

# PLAYFAIR TEAMS

## Disability, Social Justice, Inclusion

### *THE STUDENT VOICE*<sup>1</sup>

*PlayFair has been an experience like no other. It was definitely nothing like I had expected. When I was first told about the nature of PlayFair, my initial thought was that as the Grade 12s, we would be leading the special ed students in developing a presentation. As soon as I learned, the true experience was for me. I'd discovered the joy of meeting new people. Despite physical and mental disabilities, the special ed students are like any other teenager. During this experience, we talked, played, laughed, and cried.*

*Michelle, Grade 12*

There is an old saying with a great deal of truth in it.

**Show me and I will forget.**

**Tell me and I will may remember.**

**Involve me and I will understand.**

<sup>1</sup> *THE STUDENT VOICE* quotations are given in the students' words. We have not "cleaned up" the grammar to retain the originality of each quotation.

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*PlayFair gave me the opportunity to meet and get to know 12 different, amazing people, all of who taught me something. The things I've learned about the process of a presentation and about myself are lessons that'll stay with me for life.*

*Florence, Grade 11*

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*To never ever make fun of people that go to special ed because they are just as important as the rest of us.*

*Shalini, Grade 3*

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*I was glad to be in the team and heart space to heart hope. The kids are cool there and my team is fun. My group that nice to have at school and I hope to stay in the group all year.*

*Rosemond, Secondary School Special Class*

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*All my life I was judged, put down and left out of things just because I am physically disabled, but, for once, I'm not. I guess it's true. People really have no clue how powerful they really are.*

*Megan, Grade 11*

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*Everyone is just as smart as everyone else, but they learn in a different way.*

Mohamed, Grade 3

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*And I think everybody realized it wasn't just about a product, what we performed, but more about the process and how we got there. All the things we have learned from each other are so much more than we expected. I think one of the most important things we discovered as a group was how much little things can matter and make a difference in someone's day.*

Crystal, Grade 10

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*It means that you need to do things the fairplay way.*

Monica, Grade 3

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*Treat everyone the same way like you treat other people.*

Jose, Grade 3

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*The day was perfect and it took me to another world. It reminded me of all the problems I had in my life and if I can help Mrs. Galati and her daughter Felicia and other kids like me, what a difference we could make in this world.*

Jennifer, Grade 12

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*I personally feel that my group did an extraordinary job displaying how important acceptance is to everyone and how everybody, no matter what age or ability level, just*

wants to be accepted. I think by the end everybody realized how much impact it could have on someone by simply accepting them.

Crystal, Grade 10

### THE STUDENT VOICE

I thought it would be amazing if we could break down all these barriers, make people approach things with open arms, but is that possible? To me the answer to that question seemed grim but when we arrived at Mary Ward High and saw all those students just as we are, working together, it changed my whole point of view. Because now I truly believe that with presentations as powerful and inspiring as the one I was blessed with being able to witness that day, anyone could become enlightened, and would understand the importance, As I do now.

Michelle, Grade 12

### Andreas' Story

This is Andreas' personal story. He wrote it with support from a friend. Among his many qualities, Andreas happens to have Down Syndrome. Andreas filled the role of National Mentor for Disability at the startup of **PlayFair Teams. Your Community Mentor** and many others in your school and community have their stories to tell as well.

*I want to share with you part of my life.*

*School:*

*I went to St. Gregory's just to learn, but I didn't have friends. I felt sad and alone. My Mom took me under her wing and helped me to figure out high school.*

*My High School was Bishop Allen in Etobicoke*

*First the staff put me in the Green Room. I felt very frustrated that they made me go there. I was in tears. It wasn't fair to be there, because I wasn't learning in the Green Room. They didn't want to accept me. They didn't want me to learn. The Green Room only had lots of flowers. And only students with a disability were in the Green Room. It made me feel sad and I felt like I was not like the other students. I wanted to get out of there – a cry of help to get out.*

*What I did – I talked to the Principal – Pat Gavel – he was a good guy to talk to. He helped me get out of the Green Room and I went to regular class with all the other students.*

*When that happened, I felt accepted and I made friends there. After school, I went to Drama Club and we put on a school play. We did the song YMCA in the play.*

*I got involved with acting. My passion is acting.*

*After high school, I went to College at George Brown. I went to Drama School where I studied plays, like Romeo and Juliet.*

*I made more friends at Drama School. We had a similar interest in acting. We all went to auditions to be in plays. I got parts for 2 plays and was on the set of a movie called “Jewel” with Farah Fawcett.*

*In my life, I am included in many things. I am outside the box. Inside the box is negative and stressful. People are not nice or accepting of other people.*

*When I audition for a play, it is still hard work, a struggle. People sometimes see a label, they see a disability. They see differences. It is the wrong thing to think about.*

*I have learned to overcome the struggle by being in focus. I focus on my career in acting.*

*I have friends like Paul who encourage me. My Mom was really strong. She taught me how to speak out.*

*In life, we have more similarities than differences. We just want to be treated like a person, and offer our talents to the world.*

Andreas Prinz

National Mentor for Disability

(This is Andreas' personal story. He met one morning over coffee with his friend and Coordinator of PlayFair Teams, Nancy McNabb, at his condominium apartment. Nancy invited Andreas to share his experiences in school, his talents, and the important people who played a significant part in his life.)

### **Corrine's Story**

Corrine is a young woman with physical disability. Prior to a few years ago, Corrine was an active athlete. She swam on school teams. She played hockey on male teams. She loved sports. She tells us that she was a female jock. Corrine also worked in a motorcycle shop and rode motorcycles.

Corrine also rode motorcycles.

One day it happened. A car, driven by a person who was not watching what was going on around him, hit her motorcycle. Corrine lives with constant chronic pain. One leg now is shorter than the other. A computer is implanted in her abdomen.

A terrible tragedy. Yes, it was. Did Corrine permit it to stop her from attaining her aims? No, though she no longer works at the motorcycle shop.

We met Corrine when she was taking her Master of Arts degree in Critical Disability Studies at York University. She had completed her undergraduate degree. It was during that degree that her accident happened. She did not permit it to put an end to her studies. Recently she married Randy, an artist with a developing reputation. She has a career in mind. Her future includes a Ph. D.

Corrine worked with the first elementary school **PlayFair Team**. She was an inspiration to the students and all others involved. Now she is helping us to expand **PlayFair Teams** to the university and college level. She is being helped in this by Ayshia, a young Muslim woman who happens to be blind. Ayshia has been heavily involved in **PlayFair** at the organizational level. She, too, is looking forward to doctoral studies.

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*I wasn't thinking this group would change me or give me new experiences, or perspective. I thought only that I would join and do stuff and not receive anything in return – but I did. When I saw and heard stories dealing with the acceptance of people labeled with challenging needs, it made me realize that I could relate to them so much, because of the things I had gone through in my own life.*

*Daniel, Grade 11*

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*They should respect the children.*

Anita, Grade 4

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*Now I am part of this team which means so much to me, I am going to spread this message of acceptance to the best of my abilities because we are who we are, and everyone should be accepted regardless of any differences. We shouldn't have to disguise our true selves for anyone.*

Michel, Grade 12

*THE STUDENT VOICE*

*We all have become better people, inspired by each other. We've become people of wonder. Our diverse team has been a source of numerous insights, a site of understanding built on a different dimension: dimension of integrity, love and care. I've discovered new people around me, and a new person within me. Now that I got to know how to make the wonderful goals and ideas come true, I can say, from the depths of my heart, that I've been blessed, I sincerely believe that PlayFair Team would make a significant impact on everybody's life. To me, it's the greatest play of all.*

➤ *Monika, Grade 12*

Following their involvement, their understanding of disability had widened.

- *I used to think that a disability meant the inability to perform tasks because they don't have the bodily capability to do a certain thing.*
- *Actually, my best friend has a learning disability. It's not a serious one, but she just gets help when she needs it. And, actually, another friend of mine is really depressed lately. She's seeing a psychiatrist and that kind of stuff. So, I guess that's another type of disability.*
- *People can be disabled in many different ways.*
- *Everybody has strengths and weaknesses, and it's the same with disabilities. They're a weakness that a person has, but that person has much strength too. Disabilities are a problem like any other. Just like smoking. Just like anorexia. Just like any other problems that people have to deal with.*

### **Just be Sensitive Toward Disabled People**

All of the participants mentioned the importance of being sensitive toward disabled individuals. They each described feeling an increased sensitivity as a result of teaching the workshop, and they made comments about how others should display sensitivity.

- *This workshop was so eye-opening and I learned how to be and how to teach other people to include and be sensitive.*
- *By giving everyone the same amount of attention and respect. Just be sensitive, all the time.*
- *If everybody worked to help them, if everyone were to see somebody in need and go help them, like, at school or anything, then that'd be helping them already. But*

- a lot of people are having trouble and saying “Too bad”. They don’t help, just say something fast to get it over with. That’s not helping them. That’s just bad.*
- *If she, a student with challenge, asks me to help her, it’s easy for me to give the answer. But now, instead of giving her the answer instantly, I would just ask her to explain everything to me. It takes longer, but at least she understands. And it not like I’m telling her and I don’t want to deal with her. It’s a little harder, but in the long run, the results are better.*
  - *The workshop experience kind of changes you in a good way to help people like that. It makes you look at things differently, like, you realize how to be a better, more sensitive, more understanding person.*

### **Inclusion is a Great Idea**

All participants thought inclusion was “a great idea”. The majority supported complete inclusion, but a minority held reservations. Here, we focus on what the majority said.

- *It’s awesome to have everybody all together.*
- *You have to be able to experience inclusion with people with disabilities, if you’re gonna go up to university and then go and get a job. You have to know and sort of learn to deal with it.*
- *School should have a program that would not discriminate against people who have challenging aspects. And I know of schools that do have people included and really have good programs, and they interact in all their classes and have lots of friends. I think it’s totally great.*

### **Peers Can Help Make Inclusion Work**

The workshops presented by these students mostly were to other students at the elementary or secondary level. They thought that it was very beneficial to give the presentation to other students. All participants agreed that peers can have a significant influence on each other.

- *If I share this knowledge with peers, they may just pass it right along and they will start a train of respect for those children and/or adults with disabilities. Students are the ones in the school, and they're the ones around all these people everyday, so they can see what goes on. So they should be the ones to spread the word around.*
- Students don't listen to adults. If peers give the workshop, peers are more attentive.

### **Stella's Research**

Stella used interviews before and after the presentation to assess the effect on grade eight students. Her intent was to discover if any change occurred in student attitudes, and whether a peer-to-peer workshop model would have positive influence on attitudes toward inclusion.

Stella chose two students, Kate and Chew, for in-depth analysis.

#### **Before the Presentation**

Both Kate and Chew had previous experience with children with disabilities. Kate had worked as a camp counselor. In that role, she had assisted a younger girl with special needs. Her experience was positive. Chew knew a class peer who was supported by an educational assistant. His acquaintantship was not close and he felt the student having help in the class was unfair.

Prior to the workshop Kate indicated that she felt a teaching approach in which the teacher places students with differing abilities together in cooperative groups could support educating all students together.

- *I definitely think that all students should be in the same classroom. I think it is a good idea and that everyone can benefit. For example, some people are good at writing, other people are good at speaking, others at drawing, and if you do group work each person can be assigned a part that they can do. Yeah, I think that group work is good.*

During his first interview Chew queried the presence of a student with disability in his class. He believed the student could not be successful in cooperative learning due to his general incapability.

- *Our class had to work in groups to complete a project, and everyone worked in a group except the guy who had a teacher's assistant. He worked alone in the corner of the classroom, or sometimes he stayed in his other classroom, and he only had to complete part of the project. The rest of the class had to complete the whole project and present it to the class. I guess if he was good enough, he could have worked with us in our group.*

There was a single instance Chew could recall when his peer with disability did make a contribution in class.

- *Once, and only once, did the guy fit into our class. As part of our social studies class we had to create a display to show what we were working on for parent's night. Well, this guy I was telling you about did the entire lay out. He created a back-drop to a little skit we put on and did an excellent job presenting it to his*

*parents. I was really impressed by his work. I didn't think he was good for much else before. It's too bad we couldn't do more things like art and drama in class so he can feel good about himself and show his stuff.*

This was a single instance. Chew's teacher did not use art and drama with any frequency. Chew, unlike Kate, was of the opinion that modifications to the curriculum should not be permitted. If a student could not keep up, that student should not be in the class.

- *Well, it's just like that guy I was telling you about in my class. He only came in for social studies and we never saw him. I guess it's kinda because he couldn't handle the work. You know what I mean? If he could have handled the work, he could have stayed in the class, but he always left to work with another class and another teacher. I guess his special teacher is teaching him and that is better because he woulda, I mean I don't think he could keep up with us. He is obviously a slower learner.*

Chew did not question the constant removal of this peer from his class and kept to his belief that you shouldn't be here if you can't keep up with the rest of us.

Even when suggestions were made to include this particular student in activities, Chew would not hear of it. He cited reactions of his friends and his fear that he, Chew, would be ostracized if he agreed with including the student.

- *My best friend said that we should try to include him in our soccer game and the rest of our buddies flipped out. You know, they almost bit his head off. Do you get what I am saying? Why would I go against the pack? Do you think I want my head bit off? I see how he is a loner, and I don't want not to have any friends and be like him.*

However, Chew, like Kate, was aware that peer modeling was effective in encouraging appropriate behaviour in peers with challenges.

Kate:

- *This girl usually throws things around in her support class. I know she does this a lot because I am a peer tutor in her room. Her teacher always has to stick up for her. Once she is integrated into our art class, she is a complete angel. At the beginning she would toss things around, but everyone just ignored her. So, she never did it again. She probably realized that grade eight students don't do that.*

Chew:

- *He went to the front of the room to get his assignment and worked on it alone. When he was stuck on a question, he asked one of the guys at his table for help. He didn't fool around like he often does when his helper is with him. When he got something wrong, he tried to figure it out on his own. He was asked to complete one question, but because we were asked to complete two questions, he did two.*

In summary, prior to the workshop presentation, Kate and Chew disagreed on whether it was possible to include a peer with challenges. Though Chew knew that his class peer did have strong ability in art and drama, and that he responded well to peer modeling, he did not support inclusion on the basis that the peer could not keep up with the class, and that his peers would ostracize him if he supported any type of inclusion.

### **After the Presentation**

Both Kate and Chew were positive with regard to the manner in which secondary school older peers presented their workshop.

Chew:

- *When you asked the mentors questions, you would receive a response immediately since you didn't have to wait for one teacher to come around to you. If one teacher had delivered the workshop, the teacher would probably not be able to respond to so many people.*

Kate:

- *There was always a tutor around to ask a question and that you didn't feel stupid asking them a question because they were cool. They would give us examples that we could relate to cause they were not that much older than us.*

Kate's original positive attitude toward educating all students in the same class was reinforced by the peers. She pointed, in particular, to modeling effect.

- *Seeing the peer mentors showing the grade eights proved to the grade eights that we can all learn together if we are taught how. The peer tutors showed us ways to work with this little girl in the wheelchair who couldn't work very well. Instead of writing on her own bingo card, she just typed in on the computer.*

Chew was impressed by the role-playing aspect of the workshop in which one participant played the role of a girl with speech difficulties who pointed to what she meant. Chew learned how to respond and communicate in such a situation. He also learned to make accommodations to support learning.

- *I didn't know what she meant so she started to point at people when she heard their answers so I knew what she was referring to. She also took me to different areas in the classroom like the house centre to show me a baby doll which represented the fact that she had a sister at home.*

Chew also learned beyond simple support strategies. His awareness of the ability of peers with challenges developed.

- *I didn't know they were so smart. Like they seem so helpless, but this little girl who was in a wheelchair was so smart. I haven't had much experience with these kinds of kids. When you see people in wheelchairs in the grocery store, you feel sorry for them because you don't know if they can manage. I know the girl in the wheelchair can manage. Now I know that the people I see in wheelchairs at the grocery store can also manage.*

Lastly, as a result of workshop activities Chew began to think about disability in new ways:

- *Now I kinda know how it feels to be blind cause we had to walk around with a scarf over our eyes and it was really scary. Kids that are blind have a lot of courage. I think that instead of avoiding them, I should be giving them a chance to show me what they do, and I can show them something too.*

and he began to understand the power of working in a team.

- *Having to work in a group to accomplish something meant that you really listened to what each group member had to say. You really got to see who listened and who didn't, and you also got to see what they were good at and not so good at.*