

Madison S.
Lower Dauphin High School
First Place
9th -12th grade

Essay Contest Topic: What impact can a positive attitude toward people with disabilities have on both the community and the individual in question?

This summer, I witnessed what a positive attitude can do for an individual. My Aunt Kathy was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer. This was said to be incurable, but that was not an option for my aunt. She faced this disease head on with a positive attitude and was surrounded with family and friends that shared their loving smiles and hope for a positive outcome. Many months later the cancer went into remission. I believe that a bit of medication with a larger dose of love and positive thoughts was the cure for my aunt.

"Wherever you go, no matter what the weather, always bring your own sunshine." (Anthony J. D'Angelo, *The College Blue Book*). A positive attitude is what makes the difference between a cloudy day or a day filled with sunshine, especially for someone with a disability. It is so important for both children and adults to understand that a positive attitude may be simply expressed through a smile for a person with or without a disability. A smile shows a willingness to be friends, it expresses love and a feeling of comfort and caring. Looking beyond a person's appearance, by starting a conversation can bring companionship and joy to people. It allows them to appreciate one another and could be a start to a strong long-lasting relationship. A positive attitude, along with a great conversation illustrates acceptance and shows that people truly care about one another. It may, if only for a few moments, make that individual forget about their disability.

Individuals in the community have proven that a positive attitude can make a significant impact on peoples' lives. A few examples of community programs in my neighborhood that have removed barriers for individuals with disabilities are: Capital Area Therapeutic Riding Association (CATRA) and Progressive Education of Children in the Arts Network (PECAN). CATR helps people with disabilities interact with farm animals and experience riding horses. It takes many volunteers in the community to make this program possible. PECAB allows people with disabilities to perform on stage sharing their talents such as dancing, singing, displaying artwork, or playing an instrument. Even high school athletes get involved through offering a Life Skills basketball event where individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to play games with high school students on the basketball court. Cheerleaders even join in to create a positive environment for all. The community has chipped in to make every day events accessible to the disabled and for them to enjoy their lives to the fullest. This is just the beginning of many more wonderful things individuals can accomplish with a positive attitude.

No matter how an individual becomes disabled, through birth, an accident, unforeseen medical condition, or from defending our country, they deserve to be surrounded by family, friends, and a community that cares. Some disabilities are easily seen and others may not be so easy to detect. A positive attitude matters, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference" (Winston Churchill).