

# Grace's Reflections AHA Conference



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November 2011

AHA's 17 year old intern, Grace Barrett-Snyder, a former teen panelist at our fall conference in 2009, attended the 2011 fall conference on Tuesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> as a volunteer. She wrote up her observations in the AHA blog which you can follow by signing up to at: [www.ahany.org](http://www.ahany.org). For now, read below, attached or go to [www.ahany.org/blog](http://www.ahany.org/blog) and read her reflections:

## Teen Panel – 10/25/2011

This is undoubtedly an important part of our Fall Conference – and it's highly anticipated! I was a teen panelist two years ago so I paid extra close attention. And believe me when I say this year's group of teen panelists was outstanding. You shouldn't have missed it! But if you did, here's a recap:

First up was **Kailyn**. She's a 16-year-old on the spectrum, and she looked beautiful as she began her speech. Kailyn talked about feeling lonely, particularly during middle school. She struggled to connect with her peers and ended up transferring schools. From there, even when she didn't know any of her classmates, she was able to make friends. It was a struggle, sure, but Kailyn pushed through it. I admire her courage. Not only did she overcome social challenges, but she shared her story with a room full of strangers at Tuesday's conference. She is truly remarkable.

**Morgan** was next to take the stage. He is a high school junior with ADHD and PDD-NOS. He spoke openly and maturely about his difficulties communicating. Recognizing one's challenges is a critical piece of overcoming them on the autism spectrum, and Morgan accomplished that. And while he now may struggle with figurative language and comprehension, Morgan revealed he's an avid reader. It's clear that he perseveres, and I know he will achieve anything he sets out to accomplish.

When Morgan finished, I'm not sure anyone saw **Alex's** speech coming (in a good way). The 18-year-old was brilliant, and really knew how to make the crowd laugh. Through his jokes and one-man-show role playing (you had to be there), the crowd adored him and really got to understand who he is. Alex accepts his diagnosis (more than accepts actually, he *loves* it). He was able to make having Aspergers work to his advantage. Both talented and creative, Alex is bound for success.

Finally was **Drew**. This high school senior has passion for many different things, and Asperger Syndrome could never hold him back. Instead, as Drew realized, his diagnosis drives him forward. He wouldn't have it any other way. In the beginning, things were tough. It took a couple of years for Drew to get to where he is now. He self-advocates at his CSE meetings. He identifies the things he needs to work on and helps teachers understand what they can do to support him. Drew has goals and knows how to reach them. I'm impressed by him and so were the adults at the conference.

Grace Barrett-Snyder

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