

HOMETOWN HERO:

# Alexa Appel

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Alexa is my daughter and she has Asperger's Syndrome, with all of the strengths and special needs that come with it. We have put her out there to forge a path, sometimes as a guinea pig, even, and she has risen to the challenge and served as an ambassador for persons with ASD and high ability. She is currently a freshman at Old Mill High School, participating in the Patriot Players Theatre Company and the ELP/Pre-IB Programme.

Alexa has certainly benefitted from the support and services of many, including others who have been nominated for or received the Hometown Heroes award. But she has also ‘stepped up to bat’ to learn about her autism, to advocate for herself, and to work hard both academically and in therapeutic situations in and out of school.

The biggest reason I think she deserves the Hometown Heroes award is how her willingness to ‘forge ahead’ in the general education classroom has helped others learn about ASD. Several of her teachers have commented to me that her fellow students have benefitted from being in class with Alexa, not only from her knowledge but also from the lessons she can teach about students who are different. Her special contribution was reinforced when I recently bumped into one of her former teachers who made it a point to tell me how much Alexa changed her and changed the way she teaches - because she learned from Alexa.

When I think about how she has pushed herself and allowed us to push her, how she's learned to advocate for herself, and how it seems that she's changed the ‘rules of the game’ - for instance, by being the first IEP student at Old Mill Middle South with an HSA score, being one of the first Aspies in the IB program (I think there may be two in this year's class), it seems to me that she's helped not just herself but also those who will come ‘behind’ her. And she's done it without too many complaints.

I know that all of us feel our kids are our own heroes, so I hesitated to nominate her, particularly because she's benefitted so much from others. I do so because I think others benefit from her courage to let us make her a guinea pig - I think that makes her not only my hero, but a hero for the countless others who will follow in her footsteps.