

Disabilities Awareness

A special issue prepared by and for high school students

SUMMER 2000 EDITION

Finding a Place to Belong

by Justin Leader, Rockland Community College

"Friends are the family you choose." I saw that expression stitched into a throw pillow on a neighbor's couch. As a teenager, when it is hard to relate to your parents, friends become the day-to-day emotional support that everyone wants and needs. I suppose the search for a group of friends with whom you can share yourself completely is one of the "struggles of adolescence." Disabled or not, this can be one of the toughest struggles of young adulthood. Having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has always complicated this for me.

The symptoms of ADHD have been described as disconnection between impulses and the knowledge of consequences. That separation permits impulses to be acted upon even with the awareness that those impulses have repercussions.

In elementary school, I was "too hyperactive" to be admitted into the Boy Scouts and spent more time with an ignorant and intolerant principal than with my classmates. Although I had one best friend, Kelli, and a miraculous second grade teacher, Mrs. Shapiro, who through a combination of Pizza Hut coupons and gold stars, got me to read books, I spent most of elementary school shunned and ridiculed for my impulsivity. Unfortunately, there are only a lucky few who are dropped right into the middle of a group of friends perfect for them. I certainly wasn't. I just hoped that people would become aware of my disability and accept it, so that they could accept me. Such unconditional acceptance is a rarity, and although my friends have now accepted it, they often don't understand the personality traits associated with ADHD. And acceptance is only a start. While

all teenagers, with or without disabilities, will find that being accepted by their classmates can be comforting, it is not enough. In order to grow as an individual and develop a confident self-image, you have to go and find the people who make you feel like you are meant to be with them. When you are in that environment, growth is not only possible, but inevitable.

For some people, disabilities can be an obstacle to true acceptance and communication. In my case, since a large part of my personality is spontaneous and creative, and I often rely on performance and humor, my friends at school found this a little weird. I enjoyed myself and didn't worry that they didn't find it as enjoyable as I did. Without a better outlet for my creativity, this was becoming a source of anxiety for me. When I started working in amateur theater, however, I

found a community centered on just my type of personality and friends who not only accept it, but understand and encourage it. Theater allows me to capitalize on my personality and the people who enjoy it.

I am lucky, and have found those friends I was meant to have. I've always had a love for theater, and this winter I tried out for a community production of *Minnie's Boys*, a musical comedy about the Marx brothers. I was cast as Zeppo, the youngest of the four Marx brothers. During rehearsals that went past midnight six nights a week, we developed bonds just as strong as those shared by real brothers. Sam, 31, who plays Chico, is a music teacher and is a big brother and role model for me. Jeff, 24, who



The Marx Brothers:
(From top right, clockwise)
Jeff (as Harpo), Justin (as Zeppo),
Sam (as Chico), and Jason (as Groucho).

School Violence

by Allison Sheedy, Shenendehowa High School

Violence in schools is an ever-growing problem in America. It seems every time we turn on the television we hear news of a new and even more disastrous event. The question we need to ask ourselves now is how can we prevent these tragedies. Many agree that looking at the behavior of students and trying to catch the problem before it escalates could be the solution. Schools increasingly believe that their responsibility is not only to teach academics, but also to curb violent, disruptive, and antisocial behavior. They recognize that underlying problems, such as bullying, teasing and learning disabilities, need to be addressed.

Many of these problems were present in Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the adolescent murderers from Littleton, Colorado, but were not adequately addressed before the tragedy. Dylan and Eric had been quiet, intelligent boys and respectful to their teachers throughout middle school, but as they entered high school, things began to change. Dylan and Eric began to alienate themselves and became "loners". They would play violent games and were easily agitated. For a class project, Dylan and Eric made a video featuring gunmen in long coats shooting athletes in the school hallways. They were often made fun of by the "popular" crowd. Why were these signs left unaddressed?

In a paper presented at a conference on Failure Analysis and Youth Violence in Boulder, Colorado, it is stated that, "the students most likely to own guns and bring them to school have histories of antisocial behavior involving violations of school codes of conduct and criminal laws." Violence, typically, is used to express feelings, to manipulate others, or to retaliate against others. Warning signs include:

- ◆ Inability to self-regulate emotions
- ◆ Exposure to violence/abuse
- ◆ Alienation/rebelliousness
- ◆ Peer rejection
- ◆ Substance abuse
- ◆ Academic failure/ low goals, aspirations
- ◆ Lack of effort in school

Violent youth usually feel alienated. The key to curbing this behavior is learning to recognize these signs and getting professional help for those displaying them. The earlier the intervention, the more effective it will be.

Some medical conditions have been connected with violent behavior in young people. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) has often been cited because of the poor emotional regulation that accompanies it. Depression and many learning disabilities have also been linked to violence. Although medication does help, professional counseling most effectively helps children to deal with emotions safely.

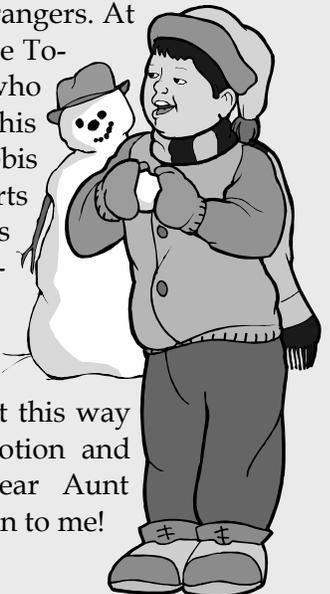
Violence is a learned behavior and can be changed. How can we change it? By working together for a solution and recognizing telltale warning signs, nurturing, safe learning environments will once again be restored to America's youth.

My Aunt Miriam

by Zvi Waldman, Yshiva & Mesivta Torah Temimah

Aunt Miriam was 24 when my cousin Eli, her third child, was born. Eli was diagnosed with Down Syndrome when he was 3 days old. Aunt Miriam opened up her heart and home to welcome him. We recently celebrated Eli's Bar Mitzvah. Eli is now one of seven children and he is the most popular in his family. He loves to sing, dance and clap and he is warm and friendly, hugging and kissing both friends and strangers. At his Bar Mitzvah, he read the Torah and addressed those who attended. He thanked his grandparents, parents, Rabbis and teachers for their efforts over the years. There was not a dry eye in the congregation.

All our lives have been touched by Eli. It may not have turned out this way if not for time, love, devotion and encouragement of my dear Aunt Miriam. She is an inspiration to me!



A Handicap Doesn't Mean You're Disabled

by Amanda

By definition, my grandfather is handicapped. However, he doesn't act as though he is, and he certainly does not want to be treated in any special way.

In fact, most of the handicapped people in society do not appreciate being treated in a way different from anyone else. They just want to be accepted as human beings.

Some people become handicapped as a result of an accident. Others are born with their disabilities. My grandfather was asleep one night on a Coast Guard cutter when another ship, a destroyer, appeared in the distance. The destroyer hit my grandfather's ship in the exact spot where he was sleeping. When he awoke, he found himself in the freezing water, watching his friends swim ashore to safety. They were



leaving my grandfather there to die. Luckily, an angel in the form of a Coast guard chef rescued him and sought out help. The next thing he knew, he was in a hospital bed without legs (from the knee-cap down) and with a broken neck.

I admire the fact that my grandfather resumed a normal life-style after being released from the hospital two years after his accident. Not only did he get married, but he raised six children.

He used artificial limbs for a number of years while holding a job at IBM. After a while, though, he ceased using them because they felt too unnatural. Now, while enjoying the "retired life," his mode of transportation is a wheelchair.

As a young child, I remember how my grandfather's disability

affected my life. I don't think that I even knew what the purpose of his wheelchair was. To me, it was just a toy, just another toy that my cousins and I could play with.

I almost always received a wheelchair ride around the house. I can't recall my grandpa ever complaining about those long wheelchair journeys down the hall to the bedrooms and the bathroom.

I am lucky for such a wonderful role model while growing up. My grandpa's perseverance and strength have influenced my life. He has taught me that no matter what a person's physical condition is, it is how he or she mentally and emotionally handles the situation that counts.

My grandfather has always had a strong sense of where he was going and what he wanted to do. He was, and still is, mentally prepared for whatever lies ahead.

My goal in life is to be that way, too.

Applying to College As a Learning Disabled Student

by Sara Pawlowski, Averill Park High School

Applying to college can be a ruthless and time consuming task - essays, life experiences, and academics are compiled into a portfolio and shipped off to a dream college (insert college's name here). The college application process is also a chance to let one's personality shine. A special talent for art or creative writing can always be expressed; colleges seek people, not just a transcript. Being different from the norm allows students to stand out in the crowd of applicants. Having a learning disability can be one of these standout characteristics. Everyone needs to find the college that is right for them. One student at Landmark College, a college specifically for learning disabled students, stated "So many people like us have fallen through the cracks." However, More than 400,000 learning disabled students are enrolled in college, and nearly all the higher education institutions surveyed by the National Education Services reported providing some form of support services or accommodations for learning disabled students. There are over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States, varying in size, scope of program offered, setting and cost. An increasing number of two and four year colleges are accepting qualified learning disabled students. When on the hunt for a perfect college match, these words of advice may help the college selection process along.

When applying to a college as a learning disabled student, be sure to have a full and frank discussion of needs and accommodations with the admissions department. What you need must match with what the college offers. Most

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colleges provide support services and/or learning centers for learning disabled students. The disclosure of a learning disability never can be used by colleges as a basis of denying admission. Colleges may not require disclosure of disabilities, however, students who decide to do so should begin the application process as early as possible in order to give the college ample time to plan for the services needed. Therefore, there is no need to hide the disability from the college.



Another source for information is the guidance department at your school. It usually has folders of information on colleges specifically geared towards people with learning disabilities and literature on the application process. Programs to look for when searching for a college are stated here, the percent score is the number of colleges that allow these accommodations at their school.

- alternative exam formats or additional time (88 percent)
- providing tutors to assist with course work (77 percent)
- making available readers, classroom note takers, or scribes (69 percent)
- workshops, information resources, and presentations (63 percent)

The SAT provides services for students with learning disabilities, the guidance department will have a bulletin in the beginning of the school year that highlights the services available for students.

Having a learning disability is no reason to dismiss a dream. The college selection process is proven less difficult when people are there to help. Seek out your guidance counselor or the internet for more tips on applying for schools with learning disabilities.

Are We Really Different?

by Satarra Alexander, Redemption Christian Academy

Do you have legs, eyes, and a mouth?
 Can you walk, see, and loudly shout?
 Do you have a nose in order to breathe?
 And do you have teeth in order to eat?
 Do you have hands and fingers to touch
 All of the things that you love so much?
 If you have all of the above are we really different?
 I can feel pain and hurt and can even have fun
 I have emotions, feelings, ideas.
 It might take me longer to process,
 but what others say I can hear
 It may take me longer to understand
 Yet I have problems just like other humans
 Are we really different?
 I sometimes can't see my way
 It's as dark as night when it has just turned day
 Sometimes I can't hear, although you are next to me
 And I might not look the way you expect I should be
 Some days I can't walk, I ride in a wheelchair
 I often wear a wig so my head is not bare.
 I go to a special person who helps heal my pains
 Everyone needs help, everyone's the same
 Are we really different?
 Do you cry when someone hurts you inside?
 And when someone praises you, don't you feel pride?
 Don't you laugh at jokes and have fun with friends?
 And don't you wish good times would never end?
 Don't you like doing things that others do?
 And don't you smile when others compliment you?
 Maybe I'm not all the same, but does it really show?
 Are we really different?
 I don't think so!



Ally's Wisdom

by Frances Ford, Bethlehem High School

I have baby-sat Ally, a little girl who has mild autism, for the past several years. She used to only speak a few words and sit still only five minutes at a time. Now she is a child who can talk up a storm and sit with me for hours while we enjoy a video. She is cute, funny, bright, and very caring.

Like the rest of us, Ally has her ups and downs. There are moments when she is confident and moments when she is feeling a bit confused. She can be serious or delightfully silly.

One thing that distinguishes Ally is the tendency to think in very concrete terms. When she was young, we often played the "What is it?" game. I choose an object; she identified it. The light switch was "light on-off," and the door-knob was "door open-close." At first I thought, "That's not what it's called." Then I realized how arbitrary our conventional labels are. Ally identified things for their purpose and function.

Even now when I talk to her on the phone and ask, "What are you doing?", she answers "I'm talking to you." I have realized that if I wanted to know what she was doing before she came to the phone, that's what I should have asked. Sometimes we think we are communicating clearly, when what we say can actually be confusing for others.

Ally helped me the most when my grandmother died. She knew that I was upset because she could see that I had been crying. When she asked me what was the matter, I told her I was sad because I missed my grandmother. She looked at me and said, "Why don't you try smiling?" At first I thought that her suggestion was foolish, but I have real-



ized the wisdom of her words. Individuals with autism have great difficulty communicating. The subtleties of language are almost always incomprehensible. Many social situations become confusing and overwhelming. There is just so much about what we do and what we say when we interact that they do not understand. However, I have learned from a very special little girl that individuals with autism have a special kind of wisdom that sheds a bright and beautiful light.

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plays Harpo, is a comedic genius who stimulates my own creativity; we bounce jokes off each other almost simultaneously. Jason, 22, who plays Groucho, has optimistic ambition, from starting his own business to producing a musical himself, that is starting to rub off on me.

These are my friends. The ones that helped me with the key struggle of adolescence: self-discovery. With them, I was able to be myself, not my disability. In a community of true peers, understanding and encouragement can transform personality traits that most see as negative and distracting, into positive and productive aspects of character. My friends in the theater have done that for me and allowed me to embrace the entirety of my personality, ADHD and all.

I am fortunate to have found two places in which I can be myself and discover myself. The first is theater, and the second is the editorial board of the New York State Disabilities Awareness Newsletter. All of my fellow contributors share a kinship of intimate experience with disabilities. We all want to help others by sharing our experience and we do that through this newsletter. I want to personally invite you to contribute to this newsletter and join the editorial board in our meetings and activities.

Good Will

by Yelena Biberman, Albany High School

Emotions of the future will embark
Upon a journey to the land of virtue

Remaining still

Our minds swim high above the oceans of the dark

As thoughts begin to grow with natural nurture

And yet

To see what things we do

Without the care of many

Is to depart to land that's new

And see ourselves between green waves

With pure and joyous envy

This poem deals with the good will that inspires people to commit their time to help others. "Emotions of the future" represent the emotional care that individuals nurture and share with those who are in need of aid and understanding. The evolution of good will is expressed in the first five lines.

Subsequently, it is satisfaction that is described in the final lines. The phrase "Without the care of many" represents actions done without promise of reward or recognition from others. Furthermore, the imagery of green waves sets the ground for the final line that describes a celebrated feeling of personal pride. The word "envy" is used to express a dramatic sentiment. It is not meant to have a negative connotation, but to make the reader think about why I chose to utilize the word. Thus the reader is inclined to find the poem's essential meaning as it pertains to the wording.

ASK US

by Frances Ford, Bethlehem High School and
Jessica Murphy, Bishop Maginn High School

My cousin has recently been diagnosed with schizophrenia. I keep asking my parents about it, but they continue to avoid my questions. What is schizophrenia? Is there a cure? Why don't my parents want to talk about it?

-Mateo.

Schizophrenia is a mental illness which causes confusion, hallucinations, and mood swings. One moment they are laughing; the next they are crying. While there is no cure for this illness, there are many medications which minimize these symptoms and enable individuals to lead a normal life. Unfortunately, many people are uncomfortable talking about mental illness. Often they do not understand its nature and causes.

I am in third grade and go to school with a girl who is autistic. Many times I notice her flapping her hands. It seems strange to me. Why does she do it?

-Claudia.

It is very common for children who are autistic to flap their hands, rock their heads, or even spin around. These movements help to calm them when they are overly excited or stressed. If you get to know your classmate and understand why she flaps her hands, it will seem less strange to you. Who knows? Perhaps you could become friends. Don't forget that we all do things other people think are strange.

Whenever I see someone in a wheelchair trying to open a door, I want to help them, but I don't want to upset them. What do I do when I see someone in a wheelchair approaching a door?

-Carol.

This is a great question. Many people are afraid of offending the disabled by



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offering assistance. Let the rules of common courtesy guide you. If you saw someone with their arms full of packages struggling to open a door, would you offer to help them? Of course you would. It is no different for someone who uses a wheelchair. If the individual is able to easily open the door, your assistance is not necessary. However, if the individual appears to be having a hard time opening the door, offer to help. Remember, offer help because someone needs it, not because someone has a disability.

I am a high school senior with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Next year I will be going to college. I am worried about all this independence. Do you have any tips for managing my school work? I am very worried that I'm going to let myself and my parents down.

-Marcus.

As you gain independence you need to stay on track. Structure is very important. Keeping a strict schedule is important, scheduling time to get work done. Lists, notes to yourself, and rituals are all great organizational tools. Also, color-coding can be very helpful, because people with ADD are usually visually oriented. Loud, bright colors will grab your attention. Break down large projects into manageable goals. Make use of deadlines. Accepting defeat and celebrating achievements are crucial. Most importantly, start using these tips as soon as possible. That way they will become routine by the time you must depend upon them.

I have always thought only blind people have canine helpers. Recently, however, I saw someone who wasn't blind with a helper dog. Do these dogs help other people as well?

-Dara.

There are, in fact, several different types of canine companions. A seeing-eye dog, the one most of us are familiar with, is a specialized form of service dog. Service dogs help the independently working physically disabled. These dogs perform everyday tasks, such as retrieving dropped items. These dogs guide their owners through life and are taught to recognize dangerous situations. They are highly disciplined and owners learn to trust them with everyday risks like crossing the street and avoiding obstacles. Some dogs aid the deaf or hard of hearing. They are trained to recognize sounds such as a telephone ring or a person calling the owner's name. These dogs distinguish the different sounds and alert the owner to each situation. Skilled companions are placed with people who benefit from the social aspects, responsibilities, or other specialized functions associated with having a dog. These dogs help to improve communication, physical activity, and quality of life. A facility dog aids a professional care give in improving the physical, emotional or developmental state of those with whom they work.



What is done to make sure that people with disabilities are treated equally under the law?

-Hobart.

In 1990, President George Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act. Known as the ADA, it has five sections. Title I deals with employment. Employers are prohibited from discrimination based on physical or mental disability. Employers must judge each person on skills necessary to do the job. Title II requires accommodations, such as interpreters, that allow the disabled to access public services. Title III deals with accommodations in private businesses. Private businesses, such as hotels, restaurants and grocery stores, must have services like accessible restrooms, wheelchair ramps, and Braille menus. In Title IV, telecommunication services for individuals with speech and hearing impairments are mandated. Miscellaneous items are covered in Title V. Thanks to the ADA, people with disabilities are granted the opportunities and services necessary to survive and thrive in American life.

Asperger's Syndrome Specialist, Dr. Tony Attwood In NY

Newsletter Editorial Board Volunteers at Conference For Parents and Professionals

by Justin Leader, Rockland Community College

Albert Einstein, Bela Bartok, Alan Turing, Bill Gates and Thomas Jefferson. Is this a list of Nobel laureates? Geniuses? People who have changed history?

Or are these people who display the symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome? Dr. Tony Attwood, the world-renowned Australian psychologist who is an expert on Asperger's Syndrome, cited them as examples of people with Asperger's during a Conference held at the Palisades Center in Rockland, New York, in October of 1999. Dr. Attwood is a practicing clinical psychologist at MacGregor Specialist Center in Australia, with twenty-five years of experience in the field of Asperger's Syndrome.

The editorial board of this Newsletter joined over 200 parents and educators at the day-long Asperger's Conference. The student editors came from as far away as Albany to assist with organizational tasks and to listen to Dr. Attwood's presentation, as well as his answers to questions from the audience. They volunteered to help with various conference logistics, room setup, registration, refreshments and cleanup.

Dr. Attwood, who has worked with Asperger's patients and lectured around the world, commented, "I have always been impressed by their patience and ingenuity in achieving abilities others acquire without a second thought."

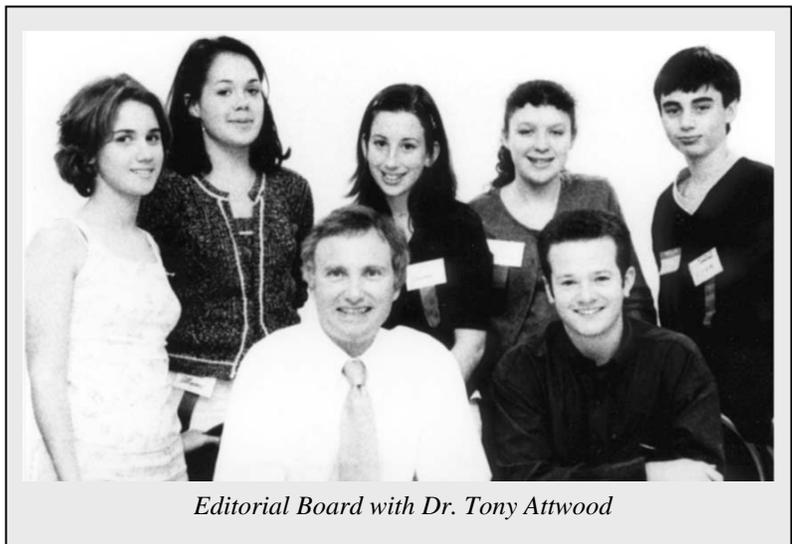
Where does the name Asperger's Syndrome come from? Over fifty years ago, a Viennese pediatrician, Hans Asperger, published the first study of youngsters, mostly boys, with a common pattern of abilities and behaviors: lack of empathy, little ability to form friendships, one-sided conversations, intense absorption in a special interest (obsession) and clumsy, repetitive movements. For nearly fifty years, Dr. Asperger's work was largely ignored. Until the 1990s, "Parents and teachers often noticed the unusual behaviors of certain children, but had no idea why they behaved as they did," writes Dr. Attwood in his book *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*.

Treatment for Asperger's involves teaching the kind of social behavior that comes naturally to most people: listening to others, looking them in the eye, and trying to understand another's point of view. Dr. Attwood believes, "Children with Asperger's Syndrome have the strong desire to have friends while recognizing their considerable difficulties with achieving and maintaining genuine friendships. Many experience ridicule, exclusion, teasing or bullying. Education programs can be used to assist them."

Education is a powerful tool. The conference provided lessons beyond Asperger's Syndrome. "The more you learn about one disability, the more you learn about the nature of all disabilities."

What is Asperger's Syndrome?

Asperger's is a developmental disorder that is a high-functioning form of autism. Dr. Attwood's patients and others with Asperger's often express above-average intelligence. Children have problems in social interaction with their peers, and frequently have obsessions with one topic - clocks, bus routes, maps, state capitals - or engage in repetitive behaviors. Often these obsessions interfere with normal functioning. Both



Editorial Board with Dr. Tony Attwood

Accessibility Awareness

by Daniel Brunina, Albany High School

At a recent Teen Leadership of Jewish Family Services meeting people with disabilities talked about their lives. I was amazed to hear about the day-to-day challenges faced by those with physical disabilities and the accommodations needed. However, what amazed me most was the great importance of education about handicap accommodations.

One school-teacher who is blind and a woman who has used a wheelchair all her life are two prominent members of the National Group for Disabled Persons, devoted to raising awareness about disabilities. They educate about all the accommodations for people with disabilities, including handicapped parking spots, handrails, and wheelchair ramps. One big concern are the people who take advantage of aids, such as handicapped parking spaces.

People without disabilities need to be educated about these accommodations. The conference focused on educating the public. Some handicapped spots have extra room next to them, marked off by thick diagonal lines. "As long as I'm not in the spot, I can take the no-parking area next to it," is an attitude that was condemned by the woman who uses a wheel-

chair. The space exists to allow someone in a wheelchair to have room to get in or out of their vehicle. If there is a car in that space, the handicapped parking spot is no longer useful.



Some walkways have handrails next to them to help those who require extra assistance. Whether it is a blind person seeking guidance or an elderly person seeking support, the rail is there for walking. Sometimes the rail is blocked, by a parked bicycle for instance, and consequently made useless. As with the parking spot, this is more likely a case of lack of education than malicious intent. People who are informed of the rail's use would be less likely to mistake it for a bike rack.

Meeting some of the people who are affected by the lack of education about accommodations made me see that there is work to be done. If more people were educated about the proper uses of accommodations, there would be fewer challenges for people with physical disabilities.

Asperger's Syndrome continued from previous page

Albert Einstein and Bill Gates dropped out of school to devote full time to their obsessions. Asperger's Syndrome occurs more frequently than classic autism: one in 300 births compared to one in one thousand. Some youngsters with Asperger's feel lonely as teenagers and experience depression as adults, because they are intelligent enough to realize their deficits, yet cannot change their behavior on their own.

Common traits include not understanding how to play with other children; unusual tone of voice; taking comments literally; fleeting eye contact; extraordinary long-term memory; inflexibility for disruption of routine; elaborate routines or rituals; poor motor coordination; odd gait when running; repetitive motions or rocking when upset or stressed; and low sensitivity to pain.

To Learn More About Asperger's Syndrome:

Asperger Syndrome Education Network: www.aspenj.org
 Yale Child Study Center: <http://info.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/>
 Online Aspergers Syndrome Info and Support: www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger
 Parent Support Network: <http://www.parentsupportnetwork.org/>

Rewards of Understanding

by Yelena Biberman, Albany High School

As a high school freshman, I met and became friends with many new people. Among the most fascinating people was Lauren.

I met Lauren in my lab class. She was outspoken and liberal. Her clothing revealed creativity; her big eyes, curiosity and strength. I was interested in learning more about Lauren, but felt shy about approaching her.

My peers made fun of Lauren's manners and actions. They considered her too strange to know and shunned her. This prejudice made me realize I was not interested in knowing people who criticize based on observation rather than experience. Still, I said nothing in her defense.

Recently, I traveled with my art class to Williamstown, Massachusetts. That was when I got to know and become friends with Lauren. She and I talked during the bus ride as she revealed to me unimaginable secrets.

Lauren told me about her lifelong battle with Depression and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). She also told me about her suicide attempts. She said, "When I was a kid, I was a dork and never good at anything social. Many times I would do or say the wrong thing. I felt rejected and lonely."

I remembered those who mocked Lauren and felt angry at them. People's cruelty can be very painful even to those who appear strong and especially to those who live with emotional and social challenges. That is why it is crucial to

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My Frustration

by Sarah Nettleton, Fairport High School

School is hard
 No one understands the frustration I feel
 No one sees my frustration
 I try hard, but my body doesn't work right
 I can't change who I am
 I can't fix my disability
 People need to understand
 I am who I am
 When will you listen and learn who I really am
 When will you see me first and not my disability
 I am very frustrated and you don't get it
 Listen to my words
 Respect my feelings
 Allow me to be who I truly am
 You might learn something about the true you
 You and I are not that different
 You need to recognize my frustration
 Without that recognition you don't know the real person I am

Depression

by Morgan Strand, Ramapo High School

The prevalence of clinical depression has remained mostly unrevealed for many years, even after the development of psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs in the 1960s. This is of particular import to teenagers, who often ignore and conceal such fundamental problems. Early intervention in the lives of those affected with depression can prevent serious lifestyle interruption. Awareness of the signs and symptoms of depression will increase chances for the identification and treatment of this disease.

Symptoms of Depression:

- ◆ social withdrawal
- ◆ persistent sadness
- ◆ hopelessness, helplessness, or guilt
- ◆ self-deprecation
- ◆ drug or alcohol abuse
- ◆ loss of interest in usual activities
- ◆ suicidal thoughts
- ◆ fatigue / lethargy
- ◆ eating or sleeping irregularities
- ◆ crying
- ◆ anxiety / panic attacks
- ◆ irritability
- ◆ attention, concentration, or memory difficulties



Without treatment, symptoms of depression can last for long periods of time. If you think a person is suffering from depression, do not tell them to "shake out of it." Treatment is necessary.

With treatment of these symptoms, teenagers can go on and continue living a regular teenage life. Without treatment, clinical depression can be very dangerous. If someone you know is suffering from the symptoms of depression, talk to a parent, teacher or counselor about the situation.

The American Psychological Association hosts an informative site about clinical depression at: www.helping.apa.org

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understand someone before judgment and not act with brutality to those who are different.

Lauren told me that art was her greatest passion. "Art is the only thing that has kept me sane because I can escape into it," she said. As an artist, I understood exactly what she meant.

Now as a senior I look back on my high school career and think about all the people that taught me about knowledge, passion, and understanding. Among them is Lauren. She taught me that refraining from prejudice and keeping an open mind can be very rewarding.

Friends Through It All

by Jessica Schubmehl, Bishop Maginn HS

Sara had always been my best friend. It didn't matter that she was different. We had fun together. Then we started middle school and our whole world was flipped upside down.

Sara and I were thrown into a larger school with more people than we had ever seen at one school at the same time. After a few fear-filled weeks, I became comfortable in my new surroundings and was doing well. I wish I could say the same for Sara. I didn't understand why she was having so much trouble. All the work we did was no harder than the things we had done in grammar school. The only real difference was how the material was presented to us, and I didn't see how that could affect her learning.

I was worried about Sara; she was getting teased a lot and always appeared so sad. She told me that she had a problem that she was working on with her guidance counselor. Sara asked if I would go with her to the guidance counselor. I went to see Mrs. Vance with Sara. Mrs. Vance told us that Sara's evaluation re-



vealed a language disorder.

Sara had an impairment in the ability to use words. Mrs. Vance said that when Sara read, she understood what the words meant.

When speaking or writing, however, her words didn't always come out the way she meant them to. That explained why Sara got the answers wrong to questions she knew.

I found out that 1 out of every 10 children in America have language disorders. These problems may mildly, moderately, or severely impair the learning process. Students with these kinds of learning disabilities may exhibit a wide range of traits, including problems with reading comprehension, spoken language and writing.

These problems are not the result of a lack of intelligence, rather they are resultant from an obstacle to communication of ideas.

After our meeting, I sat down to talk with Sara. At first she was embarrassed, but after a few minutes I got her to talk. We spoke about her disability, study solutions, and ways to help her do better in school. I of-



fered to help her in any way that I could. We started studying together. I read aloud to her and

wrote in large, dark print. During the remainder of the school year I saw an improvement. She was getting better grades, answering questions correctly in class, and making new friends. With the assistance of the Guidance Office and her friends and family, Sara made excellent progress. I was so happy for her.

It has been a few years now and Sara is a completely different person. Sara and I are still best friends, and we see each other regularly. As everyone knows, there's more to life than school, and Sara and I make sure we enjoy it! It seems like I've known her forever, and we do all the important things together, like shopping, parties and just hanging out. Sara's just a regular person who needed a little extra help. Don't we all need that now and then?

If you know someone with a disability, talk to them. Try to understand their disability. Don't be part of the problem for them, become part of the solution!

My Temporary Disability

by Matthew Cushing, Albany Academy

"Go!" I was ahead of the others after clearing the first hurdle when something distracted me. I lost my concentration and didn't see the next hurdle. At the last second I attempted to jump over it. I was going too fast and hit the hurdle. My arms got caught beneath me when I landed. I immediately knew something was wrong. I was seeing white, but pushed myself up and finished the race.

I was drifting in and out of consciousness on the way to the hospital. A nurse and some assistants put me on a stretcher, and carried me into the emergency room.

Hours later I emerged from the hospital with both arms in casts; my right, past my elbow; my left, past my wrist. I was able to perform the basic life functions, but the surgeon warned me not to use my left arm, because the bones could move.

Temporary Disability continued on next page

Living with Epilepsy

by Liam Harte, Guilderland High School

It was a cold, rainy day. I could see most of the kids at the bus stop had winter coats and hats. The clouds were particularly low in the sky. After evading the numerous puddles in the road, I reached the bus stop and walked up to a group of friends. A girl in my class spotted me and asked, "Are you going to the dance tomorrow?"

I froze. I had forgotten about the dance and now was uncertain about whether I was going or not. "Yeah, probably," I answered. She nodded and we discussed other things, but my mind never wandered away from the question she had posed. Suddenly, the bus appeared and I climbed on and took a seat in the front. I needed some time to think.

Ever since the doctors told me I had epilepsy, I have lived with an added stress. When I was younger it was not as stressful as it is now that I am in high school. I know that I have become increasingly self-conscious about it. The first seizure I ever had was in fourth grade. The doctors do not know what triggered the seizure, and I do not remember it. The students and teachers told me that I screamed and lost consciousness. Then I started jerking with muscle contractions.

Later, the doctors told me I had epilepsy, specifically the type known as grand mal. Immediately, the doctors put me on some medications to prevent the seizures. They also gave my parents a bunch of packets of information about epilepsy. When I got older, some of those packets informed me that 20-25 million people have suffered from an epileptic sei-

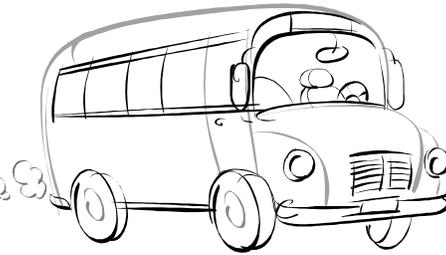
zure. Many people grow out of childhood epilepsy or they take medicine to control it. However, there is still a risk of having a seizure even if you take medication. Over the past few years, I have become increasingly aware of the chance of a seizure at any time.

The day after my seizure, I came to school and the kids were a little frightened of me. It only took a little time for them to forget, but the few days after the seizure were unbearable. The kids acted like epilepsy was contagious. Of course, I understand that a seizure is a dramatic and frightening event. I can only speculate at what the kids in high school would do if they saw me having a seizure. I naturally think the worst and can only pray that the medicine will do its job.

I know that anything can trigger an epileptic seizure, like a visual nerve impulse or an auditory nerve impulse. The dance will have lots of noise and perhaps a strobe light or something like it. I could have a seizure at any moment during the dance, if the medication doesn't work.

Suddenly, I feel the bus pull to a stop in front of my school. I soon join the line of students filing out, and suck the cold, fresh air into my lungs as I get off the bus. I realize that I have to risk it. If there is a dance that is going to be fun, I should go to it. I owe it to myself. I feel a small surge of confidence at my decision. The doors to the school swing open, and a new day begins.

*Note: This is a fictional essay.
Liam Harte hopes to raise awareness of Epilepsy.
He does not have Epilepsy.*



Temporary Disability continued from previous page

For the first few days, I could still remember the pain, and didn't move my left arm. Even though I knew better, my restraint fell to the convenience of having my left arm mobile, and I began to use it more and more.

I had to have my left arm re-broken and put into a full cast. I had to learn how to do everything over again, even eating and dressing. I learned what people with disabilities go through every day of their life. It was so frustrating that things that had been so easy had become so hard. It is amazing how people with disabilities have enough strength to propel them through such daily torment.

I learned firsthand how much strength it takes to face these challenges. Anyone who experiences that will feel only compassion and comradeship for anyone in the same position. Perhaps if we recognized our own weaknesses, we could have something in common: the struggle to be a better person.

Into Her World

by Heidi Fusco, Mohonasen High School

I threw my hands into the air, fell back on Emily's bed, and covered my stressed eyes with the palms of my hands. Suddenly Emily turned out the lights and whispered "night-night" in a small voice as the door closed.

She did it again. Just when I thought that I was the worst teacher in the world, torturing this sweet little girl with incomprehensible questions that she just wouldn't answer, she does something to show me that she does see me, she can hear me, and more importantly, she's responding to me. Sitting up, I think, "Oh Emily, I could just pick you up, hold you, and never make you work again. But you won't let me hold you. That is why we have to do this." Renewed, I was ready to start again.

Emily is a six-year-old with autism. I met her in 1996 through a baby-sitting job. This was the first time I had ever taken care of a person with a disability. Although I was a little afraid, I was excited that I would be able to do this.

Emily's autism causes her to learn more slowly than other children. She doesn't communicate or respond to the outside world as most children do. It is a rare social and emotional developmental disorder. For Emily, simple tasks, such as focusing on an object or idea, become difficult, aggravating, and sometimes impossible. This makes it very hard for Emily to play a board game with her sister because she doesn't understand about rolling dice or moving the pieces.

A year after meeting Emily, her mother offered me another job through an organization called Respite. I would work exclusively with Emily to reinforce her communication and self-motivation skills, and in turn, help to take down the communication barrier. I would accomplish this by being both her friend and teacher: playing with her while prompting her to talk and respond.

I've been doing Respite work with Emily for three years and it has been an incredible experience. Of course there were times when I would talk to her and she would just not respond the way I wanted her to. These instances of frustration are always made up for by the times when she progresses so fast and I just have to hug her.

Although I know that with her degree of autism she will never fully overcome her disabilities, it is exhilarating to see how she has improved. I have faith that someday she will be the one asking me the questions. She has learned so much and will learn so much more.

I have learned many things through the incredible experience of working with Emily, including understanding how to think of alternative ways to approach a problem, clearing up a misunderstanding, and gaining a solution. When Emily doesn't answer a question I ask, she may not understand what I am asking. If we are looking at a picture of people in a book, I know to ask, "Emily, what do you see?" Instead of "What are they doing?," because she doesn't yet understand "doing."

When I first met Emily I didn't realize the impact it would have on my life. I play only a small role in her life, because I don't see her every day and do not deal with everything her family, who are the true heroes, has to deal with. Yet her role in my life is immense, causing me to look at things very differently. Witnessing someone once labeled "helpless" suddenly "help" herself, I appreciate my whole life a little more. Those instances when this amazing little girl looks right into my eyes and smiles the most beautiful smile, reveals that life is incredible.

