

## **Teacher Cadet: An important part of my unique journey**

By: Makayla Trivett

I have always known that I wanted to become an educator someday. Not only because I love working with children, but because I want to make a difference in someone's life, the same way that so many others made a difference in mine.

When I was six years old, my parents discovered that I had juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. This disease, when diagnosed in females, only impacts one or two joints in the body, but has detrimental effects on the eyes. Along with this diagnosis, we also learned that I had glaucoma and cataracts in both eyes. The optic nerve in my right eye had been so badly damaged from glaucoma, that at the age of six, I had already lost ninety percent of my vision in that eye. For the first few years after receiving this diagnosis, I began being pulled out of school one to two times per week, spending a significant amount of time in an eye doctor's office. My eye sight was affected by dilation, which was a reoccurring symptom of the medications I had been prescribed to help the vision in my left eye. Along with this, I was pulled out of the classroom during multiple points throughout the day, to receive medications from the school nurse. Finally, we were able to gain back control of the sight in my left eye, and the time spent away from school and in a doctor's office decreased to about once a month. I was able to take control of my own eye drop medication, which helped me to spend more time in the classroom.

Despite the challenges I faced throughout my life due to my eye sight, I would have never been able to maneuver my way through my K-12 education without the compassion and lessons of advocating that were provided to me by both my parents and educators. The educators who made a significant difference in my life—those who were continuously understanding of my disability, and who held me to the same standards that they had established for every other student in the classroom—inspired me to become an educator.

I participated in the Teacher Cadet/Future Educators program at Dakota High School in the 2012-2013 school year. Based on the preferences that I had shared with my instructor, she asked if I would be interested in spending my classroom placement time in an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classroom for the year. I was unsure what the ECSE program would involve, but I said 'yes' and I am so grateful now that I did. Having the opportunity to work with young children, ages three to five, with a variety of disabilities, instilled in me a love and passion for providing children with an equal opportunity for education; regardless of their cultural, economic, or diverse needs and backgrounds. I believe that my personal experience with my own disability helped me to see the wonderful qualities that each child possesses. Qualities such as creativity, the ability to communicate without words, and the way in which they see the world a little differently. Because of my own disability and my time spent in the ECSE classroom, I was able to understand that people are a lot like snowflakes. No two people are alike and when it comes to teaching, each person learns in their own unique way. As an educator, one must appreciate the unique learning styles of each student and make adjustments in the classroom that work for each of them.

During my year in the Teacher Cadet program, I was given the assignment of creating and writing a Big Story Picture Book that focused on a disability. I decided to draw from my own personal experiences of dealing with my disability, along with the lessons of

inclusion and acceptance that I had learned during my time in the ECSE classroom. I wrote my story about a young girl who is blind who becomes friends with a girl who does not have a disability. The girl without a disability discovers what being blind means, and the two girls become friends despite the differences between them. I wrote the story in both English, and in braille, by using a braille type writer that was loaned to me by the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD). The book won first place in the Chippewa Valley Schools Big Book Competition, as well as first place in the Macomb County Teacher Cadet Competition. However, what I am most grateful for is that I was able to spread awareness of the challenges that those with a visual impairment face and the importance of accepting people for who they are regardless of their differences.

Now, four years after the conclusion of my experience in the Teacher Cadet program at Dakota High School, I am in the process of completing my last academic semester at Oakland University before beginning my full time, Student Teaching Internship in the fall. I expect to be graduating in December with a Bachelor's Degree in Language Arts and Elementary Education, with a minor in Early Childhood Education. I have hopes of returning to school to receive my Master's Degree in Special Education. My passion for helping children—and ensuring that each child has the opportunity to receive a fair and equal education—along with my love and appreciation for diversity, would have never been able to blossom if not for my own personal journey. It was a journey that included my battle with visual impairment, combined with my Teacher Cadet experiences in the ECSE classroom, which brought me to where I am today. Thanks to both of these experiences, I believe I will one day be a compassionate, understanding, and accepting educator; the type of educator I have always dreamed of becoming.