



The Treatment and
Learning Centers

TLC

a family of services where caring comes first

2301 Research Blvd., Suite 110
Rockville, Maryland 20850
301.424.5200
Fax 301.424.8063
TTY 301.424.5203
www.ttlc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 6, 2009

CONTACT

Kristin Fletcher
301.424.5200, ext. 270
kfletcher@ttl.org

TLC's Katherine Thomas High School Celebrates First Full Graduating Class

Thirty-one students receive diplomas in moving ceremony

Rockville, Maryland—On Wednesday, June 17 2009, over 350 supporters gathered to celebrate and honor the first full graduating class of TLC's [Katherine Thomas High School Program](#) at Temple Beth Ami in Rockville. Thirty-one students received their diplomas in an emotional and moving ceremony that included eight student speakers and keynote speaker [Ron Suskind](#), a KTS parent and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. KTS is an independent day school for students in preschool through twelfth grade with moderate to severe language and learning disabilities and/or high-functioning autism.

The graduates, from Maryland, DC and northern Virginia, have a variety of future plans: classes at Montgomery College, vocational training and scholarships to four-year universities [George Mason](#) and [Shenandoah](#). Director **Rhona Schwartz** urged the students to live full lives with the words of Nelson Mandela: "There is no passion to be found in playing small – in settling for a life that is less than what you are capable of living."

TLC Executive Director **Dr. Pat Ritter's** message for the graduates was to "Find your gifts, take risks, believe in yourself and don't let others define who you are. And always, always follow your dreams." KTS staff speaker **Rebekah Esch**, who had taught every one of the graduates, told touching personal vignettes about each student, urging them to "dream big, reach for the stars, and fulfill the potential we all know you have."

Eight student speakers next took the stage, telling heartfelt stories about their struggles and successes as they thanked their teachers and families for their support. **Justin Gilbertson** talked about how much KTS had changed with the new high school to offer many more opportunities. **Jessica Lipsher** thanked her teachers for "making me a better student and a better person." **Alex Dixon** thanked every teacher and staff member: "You only wanted the best for me. You are the special ones. The future is uncertain, but I am not. I am prepared to take this new journey." **Elizabeth Hitchens**, who originally came to the US from Russia speaking no English, told a deeply moving story about how everything changed for her at Katherine Thomas after being bullied at her previous school where "it was very difficult because no one saw my learning delays." **Lucas Bayerl** shared the mantra of his teachers: "Always come with a positive attitude and leave your worries behind you."

A choral interlude with the KTS Middle and High School Chorus, directed by **Amy Gardiner**, was followed by the keynote address by journalist and author **Ron Suskind**. Suskind remarked that "If one was looking for hope in America, it could be found right here in this room." Suskind thanked the students for "being our heroes and making us better people," urging the students to find the jewel in a life worth living and keep going forward.

A Non-Profit Organization Serving Individuals With Special Needs Since 1950

The Outcomes Service • The Family Hearing Center • The Katherine Thomas School
The Early Learning Center • The Outpatient Services • The Testing and Tutoring Service • TLC's Summer Programs

Diplomas were presented by TLC Board of Trustees President **Richard Ward**, with a reception following.

A Non-Profit Organization Serving Individuals With Special Needs Since 1950

The Outcomes Service • The Family Hearing Center • The Katherine Thomas School
The Early Learning Center • The Outpatient Services • The Testing and Tutoring Service • TLC's Summer Programs