

# Learning — their way

By Abby Spegman Sentinel Staff | Posted: Thursday, August 18, 2011 12:15 pm

It was in 1st grade, when she was just learning how to read, that Samantha C. Alexander's troubles became clear. Words didn't look the same to her as they did to the other kids. She didn't get the answers as quickly.

"It was obvious," Alexander, now 19, said. "It would say 'Dog' and I would say 'Pig.' "

Alexander has a processing disorder that makes it harder for her to look at something — words on a page, a math problem — and understand what it means. But over time she learned a simple trick — take it slow. It will come.

This week, 20 local students are learning similar lessons at Camp Vision. The program, held at Keene State College, hosts students age 10 to 14 with language-based learning disabilities. Through art projects, they learn why they may have a harder time in class than their peers and how they can work around the trouble.

Alexander, a counselor at Camp Vision, will be a sophomore at Keene State this fall and plans to be a special education teacher. The three other college-student counselors also have learning disabilities.

Camp Vision is the summer program of Project Eye to Eye, a national group that runs after-school activities for students at 38 chapters across the country, including Keene.

This is 13-year-old Tierney's third year at Camp Vision. Tierney has dyslexia, which makes it harder for her to recognize letters or symbols.

"Sometimes (words) look like ABC soup — B's and D's get confused," she said.

On Tuesday afternoon, she and the other campers were busy making utility belts with "tools" to help them in class.

From a mound of construction paper, paint bottles and glue, Tierney was designing a recorder that would track her homework assignments, a computer that would spell words for her and a stress ball — a balloon filled with fuzzy pompoms that she could squeeze when she gets annoyed or anxious.

"It's saying just because (you have difficulties), doesn't mean you're different," she said of the camp. "You just have to work harder."

On 13-year-old Noah's belt was a scanner to help him read and a pencil that would take notes for him.



This is Noah's first year at Camp Vision. "It's actually really challenging. It's fun, but it's challenging," said Noah, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, and autism.

"I have a different way of learning," he explained. "I learn slowly."

Last year, Noah moved from a large middle school to a smaller one, where he says there are fewer distractions. And that's what he needs.

Before, he said, "I'd sit in the back of the room and the teacher is talking and the doors are over there and the clock is ticking and there's stuff going on outside.

"Now, it's easy to focus on the teacher."

This is just the sort of realization that Camp Vision and Project Eye to Eye work toward, said Alexandra E. Connell, a national program coordinator who has dyslexia and ADHD.

"They need to be self-advocates," she said of the kids.

"They're part of a nationwide, worldwide culture, and they're not alone."

Abby Spegman can be reached at 352-1234, extension 1409, or [aspegman@keenesentinel.com](mailto:aspegman@keenesentinel.com)