

I was very honored that Dr. Tiegerman and the school asked me to speak a few words tonight to tell you about my son Jordan. You see, Dr. T and the devoted professionals at SLCD have been a significant part of our lives for the past 9 years.

I would like to start by telling you a little bit about the person my son is today. He's 12 years old and is a student at the new SLCD Middle/High School in Woodside. He has been enrolled in SLCD since 1999. Thanks to various interventions he has received at SLCD, in many ways, he is a typically developing boy – he's affectionate, friendly, he has a strong imagination, he likes video games, TV, the computer. He likes what I call boy toys; he loves science, conducts numerous experiments in our kitchen and wants to name his new dog Hayley, after Hayley's Comet. He's gentle, likes babies and can easily say the words "I love you" to us. He talks about his aspirations of being a scientist, of one day having his own home and his own family. He can't wait to learn how to drive – he has been saving for years so he can buy his own sports car and even has his own student bank book at New York Community Bank. He loves going to school and except for those times he is unwell, he wants to go every single day and be with his friends. This week, he will experience his first sleep over at a friend's house.

These may sound like normal everyday occurrences, but for Jordan, these are huge life accomplishments. You see, to look at Jordan, you may not notice any differences from that of another 12 year old boy. But if you know Jordan, you know the struggles that he as faces every day and works hard to overcome.

Our son was 3 years old when diagnosed with dyspraxia. Dyspraxia is a life long disorder that affects a person's motor skill development. It can affect any and sometimes it affects all areas of development – physical, emotional, social, intellect and language, which is your spoken speech as well as your comprehension of what others are saying. Simply put, it impedes the normal process of a person's learning ability. People with dyspraxia have difficulty performing everyday tasks that most of us take for granted – saying things like I'm hungry, or thirsty, or tired or not feeling well. It also hinders you from things like buttoning your own pants, zipping your own jacket, tying your shoes or holding a pen, even signing your name.

When Jordan entered SLCD at age 4, like other young children with dyspraxia, his speech was significantly delayed – at most, he had 10 words to his vocabulary. And those were significantly unclear. He had difficulty holding a spoon, drinking from a cup and couldn't run, skip, hop, jump or catch a ball like other children his age. He couldn't move his fingers to manipulate puzzles pieces nor did he have the required strength in his mouth to blow out the candles on his own birthday cake. He expressed his frustrations at his limitations the only way he knew - by crying, tantrums and banging his head.

Right from the start, SLCD gave our son the building blocks he needed to thrive and grow. Sign language was used in the classroom as a communication bridge to speech. For Jordan, this initial step was critical and SLCD was the only school able and willing to give a non-hearing impaired child sign language. Then, slowly, Jordan's vocabulary began to grow – at first sounds,

then simple words, then two words together, and short sentences.

We credit Jordan's successes to the devoted team of professionals who have helped him tremendously.

Thanks to the work of the physical therapists, he enjoys running and jumping and he is adept on a razor scooter which has provided him with hours of fun. Thanks to the continuing work of occupational therapists, he writes and is learning to keyboard. With the guidance from the classroom psychologists, his confidence is growing and he is learning to express his frustrations in an appropriate manner. And of course, to the all the teachers and staff that support Jordan all day long, modifying the lessons, working with him individually as needed and creating the happy, safe, learning environment he wants to return to every day.

Like other parents of learning different children, we have redefined our view of intellect and success and have learned to mark time not by age, but rather by accomplishment. And we do celebrate those accomplishments...every time I hear Good Morning mom, I love you mom or thanks, mom (even if said sarcastically) my heart sings with joy.

We are thankful that Dr. Tiegerman has remained true to her dream and opened the middle/high school program. While Jordan has had many successes academically, socially and emotionally, he still faces many hurdles. As a preteen, Jordan is conscious that his speech is stilted, that casual conversation with his peers is difficult. Making friends with those outside the learning disabled network sometimes seems impossible.

Jordan's disability will not disappear, but as evidenced by his growth so far, he can learn to compensate for some of them. And for that, he needs a team of skilled, dedicated professionals.

My husband and I are indebted to Dr. Tiegerman for providing the SLCD six year high school program which will give our son the opportunity to continue to learn in an environment that supports him, understands him and raises the bar at appropriate levels based on his individual needs. A place where he can continue to receive the therapies he needs, like speech and counseling, where he can work on his handwriting skills, play modified sports and become a technology whiz. Like parents of all children at this age, we unsure of what the future holds for Jordan, but we know with all our hearts that SLCD is the best place to help him be an effective, functional contributing member of society. Thank you.