



Aleah, 4, pictured with her books, struggles with a hearing impairment and was the recipient of funds and educational materials raised by the 2013 Columbia Gorge ESD's Rainy Day Fund Run.

With bouncing blonde pigtails, a bright pink dress and a wide, all-encompassing grin on her face, 4-year-old Aleah is every inch the energetic preschooler.

"She's pretty self-explanatory," her mother, Felicia, said when asked to describe her daughter. "Happy go-lucky all the time and always ready for an adventure," she laughed. "Of course, she also loves dressing up and having her picture taken."

After being diagnosed with a hearing impairment several years ago, Aleah became part of Columbia Gorge ESD's Early Intervention program, and is now a student in one of the four preschool classes at the Early Childhood Special Education Center in The Dalles.

The annual Rainy Day Fund Run, taking place May 31 at 9 a.m. at Kiwanis Park just off of Klindt Drive in The Dalles, is a walk/run along the Riverfront Trail whose proceeds go toward benefiting children like Aleah, who struggle with disabilities and require additional support to succeed in both their daily lives and their education.

Cindy Johnson, administrative assistant at the Early Intervention and Childhood Special Education Center, characterizes Aleah as "her own little welcome wagon" and "the most enthusiastic student in her class."

As last year's Rainy Day Fund recipient, Aleah received educational materials specifically tailored to her own needs, which allowed her to learn sign language and went a long way toward facilitating enhanced communication between herself and her family members, teachers and friends.

"Over the years, we've funded applications for things like glasses, wheel chair ramps and special therapy for a child who really needed the extra support," Johnson said. "The families know what they need most and are so appreciative of any help they can receive." Many Rainy Day Fund children receive vision and hearing care through the KEX Kids Fund.