

It's likely that many of you have seen the movie Frozen at least once. It's even more likely that you've heard the song "Let it Go" on the radio, on TV, or people at school singing it at the top of their lungs. But have you ever stopped to think why everyone seems to connect with that song? Elsa doesn't fit in, but as she sings, she realizes the importance of embracing who she is and not caring what others think. She also was forced to cover up her abilities and talent in order to fit into a particular mold. Elsa isn't the only one that's ever struggled with fitting in, though. Many students who choose to attend alternative schools have also been expected to fit into a mold and not allowed to let their true talents show. Attending Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center in Montevideo has given me an opportunity to become confident in who I am and be proud of it.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade year is where all of my troubles began. About 4 days into school, I had to get my tonsils taken out. I ended up having a lot of complications and even ended up with mrsa infection. All in all, I ended up missing school for 6 weeks. Since I was so far behind, I decided to try online schooling. However, I was not very motivated to do the work, so that was not a good option.

My 9<sup>th</sup> grade year I decided to go to the regular high school. I immediately felt as though I didn't fit in at all. The girls in the school were mean and picked on others based upon their clothing and rumors that they heard. The boys were judged based on involvement in sports or other extra curricular activity. The majority of the teachers there didn't care about me or try to help me to be successful in their class. I felt like no one else cared what I did, so I also didn't care about school. I was getting mostly D's and F's in my classes. I was skipping school and talking my mom into excusing my absences. It was time to try something different.

Around this time my cousin started doing independent study through the Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center in my hometown of Montevideo. She was a lot happier and encouraged me to try school there as well. I asked my mom many times to sign me up at the ALC, but she was very hesitant at first. However, one day she took me out to eat and while we were there, told me that she had signed me up to start at the ALC that following Monday.

I love attending Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center. I don't dread coming to school every day, which was not the case prior to attending this school. I feel very comfortable there and am now getting mostly A's. After attending for a year and a half, I joined MAAP STARS. Through the breakout sessions at the fall conference last year, I saw that I wasn't the only person dealing with things. There were girls that really opened up about the things they were experiencing, and I realized that I can open up too. I decided to run for state officer this year and got elected. This was a great boost of confidence for me, as now I feel like I can share with others how alternative education has really helped me.

Perhaps the biggest event that is a part of MAAP STARS is the State spring conference, which takes place in April each year. I attended for the first time last year and had a lot of success. As an individual, I earned a plaque in career portfolio. I was also part of a group that received plaques in the community service project and annual program of activities categories. Competing in these events really helped to boost my self-confidence.

Because of this boost in my self-confidence, I have been able to earn enough credits to attend PSEO classes as a junior. For my senior year, I will be able to attend PSEO classes full-time and graduate with my peers. This would not have been possible had I not attended Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center.

MAAP STARS is an incredible opportunity and has helped me to learn valuable lessons that I will carry with me into my adult life. Through MAAP STARS, I have gained confidence in my ability to speak in front of a group of people. I have also learned important life lessons such as how to fill out job applications, interview etiquette, and problem solving skills. These, along with many other lessons, have given me the tools to become a successful adult.

My educational journey has had a lot of ups and downs, but without MAAP Stars or my ALC I wouldn't be the person I am today. Attending Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center in Montevideo has made a huge impact on my life. I am proof that alternative education can help students to be successful and help them grow as people. I can now finally stand up for what I believe. Elsa from Frozen had it right when she sang, "I don't care what they're going to say...Let the storm rage on...the cold never bothered me anyway!"