

*Essay Contest 2009*  
*“A Letter to an Individual with Developmental Disabilities”*

**1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner ~ Middle School Division**  
***Jorian Holka***  
**Stella Niagara Educational Park**

You know what I was thinking about the other day? People, yeah-just people. And you know what I realized? All people are different.

There are people everywhere. Some are young, some are old. Some are short, and some are tall. Everybody has distinct characteristics that make them who they are. For some, this distinct characteristic could be a developmental disability.

People that have developmental disabilities are just like you and me. They do normal activities like normal people. I would like to know, however, what abilities people with developmental disabilities possess. What abilities don't they possess? Can they play football or drive a car? I know that some are worse than others, but basically they are the same.

I was also wondering what I could do to include developmental disabilities in the community? Should I invite them to a community dinner or (not to that extent) say “hello” when I pass them on the street? I don't want them to feel left out; I just want to include them. There are many disabled people and I want to help incorporate them into my activities and into my community.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner ~ Middle School Division**  
***Ashley Bower***  
**Royalton Hartland Middle School**

I'd like to thank you for reading this letter; I appreciate it.

Some questions I would ask: are you comfortable about your disability? I'm not sure if I would be able to. Do you ever feel left out because of your disability? I hope not because that's not right.

I feel my responsibility to help include people with disabilities is important. I see people being left out and it really seems to affect them. Rachel's Challenge inspired me to take time to welcome everyone equally. Rachel thought everybody should be treated kindly and fairly.

People with disabilities are amazing! They are like everyone else: they may lack in some abilities, but excel in others. Like my cousin, Andy. He lacks in some reasoning skills, but can beat me in bowling. He can bowl all strikes! Again, amazing!

If I could take one thing away from this experience, it would be that I have learned that I need to step forward and make a difference by including people and show by example.

Again, thank you for reading this letter and I hope it helps you as much as it helped me.

**1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner ~ Senior High Division**  
***Corinne Dubetsky***  
**Lewiston-Porter High School**

There are many questions that emerge when someone finds out that a person has a developmental disability. A question I would ask is what I could do to help them in a tough situation. I know that having a developmental disability can be touch at times, because I have three cousins with developmental disabilities. When I am with them, I always try to help them in any way that I can because I know it can be a struggle when they try to do certain things.

We should include people with disabilities in our community because there is absolutely no reason why we shouldn't. They are people just like the rest of us and should be treated like a normal person. People with disabilities often get looked at as different and outcasts, when in fact, they are just like everyone else. Just because they may look different or learn in a different way, does not mean they aren't like every other person.

People with disabilities possess many different traits and qualities that are all special. My cousin Sabrina has Down Syndrome. She is a great dancer and good soccer player. No two people possess the same abilities. Everyone is different. I have learned many different things with this and my own experiences. The most important thing I have learned is to treat everyone around you with respect no matter who he or she is or how different they are from you.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner ~ Senior High Division**  
***Kristen Olsen***  
**Niagara Wheatfield High School**

I would love to get to know you because you are an inspiration to me. Despite your challenges, you are caring and kind, compassionate and loving. You always find a way to light up the room and attract smiles. You are helpful, determined, and hard working, and your potential is endless. What is your life like from day to day? What do you like to do, and what do you wish you could do? Do you ever wish that you could change anything about your life? How does it feel to be different? Do you know what I think? I think you are a beautiful person that everyone can learn from. You are special, and God gave you a purpose in life that no one else can fulfill. I think it is my responsibility to include you in the community because you deserve to be independent, and you can contribute to society. I know that you can bring positive changes to the community. By including you, others will see past your disability, and appreciate what blessing you truly are. I have learned that you are an extraordinary individual with promise and courage, and you have a wonderful place in society.