavered. His was a pure altruism. He had no family members grappling with dyslexia so he did not take on the responsibility for personal gain. The joy of seeing lives changed for the better was reward enough. He was unflagging in his attempts to set up a specialist school for dyslexics, and met with minister after minister to further this dream.

In 2011, the Indian community and the *Tabla!* weekly newspaper honoured him with an award to recognise his 20 years of public service as president of the Dyslexia Association of Singapore. Even then, in his acceptance speech, he was self-effacing, giving several reasons for declining the award.

Indeed, it was not a solo effort and Dr Daruwalla credited many who had played pivotal roles in the development of DAS. But he saved the best for last, and acknowledged the two women who had been serving alongside him right from the inception of the association — his first wife



*I never knew him to refuse a request for help. Jimmy's networking skills were quite incredible and I lost count of the number of times he contacted me to say he had met yet another person who could help the DAS in some way or other. Jimmy was one of a small number of people of whom it could truly be said that he left this world a better place than he found it.*

**Mr Robin Moseley**

Retired DAS CEO (2002–2014),  
“The Success of the DAS”  
FACETS, Apr–Jun 2016

*I am not a person who enjoys publicity. In fact, I prefer to keep a low profile... There are many more deserving candidates than myself... More importantly, there are many persons who had contributed to the success of DAS and it was not a solo effort.*

*Dr Jimmy Daruwalla, 2011*

Roshen and, later after Roshen's passing, his second wife Jothy, who to this day continues to provide sterling support for the vision of DAS.

His original one-year commitment stretched to 25 vital years of nurturing a dedicated team of staff and volunteers who now run DAS' 13 learning centres and a training academy.

Unfortunately, his untimely death, almost exactly two weeks after my research assistant, Bernice, and I interviewed him for this book, robbed us of a fervent crusader for this cause. But his legacy will endure in the lives he has touched and will continue to touch through the memorial fund that has been started in his name to help further the cause of dyslexia he so passionately championed. He often quoted the London Cass Business School Study which found that 30% of successful entrepreneurs identified themselves as dyslexic. They developed out-of-the-box thinking and true grit from a young age because of their dyslexia.

Dr Daruwalla therefore strongly believed that dyslexia can be an asset and that people with dyslexia can achieve great things in life.



*This is one of the most important things we must continue in order to carry on Dr Daruwalla's legacy. This is an area that DAS must continue to emphasise, that dyslexia is an asset, that dyslexics have great strengths, that we can help them achieve and that we must help them to embrace their dyslexia.*

**Mr Lee Siang**

Chief Executive Officer,  
"A Fatherly Figure, an Unstinting Supporter,  
A Unifier and a True Believer"  
FACETS, Apr–Jun 2016