

## Perspective

In the disabled community, we have the same diversities as in every other community. In addition, there are a wide range of disabilities that affect learning, emotion, physical ability, and health. Each combination makes us more unique, and more beautiful.

Perspective is an interesting thing. I feel normal, and take all of the same classes as my normal peers. I'm active in school, the community, and sports. Still, I'm often surprised at how my perspective can be so different. Others can take things for granted, such as hopping in the car to go to the movies. I enjoy movies, but I have to plan those things. I have to make sure I have time to get into and out of the car, and plan for time in case all of the handicap spots are taken. I have to plan for having someone to help with snacks because my hands are on my walker, and I have to plan to hit the bathroom before the movie starts, because if I have to go during, I will miss too much of the film. Nothing is easy.

Easy will not make us strong. Easy will not make us capable. Easy does not lead to growth.

Understanding, though, can.

It began at the kitchen table in April, 2017. I needed an idea for a community service project in order to apply for a special program at Furman University.

"Why don't you do something for your miracle league baseball team?" my mother asked.

"No, that's too easy. Everyone will expect me to do that."

"Well, you really can't help people unless you understand them," my mother said.

"What if I got the arts students at my school to teach the special education students about art?"

My mother said, "that sounds hard."

But then again, what others see as hard, I see as a challenge worth taking. Most people I know cannot get up in front of others and talk. I struggled in most of my childhood taking speech therapy and learning to breath and pace. It's risky to put oneself out there, to risk ridicule, but I do it every day, always have. My perspective is that I am who I am, and my voice is worth hearing. It surprises me that not everyone can say the same about themselves.

My idea won me a spot in the program, but that was the easy part. By August, 2017, I was lobbying school officials and teachers to support the idea called "Star Day". As usual, I had a lot of pats on the back for having such a great idea. People always patronize me. This time,

though, I told them I was glad they liked the idea, and here is what I need done. Most made excuses to step away, but my theatre teacher was on board.

My next challenge was Special Education. I could tell they didn't think my idea would go anywhere. What could a crippled kid do? So, I challenged one teacher to give it a chance. She agreed.

The students were the easy part. They all needed volunteer hours and this was something they could do during school. But as we planned, they started seeing how fun it could be. We created stations where special education students could make hand puppets, then another station where they could help put on a puppet show. We had dancing and singing. There was every color of home-made play doh ready for creating sculpture. And we set up an improv station where we could dress them up in costumes and act silly.

I struggled to get administration on board, to get facilities to agree to set up the gym for me. It was a struggle to get time on the news show, to put up posters, and to even get the Special Education department to invite the families of these students to come see the grand showcase at the end of the day. There were teachers that refused to allow the student volunteers out of class because they didn't think Star Day would happen. I crisscrossed campus until my shoulders hurt from the walker, just trying to convince people that Star Day was important.

My theatre teacher was with me every step and helped me understand that they just don't get it yet, they don't have the perspective they need. But, they will.

And they did. Early on December 1, 2017, forty five special education students arrived. They were greeted by sixty volunteer students, who either lead the different stations or were assigned one on one as a buddy. We took care to understand which groups might get overstimulated, which needed what kind of help, and I personally showed students how to work with their buddies to ensure they had a great time.

We were making so much noise, the principal came in to see what was going on. She said, "Oh My God," and left. When she returned, she had her administrators with her. She required teachers to visit to see what we were doing. The media was invited to come see. At the end of the day, all of the students - together - sang and danced and put on a fantastic show for their friends and family.

A month later, the Arts Council voted to make Star Day an annual event. But perhaps the thing that means the most to me is this: Now, regular ed students talk to special ed students in the hallways, wave at them during lunch, and a few have even danced to the enjoyment of my special friends. Perspectives have changed.

Growing up with one foot in the disability world and one in the "normal" world has given me a unique perspective that I intend to bring to whatever my future may hold. I know that I will be

focused on helping people, any groups that need a voice. All that matters is that I understand their perspective.