

Holland Elementary

May 9, 2012

Julie Bryant is a VI Teacher and DRM for seven school corporations in South West Dubois County.

Mara Jochem is the Instructional Assistant for our featured student at Holland Elementary.

Drew Meece is in second grade and has been Blind since birth.

Martha Hammond:

Hello, my name is Martha Hammond and I am the Library Services Consultant for the ICAM and this is Chadd Smith who is running our sound stage. Today, we are at Holland Elementary School in South West Dubois County, Indiana. I would like to introduce you to the individuals gathered around our table. Julie Bryant is a Digital Rights Manager for nine school corporations and in seven of those she is also a VI Teacher. She is going to tell you a little bit more about that in a while. Also with us today is Mara Jochem who is the Instructional Assistant to one very special student whom I am going to introduce you to. Ms. Jochem, Ms. Julie has told me that you are her right hand. She said that without you she would not be able to do her job. I can tell that there is a strong rapport between the three of you. I know that the end of the school year is often just as busy as the beginning and thanks to all of you for giving us this time today.

Julie Bryant:

Thanks for giving us the chance do this.

Mara Jochem:

Thank you.

Martha Hammond:

Finally, I am honored to introduce you to Drew Meece. Drew is finishing up the second grade here at Holland Elementary School. You are going to meet him and learn a lot about him in the next little while, but Drew, there was a wonderful article about in you the *Jasper Herald* a couple of months ago. When we all read that we were like we have to meet this guy because he sounds amazing. Thank you especially for taking time out of your school day to come in today. I would like for you to tell us about that award that the article mentioned.

Drew Meece:

I received a deck of cards in Braille and I received a book certificate that I could get some books with and a fifty dollar check. I received these for winning the Braille Challenge.

Martha Hammond:

The Braille Challenge and can you tell me a little bit about that competition?

Drew Meece:

The Braille Challenge was done all over the place. The one I went to was in Indianapolis. There were three tests. There was spelling, reading comprehension and proof reading. The Braille Challenge you had to take those three tests and there would be a winner from each state. The top ten would go to LA.

Martha Hammond:

I see and so were all the people that you were competing with, were they all in the second grade?

Drew Meece:

Yes, first and second.

Martha Hammond:

First and second grade. Excellent. Well, congratulations on winning that and some really great prizes.

Drew Meece:

Thank you.

Martha Hammond:

You're welcome. Ms. Julie, how long have you taught VI students?

Julie Bryant:

This is my second year with Visually Impaired students. I actually worked with Drew as an Instructional Assistant when he was in kindergarten on a consultant basis through South West Dubois. I have been with Drew, well, this is the third year.

Martha Hammond:

I see and so were you a general education teacher before this?

Julie Bryant:

I wasn't. I just went back to school and finished my teaching degree. I had been a paraprofessional for a student who was totally blind in another school corporation and decided that I wanted to finish my teaching degree and this is what it led to.

Martha Hammond:

So you have been working with Drew since kindergarten you said.

Julie Bryant:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

I was just going to ask you about his attitude towards school and his work habits?

Julie Bryant:

Drew's work ethic is over the top amazing. He wants to be the best at everything he does. In his class they do Accelerated Reader. The goal for the second graders here at Holland Elementary is 30 points for the year. Drew reached that goal mid-year and was very upset that he did not reach it first in his class.

Mara Jochem:

He was a close second all year long.

Martha Hammond:

Since you are such a proficient reader then can I assume that reading is your favorite subject in school?

Drew Meece:

Reading is okay, but it is not my favorite subject.

Martha Hammond:

Okay, so what is your favorite subject?

Drew Meece:

Math.

Martha Hammond:

Can you explain to me some of the challenges you face in doing math in Braille?

Drew Meece:

Well, there is a math acuity test. It's got 30 questions and it is really hard and that is a challenge, definitely.

Martha Hammond:

I would imagine there is multiplication, division and what sorts of problems are on there.

Drew Meece:

No, it was more of graphs and story problems.

Martha Hammond:

Oh.

Mara Jochem:

There are lots of visual problems on the acuity test so it requires lots of manipulatives to be made up before he is able to take that test.

Martha Hammond:

When you are given an assignment in class Drew how do you prepare that assignment to turn into your teachers?

Drew Meece:

Usually, I would use my Perkins Brailier, but if I do facts which I only write the numbers, just the answers, then I would use my BrailleNote.

Martha Hammond:

Mara I know that Drew goes to regular classes and then he works with Ms. Julie for pull-outs on reading. Is that correct?

Mara Jochem:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

Can you explain to us the assistance you provide for Drew?

Mara Jochem:

Well the most important part of my job is helping Drew become more independent in the classroom. With that being said, the learning environment for Drew requires the use of many manipulatives to aid in his learning. For example, math I would take a lesson and decide what type of manipulatives we need for that lesson. I would pull together geometric shapes, fractional pieces, Braille clocks and just whatever we would need to aid in his learning. Then, I will also take graphs or pictures and we will use different mediums to make them tactile. We will use hot glue or wikki stix. Drew what else do we use? We use tactile stickers.

Drew Meece:

Let's see. One of the things she might talk to you about is the thermal form machine. You put paper in it and it would raise the picture up so that I could feel it.

Martha Hammond:

One thing that is really amazing to me is that Mara you have been here since August, right?

Mara Jochem:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

Julie is relatively new to the field and yet, you guys seem like you have everything under control and know exactly what you are doing and where you are going with Drew. It is just such a great team and I want to emphasize that. It is really evident the work that you do together.

Julie Bryant:

Thanks. It works out. It is nice because if there is a new skill then I will introduce the skill and Mara is amazing at following up with that skill and presenting it the same way that I presented it so that it is not confusing for Drew.

Drew Meece:

It doesn't take long for Ms. Jochem to catch on to a new skill.

Julie Bryant:

It doesn't take Drew very long to catch on to a new skill either.

Martha Hammond:

I can tell. One of the VI teachers that we interviewed earlier this year told me that sometimes students who are blind miss some of the incidental learning and social cues that other children receive because they are in a classroom and group settings. Can you two speak to that and Drew's development during the time you have worked with him?

Mara Jochem:

Well, I think Drew does great socially. Honestly, he is kind of a social butterfly anymore. I think it is important for myself to pay close attention to what is going on in the classroom. For instance, if the children all start laughing you know to speak up and say this is what just happened and this is why everyone is laughing so he doesn't miss those types of things. If I notice one of his friends looks sad or upset I will say Drew so and so looks upset so that he knows to have that social skill to ask what's wrong or what's going on. I truly believe that type of learning for him is equally as important as core curriculum.

Martha Hammond:

Okay. Ms. Julie I mentioned your roles in the nine schools that you serve. Can you give us some feedback on your roles in all those corporations?

Julie Bryant:

I am Teacher of Record for 19 students and I actually service 28 students now. I am DRM for the nine school corporations and I am the VI Service Teacher for all those corporations, but I only have students in seven of the nine now.

Martha Hammond:

Only in seven. I like that.

Julie Bryant:

I spend a lot of time on the road. That is my thinking time. My time where I think oh I want to do this with this student where I am going. Some days I feel very overwhelmed. I have aides in some other buildings, as well. I do spend time with Drew in the classroom. I pull out with him typically an hour to

an hour and a half a week. When I am doing that Ms. Jochem prepares things for the rest of the week using the Duxbury program and getting things ready so that gives her some work time and it gives me a chance to spend some time with Drew in the classroom.

Martha Hammond:

How is your experience with getting your materials through the ICAM and the IERC as far as goes things like timely manner? Do you get your materials when you need them?

Julie Bryant:

I do. In fact I started ordering earlier this year and I stopped because I was getting things for next year already. The nine corporations or the seven that I have students in I do have a student in at least every corporation that receives large print or Braille. I have everything come to me at our Co-op office and then I distribute that. I go back at the end of the year and pick up those books, box them up and ship them back.

Martha Hammond:

Excellent.

Julie Bryant:

Organization has been key for me the last two years.

Martha Hammond:

Those are excellent tips because being proactive early I think is the key to getting your materials when you need them and if there is training involved for the teachers, students or parents you have plenty of time to set that up. Organization is a big problem for a lot of our VI teachers because of the overwhelming responsibilities they neglect to order early.

Julie Bryant:

Because your office is typically in your car. Mara's been a huge help to me in that not only does she do her job with Drew she also is great at helping me just stay organized.

Martha Hammond:

So start early and get help.

Julie Bryant:

Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Martha Hammond:

That is how that works out. Okay, now Drew, let's go back and talk about your learning experiences. When you receive an assignment for the next day how do you go about organizing and doing your homework?

Drew Meece:

My manual Braille and my BrailleNote.

Martha Hammond:

When you take your work home do you have a place in your home that is just for study?

Drew Meece:

My desk.

Martha Hammond:

Is your desk in your room?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Mara Jochem:

Who built that desk?

Drew Meece:

My dad.

Martha Hammond:

Your dad built your desk?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

Is there something really special about the desk?

Drew Meece:

There is going to be. It is going to lock. The drawers are going to lock.

Martha Hammond:

Do you have lots of valuables that you need to keep in there?

Drew Meece:

Yes I do.

Julie Bryant:

Drew's obsession is what Drew? Tell them.

Drew Meece:

Office supplies.

Martha Hammond:

I knew that about you. So, tell me the types of accessible materials and devices that you have used so far. I know that you use BrailleNote...

Drew Meece:

BrailleNote. My cane. My cane is definitely a good one.

Julie Bryant:

Lots of manipulatives. Math window.

Drew Meece:

My Math window, yes.

Martha Hammond:

Do you use any Learning Ally files?

Julie Bryant:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

Do you like to listen to those?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Julie Bryant:

On his BrailleNote he has refreshable Braille.

Drew Meece:

It is a computer, but in Braille.

Julie Bryant:

We call it his computer for a blind person.

Mara Jochem:

The PC for the blind.

Julie Bryant:

Yes. I would have to say and I know Ms. Jochem agrees; Drew is so proficient.

Drew Meece:

I can Braille it and send it through and it will print it out in print. It is much easier for spelling tests because, beforehand, I would have to Braille them on my Braille and Ms. Jochem would have to transcribe them and it would take longer to turn them in. With this you can just print it and give it to the teacher.

Martha Hammond:

In this library are there lots of Braille books here for you?

Drew Meece:

There is a little area that we have that is set up for Braille books.

Julie Bryant:

How do you read most of your Braille books Drew?

Drew Meece:

I can read on my BrailleNote. That is mostly where I read all my books.

Julie Bryant:

I download from Bookshare, as well as from Learning Ally.

Drew Meece:

Right now I am listening to the Hunger Games.

Julie Bryant:

His mom reads to him, as well. They have read Percy Jackson and The Harry Potter Series.

Drew Meece:

The Kane Chronicle Series.

Martha Hammond:

Drew, tell me what makes these women such great teachers for you? How does this relationship work?

Drew Meece:

Well, they are fun. They push me to do my best. They are patient. Things like that.

Julie Bryant:

Who is the tough one?

Drew Meece:

Ms. Julie.

Martha Hammond:

Ms. Julie is the tough one.

Drew Meece:

She is a little more tough.

Martha Hammond:

How would you describe Ms. Jochem?

Drew Meece:

She is pretty easy.

Mara Jochem:

I get on you every now and then.

Drew Meece:

True.

Mara Jochem:

What did I tell you that you had to do this year that you were not happy about. What do you have to do every night at home?

Drew Meece:

Read for 20 minutes.

Martha Hammond:

That is a really great assignment and that is not a terribly long time is it Drew?

Drew Meece:

No, but she is moving it to 30 minutes this summer.

Martha Hammond:

Oh, well.

Mara Jochem:

We are going to make sure of that at the library aren't we Drew?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

So you will go to the public library to study?

Drew Meece:

I will be going to the public library and work 3 hours a week.

Julie Bryant:

With Ms. Jochem.

Drew Meece:

With Ms. Jochem.

Martha Hammond:

Very good. You don't want to lose skills over the summer.

Drew Meece:

No. Last summer to tell you the truth at the beginning of this year I lost everything. I mean it was pretty hard going, but we are going to make sure that does not happen again this summer. I can read 60 words per minute and I am striving for 75.

Martha Hammond:

Wow.

Julie Bryant:

Sixty words per minute typically is a third grade score for an average Braille reader.

Martha Hammond:

From his vocabulary and the way he presents himself I can tell that he is a good comprehender of 60 words per minute. No problem there, is there?

Drew Meece:

No.

Martha Hammond:

Do you have pets at home?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

What do you have?

Drew Meece:

I have two dogs. A male and female and a female cat.

Martha Hammond:

What breed are the dogs?

Drew Meece:

The female dog, she is Boxer/Labrador mix and I don't exactly know the males breed. He is a mutt. I know that.

(laughing)

Martha Hammond:

Have you ever discussed with your parents or your teachers at some point in your future maybe having a service dog?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

What do you think about that?

Drew Meece:

I will have a service dog.

Julie Bryant:

Probably not until he is older, maybe in college.

Drew Meece:

College, yes.

Julie Bryant:

Right now he has his cane, Ms. Jochem and his friends. Down the road because Drew will definitely be a very independent adult I believe.

Martha Hammond:

Yes, I believe so.

Julie Bryant:

He does a lot of things himself now. What else did we learn to do this year that has made a big difference in getting dressed that Ms. Conway, the Occupational Therapist, worked with you a lot on? What can you do now so that you don't trip and fall and break your neck?

Drew Meece:

Oh, I can tie my shoes.

Martha Hammond:

Awesome. Tie your shoes. So you recently celebrated a birthday, right Drew?

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Martha Hammond:

What were your big birthday gifts that made you so happy?

Drew Meece:

An Army Swiss knife, a BB gun and a slingshot.

Martha Hammond:

Oh my. Maybe we are glad we are not neighbors. Tell me what does a little boy who is blind do with a BB gun that is safe?

Drew Meece:

My brother helps me out when I shoot at a big round circular piece of plastic.

Martha Hammond:

Have you had any mishaps with the BB gun?

Drew Meece:

I did shoot my neighbors shed.

(laughing)

Mara Jochem:

If they didn't know that they will now.

(laughing)

Drew Meece:

Well, it bounced right off.

(laughing)

Martha Hammond:

What about the Swiss Army knife? Do you go camping? What do you do with that?

Drew Meece:

I chop trees down for bark and fire wood. Things like that.

Mara Jochem:

You are pretty good with the slingshot too, aren't you?

Drew Meece:

Yes, I get stones out of my ditch...

Martha Hammond:

What do you shoot at?

Drew Meece:

Cinder blocks.

Martha Hammond:

Oh, that is good and safe.

Mara Jochem:

Drew, tell them what you did with the nerf gun one time.

Drew Meece:

When I was at Ms. Jochem's house I took a nerf gun and shot her in the eye.

Mara Jochem:

Yes. He did.

Drew Meece:

It would have went right into her eyeball, if she wouldn't have put... It hit the newspaper. (laughing)

Mara Jochem:

He finds this very funny.

(laughing)

Drew Meece:

It was funny. I had to run back into her room to avoid being shot by her son Aiden.

(laughing)

Julie Bryant:

Why do you like to go to Ms. Jochem's house?

Drew Meece:

Because I play with her son Aiden.

Martha Hammond:

How old is he?

Drew Meece:

He is eight like me.

Martha Hammond:

Good. When you get together with your family I know you like to play Wii Games. Can you tell me about the best one for you?

Drew Meece:

It has changed.

Martha Hammond:

Oh it has?

Julie Bryant:

What use to be your favorite?

Drew Meece:

It used to be bowling, but now it is boxing. But they are both good. I usually win.

Martha Hammond:

That's what I was getting at.

(laughing)

Martha Hammond:

That is what I heard. You were the high scorer. Drew, when you grow up what do you plan after school is over and you are out in the world?

Drew Meece:

When everything is over after I graduate and everything...the President of the United States.

Martha Hammond:

You are going to be the President of the United States. That is quite a goal. Ms. Julie and Ms. Jochem do you have anything you would like to add today?

Julie Bryant:

I feel blessed every day to get to work with Drew, and Ms. Jochem and all the other students that I work with throughout the seven corporations. I really appreciate the ICAM coming in and doing this interview with us today. We have really enjoyed it and Drew, and Ms. Jochem and I were looking forward to it. A little nervous, right Drew?

Mara Jochem:

A little nervous.

Drew Meece:

Yes.

Julie Bryant:

We were looking forward to it.

Martha Hammond:

Well thank you all for coming and it has been a great morning. Drew you are just such a wonderful person to get to know and I appreciate your time. We were a little bit nervous too, so I know what you mean. I think this is a young man that we are going to be seeing again sometime in the future. We will flip on the TV and there will be Drew Meece...

Mara Jochem:

...President of the United States...

Martha Hammond:

...The President of the United States. Thank you all.

Julie Bryant and Mara Jochem:

Thank you.

Drew Meece:

Thank you.