

ISD families share reasons for placing students

By Scott Stewart

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A few weeks after Izabelle Schon was born, doctors diagnosed her with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, a genetic disorder that slows her development. She was also diagnosed as deaf.

Her mother, Carrie Fischer, told a room of about 140 people gathered at Iowa School for the Deaf about her daughter Izzy's experience at ISD, where she started school at age 3. Now 8, she receives instruction in the school's deafblind classroom.

Izzy's grandmother, Betty McGruder, said the staff at the school do more than keep an open mind about the students and their potential.

"Every single one of them opens up their heart," she said.

ISD held its annual Sound Futures luncheon on Wednesday, inviting guests on campus to the Lied Multipurpose Complex. The event raises scholarship money for college-bound ISD students and recent graduates.

Three scholarships recipients were honored: Anna Cullen, a senior from West Union who plans to study journalism; Demarcus Thomas, a 4PLUS transition program student from Tabor who is studying youth services; and Brandon Myers, a senior from Council Bluffs who plans to study computer technology support.

Funding for the scholarships came from Crouch Recreational Design, Google and Moylan Kropp Retirement Planning. Fourteen other companies, organizations and couples also helped sponsor the Sound Futures luncheon.

John Cool, assistant administrator of ISD, discussed some of the challenges deaf and hard-of-hearing students have as they transition into the workforce. He said it's hard, both because of discrimination and because of a difficulty fitting into the culture at many employers, including missing out on the rumor mill in the lunchroom – which can give tips on how to be successful.

"We all know that it is very hard to find and keep a job," he said. "There are so many things about finding



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Masta Mulemba, an Iowa School for the Deaf junior from Des Moines, and his peers are cheered following a musical performance at the Iowa School for the Deaf Foundation's Sound Futures event on Wednesday. Staff photo/Joe Shearer

a job and keeping a job that are not about the job.”

Cool praised the many Council Bluffs businesses that have helped place ISD students, both so they can gain work experience and for full-time employment. He gave an example of how last year an owner of Pizza King attended the Sound Futures luncheon and met an ISD student who was since hired and works there.

Introducing Chris Russell from Google to present a scholarship, Cool also talked about how American Sign Language has evolved. He said the sign for “Google” was derived by forming a ‘G’ with the ASL sign for “search.”

Two parents, Fischer and Herb Wilson, discussed the decision to enroll their children at ISD. Wilson gave five reasons: Independence, expertise in deaf education, language immersion, ownership at school and work experience.

“She was behind in her communications schools,” he said of his daughter Carmita. “You can’t learn if you can’t communicate.”

For Fischer, her daughter Izzy was never supposed to walk or master any number of other skills, including eating. She was told Izzy needed to start school early to start receiving therapy, and she initially looked at a mainstream program before insisting on looking at placement at ISD.

“After a few minutes, I knew it was the place for us,” she said.

“They asked what Izzy could do, not what she could not do.”

Fischer said she grew up in Council Bluffs not realizing what ISD offered to the community and the state, as well as students from Nebraska. Izzy now knows more than 200 signs, she said, and has progressed much farther than she was ever expected to already.

“That is simply amazing,” she said. “I, for one, will be extremely grateful for what ISD has done for our family.”