

The Victory Voice

The Victory Academy Newsletter

Oregon's only year-round, accredited school for children and teens affected by Autism

Edition VI · Summer 2021



Dear Victory Academy Supporters—

This past year has felt like a roller coaster ride, filled with ups, downs, and curves – resulting in both challenging times and joy-filled moments. As a community, we faced the pandemic with courage, hope, and solidarity. I am proud to belong to this village, and I look forward to a time (in the very near future!) where we can gather again, shake hands, and hug. . . hug. . . hug!!!

Since July 2020, Victory has safely offered in-person school. Though we faced many changes in health and safety guidance from the Oregon Department of Education, Victory moved forward without any closures or quarantines. Thus, our students have been “live” with their teachers and classmates, laughing, exploring, and learning.

Across 2020-2021, we also made some amazing changes at Victory. We reimaged our science, math, and transition programs, adding

more classes and in-house vocational opportunities. We completed the addition of Rhythm Hall, bringing new music and classroom spaces to our students. And, we also added some furry companions to our staff – the Victory students love these four-legged friends!

Finally, this year, one of our Victory students experienced a life-altering way in how he communicates. His journey is profound and encourages us all to rethink how we understand people with autism. I am honored to share his story with you.

My favorite thing about me is my existence

—Liam, 9

Through it all, you – our incredible community – have continued to support and uplift Victory in new and incredible ways. Thank you for your generosity and unwavering belief in all things Victory!

Tricia Hasbrook
Director of School



Save the Date

Victory's Annual Auction November 6th, 2021

Hold On Tight!

Please join us for a live auction, a special appeal, and an inspiring program celebrating learning, growth, and achievement at Victory Academy!



My favorite thing about me is that I don't give up easily

—Shalin, 13

Comings & Goings

ADMISSIONS

Upwards of 15 new students will start in the fall as Victory expands enrollment to almost 80 students. Shutdowns forced a revamp of Admissions, but the result has been an even more personalized process. Victory's annual Open House moved online with opportunities for families to attend break-out sessions of interest covering various specialized therapies and programs for elementary, middle, and high schoolers, and Admissions Day was condensed to a single day. Prospective students and parents each paired with two staff members for personalized tours, and this in-depth approach provided incoming families a clear understanding of all that Victory offers. Likewise, our teachers now have personal connections with these new students and will hit the ground running in the new school year!

GRADUATE NEWS

Last summer, Victory celebrated its first four high school graduates! All are currently participating in community-based programs, classes, and/or working beyond Victory. One graduate, Davis Wolkford, returned to teach with our art teacher, Victoria Poarch, once a week. Davis is a talented artist working on several commissioned pieces and enjoys helping other budding artists. As Victoria explains, "Davis comes in with a lot of energy. He is always happy to see the other students, and the students love having him at Victory."



Victory will celebrate one more graduate, Lily Schultz, this coming August. Lily is preparing for a busy life after Victory that will include classes at Clackamas Community College, working at Hughes Water Garden (where she started through Victory's

Work Experience program), and receiving ongoing instruction at Victory in our post-graduate program, focusing on independence and practical topics such as personal finance, navigating community transportation, and healthy self-care. In the next two years, Victory will graduate 10 more students, and we will continue to develop the post-graduate program to ensure a successful launch!



Planning For Life-Long Success

Victory recognizes how crucial it is to prepare our students for life after graduation, so we are dedicating more resources than ever to our Transition and Work Experience Programs.

With 35 middle and high school students in five classrooms, teachers are being trained for **transition planning beginning when students reach age 13**. With the student and their family, we identify goals in education, work, living, and leisure. These aspirations are translated into 1:1 trainings, group teaching sessions, and work experiences to build skills and readiness to reach these goals. Teachers will lead transition planning and integrate that knowledge into everyday curriculum to strengthen our students' readiness for the world when they graduate.

After a year-long hiatus, **our Work Experience (WE) program is returning!** Several students will work at the newly reopened **Graham and Tooze Farm** located next door to Victory, tending to chickens and collecting and packaging eggs for the general store which features art by Victory students, locally made clothing, and artisan foods. Other students will return to **Wilsonville Subaru** rotating through their sales, parts, and repair departments. WE deeply enriches our students by providing valuable job skills and helping refine post-graduation goals. It also strengthens our ties to the community and demonstrates how capable, intelligent, and amazing Victory students are!

Additionally, **Victory now has dedicated support for families as they navigate county and state disability benefits and services.** Donna Bague, a long-time Victory teacher, will now focus half of her time helping parents through the maze of applications and state-funded support opportunities such as job coaching, peer mentors, community classes, family respite care, adult living options, and Medicaid. As Tricia Hasbrook, Director of School, explains "Having Donna proactively assist our families will result in more resources for our students now and as adults. And that is the most important part – making sure our students are successful and supported long after they leave Victory."

Underestimated No Longer

In 2020, Victory student Jamie Handley experienced a breakthrough. For 17 years, Jamie, a non-speaker with autism, could not communicate with his family, teachers, and those who loved him. After starting a new therapy that teaches non-speakers to point to letters on a letterboard to communicate, **Jamie's voice was set free.**

Jamie's father, JB Handley, says prior to this, "We didn't know what Jamie's level of cognition was. We didn't know he could read, spell, or do math. We measured his cognition by his words. And by that measure, there weren't a lot of words, so there wasn't much cognition. That was the giant mistake we made."

Jamie has always been fully aware of everything around him, but was **trapped in a body that didn't allow him to share.** Now, he can share his immense intelligence, insight, and humor. He is a self-taught age-level reader, proficient in calculus, and a wise observer of life.

We've learned **non- or minimally-speaking autism is not a disability of intelligence.** It is a motor, or movement, impairment that limits the body. The movement challenges affect both gross and fine motor skills, with fine motor abilities particularly impacted, including the coordination typically required to communicate: speak, make eye contact, and/or handwriting.

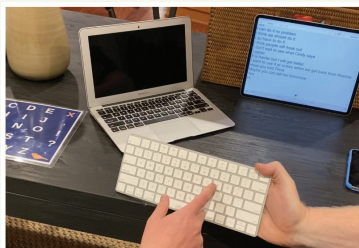
Jamie and his family worked with Elizabeth Vosseller, a Speech Language Pathologist for over 25 years and head of Growing Kids Therapy Center in Virginia, to learn to use a letterboard. Using age-level lessons, she worked with Jamie to practice pointing to letters to spell. Elizabeth explained, "We are teaching HOW to communicate, not WHAT. We are trying to get the brain and body to move together in synchrony." Jamie now shares, **"I was trapped in a prison of silence. The letterboard set me free."**

With this monumental achievement, we now understand two key insights about non- or minimal speakers:

- **Presume competence.** These students *can* and *want* to learn. As Elizabeth says, "It is not an issue of 'I don't understand' or 'I don't want to learn', it's an issue of 'I can't make my body do what I want it to do.'"
- **Teach purposeful motor movement.** Movement coordination challenges are the primary disability, and

through targeted coaching and practice, new motor skills can be learned.

Jamie now communicates with his family, teachers, and classmates using a letterboard. At Victory, Jamie has a CRP (Communication & Regulation Partner) who holds his board and writes down the letters he spells. His ultimate goal is to use a keyboard and iPad with voice output to become a fully independent communicator.



Victory made several changes as a result of this breakthrough. Jamie moved into the highest academic classroom, and his goal is to graduate in two years and study neuroscience in college. Jamie's teacher, Cindy Hutchison, shares, "Having Jamie in my class changed my whole thought process about how students learn and how they can communicate that learning to us. I see the bonds made between Jamie and his peers, and how that has shaped my classroom this year. **His is a true story of determination as well as a quiet inner strength.** There is more inside every individual than meets the eye, and listening doesn't have a look."

Victory is also providing training to understand and learn more about teaching from varied motor perspectives. Tricia Hasbrook, Director of School, says, "Watching Jamie's remarkable progress on his letterboard has motivated the Victory Team to explore new and innovative ways to support

all of our students, especially those with speaking and fine motor challenges. We are beginning to work with accomplished professionals to guide us forward. **Jamie's journey reminds us to never give up."**

When asked what he would most like people to know, Jamie replies, "Non-speakers think, feel, and learn just like everyone else. I think we all need to appreciate that we've underestimated everyone like me. **We don't act normal by your standards, but we are normal on the inside."**

JB emphatically agrees with his son, "There are so many ways that we have misinterpreted these kids to their detriment and frustration. To have my son back, to know what his dreams are, to be in a support role on his path to life is a gift I never thought I'd get. **It changes everything."**

JB and Jamie have co-written a book published in March sharing this emotional and paradigm-shifting journey called **"Underestimated, An Autism Miracle"**.

Introducing Rhythm Hall

When Victory assessed its growth and admissions goals for the coming years, it became clear that another classroom would be needed to expand enrollment, maintain small class sizes, and fine tune student placement.

Repurposing the current music room for the new classroom would give Victory the chance to also expand its music program, one both therapeutic and educational for our students. Thus, Rhythm Hall was born.

Rhythm Hall is a free-standing, green, modular building that increases Victory's music space from 300 to 1,000 square feet. Victory's music therapist and teacher, Magen Dignan, says, "That Victory has its own Music Therapy program accessed by ALL students and a dedicated building is unheard of for schools in Oregon." Magen designed Rhythm Hall carefully to create a calm, warm, inspiring, and peaceful place. However, Victory students also know it is FUN! Rhythm Hall holds an electronic drum set, keyboard, upright piano, bell set, and bins of books and instruments, in addition to plenty of room to dance, move, and play games.

My favorite thing about me is my creativity, art, and music

— Evelyn, 13

Thanks to the new space, Magen has been able to expand her program dramatically. Since everything in the room can now be displayed, students are asking to play a wider range of instruments. There are also more movement activities, and Magen's extra tall high school students no longer bump into each other during activities. The room includes a large, interactive white board as well, so Magen is able to incorporate interactive music websites into her lessons and composition work.

Best of all, her students can be as loud as they want. As Magen explains, **"The music room is a space where the kids can explore, create, express, and develop their musical side with joy, excitement, and love."**

Moving forward, Magen would like to add a standing steel drum set as well as a classroom set of ukuleles, an instrument she has been wanting to teach for years. In the meantime, Rhythm Hall continues to let the music flow.





For the Love of Math and Science

At Victory, Johnny Holliday's math and science classes have been extra bright spots this past year. Armed with a degree in molecular bioscience and significant experience working with children affected by autism, Johnny teaches math and science in four of Victory's middle and high school classes.

When it comes to science, Johnny believes in contextual learning. In some classes, he focuses on the physical sciences – motion, mass, gravity, momentum – because they can be easily observed, and he keeps his students engaged by making and observing balloon cars, catapults, or static electricity-infused balloons. In other classes, Johnny focuses on biology – life cycles, cells, DNA – and has his students raise butterflies and ladybugs or work with microscopes. **Every science lesson is hands-on, visual, and concrete.** Johnny says his greatest accomplishment is hearing students discuss lessons when he's not around. He says, "You hear them generate their own ideas or express a perspective I didn't even know they had."

Johnny also teaches high-level math to individual students and small groups, customizing the curriculum for each student. **He challenges each student while allowing them to move at their own pace.** Johnny appreciates Victory's small math groups because students benefit from being able to spend time with him one on one.

Johnny's teaching practice is guided by words of wisdom he received from a Victory parent: "Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is important." He makes the most of the time he has with his students by focusing on the concepts that will make a difference in their lives. As Director of School, Tricia Hasbrook, points out, **"Johnny knows the material, but he teaches from the heart."**

Staff Profiles



TRACI LAIRD

Traci came to Victory in 2015. Her formal title is Office Manager, but informally, she reports playing the roles of air traffic controller, mom, giver of band aids, and off-key singer of songs. Traci was recommended to Victory when a parent saw how well she interacted with a coach's autistic son at her daughter's softball games. Traci is the first person any visitor to Victory sees, and she always gives a warm welcome. Traci finds her joy in helping people – staff, students, parents, and visitors. Her job has gradually gotten bigger because she never shies away from a task and always makes sure it's done on time. When she is not managing the office, she is coaching, comforting, or conversing with everyone around her. Traci says the most surprising thing about her job at Victory is how "...seventy-plus students can wiggle their way into your heart." She feels lucky to work with compassionate staff, dedicated parents, and students who "arrive each day ready to give it their all."



JORDAN OLSEN

Jordan came to Victory as a teaching assistant in December 2019. He holds a BS in Psychology from Brigham Young University and an MSc in Family and Child Psychology from the University of Chester in Chester, UK. Now a co-lead teacher in one of Victory's middle/high school classrooms, Jordan's specialty is being "Game Master" for the class. He believes students learn better when they really connect with material, so he has spent the year creating customized activities that teach life skills, growth mindset, and social skills. To help students internalize lessons, Jordan has brought role-playing games, magic tricks, board and video games, filmmaking, cardboard crafting, costume making, Live-Action Role Playing (LARPing), a gamified classroom economy, and student government into the classroom. As he says, "A math problem may be a challenge, but if you can explain that same challenge in terms of a video game, things seem to make more sense." The added bonus of this approach is that Jordan has expanded his students' interests which helps them build friendships and leisure activities outside of Victory. Jordan is grateful for his Victory experience because it has shown him how to focus his teaching on foundational skills that will support his students long after they leave his classroom.

Victory Is Grateful To Our 2020 Donors

Your generosity in supporting Victory Academy is changing the lives of our students, their families, and families affected by autism throughout the Northwest and beyond. Thank you!

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MEI Group



Four Furry Friends

Victory welcomed its first autism service dog in 2012, and our students' love for them continues to this day. Victory's service dogs are trained specifically to work with children with autism. They have training in deep pressure and detecting when a child is upset or dysregulated.

The dogs have a remarkably calming effect, and many Victory students request them when they feel anxious or need comfort in a tough situation.

Therapy dogs have helped our students overcome stage fright, persevere reading a book, and arrive at a destination without getting distracted. These dogs take their work seriously, and when they don their green service vests, both the dogs and students know it's work time.

Haley was Victory's first trained autism service dog. A gentle soul, Haley has now largely retired from her work and roams Victory's classrooms without her vest. She is a familiar and loving presence in our students' days.

Tillie came to Victory in 2019. She is never without her service vest and can usually be found in the Hazel middle/high school classroom or the music room. Tillie is

My favorite thing about me is that I'm supportive, kind, and encouraging

— Micah, 16

especially excellent at supporting students when they are anxious. Students may request Tillie, but often she simply senses when a student is struggling and sits down next to them.

Theo is a Pet Partners therapy dog and comes to Victory with his handler and long-time Victory supporter, Chrissy Caruso. Chrissy and Theo visit Victory three days per week and focus on four elementary classrooms so Theo and the students can really get to know each other.

Sanders is Victory's autism service dog-in-training. Only six months old, Sanders is growing into his role quickly. He spends his days with art teacher, Victoria Poarch, and all Victory students as they attend art class. We expect future greatness from Sanders!

Each of Victory's therapy dogs have been instrumental in providing comfort, support, and joy to our students.

Several Victory families have even added dogs to their own household after seeing the impact they have had on their children. Here's to Haley, Tillie, Theo, and Sanders!



P.O. Box 428 · Tualatin, OR 97062

Thank you for supporting
Victory Academy!

www.VictoryAcademy.org

Important Dates

JULY 6

Victory Summer School
Session Begins

JULY 19-23

Camp Collins (Middle
and High School Classes)

AUGUST 8

Victory's Second High
School Graduation

SEPTEMBER 7

First Day of New School
Year

NOVEMBER 6

Victory Academy
Auction—Hold on Tight!

DECEMBER 2021

Winter Program

**FEBRUARY 23,
2022**

Portland Auto Show
Sneak Peek
Charity Night

APRIL 25-29, 2022

A Week of Victory!
Spring Campaign



Our Incredible Community!

Like other non-profit organizations, Victory had to restructure its fundraising efforts given the shutdowns of the past year. These donations are critical to continuing Victory's specialized programs, and our amazing community of supporters stepped in to help in a significant way!

- When the shutdowns first began, longtime Victory supporters, **Joyce and Larry Mendelsohn, along with Larry's partners at Aspen Capital**, asked how they could help Victory families facing job loss and financial strain. Together, they **sponsored tuition for 2 families!**
- Our annual auction in October was moved online, and incredibly, Victory donors made it our **most successful ever raising over \$750,000!**
- Wilsonville Subaru recently concluded their annual "Share The Love" campaign that allows customers to choose a non-profit to which Wilsonville Subaru donates \$250 for every car sold. This year, **Wilsonville Subaru once again chose Victory as one of their featured non-profits raising \$26,000 for Victory!**
- After the Portland Auto Show's Annual Sneak Peek event was cancelled this February, Victory launched a Spring Campaign focused on financial aid **raising over \$80,000!**

Thank you to all who attended our auction, supported our programs, and continue to make Victory students an important part of your life!