



SARA NYGARD

B.A. PSYCHOLOGY '10

From autism to Zumba, Sara Nygard helps people move forward toward goals.

A Speech and Language Pathologist with the Los Angeles Unified School District, Nygard evaluates and treats special education students with disabilities that adversely affect their ability to learn and communicate. The disability range includes autism, intellectual disabilities and other specific learning or speech impairments. Many students on the autism spectrum are non-verbal, so Nygard teaches them ways to express their wants and needs via Augmentative or Alternative Communication Systems.

In addition to offering evaluations and treatment, Nygard also attends individual educational program (IEP) meetings for her students, provides staff/teacher training and helps parents learn how to extend what she does in speech therapy to the home environment.

"Most people take communication for granted and don't realize that many struggle to express the most basic needs and wants," says Nygard. "I have students who can't communicate things like, 'I need the bathroom.' To see them make progress in the classroom or to hear a parent say, 'Johnny can now give me a picture of a hug to tell me that he wants a hug,' is so rewarding."

Nygard, who knew she wanted a career in a helping profession, began her collegiate path by studying psychology at CSUCI. She continued on to NYU to obtain a master's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders. NYU currently offers one of the top programs in the country and it provided Nygard with diverse practicum opportunities: a private school that specializes in Floortime therapy, a hospital and a program that serves the transgender community.

"If not for the support I received at CSUCI and its nurturing learning environment, I may not have been able to pursue my next educational endeavor at an Ivy League school," says Nygard. "There's such a strong sense of community and belonging on campus, and Doc Sawyer has been an outstanding mentor. CSUCI also instills traits that help all graduates succeed in business and personal life: compassion, diligence and humility."

In addition to her day job, Nygard is a certified Zumba instructor. She teaches classes three nights a week.

"I love teaching Zumba and believe that fitness improves my work performance," she says. "Helping others experience the many benefits it offers is a perk."

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