

When I was a seventh grade student, I struggled fitting in with the other children during physical education. I had never enjoyed sports and found myself to be less than talented in athletics. When I was chosen as captain, I was desperate to prove myself by picking a powerful team. Originally, I wanted to pick the most athletic person I could find. Then my eyes settled on someone that made me change my mind. His name was Keith, but he was not the strongest of my classmates. He was of average height and very thin. He was also mentally disabled. Of all my teammates, the person who tried the hardest was Keith. While he did not score the most goals, he was certainly the most determined. During that game, I had discovered one of life's inalienable truths: that often the smallest action can brighten someone's day, or change a person's life. It was that moment that I had come to the sudden realization that a 12 year old child could make a difference. Upon this epiphany, I immediately decided what I wanted to do with my life. I knew that I wanted to work with special needs people. Knowing this, I began to volunteer once a week with Keith and his classmates throughout eighth grade.

The following September I asked my guidance counselor about possible opportunities to continue on the path I was on. I was informed that no such program currently existed in the high school, but that nothing was preventing me from starting one. I approached the Life-Skills teacher of the high school students. She gratefully told me that every other day I would be more than welcome to help out in the classroom. These students were extremely different than anyone I had worked with before. Previously, I had only worked with people younger than myself. The students I was about to begin working with were far older than me. I quickly learned that they were not

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children, and should not be treated as if they were. They did not need someone to look up to, what they needed was a friend. It was not my role to pity them. Instead, it became my job to simply talk to them. We talked about sports and shopping. I would gossip with them about recent news and discuss politics. At the end of the year I considered the time I had spent with them as time spent hanging out with friends.

I have worked in several programs involving people with special needs. The people I have worked with ranged in ages from 5-45, and have had various disabilities. My role in helping these people is always changing depending upon their needs. I have been a counselor, a mentor, a tutor, and a babysitter. However, for each person I have worked with, I have always been a friend.

Five years have gone by since I began helping disabled people. My love and respect for the people I work with has not changed, but my perspective has. When I first began to work with the mentally disabled, I viewed them as impaired. My opinions have long since changed. I have come to realize that disabled people are people first. Although they may have a harder time doing mathematic equations than the average person, they are just as capable of achieving the important things in life. They can laugh, smile, and dance. They can unconditionally love other people. People with special needs see the world through unbiased eyes. They do not see fat, skinny, pretty or ugly. They see kind, funny, friendly, and warm.

When I first started working with disabled people, I expected to change lives. What I did not foresee, was that they would change my life as well. I have learned how to be patient, understanding, and non-judgmental. I have received numerous awards for my

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work with disabled people, and although they are heart warming, they are nowhere near as significant as the lessons I have learned.

**Honors/Awards:**

**PRIDE-Empathy (9<sup>th</sup> and-10<sup>th</sup> grade)**

Syosset High School uses the word PRIDE to symbolize Patience, Respect, Integrity, Dignity, and Empathy. Each month the school awards one student that has displayed one of these characteristics with a PRIDE award.

**The Norma Gold Human Relations Award (8<sup>th</sup> and-9<sup>th</sup> grade)**

The Norma Gold Human Relations Award is awarded to one student a year to recognize his/her contributions in the area of human relations.

**School Clubs and Volunteering Activities:**

**Assist Life-Skills Class (9<sup>th</sup> through-12<sup>th</sup> grade)**

The Special Education life skills class consists of 5 teenagers with various disabilities. I regularly help out in the class room, as well as befriend the students. I have introduced all of the students to my friends, and I eat lunch with them on a regular basis. I personally helped initiate this program under the leadership of Ms. Fuchs, the Life Skills Teacher.

**Substance Free Alliance (9<sup>th</sup> through -12<sup>th</sup> grade)**

The Substance Free Alliance's main goal is to educate teens about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Some of the activities the club has organized include visits to middle school students to educate them on how to handle peer pressure, and demonstrations within the High School about the harmful effects of alcohol on the developing brain.

**Cooking Club (10<sup>th</sup> and-11<sup>th</sup> grade)**

The Cooking Club meets twice a month to prepare basic recipes. My role in the club was to assist a boy with mental handicaps. I helped him to socialize appropriately with his peers and to complete cooking related tasks.

**Community Activities:**

**Lustgarten walk for Pancreatic Cancer Research (8<sup>th</sup> and -12<sup>th</sup> grade).**

I walk for Pancreatic Cancer research every year and help raise funds for this cause. This is very important to me, as I lost my grandmother to Pancreatic Cancer.

**Walk for Autism (10<sup>th</sup> through-12<sup>th</sup> grade)**

Every year I raise money for Autism research and participate in the walk at Jones Beach. I walk with my best friend and her brother who has Autism.

**Volunteer at Camp ANCHOR (9<sup>th</sup> through-11<sup>th</sup> grade) 5-30 hours/week**

Camp ANCHOR is a program for mentally and physically disabled children and adults. The program consists of a full time day camp during the summer, and a Saturday program during the school year, both in which I have volunteered at. consecutively for three years. I worked with people of all ages, and gained experience with a variety of disabilities, including the Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Angelman Syndrome, Mental Retardation, and Fragile X Syndrome.

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**Community Activities Continued:**

Presentation to Faculty at Superintendent's Teacher Conference (November, 2007) 30 hours +

I was asked by a former teacher to make a presentation to teachers at a workshop on the benefits of including special education students with regular education students. I was the only student in my High School asked to speak in front of the school district's faculty. My speech was based upon my own personal experience with special education students.

Camp ANCHOR Volunteer Swimathon (Summer 2007) 10 hours

Every other year Camp ANCHOR holds a fund raiser in which the volunteers swim multiple laps to raise money to benefit the program. I personally raised \$1,350.00 which went towards equipment and field trip funds.

Volunteer at KISS (9<sup>th</sup> grade) 3 hours/week

I volunteered at the Mid-Island Y JCC through the KISS program. (Kids In Special Services) I was placed in a classroom as a teacher's assistant with 5 pre-school aged children on the Autism Spectrum.

**Work Experience:**

Baby-Sitting for children with special needs (10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) Assorted hours

I baby-sit many children with disabilities. I regularly baby-sit for 3 families. The 3 people I baby-sit for are 5, 9, and 14. The 9 year old girl has Down Syndrome, and both of the other people have Autism.

Math tutor for a 10 year old boy with Autism (11<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) Assorted hours

I would tutor him before a math test. I helped him to think of math differently and made up fun math-related activities to hold his attention.

Sid Jacobson JCC (12<sup>th</sup> grade) 10 hours/week

I work various programs at the JCC, all for children and teens with Autism. Some of the programs I work at include:

Saturday Night Teen Lounge: The program meets Saturday nights for teenagers with various disabilities.

Get Fit: I teach teenagers with Autism how to stay in shape, and help co-lead an exercise program.

Fantastic Fridays: The program is for children with severe Autism. Art therapy and physical education are some of the activities the program offers.

Dr. B Well Naturally (11<sup>th</sup> grade) 10-26 hours/week

Dr. B Well Naturally is an organic health food and vitamin store. I worked behind the deli counter. Over my time working there I became familiar with natural remedies, and became knowledgeable on the benefits of various diets.

Camp Kehilla (Summer 2008) 40 hours/week

Camp Kehilla is a camp for disabled children and teenagers, run through the Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center. I worked as a counselor for a group of children ages 9-11 with various disabilities. Of the 28 children within that age group, I was personally responsible for 3 girls and 1 boy.

The Sweet Spot Shoppe (10<sup>th</sup> grade) 10 hours/week

The Sweet Spot Shoppe is a candy store. I worked as a salesperson.