

Crestview Public School  
Recipient of  
National Inclusive School Award  
From  
Community Living Ontario

Crestview Public School is a JK to grade 8 school within the Lakehead Public School Board. Just over 200 students attend. Four of my five children have attended this school with 2 currently still attending - Lyndsay in grade 7 and Leah in grade 6. Many people have contributed to the education of my children and I would be hard pressed to single out anyone in particular. This just reinforces my concept of inclusion, as it has become a school attitude rather than individual achievements. Lyndsay is a part of the school and often that is just the way things are - nothing special, nothing unique - it just is. She is pretty well treated the same as the other students and expected to do her work, participate, get along with other students and adults in the school, follow the rules and so on.

Only one teacher has questioned her right to be in a regular class but this was more from the perspective of "Wouldn't she benefit more from a special program than from being in my classroom?" For that school year, the teacher was partially right and the majority of her education rested with the EA but the teacher also benefited as Lyndsay became a teacher that year and demonstrated her ability to learn by observation rather than by direct teaching instruction. A teacher who strove for student academic excellence learned from Lyndsay that test grades and report card marks are not the be all and end all of education nor do they demonstrate teaching acumen. By the end of the school year, this teacher recognized her accomplishments and had learned that Lyndsay was in the right place and that the teacher, not the "special program" greatly influenced the benefits of her participation.

We have no magic formula and for the most part, if something different needs to be done for Lyndsay then we get together and figure out what to do, otherwise each day is basically "business as usual". If rules are broken, she gets in trouble and faces the consequences. If school trips are planned, the question has never been "Will Lyndsay go?" but rather "Do we need to do anything different to make sure she enjoys and benefits from the experience?" She attends classes, school dances, and field trips and has not been excluded from any activity other than the grade 3 and 6 testing which none of my children have participated in through my choice.

We have never had an IPRC. When I enrolled Lyndsay in JK, I told the school that she already had enough labels and I wanted her placed in a regular classroom so there was no need for this process. The principal agreed with me. She has an IEP and the support of an EA. She has friends at school that she has known since JK who invite her to birthday parties, over to play and occasionally phone conversations with. (Lyndsay's telephone manners leave something to be desired so this is something we still have to work on and with 4 daughters constantly on the phone, not something I'm in a hurry to do.) We had ISA funding for 2 years but I refused to include any assessments or participate in the process due to the negative criteria established for students with intellectual disabilities and the validation teams refused to allow her claim. This created some conflict but we were able to work things out. Classroom teachers took on more responsibility and the EA began to spend less time at her side as we worked towards establishing more independence for Lyndsay. Without being asked, her fellow students jumped in and helped out too - making sure she had the proper books and was working on the right

page, encouraging her to do things, complementing and correcting her, getting and keeping her involved in the classroom activities. Information I provided was eagerly accepted by school staff - books, teaching strategies, ideas, etc. - and we just did it.

We have great communication between school and home. Lyndsay has an agenda (the same as all the other kids use) where her homework or any other relevant information I may need is written down for me and I can send messages back to the school. Phone calls, emails and visits to the school ensure we stay on track. If something isn't working out, we don't play a blame game" or make defensive excuses but rather figure out a different way to accomplish things. We never talk about what we cannot do (unless it's related to policy or something else we need to work with) but rather to what we want to accomplish and how we are going to make it happen.

Each school year has its stories so I'll share some that were significant for me. Our school board has an outdoor education program called Kingfisher. Lyndsay dislikes winter outdoor activities so we were challenged to determine how she would benefit from a 3-day and 2 night camping trip. I was prepared to keep her home for those days but she told me she wanted to go and was quite excited about the trip. The kids were divided up by their cabins and they planned menus and responsibilities. I was prepared to pick her up and bring her home if things didn't work out. Lyndsay's oldest sister, Andrea, offered to volunteer to help out on the trip. They had a blast! They cooked meals over a campfire learned survival skills, dissected owl pellets, went snowshoeing and cross country skiing and more and they had fun. I received a phone call afterwards telling me how proud of my children I should be and was told that the adults on the trip had watched Andrea and Lyndsay and had been impressed by how they achieved a balance of encouragement and helping. They watched and they learned and they increased their expectations for Lyndsay as well. (As a point of interest, I receive phone calls from the school when my kids accomplish things, not just when there is a problem and for all of them, not just Lyndsay.)

All on her own, Lyndsay decided to try out for the school basketball team. I wasn't even aware she had an interest in the game. She tried very hard but didn't make the team. Everyone was so impressed with her efforts that they found a way for her to be involved and helped out with scorekeeping at the tournament. This year, she wants to try out for the team again and has practiced so she just might make it.

Lyndsay does not just receive help and support but is given opportunities to help others. When she was in grade 2, a program called Jolly Phonics was introduced for grade one students. When she started grade 3, we decided this program would help her learn to read but given my reluctance to accept withdrawal, we needed to figure out how to make this happen. Reading buddies were established with grade 3 and grade 1 students. Lyndsay's job was to help a student in grade one learn the Jolly Phonics program which she did while she learned it herself. Attention was not drawn to the fact that she was withdrawn for this as all the students were involved in various ways.

I have a great deal of difficulty with IEPs. This year, my anxieties were dispelled due to the efforts of school staff. They not only anticipated Lyndsay's needs but mine as well. With partial rotation, more teachers are involved and all attended the IEP meeting with ideas and plans for what was to be accomplished this year. Teaching strategies were explained, academic and social goals established and the feeling in the room was one of camaraderie. We are all working together to ensure that when Lyndsay attends high school in 2 years, she will be

ready. Her academic expectations are not the same as the other kids in her class but in some instances they are. She is not exempt from French, she is not withdrawn from class and she is learning, involved with her friends and enjoying school. Other than the Ministry required identification, there are no references to disability in her IEP.

We had a problem with the bus one year. Each morning when Lyndsay got on the bus, she would greet the bus driver with a completely inappropriate expression. The bus driver did not understand her language, so Lyndsay decided to follow it up with a hand gesture that made it very clear what her message was. When the bus driver informed the principal, Lyndsay was called down to the office, just as any other student would have been. She admitted that she had done this and that it was wrong and served her detention as a result. My phone call from the principal was not one where I was expected to intervene but rather informing me of what had happened and how it had been dealt with. Although many parents I know who have children with intellectual disabilities want to be involved in the intervention, I was relieved not to be. I have trust in the people at Crestview that things will be addressed appropriately and I felt they were. I had the opportunity to be involved but did not have to be.

The trust I have in Crestview did not come easily for me. I was terrified to send my daughter to school. I worried she would not be accepted, that my wishes for her would not be respected, that no one would love her and believe in her the way that I do and so much more. Three times I have been told by medical personnel that she would not live and three times she has proved us wrong. She proved my fears for school to be wrong as well. We have come a long way! Teachers, students, other school staff, parents and Lyndsay herself have all made this school the great school that it is. We have all learned along the way and we will continue to learn. The inclusive concept this school has developed has been partially contrived and partially a natural process. The friendships -with both adults and fellow students - Lyndsay has established are all hers. The opportunities and the means to accomplish them have been provided and Lyndsay has grasped them and grown. I am proud of her and I am proud of her school.

Submitted by Susan Blekkenhorst, mother of Lyndsay