Debra Ruh: Hello everyone. This is Debra Ruh, CEO of Rugh Global Impact and today at Human Potential at Work, we have Tanya Sheckley and she is with Up Academy which is a private elementary school and I think you’re going to enjoy this episode. They’re doing some very innovative things at her school that I think we all can learn from all over the world and I’m very excited about the conversation. So Tanya, welcome to the program.

Tanya Sheckley: Thank you so much for having me Debra. I’m really excited to be here.

Debra: Yes. Having a daughter with special needs and walking that path with her and her teachers are amazing but, I often felt like they really just did not have the tools and the knowledge that they needed to give her the kind of education I was really hoping for. And so, I’m really interested in the work that you’re doing.

So, tell the audience a little bit more about the program but also, please tell them more about you and how you… and about your journey of getting here.

Tanya: Yes. That’s exactly where I came from and how I got here. our school was filled with wonderful people who were very intelligent and have the best intentions but still wasn’t giving her everything that I knew that she was going to need to succeed and be independent and you know, it’s a mixture of what they’re able to do with the system and working within the public school and the guidelines that they have and the budget that they have. But it just wasn’t going to be enough to really support her and give her both the academic education as well as the life skills education that she was going to need to be independent and successful. And so, that was really the inspiration for our school.

My eldest daughter Eliza had cerebral palsy and we spent the first five years of her life trying all different therapies, traveling around the country, working with specialists around the world to get her the right things, to help her overcome her brain injury, reach her potential and do everything that we knew was possible for her. And then we got to the school district and kind of hit a brick wall and there’s only so much they can do. I know like so much that they’re willing to do frankly. So, it was really a struggle and we started looking for schools and different options and we looked all over the country. We really looked all over the world looking for the right fit and we couldn’t find one. So, we decided to open one.

Along that journey, I had two other children who are both typically developing typically abled kids. And so, we started looking for what really do all kids need to thrive in the coming decades and really built our school around an inclusion model as we did put my oldest daughter into kindergarten and we saw she was fully included in the mainstream class and I was terrified to send her to school. She couldn’t walk, she couldn’t talk, she couldn’t tell me if she had an amazing day and really like math and she couldn’t tell me if kids were mean to her and made fun of her or… she just didn’t have any of those abilities. And so, I was terrified to send her somewhere where she wasn’t with me, she wasn’t one of my age or one of my people you know.

I had to work with her over the years. But what happened was really amazing and she fit right in and became one of the class and the kids learned how to talk to her and communicate with her easily and she quickly made friends and the kids wanted to sit with her at lunch and they wanted to ride the bus with her on field trips and they wanted to be a part of her project group. It was a project based learning school and they always wanted her as a part of their group because she was really good at making decisions.

So, the kids were all trying to figure out what to do and what comes next. She’d be the one to be like, “oh. We need to do it this way.” And they listen to her. And so, seeing that and seeing that inclusion model really shaped where we are today.

So as you mentioned, we opened Up Academy. Up academy is a progressive elementary lab school with the focus on children with physical disabilities. So, our ideal classroom is about 70 percent typical kids and our project and inquiry-based curriculum works with what we call typically developing kids as well as kids who are gifted, kids who are twice exceptional, kids with some learning challenges. And then our full neuro development program is built around kids with physical disabilities and fully integrated into the classroom to support students at the time that they need support. So, the other things that really happened in the public school even though she was fully included and her teachers was fantastic and the kids were great is that the amount of services that she was offered first of all wasn’t enough to make any progress.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: She has 30 minutes of speech therapy twice a week and the speech therapist would come in on the speech therapist schedule. So, she might be pulled out of math to go to the speech therapy which she’d be mad about because she really like math and it takes her longer to do things anyway because of her disabilities and now she’s getting less time to do the same amount of work that the students… the other students are when it takes her longer because she’s getting pulled out on someone else’s schedule to go work on speech therapy. And then the speech therapist would show up and she’d pull out her iPad and it would take her 10minutes to get things loaded and set up and running for her and now you only have 30minutes, you’re down to 20minutes and then if something doesn’t work, takes it even longer and it just isn’t a good way to make progress.

We know that all kids learn best when things are consistent, when things are functional, when things make sense and when they can learn with their peers. So, when you’re pulling a child away out of a math class to go do something segregated, that singular, that isn’t integrated, that doesn’t really make sense, they’re also not going to make the progress as quickly as they could. As if that speech therapist came in during literacy and language arts and when all the kindergartens are working on letter sounds, you’re working on letter sounds and maybe you’re doing it verbally if you have that ability. Maybe you’re doing it on a keyboard and making that sound. Maybe you’re toggling through something. You know, there’s a variety of different ways that you can set up accessible curriculum so that the kids were all doing the same thing at the same time so it make sense and it’s functional and they’d progress faster.

You know, everybody will progress at the same rate. And when you get kids those expectations, that they can do the same things as their peers, they do the same things as their peers.

Debra: Right. Right. You set the bar high. We found that every time we set the bar high, and I’ll tell you a silly story about my daughter but, every time we set the bar high even when our daughter would fight us on it, she would…

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: Always reach those goals. And I remember, this is a silly point but, I remember when she was in preschool and she gone to preschool for a couple of years and we would get little smiley faces almost every single day because you know, my daughter was the best ever. So then she went to a new teacher at her last year in preschool and every single day, the first week, she came home with a frowny face.

The first day she came home with the frowny face, I thought I was going to you know go “this is not my daughter” and so… but every single day that week, she got frowny face. And when Friday came, I was just so furious. And so, I called the teacher and she said, “Oh. Mrs. Ruh, I was going to call you today anyway.” And she said, “Your daughter is very bright. She has so much potential but she has behaviour problems and she runs away from us.” and this particular school in Florida, it was… had multilevels. She said she hides and we did a lot of hide and seek and she won’t come to us and she said, “If you don’t get control of her behaviour…” think of a teacher telling a mom this, you know…

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: It had to be so hard but, “She’s going to have more problems. She already has so many things that she’s going to have to overcome. If you can’t get your hands around this, she’s going to really suffer in school and life.” and I really did listen and we made a lot of changes and this teacher end up just a gift to our family.

And it must be hard for the teacher sometimes to be honest with her parent. You know, with the parents. And I understand there’s so many variables. And I remember when we moved to Virginia, and my daughter was in middle school and way way way behind and she wasn’t reading and the school system wanted her to work. They wanted her to go and work at Wendy’s and I’m like, “I don’t want her to work. I want her to learn to read. I want her to understand basic math skills.”

My daughter, math is not going to be something that… she doesn’t really understand math. But I was discouraged that they wanted to send her off to work even though she did actually go and work at Wendy’s and she did really well but, I sort of wanted them to focus on her education and I saw quickly, they just didn’t have the tools and they called her included but she wasn’t included except in physical education and in theatre arts which did more for us than any speech therapy. And it wasn’t because speech therapy isn’t good but, as like you said, the speech therapist had way too many students. She was… she’s there 30minutes a week with five other kids and you know…

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: So, some of it is just a pure burden that’s on the schools and these professionals. And at the time… my daughter is 32 now but, there was little known about assistive technology and what that could do to help her learn and there wasn’t school like yours because I would have done everything I could. Because if we can educate you know our children… you know, we all know this, whether they’re typically developing or not. You know where they have neurodiversity, everybody’s going to win whenever we can educate. So, that’s why I was fascinated about the work that you’re doing. So just…

Tanya: Absolutely. And that’s what a big piece of what we’re looking at especially moving forward in the world. You know, from two different perspectives. For one, being an inclusion school; one of our main graduate standards and our focus is social and emotional learning but taking that one step further into empathetic action. And so, how do we really… as we learn to know ourselves, as children understand our place in the world and our family and our community and then our emotions and how our emotions affects us and how our emotions affect other people also taking that a step further. And I know our emotions pick other people but how do other people’s emotions affect us and how can we influence the things around us in a positive manner? And so, by kids all growing up together and they kind of for lack of a better term, demystifies disability.

You know, when I was growing up, it was… special education was a place and it was a dark corner of the school and you didn’t go there. The door was always closed…

Debra: Right.

Tanya: And you rarely saw those students. They came out… it was a different lunch hour, it was a different PE class. It was all in different schedules. And so, it was almost the scary place. But when we all learn together, we can learn what different people need to succeed.

So, as all of our kids grow and move into the world, as they’re designing things, as they’re solving problems, they can look at that from multiple perspectives and think back to elementary school and the kids that they learned with and, “okay. I’m designing this amazing corporate headquarters building. How do all of my friends get in and out? How does everybody… how is everybody able to work here?”

As we design new communities, how are we able to make that an inclusive space where we can all be capable and be valued and be productive. And so, by putting all of the kids together in an early age, it broadens everyone’s perspective and perceptions and also starts to change that attitude of differences are scary into how do we design things for everyone.

Debra: How do we tap into…

Tanya: So, that’s a big part of what we’re doing…

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: Right. Right. And recording this today on global accessibility awareness day which is a global movement. And the thing that’s so important about this is we’re all so much more alike than we are different. And I do remember when my daughter was going into middle school, I was worried about her getting bullied on the bus and she wasn’t really bullied on the bus. My son got, who is more neuro typical, my son got bullied a lot more and that’s what they do in middle school. So, a lot of these kids.

But, I remember thinking the peers of my children, they seem to be a lot more involved in understanding and accepting of the differences than I’d seen in previous generations and it seems to be getting better and better. But schools like yours are so important because you’re teaching everybody something. You know, I know now you know, now that Sara’s 32, a lot of her peers that she went to elementary and middle school with, they were very inspired by her and they’ve become special education teachers and nurses and a lot of them have said being around Sara really affected… you know, changed their lives and what they wanted to do.

So, we talk a lot about neurodiversity now and inclusion and acceptance but, we still really really are not seeing it in our schools. I know that schools are trying. The teachers are so wonderful and so understaffed. There are so many problems with this but, I like looking at models that are really making a difference. And so, I’m curious, how long has the school been open?

Tanya: We just opened. We’re brand new.

Debra: Oh. Wow. Congratulations.

Tanya: Yes. We launched in September. So, our original plans for the school. We started back talking about it in 2014 and then we got our 501c3 certification in 2015 and we’re hoping to open in the fall of 2016 and then my daughter unexpectedly passed away in March of 2016. And so, that really halted all of our plans and my entire life.

Debra: Yes. Yes. I’m so so sorry. I…

Tanya: Thank you.

Debra: I… yes. I don’t really… you never know what to say but it’s really exciting that her legacy lives on. She sounds like an amazing amazing person.

Tanya: She was a ton of fun. She was a huge soccer fan. This is her jersey behind me signed by Clint Dempsey. She got to meet the US national team ones and he signed her jersey. Yes. So that really halted our plans and I took a full year away and we as a family looked at what we wanted to do moving forward and we really decided that you know, it’s a school for everyone. It’s something that isn’t out there that is really needed because it’s something…

Debra: Right.

Tanya: We searched for and couldn’t find. And the reality is you know, there’s 17 million people in the US alone with cerebral palsy and there’s lots of other physical disabilities out there and other challenges in addition to that number and we really needed to take what she had taught us and do something with it.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: So, we finally opened up this fall of September 2018. This is our first year in operation and we’re really excited now to have a permanent space and be in our building and be moving forward.

Debra: Yes. And this is her legacy so how beautiful. And there are one billion people with disabilities all over the world and in the United States. One in four adults identifies as having a disability so…

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: The numbers are staggering and we really are doing a poor job of educating people with disabilities. But the thing I love about your school is that everybody is included because what you… there was a school here in my area where they took people with disabilities and put them together and it was a wonderful school but, I wanted my daughter to be in an inclusive environment which means everybody’s included. And so she once again had very talented amazing teachers and not and also teachers that weren’t as committed but the… we need to do it differently. And so I’m really glad that you have that school and that… you know and I’m…

We want to watch your progress. We want to learn from you because we need to take the school and we need to put it in others and then I’m also… I’m sure at some point you’re thinking what happens after elementary and you have time to think about that because these children can go through and you can figure that out in the future but education is a huge issue and I work a lot with corporations that employ people with disabilities and they often say to me, “we can’t find candidates with disabilities that are qualified to do our jobs.” And of course they’re out there but it’s really… if we’re not handling this at the education level all the way from pre k, all the way through you know, somebody goes to college or technical school or whatever, then we’re going to continue to have these major problems that we have with real inclusion.

Tanya: Yes. Yes. You touched on a whole bunch of points right there. So the first, yes, definitely our vision is to get our program up and running and then get it to a point where we can share it. where either it’s other educators coming in for a training session that we give on how to do inclusion and how to do our educational method and take it back to their school or rather our educators that we’re training and then sending out to different districts and places to train and to see what’s going on and to consult and to help. That’s a big piece of our vision and what we want to do.

you know, I can… we can only help so many kids within our four walls here but if we can make it a bigger project and take it out to other schools and train others, that’s where it really becomes impactful. Along with that, we’re looking to launch an online curriculum subscription type service where all of our projects, all of our curriculum, everything that we’re building both from a typical curriculum and also the adaptable and accessible pieces of the curriculum, being able to bundle all that and all that available online so that anybody anywhere in the world could pull it down and say, “oh. here’s a project on ecology for second graders.”, “here’s how I teach it using projects.” and “here’s how I include students with different needs.” And it’s all together in one place.

And so, that’s part of our goal as well. And then the second part of what you’re talking about with employers looking for people with disabilities. There’s actually a huge symposium here tomorrow in Mountain View about employers and its disability hiring and all the major tech firms will be there and they’re looking to really build their inclusion and diversity profiles for their HR but it’s the same problem is that we haven’t as a society provided the education.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: And so then there’s just not the candidate pool to choose from. and so, as we look in… you know, I’m in the heart of Silicon Valley and I look around and I see what’s happening with automation, with self-driving vehicles and with artificial intelligence and where technology is going and there are surgeons doing surgery using robotic hands, they don’t even have to touch a patient anymore which opens up for someone who’s disabled or has physical disability and their hands are shaky opens up a world of possibilities. Like these kids could now be surgeons because they can control a robot with their brains.

Debra: Right. Right.

Tanya: And they can get in a car but they don’t have to drive and they can tell them where to take them and they don’t have to take three buses and two trains to have them towards from where they want to be.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: Like there’s a whole world of possibilities opening up and people with disabilities need to be a part of that planning and that development because they’re a huge part of who’s really going to benefit.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: But without an education, they can’t do that.

Debra: I agree. I agree. We see it all the time. We’re see… we see these problems.

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: And we see… my nephew has autism and I’m very proud to say that he just got hired by Ernst & Young in one of those programs and he’s such a smart smart young man and he has autism. So, he you know, he won’t always look at you or things like that but he’s so gifted and I think Ernst & Young is so smart for getting him.

And so, you know the corporations, many of the corporations, they really are committed to inclusion. They are but we have to educate them. We have to educate these people. And my chief accessibility officer, she has cerebral palsy and she told me once that when she lies down, all she can control is blinking of her eyes and she cannot speak. She can verbalize noises but she cannot speak words and I can tell you all the things she cannot do but let me tell you what she can do.

She’s a brilliant writer. She’s the… one of the smartest people I know with accessibility. She’s just an amazing woman with so much to give but, when people meet her, they assume because of the severe disability, they sometimes assume that there’s not this brilliant woman there wanting to talk to you. And she just started using eye gaze technology and…

Tanya: Okay.

Debra: I’ve done speeches with her where she does all work. She does prepares everything; the presentation and then I’m there to just support her. She uses augmented technology and communications but she’s so brilliant and I think of society not having somebody like Rosemary Musachio’s brilliance. And you look at the Stephen Hawking and every person with disabilities and as brilliant but also we can’t assume every person with the disability doesn’t have something to offer the society. If we would educate them, then we could employ them and make them participate in the society. And I’ll say one more thing and I will let you talk.

But another thing that I see. I see a lot of efforts being made but people with the severe disabilities are being left out. I just hired a man that I’ve known for years; LaMondré Pough who has a severe disability but he’s one of the brightest men I’ve ever met. And the only reason why this man isn’t working is because of his disability. It’s the only reason. He’s educated, he’s well spoken, he’s a great communicator but he has a severe disability and employers are just afraid and I get that but that’s why the work that you’re doing is so important. And it’s so important that you are looking at this from how can I help others do this and how can I put programs online that benefit others. So, I just really really am grateful for the work you’re doing.

Tanya: Thank you. Yes. It’s definitely a project. It’s new. It requires a lot of education. You know, because to your point, even the kids that we’re bringing in and some of their families they’re telling me, “well, my daughter can’t do this because XYZ.” Like well, have you given her a chance? Has she…

Debra: Great.

Tanya: Tried? Look at it this way.

Debra: How do you know it? Right.

Tanya: Can she not do it because she’s sitting in a special day class and nobody’s giving her stimulation and education to do it or can she really not do it? Like there are some things that you just really can’t do. But really, even just educating the parents that…

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: Their kids can come here and they can do that. Because I have parents who have been told since their child was born all the things… you know, to your point, all the things they can’t do.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: And you could… right. And it goes on and on and they have stats usually of reports from OTs, PTs, Speech therapist and educators and neurologist and Physiatrist and whoever else has seen this kid has written a report on all the things that you can’t do. As a parent, I threw all of those away.

Debra: Good for you.

Tanya: I brought them home and I…

Debra: I did too.

Tanya: I focused. I can see my child. I don’t need this piece of paper. If somebody else needs it later, I can get it for that person whatever. But there parents who have filing cabinets full of these stuff of all the things their kid can’t do and…

Debra: Right.

Tanya: Now I’m coming in and saying, “Well, let’s send them to school and include them in the project-based learning where they can collaborate and problem solve and learn together.” And parents are like, “what?”

Debra: But that is the… that’s the way we all learn. And by the way, that’s the way we work. That’s what we do…

Tanya: Yes. And so how… you know, it’s educating the parents and finding those kids and getting them in the doors that we really can build the community and make a difference.

Debra: Yes. Let me ask you… let’s talk about a hard topic. I am going to assume funding. So, how are you being funded? I’m hoping corporations that are learning about you specially Silicon Valley are helping fund. I mean, tell us because of course this is often why a program that as important as yours doesn’t succeed. So, tell us about how you’re funding and how we can help you with that.

Tanya: Yes. That’s a fantastic question. We’re always fund raising. We have reached out to several corporations here. We haven’t had a lot of luck getting funding up until this point and you know, until we had a place, I’m selling an idea.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: And if there’s anywhere in the world an idea sells it’s here but it’s a new idea and that’s different and it involves people and it involves change and it involve something that lots of people are scared of. And so, it’s been a challenge definitely. We do have some foundation support. Pops Kids has supported us. They’re a local foundation. We’ve had some support with the San Jose Earthquakes. I mentioned my daughter was a huge soccer fan.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: The Earthquakes held her celebration of life. They held our first big fundraiser. They donated space. They donated food and beverage and people and time and games and then play the balls and jerseys and giveaways and they’ve been really really supportive. But the majority of our funding and donations is individually funded at this point. It’s friends and family and donations and crowd funding which we’ve been really successful.

We’ve raised about a half million dollars in individual donations but we really… to be sustainable and to be successful… and really, ideally, our model, everybody would pay tuition and everything else that you needed would just come with it.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: And we can’t… we can’t afford to do that at this point.

Debra: Right.

Tanya: I mean, ideally it would be free. Right? And anybody who could come and wanted to come would come and if we could get that level of funding, it would be amazing because that’s really the goal.

Debra: Right. Right. And that’s what we need because if we’re not you know… I mean, that is just so essential. I’d love to see some of those really big investors in Silicon Valley and corporations in Silicon Valley get behind this school because you’re mentioning, we talk about this on the show a lot but, you’re mentioning the artificial intelligence and the self-driving cars and the robotics and all these amazing technologies that are going to change all of our lives. That they’re really really levelling the playing field in a lot of ways for people with disabilities.

I remember one time posting something about a self-driverless car and somebody made a negative comment about it “never trust one.” And I said, “Well, let me tell you, my daughter has Down syndrome. She can’t drive. She get sick of waiting for me to drive or somebody else.” And this is independence for her.

This is so important. Not to mention that people with disabilities often have a hard time with the transportation that’s provided getting to work on time. And so, there are all these barriers to employment that we have to solve and technology is going to solve some of these but if we’re not educating everybody including people with severe disabilities in a way that helps them think like the corporations need them to think.

I mean, I love the way you’re doing it project based because once again, that’s what happens in corporations. Why not do it all the way through? So, I know a lot of corporations watch the show and I’m really hoping that they’ll get excited about this and really want to support what you’re doing and then you can help others do what you’re doing as well. Because the way we’re doing it now, it is not working. It is not working and then we have people like my daughter getting out of school. They have a special needs diploma and there’s nothing.

Now, I’m there for my daughter and I’ve pushed her and she worked at Nordstrom for years until she started having health problems and that’s a whole another story. But, we… there’s… if we don’t fix the fundamental problems that we have with education for everybody but certainly for people with disabilities, we can’t advance as a society. So, I just think that’s why the work that you’re doing is so important. But, tell us… tell us a little bit more about how school is going. I mean, you have… you’re actually operating now and then I also at the end want to make sure that people know how to contact you and learn about the school and learn about helping you fund what you’re doing because it’s very important work.

Tanya: Absolutely. Yes. So, we’re up and running. We have students. Yes, we’re still kind of building out and organizing our space but we have a full STEAM and Tinker and art lab where kids make and develop and build things. We have a library and what we call a quiet reading room. It has various different seating; there’s little pad chairs you can pull over your head, there’s little tent you can sit in, there’s regular chairs, there’s beanbags you know for kids that kind of sit and lounge wherever is comfortable for them to read and learn.

We have our regular typical classrooms set up and then our education system is really around inquiry and projects. So, we do all of the necessary academics. You know, kids have to learn to read and write and they have to learn math skills and these are basic elementary skills but along with that, we have wonder wall of inquiry of kid questions. You know, why is the sky blue? Why do porcupines have sharp quills? Why… I forget what my son asked me the other day.

He’s been really big on why is a dog called a dog? And why is a bush called a bush? Why do we… like, why are these things and language the way they are? And so, when these kids have these questions, they can type them up on the wall and our educators can build projects around them that bring in some of the standards that the kids need to learn. So in that way, the content is really focused on the kids and their interests and they’re still learning the skills that they need to learn but content is available everywhere. You know, you can go to Google, you can go to Siri…

Debra: Oh yes.

Tanya: And get content. But there are a lot of skills that come with that that you need to learn as you grow. And so, how do we draw in what’s important to the kids to teach them the skills that they need.

Debra: Yes. It sounds to me… yes. It sounds to me like you’re teaching them to think and to be curious.

Tanya: Yes. Yes…

Debra: Which will…

Tanya: We’re all about curiosity and creativity.

Debra: And that will… that will be so powerful to them throughout their life times and we don’t do that…

Tanya: Yes. Creativity… creativity was recently listed as the number one skill that kids will need in the future.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: So… and they’re innately creative as long as we allow them to continue that.

Debra: Yes. It’s…

Tanya: Yes.

Debra: Curiosity… curiosity is so important. And so, I love that you’re being too innovative but you’re teaching them to think and you’re encouraging them to be really curious. I remember my son who’s… you know, he doesn’t have a disability but, he’s very curious and he would ask a bunch of questions and he would get in trouble in school for doing that and they would scold him and he would come home and he would say, mom… you know he was asking those questions because I encouraged it.

And so, that’s another thing I love about your program and excuse me for interrupting you before. I just wanted to point out that that was what you were doing. You’re teaching kids to think and to be curious and to be excited about life. I mean, those are such important skills.

So, I want to continue watching you. I want you to tell us, give us updates and tell us what you’re doing. I’m hoping some of the corporations that are listening to the program will really want to find out more and see how they can support you. I see so much money being fondled from corporations and the foundations but, a lot of that money is spent in ways that isn’t really advancing our cause. And so, I’m hoping some of that money can be rerouted to programs like yours that is so innovative and creative and it is including everybody in ways that we can all thrive.

We often say you know, that child born with cerebral palsy that can’t speak in the traditional way, this might be the person that comes up with the cure for Alzheimer’s you know. So, let’s… nobody’s born broken. We just need to make sure that the world is adaptable to them so…

Tanya: Yes. Yes. And I will say you know, my daughter who was born with cerebral palsy and couldn’t speak was so curious and so observant. She would notice things about people and notice things about the environment and ask questions about things that other people wouldn’t even see or notice or understand. She had taught herself to read pretty much before kindergarten…

Debra: Wow.

Tanya: Because she’s… you know, when you don’t have the ability to run and play and all of these other things that kids do; rather those sort of distractions from learning… I mean, it’s all learning an…

Debra: Great. Great. Great.

Tanya: You have to learn and there’s all sorts of neuro cognitive connections there too but when you don’t have all of that and you’re really just kind of sitting and watching and learning like there’s so… it’s the world from a different perspective and there’s so much more that you can learn from quietly observing than from actively taking part. And so yes, it’s just a totally different perspective and if we can bring that into our society and into our world and presume that these kids are confident and have an understanding and involve them in decisions and creation and curiosity; it will be a really amazing place.

Debra: I agree. And I know that she must been amazing woman because you’re an amazing woman. I mean, she was an amazing girl but I’m impressed with her mother. But Tanya, tell us how we can find out more about what you’re doing. Are you on social media? What is your website? How can people find out how they can support what you’re doing and learn from you?

Tanya: Of course. Of course. Yes. We have our website. Our website is upacademysf like San Francisco dot com. So it’s upacademysf.com. That’s also our catch phrase for Twitter. We’re @upacademysf. On Facebook facebook.com/upacademysf.

Debra: Cool.

Tanya: Our Instagram is also @upacademysf and we also have one other Instagram account for our K9 ambassador and his is @Haroldonwheels.

Debra: Oh. Fun.

Tanya: So, we have a little you can see him.

Debra: Oh. There he is. He’s…

Tanya: He’s napping.

Debra: He’s napping away.

Tanya: We have a little dog with disability. His back end is paralyze. He was a rescue dog and we have now taken him from rescue to FO therapy dog.

Debra: Yay!

Tanya: But his ability… because he really shows it doesn’t matter your species, it doesn’t matter your ability; it’s really all about attitude because he’s the happiest little dog that you would ever see.

Debra: Wow.

Tanya: So, we also have our Instagram @Haroldonwheels. We do take donations through our website. People can get in touch with me directly. The easiest way would probably through our admin email which is [admin@upacademysf.com](mailto:admin@upacademysf.com). And so, yes. You know, we’re looking out, we’re reaching out, we need more funding to really fuel our programs and build awareness. You know, shows like yours that are helping us to get the word out that we’re here and what we’re doing is different and innovative and we really are working to make a difference in the world and to help others to do the same because that’s really where the magic is.

Debra: I agree. I agree. And we have to support each other to change the world. People often say, “Debra, you do all these and you’re always talking about other people” but the reality is, if we’re not all pulling together, we’re not going to have successes for daughters like ours and we need to… we all need to be included.

Society is failing when we’re not all included. We’re not able to all be educated. If we want to work, we should be able to work and stuff. So, I really believe in your program and I wish you such success and maybe you’ll come back in a year or so and tell us how the school went and you know, we’re here to help you turn up the volume.

So, I’ll follow you on all of your social media channels and we wish you so much luck. So, thank you so much and condolences about your beautiful daughter but look what she brought to the world. She brought so much already to the world. So, thank you.

Tanya: She has. She’s definitely made me a better person. She’s changed our family. Her little school is going to make its mark on the world.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: She was amazing and thank you. Thank you for having me. Thank you for sharing our story.

Debra: Yes.

Tanya: Thank you.

Debra: You’re welcome and this has only began. So, we will continue this conversation. So, thank you so much Tanya and we’ll say goodbye for now and we’ll make sure that we have all the information so you all can find out about Tanya’s work and support the school too. So, thank you Tanya and thanks everybody for joining today.

Tanya: Thank you.