

# Puzzlesolvers:

In her home district, Ashley benefited from a verbal behavioral program. However, she was not able to master academics and her district realized they could help by having Ashley's needs better met at a specialty program. Pace Learning Center was that program.

"What are we going to do?" questioned special education teacher Pam Salerno's when seven-year-old Ashley first walked through the doors at Pace Learning Center in Valencia, PA. She had difficulty communicating, used only one or two words to verbalize and had trouble with letter recognition. Ms. Salerno noticed immediately that Ashley would not make eye contact with anyone and she was very impulsive and prone to biting. "Then we knew what we had to do. We were trying to come into her world to bring her back to ours". During Ashley's first Individualized Education Program (IEP), it was determined that the emphasis would be on verbal behavioral work with speech and on academics.

The staff at Pace School then began the difficult task of working with Ashley to learn things such as the difference between yes and no. Her team uses methods and tools that put Ashley in charge of her own learning.

For Ashley, paying attention does not come easy and is not that same as it is for students in the public school system. In her world it means giving eye contact and following a specific direction, being at her work area, and engaged in her activity. The team at Pace

Learning Center discovered that she needed sensory input to focus on her work. Ashley receives Occupational and Speech Therapy and responds well to tactile activities, deep pressure, movement, or Wilbarger Sensory Brushing Protocol during her lessons.

Another educational breakthrough came about when Ms. Salerno discovered how much Ashley loves books and pictures. At first, Ashley did not understand that books contain stories, not just pictures. The staff at Pace Learning Center would read to Ashley a page out of a book with songs and rhymes and have her repeat phrases while pointing out the words. This enabled the staff to use books and props to help her learn letters by placing the prompt on the letter and having her repeat. Eventually Ashley moved on from letters to words and began to learn to read.

At the end of the year Ashley put together a book to take home to her family that consisted of sentences she had been working on. The sentences were in the context of "I can" and they were matched with pictures of Ashley doing things such as "I can run. I can hug." The staff at Pace Learning Center is proud to say that Ashley was able to read each entire sentence from her own book. Her book titled I see was later sent home for Ashley to read to her mother. Her Mom was overwhelmed with joy when her little girl sat down and read her a story. "Thank God we found this place; I don't know what would have happened to her without Pace Learning Center.

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