

hms school news

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy • Founded 1882 • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • JULY 2013

Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

Last month, I met a very engaging man in his 30s at the Abilities Expo in Edison, NJ where HMS had a display table. He was fascinated by one of our student photos illustrating use of a specific assistive communication device and wanted to ask me a question. He was using a wheelchair, did not have speech, yet he was immensely persistent in trying to communicate with me using his only mode of communication, an alphabet board and his abundant enthusiasm. He and I spent at least a half an hour together before I understood what he was trying to ask me –how could he find a program to use with his older version of that device that would have speech output in Russian. (Sadly, I couldn't give him much immediate direction except to suggest he seek assistance from his local Brooklyn UCP or contact HMS). This young man had so much confidence, potential, and tenacity, and I was



struck by how different his life could be if only he had access to the tools to communicate efficiently. He was not the only individual with disabilities I met that day whose lives I could envision differently if only they had been involved with HMS, or a program like ours, that invests in providing these essential supports.

Our students' transition away from us begins the day they enroll, as we consider what we can do for a particular student, and we continue to ask whether we are the best setting for that student throughout his/her enrollment. Whether they enter HMS at the age of five or 15, we begin to work immediately to ensure that by the day they leave us, they will have achieved a level of independence that allows them to be engaged and participate with their family and new community.

When a student reaches the age of 14, our formal transition process begins, designed to help each take increasing levels of individual responsibility. We provide opportunities for students to plan their own activities, including parties and recreational trips. We teach self-advocacy and problem-solving skills and give students situations in which to practice what they learn. We work on weighing options and making choices - skills every developing adult needs, including our students.

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Parent's Corner

By Amy Warmflash



I've often remembered our first exposure to HMS. We were reticent; we had hoped Jordana would be able to be in a neighborhood school, that her needs would not be severe enough to require a "special" school.

With the guidance of caring faculty at Ken-Crest, we were nudged toward the idea of HMS as an appropriate placement. We were given a video to introduce us to HMS. It included scenes from the Something Magical program. I watched it in my family room, and I cried. I cried because I wanted to be the parent of the wonderful child who was working WITH the HMS students, I wanted to be that mom. I cried at seeing which mom I was, and which child Jordana was.

It showed me the future, perhaps a little earlier than I was ready to see it. Yet, that snapshot stayed with me, and as we started to warm to the idea of HMS as the absolute right place, the inspiring staff and those happy children in the video, the ones from HMS, came to mind and we moved forward, with less fear and with more hope.

That experience typifies our experience at HMS these last 15 years. They have pushed and pulled us in directions we might not have been quite ready for, they showed us things we were afraid of — and then led us to them — with care, with love and showed us that the only thing that was really scary — was not moving forward. They

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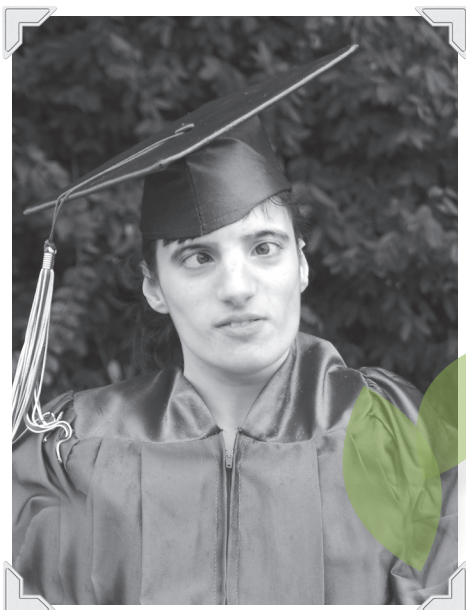


Meet our Class of 2013

This year's graduating class is comprised of four young women who have been valued members of our school community since childhood, continuing on through adolescence to adulthood. We wish them and their families the best and know they will always be a part of HMS.

Samantha Crossfield, 21
Cheltenham, PA
Years at HMS: 15
Day Student

Most significant accomplishment at HMS: Increased communication and socialization skills. Samantha really enjoys one-on-one interactions, focusing on being involved with another person. She also has learned how to walk with a walker and maneuver her manual wheelchair herself, allowing for greater mobility.



Favorite extracurricular activities: "Samantha has really expanded her interests," says Nicole Durham, Samantha's classroom teacher for three and a half years. "She loves to be on the swing outside, go swimming, play computer games, and especially enjoys lights and bright colors."

Plans after HMS: Samantha will attend the LifePath day program in Sellersville, PA.

What makes Samantha special: Her ability to identify her own needs. If Samantha needs or wants something, she will let you know. She always is doing something to surprise you!

Amanda Long, 21
Center Valley, PA
Years at HMS: 13
Residential Student

Most significant accomplishment at HMS: Being able to communicate better through her communication device to indicate what she would like to do or what she needs. One of the benefits of using her device is that Amanda has also been able to participate in plays with The Walnut Street Theatre, where she played the queen in *Hamlet*.

Favorite extracurricular activities: Horseback riding, shopping, painting, playing on the computer, bowling, going to sporting events, concerts, going for walks, traveling and staying in hotels, visiting her siblings at college, and spending time with family and friends.



What else: According to Amanda's evening nurse Pat Schneider, "Amanda always gets a big chuckle when she talks to her Mom on Skype Wednesday nights. She acts like she's not listening to mom, and then when Dad gets on camera, she is all smiles."

Plans after HMS: Amanda will be going back to her hometown where her family has worked with local resources to create a customized program for her. It will consist of a few days each week of small group programs, swimming, hippotherapy, community activities, music, and art.

What makes Amanda special: Amanda has a magical ability when she enters a room and smiles her beautiful smile to make everyone around her happy! Amanda's mother, Marilyn says, "We could be having the worst day and when Amanda comes home smiling, nothing else in the world can be bad- she has a way of helping us keep life in perspective, and that is a great gift to give people." She also is a very generous and kind young lady, donating her hair to Locks of Love anytime she gets a significant haircut.

Alanna McKnight, 20
Philadelphia, PA
Years at HMS: 17
Day Student

Most significant accomplishment at HMS: Becoming more assertive and is able to advocate for herself. She is especially good at caring for others, but now she also lets HMS staff know when she needs something, such as assistance with her wheelchair.

Leadership: Alanna has served as the Student Government President for the past two years and she recently received the 2013 Jim Roebuck Leadership Award.

Favorite extracurricular activity: Alanna loves to socialize and is always willing to welcome and tour visitors to HMS.

Plans after HMS: Alanna will be at home, filling her days with a variety of activities.



What makes Alanna special: According to Alanna's occupational therapist Janice Barbour, Alanna is very engaging, personable, and polite. She is always considerate of her peers and younger schoolmates. She also has a great sense of humor!

Jordana (Jordie) Warmflash, 20
Elkins Park, PA
Years at HMS: 15
Residential Student

Most significant accomplishment at HMS: "Jordie has made great strides in being more mature and independent," says classroom teacher Kevin Rafferty. "When she first joined my class, she would park her wheelchair next to me and ask to get on the computer. This year, she was independent throughout most of the day and rarely wanted to be in the classroom. She's still growing, learning, and maturing."

Favorite extracurricular activity: Connecting with family and friends through Skype and video chatting, exploring the hallways, and spending time with the evening staff and students at HMS.

Plans after HMS: Jordie recently moved to the Margaret E. Moul center in York, PA where she will be in the company of several other HMS graduates.



What makes Jordie special: Jordie has a unique ability to make other people happy. As she has matured, she has become comfortable with others and comfortable with herself—joking around with other students. After attending this year's prom, her parents observed that Jordie was truly ready to take what she'd learned at HMS and proudly move on to her new life in York.

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showed us, little by little, what the possibilities for Jordana were, when we weren't convinced — and when Jordana wasn't either.

We have been astounded that Jordana never really reached a plateau in her years there. They have set the goals just a little higher and a little further then took her to that next goal. We couldn't be prouder of her, more in awe of the HMS staff — or happier to see how much pride Jordana has in herself!

Jordana transitioned five months before graduation to the Margaret E Moul Center in York, PA. As we anticipate the possibilities and options for Jordana's future, we are astounded when we see how far she has come, how far we have all come.

Jordana was ready for transition. They taught her to have a life independent of her family. They taught her to advocate for herself, to trust her instincts. We never thought we would ever be at a place where we know that the future is rich and bright for her.

It is true — and it will always be true, that HMS is the best place she'll ever be. Nothing in this world could ever match the magic that they all bring every day. But they put enough of their magic inside of Jordana that she was ready to move on and has embraced her new life fully.

She moved on with confidence, with skill, and with love.

In the Hebrew scripture, the Ethics of our Fathers, it is said that he who is rich is the one who appreciates what he has. Jordana is the richest person we know and we count HMS among her most treasured possessions.

Just Ask... *Will my child stop trying to talk if he has a communication device?* At HMS School we have not seen a decrease in spoken communication when students use a communication device. In fact, some students with limited speech started talking more after learning to use a device. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) research supports our observations. Learning to use a communication device increases language exploration and use, facilitates successful social interactions, and motivates continued communication using all communication modes, including the device and speech.

Do you have a question regarding your child's disability? Please email us at Editor@hmsschool.org.



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HMS School News | Graduation 2013

A publication of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy, dedicated to reporting about student life, school programs and important events.

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HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting/serving students from any locality without regard to race, color, religion, disability [except as limited by PDE program approvals], ancestry, national origin, age [within school ages] or gender.

The Mission of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy is to educate, nurture, and care for children and youth with motor impairments who may also have other disabilities resulting from brain injury with the goal of assisting each individual in achieving his or her maximum potential. HMS School aims to facilitate independence and improve the quality of life for its students in a safe and secure environment so they can lead fulfilling, stimulating lives in their present and future environments.

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Contrast the young man I met at the Abilities Expo with the story of Rodawn a 34-year old HMS alumna. A very engaging, bubbly person, at HMS Rodawn learned to use her communication device together with speech, developed close friendships with other students and lasting relationships with staff, and had many, many opportunities to interact with others. When she graduated at the age of 21, she moved on to Inglis House where she continued to cultivate a circle of friends who added to her rich social life, not to mention her Facebook page. There she met Chad, a young man who also lives at Inglis House. They quickly developed a special relationship that blossomed into love and an engagement. While I was at the Abilities Expo, the two were being married.

Rodawn achieved what we desire for every one of our students, that is, the satisfaction of being an active participant in a life shared with those they love. What role her HMS education played in her metamorphosis I can't venture, but she was prepared for her adult experiences by a combination of her own determination, with that of her family and the school, all collaborating to provide the specialized technological, educational and emotional supports she would need to transition from student to young adult.

As we bid goodbye to our Class of 2013, we know their roads will have bumps and detours, but we expect those roads will lead to the enriching lives they deserve, filled with friendship, love and fulfillment.