

Ashleigh's Speech - October 4, 2007

Good morning Minister Richmond, Minister Taylor, and supporters of CAYA. My name is Ashleigh Dukoff. I was asked come to talk to you about why CAYA is so important to me, and other people like myself who use augmentative communication devices. In my presentation I am going to talk to you about how CAYA has helped me in my life.

Before I had my communication device I felt very frustrated. I couldn't communicate with my friends by myself, I could only talk to them with my caregiver being right beside me interpreting my thoughts. I used sign language and I only had three people who understood it, my Mom, a caregiver and my educational assistant. Before my communication device I couldn't talk on the phone at all, or write emails by myself. My communication device gave me my voice.

I got my first mingspeak device, which was a DeltaTalker, when I was 16. When I got this voice I felt free. I could now go out with my friends for get togethers and I could talk without help. I love it because I can communicate with people and they can understand me. My device has given me independence and made me believe that I can do anything I want! In grade 12 I upgraded to my current mingspeak device the Pathfinder.

I met CAYA when I was around 22. I couldn't find anyone before CAYA to help me with my Pathfinder. They opened up a whole new world to me. It made me feel joyful and it was so exciting for me to meet new people through CAYA at the Victoria chapter of Cool Communicators. Cool Communicators are groups of people in Nanaimo and Victoria who use augmentative communication. They come together to talk about different things in our community that impact us, to learn to use our devices, and to support each other.

CAYA has given me SO much. For example, I met my best friend through CAYA. One day when I was getting some help a CAYA staff told me about a girl my age who uses a communication device just like me. We arranged to meet and we met it wasn't before long that we became best friends. I can't thank CAYA enough for that!

CAYA treats everyone with respect and encourages everyone to be the best they can be in their life. They never make you feel bad for asking for help. I have so much more confidence now to thanks to CAYA.

CAYA has also gone out of their way for my caregivers. They have trained my caregivers to help them to understand my Pathfinder better. I can't thank CAYA enough for the help they have given to my caregivers.

My career goal is to do presentations to schools, and organizations within my community to talk about what I have experienced in my life. I also want to continue learning and assisting other non-traditional communicators, like myself, to use their communication devices, to dream big, and to have their voice heard in the world. Through my motivational speaking, I hope to create awareness about people who use augmentative communication. I am working towards this goal by being a part of the Toastmasters to improve my presentations.

I want to spread my message to many people as I can because I think it is good for people to hear my story about how I got my voice. I think it is important for people to see someone who has a communication device.

With CAYA's help I am here today working on achieving my goals. Thank you so much, on behalf of myself, my fellow communicators, and their families, for continuing to fund CAYA for more years. This will allow CAYA to help people like myself who use augmentative communication devices to achieve their dreams.