

Mother ends locked-in boy's long silence

GAZETTE AND HERALD/SWNS

Simon de Bruxelles

Jonathan Bryan's parents were told their son was so severely physically and mentally handicapped that he would never be able to communicate.

But with the help of his mother, he has learned to read and write, entered the BBC Radio 2 short story contest and started a blog. He has also launched a campaign for locked-in children to have better access to education.

He wrote on his blog: "If more people had believed in me I would have learnt to read and write at the same time as my peers in the mainstream class. Before, I felt like a bird in a cage. Now it is great. I love being able to tell my family and friends that I love them."

"It has made a massive difference for me being able to say what I want. My dream is that every child like me is taught to read, write and spell using the best access method for them."

Jonathan, now ten, was born with cerebral palsy and kidney failure after his mother was injured in a car accident when pregnant. He is unable to speak and is confined to a wheelchair.

His special school never attempted to teach him to read and write because of his severe condition but Chantal Bryan, 39, and her husband Christopher, 40, a carer, never accepted that their son was mentally handicapped.

She began teaching him herself several hours a day to use his eyes to select words from a list when one day he asked for a "spelling board".

In just over a year Jonathan went from being totally silent to saying what-



Chantal Bryan's persistence means that her son, Jonathan, can now communicate with his sisters, Jemima and Susannah

ever he wanted by using his eye movements to select letters from the spelling board held up in front of him.

Mrs Bryan, from Chippenham, Wiltshire, said: "It was a breakthrough. I can't describe what it's like to be able to talk to your child for first time."

Jonathan, who now has three boards for letters, numbers and punctuation, has written to Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, calling for more to be

done for non-verbal children. Jonathan said: "What brings me incredible sorrow is watching my non-verbal friends in wheelchairs miss out on the fullness of life because no-one believes that they are worth teaching literacy to."

"They are waiting locked in for someone to give them a chance to have a voice."

"I'm in the unique position of knowing what this feels like having been in

the special school system for five years prior to being able to spell."

Before learning to read and write, he attended a special school for disabled children. Mrs Bryan said: "Jonathan later told me it was 'babysitting'. High-level babysitting admittedly — lots of lovely activities, but no learning. I needed to teach Jonathan to spell."

Now he goes to a mainstream primary school in the afternoons. Once he

Song of Voice by Jonathan Bryan

As adept fingers point
My silent soul emerges,
Like the dawn blackbird's song
Suddenly breaking
the black.

Music buried in the mind
Sings melodies divine,
Of ancient tales yet untold
Unfurled to men astound.

Whose beauty hears
my voice?
What depths saddened
my pathway?
Soaring eagles spread wings
I fly to my destiny.

had been "unlocked" Mrs Bryan had to get to know her son. She said: "I asked him a whole load of questions and in some ways it was quite reassuring to realise that we did know Jonathan all along. But there were things that he had been sitting on for years."

"I asked him what the most frustrating thing was for him, and I expected him to say 'not being able to speak'. He said it was having his face washed."