



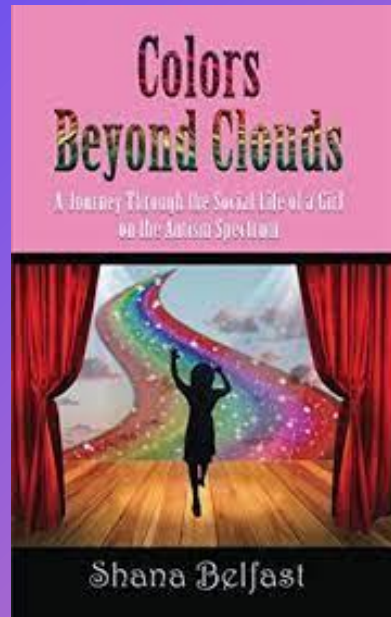
Westchester Institute
for Human Development

<https://www.wihd.org>

Welcome!

Community Support Network Transition Institute 2022

WHAT I LEARNED IN HIGH SCHOOL: THE BEAUTY OF SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS



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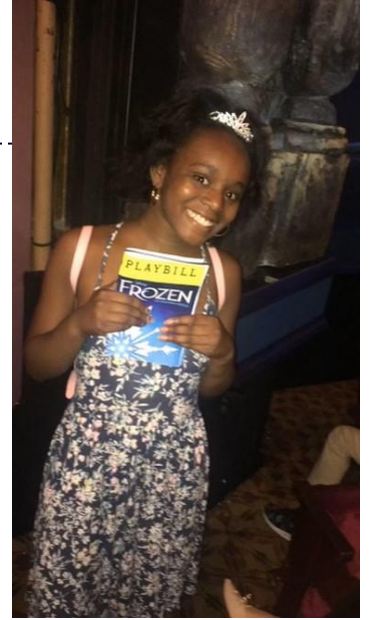
Published Author of the book: Colors Beyond Clouds: A Journey Through the Social Life of a Girl on the Autism Spectrum

Class of 2021 New Rochelle High School

WIHD Speaker Network

Introduction

- I am Shana Belfast
- I identify as Neurodivergent
- I wrote a book about my journey in 2019
- I graduated from High School in 2021
- I am currently taking a gap year
- I plan to attend SUNY Oneonta in August 2022
- I love theater!





My life is an exciting blend of great things with also some unique difficulties.

I am a Neurodivergent young woman on my way to college.

I have a lot on my plate but through it all, I have tried to find my own way of achieving my goals and conquering challenges.



MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Immediate Family



Extended Family



Friends



ME DOING WHAT I LOVE..



Performing!





MY DREAMS FOR HIGH SCHOOL

My 14 year old dreams

- +  Belong to a friend group
-

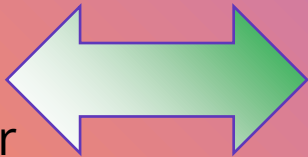
 Make new friends

+
○
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 To successfully manage challenges To feel free to be my authentic self

MY SOCIAL SKILLS INVENTORY ⁸

I am a hard worker

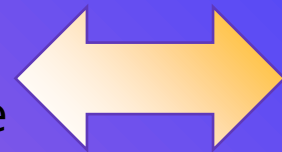


I can get too focused on things

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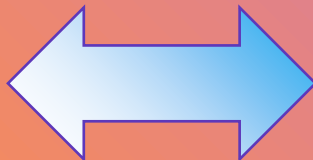


I am passionate



I wear my heart on my sleeve

I love having friends



People can perceive me as needy

I want to be thoughtful and polite



It is hard to define my own version of self-advocacy



How does Neurodivergence look like in my life?

Stuck in a Thought

Passionate about My Interests



What I wish students knew as they enter high school: My top 10 list!

- 1 Being kind has nothing to do with being pretty and popular.
Niceness is about choosing to treat people the way they want to be treated.
People of all colors and sizes can make that choice.



2 Good friends uplift you and don't ask you to do things that you are not comfortable with. They also do not tell you who and what you can share with others.



3 Sometimes, it is ok to let people go. A person may not turn out to be your best friend but they may be the best friend for someone else.

Letting someone go, opens the door for other people to come into your life.



4

Success can come in many different ways.

Try not to get fixated in only one vision of success, you can succeed in many ways.



5 Speaking up for yourself can be scary for many students, which is understandable but it doesn't always mean being loud, rude or yelling.



6 Learning to tolerate a little discomfort can teach us to tackle the big challenges in life.



7 Finding people that can relate to your unique struggles can be a powerful way to find a supportive community.



8

Sometimes it can be difficult to make friends in high school. If you find it difficult or feel lonely, try to join an activity you enjoy - sports, theatre, or a club are just a few examples.

Joining an activity can help you to meet new people who have the same interests as you, and that way you can be part of a community, which is an amazing experience.



9 Words matter a lot, be thoughtful of what you say to someone in person or online.



10



Today you are **YOU**,
that is truer than true.
There is **NO ONE** alive
that is **YOUER** than
YOU!

-Dr. Seuss

Believe in YOU!



My advice to high school educators



Please try to be understanding to us, and not ignore/dismiss our issues.

High school can be very difficult.

My advice to high school educators



Please try to listen generously to us,
and get to know us.

This will build trust and help the
student-teacher relationship.

My advice to high school educators



Be creative on how you involve students in social opportunities.

My advice to high school educators



Our lives are complex. Please try not to assume everything that is going on, or jump to conclusions. A student who is inattentive in class may seem like she doesn't care about her education, but in reality, she might be struggling with a situation.

Please be kind to your students and try not to judge or assume, it will make them feel so much more comfortable.

My advice to high school educators:

- Participating in IEP meetings

- It takes a lot of courage to go to an IEP meeting.
- Going to the IEP meeting means that we have to acknowledge the fact that we need extra supports. It requires some self-awareness and what one might need in school.
- It can be a little scary and intimidating.

My advice to high school educators:

- Participating in IEP meetings

What can schools do to help a student?:

- The adults involved should talk to the student prior to the meeting about what to expect.
- The adults should be understanding how the student is feeling. I was out of my comfort zone. This is a very vulnerable time for any student.
- Remind the student of their strengths.
- Make sure the student understands how their needs are being addressed by their IEP. Spent time truly listening to the student.

My life update

- After graduating from High school in 2021, I decided to take a gap year.
- My intention for my gap year is to become a healthier person and be emotionally ready to go to college.
- Being a senior during COVID had lasting effects in my mental health and I want to give myself time to heal from that period in my life.

Coping through COVID

- In the beginning I was excited to spend more time at home.
- As time passed, it was hard to not see my friends or go out.
- Different teachers had different approaches to teaching and coping with COVID.
- I was able to be in my last High School Musical.
- At the beginning of COVID, I painted my door with smiley faces, rainbows and butterflies to cope with COVID.
- During COVID, I went through a lot with my mental health and developed some tics, and even though COVID is somewhat over, I am still dealing with the consequences of that period in my life.

Vision BOARD



My Attitude – I want to:

- 😊 Be a happy and positive person
- 😊 Be better at regulating my emotions in positive ways
- 😊 Handle challenges and setbacks
- 😊 Perseverate less
- 😊 Be at peace with myself and others
- 😊 Be empathetic, but not overly emotional or sensitive



My Choices- I want to be make wise decisions about:

- ✓ School
- ✓ Career
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Relationships



My Experiences - I want to:



Continue to be in musicals and plays



Work with kids/young people



Be part of a great college community

Learn new ways to be creative
Travel and learn about new cultures.

PRESENTATION TITLE

+



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THANK YOU

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