

Glimpses

My daughter's schedule often makes my brain whirl with all the logistics involved: her college course, French classes, being assistant teacher at integrated dance workshops, speaking at conferences, fitness class, downhill skiing, volunteer work... the list goes on. What is remarkable about all this activity is that after an extensive brain trauma when she was 14 months old, the Head of Neurology at our hospital said: *"Put her in an institution and get on with your lives. She will never know you and will probably die within two years."* Instead, we brought her home and educated her there until high school graduation.

In the first few years of this homeschooling journey, I really believed that between God and homeschooling Monica's challenges would be fixed. I thought her disabilities would disappear and she would become "normal" again. Normalcy however, was not to happen. Instead, a creative, God-inspired, custom-designed home education unlike anyone else's in the world occurred.

Our focus in Monica's toddler years consisted of trying to get her to be able to eat again so her g-tube could be removed – and we read to her, played with her, and listened to lots of music. After the removal of the g-tube was accomplished, we felt communication needed to be the next goal. So, we worked with a speech therapist blowing bubbles, using pictures so Monica could communicate her thoughts, and worked on a variety of sounds; we read to her, played with her, and listened to lots of music. Within a couple of years she was putting three and four imperfect words together, so we went on to the kindergarten stage of our homeschool. This consisted of crafts, park outings, reading aloud to her from an enormous variety of books and listening to lots of music - plus working on hand control. When Monica turned six years old, we purchased our grade one curricula. I began to teach her phonics, math, and lots of Bible lessons. We continued to read lots to her and listen to music. Math was an effort of futility, but bit by little bit Monica learned to read.

A few years later, during an occupational therapy session, her therapist did some testing. It was grueling and Monica struggled with basic tasks of assembling puzzle pieces, recognizing shapes that weren't complete, and copying block

patterns. In the midst of all the negative results, there was one comment I tucked away to retrieve during depressing, frustrating days – *“Monica has severe ADD and learning disabilities. She should not be able to read.”* In response to my comment that she *does* read, I was told, *“Yes, but if she had gone to a public school, she never would have learned.”*

That was my first glimpse that maybe, by homeschooling, I *was* making a difference.

Monica is 21 years old now, and over the years there have been numerous glimpses that intentionally *homeschooling a child who struggles* has made a significant impact far exceeding mere academics. I have also seen that her ability to volunteer, her independence in the community, her skill as a writer, her handling of stressful situations, and her transition to adulthood are in fact due to the immense time, effort, and blessing of custom-designed homeschooling.

Because we were able to custom design her education, we had the opportunity to make one of Monica’s goals a reality - volunteering. With the assistance of a community occupational therapist, we found a place that would be open to having Monica volunteer and then took time to train her for this role. She volunteered by visiting residents in a Retirement Home for many years, and is now volunteering with special needs children and teens. In 2009, a previous support worker noted Monica’s heart for others and nominated her for a volunteer award. Monica ended up being a Celebration of People volunteer award finalist!

In our custom-designed high school we found that having Monica take an online writing course with a personal coach helped both of us. I had gotten to the point of giving her mainly corrective feedback on her writing assignments. The coaches actually gave her positive feedback too! One coach even emailed me to tell me that she had forgotten over the weeks of reading Monica’s assignments that Monica had any learning disabilities! This appraisal from a third party lifted our spirits tremendously and also enlightened us that she had ability in the midst of so much disability.

Mid way through high school, we went to our hospital's transition clinic - an all day session for teenagers with various disabilities to help prepare for adulthood. We met with six different specialists including an occupational therapist, social worker, rehab nurse, and academic counsellor. Over the course of the day many suggestions were made to help these teens transition. It turned out we had unknowingly, through our custom-designed homeschool, implemented every one of the suggestions. At age 16, Monica was already doing the things they expected would be accomplished by the age of 25!

These third-party analyses have helped us to obtain 20/20 hindsight as to the significance of homeschooling a special needs child. These reports have not only encouraged us to persevere, but have also grown our confidence that progress is being made, far surpassing any achievement that could have been made with other educational options.

Conviction to homeschool began because we did not want to leave our daughter with someone else to determine her educational plans and goals, or to take care of her physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Conviction continued through middle school and high school for those same reasons and the occasional glimpses we would get to convince us that *homeschooling delivers*.

I believe the Head of Neurology was correct in his assessment: if we had put Monica into an institution, she likely never would have known us and perhaps would have died in a couple of years. Fortunately, we chose a better option. God and our custom-designed homeschool have produced miracles, making Monica the energetic, active young woman she is today. I pray our hindsight will encourage you to keep your vision intact and spark confidence in the magnitude of what you are accomplishing by homeschooling.