



“I accessed the resources I needed, and was assured that my dream was possible as long as I was proactive”.



by Sarah Feinstein

I started working for LAUSD in 1999 at a special education center. I was placed with a student who had a reputation for challenging aides quickly. Some staff members suggested that I would not last long. However, this only fueled my desire to show them how capable even the most “difficult” student could be, given the right kind of support and reinforcements.

Melissa, (not her real name) had autism. She was prone to pulling hair, and self-injury. She sat slumped down, isolated from her classmates and the curriculum. How was I going to earn her trust so that we could get past her behaviors in order for her to engage in learning?

At the time, I had been reading about the therapeutic effects of music on students with autism. So, I asked the teacher if there were any instruments in the class. She directed me to a dusty box in the back of a cabinet. I chose a paddle drum and stuck it once. She turned her head. I struck it again, now with simple rhythm. This time she giggled and rocked her body. I walked closer, repeating the rhythm as she looked me in the eye. She laughed heartily and stomped her feet. I introduced myself, “Hi, I’m Ms. Sarah!” Soon after, Melissa became one to be hopeful for.

In my time with Melissa, I was told I had a gift for teaching; unfortunately it took a while

for me to trust that gift. So, my career path had taken many turns over the years. I started with Child Development then switched to Liberal Studies. Five years later, I transferred out of state to study Music Therapy. That was an expensive experiment, only to decide that the field was too obscure. So, I came back to L.A., taught preschool and went back to school to pursue teaching special education while working again as a paraprofessional with LAUSD.

It took ten years and over \$40,000 in out of state educational loans just to get back to my gift. I wish had known about the Career Ladder sooner! Without the Career Ladder’s Scholarship Program, I might have wasted more time. However, with staff support I accessed the resources I needed, and was assured that my dream was possible as long as I was proactive. I received the scholarship money just when I needed it the most.

The Career Ladder staff has truly kept me on track. Now I am proud to say that with the help of the Career Ladder, I have completed my bachelor’s degree, passed CBEST and CSET and have accepted a job offer as a special education teacher at a local middle school.