

I've been the executive director of St. Rita School for the Deaf for 15 years. Everyday I walk these halls and everyday I'm amazed at the progress our students are making. I've seen children enter our program before they can even walk and stay for many years until they graduate...going on to become successful adults.

With each child there is a different story...a real story...a remarkable story. It's stories like Nic Erhardt's. He started in preschool this year. Like several of our students, Nic has been diagnosed with Apraxia...a motor disorder that affects not only his speech but his fine and gross motor development. When Nic first began our Montessori Preschool Program he struggled to communicate, not only at school with his new friends but even at home with his family. After being in our program for only a few weeks, Nic was using sign language to communicate. And the smile on his face...well, it was almost as big as mine.

We have such an awesome responsibility to our students. It's up to all of us to help them learn...grow...and dream about a future where anything is possible. With the unique programs at St. Rita School for the Deaf, our students are receiving an education that is preparing them for a future of exciting opportunities.

One way we are preparing students for the future is with our formal Literacy Program. Many students, like Yasmine Crawford, have made exceptional strides with literacy in only a short time. Our full-time literacy coordinator, Maryann Barth, works with teachers and speech therapists to help each student develop strategies to improve their reading and writing skills. The success of the program is measured not only in our formal testing, but more importantly can be seen in the confidence that students, like Yasmine, now have for learning.

A life of independence is one of the hopes we have for all of our students. At St. Rita School we have many deaf students, like Gregory Reitz, who have multiple special needs. With our unique vocational program, Gregory and his classmates are learning independent living skills they'll need to be self-sufficient in the future. But our vocational program does so much more than just teach new skills...being a part of this program has given Gregory and his classmates a true sense of belonging. Seeing your child *fit-in* for the first time...well, that's any loving parents' dream.

Our School has been blessed with dedicated, loving teachers who encourage St. Rita students to do their best and dream big dreams. We are so thankful for them and for our students...we're thankful for their stories... we're thankful for being a part of their stories. And we are also thankful for you, our generous donors who help us keep the stories going. With your continuous support, you'll no doubt find us climbing high... where all the dreams we dream, do come true...