

As a follow-up to our planning session, a note went to parents commending their child for supporting a student in their class. We had an ulterior motive for sending the note. We anticipated some resistance from parents, given Sue's history within the community. Moreover, we wanted to communicate that this was something which the school valued and which was important as part of the regular curriculum. In the note, parents were asked that if they had any concerns about their child's participation they should contact the school. Not one parent phoned to indicate that they had any concerns.

Later in the year, I asked a few students how their parents felt about them helping Sue when it was known that she could hurt others. They told me that their parents told them "to be careful" and "to just watch out."

As part of our support to the students we felt it important to give them an opportunity to discuss on a routine basis how things were going. We usually met in the cafeteria at lunch-time for these discussions and Sue usually joined us. The talk never focused on Sue unless the students were asked direct questions about how things were going. Right from the first meeting we could see that it was intuitive for the students to include Sue but it required leadership on our part to get it started.

Advocacy and Growth Among the Students

As groups usually do, this one took on a personality of its own over the weeks. One of the interesting developments was the emergence of leaders. Kerri Ann, even at her young age, made astute observations about Sue's program and seemed to instigate many positive changes. For example, Kerri noted that the aide or teachers didn't seem to be giving Sue enough independence. She said that as Sue's support group gained confidence they wanted to take more responsibility for Sue during certain classes such as gym, library or free time. They wanted to play with Sue alone in the school yard, or go to the library and read to her and see if she would reciprocate. She asked why Sue