

Iris the dragon lives a storybook life to help children with mental health disorders

Slaying stigmas

BY MIKE GILLESPIE

A mother/daughter team from the Ottawa Valley is behind a new series of illustrated children's stories with a message: break down the stigma about childhood mental health disorders.

Author Gayle Grass and daughter, Jessica, an occasional teacher, teamed up with an unlikely partner to help get their message across to children — a dragon.

Iris the dragon already took her first flight as a spokesperson for mental health issues in *Catch a Falling Star*, a story that presented readers with a variety of symptoms that could be considered red flags in a child's emotional and social development.

Now Iris is back in a new story, *Lucky Horseshoes*, a tale that addresses the topic of Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Aimed at both caregivers and children, Gayle Grass says the story gives children who have ADHD an opportunity to "identify with their thoughts, feelings and actions through the

young character in the book." There's also an epilogue about the disorder from Dr. Catharine Robertson, staff psychiatrist at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and chair of the ADHD Network of Eastern Ontario.

Lucky Horseshoes, illustrated by Ohio children's books artist Linda Crockett, tells the story of Skippy, a child with ADHD who overcomes frustrations and problems at school after she meets Iris and learns to love and work with a young colt.

"If Skippy were a real child, she may well have the combined type of ADHD," Dr. Robertson tells readers. "This means, compared to other children of her age, she may be significantly more inattentive (have difficulty focusing, or being too easily distracted or daydreaming), as well as hyperactive and/or impulsive."

The psychiatrist points out that the way ADHD is diagnosed may be unexpected to some.

"There is no blood test for ADHD. It is diagnosed by looking at difficulties experienced by the child and those around the child," including family,

teachers and others.

Mental health experts at the Children's Hospital have lauded the book as "developmentally appropriate and captivating for children."

Lucky Horseshoes and the original book in the series, *Catch a falling Star*, are published by Iris the Dragon Inc. and can be purchased through www.irsthedragon.com



DETAIL FROM LUCKY HORSESHOES BY GAYLE GRASS, ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA CROCKETT

THE BOOK

Lucky Horseshoes

BY GAYLE GRASS

Iris the Dragon Inc.