



Calgary Jewish Federation

Meshane Ha Briot: Inclusion Essay Contest, 2020

Perspectives on Inclusion

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Division A Winner, Grade 6

The Oxford Dictionary definition of inclusion is the act or state of including or being included in a group or structure. People have different perspectives on inclusion and what it means. It doesn't matter what you look like or what differences people have, every person no matter what should be included in activities and experiences that they want to participate in. Several years ago, Calgary Jewish Federation dedicated itself to including everybody in their programming, and they worked hard on helping children or anybody with special needs, and their families, participate and be included in activities within and outside of the Jewish community. People who believe in inclusion, believe that these differences do matter, but should also be accepted, respected, admired and even celebrated. Inclusion is important to me because I have family and friends with special needs, my dad works with children with special needs, and because I am Jewish and what my community does is part of who I am. I decided to interview four different people, to get different perspectives on the importance of inclusion, and the challenges of including people. These people include a mom and son who has special needs, a speech therapist and a peer helper.

Person 1 - mother of child with autism

What have been some successful examples of Mac being included?

Mac was in a hip hop class by himself and he didn't go with anybody helping him but the teacher knew that he had different abilities.

What strategies have helped make inclusion more successful?

One strategy was preparing because new things for Mac were stressful and exciting at the same time and it was hard to just walk into a new environment.

What has Mac's inclusion taught other people?

Mac's inclusion has taught kids at school that everyone has different abilities and has different things that they are good at.

Are there challenges with Mac's inclusion with his extended family?

Yes, one of the reasons is that Mac can't concentrate when lots of people are talking and that is one of the things that happens quite often.

Person 2 - child with autism

What do you like to do by yourself?

Like to play Hotwheels, Mario and Superheroes.

What do you like to do with other people?

Like to play hide and seek and tag.

What activities do you like to do with your big family?

Toboggan and ski.

What do you learn from other kids?

Play different games.

Person 3 - speech therapist

What is your role as a therapist in making inclusion more successful?

It is usually the child and the parents that I work directly with, so my focus is educating them on how to educate people in the community like peers, instructors, teachers, and aides. I try to give them strategies for the people that their child will interact with, to help make the child as successful as possible. For example, I may do a tip sheet for a karate instructor, which may include things like making sure the child is positioned near the front of the instruction area, or recommending a specific dot or spot on the floor, to remind the child where to stand during instruction.

Is it hard to keep the children you work with, engaged in group activities?

That really depends on each individual child. It also depends on the fit between the child and the activity. Some children, when they are engaged, can be very focused on the activity. Other times, the fit might not be quite right. For kids with limited attention, or those that have a tough time being still, it's important to choose the right activity for their personal style and interests.

Person 4 - peer therapy helper

What have you learned from the children with special needs that you have worked with?

I learned that they like so many different things. One peer really likes music, and taught me so many different things like what different notes were.

What are the biggest challenges in including people with special needs in activities?

It looks like sometimes they are hard to keep them focused and not distracted and it teaches me to be more patient so we can have fun.

From a parent of a child with autism, I learned that much of her child's success in a dance class was because a teacher worked hard to include him. The teacher knew that he might need extra help to be included. I also learned that strategies are very important to this success and they helped prepare the child for different events and activities. One other thing I learned from her was that some people have problems concentrating when there is a lot of talking in their environment.

From a boy with special needs, I learned that he enjoys to play with others and he learns how to play different games and activities with other people. He also likes to ski and toboggan with his big family. Being included with other people is important to him.

From a therapist that works with kids with autism, I learned that you sometimes have to educate people in the community about differences that some people have, and give parents or teachers strategies to help them if they need a bit of extra help. I also learned that it helps keep them engaged by including them in activities that they enjoy doing.

From a boy who helps kids with special needs, I learned that they can teach you so many things that you don't know about and they really contribute to the world and to your knowledge

of that specific impairment. The last thing I learned was that it can sometimes be tough to include them and keep focused and keep them engaged in group activities.

Inclusion is important to everybody, it helps to celebrate differences, and it helps build a community. It helps people to know that they should take the extra step to help everyone be included in the activities they would like to participate in.