

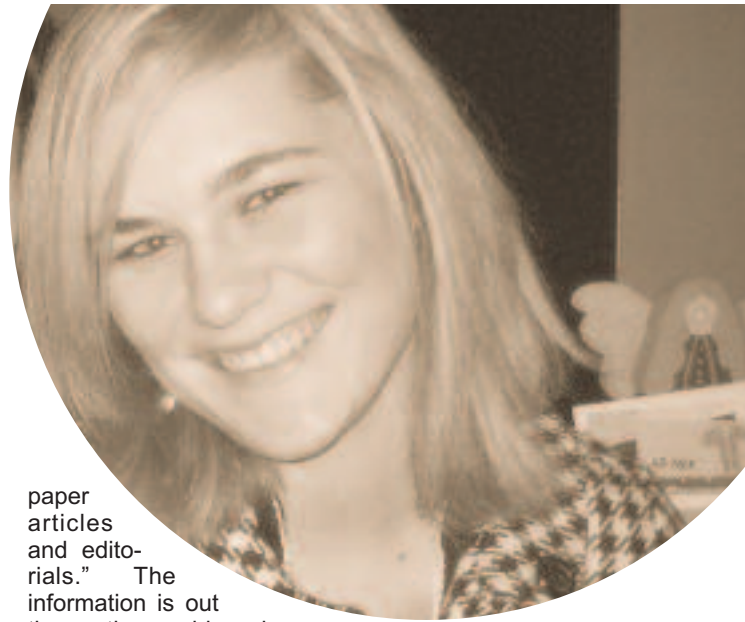
Danielle Hayes

CivicWeek: Chicago 2006

Danielle Hayes, a freshman at Washington University in St. Louis, knows what she wants to do – build community in urban environments. Since participating in **CivicWeek: Chicago** in the spring of 2006, Danielle has involved that goal in every aspect of her life, from the way she plans to spend her upcoming spring break (she'll be taking an Alternative Spring Break trip to volunteer in Belize) all the way to her future career plans (Teach For America or the PeaceCorps, followed by work in the nonprofit sector).

At home in Cleveland, Danielle is passionate about a huge problem facing her city: extraordinary segregation between the white and Catholic population in the West and the black and Jewish population in the East. Danielle, from the West side, came to college having known only one Jewish student and a handful of African American students. "There is so much to learn from people," she says, "and segregation breeds only ignorance, fear, and the perpetuation of stereotypes. It is natural for people to be uncomfortable around what is unknown to them. So why not get to know each other? Get to know the man, instead of the black man. Get to know the woman, instead of the white woman. I hope that race can someday become something we don't tiptoe around."

Apathy, says Danielle, seems to be the greatest barrier to social change in our nation. "It's not enough to say that the general public needs to be educated on these fronts. We are beyond that. There have been documentaries, photographs, studies and reports, news-



paper articles and editorials." The information is out there; the problem is that we are not moving on it.

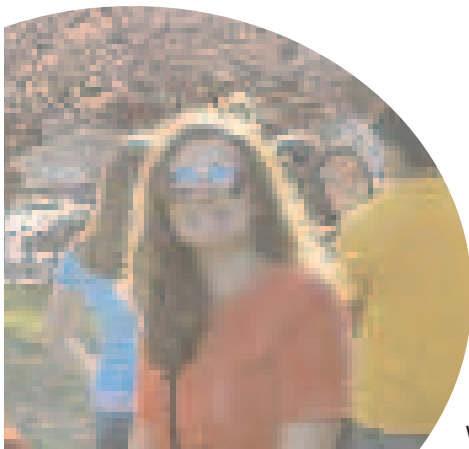
What gives Danielle the hope that things can change? People. "I love them," she says. "This world is full of brilliant, dedicated people. Every individual can bring something to the table, whether it's food or comic relief or the necessary changes to public policy."

"Life's not fair, which means that sometimes good hardworking people fall on hard times," Danielle reminds us. "This is the land of plenty, and many of us have more than enough. And many of us do not. So at the risk of sounding naïve and idealistic I'll say it: share. Share your time, your skills, your attention."

"I can make changes in my own community."

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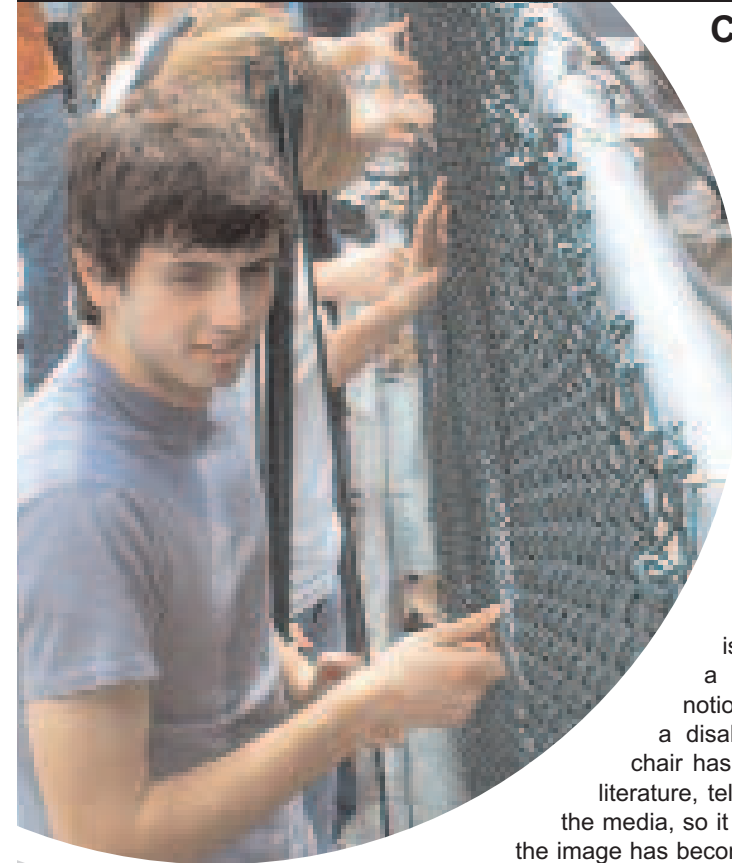
Andrea Hagan enjoys a tour of Georgetown University's campus during CivicWeek 2006 in Washington, D.C.

Catalyst

CEP's Alumni Newsletter • March 2007

Fighting Stigma and Stereotypes

Interaction with people with disabilities breaks down the barrier of judgement and promotes positive engagement



CivicWeek students construct a fence around a children's playground at Chicago's Cornerstone Community Outreach.

When you hear the word "disability," it is likely that the first image that comes to your mind is that of someone in a wheelchair. The notion that everyone with a disability uses a wheelchair has been perpetrated in literature, television, movies, and the media, so it is not surprising that the image has become the iconic symbol

of disability.

However, imagining that a wheelchair is what defines disability causes one to miss the larger and incredibly more diverse picture. While many people with physical limitations due to a disability do indeed use a wheelchair for increased mobility, it is important to recognize that there are many varied kinds of disabilities, and more importantly, many different kinds of people with disabilities.

Paraplegia, blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, limb amputations, mental illnesses, HIV/AIDS, and learning impairments are all grouped together under the vast category of disability, as are many other varied conditions. As the types of disabilities are varied, so too are the individuals with these disabilities.

Ignorance and stereotypes can cause people to think that all individuals with disabilities act the same way, have the same personalities, and hence, should be treated the same way. Clearly

this is why many individuals with disabilities believe that they suffer more harm from stigma and stereotypes than they do from their actual disability. It is the unfortunate truth that people with disabilities often are rejected socially, pitied, and, in some cases, portrayed as heroes for overcoming obstacles, while their disability is glorified.

While glorification may seem like a positive thing, many people with disabilities feel that it only increases misunderstandings and pushes them even further away from the central thing they truly want: to be treated and viewed as the normal individuals with varied personalities that they are.

In your CEP experiences, you have studied issues of prejudice and ignorance towards the homeless, as well as many other minority groups in society. As you approach the issue of

better integrating individuals with disabilities into society, try to

discover your own prejudices and stereotypes and set them aside. If you

would like get involved, it is important to educate yourself about people with disabilities, but it is

even more important to simply reach out to individuals with disabilities in your community. If you

spend a little time with individuals in your school or community, or volunteer with one of the

organizations profiled inside the newsletter that work with individuals with disabilities, you will likely find your preconceived notions fading away and the process of a genuine education beginning.

There are an estimated 50 million people living with disabilities in the United States and an estimated 500 million worldwide.



There is still time...

to apply for summer programs

Application Deadlines

Civic Leadership Institute in Chicago (Grades 10-12):
Postmarked by May 15

Civic Leadership Institute in Baltimore & San Francisco (Grades 10-12): Received by April 6

Youth & Society in Chicago (Grades 7-9): Postmarked by May 15

Youth & Society in Baltimore (Grades 7-9): Received by April 6

Although some of you may be preparing to head off on one of our spring trips, it's already time to start thinking about summer (if you haven't already) as well. You won't want to miss the exciting programs we have planned for this summer, so be sure to get your application in by the appropriate deadline! For more information and applications, visit our website at www.ctd.northwestern.edu/cep/

Spotlight on Service

The Special Olympics
www.specialolympics.org

True to the spirit of volunteerism, Special Olympics volunteers worldwide adamantly proclaim that they take more out of the experience than they could ever put into it. Founded in 1968 as a non-profit venue for athletic training and competition for individuals with intellectual disabilities, the Special Olympics now serves over 2.25 million athletes. Along with providing individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to improve their physical fitness and self-confidence, the Special Olympics strives to change attitudes about individuals with intellectual disabilities worldwide. By volunteering with the Special Olympics, not only will you have the opportunity to comfortably engage socially with individuals with intellectual disabilities, but, as many current volunteers testify, you can also take away lifelong friendships and life-impacting experiences. Programs can be found at the local, state, national, and international levels. To find a program near you, use the program locator found on the Special Olympics website at www.specialolympics.org/.

Make an Impact:

In some places across the country, students are beginning to notice a change in their classrooms: students with disabilities, formerly segregated into special education classes, are now sitting beside them during the day, taking an active part in the same lessons, and becoming part of the same community. These classrooms, called inclusive classrooms, are still few in number, but they are growing steadily as parents and students fight for better educations for learners with disabilities. Along with the movement for inclusive classrooms, there is a counterargument against them. Here, we give you a glimpse at both sides of the debate and finish with some pointers on how you can start to change things in your own community.

Arguments for segregated classrooms center around several concerns. First, "normal" classrooms may not be able to provide the services a student with a disability uses, like specialized equipment or learning technologies. Second, integrating learners with disabilities into a classroom of non-disabled students requires a great deal of training for teachers, which is very difficult to accomplish when many teachers are already overworked and pressed for time. Finally, the only way to address either of these challenges -- providing for individual needs and training instructors -- requires funding that does not exist in the public school system. Depending on the student, it can cost thousands of dollars a year to include just one individual in a traditional classroom.

Still, the dangers of keeping students segregated are chilling. Many students with disabilities are forced to live their lives in a bubble: they ride their own bus to school, go to their special education classroom, stay there all day, leave school on the same bus before the rest of the students, and go straight home to their families, never getting the chance to interact with most of their peers. Though students with disabilities are integrated to different degrees in each school, this confined cycle is the reality for all too many, and it robs them of the opportunity to be the "regular" kids that they are -- to build friendships, pick up hobbies, challenge themselves in the same academic environment as their peers, and learn from and teach those around them. It robs students without disabilities, as well, of the chance to interact

with people who are not completely like themselves, thus perpetuating stereotypes and negative attitudes about disability.

In the past few years, many ambitious school districts across the country have been proving that, despite the arguments against it, inclusive classrooms are both possible and extremely beneficial to all involved. They require a great deal of time, effort, and creativity from teachers, parents, administrators, and students with and without disabilities, but the payoff is tremendous, and tremendously important. Finally, students with disabilities have the chance to get out of a segregated classroom that keeps them hidden away from the rest of the school and become part of a social and intellectual community to which they have just as much to contribute as their peers without disabilities.

The inclusive classroom movement is still small and largely unsuccessful for many reasons. Chiefly, it cannot take root in the public because we tend to think about disabilities as tragic or troublesome, and we assume people with disabilities are "broken" or limited in what they can do. We almost behave as if having a disability means someone is no longer a real person. As a result, we also assume that integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms is either impossible because they can't function there, or dangerous because they might have a negative influence on their "normal" peers. These attitudes spring from ignorance; interacting personally and equally with someone who has a disability surprises many people with the discovery that they are, in fact, just regular old people who have a body part that functions a little differently than others.

It is in your hands to change classroom segregation and the attitudes that perpetuate it. Below are a few ideas about how to start advocating for inclusive classrooms where you live.

1. Start with the way you think about disabilities. Consciously step away from the assumption that a disability is something to be pitied or feared. Don't think of a disability as something that's "wrong" with a person, or that it limits his or her potential to live a normal or fulfilling life. The best way to

In the lives of individuals with disabilities

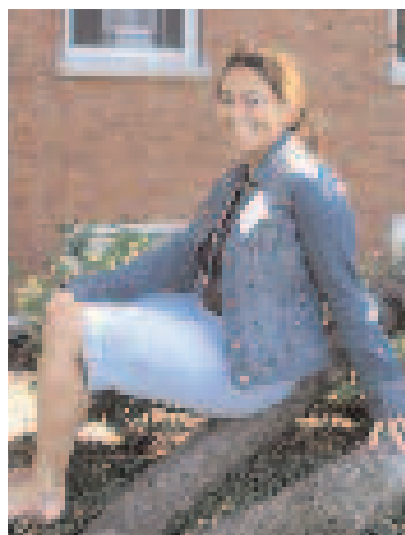
change your own attitude about disabilities is to interact in a meaningful way with people who have one.

2. Change the way you talk about disabilities. People with a disability have names, and that is how you should refer to them, only mentioning their medical diagnosis if it's necessary. Naming people according to their diagnosis (for example, "She's autistic") defines them entirely by what they can't do and makes them just that -- a diagnosis -- rather than a whole person. Instead, use "people-first" language when talking about a disability ("She has autism," rather than "She's autistic," or "He uses a wheelchair" instead of "He's wheelchair-bound").

3. Research the inclusive classroom movement. An online search for "inclusive classroom" or "integrated classroom" will provide links not only to organizations who are fighting for more equal education, but to a number of more personal pages about individual experiences with the issue. Check major newspapers for articles on inclusive classrooms to see what the movement looks like near you, or across the nation.

4. Learn about the special education programs in your school district. Start with your own school, and branch out to the rest of your district. What are the special education classrooms like? By whom are they staffed? Do students have the opportunity to interact with the rest of the student body? If they do, is it in a meaningful, deliberate way -- or are they just physically placed in the larger group without any effort to make them a real part of the social community?

5. Start talking to people about change! Open up a dialogue with school board members, principals, teachers, students with and without disabilities, and parents. Talk through the barriers that prevent more inclusive classrooms at all those levels, individual up to administrative, and work together to think about creative solutions. Look to inclusive schools for models.



CEP says goodbye to Cortney DeArmond

CEP recently said goodbye to a valued staff member, Cortney DeArmond, as she moved to new a position with Chicago's Christopher House. Cortney has worked at CEP for the past five years in many different roles. Whether as Residential Counselor, Office Manager, Assistant Academic Dean, Residential Assistant, Residential Dean, or Outreach Coordinator, Cortney has been a great asset to CEP with her tremendous skills and dedication. We thank Cortney for her hard work and wish her the best of luck with her new position!

The Civic Education Project (CEP) combines traditional education and community service to promote civic responsibility among young people, giving them the knowledge, experience and leadership skills they need to make a positive impact on society.

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CEP's Catalyst newsletter is written and produced by Kaitlyn Patia and Jen Sharber