A step in the right direction

Each student has unique needs and a specialized IEP tailored to address those needs. The Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD) offers a variety of resources and support to meet these needs.

Steps 1, 2, and 3 cover the special education journey, broken down into sections based on which stage of the process families are in:

**Step 1: Getting started at SSD** – Featured resource: Assessment tools

**Step 2: Making the most of the IEP process** – Featured resource: Meeting evaluation checklist

**Step 3: Planning for adult life** – Featured resource: Checklist for the first 21 years

Find your path at www.ssdmo.org.

**Consider Yourself…Impressed**

In a recent production of “Oliver,” Normandy High School junior Ashley Brown had a piece of advice for the title character: “Go home…you little brute!”

Granted, it was just one of her character’s two lines in the musical production presented by Variety Children’s Theatre. But Ashley, an SSD student and member of the cast ensemble, sang and danced to several familiar tunes, including “Consider Yourself At Home.”

However, anyone who knows Ashley will tell you she does not follow the advice of her character.

Along with her growing theater résumé, Ashley finds time away from home to participate in sports, dance, and chorus. She is also an active member in the St. Louis 4-H Urban Youth Development program.

Ashley insists all of her extra-curricular activities count as “down time” for her because “she wants to spend time with my family and friends.”

In middle school, Ashley received her first taste of the theater, playing Shug Avery in the musical cabaret of “The Color Purple.”

It comes as no surprise that Ashley enjoys performance on stage — it runs in her family. Her older sister, Amber, participates in the Variety Children’s Chorus. She is also an active member in the St. Louis 4-H Urban Youth Development program.

Ashley has been a “Variety kid” since she was three years old, receiving all the equipment she needs, including several wheelchairs, over the years.

Ashley’s big sister’s advice came in handy as Ashley took part in her first Variety Children’s Theater production last fall, serving as the assistant costume director for the production of “Tom Sawyer.”

After that, she earned her spot on stage in this year’s ensemble for “Oliver!”

“My goal is to audition for more productions,” Ashley said. “(I always say) Don’t be afraid to do what you want to do in life.”

Along with acting on stage, Ashley is the full triple-threat. She performs as a dancer and singer, too. She is a member of the dance ministry team at her church, and she’s participated in the Variety Children’s Chorus.

So what does Ashley do during those rare times she actually is at home?

“She does chores, like anyone else,” her mother, Michelle Mitchell, says. “We don’t treat her any differently because she uses a wheelchair.”

But Ashley expresses less interest in her chores and more concern with her other at-home activity. “I’m a big gamer,” she admits. “I would love to pursue making graphic designs for video games.”

So much so, she is considering gaining these skills at DeVry University’s gaming degree program after finishing high school.

Ashley has been a “Variety kid” since she was three years old, receiving all the equipment she needs, including several wheelchairs, over the years. The Children’s Charity of St. Louis assists more than 1,350 St. Louis area children by providing them with medical equipment that empowers them to be physically independent. It also conducts a number of inclusive programs such as theater, chorus, camps and field trips.

Along with her stage work with Variety, Ashley has been an active soccer player for the past five years with The Disabled Athlete Sports Association. This summer, Ashley and the DASA Firecrackers made it to the national championship in Indianapolis. But that’s not the only place her talents have taken her.

Performing with the Variety Children’s Chorus, Ashley made a memorable trip to Washington, D.C., to perform at the White House.

However, it’s still unclear how much Ashley remembers from the performance. "Well, I kind of fell asleep on stage," Ashley said.

“It was such a hectic trip, and we did so much traveling to get there, by the time they hit the stage, Ashley was just out,” Mitchell explained.

With as much as she does, it’s hard to blame her for catching a much-needed nap.
Scholarship, Campership Deadlines Approaching Quickly

With the school year approaching the halfway point, many students are already making plans for when the school year wraps up. Summer jobs, time with friends and trips to the park are popular choices. Many graduating seniors, however, are preparing now for post-secondary education. And it’s no secret that the cost of schooling is rising every year.

To help deserving SSD students offset the costs of college and camp tuitions, SSD and other organizations, including the Special Education Foundation (SEF) and the Bonhomme Lions, provide opportunities for scholarships, camperships and other awards.

“The impact of scholarships on the students and their families is significant,” said SEF Executive Director Diane Buhr. “It gives a student a great sense of accomplishment to be selected as a scholarship recipient, it aids in self-esteem and provides a very good financial start for the first year of college.”

Each reward is unique, and has its own history and special requirements. Scholarships and camperships will be awarded at the Commitment to Kids Awards Banquet on April 28, 2011.

Scholarships:

SSD Board of Education Scholarship
Established in 2008, the SSD Board of Education honors graduating SSD students who show strong leadership skills as well as a dedication to volunteerism and community involvement. For the 2010-2011 school year, the SSD Board will reward two students who demonstrate these skills and who plan to attend college or post-secondary institutions. Visit www.ssdo.mo.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 28, 2011.

Bonhomme Lions Scholarships
The Bonhomme Lions, longtime supporters of education in the St. Louis area, have been providing scholarships to graduating SSD students for many years. Visit www.ssdo.mo.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 18, 2011.

Allison M. Haake Memorial Scholarship
Established in 2008, this scholarship was created to honor an aspiring teacher who lost her battle with cancer in 2007. The scholarship is awarded to a deserving SSD student who has an interest in working with children. Visit www.ssdo.mo.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 18, 2011.

Special Education Foundation Scholarships
The Special Education Foundation (SEF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of students with disabilities within the St. Louis area. Each year, SEF awards scholarships to college-bound SSD students.

Special Education Foundation scholarships are awarded based on several criteria. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 18, 2011.

Winners for the award are selected based on multiple criteria. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 28, 2011.

Laura K. Sherman Laughlin Scholarship
This scholarship honors the memory of Laura K. Sherman Laughlin and pays tribute to her life and to the many lives that she touched. The scholarship is presented to a deserving student who has sustained a brain injury or brain-related disability, including cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 28, 2011.

Dianne Arbeiter Scholarships
Given in memory of Dianne Arbeiter, a 25-year SSD employee, these scholarships are awarded to students who are served by the deaf/hard of hearing program of SSD. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is March 11, 2011.

C.J. Aubuchon Campership
This campership, given in honor of C.J. Aubuchon who lost his battle with cancer, is presented to a student who exemplifies C.J.’s qualities of kindness, caring, humor and courage. Visit www.sef-stl.org for more information. Deadline is Feb. 10, 2011.

Special Education Foundation Camperships
The Special Education Foundation’s mission is to assist students with disabilities to achieve success in their endeavors beyond the classroom. One of the ways it carries out this mission is by providing tuition to enable students served by SSD to attend summer camps and other instructional and/or recreational camps. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is April 18, 2011.

Dianne Arbeiter Camperships
Given in memory of Dianne Arbeiter, a 25-year SSD employee, these scholarships are awarded to students who plan to attend college or post-secondary institutions. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 11, 2011.

Stages St. Louis Access the Arts Campership
In partnership with Stages St. Louis, this campership offers assistance to students who wish to participate in the performing arts. Access the Arts is specifically designed to make participation in musical theater arts accessible to students with special needs. Visit www.sef-stl.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 11, 2011.

Bonhomme Lions Scholarships
The Bonhomme Lions, longtime supporters of education in the St. Louis area, have been providing scholarships to graduating SSD students for many years. Visit www.ssdo.mo.org for complete details and an application form. Deadline is Feb. 18, 2011.

Students and staff at Neuwoehner School in Town & Country put in a paved pathway to make the new school sensory garden accessible to all students. The project was managed by students in the Boot Camp program at Neuwoehner. This program helps to develop leadership skills by pairing students of various disability levels together to assist one another. The project was funded by a Lowe’s Toolbox for Education Grant.