

The Challenger

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WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Jenifer Vick

All of us have a desire to be respected, to have our voices heard, and make decisions for ourselves. The Arc provides a platform in which people with disabilities can achieve these goals. Voices Unlimited is a self-advocacy group for people 18 years of age and older. It has its own board of directors and meets on a monthly basis to share ideas, build friendships, learn about services in the community, and participate in advocacy activities.

“Voices Unlimited is a wonderful advocacy group,” replies Jeff when asked what he likes about the group. “It is filled with different individuals who want to understand the rights that are a part of their life. It’s an incredible group of individuals.”

There are people in our community who don’t know someone with a disability. Jeff feels that those people’s lives could be enhanced if they just made an effort to meet someone new. “People with special needs have gifts,” he says. “Regular people may never understand or



see all of those gifts. They would see those gifts if they would just take the time. With people like us, good things can happen.”

Jeff is an articulate, self-aware, and passionate young man. He knows what he

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likes and what inspires him. His favorite quote is from Notre Dame’s former head football coach Knute Rockne, “That on or off the field, it is faith that makes the difference, it is faith that makes things happen.” These words are important to Jeff. He said, “I use these words in my life. This is how I got here.”

In addition to his family, friends, and job at Goodwill Industries, Jeff is passionate about The Arc of East Central Iowa and Voices Unlimited. “The Arc is a wonderful organization,” said Jeff. “They give their time and talent to those who need it more. When I meet people, I tell them about Voices Unlimited. I say, ‘Don’t be afraid to try it. It is a genuine opportunity. You can make a difference, WE can make a difference.’”

Jeff believes that there may be some who think he doesn’t know what he wants for his future, but he seemed to have a

Self Advocacy - A New Start in a New Year

To start out the new year – 2007, The Challenger team decided to focus on the topic of self advocacy and self determination. What a great way to start off by talking about the power of having a voice.

Having a voice means having a say. What an empowering thought! It was not that long ago that people with developmental disabilities such as mental retardation had absolutely NO voice. Someone else made all their decisions. Imagine being told by someone else what you will wear; where you are going, whether you want to or not; where you live or work; how to plan your day’s activities, all without asking your opinion.

What a long way we have come. Read and enjoy.

Delaine Petersen
Executive Director

clear idea the day I spoke with him. “Once some of my other responsibilities are met, I would possibly like to get married to my girlfriend,” he said of plans for the future. “I know I will have a good deal of success in my career and that I have a wonderful life ahead.”

For more information regarding Voices Unlimited please contact Stephanie Boss at 319-365-0487 x1043.