

Good Version.

WORONKO.MF

FOREST Nov. 11, 1989  
Woronko  
STRULLY ARTICLE

Dear Barb,

Here is the new and improved version of the article with another author included. I feel like we are pen pals. We should exchange photos or would that ruin the mystery? Hope you like the article.

By the way the name of Mrs. Woronko is spelled MARTHE.

#### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL; THE DREAM BECOMES A REALITY

Marsha Forest, Director of Education Frontier College. Toronto  
Jeff Strully, Exec. Director Colorado ARC.  
Stan Woronko, Parent of Katherine and Stefan

#### THE WORONKO STORY

On Jan. 13, 1989 ten people will gather for dinner at the home of Stan and Marthe Woronko to help plan the future for their teenage daughter Katherine, who will soon graduate from High School with her friends.

What's so unusual about this you ask? What's the big deal about dinner for ten? For those who have known the Woronko family for the past five years it is more than a big deal -- it is a minor miracle--a miracle based on hard work, change of attitude and massive doses of love.

Katherine Woronko was born July 9, 1971. A happy healthy baby she developed a severe developmental disability after injections for whooping cough. This changed life dramatically for the family.

By Oct. 1983 Stan and Marthe were desperate and they accepted with relief an offer for placing Katherine in a group home. Both the professionals and the family thought at the time that Katherine would benefit from the structured environment and behaviour management techniques offered at this facility.

Katherine's 15 page single spaced typed Individual Program Plan (IPP) never once mentioned the need for friends, for a regular school experience, or for good old fashioned fun. She was to be programmed from morning to night with "differential reinforcement and positive practice."

During this time Katherine was attending a segregated school near the group home. What really bothered Stan at first was the poor quality and boring program at the school. He simply wanted a better quality program. After attending a talk by a principal of a nearby school system which integrated all children with special needs, Stan started opening his eyes and realized he didn't want a better program in a segregated setting, he wanted Katherine to get out of the segregated life style altogether.

In the Spring and Summer of 1984, Stan and Marthe began to meet a variety of people who saw a different vision of life for

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people with disabilities irregardless of the "severity" of problem presented. These people ( educators, psychologists, a other parents) opened new doors and new options and presented new way of thinking.

~~Annmarie~~

In 1984, Stan and Marthe attended a course for parents led by Judith Snow and Marsha Forest. Here they themselves articulated their new vision of school and community life for Katherine. Here their hopes and dreams were accepted and validated. . Here stories were told and people -- both parents and professionals, laughed and cried together and made plans to build new futures. Doors and dreams locked for too many years now seemed opened to Stan and Marthe. Hope was reborn in the family.

All the above made Stan and Marthe realize what had been missing in Katherine's life and their own lives. They began to want their daughter to have real friends and a more normal life. They began to dream out loud about Katherine attending regular school and indeed when she was fourteen attending the regular high school. They actively began to look for ways to set their lives on a new track.

After a lengthy and difficult struggle with one school board, the family was ecstatic when another school board accepted Katherine in the local High School. In Sept. 1986, Katherine Woronko entered the doors of St. Robert's High School in Richmond Hill, Ontario with all the rest of the 14 year olds in her neighborhood. It was a day to remember!

Through a grant obtained by Marsha Forest, Annmarie Ruttimann was hired jointly by the school and Marsha to be the Integration Facilitator for Katherine. From the beginning there was planning that always involved the family.

The initial goal everyone as a team decided upon was that by December Katherine would have a circle of at least six friends. First the foundation would be built -- Katherine would get to know her new environment and her tour guides and connectors would be her peers. Annmarie's job would be to make this happen.

Based on this simple but profound common sense logic, Katherine began to blossom. Within one month major changes could be seen in her behaviour. Objectives that highly trained behaviour specialists could never seem to achieve were realized with the creativity of Annmarie and Katherine's growing circle of friends.

This did not happen without a lot of work, time, energy and committment. The key however was Annmarie's unflagging love and belief in Katherine and her family. The school was sceptical, neutral, watching. But no one could deny that Katherine was learning, growing and changing beyond the wildest dreams of anyone involved.

By March of 1986, ~~Marthe and Stan~~, eager to have Katherine *come*  
home ~~again~~, reunited ~~their~~ family in their wonderful home on  
Arnold Crescent. *with her*

#### THE STRULLY STORY

Shawntell Strully in Littleton, Colorado has a similar story. After years of wilting in segregated educational settings, Shawntell's family bucked the system and insisted that their daughter attend regular school with regular kids. Shawntell today attends Arapahoe High School and has an active circle of 15-18 girls who get together regularly to figure out how to support one another.

These two families represent a growing trend called the "regular education initiative". This initiative involves families and professionals who want all children to go to their regular neighborhood schools alongside their brothers and sisters, to have friends and learn as much as they can.

Both families in this article feel that the single most important issue facing all parents is their child's safety and protection from exploitation, abuse, neglect and mistreatment. Yet at the same time parents want their children to be active, involved included and have a dynamic "quality of life."

Jeff and Cindy Strully put it this way:

"The only way we can think of ensuring our daughter's protection and future is by surrounding her with a group of people who want to be in her life. We fear the biggest hurt for Shawntell will be paid people coming in and out of her life. We fear her being surrounded by people who don't really know or love her--people who won't see her talents, gifts and abilities but who will write 20 page IEP's about what she can't or won't do.

What we want for Shawntell is a group of people who will 'walk with her for at least part of her journey.' Our worst nightmare as parents is not whether Shawntell holds a job, is fully toilet trained, has tongue lateralization, or can make three purchases in a supermarket. We do want to make sure she has company on a Saturday evening and has people around her simply because they like her and she likes them.

The only way we can think for this to happen is for Shawntell to grow up in a family of her own; to live in a community where people can get to know her; for her to go to the regular school with everyone else and to be part of regular classes and school life.

Full inclusion will not happen if Shawntell is part of "special education." It will not come if she is an outsider. It will not come from the "special education department."-- it will come from her friends!"

What both the Strulljy's and the Woronko's need from the schools to make this happen is an INTEGRATION FACILIATOR -- a teacher whose job it is to introduce children who have been "strangers" back into the real world...a person who can CONNECT with others and build a new community. This means a major change in roles and will be a challenge to school systems everywhere.

#### COMMON SENSE

We want to be clear. We are not saying "socialization" is the end all and be all. We are saying that the development of real friends over time for all children and adults with challenging needs is possible. It will not happen through wishing, through miracles or through osmosis. It will happen with a conscious plan of action and teachers, parents, school administrators who are committed to the notion that it can happen.

Why for example can quality integrated education happen in certain places in Canada and the U.S. and not in others? The answer is clear and has nothing to do with money but everything to do with values.

If a school system truly values inclusion and diversity than Shawntell and Katherine will be included and valued. If the school system is interested in elitism and exclusion, goodbye Katherine and Shawntell.

We are also not saying that having friends is all there is to do at school. We think K and S should "have it all". This means having a job after school and on week-ends. It means going to the mall to shop with your friends. It means learning to pick a video you know your parents will hate. It means "hanging" out and getting caught smoking in the non-smoking area.

It does not mean going to a job far from school for one or three days a week when you are 13. It does not mean shopping with 4 other kids who don't talk during the school day when everyone else is taking gym. It does not mean constantly doing things with adults who try to teach you what they think is useful for you.

Katherine and Shawntell are the lucky ones. They are enjoying the life of a teenager with all the pain and joy this entails. Both these young women were labelled at the "bottom of the heap." But they are the "gifted" ones. They have told us with their hearts and souls what they need. Neither can talk with words. Neither can always go to the bathroom or eat without assistance. Neither can do advanced math or even read. But both these young women are brilliant social policy creators.

Through the pain and suffering of their rejection they have told us clearly that they need to belong and to be loved. They have said, "I WON'T LEARN TILL I AM LOVED." Once the environment provided that real support everyone changed and grew-- all had a

true change of heart.

The research and practice tell us it can be done. Shawntell and Katherine are simply two who have shown us the way. It is now up to the rest of us to build circles of friends around those we love and close all the doors that segregate us from one another.