

Jason: a success story

Jason Lantz is a handsome, self-confident, 20-year-old man. You might think: Here is a young person who has been given every advantage since birth. Not so.

Jason spent the first eight years of his life in a dysfunctional family where he suffered physical abuse and extreme neglect. He rarely attended school and was too hungry and upset to learn when he did attend. At 8 years of age, the county juvenile authorities removed him from his home. He was placed with the Lantz family as a foster child.

“If you work at something really hard, you can do almost anything,” Jason believes.

When Mrs. Lantz realized that Jason couldn't read, count or print his name, she had him tested by the Troy Public School System. The tests determined that Jason was severely emotionally impaired. Jason was placed in a special education classroom for emotionally impaired children.

Jason's desire to learn, to improve himself, to even excel became immediately apparent.

One year later, Jason was retested and the severely emotionally impaired label was dropped and Jason was certified as learning disabled. Jason worked hard.

If a teacher assigned one page, Jason did 10. He was also becoming an excellent athlete, which helped him gain self-confidence as well as friends.

When Jason was 9, his adoption by the Lantz family became final. This

gave him a real boost. He was now part of a large family—seven kids—that loved him very much.

The Lantz are members of Faith Lutheran Church in Troy, Mich. At home and at his church, Jason was learning about a wonderful Savior who had seen how he was suffering and had made so many wonderful things happen in his life. Jason's love for Jesus was growing stronger every day.

Jason was tested every two years in Troy. To the tester's amazement, Jason's tested intelligence level continued to climb. Jason's parents were also continually amazed at God's goodness. Soon Jason was attending some regular classes each day. Now he wanted to attend a Lutheran school with his brothers and sisters.

At age 13, Jason entered the sixth grade-Middle School. This is where the pressure—the teasing and taunting—really becomes constant for the “Sped” (special ed kids), as they are cruelly labeled. They can become total social outcasts. The Lantz did not know if Jason would be strong enough to handle this, but God prepared the way.

That fall, Trinity Lutheran School in Utica, in partnership with Lutheran Special Education Ministries, opened a resource room for students with learning disabilities. Nancy Niemeyer was the special education teacher assigned to work at Trinity. Jason was immediately transferred from public school to Trinity.

Testing at the Ephphatha Center, Detroit, Mich.

Jim Pagels tested Jason at Ephphatha Center of Lutheran Special Education Ministries in Detroit. Pagels determined that Jason should spend half of each day

with Mrs. Niemeyer and the other half in the regular sixth grade classroom.

The Grade School Years

Jason attended sixth, seventh and eighth grades at Trinity Lutheran School in Utica, with support from Mrs. Niemeyer. In the resource room, Jason received one-on-one teaching, primarily in English. He was able to work at his own pace.

Each year, Jason progressed and spent more time in the regular classroom and less time in the resource room. He had done well academically, but was still far behind in English. He simply could not organize his thoughts and put them down on paper. Spelling was especially difficult for him.

Jason, however, had grown spiritually and was actually acquiring some self-confidence. At Trinity, no one had even seemed to notice that Jason went to special classes. He was never once called a “sped.” He was just another kid growing up and having fun.

(Continued on next page.)



Today, Jason Lantz is a handsome, self-confident young man.

As confirmation and eighth grade graduation approached, so too came a new problem. Lutheran High School North did not offer special education classes. The thought of public high school was very frightening to Jason. The Lantz family waited and prayed.

High School Years

Our faithful God was once again at work! Less than one week before school started in the fall, the Lantz family got a call from Lutheran High North. The high school, like Trinity, formed a partnership with Lutheran Special Education Ministries to help students with special needs. Jason would be able to attend North.

Gloria Burley was hired as the resource room teacher. What a blessing this woman was to be in Jason's life.

Mrs. Lantz said, "Gloria Burley loves the Lord and loves her work, and both were very obvious in the way she helped my son. Between Gloria's dedication, Jason's determination, and God's blessings on them both, things really happened."

Jason attended a special English class taught by Mrs. Burley during his freshman and sophomore years. He progressed so much that by his junior and senior years, he saw Mrs. Burley only for tutorial support.

Bruce Braun, who was the Director of Guidance at Lutheran High School North when Jason entered the school, said, "Jason knew his own weaknesses and worked to overcome his difficulties. He was sincere, goal-oriented, hard working and came from a very supportive family."

Jason feels that Mrs. Burley was the best teacher he ever had. And in the four years he attended North, not one student ever made a comment or treated Jason any differently because he was in "special education."

Reevaluation

In October of Jason's senior year in high school, he returned to the Ephphatha

The students are helpful and polite. They're well dressed.

The school is orderly and neat. There is no graffiti on the walls. The campus is located on 35 acres in a quiet, residential area in Mount Clemens, Mich.

Sound like a dream? It's not—this school really exists: Lutheran High School North. This is where Jason Lantz attended high school.

Dale Cooper, the principal, is justifiably proud of the school. This college-oriented high school opened in 1972 with 65 students. Today, the school has 600 students, nearly 90 percent of whom go on to college. The building was finished in two phases: the first part in 1974, the second phase in 1983. During the 1986-87 school year, Lutheran North was named a National Exemplary School by the U.S. Department of Education. This is the highest honor conferred on a school by the national government.

"The cooperative arrangement we have with Lutheran Special Education Ministries has been a tremendous blessing for us," Cooper commented. At one time, the school received special services from the public schools in Utica—teachers were able to come on site. However, when the law changed in the 1980s, public school teachers could no longer come onto the site of a parochial school.

"It would stigmatize the kids to have to go off-campus for special help," Cooper commented. So, eventually, students with learning disabilities stopped attending Lutheran High North. "Lutheran Special Education Ministries has opened that door (for learning disabled students) again," he added.

Cooper commented on the tutorial study hall teacher. "The resource room teacher works closely with the teachers on our staff. They also form a linkage between the students and the student's teachers."

"If you look at Jason's grades—it really is a success story. His grades got better the longer he was here," Cooper said.

Center for reevaluation—to see how he had progressed and to see if he qualified for learning disabled services at the college level.

However, the tests showed that Jason had developed his learning skills so well that he no longer qualified as learning disabled (according to state guidelines).

According to Mrs. Krause at the Ephphatha Center, a person's learning disability never really disappears. "It may seem to disappear because you're not struggling with it so much. But it's not because it's gone, it's because you've learned to cope," Krause commented. "Jason found his strengths and worked in those areas and found ways around his weaknesses."

Jason Today

Jason graduated from North last June and now attends Macomb Community College. While he readily admits he works hard, Jason is confident in his ability to succeed. When his grades came at the end of the first semester, he could not wait to call Mrs. Burley and tell her that he earned an "A" in freshman English! To God alone be the glory!

A Summary

"We really, really appreciate the

(Lutheran Special Education Ministries) programs," Mrs. Lantz commented.

The Lutheran Special Education Ministries Statement of Ministry says: "With the knowledge of God's love and desire that God's love be revealed through our ministry, Lutheran Special Education Ministries serves to enable children with special learning needs to receive a Christian education."

That statement sums it all up in Jason's case. "The Lord had it all laid out for Jason, straight through!" his mom says.



Mrs. Lantz believes in the importance of a Christian education.

How do you know if a child has a learning disability?

There's no easy answer to that question. It takes a great deal of information from parents and teachers and an extensive evaluation process to help determine if a child has a learning disability.

A child with a learning disability has average or above average intelligence, but struggles in one or more academic areas, like reading or math.

If the child attends a Lutheran school in Michigan or northern Illinois that has a partnership with Lutheran Special Education Ministries, help is available. A resource room teacher or consultant from Lutheran Special Education Ministries talks with the student's classroom teacher and parents. As a team, they discuss ways to help the child.

If the child still experiences difficulties, a referral can be made to the Ephphatha Center for evaluation. The referral asks the teacher specific questions:

- Does the child appear to be more intelligent than the work produced?
- Does the child's attention span seem to be limited?
- Does the child appear to daydream, etc.?

The teacher then asks the Ephphatha Center staff to find the answers to specific questions, for example:

- Does this child have a learning disability in the area of reading?
- What teaching methods can I use to best help this child?

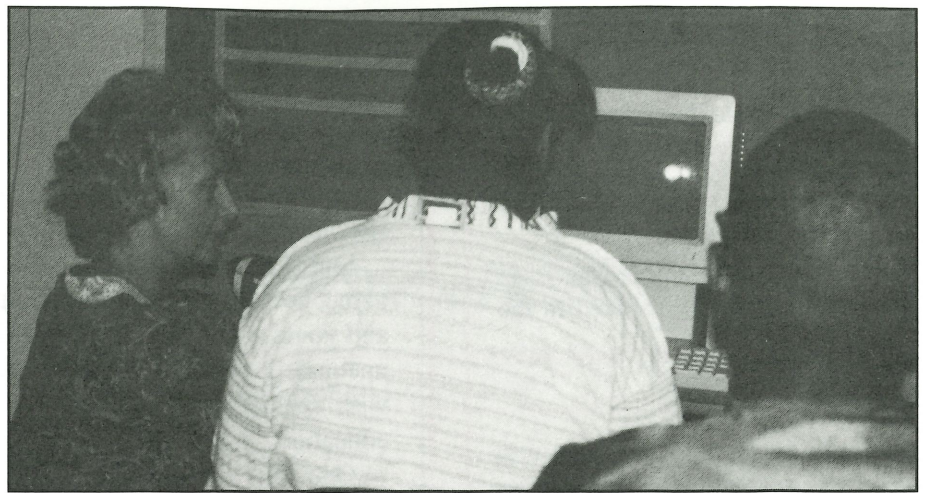
Two years of report cards and two years of achievement test results are given to the Ephphatha Center staff along with this referral form. The Center staff members look for a consistent pattern of scores in certain areas.

From the information received, the staff makes a determination as to what evaluation measures to use when the child is scheduled for an appointment.

The child is seen at the Ephphatha Center at 6861 E. Nevada in Detroit for testing.

The child will usually work with both a school psychologist for ability evaluation and an instructional consultant for educational evaluation. The entire process takes about three hours.

The parents are kept busy during the evaluation too. They are interviewed by



Gloria Burley helps students work on computers during Mr. Brower's class at the North Detroit Lutheran School.

a consultant and have the opportunity to ask questions. They also fill out a packet of forms requesting information dealing with family history, medical history and developmental milestones such as when the child first started to walk and talk. Additional questionnaires deal with behavioral issues.

After the evaluation is complete, the Ephphatha staff members fully explain

all results to the parents. At this time, the possibility of a learning disability is discussed, along with recommendations.

A follow-up meeting is set at the child's home school to implement the recommendations. The parents, classroom teacher and Ephphatha consultant work as a team to support the child and hopefully to enable the child to be more successful.

This letter was written to Jason by Mrs. Gloria Burley (Mrs. B) in the spring of 1990, Jason's senior year at Lutheran High North. Mrs. Burley was the resource room teacher at the high school. For Jason's first two years of high

school, she taught a special English class; during his last two years, she was his tutorial study hall teacher. The letter is an example of the special relationships that develop between the students and resource room teachers.

A letter to 'J':

You are about to be graduated from high school. I remember back to that time nearly four years ago when you were a skinny, anxious freshman and I was just starting the resource room at the high school. We were both excited about our new prospects and eager to begin. Now, in such a brief time, this phase of life is behind us.

Although you've had many adversities in your short life, God has richly blessed you with loving Christian parents and teachers. I know that you are aware of this. What you don't realize is that we have been blessed by your presence in our lives. Yes, we've been there to guide you, to teach you, to hold you up in God's love. But from you we have learned about determination, persistence, faith and the miracles that God's love can work in our lives.

You have shown us the presence of God through a spirit that refuses to quit, a faith that has remained firm in spite of earthly problems. Watching you grow day by day has strengthened my own faith and constantly reminded me that only through reliance on Him, can we succeed. Working with you and your parents has been an experience in being one in the Spirit—carrying each other's burdens, sharing the joys, and holding up one another to God in prayer. I thank God for that experience.

When you cross that stage to get your diploma, you may glance at that black-robed sea of academia, your teachers. I'll be there. I'll be the one wearing the big smile and the tears. Go with God, dear student and friend. In all that the future holds for you, serve our Lord with gladness.—Love, Mrs. B.

Want to know more?

If you or your group would like to know more about Lutheran Special Education Ministries, call (313) 368-1220. Staff members will be happy to loan you a copy of a new video, "But Now I Know I'm Not."

Jason Lantz, the subject of this issue of the "Advocate," is featured in the video.

Thank you!

Thanks to all the groups who collected and sent in Campbell's soup labels during the year! The school received 380,000 labels this year! With those labels, Lutheran Special Education Ministries will receive computers, AV equipment, VCRs, TVs and athletic equipment.

Please don't stop saving the labels! The goal for 1991 is to reach 1 million labels. That will enable the school to receive a new van.

As labels are collected, please send them to Lutheran Special Education Ministries, 6861 E. Nevada, Detroit, MI 48234.

Wanted!

To help in our ministry, we need the following items: lawn mower (\$300); washing machine (\$400); slip table to be used in making ceramics with our students (\$500).

If you can help with any of these items, please contact the Development Office at Lutheran Special Education Ministries, 6861 E. Nevada, Detroit, MI 48234, or call (313) 368-1220.

Will you help continue our ministry?

Lutheran Special Education Ministries has provided children with special learning needs a Christian education for more than 118 years.

Lutheran Special Education Ministries faces the future with a new name, new challenges and new opportunities. With the Lord's help—and yours—Lutheran Special Education Ministries will continue its unequalled record of innovation and leadership to help more children with special learning needs to receive a caring Christian special education.

One way you can help Lutheran Special Education Ministries to provide this special ministry to children with special learning needs in the future is through deferred giving (for example: wills, trusts or other options). If you are interested in deferred giving and would like some assistance from Lutheran Special Education Ministries, please fill out the bottom of this form and mail it to the address below.

Thanks so much for insuring that our ministry will continue to be able to help children, not only now, but in the future to know of the love of Christ.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Lutheran Special Education Ministries
c/o Gregg Braun
6861 E. Nevada
Detroit, MI 48234

Statement of Ministry

With the knowledge of God's love and desire that God's love be revealed through our ministry, Lutheran Special Education Ministries serves to enable children with special learning needs to receive a Christian education.

The Advocate

for Students with Special Learning Needs

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