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Child's tale dispels ADHD myths

Girl feels she 'can't do anything right'

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HELEN HENDERSON

Imagine going to school one day and finding rabbits hopping all around the classrooms and down the hall.

That's what happened to a little girl named Skippy, who had been asked by her teacher the day before to clean out the bunny cages. Just as she was finishing the job, Skippy thought of something else she wanted to do and ran off, forgetting to lock the rabbit cages.

The other kids thought having rabbits all over the place was funny. But the teacher scolded Skippy, who ran off in tears.

The thing is, Skippy was always getting into trouble for not paying attention and darting around. As a new book from author Gayle Grass explains it, she didn't understand why but she always found it hard to concentrate.

At school, "the sounds in the halls, the shouts and laughing of the children in the yard, even the lights in the classroom, bothered her. She tried to avoid them by moving around in her chair but this got her into trouble. Often the best way to ignore the noises was to daydream."

Sometimes, Skippy confesses to her friend Iris, the gentle swamp dragon, "I get so frustrated I get really angry and I think I'm going to explode.

"It mostly happens when I feel I can't do anything right. Then I scream at my mom and break things. I feel really bad afterwards as my mom tries so hard to help me."

So begins Skippy's journey to understanding what has been labelled attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity, or ADHD. Through her friend Iris, she meets a young horse who has hurt his knee. Together the two learn to achieve their dreams.

Catch A Falling Star, the first book in the "Iris the Dragon" series, helped children, their families and teachers see how to get over the stigma and cope with mental health issues. *Lucky Horseshoes* looks specifically at ADHD.

Coming as they do in the midst of what can only be described as a crisis in children's mental health services in this province, they are welcome resources.

More teenagers and young adults die of suicide each year than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, pneumonia, influenza, birth defects and stroke combined, according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Of the 20 per cent of Canadian children who need help for a mental health problem, 80 per cent receive no treatment, it says.

As the *Star's* Andrea Gordon reported this month, unless the province provides significant new money in its spring budget, advocates say children's mental health services will have to be chopped, adding to already over-lengthy waiting times and putting more children unnecessarily at risk.

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