

Mr. Slater

W131 Honors Composition

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Final Draft

Audience: The audience would include parents of children with ailments preventing their working capacity from full functionality, school operators who have the power to help with teaching, and employers interested in hiring employees.

A Special Case

“Mommy, why am I in a different class than the other kids?”

“Well, sweetie, you’re in a Special class, full of other very special people.”

“Oh... are they better than me?”

“No, honey, you all are equal no matter what the other children say, or do. We love you very much, and want the best possible education for you. This way, you’ll get extra-special time with the nice teacher, and everything will be okay. Alright, sweetie?”

“Yes, Mommy, I think I understand.”

One in 88 children are diagnosed as being autistic, a form of Special Needs, in the United States according to the National Autism Association. They are each affected differently by their needs, usually a combination of mental, physical, or emotional disabilities. This makes it difficult to go through and categorize each child and how best to pursue treatment or coping for their problems. Above is a typical scenario for one of these children, wondering what sets them apart and dealing with the predicament of being separated from other kids. It shows how they compare themselves and can be emotionally affected by the results. These children need help in finding a place to fit

in. If we stop pursuing perfection just because we know it is unattainable, then there will be no motivation for a better future. Using this thought process, Special Needs children should continue to try to be the best they can and, more importantly, be readily offered opportunities to achieve this. America has already defined itself as the most considerate, especially for people with disabilities. Other countries' Special Needs individuals are abandoned in streets and left to fend for themselves without a cent to their name. This injustice is visible throughout Italy, where the healthcare is poor and families cannot afford meet the needs of their disabled children. They do not receive any benefits, and have to scrounge in the alleys for coins and scraps of food. It is a miracle that the U.S. has progressed as far as it has in taking care of these individuals, but there is always room for improvement on the way to perfection. Citizens with Special Needs should be able to follow the American Dream of gaining a job and settling down to establish a family. Unfortunately, due to difficulty of functioning physically and minor mental or social setbacks, most disabled individuals are overlooked when applying for Medicaid to be able to receive an occupation. Jobs should be made more attainable for Special Needs people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities throughout the United States.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is meant to prevent discrimination of Special Needs people in the workplace, but its reach cannot always extend as far as necessary. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 “prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment” (“Facts”). Discrimination is varied depending on the situation, but a common scenario is for a high-functioning autistic individual to not receive the ADA coverage because they understand

enough to grasp a basic concept by themselves, but are still considered disabled in other areas. It is harder for these individuals to get into the program; they can do some things well, but other tasks are more challenging and require assistance. Without the benefits provided by the ADA, it is harder for them to adjust their lives to working, and becomes increasingly difficult to do tasks without a full comprehension of subject matter. These people should be allowed under the coverage even if they are higher functioning. Katie, a 22-year-old woman with a higher functioning form of autism, had to apply for Medicaid and the disablement program in order to possess a job. She underwent severe testing to see where her education stood, and was interviewed by multiple service workers to be allowed to apply for Medicaid. She had to obtain a physical from a doctor saying that she could do the work necessary for certain available jobs, which took even longer. The entire process to check her background and make sure she qualified for the disability section consumed 5 months of time. People like Katie, although they are able to comprehend more than the average disabled person, are still autistic and need to be offered the same protection as others. It is simply not fair for a Special Needs girl to be denied almost half a year in the hopes of getting coverage to have a job and feel accomplished. All Special Needs, no matter the intensity of the case, should be allowed into the program for some form of help. These certain individuals have challenging enough lives, and have to exert excess effort just to perform everyday tasks. They should be offered coverage, without basing acceptance on how high functioning they are in certain areas. Each individual is, regardless of their functionality, diagnosed with Special Needs, and should be accepted for who they are and how much they can do. There should not be such a lengthy process to go through for a mere chance at a job. They are under an incredible amount of stress, particularly when they know that other kids their age are

able to apply without such a hassle. This further separates them from the crowd, and can lead to negative emotions.

It is important for these Special people to assert control over their own lives by obtaining a job and to feel positively about their decisions and the tasks they have completed. An optimistic attitude towards life is critical when around the disabled, and having a steady job would solidify in these individuals' minds that they are cared for and will be supported in whatever they do. They need to eventually reach a point of completion in their lives; meaning they learn to make do with what they have and live without whatever they do not possess. Author Linda Lucas worked with average students about how to best understand the mindsets of Special Needs children, and she set up programs for them to volunteer as helpers in the classroom. She said that the aids learned to not get frustrated at what the kids could not do, but appreciate what they could. Lucas gave an example of a disabled child trying to write a letter with crippled hands. Instead of being frustrated at how long it was taking, the student aids cheered the child on and encouraged her in her task. Lucas said that her students had "come to recognize that disabilities can be overcome, that the individuals who do so are not superhuman or amazing but simply human beings using the abilities they have to compensate for those they do not" (Lucas 214). A Special Needs person would feel immense outward fulfillment and pride in doing something that no one thought they could do by achieving their goal of a job or other substantial position. It would be a positive and productive experience for disabled individuals to become involved in their communities and prove to themselves that with a positive attitude and the right tools to succeed, they can accomplish anything by dreaming big and setting attainable goals. The emotional pull to gain recognition that they are normal and can be treated like others would be

overwhelmingly strong. Giving these people jobs and the potential to assist others helps their own mindsets on the abilities they possess and how they can feel better about themselves.

Something commonly preying on the minds of Special Needs children is the thought that they will never fit into regular society; with a job, that fear would be eliminated. Most of them are already separated by their schools into simpler classes, which is helpful for their education to be on a necessary level of growth. Unfortunately, this keeps them away from the “regular” kids. “The social relationships of children depend critically on attentional and affective interactions. Moreover, children appear to learn... by observing the emotional reactions of others” (Sigman 796). Separating the Special Needs children deprives them of learning about typical adolescent tendencies and emotions in response to positive and negative stimulation. They are not given the same opportunities due to their hindrances. Regrettably, there is not much that can be done in school without limiting the other children. One change that could differ, though, is their lives after school is over. They could have access to other people through working, and gain new experiences with somewhat challenging daily tasks to keep them interested. This would fulfill the longing to be “normal”, and unite with other people. A behavioral therapist named James Lehman with a Masters Degree in Social Work commented in an article he wrote, “many learning disabilities often don’t manifest themselves until your child starts school, although the issues have been there since birth. So when a child gets to kindergarten or first grade, you might see that he has trouble reading, doing math or processing social situations. In reality, that disability has been there all along—it’s just surfacing in a different, more concrete way. By the time that child has been diagnosed, he’s probably already developed a very cautious way of looking at the world; he already feels different and is working hard to hide it. The learning disability might not be discovered until years later, but it has always affected that child.” He

believes that they are immersed in these feelings at a young age. These thoughts could be counteracted if the child knew that they would have a secure future with a place to go. This also gives an answer to questions these children may ask their parents about later on. If a Special Needs child asks their mother or father what job they will have or tells them what they want to be when they grow up, the parents will be able to fully address the child with the utmost certainty that they can do whatever they dream with their lives, without any of the limitations they receive at a young age in school.

Aside from schooling, physical activities included while having a job are beneficial for Special Needs individuals. Work provides extra stimulation for the brain when actively partaking in events. Doing exercise in different environments would increase thought processes and help to get the brain thinking about the world (See Figure 1). Schools encourage exercise with what they call Special Olympics, where the students compete in games such as the long jump, running on the track, shot-put, Frisbee throwing, and more. It is shown that they do better with exercise, which may lower obesity common in autistic children and increase fitness (Walsh 1412). A job that has to do with working outside or cleaning would instill basic skills as well. It would be beneficial to have a job and reinforce knowledge on how to perform certain tasks. Some schools offer programs with volunteer work like stacking cans at the grocery store or mucking out stalls at a local barn to keep the students active and doing something pertaining to their lives. If Special Needs individuals had better access to jobs that deal with their strong suits, which may be physical work for some, then it would add to their overall well-being. Exercise releases endorphins, which makes the person exerting energy happier. If the Special Needs people stay active with their jobs, then it will allow them to become more involved in their community and able to do things on their own.



Figure 1 shows a Special Needs girl participating in a Special Olympics event of kayaking, which involves her in her community, increases her exercise, and encourages her to do the best she can with what is in her possession. These fundamentals will help her with job skills later on.

Source. Photograph 1. *Moschella & Winston LLP*. Moschella & Winston, LLP, 2011. Web. 18 November 2012.

A major concern with many Special Needs people trying to get jobs in the workplace is the option for wages. According to Baldwin and Johnson, “low wages and low employment rates for persons with disabilities are the result of

discrimination caused by prejudice. Prejudice against persons with disabilities is well documented, but so are the limiting effects of physical impairments on workplace productivity” (Baldwin 548). This means that people with disabilities are not being hired because lower functioning individuals cost the same as everyone else for the company and cannot keep up with productivity how the employer would like. To solve this problem, it makes sense for an assistant to be hired especially to help the disabled person with whatever job they are doing. This would keep productivity up and the wage would be paid by the Americans with Disabilities Act coverage, solving the problem of discrimination against the disabled. Jobs would be created for these assistants, and they could dedicate themselves to helping others. The disabled workers would receive payment depending on their specific productivity and time invested in the work. Minimum wage would not apply, because not all of them can work at the same rate. Some can do their job in short spurts, while others take a longer time to complete a task. Jobs should be sought out at places with simple tasks, such as arranging food at the grocery store or walking the dogs at a local kennel. The employer would gain the benefit of a worker at a lower rate depending on the

productivity, and the worker would have the satisfaction of acquiring a job and carrying it out either on their own or with the help of an aid. The time spent by the aid could be limited even more if Special Needs people were started on the goal of working at a younger age in school for higher benefits.

Disabled people would do better in the work force if they had previous knowledge from schooling to help with the school-to-work transition. Most problems in the work force result from employees being uneducated on how to go about the tasks of their job. This could easily be fixed during schooling. According to Job Accommodation Network members Alice Jacobs and Deborah Hendricks, “young adults with a SLD [specific learning disability] often receive little or no guidance during high school in the area of career counseling and, therefore, lack necessary job-seeking skills” (Jacobs 275). These teenagers are not gaining the proper education to represent themselves in the business world. Programs need to be put in order to help disabled students learn specifically what they need to know for any job they intend to have. Such programs would be a type of vocational teaching method, and would require more teachers to help with the variety of available topics. This will create jobs for other people and benefit the students. Basic skills need to be taught to the Special Needs students so that they will know what to do on the job. This could include math, reading, and writing for specific tasks (See Figure 2). “External resources beyond the school setting are needed to facilitate career development and job placement support services, persons with learning disabilities, who have a 'hidden handicap,' need proactive efforts to help them overcome both hidden and overt barriers to their employment; and experience-based education is needed to meet motivational and career needs of persons with learning disabilities” (Jacobs 275). If this program was initiated, it would involve field trips to observe doable jobs for Special Needs children, helping them experience what they

could eventually be doing. Carroll High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, has an excellent program for Special Needs children and those with disabilities. Every other Thursday, the Special students take trips to the local baseball park to gain personal skills and socialize with others. Along with that exposure, the students are actually assigned to a job their senior year. Local businesses accept them as volunteers and potential future workers through the school program. These guidelines for Special Needs children at schools should be followed, because it sets the disabled students up for success. This would help them in their overall goal of getting a job and being a part of the working community. They will be aware of what is expected of them and be taught what is necessary to finish their tasks and fulfill their employer's needs. By being more active in seeing what they need to do, they will have an increased opportunity of gaining a job.



Figure 2: Special Needs students are taught basic courses of mathematics, spelling, reading, and writing in class. These abilities can help later in life with gaining a job and functioning on a daily basis. Source: Photograph 2. *St. Vincent's Special Needs Services*. St Vincent's Special Needs Services, 2008. Web. 18 November 2012.

Special Needs children should be allowed to pursue their dreams just like anyone else. There are incredible amounts of potential benefits to help them reach their goals in the future. Making it easier for those with Special Needs to access Medicaid would be the first step in encouraging job growth. Maintaining a positive attitude when handling the kids at a young age will help them to not grow discouraged with themselves, and instead allow them to see the benefits of what they can do over what they cannot. Having a job would allow them to fit into the general crowd of people, without

being isolated and tucked away from everyone without the proper emotional stimulation. Just as the emotional impact is important, so is the physical health that could be maintained through actively

participating in a job with a goal in mind. With the wage issue being eliminated by hiring an extra helper from the government, this allows the Special Needs to have some leniency with their own job, while creating new jobs for their assistants. This will increase the money circulating in the economy, helping everyone because of the high ratio of Special Needs individuals. Having a more advanced school-to-work program would be more effective as a vocational school for the kids to learn what they need specifically for their job instead of teaching things that are hard for them to understand. Jobs need to be made more attainable for Special Needs individuals in the United States to enhance the shape of their future. It makes sense to help them out of their predicaments and make the U.S. a better place, including more jobs and cheerful kids with their lives ahead of them. It is only fair that these disabled individuals be allowed to chase the American Dream of settling down and maintaining a job to establish a livelihood and pursue happiness.

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