

My Civics Participation Project Reflection

By Jack Barrera

Katie

When I was about three years old, my parents recalled me asking them why so many people came to see Katie. Like any other sibling, I was jealous of all the attention that she received. Sometimes I wouldn't see my parents for days as they were constantly in the hospital day in and day out. It seemed as if Katie was taking away all of my attention against my will. As I got older, I began to understand the amount of support that she needed to stay alive. My sister was born with a hole in her heart and throughout her life thus far, she has experienced open heart surgery twice. The fear that Katie would stop breathing led to many restless nights for my parents. My first true fear in life came years after all of her operations when I was finally able to think clearly for myself. I began to feel the same fears that my parents felt years ago during Katie's operations.

How this project changed my view

For my whole life, my sister had been the only kid with special needs that I'd spend time with regularly; I would occasionally go with the rest of my family to events arranged for people with disabilities. Since my sister has had access to an above average education for a kid with down syndrome, she has no fear to approach typical kids and befriend them. My lack of participation in the special needs community led me to believe that the bond that my sister and I shared was inimitable. Working with a vast group of different kids and being able to bond over soccer has drastically changed my views of the special needs community, even as someone who has a family member with special needs. There is a great diversity of kids who all have special needs and I was able to learn a lot about the culture of the special needs community through the parents, who are some of the most kind hearted people one could ever hope to meet. I can see their work and dedication reflected in their kids along with their community motto: "choose kindness," which is so greatly needed in our modern society.

Advocation for kids with special needs

For nine years my parents have fought for my sister to receive the same level of education as any typical kid. The education systems make little to no effort to incorporate students with special needs in class with typical kids, and it has been that way for a very long time. Also, prior to 1975, kids born with disabilities were taken and put into group homes or institutions. If my sister had been born during that time, she wouldn't be living with us. It wasn't until after the mid 1970's that the government began to protect kids with disabilities which was the first step towards them being given their full rights as American citizens.

John F. Kennedy

Growing up, President John F. Kennedy's older sister Rosemary Kennedy struggled with severe seizures. Nine months after his inauguration, Kennedy organized a team of twenty-seven highly-skilled scientists all focused on the field of special needs. Kennedy brought light to the special needs community using his political strength and fought to make them included into society.



Arnold Schwarzenegger



In 1979, Arnold Schwarzenegger was named as the head training coach for the special olympics. Arnold's work with the special olympics brought a great amount of attention to the program as well as inspiring many kids with special needs to become great athletes.

Fighting For A Change

By being involved with the special needs community, I have learned so much. Some of the happiest people I have met in my entire life have had special needs. Even though they don't have nearly as many chances in life as will you and I, they are able to cherish and be grateful for what they have. No matter how severe their disabilities may be, it will never justify them being treated as less than human. Doing the bare minimum is not enough; people with special needs deserve far more than what the world has given them. There are only positive benefits that volunteers can obtain from working with kids with special needs, regardless of what sport they choose. Through the usage of sports, both the kids with special needs and the helpers learn the essence and necessity of patience.

My stories from my volunteering

Special Needs Sports Associations

Helping kids with special needs play sports is an ideal part time job for any athlete who wants to begin volunteering. Teaching the kids how to work together as a team not only helps them to improve as an athlete, but teaches them how to work alongside other people in society.

If you are interested in volunteering to help people with special needs, some great organizations to get started with are Amigos Unidos (male counterpart), National Charity League (female counterpart), and the Friendship Foundation.