

Irvine Student Honored With International Award

Arlington, Va., March 1, 2020 — In February, **Baharnaz Alimohammadi** of Irvine, Cal., received the **2020 Yes I Can Award** from the **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**.



A tenth grader at University High School, Baharnaz has had a passion for singing for more than 10 years and is well-known at her school and at various recitals for her operatic performance and advanced vocal talent. However, not many can tell she was born with hearing loss.

Born three months early, Baharnaz faced numerous health issues, including hearing loss, severe visual deficiencies, sepsis infections, and breathing and heart problems, and weighed just 1.8 pounds at birth. She struggled to learn how to speak for the first years of her life, making it difficult for her to fit in with her peers. But after many months of speech therapy and receiving her first hearing aids, her speech began to take off.

Shortly after, Baharnaz found her love of classical music through cartoons and the radio, eventually idolizing the great opera singers. At 6 years old, she began singing classically for the first time, quickly mastering several Italian, French, and German classical pieces.

When Baharnaz entered elementary school, her parents fought to place her in a general education program with accommodations for hearing loss, which they believed would benefit her both academically and socially. They were proven right. Baharnaz joined her school's general choir program and – with the help of hearing aids and an FM microphone – was able to flourish alongside her classmates. She quickly became one of the strongest singers in her choir, landing solo after solo, which has continued over the years and into the present.

Today, she sings in her school's advanced choir program, has won the yearly talent show at her school five times in a row, and is currently trying out for America's Got Talent. In addition to choir, Baharnaz spends much of her free time volunteering and helping tutor other children in her school in math and science. She is known for her hard work, perseverance through challenges, and great enthusiasm for helping others around her, and was even honored with the David Leidal Award at the end of eighth grade.

As for her piece of advice? "No matter how much life seems to bring you down, never forget who you truly are and that will take you beyond the stars."

CEC is proud to honor Baharnaz with this award in the Arts category. She received the award at the Yes I Can Award Ceremony on February 7, 2020, at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore., as part of the CEC 2020 Convention & Expo. The Yes I Can program recognizes the accomplishments of 12 students with exceptionalities in six categories: Academics, Arts, School & Community Activities, Self-Advocacy, Technology, and Transition.



The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the educational success of children and youth with exceptionalities that accomplishes its mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. Learn more about CEC at cec.sped.org.

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