

California School for the Deaf - Riverside
Special Edition Issue, Fall 2013

Deaf Teens

IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA
- THEIR STORY



Jens Rechenberg

Student interviews on Deafhood, family, communication, education, wishes, goals, and advice

Brianna

*- Re-learned ASL
two years ago*

*“Part of my life
is being Deaf.
I want to learn
about that
world.”*



Erika Thompson

Most parents eagerly anticipate hearing their child’s first words, “Mommy” and “Daddy”, and for that child to grow up hearing them speak their words of love and encouragement. Brianna, who was born profoundly deaf, has made her parents’ wishes come true through hard work, cochlear implant surgery, one-on-one tutoring, and home schooling. With persistence and parental sacrifice, Brianna can hear and talk through spoken English, and credits her parents for her success.

The first language Brianna learned was sign language, before she underwent inner ear surgery. When she was an infant, her mother did not realize her colicky baby was deaf and in

need of visual communication. Once they discovered her hearing level, they used sign language for two years, giving Brianna a large sign language vocabulary base for a toddler. At the age of three, she got a cochlear implant. Her Oral/Aural preschool teachers advised her mother to stop using sign language and to expect Brianna to focus on auditory input to learn English. With the implant, she spent her childhood in extensive training, working on her listening and speaking skills and learning to filter out background noise.

Brianna’s mother also reflects how much work it was to raise her deaf daughter: therapy and communication expectations were time-



*“When I listen,
it’s hard work,
but when I see,
it’s easy.”*

*- Brianna with
her only deaf
classmate*

consuming and emotionally draining. It involved particularly a lot of driving, to and from various therapists all over southern California, with multiple appointments within the week every week for many years. The hardest part, her mother said, was the switch from sign language to a limited spoken English communication. “I would pick her up from school and she would beg through sign for food, and I was not allowed to respond to her signed requests. I had to wait until she asked through speech. It was absolutely the hardest, most heart-wrenching thing I have ever done!” Brianna had eventually learned to focus on speech and listening, working with her speech teacher of seven years who was always her constant guide. A little sign language was still advantageous during bath time, bedtime, or when Brianna was out at the beach, times she could not wear her hearing device.

Brianna is completely deaf if not wearing her cochlear implant device. With her implant, she can hear English “within the speech banana on the audiogram” while in a quiet environment which is free of distraction. She is limited to two others in a group conversation in order to hear them. She hears over the phone, but with a lot of hard work and struggle. At restaurants where it is noisy, she feels left out as she smiles at her dining companions without understanding the conversations. In the classroom, hearing through her cochlear implant device alone is a problem in the midst of so many noisy hearing peers and

teachers.

Brianna took classes without an interpreter at a school where teachers used spoken English only. When Brianna was in the lower elementary grades, she was still too young to understand that she was different. In spite of all the auditory amplification and training, Brianna felt that she learned mostly from looking around, using her eyes. For years, she could not understand her teachers through hearing alone. What truly helped her all these years was the tremendous support she got from her friends from church. They shared their class notes and even the questions and answers with her, and helped her with her feelings. For her education, she relied on work outside the class, especially with the increasingly advanced content in high school. Too much stimulation occurred in the classroom; the information was too much to take in, as Brianna tried to figure out what the teacher was saying or who in class was talking. Brianna understood none of the movies, unless they came with captioning or subtitles. She would have been able to handle any information if it had been visible. Lastly, Brianna did not know enough sign language to be able to use an interpreter. As she has never had this service up to this point in her education, it would be a huge undertaking for her family now to assert her rights for an interpreter.

Before Brianna went into the third grade, her family had been concerned about her possibly

becoming lost within the increased class size and increased auditory distractions. Therefore, they decided on home schooling and one-on-one tutoring. This was helpful because Brianna could focus on the tutor's spoken words in a quiet, low-key setting. Also helpful was Brianna's intentional placement with a deaf boy, Kaiden, who had the same kind of hearing and experiences that Brianna had. They took the same classes and tutoring together through a Christian home-schooling system, with partial mainstreaming for one or two classes through Biola Star Academics. Without this deaf peer alongside her, Brianna would not have been who she is today, she admits. The one class she took in a large classroom setting was still difficult for her, because the information was not visually accessible. "I am a visual person," Brianna said. She gradually reached a passing grade due to all the one-on-one tutoring.

As an extracurricular activity, Brianna has been involved in ballet since she was three years old. She hears the vibrations, but not the music melody or the lyrics. She admits dance class was frustrating because she could not hear or lipread her teacher while they were in motion. They were not very patient with her. This ballerina has learned to overcome, however, and is now dancing at her church, gifting others with the gift of her natural talent.

Brianna is relatively satisfied with her early upbringing, but she yearns for something more. She is in close communication with her family and her few friends from home school and church. She has grown into a polite and sweet teenager, with hearing and speaking skills, but she feels alone and isolated. This strikingly beautiful, yet hesitant and shy teenager wants to explore her Deaf identity. "Part of my life is being Deaf. I want to learn about that world." She is curious and growingly fascinated with the language she first learned as a baby, and the natural language of Deaf people. She is now learning ASL in her second year of study, along



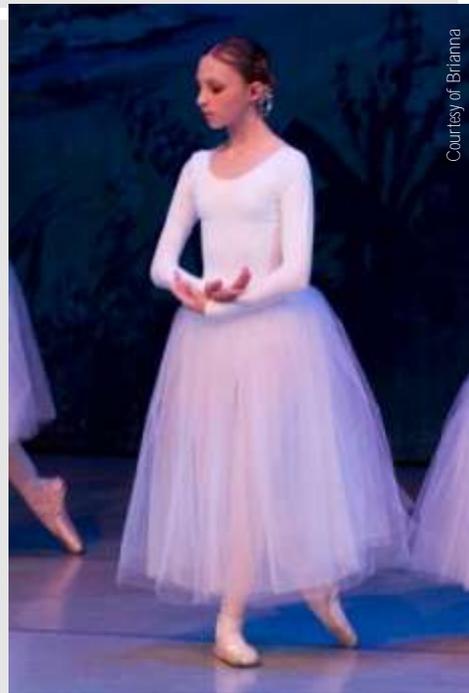
“Brianna’s writing and her word order have improved a lot this year, after she started learning ASL.” - Mom

with her deaf peer, Kaiden. Their parents hired a hearing expert with a credential and teaching experience in the Deaf Education field, including at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. Stacey Winsberg had immersed herself into the “Deaf world” with best friends who have also grown up orally. They now communicate through ASL and spoken English. Stacey was taking some years off as a stay-at-home mother. She agreed to teach these two deaf students ASL in a classroom setting with hearing peers for their World Language course requirement, only because she felt she was meant to reach out to them. On the first day of ASL class, Ms. Winsberg told Brianna and Kaiden in front of the entire class, “I am humbly honored to teach you your native language”. Upon hearing this, Brianna’s eyes brimmed with tears, as she felt emotionally empowered and ready to make connections to her own identity.

Brianna is happy with the progress she has made. “I could finally understand 100% of the conversation after I learned sign language!” Brianna exclaimed. The conversation through spoken English had always been too fast for her to follow, but she is now becoming increasingly comfortable talking through sign language. “When I listen, it’s hard work, but when I see, it’s easy,” Brianna explained. She and her ASL teacher have developed a close relationship over the last two years of ASL class and tutoring at her house, and Brianna is thriving. At Ms. Winsberg’s house Brianna’s mother reflected, “Brianna’s writing and her word order have improved a lot this year, after she started learning ASL.” Brianna admits that if she were communicating with somebody who knew both English and sign language, she would be more comfortable conversing in sign language, as she does with Stacey. That signed conversation is a normal, pleasurable, and free interaction for Brianna, without mental stress. Because of her struggles in the regular classroom with the



Courtesy of Brianna



Courtesy of Brianna



Courtesy of Brianna

Mom wants to love and protect her daughter as she always has, but also let her fly away to develop her own identity.

non-visual information overload, Ms. Winsberg who is now her personal advocate suggested using an interpreter. Brianna is still considering it. Among its advantages, she could benefit from an interpreter's gist of the auditory messages occurring in the classroom. For example, if told about a question from a student in the back of the room, out of her vision, she could be saved the embarrassment of asking the same question again moments later.

Brianna's mother is now also learning ASL along with her daughter, wanting to improve her skills and be prepared for the fact that ASL might be a bigger part of Brianna's life someday. Most

Deaf people join the community at some point in their lives. Should Brianna choose this language, or have friends who communicate through ASL, she wants to be a part of their lives. Like many parents, her mother is at the point where she wants to love and protect her daughter as she always has, but also let her fly away to develop her own identity.

**native language= deaf people's 2nd or 3rd learned language may eventually become their native tongue when ASL is the best fit for them*

Alexa

Erika Thompson & Laurie Lewis



Two Sounds, One Love

Alexa became deaf as a baby. When they discovered Alexa's hearing level, her parents took sign language classes so they could communicate effectively with their child.

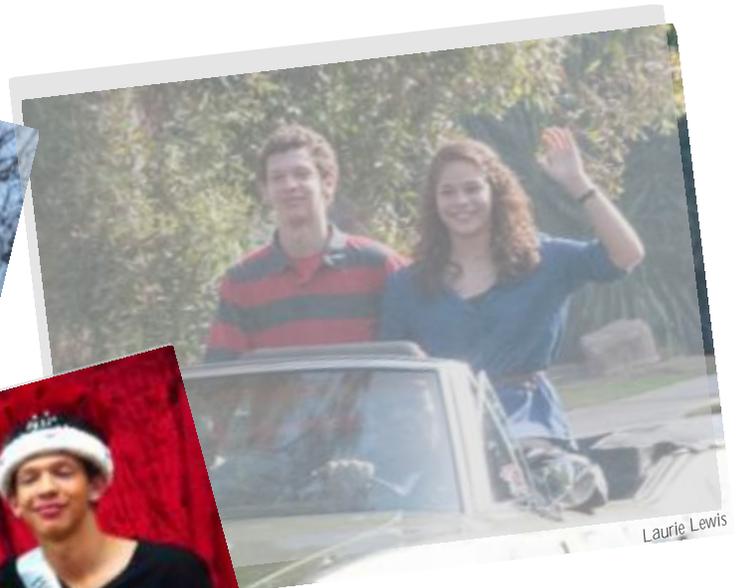


Alexa eventually learned to speak and use sign language simultaneously when talking to her family, who did the same with her. For some years during her childhood, Alexa was enrolled in a speech class at the University of Redlands. Her mother, through experience in this program, decided to become a speech therapist. Alexa is most comfortable using both sign and speech with her family and other hearing people. She is also at ease signing only with her deaf peers and deaf adults.

Alexa has worn hearing aids from around age three to age 12. When she became a student at CSDR in the sixth grade, she wanted to fit in, and chose to stop wearing her aids for a few years. However, she missed listening to music and signing out the lyrics that she heard well with her hearing aids. She donned her aids again last year after having gradually become more confident in herself, and less worried about what others thought. Her grandmother had wanted a cochlear implant for her, but Alexa felt it was too imposing. With the residual hearing she still had, she believes the operation would have been pointless. "I do not want something stuck in my head forever," Alexa confesses. She became

"I could easily communicate with everyone and I bonded instantly with my deaf friends."





so tired of the constant inquiries about getting the implant that she now flatly says “No”. Hearing aids are sufficient to meet her needs.

From age three to the 5th grade, Alexa learned in a small deaf program in a self-contained classroom at a public school. Because she was still physically tiny by the end of fifth grade, she repeated that grade to stay in Elementary school. During that repeated year, she tried for the first time to mainstream into a hearing classroom with an interpreter. She got along well with the teacher and students, who helped her during the days the interpreter was absent. The teacher, who fortunately was familiar with the Deaf community, was also very helpful to Alexa in the public classroom.

Alexa first found out about CSDR through the annual Silent Sleigh parade that the school hosts, where she met a Deaf Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus. Upon originally learning of the “deaf school”, she had thought it was a college for deaf students, and could not wait to attend the school. At that time, she realized the school served younger students, including middle and high school students, and she immediately requested to enroll there.

Alexa feels that the best part about being at a school for the deaf is the ease of communication

with everyone, and she has instantly bonded with her deaf friends. This kind of access is what she wants to keep during her college years at Gallaudet University, where she now attends as a freshman.

At CSDR, Alexa took advanced courses with her deaf peers. She communicated directly with teachers and other students in ASL, written English, and spoken English when applicable. She was also involved in many school activities. Alexa served on the Associated Student Body Government as Treasurer, handling membership dues, reports, membership drives, monthly student government news, and fundraising. She played on the Girls Softball team, which won the national title last year among all schools for the deaf. Two years in a row, CSDR and other deaf schools across the nation recognized Alexa as “Best Actress” in the school’s student-produced movie as part of the annual Movie Night competition*.

During the past school year, the high school student body elected Alexa as their Homecoming Queen, and she rode in the Silent Sleigh parade. Who would have thought that Alexa, who first saw CSDR at this parade as a little girl, would in her final year at CSDR be reigning over the parade as its queen?

**To purchase a DVD of the movie “Two Sounds One Love” in which Alexa starred, contact TV/Film Production teacher at ylee@cldr-cde.ca.gov.*

Garrett



- He did not receive services because previous professionals determined he was “hearing enough” to not qualify for assistance.

signs only with his mother and tries to decipher what his friends and relatives say through lip-reading. Otherwise, for most of his life, Garrett relies on his listening ability to communicate with hearing people. When people speak fast or converse in noisy areas, he is unable to follow the conversation. He is comfortable with using both spoken English and American Sign Language, switching back and forth as

needed.

Throughout his school years, Garrett attended public schools, including one semester at a public high school. During those years he did not receive any services because previous professionals determined he was “hearing enough” to not qualify for assistance. He did not have a sign language interpreter and had to rely solely on lipreading for pieces of information, teacher notes, and extensive studying. This was challenging, especially in classes like Biology. He had to wait until after class to approach the teacher to ask for lecture notes because he missed some information during class. His hard work outside of class did pay off with good class grades.

Garrett transferred to University High School in Irvine, the high school site of the Orange County Department of Education Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program. This program enrolls about 125 deaf and hard-of-hearing students who have the option of taking classes with teachers who use sign language, or classes with general education teachers and a sign language interpreter. Interacting with the critical mass of deaf peers on campus, Garrett

Garrett was born deaf to hearing parents. He wears a hearing aid in his left ear, and has had a cochlear implant behind his right ear since he was ten years old. His mother learned a little ASL while he was young, but for the most part, his parents use spoken English with him. He also speaks clearly and fluently using his voice. If he is swimming with his hearing family, he cannot wear his hearing devices. At those times, he

NATIONAL EXEMPLARY SCHOOL

*"I wish I had
this extra
support
the whole
time."*



Erika Thompson

quickly picked up more sign language. For the first time, Garrett had access to an ASL interpreter in the classroom, watching both the teacher and then the interpreter when he missed certain information or needed clarification. "I wish I had this extra support the whole time (starting from Kindergarten)", he admits.

Garrett continues to do well in school, getting much more out of his education at this program setting. He is not involved in extracurricular activities and wishes for such a club that focuses on Art, his primary interest. However, he enjoys his Advanced Art class. He wants to attend a four-year college to study Digital Art, hopefully at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the top college on his list. RIT houses the National Technical Institute for the Deaf that encompasses one thousand three hundred deaf and hard of hearing students on a campus of fifteen thousand hearing students.

Garrett credits his success and happiness to his parents and stepparents who have been

supportive of him, and to ASL for extra clarification, and to his social interactions and friendships. Most of his friends are deaf peers with whom he is the most comfortable.

At his former school where he was the only deaf student, Garrett had no friends, in spite of having clear speech and lipreading abilities. He was isolated. "Professionals have not understood that having deaf students around, communication-like deaf peers with whom he could interact, was important for his social-emotional environment and growth", explained principal Jon Levy of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program. Now Garrett likes mingling among hearing peers and interacting closely with his deaf friends during class breaks and lunchtime. He feels accepted here. He also attends school dances and football games, enjoying the high school scene, which is new to him. Garrett's mother is thrilled for him.

"Upon arrival (at these events), my son eagerly took off to see his friends . . . That had never happened before."



Karina

- Daughter of an oral deaf father who later learned ASL

“My dad remembers always trying to figure out everything, feeling left out, and he did not want the same for me.”

Courtesy of Karina

classes and excels in the school-wide Math Olympiad that CSDR hosts every spring. She is also active in the Jr. National Association of the Deaf as vice president, and just attended the Youth Leadership Camp

for deaf students last summer.

Karina was born deaf to a deaf father who himself was raised in an oral program and later used ASL as an adult. Her mother is not in the picture and her father has raised Karina since an early age. She first enrolled at Tripod in Burbank, a deaf program from Kindergarten through first grade. “It served as my foundation for ASL, which would not have happened if I were in a hearing program at first,” Karina explained. Until the 9th grade she was always mainstreamed. At the elementary level she had hearing friends, which was possible because the school was small.

Karina has attended and excelled in almost every type of school setting for the Deaf: a small deaf program, full-time mainstreaming, and a school for the Deaf. Karina did well academically as a freshman at a large public high school, using a sign language interpreter. She transferred to the California School for the Deaf in Riverside for the rest of her high school years to pursue personal, academic, and social growth. At CSDR Karina competed on the national Deaf Academic Bowl and was selected as an all-star player in the Western Regional. In school sports she participates in volleyball, softball, cheerleading, and wrestling. She is enrolled in Honors and AP

There she was popular among her peers and happy for a while. Other students were motivated to learn sign language and communicate with her. However, she was sometimes left out during interactions that involved more than two people. Overall, her experience was wonderful, but fleeting.

When she entered middle school, the student population was larger, which made interaction tough for her. Some friends entered into cliques. "I felt alone. Students had to work harder with gestures to communicate with me. Most students did not bother to learn sign language," Karina shared. She had friends who could fingerspell well enough to communicate, but they did not sign fluently. "I was somewhat happy, but still felt left out, especially at times when others joined in the group with my friends. These friends would interact through voice only and I could not be a part of it."

Karina mostly signed with her family members. Her deaf parents were the only deaf members of their families, thus Karina had hearing grandparents. Her grandmother in particular was supportive, patient, and never got frustrated with her. She was able to deal with her temper, which is typical among deaf children if communication is a struggle. "When I was young, I felt nobody understood me (who had rapid and urgent vocal expressions). I would throw tantrums, but Grandma rarely got mad at me." Her grandparents worked hard in learning sign language for their granddaughter. Even though their son (Karina's father) was deaf, he was oral enough to communicate through speech only. Now with Karina, the parents finally learned ASL a generation later. It was worthwhile for Karina's grandmother because she and Karina developed a close relationship for a good, precious while, before she passed away with cancer when Karina

was in the fourth grade.

"I really miss Grandma; she was the one who taught me to talk." Karina described how they would pretend to talk to each other on the phone. Once, she went to a friend's house across the street and phoned her Grandma to say hello. She heard her Grandma's response, 'Hello, Karina', with her hearing aids. "I was so thrilled that I ran back home to hug Grandma!" Karina also went to a speech program in Los Angeles County. The director advised her to wear her hearing aids for speech therapy, but she disliked the prolonged use of her aids, and stopped using speech. "I hated my hearing aids. They did not feel natural and were in fact very annoying. I have long accepted that I am who I am. The hearing aids did not help. I learned to rely on my eyes."



After experiencing limited access to communication in the public classroom, Karina eventually got fed up with mainstreaming, wanting full access at a school for the Deaf. When her family first requested a transfer to CSDR, her school district resisted even after many meetings throughout the summer and early Fall. "I was upset that it had been so hard for me,"

Karina protested. The battle had deeply affected her because she did not win the transfer until two months after the school year had begun. She came as a freshman, and found that students had already bonded with each other for the beginning of their high school experience. Having missed the deadlines for tryouts and applications, she also was not able to participate in any organizations that year, such as volleyball, the formation of the school song troupe, and Associated Student Body Government. The academic demand was pressing, too. "I was behind in homework for that quarter, having to catch up a whole lot," Karina explained in frustration.



“I would like to travel and establish schools for deaf children world-wide, so they can get equal opportunities as I did.”

Courtesy of Karina

Starting as a new student mid-semester at CSDR was awkward at first for Karina who, like many newcomers, required time to adjust. She was used to the hearing school system, so she experienced culture shock at this new school for deaf students. The class size was smaller for one thing. However, she held steadfast to why she wanted to come here in the first place: she could finally be herself with direct communication.

In a flamingly rapid string of statements, Karina emphasized, “I am naturally a very straightforward person. I can be blunt and I hate to be restricted to the interpreter for sending my verbal expressions. Sometimes I like to speak up to the teacher directly, but the interpreter would screen out or modify my words or tone, so I could not really be

Karina expresses herself easily and rapidly, with a sharp mind, always thinking quickly.

Karina’s cognitive growth is likely due to reading in ASL at such an early age.

myself. Here, at CSDR, I can finally start a life where I could communicate with everybody.” At school, Karina has many close friends, including a best friend who is deaf and very similar to her in personality and life goals. She is still taking time to acclimate to the variety of different personalities on campus. She no longer needs to befriend just a few deaf friends, but has a whole range of options in friendships. After a few months, Karina felt that she could fit in and she believes that it definitely is a lot easier to do that at the school for the deaf, as compared to at a public school.

Karina thanks her dad for his support, for always asking her questions, and for fighting so hard to help her enroll at this school. “My dad remembers always trying

to figure out everything, feeling left out, and he did not want the same for me.” Karina’s father described, through a personal interview, how Karina expresses herself easily and rapidly, with a sharp mind, always thinking quickly. “She is definitely not like me.” The father remembers how he used to read to his daughter every night during bedtime, signing aloud all the stories. At age five, Karina insisted upon reading the books herself. The father credits Karina’s cognitive growth to reading in ASL at such an early age. The father added that Karina has had a difficult route in her life, not being with her mother and losing her grandmother and uncle. But through this all, she still does her very best. “If not for my dad, I would have been alone,” Karina said.

“Here at CSDR, I can finally start a life where I could communicate with everybody.”

Karina has several ideas about what she wants to do after graduation. She enjoys English and looks up to her CSDR high school AP English teacher, Gloria Daniels, who is hearing with deaf parents. Ms. Daniels knows how to handle such an intelligent and articulate student, and to teach to her highest potential. Among Karina’s dreams are to attend Gallaudet University for her four-year college experience, and to study for her master’s degree elsewhere with specialization in English and Special Education.

Karina concluded, “I want to travel and establish schools for deaf children world-wide, so they can get equal opportunities as I did.”



Courtesy of Karina

(Above) Karina triumphant at the summer Youth Leadership Camp in Silver Falls where she hiked all the way up with other deaf students from across the country



Erika Thompson

Clarisia

- Speaks three languages:
Spanish, English, and ASL

FAMILY AND LANGUAGE

Clarisia is trilingual – fluent in Spanish, English, and American Sign Language. She grew up oral in Sylmar, California, the seventh child of nine children and first in her family born in the United States. Her entire family communicates in Spanish, while some of the children also speak English. Three of them were born deaf: The oldest only speaks Spanish as a native Mexican. Clarisia and her older sister are the only two later blessed with fluency in a third language, American Sign Language. They later in their childhood communicated with each other in ASL or in voiced Spanish with ASL on the hands simultaneously. Some of the hearing siblings learned ASL later to communicate better with the Deaf sisters. Clarisia learned her three languages in this order: Spanish, English, and ASL. She could hear a lot with her hearing aids, hearing her first language spoken by her parents and hearing siblings. She learned English at three years of age, and remembers finding this language tough and unclear. She eventually got the hang of English because of school. She unfortunately had no chance to improve her Spanish syntax. She had only used it informally at home. In a Spanish course at CSUN, with the support of a trilingual ASL interpreter in the classroom, she is learning formal Spanish to strengthen her first language. Now, as an adult with hearing aids that still work well for her, she is most comfortable in these languages in this reversed order: ASL, English, and Spanish. Clarisia uses ASL with natural ease, reads and writes in English, and if she speaks with other signers who also know Spanish, she likes using ASL with spoken Spanish. Overall, Clarisia prefers to sign. “Sometimes, I would

“I struggled to pay attention. I focused too much on listening to the words, and not to the whole message.”

Erika Thompson

rebel and take out my hearing aids. English makes me feel restrained, while ASL helps me express exactly what I want, and get right to the point.”

SCHOOL

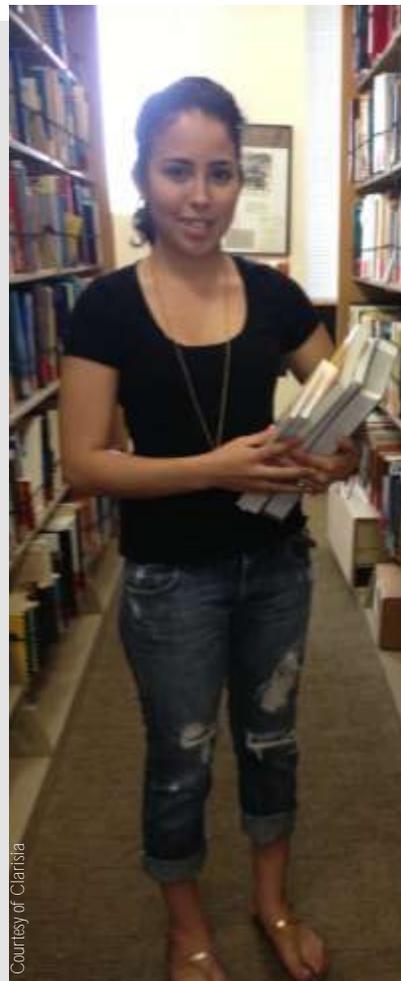
While her older deaf sister attended a deaf program in San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, Clarisia was mainstreamed, accustomed to that environment and preferring to stay close to home. She had used a special hearing aid with amplifier to help block out background noise, intended for her to focus on sounds from her teacher. She admits she had struggled to pay attention. She focused too much on listening to the words and not to the overall message. She started using an interpreter as a teenager at Granada Hills High School and began learning ASL. Finally, she no longer felt behind in her classes and could participate with the others. Moreover, she understood the best in the mainstreamed class that had a deaf teacher. He taught the students directly using ASL and written English. Clarissa wishes now she had attended a school for the deaf.

IDENTITY

Clarisia treasures both her Hispanic heritage and her Deaf culture, although she wishes she had found Deaf culture earlier in life. Clarisia had always been searching for her Deaf identity, emphasizing that we all have a need for it. “I had been acting like someone I was not,” and only recently have finally been able to fit in “with my people. I am not hearing; I am different,” Clarisia asserted. She advises that a deaf child needs to be comfortable to accept who he or she is. She felt that she would have been accepted and understood more if she was already rooted with a solid identity. As for her Hispanic culture, she suggests that educators make more effort to reach out to Latino parents of deaf children. She believes many of these families possibly feel intimidated in the American society and with the Deaf community. “My parents didn’t have the resources, feeling overwhelmed and intimidated because they did not speak English,” Clarisia explained. She wishes her parents had been empowered to teach her more about her Deaf identity, rather than just “letting the school take care of it.”

COLLEGE

Clarisia enjoys her college life at California State University, Northridge. She works in the National Deaf Archives Library at NCOD three times a week in between her classes. The library houses a vast



*At the
National
Deaf Archives
Library
(CSUN),
Clarisia builds
the Deaf
identity she
has sought
for so long.*

collection of publications and media on Deaf history, culture, art, folklore, famous people, schools, academic theories of Deafhood, Deaf sub-cultures including Deaf of Color and Diversity. The contents timeline include Deaf people from the time of Aristotle, through the seventeenth century when Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Deaf Frenchman Laurent Clerc first brought Deaf education to America, to the current “Deaf World” events across the globe. Clarisia immerses herself in these rich Deaf culture materials, now building her Deaf identity. At CSUN, she is also involved in the Deaf sorority and serves on several committees. They include organizing for the Mr. and Miss Deaf CSUN biennial pageant and for the annual spring banquet of CSUN’s National Center on Deafness (NCOD). She invites its deaf and hard-of-hearing students, Deaf Studies majors, most of whom are hearing students, and friends in the community. She has great opportunities there. “If it wasn’t for the Deaf community, I would not have been as involved, and I would have felt alone,” Clarissa reflects. With her major in Sociology and Criminology, Clarissa aims to work in the field of rehabilitation for Deaf and Latino juveniles, to help steer lost teenagers onto the right path.

Tyler Berdy

Tyler turns the car radio up, blasting rock music on his way to meet his teammates for golf practice. He is confident that his team will win the next match, as their current league record is 14-0, undefeated. Afterwards at home, he does his homework for pre-calculus with country music playing in the background to help him focus. His mother, an executive assistant for a film production, is home and prepares him dinner. He hears her calling him, and they chat with ease about how his day went. His father will soon return home from his engineering firm in Orange County where he manages the firm's Auto-CAD department, a microcomputer design software program. It is only the three of them at home, as Tyler approaches his last year of high school. His older brother works as an actor in L.A. The Berdy family appears to be the typical American family, with one exception. Everybody is Deaf. They communicate using American Sign Language with one another, using written and spoken English as needed with hearing people.



Erika Thompson & Wes Rinella

- Tyler (bottom right) in the film



“I can speak and lipread, but if I’m in a group of hearing people, or the information is important, I expect to have an interpreter.”

When Tyler was a child, he starred in “The Legend of Mountain Man” by Mark Wood’s ASL Films, acting along with his family. He played an adorable little boy who first saw ‘Bigfoot’, and was the only character who personally interacted with it. In a twisted turn of events, ‘Bigfoot’ carries the boy’s unconscious body across the mountain. Throughout their journey, the boy and the monster develop a heartwarming,

playful banter and understanding with each other, which finally help his family accept the existence and good intentions of the creature at the end. Looking back to this movie production, Tyler feels honored to have worked with such Deaf acting legends as Howie Seago, Freda Norman, film director Mark Wood, and the late De’VIA artist, Chuck Baird.

HEARING / LANGUAGE

Tyler was born profoundly deaf. He has worn his hearing aids since he was six months old. He can hear people signaling him. When he lipreads without aids, he finds it requires too much effort. His hearing aids help him match the sounds to the lips he watches. He hears the lyrics in songs that, as a lover of music, he craves every day. Tyler calls music his therapy, and adds, “I’m still thinking about last night’s production of ‘Grease.’ I truly enjoyed such an amazing show and the great music!” Tyler uses spoken English for casual conversations. He is not fond of writing back and forth, especially if he is able to speak and lipread well. His good oral skills are due to his Deaf parents’ insistence on private speech therapy that began before his first birthday, starting out as simple babbling exercises. Therapy continued at school in two brief sessions a week on campus as requested by his parents at his annual IEP meetings. Tyler was at first reluctant about taking up speech, but now is thankful to his mom for preparing him for “the hearing world”. His mother explained that she

gave them opportunities to talk and practice in playful, relaxed settings. “If I saw that the child did not do well, I would not force speech upon him. It just turned out that my boys took to it well when learning speech,” Tyler’s mother said. Tyler recalls that it helped to see his Deaf father using his voice and lipreading with the other engineers, on the occasional days he took the boys to his workplace. “I watched how Dad talked with hundreds of employees. That stuck with me as I realized the importance of speech with others.” Tyler chose to stop speech therapy during his early teen years, because he had acquired enough skills for his daily use. If he ever needs further reinforcement or should his skills ever decline someday, he would not mind resuming sessions as needed. However, if instruction or conversation ever occurs in a whole group of hearing people, or if the information is vital, as for academics, Tyler expects to have an ASL interpreter.

SCHOOL

From age three to the fourth grade, Tyler attended the California School for the Deaf in Riverside, where he learned through sign language and written English. He had full access to academic information and social interactions with peers while he continued his twice-weekly speech sessions.

Tyler was doing well, so the family experimented the next year with his attendance in the mornings at a local public elementary school a few blocks away. Later in the day he attended the school for the Deaf where he could play after-school sports as a student. Though Tyler’s family was deaf, exposure to hearing peers and the spoken English environment was not new to him because his parents created intentional opportunities for interaction in the hearing world. For instance, his father had always expected Tyler to order food for himself at restaurants.

Tyler was, nevertheless, new to the large class size, the many hearing friends, and being so close to home. This transitional experience helped Tyler make his own decision to attend the local public school full-time the following year as a sixth grader. After solid development in his native language of ASL, Tyler’s

After solid development in his ASL, Tyler’s English took off as his second, equally fluent language.

English grammar and writing became his second, but equally fluent language in his public English classroom, where he also had access to a full-time ASL interpreter.

During his late middle school and early high school years, Tyler and his brother moved to Indiana where he once again attended the state's school for the Deaf. He has fond memories of his school years there with his Deaf and his hearing friends who had Deaf parents, many of whom were equally fluent in ASL and English. Tyler served in a variety of extracurricular functions as Treasurer for his student class and as chair for fundraisers and organizations where he developed life-long leadership skills.

For his junior year of high school, Tyler moved back to California where his brother began working in L.A. Tyler attended a public high school that had a

good golf program, where he met up with some of the same classmates whom he had known from elementary school. Tyler had been happily consumed with golf, playing on the high school golf team. During golf instruction, Tyler used his voice and lipreading skills in one-on-one conversations. This fall semester, Tyler has recently begun training in the afternoons with the prestigious Hank Haney International Junior Golf Academy. He continues his studies in the mornings as a transfer student at the Heritage Academy. To help pay for golf tuition, the Deaf community rallied together at several game fundraiser events in northern and southern California to support Tyler's dream.

After experiencing both education settings at mainstreaming and deaf schools, Tyler has grown into a well-balanced, competent bilingual young man with ASL verbal skills, spoken English functionality for casual and social settings, and written English skills for academics.

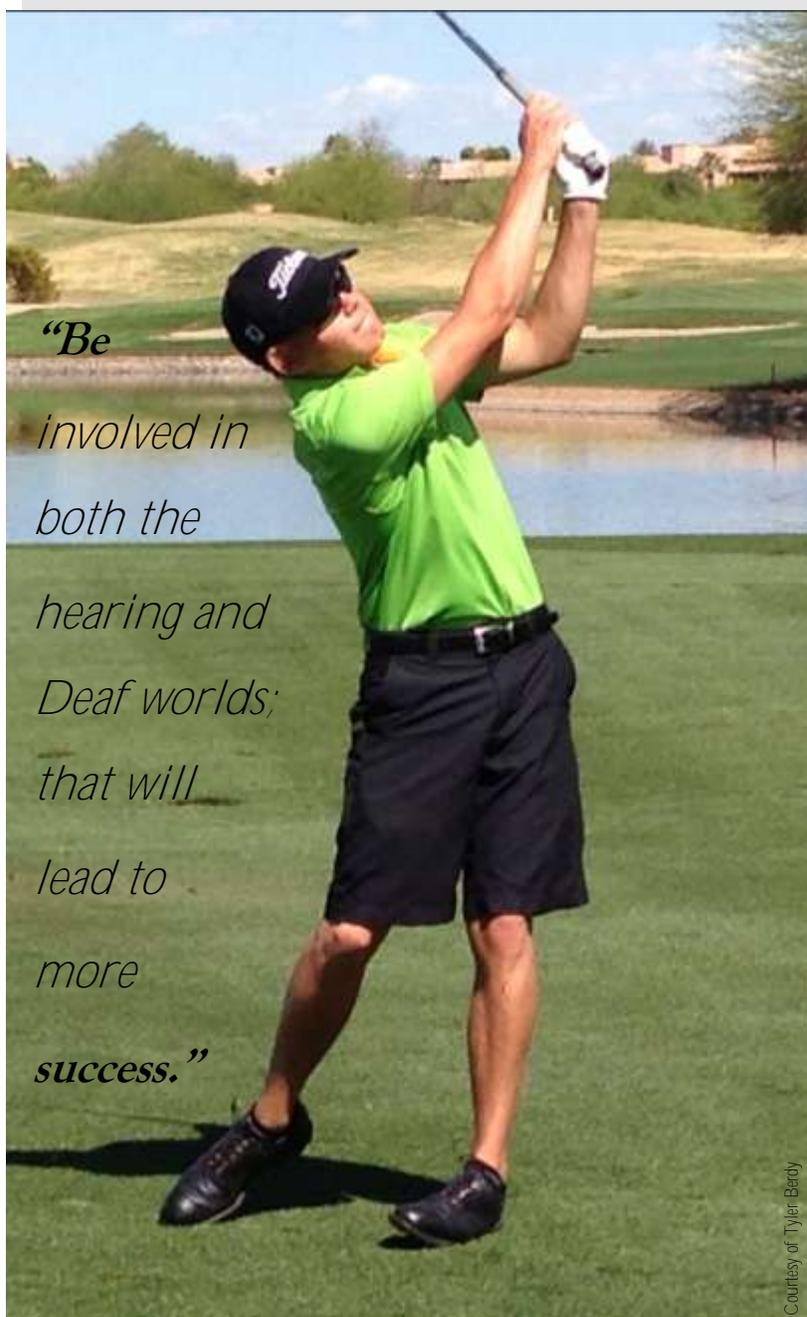
GOALS

Tyler wants to be an engineer like his father, in the biomedical field. He has enjoyed his biology and earth space science courses. He became fascinated with surgery and technology, after meeting a deaf biomedical engineer who commuted daily on the train with his father. He is interested in coming up with more efficient technology to alleviate the trauma and risks of surgery. Tyler has his heart set on attending Arizona State University for its golf program, services for deaf students, and strong focus on the science and technology major, including an Engineering student housing unit with specialized tutoring. "Research lists Biomedical Engineering as the second best job on earth," says the eager, future Dr. Berdy.

ADVICE

Tyler advises other deaf children to be involved in both the hearing and Deaf worlds; "That will lead to more success. They will have better job opportunities and know how to deal with hearing people and deaf people. If I never had the experience with both hearing and Deaf people, I never could have thought of pursuing my dream in biomedical engineering." His mother added that she made an effort to make sure they did well in school. When asked if Tyler had any wishful thoughts about his childhood, he grinned, "I wish I had played golf when I was younger, so I could be an even better player."

"Be involved in both the hearing and Deaf worlds; that will lead to more success."



Dakota

Dakota is a happy deaf thirteen-year-old girl who tests above grade level in everything, takes honor courses, and enjoys her art studies in theatre, drawing, and circus performing.

BILINGUALISM

Dakota's parents dreamed of having a bilingual child. During her mother's pregnancy, they as residents of southern California debated whether to teach their daughter Spanish or German. German, the language her mother and grandmother spoke fluently in addition to English, won over as the language spoken to Dakota for the first months of her life. Dakota ironically never heard any of it, as her parents eventually discovered she was deaf. Her surprised mother realized, "She's not a German baby... she's a signing baby!" Dakota grew up as a happy bilingual, and reaped the rewards of knowing more than one language - English and ASL. This cognitive advantage has helped Dakota succeed in her Honors English class and get high-test scores at her public school in San Diego.

In the father's view as an engineer at the time he learned of Dakota's hearing level, important decisions on how to raise a deaf daughter must come with a safety net, a contingency. "Don't put all your eggs in one basket," the father clarifies. "Dakota's vision was 20/20 but her hearing is definitely not "20/20", so of course she must utilize the access she has most, visual access."

FAMILY AND COMMUNICATION

Dakota's family use both ASL and English. This includes her older brother (age 16) who signs fairly well. Her parents also express themselves through ASL with her. With them, she sometimes uses simultaneous communication (ASL and voice), as she does with those who know some sign language but not fluently. Her mother, a math teacher, is almost done with her certificate courses in becoming a



- Daughter of active hearing parents

Erika Thompson

full time ASL teacher. The mother found teaching ASL so much more fun than math, and looks forward to this career transition. Dakota is pleased with her mother's progress in ASL. She notes how her mother shows advancing, varied sign vocabulary choices as they converse with each other. Dakota, who is at ease using either speech or sign

language, admits she enjoys using ASL the most. "Through ASL, you can express yourself more," Dakota points out, although she is happy that she can also talk.

The Ronco family has stayed in touch with the Deaf community. They attended family summer camps through the American Society for Deaf Children since Dakota was three years old. This has become a biennial family tradition to attend this camp together with other deaf children and their families. The mother has a masters degree in Deaf Education and is teaching ASL with connections to deaf educators. The father serves on countless projects and committees, including as a member of Hands and Voices, and travels a lot to give presentations on the importance of parents communicating with their child.

FRIENDS

Dakota has some hearing friends who can sign, but her close deaf best friends have always been in her life - one since the age of four and the other since she was eight, through her parents who connected with other like-parents with deaf children. She and her friends stuck together intentionally from the previous school to the next. "I don't think I could bear to be without them. I would have hated being the only deaf student, and be picked on. I'm glad I have my friends," Dakota asserted.

SCHOOL

Dakota along with thirty other deaf students is enrolled at the Creative Performance Media Arts program for up to the eighth grade. The curriculum includes creative, fun classes, computer arts, dance, as well as academics. She has ASL interpreters for her public classes, while some of her friends take classes geared for deaf



students with a teacher who sign. This person is also available to Dakota for assistance as needed. At school, Dakota teaches her hearing peers how to sign the alphabet and chats with them, as she also has full conversations with her deaf friends. Now in the eighth grade, Dakota and her family are uncertain where to place her for her high school years. While the California School for the Deaf in Riverside is an attractive option, the parents wish the school was situated closer to home so they could see Dakota everyday during the week.

ACTIVITIES

Dakota advanced to the green belt in Aikido to protect herself. She's also in a community circus group as a performer where access to communication is visually facilitated. "This circus group is theatrical and can use miming skills without depending on their voices. The teamwork and activities help me build my confidence."

Dakota loves writing stories. A year ago, she published a book about a girl who converts into a mermaid, a story she had gifted to a friend.

Dakota is also an artist. She painted her mother's van in colors and patterns of the hippy seventies. A wall mural she once did for the city won her an iPad.

GOALS

Dakota, at thirteen, is interested in acting or other active events that involve traveling and fun underwater biology, for instance. She does not see herself sitting in an office dealing with phone calls and computer work. For college, Gallaudet University and the Rochester Institute of Technology are feasible options.



Erika Thompson

“After the birth of our daughter, we as new parents viewed the sign or speech questions as being analogous to being in a restaurant, asked if we wanted “soup or salad?” with our entrée. Our answer was simple: ‘Yes, we want both’.”



www.tomandjerrysekalb.com ; www.musthavemenus.com

“Dakota’s vision was 20/20, but her hearing is definitely not “20/20” so of course she must utilize the access she has most, visual access.”

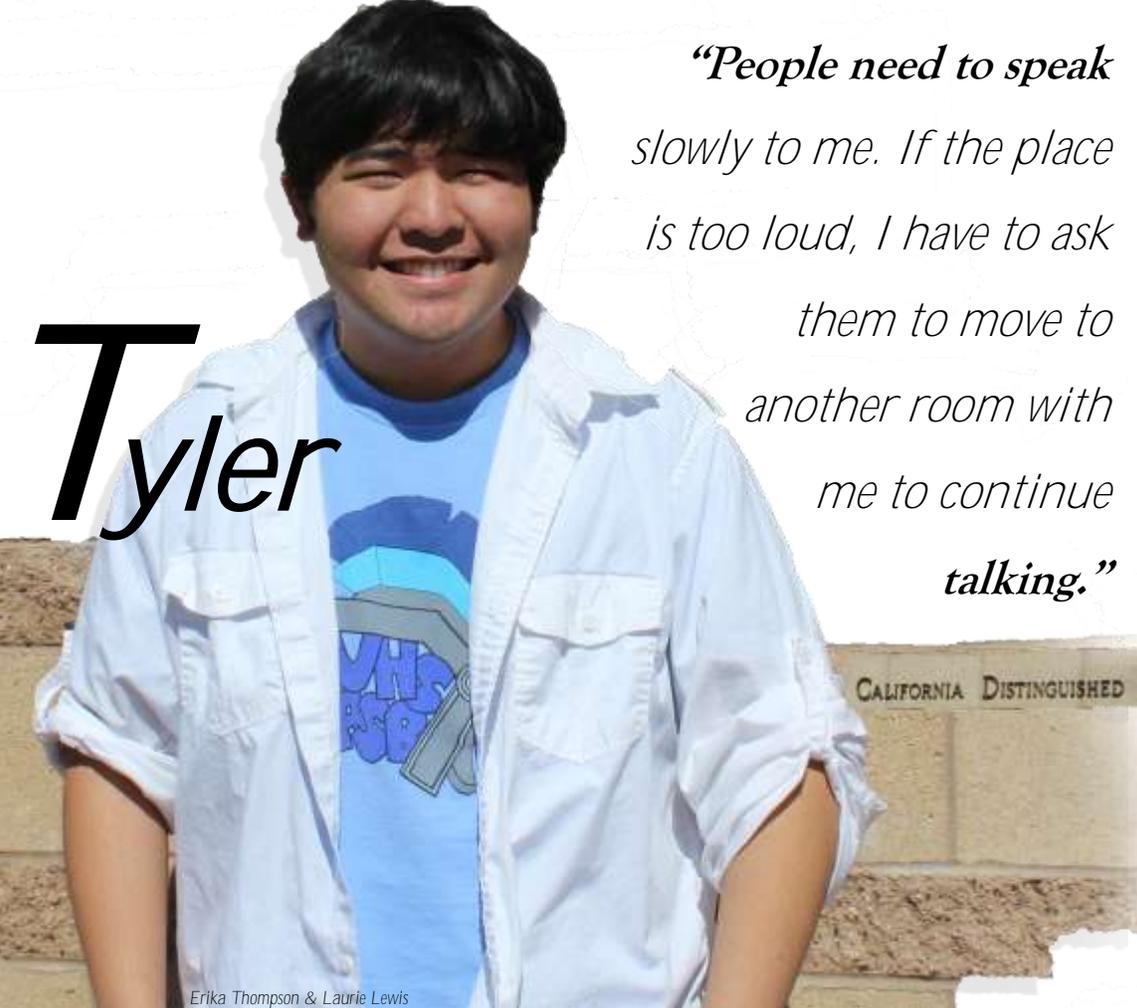
* * *

“Our household is primarily bilingual in ASL and English.”



“For children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to arrive being ‘Kindergarten Ready’... they must have early language development. Lay the foundation for those children to be raised happy and successful.”

Erika Thompson



Tyler

Erika Thompson & Laurie Lewis

“People need to speak slowly to me. If the place is too loud, I have to ask them to move to another room with me to continue talking.”

working hard to decipher auditory information. His deaf friends and teachers in Deaf education and Deaf culture studies have all helped him to learn more about his Deaf identity, and to feel confident in himself as a person.

Tyler's parents have also learned a little sign language, and are able to communicate with him visually when restaurants get noisy or when Tyler is at the beach without his hearing devices. Tyler acknowledges that his mother has always been encouraging and accepting of who he is as a deaf person. She has continually guided him in learning right from wrong, and always encouraged him to achieve his personal best.

Tyler is a mild mannered, softly spoken 18 year old who has graduated with good grades last spring from University High School. He now attends California State University, Northridge to study mathematics. Tyler was enrolled in high school AP Calculus in a public classroom with hearing peers. Deaf since birth, Tyler hears through cochlear implants in both of his ears and is able to discern speech from teachers and peers, as long as the conversation takes place in person in a quiet setting. His own speech is well understood by a majority of people, especially when others have had had time to get to know him personally.

Why did a successful kid like Tyler, who could hear and speak, eventually learn sign language? Could he have thrived through English alone? Tyler answered, "No, I needed both." With his hearing friends, he often felt left out as he tried to communicate with them. He appreciates having learned to talk and interact with hearing people, but admits that he is more comfortable with his deaf friends who are just like him. When he goes out with his deaf friends, he can relax and sign with them without worrying about noisy backgrounds or

Sign language has played a surprisingly large role in his education and personal growth. At intervals in the classroom, Tyler cannot hear the teacher clearly, so he quickly looks at the sign language interpreter for the missed information or additional clarifications. When the class watches educational films that are not subtitled, the interpreter is the only way Tyler can access the audio because of excessive noise through media transmission. At school with other deaf students, Tyler enjoyed competing for the Deaf Academic Bowl. They recently won the Western Regional championships against other Deaf schools and regional programs. His team also placed second on the national level at the Gallaudet University campus in Washington, D.C., the only Deaf Liberal Arts college in the world. Tyler likes school, learning a lot, making friends, and having great memories. He served as a Deaf/ Hard of Hearing representative on the high school Associated Student Body and as a member of the Junior National Association of the Deaf with his deaf peers. He says that learning ASL contributed to his language development and English literacy.

"I never knew how much I had missed before sign language. For the first time, I am understanding everything."

*National Deaf Academic Bowl Competitions
(Right)*



He continues learning American Sign Language, through which he communicates with some struggle, as he also does through speech. He knows he will continue refining his ASL skills throughout his college years, especially if he attends college with a large number of other deaf students.

Jon Levy, principal of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program of the Orange County Department of Education, pointed out, "When Tyler first came here in the seventh grade with very little to no sign language, he was greatly delayed in literacy. After learning sign language, he has grown to his present reading level in English, jumping eight levels within only six years of being here."

"ASL filled in the gaps that I had. I learned a lot more about English structure from explanations through sign language." Tyler admitted.

After his immersion in an educational setting of bilingualism and biliteracy through a visually accessible mode, Tyler realizes, "I never knew how much I had missed before sign language. For the first time, I am understanding everything."



Courtesy of Tyler

Alana



- Has attended CSDR
since she was two

“... a true scholar-athlete who excels in academics, leadership, and sports. This ideal student sets an example for others.”



Ernesto Rodriguez '14

Alana is the only deaf member of a family of musicians. Her mother is a singer, her father a drummer, and her older sister an oboist, who blows through her reed to give the sound a vibrating, penetrating voice. Alana wants to be a part of her family and make them proud by learning to dance ballet and to play the piano. As she routinely fingers the keys, she struggles to identify the difference between low and high-pitched sounds. Her parents analyze the quality of music they hear at concerts, but the sounds are generally all the same to Alana who is profoundly deaf and wears hearing aids.

While she attempts to relate to her family's interest in music, Alana's spirit and passion are in sports and theatre. Whether on the softball or track field, or the basketball or volleyball court, she is a deadly threat to opponents who play against her. Alana's power plays have earned her honors as Most Valuable Player, and have helped her team win games in the CIF league playoffs. Alana also performed on stage as the lead actor in a community musical theatre production of "Nobody's Perfect," playing a deaf character who used sign language and spoken English. She truly enjoyed this experience, especially when she taught the other actors and crew about Deaf culture, inspiring them so much that some of them wanted to major in Deaf Studies in college. Alana also stunned the audience

Erika Thompson & Laurie Lewis

as a competent and dazzling mistress of ceremonies at the national Deaf pageant, hosted by CSDR's Jr. NAD student organization. She glows as an ASL singer with the school's spirit song group and in her high school Drama productions. Many would agree that Alana's vibrant voice flows through in her body language, her facial expressions, and through her hands, visibly just as rich as the sounds from her sister's oboe.

In addition to sports and performance activities, Alana is a gifted and earnest learner at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside, where she has attended since she was two years old. As if her additional activities as a class officer, a member of Jr.NAD, and part of the student body government were not

enough, she excels in academics with a 4.0 GPA in her honors and AP courses. She passed the state high school exit exam on her first try. Alana reads a lot and admits that her studies in speech, in addition to ASL, have had some influence on her literacy skills. Her specialty in math has also enhanced her team's success in the Deaf Academic Bowl, where they competed against the finalists from other schools and programs for deaf students in the nation. She also enjoyed her 8th grade trip to Rochester Institute of Technology, which houses the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, where her CSDR team competed in the national "Math Counts" tournament. Her love of mathematics and technology has her thinking of attending this university in New York, or Gallaudet University, to major in engineering or business. Alana says, "I want to make an impact on the world. I know I am meant to do something important."

CSDR high school principal Mr. Timothy Hile described Alana as he presented the Top HS Pupil award to her onstage in front of 425 students as, "A true scholar-athlete who excels in academics, leadership, and sports. This ideal student sets an example for others." Alana credits her success to her school and to everyone she has known here.

"Everyone gave me opportunities to go out and see the world more, and to open my eyes to both cultures of the hearing and the Deaf. They taught me how to cope with the hearing world, and to learn from other people's mistakes. CSDR is like my second family."

*"This school
(CSDR) is like
my second
family."*

Although Alana's immediate family uses sign language with her, she wishes her relatives would also learn her language. She would love them to be a greater part of her life and be able to see what kind of lively and successful personality Alana truly is when she is expressing herself through ASL. It has been somewhat hard on Alana that her older sister has moved out to attend college. Her sister has been her best and most communicative link to her relatives at family events. "If everybody signed, we would be made into one big, even happier family," Alana said wistfully.

While Alana's parents sign to their daughter, she responds back through speech because she wants them to understand her. They struggle in "reading" sign language, as they have not had enough practice in doing so. This arrangement is "do-able", but sometimes Alana feels uncomfortable when she gets sick, has a sore throat, or is not in the mood to speak. She regrets that she cannot talk to her own parents with ease. "It gets harder as my parents get older," Alana admits. "My mom feels bad, but I tell her she's a good mom," who has tried to do what she thought was best. Like the title of Alana's play, "Nobody's Perfect".



- The whole family learned sign language to communicate with Alana (right)

Dominique

- Deafened at age 8 in Liberia

CSDR Valedictorian '13

Out of 180 high school deaf students at California School for the Deaf in Riverside, Dominique received the award as this year's top student in the Career Technology Education program. Principal Ms. Shelly Gravatt explained onstage to the entire school of 425 students that in all the courses Dominique took, she excelled with high grades during her four years at CSDR. These courses included Computer Applications, Digital Imaging, Television and Film Production, Career Preparation, Leadership, Yearbook, Health, and Work Experience. Dominique has a positive attitude in learning, is attentive to her teachers and is kind to her peers.

Dominique's Personal Narrative:

"At nearly 18 years of age, my life experiences are uniquely different than most of my friends and peers of the same age. I was born hearing, with my twin sister, on the twenty-seventh day of May in Liberia, West Africa. As my first language during childhood I spoke English, which was one of the official languages in Liberia, while my parents spoke both English and Bassa. At eight years old I became ill with meningitis, which made me deaf. I remained in the hospital, recovering from meningitis, for two long and excruciating years. Not knowing that sign language existed, my family had me attend a public school in Liberia. Consequently, I could not hear what the instructors were teaching or what other classmates were saying. Years passed where I did not know what went on inside classrooms, all because there was not any known communication for me.

My parents knew that I deserved a better education elsewhere, outside of Africa, and had saved money for our move to help give me a better life. In May of 2006, my aunt, who was already living in America, acquired guardianship of my twin sister and me. We travelled to southern California to live with my aunt, intending to gain a better education. We enrolled into the 5th grade at a local public school. During 5th and 6th grades I



Erika Thompson



With her hearing twin sister, Dominique (left) fled her homeland in Liberia for a better life here.

continued to fight to understand, since there were no interpreters and I did not know any sign language. I felt I did not belong where I was and I felt lost. Then my middle school counselor finally mentioned to my aunt about the School for the Deaf located in Riverside.

When my family and I first visited the CSDR campus, I remember catching my first glimpse of American Sign Language and feeling captivated with amazement and disbelief. I took ASL classes at CSDR when I enrolled into CSDR's middle school. Soon after, my feelings of insecurity, confusion, and exclusion dissipated. Finally, I could communicate with others, understand my teachers, and serve in student activities. Within a few short years of being exposed to and educated in ASL, I felt confident and ASL seemed to be a natural part of my life. I had not accepted my Deaf identity until I came here to CSDR. Here I finally fit in.

“My feelings of insecurity, confusion, and exclusion dissipated. Finally, I could communicate with others . . .”

ASL is now my most comfortable, native language, while I also still speak English, using voice and writing. I do wish that my family could also learn ASL so I could feel free to communicate with them about what is happening at school and in my life. My twin sister and I have a unique, uncanny ability to understand each other through speech and signs, in a way that only twins can do. With the school's cultural and educational approach with bilingualism, I have become proud and ultimately happier.

I have graduated from CSDR with honors as Valedictorian for the class of 2013, and I have been accepted to Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. You see, I was just a black deaf woman from a faraway country without education, fighting for a better life, and to this day, I made it to the next chapter of my life but not without my opinion, my voice, my family, my teachers, the staff, and California School for the Deaf, Riverside.”

Elena Mayer



Terri Vincent

National Center on Deafness, CSUN



*- Miss Deaf
California
State
University
Northridge,
2013*

Elena, a Psychology major student at California State University in Northridge confidently switches back and forth between using spoken English with her hearing classmates and professors, and American Sign Language with other students and staff who are also deaf or know sign language. Elena wears a cochlear implant, likes speaking and listening, and shows pride in her Deaf identity with respect for American Sign Language. She loves who she is, and has confidence in both worlds of the hearing and the Deaf. She has all options and access to communication. Elena enjoys bilingualism and communicates with ease. A few days after her interview for this article, Elena won the biennial pageant for the title of "Miss Deaf CSUN".

FAMILY AND COMMUNICATION

Back home in Missouri, Elena uses either ASL, voice, listening, speechreading, or a unique family recipe: a mix of everything with her oral deaf parents who also use sign language, as does her younger deaf brother. With her family, communication choices were up to Elena and her personal mood. Sometimes she spoke to her

deaf parents entirely through speech, other times wholly in ASL, and sometimes using both. For example, if her hands were full while carrying something, she spoke and if her mouth was full with food or if exchanging information through a glass window, she signed.

It was Elena who asked her parents for a cochlear implant when she was five years old.

She specifically remembers signing to them, "I want to hear more." She had seen how her younger brother's hearing aids eventually stopped working for him, so he got the implant. She explained that she had perceived the cochlear implant as advanced hearing that did not change who she was. "My cochlear implant was just a tool; I already had Deaf culture and language at home."

SCHOOL / COMMUNICATION PHILOSOPHIES

Because Elena learned ASL and English at the same time, her language and academic skills are high. Her parents guided and supported Elena in making demands for her educational needs. Elena's

"My cochlear implant was just a tool; I already had Deaf culture and language at home."



mother runs her own business as a life coach. Her father supported her mother behind the scenes while he also served as an alumni director for the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in New York. Elena first began preschool at a school for the deaf in Rochester, NY, prior to getting her implant. “This was where I got my language foundation with signing and talking,” Elena said.

The family later moved to St. Louis, a city considered an “Oral Mecca” with three local oral schools, the state school for the deaf located several hours out of the city. Before the move, Elena had been happy, loving both sign and speech. When she enrolled in an oral program, the educators asked her to hide her hands under her thighs. She ended up signing less at home with her own deaf family. Elena reflects, “I was disappointed and shocked. Why had the education system been split with sign only or speech only? Why not use both?” She and her family did not follow the school’s advice; they took advantage of both at home. The oral school later reprimanded the parents, asking that they stop signing at home. Elena’s mother, in a sharp response, explained to the school, “You do your job with speech, and let us do our job with language.”

With their limited school options, Elena’s parents offered her any school of her choice, even MSSD, the national school for the Deaf in Washington DC. Elena chose to attend a local mainstreaming program in middle and high school and succeeded there, always making the Honor Roll. Her Advanced Placement courses prepared her well for college. She was lucky to have teachers willing to go out of the way to accommodate her. Her parents always encouraged achievement, making her work hard and giving her so much that she wants to give back to them and to the community. Her parents impressed upon Elena that college was not optional, that she must attend the college of her choice. Elena chose CSUN because of its mixed hearing and deaf student population. “I learned a lot from my mainstreaming program setting,

because I already had my ‘Deaf Fantasyland’ at home. Since I had both environments, I am satisfied with my educational upbringing,” Elena asserted.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

When asked about the support services she received in school, Elena’s answer was unique. She initially asked for no interpreting services at school, preferring real-time captioning for videos and reading text. She wanted to develop her own strategies, different from those of her deaf parents. Elena emphasized the importance of the IEP* meeting. Her parents, teachers, counselor, and she discussed in depth what she needed. She insisted that all educational videos be captioned. If not possible, the teacher would excuse her from participating without affecting

her grade. Her teacher would make every effort to look at her and not at the board while speaking, and to confirm understanding with her frequently. She asked one to two friends in each class to help as needed. Elena met with the teacher one-on-one during breaks and Study Hall when possible. Without this support she does not think she would have done so well, especially in high school with its large class size. At CSUN, she now is using interpreting services. She found it helpful that the interpreter informed her of homework assignments that she might have overlooked at the end of class

while taking notes. She does not consider this as “enabling, just supportive.” She has a right to access environmental information. Elena was already accustomed to the interpreter, requested by her parents at family functions such as temple services and graduation ceremonies. However, she was new to accessing the interpreter in the classroom setting. At first, she did not trust the interpreter as her medium for class information. Eventually she grew relaxed and comfortable after she compared the information she hears with what the interpreter signed. She found that ASL-interpreting made her courses much easier

“I was disappointed and shocked. Why had the education system been split with sign only or speech only? Why not use both?”

to understand, so much so that she felt she could handle other courses that are more difficult.

ADVOCACY TOOLS AND DEAF IDENTITY

Life has worked out for Elena in large part because her parents taught her to advocate for her own rights. She regularly makes requests and asserts for her needs. She felt that if her parents had been hearing without knowledge of the Deaf world or the right tools, they might have felt compelled to take over for her. “If so, I might have felt disconnected from them, perhaps felt lost,” Elena pondered. Elena has personally witnessed this tendency among her cochlear-implanted deaf friends and their families back in St. Louis. She saw how some parents took over for their children. Some of her friends, who are now in college, got ASL-interpreting services, but others still do not sign. Elena tells, “They realize later in life that the cochlear implant did not change who they were and are now learning about their own identities.” Elena has grown up as an independent, self-reliant young Deaf woman with confidence and tools for advocacy that will take her very far in life.

ADVICE

Elena offers some advice to parents of deaf children: “Give your child all options. As my mother (a life coach) would say, maybe your child would not want to sign or to use voice. That is okay as long as you start your child’s life immersed in education with language and everything! Let your child lead you.”

**IEP = Individualized Education Plan, an annual meeting for a student in Special Education, parents, and school district to discuss student needs, progress, and educational placement*

“Start your child’s life immersed in education with language and everything! Let your child lead you.”

- Elena’s mother



Courtesy of Elena Mayer

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF—RIVERSIDE

“Where language and learning thrive!”

*Serving as a school and a state resource center for
Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students in Southern California*

AP/Honors Classes

ASL/Literacy Instruction

Common Core Standards

Career/Technology Education

Full Accreditation

Speech/Audiology Services

Family Sign Language Classes

Parent Infant Program



Academic Bowl

After-School Activities

Athletics Program

Close-Up Program

International Club

Student Government

Transition Partnership

Resource/Service Referrals



California Deaf Education Resource Center

The California Department of Education, along with the California Schools for the Deaf, agrees that one of its most important goals is to ensure a quality education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and adolescents. Together, we recognize that the more consistently deaf and hard of hearing children in California receive resources and services, the more these children can benefit from a quality education. Following the initiative of Scott Kerby, Director of the State Special Schools and Services Division, these entities are working to establish the California Deaf Education Resource Center (CDERC). In accordance with California Education Codes, the CDERC aims to provide support to all educators, professionals and caregivers who work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. These services will include training and guidance on early intervention, parent education, curricula

and assessment, and community education, as well as assistance to Local Education Agencies.

Under the leadership of the Schools for the Deaf, CDERC will have the advantage of a large, state-wide community of professionals from which to draw resources and information to develop trainings and services.

The CDERC invites everyone to work together toward a shared vision of language, educational opportunities, school readiness, and prosperity among all Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in California. To access services or to ask questions in Southern California, contact Dr. M. Natasha Kordus, Ph.D. To access services or to ask questions in Northern California, contact Ms. Roberta Daniels at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont.

- M. Natasha Kordus, Ph.D., CDERC Supervisor at CSD Riverside

California Special Edition Deaf Teen Issue
Fall 2013

Author, Editor, and Designer: Erika Thompson
Community Resource Specialist

ethompson@csdr-cde.ca.gov

Copy Editors: Brandi Davies and Lynn Gold

Photo/Layout Assistance: Terri Vincent,

Laurie Lewis, Wes Rinella, and Rene Visco

Special Thanks: Julie Rems-Smario, Jon Levy,

Stacey Winsberg, Niel Thompson, and Terri Vincent

School Superintendent: Mal Grossinger



CSD
RIVERSIDE

Resource Center Contact:
Southern California—

M. Natasha Kordus, Ph.D.

951.248.7700 x6542

951.824.8105 VP

nkordus@csdr-cde.ca.gov