

June Nelson Memorial Scholarship Essay

An issue of social importance that is important to me is special education. Children with special needs have equal rights. For the last three years, I have been volunteering at Rae C. Stedman Elementary School as a student teacher's aide. I was initially placed in a Kindergarten class with an exceptional teacher and carefree, bubbly, spontaneous students. These students knew instinctively how to savor the simplest pleasures of life. One student in class caught my eye, everything was a little bit harder for him, when working in the general education classroom setting. As the aide, the teacher had me help this student each day. He was courageous and determined. When this student achieved a learning task, like writing his name, it was ten times the achievement of other students. He had to work harder, therefore his achievements meant more to him. I developed a relationship with this student, which continued my decision to go into education.

The following year I specifically asked to be placed into the special education classroom. My intention was to develop experiences and learn more about individual students with various disabilities. For a year and a half, in the special education classroom, I had the opportunity to work one-on-one with an incredible young lady. I have developed a positive relationship with her both personally, and professionally. During my time with her, I have helped her learn to read and write as well as increasing her self-awareness, which has increased her self-love and empowerment. She has also helped me and has enhanced my life. With special needs students, the little things are the most important; now, in my everyday life, they are to me as well.

There have been times when I have felt at a loss regarding how to handle a particular problem, emotion, and/or situation working with special needs students. As a student teacher's aide, I have the opportunity to work as a team with my classroom teacher, special education teacher, special education district coordinator, elementary school principal, and other teacher aides to support our students. Having a team of people is important for several reasons. First, we all see things differently, have insight from different experiences, and hold different areas of expertise. As team members, we learn from one another and together we develop better plans for addressing individual situations. Over time we have built rapport and trust amongst us. Our decision-making process is inclusive and engages all team members. Our consensus decisions are cooperative in which all team members agree to support a decision in the best interest of the student. Teamwork leads to more effective implementation when the entire team agrees, increasing quality outcomes.

I have used consensus decision making in my school and community. This fall I spearheaded a mission for her inclusion in our local dance troupe in order to provide the opportunity to increase her self-esteem, body awareness, and connection with the arts. Unfortunately due to her disability and socioeconomic status, she is often limited in accessing community resources. My school team and I secured funds to pay for her dance classes. Her family authorized permission for participation and the local dance troupe teachers coordinated the appropriate dance class for her inclusion. I personally, worked with the school, individual dance instructor, local seamstress, her therapist, and her family to ensure the dance recital was seamless and successful. This experience was extremely positive as evidenced by the extreme joy exuded by the young lady. Her exuberance was contagious to everyone who watched. Additional benefits in engaging her in dance have made her more accepted by her peers, fellow students, and community. This inclusive opportunity allowed them to interact socially with her outside of the school setting.