

Alone

This short story of my experience witnessing a form of disability bullying and outcasting is a message to all teens to be inclusive of everybody, especially those who greatly differ from the majority.

When I opened the door, and walked into the classroom for the session at the 4th Annual Young Men of Color Summit, my attention was immediately drawn to what appeared to be an isolated boy. He sat there alone, in the center of empty school desks, surrounded by a sea of young teens. I struggled to comprehend why this young man was so secluded from everyone else. I questioned myself, “how could no one in this room, full of young teens, have the courage to at least engage in a conversation with this boy?” The closer I got to the boy, the more I felt it was my responsibility to acknowledge and include him.

My first thought was that he may have a mental and or physical impairment. He was a young boy wearing glasses, hunched over in a wheelchair. When I got closer, I clearly noticed the severity of his impairments. After I pulled out the seat next to him and introduced myself, I realized that his most prominent features were in fact, his uncontrollable joy and cheerful smile. I can’t remember a single moment after I sat down next to him, that he wasn’t smiling. It appeared that he did not realize that everyone else in the room deliberately avoided sitting next to him. He was in his own world, enjoying himself, making himself laugh, as well as making me laugh during the entire session. The more we shared stories and information about ourselves, our interests, and our family, the more I felt a bond growing between us. He even asked me if we could be best friends, I looked at him, smiled, and told him that I felt like we already were.

I don’t believe that the other teens in the room had any idea of what they were missing out on when they decided not to include this young man, leaving him to sit all alone. Each time I reflect upon this moment, I think about what the world would miss out on if I were treated as an outcast, just as this teenage boy appeared to have been treated. No one would know how big of a heart I have, or how creative, intelligent and ambitious I am. Furthermore, no one would know how passionate I am about positively impacting my community, or how I am inspired to assist and guide my peers towards the path of righteousness. For these reasons, I strive to be consistently open-minded, which is why I took it upon myself to engage with the boy who sat alone that day.

Inclusivity is extremely important, no matter a person’s race, religion, belief, sexual orientation, or physical difference. When it is obvious that a person doesn't have a high enough self-esteem to include themselves, we should all take it upon ourselves to be the one who includes that person. I often find myself befriending people who are quiet or not like the rest, because I feel moved and relieved when I am able to effectively encourage a person to find their voice and crawl out of their shell. I highly value being helpful and open minded about people of all different backgrounds because those traits allow me to be more inspirational to others. I take advantage of every opportunity to defy stereotypes and do what is right, because I am mindful of my platform as a young leader. At this event, full of wonderful teens, we sadly forgot the importance of embracing others, and being a more open minded human being. This taught me just how much we miss out on, if we never talk to the one who sits alone.