

# Tone Teacher

**A young researcher helps kids with disabilities learn how to read.**

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Kayla Cornale uses music to help kids learn their ABCs. Kayla's first student was her 7-year-old cousin Lorena. When Kayla was a 14-year-old high school student in Burlington, Ontario, she used a piano to help Lorena learn how to spell.



Lorena has **autism**. Autism is a brain disorder. People with autism have trouble using language and communicating with others. Doctors aren't sure what causes autism. It has no cure, but many people with autism can find ways to handle some of their problems.

Lorena overcame some of her reading trouble with Kayla's help. Kayla, now 18, noticed that Lorena didn't know the alphabet, but she could sing along to many songs. Kayla found a way to tap into Lorena's love of music. She created a system called Sounds into Syllables. The system matches letters to notes on a piano keyboard.

## RESEARCH AND REWARDS

Kayla had to learn a lot about autism to help her cousin. She did research at libraries and online. "A large majority of autistic kids do have an interest in music," Kayla says.

As Kayla learned more, she started testing the system on more kids. She got help from professional **psychologists**. Psychologists study the brain and how it works. The psychologists helped Kayla get in touch with even more kids.

Kayla's project has earned her many awards and scholarships over the past few years. Most recently, she won the 2007 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

Kayla is still perfecting Sounds into Syllables. She says early results from research done in 2006 and 2007 shows that 80 percent of the kids who used the music-based program improved their reading ability. "One boy named Nathan could only recognize the letter *N* when he started," Kayla says. "By the end, he could read and recognize every letter in the alphabet."

