



## Student Stories

### ***How CATC changes lives, gives hope and opportunity***



**“When you're a child with Asperger's the best thing is to be with adults, who can correct you...I'm a kid caught in the middle. Not a bad neighborhood, not a poor family, but I do have trouble with the average path.”**

**-- Emily L., CATC and Bridging the Gap student 2011- 2012**

It probably would have helped if Emily had been diagnosed with Asperger's sooner. At age three when she'd get out of the car while her mom was driving, or as a little girl pushing her mom out of her bedroom and moving a big dresser to bar the door... agoraphobia... hospitalization for depression. These days, there's more awareness but back then every diagnosis missed the mark .

In 11th grade they identified Asperger's Syndrome--which Emily defines as a high functioning form of autism--and Emily began more productive treatment. The arts are a wonderful outlet and she came to CATC on the advice of her art teacher. There she learned she also needed the credits, having failed two classes because of the hospitalizations.

Everybody at CATC seemed so good at art and she feared she could never measure up. Then there was Bridging the Gap--an opportunity, if accepted, to have a career and a self-sufficient life. "I didn't expect to get into BTG, but did. So many other qualified people. I told them my story about wanting to be a nurse but having no money for college."

It wasn't easy to step up to all of these opportunities. She had always managed to do well in school despite her challenges. "We can be intelligent and understand the material but sometimes there's a disconnect in communicating that I understand." Plus, she just plain wanted to be done with school. " I struggled to keep coming and disciplining myself, but when you're depressed, you don't feel like doing things." Transportation was an issue, especially after problems at home and moving in with friends. When she asked, CATC helped with bus fare.

Emily found joy in her art work, especially in stained-glass studio, and even sold a piece. She graduated, completed Bridging the Gap training and was hired at Cincinnati Children's.

Some people think Asperger's Syndrome is a weakness, she observes, but Emily thinks it's neither weakness or strength. "I'm different in ways that can help. At Children's I work with a lot of kids with learning disorders or autism and I can sympathize." She applies what she learned at CATC about judging others. "A lot of kids are alone there, and you want to judge, 'where are the parents?' Then you find out they have kids at home, a minimum wage job, no car."

In the fall of 2013 Emily plans to apply to college to become a nurse, "but currently I'm just getting my bearings." Her job is part-time, but she fills in for others every chance she gets and mostly works five days a week. "I'm glad I have a job now, I'm happy and that's it. Without CATC, I wouldn't have graduated or known what to do if I did--which would have kept me from graduating."