

Changes in Sue's Life

Sue's peers were not the only ones to change over the year. Sue's life changed as well. She went from being alone to having a group of peers who cared about what she was doing every day and who actively participated in making her life better. Sue went from living without many meaningful social interactions to being involved in active friendships.

One student told a story about Sue sharing something she enjoyed. Sue had gone over to this particular student, put her arm around her, and directed her over to where she was listening to some music. The student said, "At the first of the year she did not want me around her. Now she actually enjoys seeing me." Another student spoke of the changes in Sue. "She has calmed down. I knew her when she was in kindergarten. She has now learned how to treat other people."

At the same time, there were difficulties over the year. Kevin spoke of Sue coming over to him and hitting him in the face. When we sat and talked about the incident, he shrugged and said, "I was at the wrong place at the wrong time." I had expected this experience to frighten him away but it didn't seem to deter him from resolving to be with Sue. We learned later from his parents that because of Kevin's acceptance of Sue they did not contact the school about the incident. Previously, this incident would have called into question whether or not Sue would have been allowed to stay in the school. Having a peer advocate for her changed the parent's perception of the seriousness of the incident. In turn, the parents did not demand that the school mediate the situation. The bonds of friendship brought out Sue's positive attributes which made the student want to mediate on her behalf. If she was identified only as a hitter or a kicker the student may have wanted the school to deal with the behaviour.

We came to realize that before the students became involved, Sue's behaviour would have resulted in students staying away from her while adults intervened. It became obvious that peers, by becoming involved, looked past her