

## **A Special Need for Special Needs**

Following a schedule set by his parents, 15-year-old Kainoa eats breakfast, brushes his teeth, and gets ready for school. Kainoa, affected by obsessive compulsive disorder, becomes distraught if his schedule changes unexpectedly. Kainoa is not alone. According to a 2008 survey by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "10.2 million U.S. children have special health care needs," which include autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and obsessive compulsive disorder. Although the existence of these disorders is recognized, there is a lack of education about them for the general public.

In Hawaii, many public schools have programs that cater to special needs students. However, these students must learn to interact with others outside the program. It is a fact that people shun or become frightened by what they do not understand. To prevent this from happening to students with special needs, education about these disorders should be implemented into classroom curriculum. Education about mental, psychological and developmental disorders will give other students a more compassionate outlook about their peers. Clubs at school can be formed in which students perform service in the community for organizations that work to raise awareness for the various disorders. This will create a more sensitive atmosphere and understanding not only in the classroom but in the hallways and outside school.

Having a brother affected by autism, I know firsthand what my brother endures. Simple tasks like buying groceries or washing dishes must be taught and constantly practiced. My family does a lot to support my brother, but it helps tremendously when we have assistance from his school. If kids are educated about special needs, they will have a better understanding of the disorders and not be afraid. As his sister, I would appreciate this because my brother will get the

support he needs at home and at school. This will teach him life skills and how to interact with others his age.

Clarence T.C. Ching would have supported this effort to educate students. The Ching Foundation is a benefactor of many schools such as Sacred Hearts Academy, Maryknoll School, Damien Memorial and the University of Hawaii. Knowing that he deeply cared about education, Ching would not have hesitated to support more of Hawaii's children.

More than 13 percent of our nation is comprised of children with special needs. It is crucial for these children to learn life skills and to interact with others around them. In order to achieve this goal, students must be educated about mental, psychological and developmental disorders. If this does not happen by 2020, Hawaii will experience a schism between those with special needs and the majority, and special needs children will experience difficulty transitioning into life with their other classmates. Clubs and extracurricular groups can be formed to reinforce this education outside the classroom. Doing so will improve the relationships among students and their peers with special needs as well as carry out Mr. Ching's goal of enriching Hawaii's education and giving a voice to the voiceless in the community.