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Special Needs in the Community

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SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE COMMUNITY

By

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of the Requirements for
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Thesis Summary

Currently, there are very few summer camps for children with special needs. I co-founded a special needs camp called Camp Chip and Love for children who have mild physical and mental disabilities. The camp was created to help give special needs children the opportunity to become involved in a summer camp and introduce them to golf, tennis, and arts and crafts. Starting a camp is very challenging. I was responsible for ordering supplies, t-shirts, trophies, obtaining medical releases for the participants, and registration of campers. I made this camp free of charge by going to different corporations and asking for donations. Medical waivers were made and an online webpage has been created.

I plan on discussing the process of creating a camp along with the biological science surrounding certain disabilities that I have come to see at this camp. As co-founder of a special needs camp, I have been able to experience the joy and happiness that many children with Down syndrome, autism, and other conditions exhibit when a task is completed.

Through this experience, I have met children with different disabilities such as speech delay, motor skills impairment, and eye disorders. Being involved in this camp has taught me the extent to which children with special needs have fun and fulfilling lives. The camp offered opportunities to build social skills and created an environment where they would succeed. It humbled me and instilled in me a sense of compassion and love for individuals with delayed cognitive skills and physical limitations. The smallest acts of kindness can bring a smile to a child's face. The simple joy that they experienced while participating in the camp's activities inspired me to want to unconditionally help others. I have learned compassion, leadership, and respect through the entirety of this camp's making.

I have included a reflection of my time while I have been directing this camp. In my thesis, I will discuss where I see the direction of the special needs camp in the future. After reflecting on the past experiences, I researched how children develop their cognitive skills and investigated how people with special needs develop socially and behaviorally.

Ultimately, I hope to create a camp that will continue long after I have moved away to obtain other life goals. I hope that through this project, I can increase the resources I currently have and enhance them so that more people will be reached. I am thankful for the opportunity to pursue such a great goal and am excited to see the numerous lives that it will change, hopefully, for the better.

I. Introduction

As the steady beeping sound from my watch began, I knew it was time for the activities to begin. “Everyone to their first station!” I called. As campers and volunteers began to move to their first activity, I reminisced on the first two occasions this exact moment happened. Having now continued this special needs camp in its third year, I think of how nervous I was the first time the camp began. Ordering t-shirts, assembling volunteers, creating medical safety sheets, buying snacks and drinks, and recruiting campers would all have been for nothing had the camp not succeeded. Over the years, the nervousness has slowly faded and has been replaced with excitement and joy. Although I will never fully be without worry, having consistently succeeded in each of the previous camps has assuaged my worst fears that campers will not have an exciting time and won’t enjoy the camp.

My desire to work with special needs children began during my high school years. Every day after school, I would make my way to Mrs. Dowdy’s office who would take me and another student to our homes. Mrs. Dowdy was a high school teacher who taught children with special needs. It was during this time while I was waiting for my car ride home that I began to interact with children with special needs, such as Down syndrome and autism. As the semester progressed, I became closer to each of the children I interacted with and discovered that I enjoyed talking to and helping these kids. It was this experience that sparked my interest in working with special needs children in the future.

I was fortunate enough to become best friends with a student named Dana Byars during my high school years. We both played varsity tennis and wanted to become physicians. As our friendship grew stronger, we both were accepted to the South Carolina

Honors College. Although she was a year younger than I, Dana was always trying to serve the community through service activities and volunteering. We began talking one spring afternoon about our interest in working with special needs children and discovered that there were very few camps for children with special needs during the summer. Luckily, as it was summer after my freshman year of college and the summer before Dana began college, we realized we had enough time to create a special needs camp. As we thought about the idea of cofounding a special needs camp, we decided to investigate the possibility, and researched what was needed to begin our own special needs camp.

II. Reflection

In order to ascertain the requirements to begin a special needs camp, we contacted South Carolina Special Olympics. We discussed our vision and learned there was a lot that was required to start a brand new camp. Thus, our journey began as we started drafting medical release forms and creating a website. We decided to host the camp at the Country Club of Lexington as there were tennis courts, green golfing areas, and space to play games and set-up arts and crafts. I spoke with the director of tennis at the Country Club of Lexington who informed me that he would reserve the tennis courts and golfing areas during the times we requested for the camp's duration. Understanding that having a special needs child can create a huge financial stress on the parents, we decided that the camp would be made free of charge. In order to do this, I spoke with many companies and corporations to gain their support and donations to bring this camp to fruition.

Camp Chip and Love is a camp where participants are able to play tennis, golf, games, and make arts and crafts. We decided on the name of Camp Chip and Love for two reasons: First, the camp is hosted at the Country Club of Lexington which has the initials of CCL. Second, the camp incorporated tennis and golf into the activities that were completed. We took the word “love” from tennis, which means zero when keeping score. We also took the word “chip” from golf which is a golfing technique. We took these two words and created Camp Chip and Love.

After naming the camp, we created a proposed schedule. We decided to make a two-day camp that operated from eight to ten in the morning. Since it was summer, we did not want the campers becoming too hot and decided to split the camp into two days rather than risk overheating the campers because of summer’s heat. The proposed schedule started the camp at 8:00 am. During the first ten minutes, arrival and welcome chants, songs, and games would occur. At 8:10, campers would be moved to their first station of activities. Each camper would be assigned a station to start at each morning so that an even number of campers would be at each station. Each activity was planned to last twenty minutes. At 8:30, the whistle would be blown to signify a change in stations and each camper was moved to the next station. At 8:50, the whistle would be blown a second time to signal the end of station two. We envisioned having snack time after our second station. Since we decided to only have four stations in total, snack time would be best placed in the middle of the morning in order to give the campers a break from all the activities so they could rest and cool down. This snack time would begin at 8:50 and last until 9:00. Following snack time, stations three and four would take place from 9:00 until 9:20 and 9:20 to 9:50, respectively. We added an extra ten minutes into station four in case the camp

encountered some kind of delay that would set the activities behind schedule. Finally, from 9:50 to 10:00am, we had closing. During this time, we would ask the campers which final game they would like to play. Through the course of the last ten minutes, we would play the game of their choice to finish out the camp. The campers would then be released to their parents after the closing activity occurred.

The activities that were to be completed during the camp required us to make sure we had enough tennis racquets, child-size golf clubs, games, and arts and crafts materials in order for the camp to run smoothly. A budget was made by searching for the best prices online. Also included in the budget was how much the snacks and drinks, trophies and t-shirts for the campers would cost. Upon completion of our budget, we had an understanding of how much money we would have to raise from sponsors in order for the camp to take place. I was very fortunate to speak with certain companies who gladly donated money to our cause. As the monetary donations started pouring in, supplies were bought and stored for our first camp which would take place on a Friday and Saturday in June.

During this stage of planning, we also went into the community and spoke to different high schools and middle schools about our camp. Afterwards, we left pamphlets for the class to take home to their parents in order to have participants join. Furthermore, we e-mailed different special needs teachers at different schools and told them about the camp. Initially, we wanted to host a special needs camp for children between the ages of seven and seventeen. We hoped that if our camp succeeded, we could increase our age range and allow more people to sign up. During the first year of the camp, we had a maximum camper

limit set at twenty campers. This allowed us to make sure the camp ran smoothly and effectively.

In order to make it easier for campers to sign up, we created a website so that campers could register online. They could also print off a medical release form to fill out and bring with them to the first day of the camp. We then realized we would need someone at the camp to take care of the campers in case they became ill, or hurt themselves during the camp. In order to satisfy this requirement, we recruited two nurses to be available at the camp should anything happen. The nurses reviewed each camper's medical history and was knowledgeable of proper protocol for taking care of injuries.

After securing nurses who would be at the camp should anything unexpected happen, I then put my focus on searching for volunteers to help out during the camp. We e-mailed and messaged friends requesting their help as volunteers. Our goal was to find enough volunteers so that we would have fifty percent more volunteers than campers. Having enough volunteers offer their time allowed us to give each camper their own volunteer that would walk with them from station to station and help them if needed. Once we had enough volunteers, I was then able to start the process of ordering t-shirts and trophies. We decided to make the t-shirts yellow for campers and navy blue for the volunteers. This made it easy to distinguish between the campers and volunteers when necessary. As t-shirt requests were put in, I started ordering trophies which the campers would receive at the end of the camp.

As June came steadily closer, Dana and I became very excited that the camp was going to occur. Registration was completed, supplies had been bought, and volunteers were ready to start. We began creating name tags for all of the volunteers and campers to wear on their

t-shirts. Also, we created a spreadsheet which displayed which volunteer would be with which camper.

After the spreadsheets had been made, and tasks had been assigned, an informal review session at the country club for all of the volunteers was given so that they could receive their t-shirt and know what to do when the day arrived to begin the camp. We created a handout for each volunteer on the overview of the camp and discussed the ultimate goals of each station. We told the volunteers which camper they were being assigned to and talked about which station they should take their camper to when we blew a whistle (which would signify a change in stations). Volunteers had also been allowed to lead a station and we told everyone which volunteers would be leading each station. For tennis, the leader was in charge of showing campers how to hold a tennis racquet, if necessary, and explaining the games that would be played. Furthermore, the leader would also talk about certain drills that would be performed if the camper was advanced in their tennis ability.

The leader in charge of golf would be in charge of showing campers how to hold a golf club and the objective of each golfing game. Arts and crafts leaders would know which craft would be performed by the campers that day, and would show the campers how to use all of the crafting materials. We decided to make pet rocks the first day and masks the second day. Finally, the leaders of the games station would explain the rules of whichever game was being played that day. The first day included bocce ball and the second day included freeze tag and hula hooping. Finally, we finished our necessary requirements for the camp to begin and now had to wait for the day to arrive.

Early Friday morning, I awoke with a lot of enthusiasm and nervousness. I was hoping that our months of planning and preparing were going to help our camp succeed. As I arrived at The Country Club of Lexington that morning, I began putting out signs which would direct campers to the tennis courts. We told the volunteers to be at the country club at 7:30 that morning in order to be there when the campers started arriving. This way, we could introduce the campers to their volunteer who would be with them throughout the camp. After placing the signs, we put out all the equipment needed at each station and set-up an entry table in front of the tennis courts. As the campers arrived, they were given a t-shirt and name tag to wear. We took the medical release form from the parents and placed it in a binder which we handed to the nurse. Finally, the clock struck 8:10 am and the campers and volunteers began heading off to their first station of activities.

As the sunlight beamed through the canopy of trees surrounding the tennis courts, I realized how fortunate we were to host the camp on such a beautiful day. We had prepared to do other activities and games inside the clubhouse if it had been raining, but our luck held out and the backup plan was not needed. So far, the camp had gone well and all the campers had arrived on time. I decided to go to the golf station to check on the campers and see how the golf leader was doing. During this activity, the campers were given child-sized plastic golf clubs and were positioned on the putting green to hit the golf balls through different obstacles. This activity is closely related to a game called putt-putt. First, the golf leader showed the campers how to hold the golf club. He then showed them the obstacle course that was made on the green and had the campers swing their club one at a time through each obstacle. Each camper was given a different colored golf ball so that they knew which ball was theirs when it came time to hit again. While talking with some of the

campers, I learned that most of them had never held a golf club before and were excited to try something new. I was glad that they were able to venture outside of their daily norms and learn new things.

As 8:30am rolled around, I blew the whistle which signified the end of the first activity and that it was time to move to the second station. I decided to join an activity station this round to see how the volunteers and leaders were doing. As I walked over to the arts and crafts station, I heard one camper yell in excitement about making his own pet rock. This eight-year-old boy, named John, had Autism. According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke,

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a range of complex neurodevelopment disorders, characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior. Autistic disorder, sometimes called autism or classical ASD, is the most severe form of ASD, while other conditions along the spectrum include a milder form known as Asperger syndrome, and childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (usually referred to as PDD-NOS). Although ASD varies significantly in character and severity, it occurs in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups and affects every age group. Experts estimate that 1 out of 88 children age 8 will have an ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, March 30, 2012). Males are four times more likely to have an ASD than females” (Autism Fact).

Usually, yelling in excitement is not a common trait for people with Autism. John allowed me to see that there are always exceptions to the rule when it comes to levels of expression for disorders. Other than his outburst at making pet rocks, John was usually quiet and did tasks with, what seemed to be, complete apathy. I was very happy when I heard John get excited about making pet rocks because it allowed him to do something he wanted to do and show his excitement.

Many times, people with special needs have a hard time carrying on conversation with other people, and even kids their own age. This camp allowed people from the ages of seven to seventeen to come together and interact with one another. During arts and crafts time, different campers were offering advice on other's works of art as well as discussing the activities they had done so far. As John was putting eyes on his pet rock, a truck raced by the country club. John immediately said "That was an F-150 going sixty-five miles per hour". I came to learn that John was very knowledgeable about trucks. He could distinguish between any sort of make and model that passed by the country club. I was very shocked because the only thing I had heard him say prior to the truck's appearance was how happy he was to make a pet rock. I was fascinated with how much John knew about trucks and couldn't believe the amount of information he knew at the young age of eight. As we continued to watch the road while finishing the pet rocks, I asked John to name other trucks that passed by. Without even pausing to think, he correctly identified each and every truck as it sped by. He even stated how fast they were going, but I was unable to track how close he was in his estimation. I later came to find out that John's dad is a police officer who started talking with him about trucks and cars when he was very young. Sometimes, people with autism are very smart in certain areas that surpass the average person's

knowledge of that specific area. I was excited that I got to witness John's passion as he taught me about trucks, and all of the different types of engines and mechanical features. He stated that one day he would be able to drive on his own and that it would be the happiest moment of his life when he finally received his driver's license.

John had a twin brother named Jackson. Jackson displayed different traits of expression than John and had Asperger syndrome. Whereas John was quiet and introverted most of the time, Jackson loved talking to people and making new friends. Whenever a new activity was about to begin, Jackson would be the first person to shout in excitement and talk about how much fun he was having. His excitement and optimism was contagious and even affected the volunteers and other camper's moods. As Jackson continued to shout and show his excitement, the volunteers and other campers would also jump up and down and start running to the next activity when the whistle was blown.

Finally, the end of station 2 arrived as the clock struck 8:50. I blew my whistle and shouted "snack time!". All of the campers came from the golfing green, tennis courts, and grass and returned back to where they checked in to receive their snacks and drinks. We had three different options of drinks and food for participants to choose from so that everyone would be happy. In the rest area, there were many trees and benches that allowed campers and volunteers an area of shade from the sun and a place to sit and relax. Volunteers and campers joined together and talked with each other about the day's activities and what their favorite activity was so far. During this time, I made sure to speak with the volunteers and ask them how everything was progressing and made sure they knew which station they were going to after snack time. Fortunately, the volunteers were getting along with the campers they were stationed with quite nicely and no one had any

complaints or problems. As snack time was coming to a close, I then went around and talked with some of the campers, and asked them how their day was going. Most of them were enthusiastic, and some wanted to start playing again immediately! Finally, snack time ended and I blew the whistle for the start of the third activity.

This time, I went to the tennis courts to see how the leader was doing with the campers. During this station, the tennis leader was feeding balls to the campers and showing them how to hold their racquets. Two of the members had played in a Special Olympics tennis tournament before, and, therefore, knew what they were doing. Because of this, we had another volunteer take these two campers to the connecting tennis court and play points. This way, the beginner and advanced campers were each able to play at their own level.

Unfortunately, during this station, one of our campers, Erin, hit herself with her racquet. As the little girl started crying, I rushed over to her to see how badly she had injured herself. Erin had Down syndrome and would not talk to anyone. The nurse came over and examined the girl. She then put hydrogen peroxide and a Band-Aid on her scratched head. Luckily, the tennis racquet had only grazed the child. Because Erin had Down syndrome, she would normally sit down and not talk to anyone if anything happened to her. I was informed of this information prior to the camp taking place. As I saw Erin sit down on the side of the tennis court, I decided to sit by her while the camp continued on. I spoke to her and reassured her that everything was going to be alright and she would be fine. Finally, I decided to tell her a story about one of my own injuries when I was playing tennis. I told her my entire body started cramping because of dehydration, and jokingly acted out what I looked like with full body cramps. Fortunately, the child laughed and told me I looked funny. She then smiled and decided that she would play again. I was very

excited at this turn of events because her parents specifically said that she would not do anything for a few hours if something happened to her. As she returned to the court, I noticed that she was a little apprehensive at first. Since she was a beginner, I decided to throw her balls from the same side of the court in hopes that this would be easier for her to do. As we continued to do this, her hand-eye coordination increased and she finally hit her first ball over the net. She started jumping up and down because she was so excited! Erin said she was having a lot of fun with this drill because it was a lot easier and asked if we could continue. We did this drill until five minutes before the next change of stations at 9:20.

During the last 5 minutes of the tennis station, we played a group game called doghouse. All of the campers stood in line behind the service line and hit the thrown ball over the net. If they were unable to do so, they dropped their racquets and ran to the other side to try and catch other balls that people would hit over the net. The balls that we used were children's tennis balls and were very soft and bigger than your average tennis ball. The game was a success and all the campers had a great time playing. Just as a camper finally won the game, my watch started beeping signaling that the station had ended, and it was time for the last rotation. I blew my whistle and told everyone to move to their final activity of the day.

For the final activity, I decided to go to the games section. During this activity, campers played a game called bocce ball. We had four different sets in case we needed to modify the rules. This game required each camper to get a specific colored ball and throw it closest to the original thrown ball. In many cases, people with special needs have a hard time discerning the difference between using too much force and not enough. This game

allowed the campers to practice their motor control by throwing the ball as close as they could to the center white ball. It took some time for campers to understand that they could not throw their ball as hard as they could, but as the game progressed, the children became better at figuring out how hard to throw the ball, and place it where they wanted. It made me very happy to see the camper's face light up with joy and excitement when they hit the white ball. This was a task that they had previously been unable to do and after some practice, they were able to accomplish the task. As the final station came to a close at 9:50am, I noticed that the campers were smiling but starting to get tired from all of the fun activities. I blew the whistle and everyone met in the middle of the grassy area. I asked the campers to identify their favorite activity and gave them the options of playing it together or start cooling down for their parent's arrival. The participants stated that they had a lot of fun playing doghouse, and they would like to play a game with the entire group. With yells of excitement from all the kids, the campers and the volunteers lined up in a long line on the tennis court and started a game of doghouse. It was nice to see the bond that the campers and their volunteers had already formed. Parents began arriving during this game and watched their children hit the tennis ball. Many were very surprised to see how good their child had become at hitting the ball. The drills we had performed with the campers worked on their hand-eye coordination, and taught them to wait for the ball to come to them before swinging. Finally, a winner was declared and everyone departed with their parents. The first day of camp had been a success, and I was ready for the next day to arrive.

Saturday morning came and the camp started the same way it had on Friday. Campers came wearing their yellow t-shirts and immediately went to their volunteers who had on their blue t-shirts. Many of the children came up to me and expressed how much fun they

had the previous day. Right as Jackson and John were walking up to the check-in desk, a truck rode by. Sure enough, John yelled that it was a Ford Ranger and it was going 55 miles per hour. I told John he was right again, still amazed at how knowledgeable he was regarding trucks. As our final campers arrived, everyone was laughing and having a great time with the other campers and volunteers. This morning was different than the first because everyone knew each other and all of the previous social barriers had been broken. At 8:10 am, I blew my whistle to signal the start of day two.

Most of the activities in day two were the same as in day one, with the exceptions of games and arts and crafts. During station two, I decided to sit in on the arts and crafts activity and see how the campers were enjoying it. This day's arts and crafts activity was creating masks. We had crafting eyes, tubing, string, paint, and clay to decorate the camper's masks. The participants were enjoying themselves and some made their masks very comical by adding bigger than normal ears or eyes. Ultimately, the masks were a success with the children, and many were excited to take them home and save them. One child even said that he was going to keep his mask until Halloween. He made his mask scary by drawing sharp teeth. As the children finished their activity, we wrote their names on the back of the mask and saved them for the end of the day for the campers to take home.

During station four, I decided to participate in the games section. The games for the second day included freeze tag and hula hooping. Most of the kids wanted to compete and figure out who could hula hoop the longest. Volunteers also participated and overall, the children had a great time and laughed a lot. Following hula hooping, we played freeze tag within certain boundary lines. This activity made the children exercise and was a success according to the campers. Some of the campers wanted to keep playing instead of changing

stations after the whistle blew. Once again, as the fourth activity finished, the campers voted to play doghouse with everyone. Overall, this was the campers' favorite game and has been implemented in all of the future camps.

As parents started arriving at 10:00 am to pick up their children, we had them congregate with the children and volunteers under the trees by the check-in area. Prior to the camp's start, we had trophies made for each child with the words "Camp Chip and Love" engraved on them. Since this was the last day of camp, we had an awards ceremony for each participant. Along with the trophies, were printed out certificates that had the camper's name and reason for the award. All of the campers were so excited when they received their trophy and certificate. One display of excitement was made by Jackson who was awarded most enthusiastic. He went around and gave everyone a hug or handshake after he received his award.

Finally, after awards were completed, we had cupcakes to celebrate the end of the camp. We didn't realize how close we had become with each of the campers until they were leaving. All of the participants told us how much fun they had and that they definitely wanted to come the following year. Ultimately, the camp was a huge success and I am grateful for the opportunity to continue hosting it. It will be in its fourth year this upcoming year and will include many of the original campers along with new ones that we will recruit from surrounding schools.

III. Types of Disorders

Through this experience I have met children with different disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome and other conditions. Because of this camp, I have researched these different disorders which I have seen firsthand. The main three that were seen at Camp Chip and Love were Down syndrome, autism, and Asperger syndrome.

As I reflect on my time with John, I realize that he fit many of the symptoms that are associated with people who are diagnosed with autism. According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms are seen in social skills, language, and behavior. Symptoms associated with social skills include “failure to respond to his or her name, has poor eye contact, appears not to hear you at times, resists cuddling and holding, appears unaware of others' feelings, seems to prefer playing alone — retreats into his or her own world, and doesn't ask for help or request things”(Autism). Symptoms associated with language include “not speaking or having delayed speech, loses previously acquired ability to say words or sentences, doesn't make eye contact when making requests, speaks with an abnormal tone or rhythm — may use a singsong voice or robot-like speech, can't start a conversation or keep one going, may repeat words or phrases verbatim, but doesn't understand how to use them, and doesn't appear to understand simple questions or directions” (Autism). Symptoms associated with behavior include “performing repetitive movements, such as rocking, spinning, or hand-flapping, develops specific routines or rituals and becomes disturbed at the slightest change, moves constantly, may be fascinated by details of an object, such as the spinning wheels of a toy car, but doesn't understand the ‘big picture’ of the subject, may be unusually sensitive to light, sound and touch, and yet oblivious to pain, does not engage in imitative or make-believe play may have odd food preferences, such as eating only a few foods or craving items that are not food, such as chalk or dirt, and may perform activities

that could cause self-harm, such as head banging”(Autism). Currently, there is no treatment or medication for people with autism. Certain therapies like behavior and communication therapies are available which can help autistic children’s functioning abilities. I realized that John’s failure to make eye contact multiple times and constantly discussing trucks and its components were symptoms of autism. One thing I learned about autism is that each case is unique. Communication is vital in activities involving people with autism. One type of autism spectrum disorder is called Asperger syndrome.

John’s brother, Jackson, had Asperger syndrome. This is an autism spectrum disorder in which the affected children and adults have a higher functioning ability. According to Autism Speaks, which is the world's leading autism science and advocacy organization, people with Asperger syndrome do not have as significant a cognitive and social delay in development like in autism. Symptoms include “limited or inappropriate social interactions, ‘robotic’ or repetitive speech, challenges with nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expression, etc.) coupled with average to above average verbal skills, tendency to discuss self rather than others, inability to understand social/emotional issues or nonliteral phrases, lack of eye contact or reciprocal conversation, obsession with specific, often unusual, topics, one-sided conversations, awkward movements and/or mannerisms”(Asperger). Jackson exemplified some of these symptoms such as above average verbal skills when he was constantly expressing his happiness at each activity. Also, he consistently didn’t respond to certain volunteers when they tried to discuss with him other topics due to his excitement about whatever was currently happening. While there are similarities between autism and Asperger syndrome, it is important to know the difference in order to better understand and communicate with each individual.

The third main disorder that was seen at Camp Chip and Love was Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a chromosomal condition which affects chromosome 21. Also called trisomy 21, most cases of Down syndrome include each cell having three copies of chromosome 21. According to the National Institute of Health, rarely, “Down syndrome can occur when part of chromosome 21 becomes attached to another chromosome during the formation of the zygote. In this instance, affected people would have two copies of chromosome 21 and an extra portion of chromosome 21 attached to another chromosome which would result in three copies of genetic material from chromosome 21” (What). Symptoms of Down syndrome include “decreased or poor muscle tone, short neck, with excess skin at the back of the neck, flattened facial profile and nose, small head, ears, and mouth, upward slanting eyes, often with a skin fold that comes out from the upper eyelid and covers the inner corner of the eye, white spots on the colored part of the eye (called Brushfield spots), wide, short hands with short fingers, a single, deep, crease across the palm of the hand, and a deep groove between the first and second toes”(What).

People with Down syndrome are usually slower to develop physically. Camp Chip and Love allowed me to interact with a girl named Erin. Erin had Down syndrome and displayed the flattened facial profile and short neck. She also had impulsive behavior and delayed language and speech development which are common intellectual and developmental symptoms. Currently, there is no treatment for Down syndrome but there are educational therapies and programs, called early intervention programs, which help increase a child’s functioning capacity.

IV. Conclusion

Ultimately, being involved with this camp has taught me the extent to which children with special needs have fun and fulfilling lives. The camp offered them opportunities to build social skills and created an environment where they would succeed. It humbled me and instilled in me a sense of compassion and love for individuals with delayed cognitive skills and physical limitations. I was inspired to unconditionally help others when I observed the simple joy that the campers experienced when socializing and completing tasks. Through this camp, I have learned about different types of disorders and how to effectively handle children who have special needs. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to cofound Camp Chip and Love and am excited for the fourth consecutive camp this upcoming summer.

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