

<https://observer-reporter.com/living/school/washington-second-graders-create-artwork-of-inclusion/> article=000ff620-2111-11e8-98b1-0200301b5f61.html



## Washington second-graders create artwork of inclusion

Natalie Reid Miller Mar 31, 2018 Updated Mar 31, 2018





Second-grader Tray'von sat center stage, calling out directions in a clear voice while classmate Kameron tapped on a plastic cup.

"Try to listen very closely," Tray'von said. "Everyone has to be super-duper quiet, like a little mouse."

His eyes closed, Beckett attempted to dip a paintbrush, attached to a walking stick, into the cup of paint.

When asked why they were doing that type of exercise, students replied, "So we know what it's like to be Tray'von."

"They get it," said Kim Resh.

Through their nonprofit, Mikayla's VOICE (Voice of Inclusion for Children Everywhere,) mom Kim and daughter Mikayla, who has significant developmental delays, visit schools to inspire students and educate them about the importance of inclusion.

While they usually stay closer to their home in Nazareth, Kim and Mikayla traveled to the western part of the commonwealth to visit Washington Park Elementary for a second time. In November, they presented a program on inclusion and acceptance to the entire school.

Tuesday, through their Wheels of Friendship program, they created an art project – a visual reminder that it's always possible to include everyone – with Debbie Griffin's class.

Resh said she was moved by Washington Park students during their first visit, and eager to come back.

"It's a lot for us to travel this far," said Resh. "We're really excited to be able to work with a class that is so successfully including a student with a vision impairment and a student with a hearing impairment."

Tray'von is blind and student Mah'kai has a hearing impairment.

Griffin said her class, like most children, are accepting and inclusive.

"They have kind hearts," said Griffin. "They really want to be helpful."

Wheels of Friendship was modeled after an art project that Mikayla participated in while in middle school, in which her classmates applied acrylic paint to canvas by using the wheels of her wheelchair. In addition to wheelchairs, other groups have used the paws and tails of service dogs to create artwork.

Griffin's class used Tray'von's walking stick to apply paint. Keeping in line with the elementary school's "Be" Rules, such as "Be safe" and "Be respectful," students chose to create paintings that spell out "Be Unique."

Each painting was created with layers, so that Tray'von and others with vision impairments can feel the textures. Students affixed bees with wings that have their initials in braille, made flowers from their handprints and painted letters in sign language.

The finished product will be displayed in the school.

The project was funded by "Include Me," an initiative of Arc Human Services that promotes inclusive education and meaningful employment for those with disabilities.



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Students Joseph, left, and Joey paint with a brush attached to Tray'von's cane with Kim Resh's help. Resh is the mother of Mikayla, a woman with developmental disabilities. The mother and daughter travel to schools to celebrate diversity and inclusion.

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Kim helps student Beckett dip his brush in the paint.

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than them.

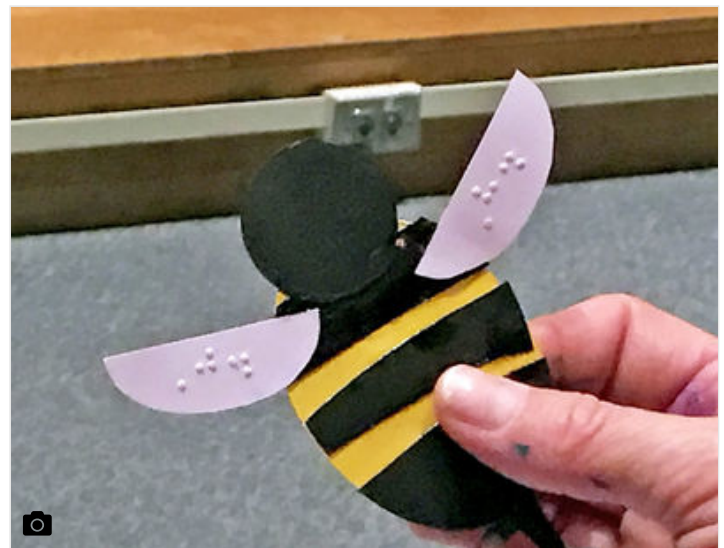
"I've never had a kiddo let me down. They've never disappointed me. When you explain it to them, they get it," she said. "When I was in school, kids with disabilities were kept separate. It's not like that anymore. Kids are kind. It's a privilege to get to do this with them."

As if illustrating her point, when Resh asked the students why they created the paintings, Tray'von didn't miss a beat.

"We made this for everyone, because everyone is different," he said. "Not everybody has to be the same."

Resh has been a powerful advocate of inclusion for all since Mikayla, who was with profound brain damage, entered first grade. Her parents asked that she be included in a regular class. At the time, full inclusion for a child with significant disabilities was rare in many districts. Going through the school system just like any other student gave Mikayla, now 23, opportunities that she might not have had otherwise.

Resh said students are now accustomed to spending time with peers who are different



Bee

## Natalie Reid Miller

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Natalie Reid Miller is Community Editor and has worked at the Observer-Reporter since 2013. With fellow Observer-Reporter journalists, she won the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania's Ray Sprigle Memorial Award for the "Under the Label" social series.

