

Kayla's speech

Hi my name is Kayla Baylor. I have been on my mental health journey for 15 years now. I am currently diagnosed with Asperger's which is a form of high functioning Autism. At the age of 8 I was diagnosed with Asperger's. This made me feel happy to know who I really was. At the same time I felt upset because I knew there was going to be a long journey ahead. Some challenges were in school, within the community and at home. Family often joked that I am a medical mystery with a missing piece like my Autism.

Some of the struggles are speech, social skills, and motor skills such as tying my shoes. I received Occupational Therapy over the years to work on my motor skills such as learning to write and tie my shoes. At the age of 9 years old I finally learned to tie my shoes. Many times I was mad because I could not do what so called "normal" people could. Some of my characteristics are nervous twitching, shouting out random crazy things, doing weird things with my hands, and processing slower than other people in certain subjects. This makes me feel stressed, frustrated and at times hurt emotional.

I have been in and out of different school's. I have found it hard to find a school or program that can meet my needs academically and socially. There were many times that I felt unsafe and that I did not belong. This made me very depressed. I was often left out and a easy target for bullying. This led me to be more depressed and suicidal. I would isolate myself, have low self esteem and question my mental health. These feelings led me to not trust people or feel comfortable around them.

Some ways that I would deal with everything was watching TV, listen to music or cuddling my dog Abby . When I would do these things I would feel escaped, free, relaxed and different in a good way.

Some of my accomplishments are being New Jersey Miss Amazing PreTeen 2013-2014 and now Jr Teen 2014-2015. The Miss Amazing pageant offers girls with disabilities the opportunity to become community leaders and change makers. They believe that all people should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential through encouragement and support. Another great community group I belong to is Camden County Youth Partnership I am the Social Media Rep on the youth board. This is a group for teens with mental health challenges and they are encouraged to break the stigma associated with mental health diagnosis. I have been able to learn a lot from my peers, do community service, and learn leadership skills.

Now I have had my ups and downs in life like everyone has. But through my journey I have become a strong advocate for others with the same disabilities and at times with other forms of disabilities. I attend lots of conferences to learn the rights and laws that protect my special needs. I help educate others on fighting and never give up on themselves. I now do my own I.E.P which stands for Individual Education Plan. This is a legal document that many students with various disabilities have to help provide them with accommodations in the classroom.

I am a fighter and always will be. Remember in life we all have various challenges. We are just given a diagnosis and it may come at different times in life. We just want to be accepted and understood. All those with disabilities have feelings and dreams. We all have abilities but we may just have a different way of accomplishing our goals.

"Remember everyday is a journey and with every step you take it makes you a stronger person"

Thank you! !

Kayla Baylor