



PLACE TO BELONG

# ACTIVELY AWARE

Junior forms  
**AWARENESS CLUB**  
to inform, support



**W**HEN JUNIOR LYNDEN SHEPARD started feeling out of place and, most of all, alone while walking the halls with over 2,000 other students, she didn't back down and withdraw from the school. Instead, she stepped up.

With the help of business teacher Tiffany Griggs and the support from principal Anthony Watson, in October Shepard worked to form the A&E Club (the Autism and Epilepsy awareness group.) The club officially started as of the second semester with Griggs as the sponsor. Meetings were held in her room after 8:30 a.m. on Tuesdays that fall on a B day.

"We wanted to offer support to any kid that deals with Epilepsy and/or Autism," Griggs said. "We want to let them know they're not alone, increase awareness and have fun."

Although she's been living with Epilepsy since she was a year old and was diagnosed with Autism in middle school, Shepard says her life is only slightly different than others her age.

"I've been living with these conditions for a while now," Shepard said. "I'm almost 18, and it's not so bad."

Shepard has a set schedule to follow but had adjusted

to Epilepsy and life as a high schooler.

"I take classes and go through test taking," Shepard said. "I have friends both in normal and in special education classes."

Shepard's form of Autism is called Asperger's syndrome. It is often hard to tell if someone has Asperger's simply upon meeting them, but common symptoms can be noticed, including difficulty interacting in social situations, repetitive behaviors and a constant ritual cycle.

"It can be difficult to deal with, but I'm trying to tell people that there's really no difference from everyone else," Shepard said. "In some ways there is because we sort of see things in a different way, but there really is no difference."

Along with Asperger's, Shepard has Epilepsy, a seizure disorder, which can cause a person to have two or more unprovoked seizures at any time. People with Epilepsy can go through vns therapy, implanting a pacemaker device that warns of an upcoming seizure. Shepard has gone through that therapy.

"Whenever I tell someone I have Epilepsy I usually get, 'Well, what's that?' I'll say I also have Autism and that's

why I'm acting this way and then they're like well 'What is Autism?'" Shepard said.

Because high school students are not familiar with what Autism and Epilepsy are, they don't know how to react to Shepard or other students with the same disorders.

"I have to try and explain and the people are very understandable," Shepard said. "They listen to me, but I really want to raise awareness."

Shepard is not only raising awareness so others can learn more about kids with complex neurological disorders such as hers, but she is also giving support to those who are living with the disorders and are feeling like they are alone.

"Some kids who have Autism sometimes feel like they don't belong and no one knows what they're going through," Shepard said. "They feel like they're in a weird place that's somewhere between special education and mainstream Stony Point. I hope that the A&E club will bring everyone together and no one will feel out of place ever again." *story by Deililah Rivera*