

Day in the Life of an AHS Student with a Disability

For students with physical or learning disabilities, a day at school is essentially the same as any other student's. However, certain accommodations must be made to meet their needs and to ensure that these students are properly receiving their education.

Condy Kan, a senior at AHS who is hard of hearing, says that her day at school is basically like anyone else's, besides the addition of a translator. An interpreter sits across from her or next to a teacher during a lesson to translate the teacher's spoken words into American Sign Language (ASL) which Condy learned at the age of six. Additional assistance is received through the cochlear implant, a surgically implanted device that aids people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Outside of class, Condy participates in many sports, such as field hockey, swim and water polo. In field hockey, as she did with gymnastics in the past, Condy learns the daily routines and repeats them. Because she doesn't have a translator during her after school activities, she learned how to read lips. Since she can't wear her cochlear implant during swim and water polo, she asks her teammates what to do during practices.

For other students, additional help during the school day may be required. A team comprised of the student's parents or guardians, a psychologist, a special education teacher, the nurse and, perhaps an administrator, meets to discuss whether or not an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is necessary to meet the student's needs. The team decides together, based on an individual's needs, how best to accommodate the student and make education at the school a smooth process.

Some elements of IEPs may include certain classes designed to help students with disabilities or the assistance of a one-on-one aide. Teachers are trained to be able to adapt to all types of learning preferences, while aides are district staff members assigned to certain individuals who need help throughout the day to make the school day flow more easily.

"I want to make sure that all students have equal access to public education, not just special education kids," Head of Special Education Department Jessica Castillo said. "Individuals all have different needs and strengths, and teachers should make sure that everyone is successful."

School psychologists Tak Tsubo and Vivien Wong, school nurse Anita Man, senior Condy Kan and teacher Jessica Castillo agree on one idea, which is that students with disabilities are just like students without.

At the end of the day, Tsubo emphasizes the idea: "Students with disabilities aren't very different; they are part of our school community and shouldn't be treated as a separate group."

By Copy Editor: Caroline Ren

Day in the Life of Alumnus James Takhar

Growing up, I always knew my older brother, James, was different compared to everybody else in my life. He could not talk the way other children did and he had a hard time understanding people. When it came to focusing in class, he had a hard time doing so and did not learn as fast as his peers. James has these traits that set him apart from others because he has autism.

Right now, James is 21 years old and his life is packed with activities so that every day can be fulfilling. He attended AHS and graduated in 2010. While at AHS, James participated in full-inclusion classes, meaning that he took all the same classes as any student without a disability would, but with an aide.

At AHS, his classmates were very accepting of their fellow Moor and, rather than ignore him, they befriended him. Even though it is unclear if James truly comprehended their actions, he nonetheless expressed enjoyment from the company of his peers and the support they gave him.

After graduation, James moved on to take classes at both Mountain View High School (MVHS) and Pasadena City College (PCC) and had his aide with him at both schools. A normal weekday for James begins with him getting ready for school at six in the morning. After he has prepared for the day ahead of him, he leaves for school, where the program James attends provides a bus service to take him and other students with disabilities to school.

At MVHS, he participates in the school's transition program which teaches functional living skills: mobility, safety, work experience and community-based instruction. Basically, this program teaches him how to interact with the world around him, to better understand people and vice versa. After classes at MVHS, the next item for the day is a computer class at San Gabriel Valley Training Center.

When his school day is over, James takes the bus back home, and depending on the day of the week, he has a variety of activities. For example on Mondays, he goes to palates and speech therapy almost immediately after school, while he goes ice skating Thursday afternoons. Additionally, he works at the sporting goods store R.E.I. once a week in Arcadia, and stocks supplies on the shelves.

Although James seems very different from the average student, he actually has a great deal in common with everyone. He enjoys being active, meeting new people, watching movies and hanging out with friends. He always gives a big smile whenever he sees one of his old friends from AHS who included him in activities. Even though James may act differently, in the end, he is just the same as everyone else.



By Staff Writer: Sarah Takhar

FEATURES

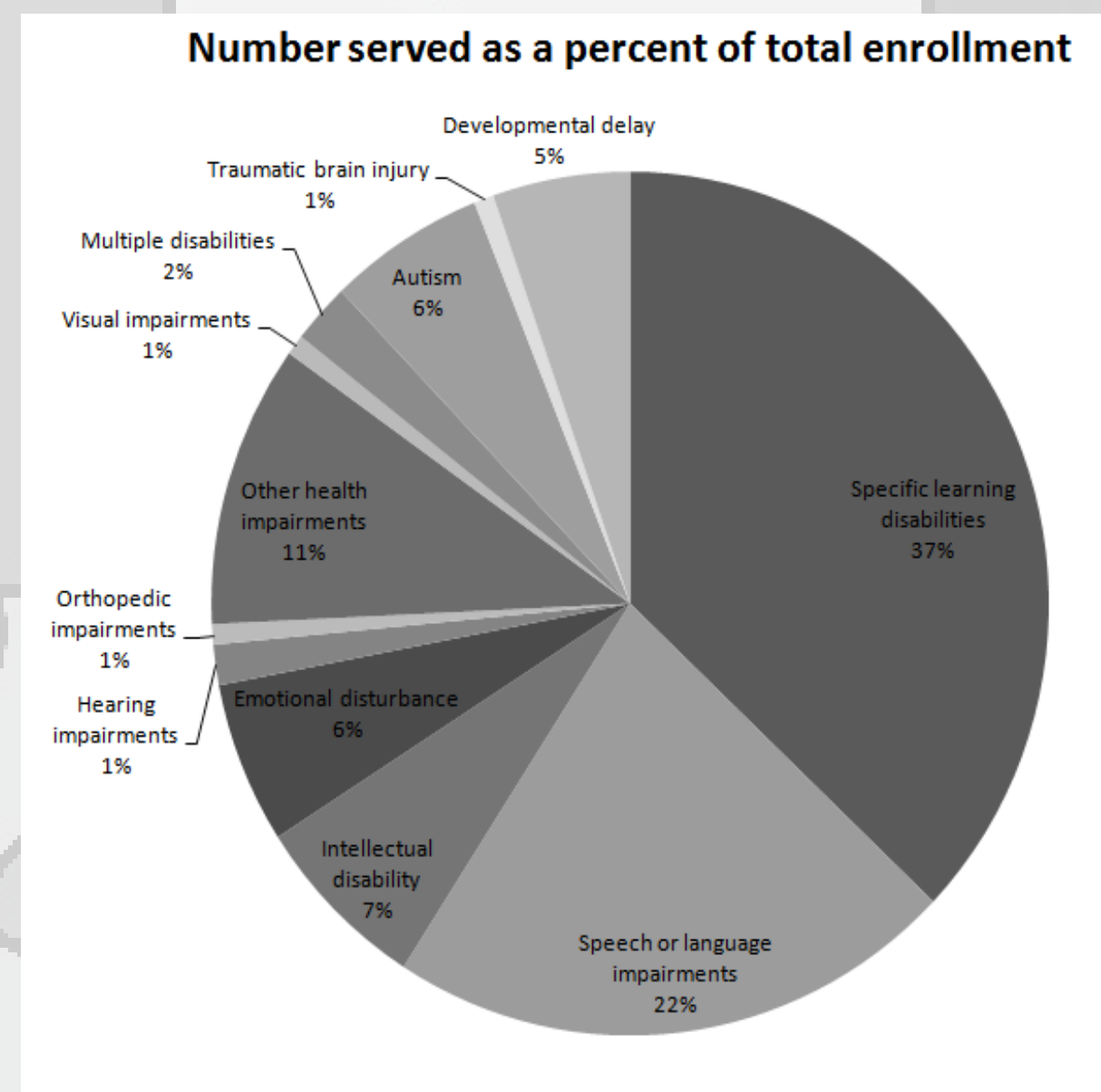
Connecting One Piece At a Time

Approximately 650 million people live with some form of disability. People often seem unaware of these specific individuals' needs or circumstances. The "world's largest minority" according to United Nations organization, actually endures many difficult obstacles, physically and mentally, just to get through the day. Some of these barriers include—but are not limited to—transportation, communication and discrimination. In addition, they do not have equal access to benefits like the rest of the people around them.

Some don't realize that disabilities can affect women, men and children, of any ethnicity, at any time. Some disabilities happen at birth, due to an accident, age or sickness. Studies show that the whole community benefits when a person with disabilities fully participates in the physical environment present in their lives. By understanding what people can do to assist these individuals, we would be providing them with more resources and a chance to be part of the world that we all share. Together, with more possibilities, everyone would be able to achieve greater comprehension and, ultimately, unite as a group with similar goals.

By Features Editor: Dalla Wong

Statistics of Students With Disabilities (2009-2010)



Interview With Special Education Teacher Kathleen Doyle

What is the LIFT Program?

"The purpose of the Learning Independence For Transition (LIFT) program is to guide and teach adult students with disabilities the skills they need to live as independently as possible. Our days are busy and full! It is never a boring day at the LIFT program.

We learn daily living skills, such as cooking, cleaning and maintaining a household. Cooking, of course, is one of our favorite activities! We have a kitchen area with stove, sink and refrigerator. We also grow vegetables and herbs to use in our cooking lessons, thanks to a grant from the Alhambra Rotary Club and Alhambra High School's Green Academy, who built the raised beds for the garden.

We learn what we call "functional academics." Functional academics are real life skills students need to function independently, such as banking, understanding taxes, use of money, filling out job applications and writing résumés. Students also learn about the importance of social skills in job settings. We go out into the community every day. We learn to safely navigate the city with use of public transportation, and practice use of money in the community. One of the perks of this program is going out to eat at a fast food restaurant every Friday! We also do volunteer work in order to gain important vocational skills for future jobs. With the help of AUSD's Vocational Specialist, Melanie Ware, and her team, we work at places such as Sizzler, the Alhambra Courthouse, YMCA, Smart N Final and Gamestop."

Who or what caused you to become a Special Ed. teacher?

"When I was going to college in Fort Worth, Texas, I taught dance to students in some of the more disadvantaged areas of the city. I was impressed by the resilience of many of these students in spite of very difficult circumstances. I found that I could be a positive influence and had the potential to make a difference in their lives. Yet, as much as they learned from me, I learned far more from them. When I came back here to my home state of California, I decided to pursue a teaching credential, and soon began teaching in Glendale.

Then my kids were born, and I stayed home for a while to care for them, including my youngest son who has disabilities. Before my son was born, I was, admittedly, naive about people with disabilities. I taught my son at home through a program designed specifically for him and learned a great deal. When I returned to teaching, I entered the special education field and feel so fortunate to have found my way to the LIFT program. Like those dance students in Fort Worth, my students face challenges and difficult circumstances of their own. Every day, they impress me with their positive attitude, hard work and willingness to keep going despite tough odds."

What Can We Do to Help?

"We are all part of this one family called the human race, and we all share the same feelings, hopes and dreams. I find that my students are some of the most interesting people I know! I enjoy their sense of humor, and learning about their perspectives and unique views of the world. It's very easy, to simply say "hello" to someone with disabilities. I would also encourage AHS students to sit next to someone with disabilities at lunchtime and get to know him or her. If you have someone with a disability in one of your classes or clubs, start a conversation, or walk with him or her to the next class. Ask a few questions, and you may find that you have some things in common. There are also many great programs that welcome volunteer help, such as Special Olympics or Ability First. And one day, when you become that successful business owner or manager, I hope you will consider hiring someone with disabilities. You'll find you have an employee who is, not only, dependable, dedicated and hard working, but also very likely someone with a sense of humor and positive outlook that is almost guaranteed to increase morale in the workplace and productivity in all employees."

Interview by Features Editor: Cynthia Luong

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