

DisAbility Awareness / Awareness of Abilities

Sandi Witt and Rosemarie Deming, Dunloggin Middle School, Howard County

410-313-2831,

switt@mail.howard.k12.md.us

DisAbility Awareness in the 7th grade develops the idea of disability awareness in a variety of ways. Films, discussions, hands-on activities, and role-playing give the students many opportunities to develop an increased sensitivity to those around them that have disabilities.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project?

This project meets many needs of the community. We contacted the community school that fits this area of need to see how we could best support them with our resources and services. Together with the staff and administration of Cedar Lane School, the school



that serves the needs of the students of Howard County who are profoundly physically and cognitively disabled, we have created a list of needs each year of the partnership. Every fall the program is revised to meet the changing needs of this community and the curriculum. Through this program the students at Cedar Lane School, as well as the 7th graders at Dunloggin Middle School, mutually benefit from their shared activities. Cedar Lane middle schoolers have the opportunity to socialize with age appropriate peers and Dunloggin students gain an appreciation of the daily life activities of students who are their age and are differently abled than they.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives?

A variety of curricular needs are met throughout the year in each of the lessons. Problem-solving, written reflections and reading to perform task activities are designed to promote the best strategies for integrating the activities into the curriculum.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project?

As the Dunloggin students participate in various activities involving the students from Cedar Lane School, reflection time is built into the schedule. This can be in the form of discussing what was observed, writing about personal experiences, or drawing pictures of the students participating in an activity. While completing the classroom activities, reflection time becomes part of each experience for the students as it must happen when the experience is fresh in the

minds of the students. Reflection also helps to prepare the students for the next activity, allowing for concerns or questions to be addressed.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Success of this project depends upon students taking a leadership role since the project involves students working with students. Students help to plan fundraising (penny drive) activities in our school, prepare and give the morning announcements regarding service activities, serve as students guides for our speakers on dAp Day (DisAbility Awareness Day), write the necessary press releases and thank you letters as the activities conclude throughout the year, and serve as service ambassadors to visitors in our building.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? Community partnerships fill a wide range of needs. The primary partnership with this program is with Cedar Lane School in Howard County. The partnership between two schools has evolved to relationships among individual students and then with their families. We have also involved the businesses that have a partnership with our school to help fund various needs that arise as we progress through the project.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Coordinating schedules for two schools can only happen if extensive planning is involved. We must work with administrators, staff, students, and parents from both schools. Devising a program that meets the needs of an entire grade level of students in two schools cannot happen unless intense planning is involved. Students are a significant part of the planning process so they can begin the foundation of planning service in their own communities.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students acquire the knowledge and skills needed for service through this program. In the classroom students participate in a variety of simulations to experience the needs of those who are less able. Through infused lessons, speakers who share their experiences as disAbled, partnership activities, and participating in dAp Day (a Howard County program created by Anne Wade that provides a variety of speakers who have disAbilities and are willing to share their experience with the students), our students have the experiences to equip them in the real world as sensitive, caring, and understanding community members.