

# LIMITLESS learning

Special education teacher finds passion in helping students with math, reading

story by a. rodriguez

She knew what it felt like to be different. People told her she would never go to college or even graduate high school. They said she would be nothing more than a janitor at McDonalds. She used that as her fuel to make a difference and to prove them wrong.

Special Education teacher **Melody Smith** is hearing impaired with moderate to severe hearing loss in her left ear and severe to profound hearing loss in her right ear. Her condition is a genetic disorder. She graduated from Longview High School in 1997. She then continued her education at the University of Houston where she became specialized in mathematics and special education. Smith is currently the special education resource teacher for third through fifth grade.

"I understand what it feels like to have a disability," Smith said. "It's really not a disability. It's an ability to learn things in a new way. You have to find the different ways that help you."

Sign language was Smith's first means of communication. She was given her first hearing aid when she was one and a half years old. With the help of her parents, she began reading lips and that is currently her immediate way of communicating.

"My parents really inspired me," Smith said. "They always showed me what people say you can and can't do isn't true. If you want something go for it, and I did. I wouldn't want to be born any different way because being deaf has shaped me."

Knowing what it feels like to have to learn a different way, Smith decided to pursue a career where she works hands on with students who need extra help.

"I wanted to make a difference in this field," she said. "Everybody has something different and unique about them. Everybody has to find ways to adjust and if you don't find these ways and use those ways you're only hurting yourself."

Smith incorporates ways to help her students with

their different learning styles. She uses visual aids, mnemonic tricks, songs, and color coded strategies with her students.

"When we get something right she gives out snacks and when we get something wrong, she helps us really good because she tells us that's the wrong words and to try again," **Zeek DeLeon** [4] said. "She keeps teaching us and I'm proud of that."

After finding what works for individual students, Smith tries to implement that technique into each lesson. Whether that be helping in reading or mathematics.

"My dad was the same way (with reading)," **Corbyn Fryant** [4] said. "He told me that each year my reading progresses. I think this class is helping me because all the boys read together. Ms. Smith puts us in order to read. If some kids don't know how to read, the school has different teachers to help them get better and do the steps that I'm doing."

All of Smith's students have an idea of what they want to be when they grow up. With the help of Smith, her students can get closer to their aspirations through each lesson of improving their reading or math skills.

"I want to be a cop when I grow up because I see cops everywhere helping people," DeLeon said. "I like helping people because if they are having trouble, it's just like me, people started helping me. I'm one of them who needs help too trying to do math, and Mrs. Smith is helping me."

Each teacher has a mantra or wish for their students to take away from their class. Smith wanted her students to learn about life and how their disabilities are giving them a different ability.

"I tell my students that you are the best advocate for yourself," she said. "Nobody else knows what you need or want more than yourself. Don't ever limit yourself and don't let other people limit you. You can do what you want to do, it doesn't matter what other people say."



Relaxing in the bean bag chair, **Zeek DeLeon** [4] reads after class is over. Ms. Smith's classroom has shelves packed with various books for the students to enjoy. photo by d. smith



Hands on the globe, **Landon Damas** [3], **Zeek DeLeon** [4], **Kaleb Bornmann** [4], and **Corbyn Fryant** [4], admire the different places in the world. "My favorite thing about the classroom is the globe because it shows us about the world," DeLeon [4] said.

photo by d. smith  
Sitting across from his teacher, **Corbyn Fryant** [4] reads out loud to test his verbal accuracy. Students would have multiple sessions with Ms. **Melody Smith** to improve their reading and spelling. photo by n. hussein



Ready to work, **Landon Damas** [3] discusses his assignment with Ms. **Melody Smith**. "My favorite thing about being in Ms. Smith's class is reading books," Damas said. photo by a. rodriguez



Leaning over the table, Ms. **Melody Smith** records the progress of her students as they read out loud. She encouraged her students on verbal accuracy. photo by d. smith



Finished with his work, **Kaleb Bornmann** [4] displays his assignment to Ms. **Melody Smith**. This assignment consisted of students finishing a sentence about a panda. "She helps us with how to learn," Bornmann [4] said. "Reading is hard for me." photo by a. rodriguez



Crayon box beside him, **Corbyn Fryant** [4] finishes his illustration for his assignment. "Ms. Smith is helping me with spelling words and reading," Fryant said. photo by a. rodriguez



"I want to be a cook or a scientist when I **GROW UP**. My favorite thing about being in Ms. Smith's class is to **READ**. She **HELPS ME** be a better reader." photo by n. hussein

Laura White [5]



Engaged in the lesson, **Laura White** [5] takes notes in Mr. **Billy McBride**'s class as he goes over the 1980's history timeline. McBride made it a point to teach the students about the past generations starting from the 1900s to 2001 to give them a cultural background. photo by n. hussein