Family Shares SSD Journey

Recent high school graduate J.J. Steamer is a testament to the success of SSD’s vision: partners for every student’s success. In conjunction with J.J. and his family, a multi-disciplinary team has worked together for nine years to help J.J. overcome challenges and reach his goal of becoming a high school graduate.

Recently graduated from Affton High School, J.J. received SSD services including occupational therapy, speech therapy and resource services. His journey is a great example of how students can overcome obstacles, meet challenges and persevere with the right supports.

According to his mother, Melinda Steamer, J.J.’s early years were filled with a series of challenges. “Early on, I could tell something wasn’t quite right. He was easily distracted in school, he had a hard time keeping his interest, he was disorganized with his schoolwork, and he was deeply disturbed by any changes in schedules.”

J.J. and his family worked with school administrators, doctors and counselors to try and determine what they were faced with during his early elementary school years. “We went through several different types of medicine to ‘cure’ J.J.’s behavior because everyone seemed quick to diagnose him with ADD or ADHD,” says Melinda. “None of the medicines diagnose him with ADD or ADHD,” says Melinda. J.J. was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, a type of autism that is considered high functioning, but still has its own challenges.

“After the initial shock wore off, I read everything I could about Asperger’s and all of the characteristics fit J.J. to a tee,” says Melinda.

Since his diagnosis, J.J.’s school and SSD provided a multitude of services. “I will always be grateful to that fourth-grade teacher,” says Melinda. “J.J. has received academic help, occupational therapy and speech therapy. He still has problems focusing in class when it doesn’t pique his interest, but he’s come a long way since the early days.”

J.J. is looking forward to the next stage in his life, and SSD is helping him with transition. “I’m glad I’m done with school,” says J.J. “And I’m excited for the next part of life, but I’m also concerned about the future.”

During his last semester of high school, J.J. started working in the afternoons at K-Mart for school credit. “J.J. thoroughly enjoys work and being out in the real world,” says Melinda. “Looking into the immediate future, college is just not an option at this time.

“Thanks to SSD, J.J. is enrolled in a work program that starts this August. He will be working at the First Congregational Church, which is part of Webster University,” says Melinda.

J.J. will work about 30 hours a week and delve deeper into the real world: working, dealing with bosses and co-workers, job duties and new responsibilities. He will be with other young adults like himself and will work with a mentor to guide him.

“The program is a mix of work and school,” says J.J. “We will be doing multiple things including working in the library, doing community work, and helping out around campus and the church. I am definitely looking forward to it.”

Melinda has high hopes for J.J.’s future. “He will be able to stay in this program until he is 21 years old,” says Melinda. “At that time, he might be ready for college or technical school or a full-time job. We’ll just have to wait and see. I am extremely proud of J.J. and his accomplishments, and very happy to be his mother.”
SAVING THE DATE
CALENDAR FOR SSD SCHOOLS*

AUG. 12, 2013
First Day of School

SEPT. 2, 2013
School closed in observance of Labor Day

OCT. 18, 2013
Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance

NOV. 8, 2013
Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance

NOV. 27–29, 2013
School closed in observance of Thanksgiving

DEC. 20, 2013
Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance

School closed for Winter Break

JAN. 6, 2014
Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance

JAN. 20, 2014
School closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

FEB. 17, 2014
School closed in observance of President's Day

MARCH 17–21, 2014
Spring Break

APRIL 25, 2014
Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance

MAY 22, 2014
Last Day of School

JUNE 9, 2014
Summer school begins

* Students that attend school in a partner district follow the school calendar of the partner district. Visit www.ssdmo.org/isd_services/schools.html for links to partner district websites.

Community-based transition sites follow the SSD school calendar above.

SAVE THE SITE:
www.ssdmo.org

The SSD website offers a variety of resources, including detailed descriptions of the entire special education process. The process has been broken down into three steps, so visitors can easily find the information they need.

Step 1: Getting started at SSD
Learn about the evaluation process and special education services at SSD. Visit www.ssdmo.org/step1.html.

Step 2: Making the most of the IEP Process
Get answers to your questions about the IEP process, including timelines, IEP meetings and placement options. Visit www.ssdmo.org/step2.html.

Step 3: Planning for adult life
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SAVE MONEY
SSD, the Special Education Foundation, the Bonhomme Lions and a variety of other organizations offer scholarships to SSD students. Mark your calendar to turn in scholarship applications by Feb. 14, 2014. Applications can be found on the SSD website beginning in December at www.ssdmo.org.

SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE EXPERTS
SSD’s Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program offers families a variety of opportunities to learn more about special education and disabilities through educational workshops, district resources, referrals, resource fairs and other special events.

A variety of free workshops are offered on topics ranging from basic sign language and teaching kids social skills to college preparation and understanding the IEP process. For more information about these events or to register, visit www.ssdmo.org/cool_tools/workshops.html.

The Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) provides a vast array of special education and disability-related tools and resources for SSD families and the community at large. The FCRC’s collection includes thousands of books, journals, videos, resource packets and more. For details, visit www.ssdmo.org/cool_tools/frc.html. Materials may be sent home through school mail to families whose children receive SSD services or people may visit the center to check out materials.

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