

Malarie Allen: A lesson in unconditional love

By Malarie Allen | mallen@sandmountainreporter.com | Posted: Wednesday, April 10, 2013 3:27 pm

I met some wonderful members of our community last month while writing a series on Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March.

Unfortunately, sometimes it's easy to forget how human people are. I first had the pleasure of meeting Kim Smith and her fun-loving, tenderhearted, friendly daughter Jessica. Unfortunately, like with so many developmentally disabled individuals, Jessica's loving ways are not always reciprocated by those she meets in public.

"That's hard, the staring and not understand how they're God's creatures too," Smith said. "They want to make fun of her and point and ridicule, and that's hurtful. They act like maybe she's contagious if they were to get too close to them or touch them.

"Now don't get me wrong. There are some awesome people out there too that are just loving and accepting, but the ones that don't know, they don't need to judge.

"It's hard when parents and workers take Jessica out and Jessica says hey and somebody just looks at her funny. That's hurtful, but she's just that outgoing person and she doesn't meet a stranger. She just has a forgiving heart. She's just got that unconditional love."

So many of the developmentally disabled individuals I have met in my lifetime share a similar uninhibited love and concern for everyone they meet. I sometimes wonder if that itself is a key reason others shy away from them. Perhaps we should be more free to love. As Scharlene Chamblee, owner of GSC Care group homes, said, we often spend our lives focused on petty matters, holding grudges and refusing to forgive.

"We get our priorities mixed up," she said. "They take things at face value, and it's almost a blessing. If we could all be that way, we might find a lot more peace."

Chamblee and others who work with the developmentally disabled teach their clients the same lessons we all must learn.

"We try to work the same principals everybody used to be raised under — manners, politeness, respect and all that," she said. "And to get respect, you have to learn to give it."

On that note, I want to express the high amount of respect I have for the agencies and individuals that provide the care, assistance and learning opportunities for those with developmental disabilities. If you know someone with a developmental disability, contact the Marshall-Jackson 310 Agency or the Alabama Department of Mental Health and take time to search for the right organization to fit your loved ones needs. Good communication in particular is important. For example, Mary Horton was pleased to tell me the Arc constantly communicates with her about the needs of her daughter, Tynese.

Arc staff make note of physical requirements, religious preferences and provide other assistance when they can.

“(Tynese) doesn’t want to be anywhere else,” Horton said. “She doesn’t like it when she has to miss the Arc.”

Special thanks to Chamblee, Kitchens, Marshall-Jackson 310 Agency Director Jim Dobbs, those in public school special education programs and all others who care for, work with and advocate for the developmentally disabled members of our society.

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