

Connect-Ability



A newsletter on disabilities awareness prepared by and for students

*My Dream
When I see myself in the mirror
I see my dream
Float through my mind.
When I see my dream
I see the real me.
A good chef.*

– Valoree Lisi

A message from Maria Neira, NYSUT vice president



Maria Neira

Valoree Lisi, a June graduate of Newburgh Free Academy, wrote this poem at the poetry writing workshops held for *Connect-Ability's* editorial board members at NYSUT headquarters in August. Valoree is one of the co-editors of *Connect-Ability*. After being included in general education classes since kindergarten, Valoree is now focused on becoming a chef. I had the opportunity to welcome Valoree and the rest of the board members, 22 students representing 17 school districts and five postsecondary institutions, to the summer meeting and to listen to the amazing poetry they had written. I know you will enjoy this issue which includes a variety of poems on topics related to disabilities written by members of the editorial board and students from around the state.

Earlier in the school year, workshops on script writing were offered to the editorial board members by staff from the NYS Theater Institute. The students were immersed in acting exercises, costume and set design, and production activities. They ended the two-day theater experience by writing and performing five one-act plays. Scripts for these plays are included in this issue to show you how our students used this new form of communicating their messages about disability.

Plays and poetry make up the 2009 issue of *Connect-Ability*. In between is artwork from three student artists. Also included are articles on a special summer work assignment in Washington, how some students are handling depression, a personal experience with a disability that almost derailed a student's education, and even a couple of book reviews. There is truly something of interest to everyone in this exciting new issue. Let us know what your reactions are by e-mailing us at cmcbugh@nysutmail.org. Students who are inspired by this issue can submit their own writing or artwork for publication in the next issue of *Connect-Ability*. We would love to hear from students in every area of the state.

Editorials

Austin Crittenden Red Hook High School

Everyone has a story to tell or something to say. The *Connect-Ability* newsletter allows students to speak out and share their ideas, as well as their knowledge about disabilities and people with disabilities.



The newsletter's editorial board includes students with and without disabilities from all across New York State. We are a journalistic advocacy group that focuses on raising awareness about disabilities. As the years progress the board continues to expand, thanks to the help of the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). During biannual meetings board members participate in writing workshops. It is difficult to explain the amount of excitement that I feel when so many young minds are all together writing for a common purpose.

The *Connect-Ability* newsletter has been a huge part of my life for a very long time. I joined the editorial board as

an eighth grader, following in my older sister's footsteps, not knowing what exactly I was getting myself into. I had no idea it would make such an impact on my life. In the duration of my membership on the editorial board, I have made friends and met many interesting people with whom I have shared many precious memories.

My time working with the newsletter has taught me many things. Before I joined, I knew practically nothing about inclusion, Individualized Education Plans, accessibility, and much more. There lies the problem. People are not as informed as they should be on the subject of disabilities. That is why we, on the editorial board, put forth the effort to raise awareness and spread knowledge to our peers and others.

Limitations only tell us so much about one another. Everyone has different qualities and strengths that make them unique. It is important that we look beyond the disabilities and into the hearts of people. I can only hope that this newsletter opens the eyes of others as much as it has for me.

Here are our stories. Now it's your turn. Read and listen to us. Then tell us what you think. Join us. We need your voice too.

Valoree Lisi Newburgh Free Academy

First, I want to thank Tom Corrado, our writing coach, for making me a better poet. Thank you, also, to the advisors and NYSUT staff who have helped make me a better person through my experiences with *Connect-Ability*. I would like to say how my experiences should encourage other students to get involved with this project.



My very first experience with the writing workshops was a good one. I connected right away to the other members and we all felt free to express our opinions and make a difference. We all took responsibility for our opinions and defended them. We all shared the

knowledge we had gained in our youth. We demonstrated the ability all students have to connect with one another, speak out and respect each other. We also learned how to improve our writing skills. Knowing how to write better is a good thing.

My second experience taught me that everyone has challenges and that I can help other students become more creative writers and thinkers. I began to help other students solve their own problems and overcome their own challenges. Helping include every member of the group was something I was good at.

We can all make a difference. Join *Connect-Ability* and find out how you can connect using your ability. Join us if you have something to say about disability. I have found deep within myself that inclusion works and it is a good experience to share your story.





Playwriting

“The Play’s the thing...”
– Shakespeare

Connect-Ability editorial board members participated in writing workshops last March designed to help them develop skills as scriptwriters. Workshops were conducted at the New York State Theater Institute (NYSTI) in Troy and included acting classes, introduction to set design and costumes, as well as script writing. Board members toured behind stage and talked to theater personnel about every aspect of theater production. They returned to the theater at the end of the day to see a musical version of the Anne Frank Story. On the second day of the workshops, writing in groups, they created the following scripts to send a message about disability.



Unscrabbling Rachel

Characters:

Zach, Elizabeth, and Rachel have been friends since early childhood.

Rachel's Mom has always encouraged Rachel to be honest with her friends about her disability but she has been reluctant to share. She is afraid people will expect less from her if they know she has dyslexia.

Dyslexia:

Dyslexia is a specific form of learning disability. Students with dyslexia may have problems in expressive or receptive, oral or written language. They may have difficulty with reading, spelling, writing, speaking, or listening.

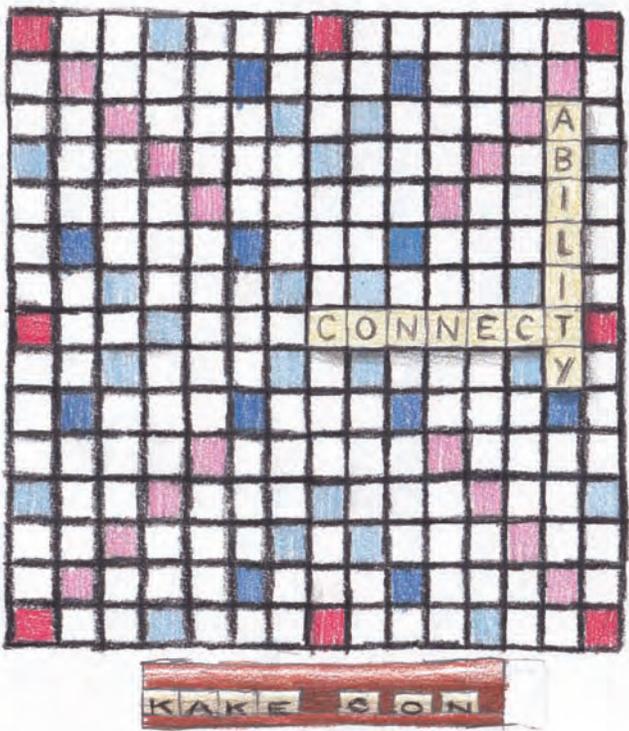
After school walking to the parking lot...

Zach

I am so glad it's Friday! TGIF, lets all hang out tonight and relax, it has been a stressful week.

Elizabeth

Sounds perfect, you guys can come over to my house! We



can watch some movies and play board games.

Rachel

That sounds great, I can't wait!

They all go home and plan to meet at Elizabeth's house at 7:00 P.M.

Rachel

Mom, I'm going over to Elizabeth's house tonight. Do you think you can give me a ride over?

Mom

Sure! I'm so glad you've overcome your worries about doing things with your friends. You can't let your learning disability control your life. It will be good for you to get out of the house, I'm sure you'll have a great time tonight.

Rachel arrives at Elizabeth's.

Zach

I brought over the best game! **Zach presents a Scrabble board.** My dad just bought it for me! I love this game.

Elizabeth

Wow, I'm so glad you brought that over. It's one of my favorite games too! **Rachel stays quiet and looks nervous as Zach hands out the Scrabble pieces.**

Zach

Rachel, why don't you go first? **Rachel stares at the jumble of letter tiles searching for a word to spell out. She is trying to work through her fear that her dyslexia will ruin her fun.**

Rachel

I'm not really familiar with the game. Why doesn't Elizabeth start? **Rachel understands the game completely; she is embarrassed to tell her friends about her dyslexia, but also doesn't want to ruin their enjoyment of the game.**

Elizabeth places tiles down, spelling "Connect" across the board. Next, Zach spells "Ability" off Elizabeth's word. It is now Rachel's turn.

Rachel stares at her tiles and is excited that she has the letters to spell "cake." She places the letters "kake," on the board. Zach and Elizabeth stare at her and start to laugh.

Zach

Are you kidding Rachel? "Kake" is not a word, what were you trying to spell? **Rachel blushes and looks at the ground.**

Rachel

Cake, you know like the dessert?

Elizabeth

Laughing while she speaks. Rachel, are you stupid? It starts with a "C" not a "K." You stink at this game! Every second grader knows how to spell cake. **Anxiety and embarrassment finally getting the best of her, Rachel begins to cry.**

Rachel

I don't mean to ruin your fun! I didn't want to tell you guys but I have dyslexia. It causes me a lot of anxiety especially if I'm playing board games like Scrabble.

Zach

I feel so bad, why didn't you tell us before this? How long have you had it?

Elizabeth

I am so sorry for calling you stupid, I didn't understand. I know you're not dumb! I don't know why I said that. You're really good at math and science.

Rachel

It's okay; I don't like telling anyone even my friends about my dyslexia. I don't want people to automatically assume I can't do something or get good marks. I'm glad I told you guys about it, though, because you understand that I'm able to accomplish a lot, even though I have a disability. I actually got diagnosed with it in fourth grade. It's hard to talk about it even to my friends but my teachers have taught me some strategies that I can use to learn in different ways from you. So I keep up most of the time.

Zach

You aren't any different from us. Thank heavens for spell check, Rachel. I use it all the time myself. We all have weaknesses and we'd rather not talk about them either. But friends can help. Let's just watch a movie instead!

Alexis Kim, SUNY College at Geneseo
Cassie Ford, Bethlehem Central High School
Alysa Shaw, Bethlehem Central High School
Steve Diluka, Williamsville High School

Mark's Math Teacher Adds Things Up



Characters:

Ms. Frea is a high school math teacher

Maryellen, Eddie and Mark are Ms. Frea's students

Ms. Honeywell is a school counselor

Mrs. Smith is Mark's mother

Mental Illness:

Ms. Frea is concerned that Mark might need a mental health evaluation. Mental illnesses are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behavior or some combination. Like other health conditions, after conducting an evaluation, physicians can prescribe treatment to address the symptoms of mental illness.

About three months into the new school year, Ms. Frea began to notice that something wasn't quite right with Mark.

Ms. Frea

Speaking over classroom chatter. Is everyone here? **No response from the class.** We're beginning everyone! Take out your notebooks and homework, did anyone have difficulty with the homework? **Ms. Frea, noticing that Mark has not prepared his desk, restates her question.**

Ms. Frea

Looking at Mark. No one had trouble with the homework? **Pauses while waiting for Mark to respond.** Did anyone forget to do homework?

Maryellen

Raises hand briefly. I tried to do my homework but I gave up because I don't think I was doing it right.

Ms. Frea looks to Mark before answering Maryellen's question. Ms. Frea takes note that Mark has not begun to prepare his desk.

Ms. Frea

Looking at Maryellen. What question did you have trouble with?

Maryellen

All of them!

Ms. Frea

Well, which one did you give up on?

Maryellen

Question three; factor $(X+4)(X+4)$.

Ms. Frea

Let's go over this. *Teacher begins writing the equation on the board.* What's the first thing we do here? **Ms. Frea looks to Mark and tries to make eye contact. Mark stares blankly at the teacher, almost looking through her; his desk is still unprepared.**

Eddie

Raising hand and beginning without being called.

Multiply the first variables in both parentheses; so X multiplied by X equals X squared.

Ms. Frea

Writing Eddie's explanation on the board. Very good, and then we'll multiply the second variable in the first set with the first variable in the second set. *Writing the equation out as she explains, and again tries to make eye contact with Mark.*

Eddie

Speaking without being called. And so X multiplied by 4...

Ms. Frea

Turning quickly and interrupting Eddie. I wasn't asking you!

Eddie throws both hands in the air and then immediately lets them fall to his side.

Ms. Frea

Looks to Mark who is still staring in her direction. Mark, what's the answer?

Mark stares blankly at the teacher without flinching. After about ten seconds of silence the teacher restates her question.

Ms. Frea

Mark, why don't you have the assignment out? **Ms. Frea pauses, waiting patiently for a response from Mark. She stands silent and stares at Mark for about fifteen long seconds.** Mark, what is $4X$ plus $4X$?

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Tough Challenges

Miguel Trujillo, High School of Art and Design

When it comes to a tough challenge, I have to be ready for anything. Challenges bring difficulty and complications but I push on. Whatever comes my way in my schoolwork or family life, I tell myself, “I can do it. I know I can do it.” All I have to do is to believe in myself and use my inner strength to reach my goals. I am determined to accomplish all of them.

It all began when I first started school. I noticed that I had trouble with words, learning them, spelling them, defining them. Writing was also a challenge for me and I made lots of grammar and spelling errors. What was worse, many of my sentences did not make sense. Back then I felt great about teachers who helped me with my writing. Receiving their help made me a better writer. One of my teachers gave me some tips I was able to put into practice. One tip, in particular, helped me improve my topic sentences by supporting them with specific facts and details.

With every passing year I realize that I will have to make decisions on my own as an adult. I will have less support from teachers, family members or friends. Doing things on my own is my goal. In school and at home I am being taught and prepared for the real world. Without this education I will not survive in the world.

Sometimes I feel as if I am wearing chains on my skin that are holding me back from being a successful person. These chains are linked to the issues I have had and to the aspects of my disability that slow me down. Contrastingly, when I work hard and feel successful, it is like pulling one chain off one link at a time. First it's painful. Then I wait for the feeling of freedom that follows. Working hard brings inner power, mental strength and great rewards like being free, being happy, being able to push on for anything I want and succeeding.

Every morning I wake up and wash my face with fresh cold water. I believe every day is a day to start something new. I push myself to throw out those old memories of failure and disappointment, difficulty concentrating, struggling to pay attention, and performing poorly on school tasks. Now I enjoy coming to school, working on projects, learning new things, having friends to talk to and work with. When I graduate, I will tell myself, “I've finally done it!”

I think about my successful future. Now I am able to complete class assignments and increase my attention skills. When I give my best effort I can now feel peace. When I am on my way home there are always many eyes on me, many stares, I ask myself, “Am I really different?” But the answer doesn't matter because I will be successful in school. As I improve my grades and increase my skills I am showing my family and friends that I have confidence. People will be able to learn from me. I intend to be a role model for others with similar challenges.

The best part of my day is when I am able to pay attention to my work and the important stuff in my life rather than wasting time. Time is important. I have to use it wisely. I will not let this disability control my life. I have to prove to myself and others that I will complete all of my projects and be proud of my accomplishments. I want to be a winner.



Real Friends

Characters:

Darion: An unusually outgoing boy who has lately been quiet and reserved. His parents have been constantly arguing and he has been falling behind on his school work. With the additional pressure of finals, he doesn't realize that he has become deeply depressed.

Depression:

Depression is a condition that involves the body, mood and thoughts. Depression can affect the way a person eats and sleeps, the way he feels about himself, and the way he thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be wished away. It requires support from friends and family and the right interventions, but it can be treated.

Livius: Darion's best friend who is outgoing and lively. He is always willing to listen and often tries to help others.

Jessie: Darion's good friend who can be just as lively as Livius. While she is not good at initiating difficult conversations, she is not afraid to chime in if others start talking first.



Darion is in his room, sitting quietly at his desk. There are piles of books everywhere and some of them are left open. In the background, two people can be heard shouting, followed by a door slamming. Darion sighs and looks at the picture on his desk of him and his parents when he was younger. A little while later, he hears Livius and Jessie enter his room. Darion turns over the picture so no one can see.

Livius

What's up, Darion?

Darion

I don't know, man, what are you guys doing here?

Jessie

We were wondering where you were and wanted to hang with you tonight.

Livius

Yeah! We could see a movie! *Pauses, appearing to be in thought.* Oh! Monsters of the Caribbean is supposed to be incredible! Let's see that one.

Jessie

Yeah! It'll be fun! You should ask your parents, Darion!

Darion

I don't know guys; I'm not feeling too good tonight. I kind of wanted to just stay home.

Livius

Come on, Darion, this is our last weekend before finals! We gotta have some fun before we have to work!

Darion

I got stuff to do. Besides, that movie is pointless.

Jessie

Way to kill the mood, square!

Livius

Who uses the term "square" anyway?

Jessie

It doesn't matter! Darion is still a square.

Darion

Turns away. Leave me alone! If you want to go to the movies, then go without me.

Livius

That's no fun. You should come with us. Everyone needs a break. What's the matter with you these days?

Darion

Turns back at his friends, glowering. Leave me alone! I appreciate your concern, but please don't try to help me.

Jessie

Listen, you've been acting so moody and quiet lately. You need to tell us what's going on.

Livius

Darion, you used to come over and tell jokes, and dance all the time. Now, you just criticize everything, and you're too quiet. What happened?

Darion

Sighs, looking defeated. OK you guys won't let up, will you? I'll tell you what you won't want to hear. No matter how crowded the room is, I always feel alone. I know I've been acting differently, but I don't know why. I don't know how to tell you guys how I feel. I just can't have fun and be happy all the time like you guys.

Jessie

Come on man, you can't just tell us you don't want to hang out and not explain why. We're here to help you, dude!

Darion

Turns away again. It's complicated. You couldn't understand how I feel. I don't want to talk about it right now.

Jessie

We're your friends. You have to tell us!

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My Friends Mean The World To Me

Everyone has bad days. Maybe you just broke up with your girlfriend or boyfriend, received a bad test grade, got cut from the basketball team, or maybe you just feel down. But usually, after a day or two, you feel like yourself again. For some people, this isn't the case. Long periods of time will pass with nothing specific going wrong, but they still feel bad. They may be depressed.

“I have been depressed for as long as I can remember. It has been the biggest struggle of my life. My depression has affected my friends, my schoolwork and my self-esteem. My friends mean the world to me but I make them sad by not caring about myself.”
– Lindsay

Depression is a very serious condition that can become life threatening if left untreated. It is also an uncomfortable and difficult condition to deal with. This is possibly one of the hardest parts of living with depression, and is mostly do to with the fact that many people are misinformed about depression and tend to be influenced by stereotypes and the many myths surrounding mental illness. Those who experience depression have the additional burden of dealing with how other people see them and their disability.



Everyone needs to get educated about depression. Knowing the facts will help reduce stigma and stereotypes and make it much easier for people who have depression to deal with their disability. If they don't have to worry as much about what other people think of them, they can focus their energies on getting treatment and developing strategies that will help them control their condition.

Depression can seem like just another small problem in today's society but when you know someone who has depression, it is a very different case. It isn't easy to admit that someone you know may be depressed. It's easier to just think that they will get better, or that they are just



Patricia D'Eredita

looking for attention. This is usually not the case. If someone talks about being depressed, or is already diagnosed, your job is to be supportive of their treatment and help them get better. Depression is a disease like any other. Nobody chooses to get it, or wants to get it. And once diagnosed it can be treated like other diseases.

“I was walking on the beach one day with the hot sand between my toes and suddenly I felt sad and started to ache all over. The next thing I knew I was sitting on a bright yellow beach towel talking to my friend, Jimmy, about depression. Jimmy told me he would help me in any way I needed him.”
– Jazmine

The best thing to do for someone who is depressed is to just listen and be there. Really listen to what they have to say. Don't judge them but instead try to understand. If their behavior isn't easy to figure out, be OK with that. People who have depression usually need friendship most of all, someone to encourage them and urge them to keep going. You know how to be a cheerleader. So cheer for your friend. If you are a true friend, you have an important role to play. But recognize that your friend may not be ready to “cheer up” because you're cheering him on. Be OK with that too. Friends have patience with one another.

Shane Messmer, Editor
Red Hook High School

With help from:
Jazmine Fox-Solomon, Zenelie Gonzalez, Kayleena Brown, Angela Napoli, Lansingburgh High School
Lindsay Faulisi-Perkins, West High School

Two Students Speak Out on ADHD

Millions of children in the United States have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD symptoms include inattentive, impulsive and hyperactive behaviors. Signs and symptoms of ADHD may be exhibited before school begins, but indications of ADHD may become more apparent as students participate in activities that require focused mental effort. Students may be eligible for additional services offered under the Federal Rehabilitation Act, Section 504 or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These can include coursework adjustments; changes in classroom set up; modified teaching techniques; study skills instruction; and increased collaboration between parents and teachers.

Kevin: I have ADHD and I have a 91.85 average in school. With ADHD I am sometime truly hyper and I need medication to calm down. I also get distracted easily and I can be very chit chatty. Without my medicine I think of too many things at once. Sometimes I learn things slower than my classmates and I am embarrassed to admit it when I don't get something in class. In school I can have a hard time understanding subjects like math, reading and spelling. I have to force myself to listen and

understand. I achieved the high average I have because of teachers taking the time to help me and keep me on task. I have a learning disability but that doesn't keep me from learning.

Joey: I was diagnosed with ADHD about four years ago when I started middle school. My parents knew I was a "handful" but they thought I was just an active kid until they began to get negative reports from my teachers. My grades were going down. My behaviors were affecting both my school and my social life.

My parents responded to my teachers' concerns by taking me for an evaluation. By the time I was diagnosed with ADHD, I felt that I was different from anyone else I knew. I had no friends because everyone thought I was bothersome and noisy. I couldn't pay attention and I began to forget things. I always ask myself "why me?" and "how could this happen to me?" Whenever I asked my parents if they thought I was different, they would always say no and that made me feel better. The support of my parents has helped me cope with ADHD.

Kevin R. Lasher, Port Byron School
Chad Badger, Lansingburgh High School

The Ability to be Rex

Characters:

Rex: A potential dropout who may have a learning disability

Mr. Shumer: The principal

Mr. Mackey: The school counselor

Mrs. Ryan: Rex's mother

Learning disabilities:

Learning disabilities vary from person to person but refer to a group of disabilities that affect a broad range of academic and functional skills including the ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason and organize information.

Rex and his mother have been called into the principal's office along with the school counselor.

Mr. Shumer

Rex, you know why you're here. You shouldn't be skateboarding on school grounds and I had no choice but to call your mother in. **Mother enters room with look of disappointment.** Welcome, Mrs. Ryan. I pulled your son into my office because I caught him skateboarding. However, there are some bigger issues that need to be addressed. Mr. Mackey, would you like to go into greater detail with Mrs. Ryan about Rex's difficulties?

Mr. Mackey

Since freshman year, Rex's performance level has been slipping and he's currently failing multiple classes.

Rex

I don't care about my grades, I don't care about school. I just wanna be a hip-hop legend. Forget about Naz, Jay Z and DMX, people are gonna buy albums of the T-REX! My



Fahym Williams

first album is gonna sell big time in just a few years. I'll be all the way to diamond because platinum is nothin' and gold is old.

Mrs. Ryan

Rex, we've talked about this and that is not a realistic dream, especially with your failing average. I want you to realize how much you will regret this when you are older. True you may get a little attention now as the cool kid but once high school passes, the new cool kids will be the ones who go to college and you'll be lucky to be flipping burgers at MacDonald's. So what is it going to be, Rex? Are you willing to work hard to truly make a name for yourself or are you going to limit the quality of your life to just a few fun years and a lifetime of broken dreams? Your

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Cutting: It Stung Like a Thousand Bee Stings

“Why was all I could ask myself? Why was I born? Why am I here? I hated my life and everything about it. Only sixteen and no way out until I get help...”

“I began to follow the special cut on my right arm. It was special because it was a letter, the letter X. It was an X to mark how I’m always wrong...”

“I sit in my room and listen to music trying to drown out all my sorrows. I find my nail file and just try to calm my nerves filing my nails. I accidentally slip and cut my finger. The file was too sharp. It hurt. I ran to the bathroom to get a band aide. I look at my cut and it strangely makes me feel good...like I have been released for a minute from my pain.”

Self-mutilation is the intentional harming of one’s own body with no intention of suicide. “Cutting” is the most common practiced form of self-mutilation, however, there are many more which include biting, bruising, pulling at hair, or burning. Over ten percent of American teenagers have experimented with self-mutilation and the percentage continues to rise. Self-mutilation is not an easy topic to discuss, but it needs to be addressed.

Everyone knows that teenagers often have stressful lives and are susceptible to depression, but why would anyone cut himself or herself to feel better? For most who attempt cutting, the incentive is that it is a coping mechanism that provides temporary relief of intense feelings such as anxiety, depression, stress, emotional numbness and a

sense of failure or self-loathing. Cutters feel that physical pain is easier to deal with than emotional distress. They haven’t learned healthy ways of expressing their emotions.

“Absentmindedly, I caressed my forearm. It stung like a thousand bee stings. But...it was comforting.”

It’s important that people who practice self-mutilation, or even consider it, have someone there for them. If you know of anyone who cuts, please show that you care and try to help work towards a recovery. Understand that self-harming behavior is an attempt to maintain a certain amount of control that in itself is self-soothing. Let the person know that you care and are available to listen. Spend time doing things you both enjoy doing together. Offer to go to a trustworthy adult with them and seek help. Don’t make judgmental comments or tell your friend to stop cutting. Professional help is needed to teach alternate ways to express feelings but you can help your friend find that person and get started learning new ways of communicating.

Austin Crittenden, Editor, Red Hook High School

With help from:

Kelly Barbous

Jonathan Gonzalez

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Lansingburgh High School

I’m Mostly The Same As You

What is Aspergers Syndrome? Is it a disease? A form of mental retardation? Or something totally different?

Aspergers Syndrome Disorder (ASD) is actually a type of high-functioning autism. No one knows where ASD originates from and it has no cure, though there are many people who are searching for a way to bring an end to autism. People with Aspergers Syndrome are not all the same. ASD is a spectrum disorder; this means a person diagnosed with ASD can be mildly to severely affected.

Some symptoms of Aspergers Syndrome are avoiding eye contact, difficulty speaking, nervousness in unfamiliar environments, trouble learning, having a hard time controlling emotions, and difficulty understanding facial expressions and tones of voice. Being diagnosed with ASD doesn’t mean that a person is “retarded” or a “freak.” In fact, many people with Aspergers Syndrome are very intelligent. Often a person with ASD becomes very interested in

and preoccupied with a specific subject. This can lead to knowing a large amount of information about the subject and being labeled a “genius” in that area. While a person with knowledge about a subject can be a great resource to others, it may be difficult for peers who are less interested in the subject to tolerate a conversation with a person who has ASD because almost any conversation will come around to focusing on the favorite subject.

Some people with ASD are so high functioning that others aren’t really aware of the condition. Others have more difficulty, and therefore require extra help in school and in social settings. Though ASD can make life a little difficult, not everyone who is diagnosed with it views it as a bad thing.

“Aspergers Syndrome is what made me who I am,” one girl, who asked to remain anonymous, said. “It’s a part of me...getting rid of it would be tearing a large amount of

my personality away, along with many of my interests and desires.”

Many people with ASD have learned to cope with the help of others. “I myself have Aspergers Syndrome and I have learned to deal with it and become a good person,” ASD-diagnosed Nick Faulds wrote in an essay about Aspergers. “What really helped are the sports I play. Those sports made me mentally and physically strong, and they have made me into the person I am today.”

Being diagnosed with ASD can be difficult, but it isn't the end of the world. “Though autism is a mysterious disorder, one thing can be sure,” Sarah Conlen wrote in an article about autism. “We can not give up the love and support that we have for the people in the world who have autism.”

Love and support is what helps people overcome the hardships that come with ASD. Those who have it are not “strange” or “unintelligent”. Treat them with respect and it will be appreciated. The next time you meet someone who has Aspergers Syndrome, look for the things you have in common.

Emily Sanders, Editor, Taconic Hills High School

With help from:

Sarah Conlen, Sarah Yetto, Lansingburgh High School

Nick Faulds, Keshequa Central School

Hi, my name is Andrew.

I'm 10 years old and have been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome.

I'm the same as all of you,

You just don't see it.

That doesn't mean I'm any different.

I'm able to do everything you can.

Know me the way I am and I promise you'll see.

I'm just the same as you!

Connect-Ability '09



***Students work together
at August 2009
Writing Workshops.***



Poetry Writing

Poetry writing was the focus of the second series of writing workshops in 2009. Students enjoyed getting reacquainted with some famous poets. They each read a favorite poem aloud and described why they liked it. Led through a variety of exercises by their writing coach, Tom Corrado, they had written more than 50 poems by the end of the day covering a range of disabilities related topics including IEPs, autism, being different, inclusion, and planning for life after graduation.

“Poetry can tell us what it’s like to be other people, and what it’s like to be ourselves.”

– Stephen Burt

Shane Crittenden, Red Hook High School

IEP (Individualized Education Poem)

Give me a challenge.
Let me grow.
Don’t be a bully.
Be a friend.
Access.
Inclusion.
Education.
Different names for the same thing.
Give me a challenge.

Austin Crittenden, Red Hook High School

Sittin’ on 24s

People stare
When I roll in.
I go to school
Like other kids.
But it’s different.
How?
Sittin’ on 24’s
Isn’t as cool
As the rappers
Make it seem.

Alyssa Shaw, Bethlehem Central High School

Please Stay

Darkness is taking over my light.
Why am I not putting up a fight?
As sorrow builds in my heart
I realize I need a fresh start.
Too much time spent alone
Too much time to think.
Too much time to remember the hurt.
Why am I pulling back when you're reaching out?
It's hard to understand what this is about.
I know I've been pushing you away.
But I'm begging you
Please stay.

Conor Quinn, Columbia High School

Out

You say we're different.
You keep us out.
You make us want to
Scream and shout.
Why can't you see
You're just like me?

Rachel Siegel, The Institute for Collaborative Education

Normal

The word to describe the masses.
The term we all want to be.
I see it in your Hollister shorts,
Your bowling trophies,
Your caffeine addiction.
But my mind takes me elsewhere
Or elsewhere takes my mind.
To be correct
If I were normal,
I would blend in.
I leave the crowd.
The difference
Is my release.

Lauren Ha, Albany High School

Remember

I don't remember
Asking to be born like this.

I don't remember
Hearing my parents requesting

That my condition be like this.

I don't remember
Any ancient curse
Choosing this fate for me.

I don't remember
Spinning the roulette wheel
And getting a disability
For a prize.

I do remember
Asking others for help
When I needed it.

I do remember
Hearing my parents request
That someone be there for me.

I do remember
People cursing me out.
Saying I'm the wrongness in society.

I do remember
The friends who came along.

Kate Dingman, St. Johnsville Central School

My Own World

I get mad
When I hear voices
In school
Say "she's dumb."

But when I get home
And go to the barn
And feed my horses
I feel free.

I'm in my own world there.

Chester Anand, Red Hook High School

Choice of Words

They said it because we say it.
He meant to say stupid.
She meant to say loser.
Now try to listen
As the words
Choke you
As you let stigma
Sew your eyes shut.
Now what were you saying?

Cassie Ford, Bethlehem Central High School

Adventures in Mild Autism

A girl with a lot of spirit
And very kind
With love to find
Had one problem.
When friends told
A simple joke,
She felt they were
Putting her down.
They insisted they were just
Fooling around.
Even in school
When her teacher would say
“Look at me!”
She wanted to flee.
This had been going on
Since K-5.
Until 8th grade
Things went right by her.
The guide explained,
“You have a hard time
With tones and humor.”
Now she felt better about herself.
Now she could be herself.
In high school
Things were hard.
But when she spread her wings to fly
And got involved
With her peers
She had some good years.

Jeffrey Twitty, Niskayuna High School

I am a Football Captain

I am a football captain
With as many friends
As can be.
But sometimes I feel lost
In my class of 23.
Please don't confuse this.
I can still do fine by myself.
It's just now and again
I need extra help.
But really we all do.
So why do I think it's just me?
My counselor says it is common.
Would she lie?
I just need more time
To focus.
And if I take that time
I'll do my best.
Yes. I have a learning disability.
But I don't let it make me less.
I can still be a great success.

Katelyn Calhoun, Bethlehem Central High School

The Unseen

I can feel
Warm tones of light
On my face,
On my arms.
Shades of oranges and reds
Warm my palms.
Caressing velvet petals
I imagine are blue.
I hear lush grass
Licking at my heels
And the soft footfalls
Of my friend,
My companion.

Emily Sanders, Taconic hills high school

ASD

I have ASD:
I have trouble speaking;
I'm afraid to talk.
My lips are zipped.
My mouth is locked.
I struggle throughout the day
For what to do, what to say.
When I speak,
I'm drowned out by the crowd.
I'm too quiet.
They're too loud.
Sometimes I struggle while in school.
But I'm not dumb;
I'm no fool.
I see and hear; I am aware
Of the things occurring there.
Though I'm different, I'm just like you.
I have dreams and feelings too.

Elinda Williams, Colonie High School

Wishing on a Shooting Star

I sit in a crowded room
My head buried in my hands
Trying to understand.
My palms are sweaty.
My hands feel heavy.
My imagination runs rampant.
Darkness swallows me.
Pain just seems to follow me.
How could I be surrounded by so many faces,
Hundred of different races,
And still feel so lonely?

How could everything in my life
That I thought was so real
Turn out to be so fake?
Why even try
When everywhere I turn
Nothing seems complete?
I'm wearing the weight of the world.
So I'm wishing on a shooting star
That in the morning I'll feel better.
But if that doesn't happen
I'll start a letter
To explain to the world
Why I 'm no longer here.
Maybe I'll wish on a shooting star tonight
That I'll feel better.

Nina Kaledin, Niskayuna High School

Disability is Just Another Word

Disability is just another word.
It doesn't define a person.
Everyone is different.
We all have things that are special.
We all look at things differently.
A disability is just the way
Someone looks at the world.
Stop and take the time
To look through someone else's eyes.
Now that can make a difference.

My Uncle

Why can't you like him?
Just because he's different?
He's just the same as you and me.
He is loving.
He is smart.
He cherishes life.
He would do anything
To make his family smile.
Why do you use the "R" word in front of him?
Do you think it's OK?
Do you think he doesn't get it?
Do you think he doesn't understand?
He's my uncle.

Kathryn Rothfuss, Bethlehem Central High School

Judge Not

Judgment comes along with everything.
But it shouldn't
In things that people don't choose for themselves.
Like disability.

Another Word

Some people have long hair.
Some people have dimples.
Some people have a disability.
It's just another word
It's not the person.

Laquavia Weaver, Lansingburgh High School

Bipolar Disorder

Sometimes I'm happy.
Sometimes I'm sad.
Why can't I control the way I feel?
Why won't my moods just stay real?
I have changed again.
I'm no longer sad.
Now I'm mad.
Angry at everyone around me.
Not because I have a reason.
But because I can't control it.
I ask myself why.
I don't understand why.
I'm just like this.

Ryan Lucey, Lansingburgh High School

Try to Imagine...

Try to imagine
Reading this
But being unable to tell someone else about it
Being unable to find the words.
Opening your mouth and no sound coming out.
Not getting the sounds right.
Words coming out jumbled up.
Words getting stuck
Someone jumping in
Saying words for you.
Being unable to join a conversation.
Taking too long to speak.
People ignoring what you're trying to say.
Feeling embarrassed and moving away.



Patricia D'Eredita

Alyssa Devoe, Lansingburgh High School

Dirty Hands Again

My hands are raw and bleeding
As I scrub away those dirty germs
And count to 37.
Scrubbing away
That horrible idea
Again.
Why can't I get these germs
And thoughts
Away from me?
I know I am ridiculous.
But still.
I walk upstairs
Counting the steps to my room
Again.
I touch the doorframe six times before I enter.
I lay down.
I can't stand my room
Again.
Now I have to rearrange the furniture
For the eighth time this week
Again.
After this
I will go wash my hands
Again.

Sarah Yetto, Lansingburgh High School

Aspergers Syndrome

While most of you could talk at two,
It took me until five.
I'm really good at puzzles.
In high school
I don't switch classes.
That doesn't mean I'm different.
I can do everything you do.
It just takes me a little longer.
Please don't judge me before you know me.
You can't catch it.
Get to know me and you'll see.
You're a lot like me.



Patricia D'Eredita

Shane Messmer, Red Hook High School

Are you Happy?

Why are you so sad?
This makes no sense to me.
No, no. You have a good life.
You must be happy.
But you still look sad.
It's easy to be cheerful.
It's normal if you're cheerful.
It's normal to be cheerful.
Just tell me!
What's making you so sad?
My reflection in the mirror
Never answers.

You Can and I Can.

You feel bad for me,
Because I cannot see.
But you cannot see,
What I can see.

You pity me,
Because I cannot hear.
But you cannot hear,
What I can hear.

You have sympathy for me,
Because I cannot speak,
But you cannot say
What I can say.

You think that I cannot.
I know that you cannot.
But I can.
And you can.

Neil Botticelli

Colors

Taken by surprise; should I have known?
The colors change; they always have
Red and green
There, too, was blue.

I was taken by surprise; "green means go"
was the rule of thumb.
Green meant go for anyone.

They were taken by surprise; we know.
This green did not apply to everyone.

There was a crash
A very loud smash.
But green meant go, for anyone.

Alexis Kim, SUNY College at Geneseo

California rolls at Mari's

My friends invite me out for sushi.
Craving the fresh taste of ginger, I almost accept the offer.
I remember my friend
He waits for me.
Rock, paper, scissor, shoot.
I choose rock, he chooses paper.
We play this game every day, but it always makes him
laugh.
My stomach growls- I wish I was at Mari's.
We play Uno. I lose, again.
We talk about the upcoming prom.
Like me, he is anticipating a night to remember.
We talk about zoos.
Like me, elephants interest him.
We talk about our renovated library.
Like me, he's impressed by the design.
He tells me jokes.
Like him, they make me laugh.
Laughing, chatting, and playing, sitting at his table
Friendship is in its purest form.
Our differences exist, yet fuel our friendship.
I no longer crave sushi, rather acceptance for my friend.

Fabio Botarelli, Trinity College

Something Is Everything

You can have a million friends and always feel alone
You can catch the common cold but never break a bone
You can live one hundred years but feel dead every day
You can know every fact but not know what to say

You have some that cannot read but teach themselves to
cook
You have some that never speak but who can write a book
You have some that cannot hear but can see far and wide
You have some that cannot see but know each person
from inside

No one can do everything, only the best they can
But if you do some things well, you'll have a million fans
So if you find yourself one day feeling emptiness
Just focus on the things you love and you'll find happiness

Mitchell Goliber, SUNY College of Technology at
Cobleskill

People with Disabilities

People deserve to
Earn a living. Not
Only those who have the
Power to succeed in a
Learning
Experience. Not only those

Who
Intelligently
Think about
How to get ahead. Everyone

Deserves the chance to
Investigate and
Search for
A
Big
Important job or a
Little important job
In this life.
The
Imperative to work is
Equal and not just for
Some.

David Shteyman, Association for Manhattan
Autistic Children

Moonlight Line

Tell me a place
Where the boundary between
Earth and sky
Night and Day
Dreams and reality
Blur just like
A moonlight line.

No Rivalry

Brother
Born from love and hope.
A bond stronger than time.
We play and frolic
Bicker and fight.
But at the day's end
We are brothers once again.

*"It was through Jesse in my free periods who gave me the
chance to "free write" that I discovered my poetic ability."*

A Job for Jessica

Characters:

Sarah is an 8 year old

James is Sarah's 14-year-old brother

Mother of James and Sarah is looking for a reliable babysitter

Jessica is a 21-year-old college student who has low vision

Visual Impairment:

Low vision generally refers to a severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision.

Low vision applies to all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, although they may require adaptations in lighting or the size of print.

Mother

In living room, walking through with laundry basket.

Sarah

I'm hungry! I'm hungry! Mom, I'm HUNGRY!

Mother

One moment, honey. **Shouting.** James, get down here and help me!

Sarah

Hey, someone's here!

Mother

Oh, that must be the babysitter; I was expecting her.

Shouting. James, get down here!

Jessica

Knocking at the door. Mother opens it. Hi, I'm Jessica. Is this house number 345? Are you Mrs. Pfifer? **Still holding laundry.** Yeah, hi. Come on in! Have a seat on the couch...can you find the couch? **Sighs because the couch is covered with clothes and then leaves the room.**

Sarah

Approaching Jessica. Hi, I'm Sarah! What's your name?

Notices Jessica's unusual glasses. Hey, what're those glasses for?

Jessica

Well, they keep my eyes safe.

Sarah

Oh. Okay. I think they're cool!

Mother

Returning to the room. Sooo...are you here for the babysitting job? **Shouting.** James, Please come down here!

Jessica

Well, yes, I can see that your hands are full.

Mother

Speaks wryly. Oh really?

Jessica

Well...maybe not "see", but I did notice. You do realize that I will take this job very seriously, and I am capable. I am a certified babysitter.

Mother

Yeah, um, okay. I'll take that into consideration.

James

Coming downstairs. Mom, why do we need a stupid babysit— **Sees Jessica and stops.** Well, this may work out after all... Waves a hand in front of Jessica's face.

Mother

Speaking sharply. James!

Jessica

Please don't do that.

Mother

Sitting down. Okay, let's begin the interview. What experience do you have with children?

Jessica

Like I said, I'm a certified babysitter and, for a while, I was a live-in nanny. I also had to take care of my younger siblings. I have a couple of letters from people I used to babysit for if you want to see them.

Mother

Reading letters but still unsure. I'm still not so sure...

James

Pulling Mom aside. Mom, Mom...we can do this; it's cool. Besides, Sarah likes her!

Sarah

Yeah Mom! And I bet she can make brownies and play a lot of games together—

Mother

Oh...okay...

Later that night...

Jessica

Knitting and talking to Sarah. What happened to your last babysitter?

Sarah

Mom said that she was irresponsible. But I loved playing those games with you, Jessica. Our last babysitter didn't pay any attention to us.

James

Yawning. Well, I'm going to bed. See you later. **Making stomping noises.** I'm going up the stairs now! **Turns around and tiptoes toward the front door.**

Jessica

I can hear you; I'm not deaf. **James stops, astonished.** Hey, listen; you're not going to get one over on me, okay? You said that you were going to bed, so go to bed! Just because I have a disability doesn't mean I'm not capable of doing my job.

James

OK, I get it. Sorry. I guess I thought...wrong.

Valoree Lisi, Newburgh Free Academy

Shane Messmer, Red Hook High School

Katie Rothfuss, Bethlehem Central High School

Elinda Williams, Colonie High School

Emily Sanders, Taconic Hills High School



The Ability to be Rex...

Continued from page 9

father and I have worked hard to make sure you got a good education but it's up to you now.

Rex

Well I understand where you're coming from, Mom, but it's just been really hard for me to learn and pay attention lately. It takes me so long to read my homework assignments that by the time I get through half of them, everyone is about to go to sleep. Do you know what it feels like to be the only one up late? Everyone else can sleep knowing they can go through life with no worries at all and the next day my struggles go on and on.

Mr. Mackey

Maybe you have a problem with learning. You may need help. The good news is that there are many programs and services available to put you on the right track.

Rex

There's no way that I have a learning disability, and if I do, I'm not doing anything about it. I'm not DISabled, I'm ABLED. I know I'm smart.

Mr. Shumer

Let's not jump ahead on this, Rex. If you have a learning disability, you would be one of over 4 million people in the U.S.A. who also have learning disabilities. Just look up dyslexia on Wikipedia and you'll find that a lot of people in the USA have it. What's more, learning disabilities affect people with all levels of intelligence including the highly gifted. There are famous people who have succeeded in spite of their learning disabilities like Thomas Edison and

Albert Einstein. And dyslexia is just one of the many kinds of learning disabilities there are. So, there's no question that people with disabilities are capable people. But I bet you that even the famous ones needed some help along the way – some sort of mentor or an accommodation of some kind.

Mrs. Ryan

Rex, just give it a try. Maybe you'll be happier with some help. And if, by some unfortunate chance, you want to continue your life the way you are with no help, then so be it. But trying won't hurt anything.

Rex

Fine I'll give it a try, I guess, but I still want to be a hip-hop legend.

Mr. Shumer

You know Rex, you can get an education before becoming a hip-hop legend. Ice Cube, Tupac, and Ludacris all graduated from college before making it big in the rap industry.

Rex

Is that so? Awesome. You mean it, right? I could do both too? Hey, that's cool. Maybe I could do a sick rap album about struggling with a learning disability! I mean at the end of the day it's all about keepin' it real, right?

Fabio Botarelli, Trinity College
Katie Dingman, St. Johnsville Central School
Gabby McNary, Bethlehem Central High School
Elinda Williams, Colonie High School

Mark's Math Teacher ...

Continued from page 5

Mark reaches down to his bag and removes a notebook, a pen and a marker; Mark then returns to staring at Ms. Frea seemingly uncertain of what to do.

Ms Frea

Mark, what is $4X$ plus $4X$?

Mark

Oh! *Suddenly becoming aware of the teachers request.* That's easy - it's $4X$.

Ms. Frea

Mark, what is 4 plus 4 ?

Mark

Counting on his fingers. Nineteen!

Ms. Frea continues moving on with the lesson and ignores Mark who now withdraws.

Scene 2

Ms. Frea and Counselor, Mrs. Honeywell, are in the lounge after class; the two women are discussing the behaviors of some of their students.

Ms. Frea

I noticed that Mark was having some issues focusing today. In fact, the past few months he's been having trouble. He's so different from what he used to be. He was always attentive, interested in learning, ready with an answer and totally prepared. Now he's the exact opposite. The kids are beginning to shut him out too; some won't even speak to him anymore. He used to be so easy going with lots of friends. Now he seems to be in a dream world of his own.

Ms. Honeywell

He's trying to tell us something, maybe? Some of his other teachers have mentioned this as well. They describe him as generally unresponsive and some say he answers with gibberish and silly talk. Several students have informed me that Mark sends confusing text-messages at all hours of the night.

Ms. Frea

That's interesting, but I'm not surprised; the class was working on basic equations and his answers were pretty baffling. The other kids can be vicious and I am afraid to embarrass him. It seems as though he is disassociating terms. I say apple and he thinks oranges.

Ms. Honeywell

Oh, wow. That's definitely a problem. His English teacher says he doesn't pay attention in class. She seems to believe Mark has a substance abuse problem.

Ms. Frea

I don't think drugs are a factor. He's like that every day. Sometimes I have to call out his name several times before getting him to react. The other day I barely whispered his name at my desk and he jumped as if he was startled.

Ms. Honeywell

I see; now I'm curious. What's his relationship with his parents like, do you know? Perhaps you should speak with

them after school and see how they feel about Mark; this issue may be apparent in Mark's home as well.

Scene 3

Ms. Frea and Mark's mother talk.

Ms. Frea

Ring. Ring. Hello, Mrs. Smith? This is Anita Frea, Mark's math teacher. I hope I'm calling at a good time. Are you free to talk for a few minutes? Good.... I wanted to talk with you about Mark's behavior. It seems to have changed over the past several weeks. Let me give you an example, sometimes he hears me perfectly and other times he seems to be in a world of his own. He often gives silly answers to my questions. I'm not sure...

Mrs. Smith

Oh, yes...I am glad you called. I'm seeing that change at home as well. I wasn't sure if it was a phase he was going through. I wasn't sure what to do. Is it affecting his math work?

Ms. Frea

Yes, it really is. I know some behaviors can be confusing. I talked to the school counselor, Mrs. Honeywell, about it today and she said that these might be signs of a mental health issue. I don't want to alarm you because I think we don't have enough information to really say what is wrong. Has he been depressed recently? Is he keeping to himself more?

Mrs. Smith

Mental health issue? I'm not sure he's actually crazy. I don't want to jump into thinking like that! But to be honest with you, he is spending less time with his friends lately. Can I talk to the counselor and maybe get some ideas from her?

Ms. Frea

Oh, sure, that would be a good idea. And, Mrs. Smith, I don't think Mark is "crazy". He's a good student and a good kid. He's got a lot of strengths. I just notice some significant changes lately and I want us all to be working together to try to give him the support he needs. But, at this point, we don't know what he needs. That's why an evaluation might be a good starting point for all of us.

Mrs. Smith

I've had a feeling something was wrong for some time now; I just don't want to think my son has a problem, you know? I... I just want to believe that this will go away on it's own. But I know I can't stick my head in the sand over something like this. I'll call Mrs. Honeywell. Maybe you could say something to Mark about all of this and I will too. We need to get his opinion first off.

Scene 4

Teacher and student have a discussion.

Ms. Frea

As the class is dismissing, Ms. Frea warmly approaches Mark, as he stands next to his desk organizing materials in his backpack. Hey Mark, how are things? *Ms. Frea takes a seat at an empty desk next to Mark.* Could you sit down for a minute? I've noticed that your performance in class has diminished recently; if there's something keeping you from doing your best, you

should let me know... **Mark stares blankly and Ms. Frea rephrases her statement.** I don't want your grades to drop if there is something distracting you from doing well, you know? You have been one of my top students.

Mark

Yeah, it's Margret's hair. It's all messed up. Did you notice?

Ms. Frea

Do you understand exactly what I'm asking you, Mark? I really don't think Margret's hair is the problem here.

Mark

Whoa! No need to get jumpy.

Ms. Frea

It's a real burden, I can see, for you to listen to me.

Mark

Yeah, but I can hear the ocean.

Ms. Frea

Mark, are you even trying to listen to me?

Mark

The only thing I know about you, is what you tell me.

Mark stares coldly through Ms. Frea.

Ms. Frea

Mark, Are you feeling all right?

Mark

Yes, Queen.

Ms. Frea

I'm afraid when you talk like this you may have some serious emotional or mental health issues.

Mark

You think I have Skittles? Yes, I do have Skittles.

Ms. Frea

I have talked with your Mom, Mark, and we are all going to sit down with Mrs. Honeywell.

Mark

Totally unnecessary, Mrs. Frea. I'm Ok, really.

Ms. Frea

I had hoped that we could talk about this and maybe work something out, but I think you need to talk to someone with more professional expertise than I have. It's important.

Mark

Laughing. Got some Dijon mustard for my sandwich, Ms. Frea?

Ms. Frea

Mark, I am going to ask you to try to focus for just a few minutes. It's important.

Mark

I have to ask you something first.

Ms. Frea

Okay...

Mark

Would you have some Dijon mustard by any chance for my sandwich?

Ms. Frea

This isn't the time to talk about mustard, Mark. I've noticed you having trouble not being able to pay attention to things in class and it seems to me as if you've become quieter and more withdrawn than you used to be. It appears as though this has been going on for a while, Mark. Your parents are waiting outside and I would like to call them in so that we can talk about referring you for an evaluation. Things will work out a lot better for you, Mark, if you get some help. I know you are confused and probably feel lost about what to do but we need to work together to find some way to figure this all out. Will you try?

Mark

I'll try Ms. Frea but it may be hard for me. I'll try....

Neil Botticelli

Katelyn Calhoun, Bethlehem Central School

Jared Cutler, Oakwood Friends School

Mitchell Golliber, SUNY College of Technology at Cobleskill

Marissa Kosciusko, Eastern Suffolk BOCES

Real Friends...

Continued from page 7

Livius

We want to help, Darion. Come on. Talk to us, man.

Darion

Do you really want to hear? I mean, it's just a bunch of whining. It's not your problem.

Livius

Yes, we do care. Friends are like that, Darion. We want to help! We're serious.

Darion

Okay, you know what?! Fine. **Pauses, looks as if in thought.** But if we're going to talk, then let's go to the garage where my parents won't hear us.

Jessie

Fine.

Livius

As long as we can help.

The trio leaves to go to the garage. Before Darion leaves the room, he picks up the picture of his family. After staring at it for a second, he brings it along.

Shane Crittendon, Red Hook High School

Jhasean Pompey, Lansingburgh High School

Chester Anand, Red Hook High School

Lauren Ha, Albany High School

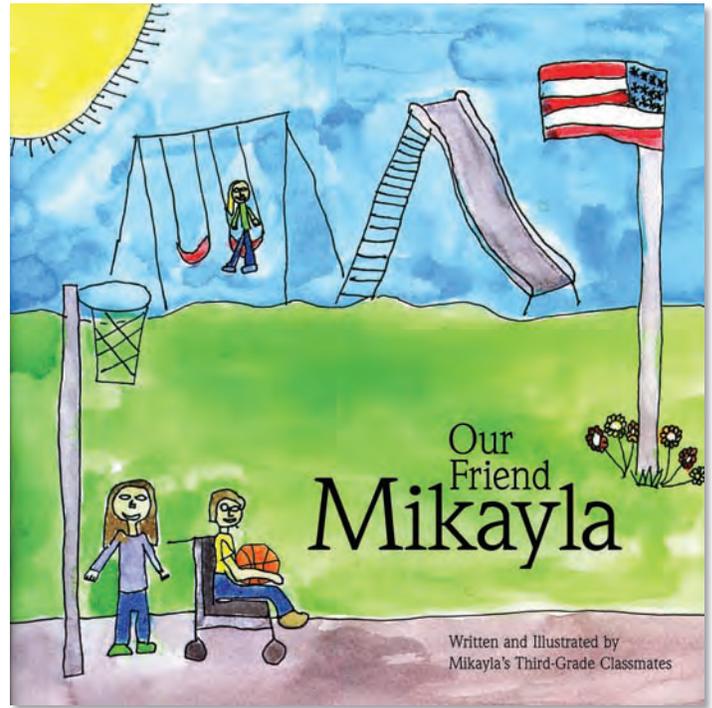
Mikayla and Franny

Two children's books we all should read

Katelyn Calhoun

Bethlehem Central High School

"People with disabilities aren't really different... [They] do things in a special way." Only a child could state the truth so simply, a child who has been taught to accept those around him even though they may seem different. In *Our Friend Mikayla*, written by Mikayla's third grade classmates, a whole student body learned to love and accept a young girl with a significant physical disability who really wasn't much different from them. Writing the book became a class project because Mikayla's friends felt they had an important message to share with other children. Their goal was to teach other kids that "having a friend with a disability is cool." Mikayla's mother would like every elementary school to have a copy of this book for students to read.



Understanding Franny, about a girl with bi-polar disorder, describes a very serious and invisible disability from the point of view of a nine-year old. Franny shares her experience with the troubling symptoms of her undiagnosed disability before she finds help in a therapist. Like Mikayla's mother, Franny's mother plays an important role in providing support. Both mothers are happy about sharing their children's stories with others. Rachel Siegel, one of *Connect-Ability's* editorial board members, wrote and illustrated *Understanding Franny* to help children better understand bi-polar disorder and to show that kids with bi-polar disorder aren't that much different from them.

In the beginning Franny was always confused and unhappy. Her mother's support and the care of a therapist led to the discovery that the chemicals in her brain "weren't balanced out right." Once she got the help she needed she was able to "enjoy life to the fullest." Ms. Siegel dedicates her book to "all children with untreated bipolar disorder." She hopes that her personal story will soon find a publisher. Both books are important additions to disabilities awareness literature. We hope that both will soon be available to a larger audience.

The best way to become accepting of others is through knowledge. Kids are open to learning about others. Teaching them about disabilities is a good idea. The younger we learn to accept one another the better life will be for all. Stories like these two books should be available in school classrooms and libraries as a first step in making the world a more accepting and loving one for all. They are great tools to inform children and adults about those around them.

For more information on *Our Friend Mikayla* go to www.bubelaiken.org, and to learn more about *Understanding Franny* send an e-mail to cmchugh@nysutmail.org.



Rachel Siegel

Education That Works: The Impact of Early Childhood Interventions on Reducing the Need for Special Education Services

Each year the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) hosts internship programs for college students with disabilities in Washington, DC. I was one of eight students to receive an internship this past summer. I worked for Senator Charles Schumer whose pro-education stance was of great interest to me. I have described below one of the many meetings I attended on his behalf.

On June 11, at the Capital Visitor Center, a panel of educators explained why they embraced the concept of early childhood intervention as an educational initiative to deal with the growing number of students with learning disabilities. In her very brief opening statement Dr. Sonya Anderson, Education Program Director, Oprah Winfrey Foundation, outlined a position in favor of early childhood education beginning when children are under 3 years old. She believes that children enrolled in high quality early education are less likely to need special education services later on. With more money going into early childhood intervention programs, a good deal of money could be saved on special education programs later on.

Panelist Kathleen Hebbeler, Manager of Community Services and Strategies, Stanford's Research Institute (SRI), a developmental psychologist and researcher, had her reasons for promoting early childhood intervention. The development of the brain in the first three years of life is the most crucial stage for learning. Numerous studies have shown that with appropriate intervention, young children with disabilities can make dramatic improvements during these early years.

These studies also show that many children who have participated in Early Intervention (EI) may not need special education services or may need fewer services when they get to kindergarten. In the year 2007 there were over 300,000 children in the United States under the age of 3 who had developmental delays, disabilities, or at-risk conditions who were receiving services through IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). IDEA is a federal law that guarantees a free, appropriate, public education for children with disabilities. Under IDEA each



state is allowed to design its own special education services and programs.

Hebbeler recommends two policies that work cohesively to promote early intervention. The first is to increase federal support for early intervention programs because states are struggling economically and are now considering redefining their eligibility criteria to serve fewer children. Her second recommendation is to develop a policy that ensures that every child and family receive high quality services. Such a policy would address reimbursement procedures that sustain best practices, greater support for leadership development at the local level so that all administrators overseeing the delivery of EI services understand exactly what constitutes quality service. Hebbeler recommends the development of new assessment tools that reflect the latest research and best practices, and individual child record data systems measured to track children's progress.

Support for and expansion of EI programs can impact positively both for individual students with disabilities and for school districts looking to save money down the road.

Fabio Botarelli, Trinity College

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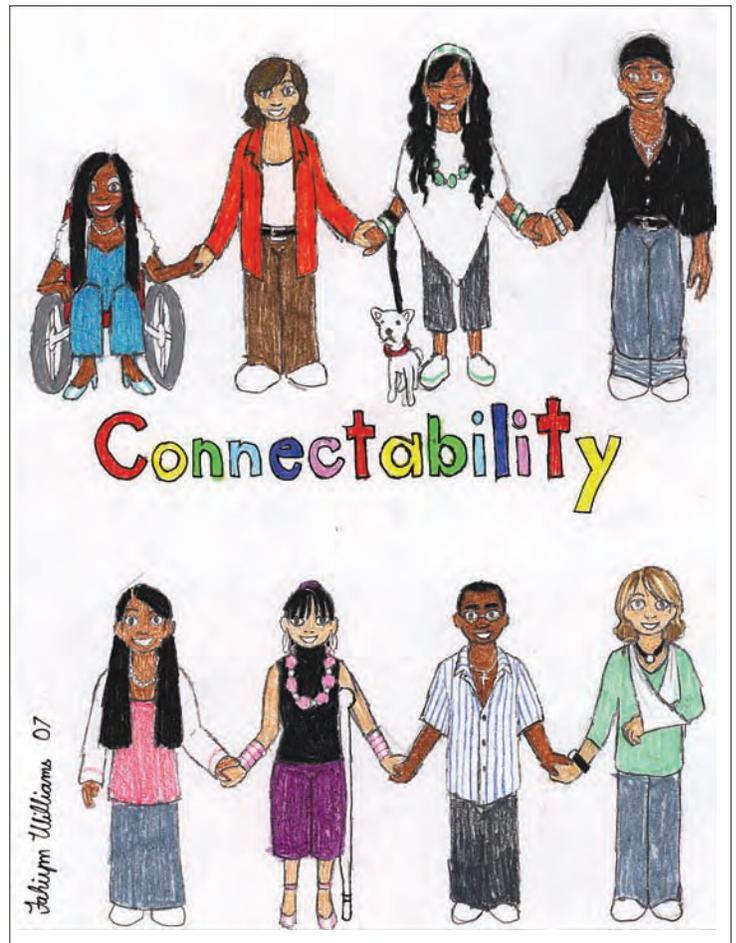
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WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are looking for students in grades 7-12 who are interested in writing essays, articles, personal stories or poetry related to disability. We need student artists, as well.

We want this newsletter to connect students with and without disabilities so that we can learn from one another, make friendships and participate in an inclusive environment.

An annual issue of *Connect-Ability* goes out to schools across New York State. High school students who serve on its editorial board edit it. Add your voice to ours and send us something you have written or created.

If you or a student you know would like to learn more about how to participate in this exciting project, contact Catharine McHugh at (800) 342-9810 or 518-213-6000 X6522 or at cmchugh@nysutmail.org. We look forward to hearing from you.



Editorial board members receive a Character Education Award from The College of the Sages for their work in raising awareness about disabilities.

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