

Education News & Notes

Graduating With Honors And Defying The Odds

(NAPSA)—Rebecca Diakunczak was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when she was just 8 months old. Doctors told her parents that, because of her learning and motor delays, it was unlikely she would complete high school, let alone college. The Middleburgh, New York native has proven them wrong.

Diakunczak graduated high school with an academic average of 92.5, and credits Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic with helping her get there.

RFB&D, a nonprofit organization based in Princeton, New Jersey, serves more than 137,000 members with a library of 100,000 recorded textbooks and educational materials. Students with disabilities that make reading challenging or impossible rely on the organization to access the printed page and to achieve educational success.

Diakunczak was the recipient of the National Achievement Award program's 2004 Marion Huber Learning Through Listening award, given annually by RFB&D to graduating high school seniors with learning disabilities in recognition of extraordinary leadership, scholarship, enterprise and service to others.

Diakunczak says that she initially felt alienated from other students in high school, as their curiosity about her disabilities made them apprehensive about befriending her. She overcame



Rebecca Diakunczak received the 2004 Marion Huber Learning Through Listening award.

this by introducing a school disability awareness program called "Everybody Counts." The program's success led to Diakunczak receiving a citation from the Board of Education.

She also competed in community and national wheelchair track and field events, and participated in the drama and Interact clubs.

Honors included the Youth Appreciation Award, presented by Optimist International, and the President's Education Award. She also mentored young teens with disabilities and wrote articles for www.disabilitycentral.com.

"Rebecca is a role model for all students, regardless of disability," says John Kelly, RFB&D Presi-

dent & CEO.

According to a study published in *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, students with learning difficulties showed a 38 percent increase in reading comprehension after using RFB&D's audio textbooks on CD. The study was conducted by Johns Hopkins University to evaluate how the recorded textbooks affected the process of learning for secondary students with learning problems.

In the Johns Hopkins research project, nearly 100 special-education students participated in the eight-week study.

"The findings are important because they demonstrate that students who need alternative ways to access high-content material can experience success," said Michael Rosenberg, professor, Department of Special Education, Johns Hopkins University, following the release of the study in 2003. "Also important is the kind of partnership between a national nonprofit organization and a team of university researchers, because it enables us to conduct applied research that directly impacts the lives of children."

To Rebecca Diakunczak, cerebral palsy is not an obstacle to achievement, but she admits, "RFB&D has given me educational opportunities I would not have had otherwise—it has helped me reach these milestones in my academic career."