

March 2019

In Memory of Pegi Young 1952 – 2019

In 1985 Pegi Young faced a significant personal challenge. Her son, Ben, needed an appropriate educational program that would take into account his severe physical and speech impairments ... a program that would support his need for literacy, communication, self-dependence, and social inclusion. After an extensive, frustrating search, Pegi realized that most programs for children with significant impairments were severely limited in the educational opportunities they afforded; were ill-equipped to deal with the communication needs prevalent in this population; were unwilling or unable to provide an environment with high expectations of achievement; and that few professionals were qualified to or capable of delivering an appropriate learning and communication curriculum. Rather than settle for “next-best,” Pegi Young took this opportunity to address this challenge, not only for her son, but for children with severe physical and speech impairments worldwide.

In partnership with Jim Forderer, another parent with children needing intensive education and communication intervention, and Dr. Marilyn Buzolich, a speech and language pathologist, Pegi became the guiding force behind the creation of The Bridge School. The school was founded in 1986 as an educational program serving children with severe physical and speech impairments. Pegi’s charge to The Bridge School staff was to challenge the prevailing attitude of programs that had extremely low expectations for these children, to offer hope to their parents and to develop an environment where children with severe physical and speech impairments had the opportunity to develop their potential and demonstrate their ability to communicate, participate in and contribute to society.

What started as a small school program in Hillsborough, California, has evolved into an internationally recognized model program for serving the needs of these children and their families. Pegi Young was the spark of energy and vision behind this effort. She worked tirelessly to secure necessary permits to open the school and to negotiate for a physical location that would serve the needs of these students. It was her inspiration and the commitment of Neil Young to ensure funding to support her dream that led to the development of a unique educational program where children and families could receive the support they needed to move forward with their lives. Neil and Pegi Young were the driving force behind the The Bridge School Concert from 1986 To 2016, which raised the necessary funds to support the school.

In keeping with the goals of The Bridge School, graduates have returned to their home school districts and continued their education. Three have graduated from universities: one from San Francisco State University and two from the University of California at Berkeley. They embody the spirit of The Bridge School mission: *Give them an opportunity and they will achieve; give them the means and they will help shape their world; give them a voice and they will advocate for themselves and for others who cannot speak for themselves; give them an education and they will give back to the world.*

Pegi's vision did not stop at the creation of a small school that would serve a limited number of students. She took on the mission of ensuring that what happened at The Bridge School would make a difference in local communities, at a national level and internationally through various mechanisms. In the late 1990s Pegi began another model program, the International Teacher in Residence. Partnering with ISAAC, the program's goals are to support the spread of successful teaching and communication strategies in countries at the beginning stages of providing an education for children with severe disabilities. Professionals from throughout the world apply to come to The Bridge School for a year of intensive training in the use of augmentative and alternative communication and educational programming. The following year, some Bridge staff travel to the Teacher in Residence's home country to offer workshops and training in an effort to support dissemination efforts. Since 1998, The Bridge School staff has hosted eleven TIRs from 8 countries. [Go to <http://www.bridgeschool.org/outreach/teacher-in-residence/> for more information and to meet the TIRs.]

Many individuals would have stopped at this point and congratulated themselves on a job well-done. Not Pegi Young! She wanted to ensure that the efforts of the staff, the children and the families from The Bridge School could be proven effective, so under her direction, a Research Program was established to conduct retrospective and prospective studies of The Bridge School student population to document successful programming, educational approaches and student outcomes. To ensure that The Bridge School continues to provide a bridge to education, training, research and service, Pegi also supported the creation of AAC By the Bay, an international conference that, with the support of Cisco Corporation, which has been live-streamed to countries throughout the world.

Pegi has received numerous awards for her efforts at making her vision a reality. Recent awards include: the ISAAC President's Award for her work in supporting the education and use of augmentative and alternative communication globally, Computerworld Honors for visionary use of information technology, and the Fred Strache Leadership Award from the CSUN International Conference on Technology and Persons with Disabilities for the contributions she has made to the education of children with disabilities.

Pegi's unselfish efforts in the support of the education of children with severe speech and physical impairments and service to their families are deserving of recognition. Her work has changed the lives of children and their families throughout the world.

The Bridge School family was saddened when, on January 1, 2019, Pegi lost a long and courageous battle with cancer. We ask that the augmentative and alternative communication community keep her and her legacy in your thoughts and prayers and that

you continue in your quests for excellence, enhanced opportunities, self-determination, access to communication, education and community for people with severe physical and speech challenges – no matter who they are or where they live.

- Submitted by Vicki Casella, Executive Director, [The Bridge School](#), March 2019