**Ashley’s Corner**

By Ashley Mathy, Article 1, February 2016

Hi, my name is Ashley, I am 20 years old and have been riding at Willow Creek Ranch for nearly 6 years. I was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified, (PDD-NOS), which is a form of autism. Behavioral symptoms of PDD-NOS can include emotional outbursts and tantrums often as a result of fear, anxiety or misunderstanding a situation. Often language can be taken literally and I don't understand when someone is joking or being sarcastic, happy, sad or angry. I have difficulty understanding body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. I have social anxiety, spacial awareness issues, and “perseveration" -- dwelling on a certain subject. (http://www.nationalautismresources.com/autismsymptoms.html)

I am going to educate my WCR family through a series of articles based on my own personal experiences so they can start to understand what it’s like to have special needs.

My topic for this article is:

“Words or phrases are taken literally.”

Parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and those working with children and adults with special needs must chose TV programs, reality TV, and Disney and Pixar movies, viewed by us, wisely. Whether a movie is rated G, PG, or PG-13, movies can be taken literally. The message of the movie needs to be considered, because there are times when we cannot determine if the movie is “real” or “fake.” We can also learn good AND bad behaviors from movie characters because it sets an example of behaviors we may not be able to know the difference between. Not only could the content of the movie send us the wrong message, but also the music or theme song.

Another thing is words and phrases are taken literally. People must be aware of their words like “get with the program,” “get over it,” “snap out of it,” and “don’t have too much anxiety.” These phrases are often used out of frustration by the caregivers and teachers. It is important to know that they really hurt people like me with special needs. How can I “get over it”? Are you asking me to “get over” my disability? To “get over” or “snap out of” something I have little control over? I can’t just “snap out of it.” Do you know what I am going through? Do you know what increased my fear and anxiety? My brain works differently, I need processing time, I don’t understand, my thoughts are repeating in my head (OCD), my fear and anxiety doesn’t always relate to reality of people without special needs.

My next topic will be sensory overload! What things in my environment affect my emotions and behavior? If you have any questions for comments for Ashley, email wcrvolunteercoordinator@mail.com and put “Ashley’s Corner” in the subject line.