



**Library:** Webster Public Library

**Title of Program or Event:** Disability Awareness Training for Teen Volunteers

**Age level:** grades 6-12; adults                      **Saturday, March 13, 2004; 3 – 4:30 p.m.**

**Description of Activity:** Getting to Know Those Who *May* Be Different: A Free Disability Awareness Training Workshop for Teen Volunteers

**Objectives / Goals:**

- to assist teen volunteers to analyze ways that they can best help children or youth with disabilities wherever they may encounter them: school, church, summer camp, youth programs
- to better understand “People First Language” as a way to include people with disabilities
- to offer an opportunity for teens to meet and talk with young people with a variety of disabilities
- to identify teens willing to assist with upcoming programs offered at the library through the Building Bridges grant

**Suggested setting:** library meeting room, with tables and chairs arranged in a U to encourage discussion.

**Time required:** 1½ hrs.    **Materials needed:** pencils for note taking for participants; handouts; screen; media projector for presenter’s laptop computer; audiovisual cart with overhead projector for presenter’s transparencies; presenter’s table and chairs for additional speakers and helpers; sign-up sheet for helpers for upcoming programs, specifically summer Book Buddies.

**Advanced Preparation:** The Building Bridges Project Coordinator contacted Patty Corvaia, Public Education Coordinator for The Advocacy Center (590 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620. 585-546-1700, ext. 267). Patty designed a PowerPoint presentation and handouts and arranged for two additional speakers (Sarah and Rebecca) to share their personal experiences with living with multiple handicaps. The Project Coordinator and Teen Services Librarian developed half-sheet fliers and a handbill describing the workshop which was aimed at potential volunteers to assist with library programs, Scouts, church youth group members, and students doing community service. The program description and registration information was posted on the library’s web site for online registration.

Publicity avenues included two counter displays in separate parts of the library with the handbill and fliers to pick up; handbills on the bulletin board in the library’s Teen Lounge and the library foyer; a variety of emails were sent to community contacts with the handbill as an attachment (the Town of Webster Asset Coordinator, to forward to their STARS group; the school library media specialists at the middle and high schools in

Webster to post; the young adult librarians at all Monroe County Library System [MCLS] units; the local contact for TIES [Together Including Every Student], to forward to interested students). Direct mailing included 104 handbills mailed to Webster Public Library Teen Volunteers (formerly Junior Volunteers) and 20 handbills mailed to the youth group leaders or ministers at the Webster area churches. A press release was sent to the **Webster Post**, **Webster Herald**, and the "Our Towns" section of the **Democrat & Chronicle**, both by the Webster Public Library and the Communications Office of MCLS. The local cable channel was sent information for the bulletin board crawl messages. Members of the WPL's Teen Advisory Board were encouraged to attend and two members did. Note for next time: one contact overlooked was SABAH, the Skating Association for the Blind and Handicapped, which has a chapter at the Webster Ice Rink.

**Procedure:** Three days before the program, only 5 students had signed up. Within 24 hrs., another five had committed to coming to the program. The afternoon of the program, there were four walk-ins and three adults (a parent, a TIES coordinator, and a youth group director for the United Church of Christ Congregational), for a **total attendance of 16**. There were 6 staff members, presenters, and helpers in attendance as well. Patty gave her PowerPoint presentation, with a chronology and overview of how people with disabilities have been treated throughout history. A societal shift began with the influential Kennedy family whose daughter had developmental disabilities. The NYS OMRDD created in 1977 and Justin Dart's influence in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act were instrumental in changing the way youth with disabilities have been treated. Patty focused on how exclusion, being afraid to do "the wrong thing," and peer pressure often leads one to not become friends with a person with disabilities. She emphasized being a friend all the time, not just at school, and having a zero tolerance attitude about bullying and teasing. Sarah and Rebecca shared their personal perspectives as persons living with disabilities. Patty distributed a handout on People First Language and pointed out how it helps us include everyone. A "Family Feud" type game had two sides of the room competing to rephrase exclusionary language into "People First Language."

**Modifications:** Sarah prepared her remarks ahead of time, presenting them on an overhead transparency, which Rebecca read aloud, using her Braille notebook (where she had scanned the text previously). As students in the audience asked Sarah questions, her mother Susie assisted her in typing her responses in MS Word on the laptop. The remarks were enlarged to 28-point type and shown on the screen via the media projector. The technology was cooperative and enhanced the discussion immeasurably. A staff member was needed to be on hand for assistance.

**Evaluation:** "Understanding and Respecting Our Differences is the Key to Accepting Each Other" was the common theme throughout. The students were asked to complete a written evaluation of the presenters at the end of the program. Patty was dressed casually in jeans, related well to the teens, and gave a relaxed mood to the program, engaging the group in discussion with her and the other speakers. Ten teens signed up to assist with the summer buddy reading program and will be contacted to work later in the school year.