



## Congratulations to Diana Garza, Winner of the 2018 HIE Help Center Scholarship

*We are pleased to announce that Diana Garza is the winner of the 2018 HIE Help Center Scholarship. Diana is an occupational therapy student who hopes to help special education students in the future.*

In her essay, Diana discusses how she was hit on the head by a babysitter as a child. This injury required emergency brain surgery. Afterward, doctors told her parents she would likely need speech and physical therapy. Throughout her essay, Diana talks of her experiences in the special education system and her desire to be treated and viewed in the same way as her peers. These experiences inspired her to help special education students and ensure they are not looked down upon or treated differently due to their condition.

For more information, check out Diana's winning essay, and view her personal video, below:

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# Diana's Essay: "Different is OK"



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We all think, act and feel differently towards people and things in our own lifetime. For example, some people see me as a hard-working college student in two honor societies with a GPA of 3.6. Others see me as a special education student who, in their eyes, wasn't capable of handling school.

I was just six months old when my babysitter hit me on the head so hard it fractured my skull. I was rushed to the hospital to have emergency brain surgery. Afterwards the doctors told my parents I would never be the same. I would need speech and physical therapy. I would even have difficulty learning at the normal pace of a regular student.

Therefore, when I entered first grade, the teacher pulled me out of my class and placed me in a special education classroom. As soon as I walked in, I sat down at a desk away from everyone else. The teacher handed me some paper and told me to practice writing my name, then left. I turned around to the group of kids that were sitting across the room. They were repeating the days of the week, what the weather it was for that day, and then were counting to twenty. My heart started beating fast as I realized my school life wasn't going to be the same as everyone else, and I was right. Instead of helping me become smarter, the teachers



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were interfering with my learning. For example, they would give me answers to questions I didn't understand instead of teaching me how to get the answer. They were holding me back when they should have been pushing me forward.

I was in the middle of my fifth grade when I learned about what happened to me as a baby and started to see how everyone looked and treated me differently. That's when I decided I would no longer be a special education student. When I entered middle school, I learned about my accommodations that I needed to pass all my classes. The first was I could ask the teacher to go to the testing center and/or have the questions that I struggled with read out loud to me. The second was I could have more time for both my class work and tests. As simple as this sounds, it wasn't easy for me to request these accommodations.

I made it clear to my parents and teachers that I didn't want to be looked at or treated differently just because of these accommodations. Luckily, both my parents and teachers understood this and helped me as much as they could. However, even though I worked closely with my teachers, I didn't always make the perfect scores on my class work, projects or tests. Then I would end up asking for a retake. This really frustrated me because all my friends wouldn't have to work as hard as I had to and yet they scored higher marks than me. Whereas I would study day and night for weeks on end, giving up a majority of my freedom and extra-curricular activities. I was doing all this extra work to be able to go to the next grade level. In addition, I was dealing with the stress and emotional pain of being bullied and trying to gain acceptance by my friends.

Each year the school hosted a meeting where we would talk about how I was doing in my classes and discuss my individualized education program or IEP. At first my parents took charge of these meetings. However, the older I got the more involved I was with the meetings. By high school I oversaw these meetings and made sure the accommodations I needed were still offered. The meetings weren't the only thing I took charge of.

I also took charge of my injury by understanding my limits and knowing what to do when



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I struggle with an obstacle in my way. For example, I knew that I forget things easily which makes me a slow learner. Therefore, I studied long and hard every day along with working with my teachers and tutors to keep my grades up. This worked for every class but math. My afternoon math class was always the subject I was getting Cs in. This made me learn that my brain is more alert in the morning than the afternoon. Therefore, I would make sure my math classes always took place before noon. After doing all of this, I slowly saw my math grade go up. Since I improved my math grade, I earned a place on the A-B honor roll and was recognized for this during my senior year of high school. My parents expressed how proud they were of me and how I learned to handle failure and grow from it. They also loved watching me become more independent. A good example of this is when I entered college. I attended Northwest Vista College starting in the summer of 2016 and plan to end in the spring of 2018. To overcome the challenges I encountered at Northwest Vista College, I continued doing what I did in both middle and high school. Furthermore, I learned a few more strategies along the way. Since my grades stayed either an A or B, I earned membership into two honor societies.

What happened to me when I was younger was unfortunate, but with the support of my parents and my perseverance to never give up I overcame these obstacles. I should be given this scholarship due to this life changing adventure, because I've come to understand that even though special education students and those with disorders are very different, it doesn't mean they should be looked down upon or treated differently. I wish more people could see how amazing these students can be if they are only given a chance to shine. Therefore, I want to become an occupational therapist. So, I can help children with disabilities to be able to shine, something I wish teachers in my grade school years did for me.

Furthermore, I will use my master's degree in occupational therapy to better the industry by being a role model to the children with disabilities or disorders. I am able and capable of doing this through my work by sharing my story, to show them that they too can do anything they set their mind to. I am aware that not every child will have the same disabilities as me, therefore I won't be able to connect with them on a personal level. Yet I'd still be able to understand their struggles along with the feeling of hopefulness that they can



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overcome their disability. I don't want children to go through their lives having doctors, therapists and teachers tell them they can't do something because they are not capable of it due to their disability. That's what happened to me when I was a baby. The doctors told my parents I wouldn't be able to talk or walk and I would have seizures for the rest of my life. However, I proved them wrong. I graduated from high school and went to college, where I became an honor student with a GPA of 3.6. In conclusion, if there is anyone in this world who can inspire children with disabilities it's another child who went through a similar experience.

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