

## I Have a Thank-You Card

by Claire Sloan, Boost Camp volunteer, age 14

I have a thank-you card: a sheet of light blue construction paper carefully folded in half, with block letters drawn on the front, and tiny fingerprints pressed on the inside. The fingerprints have little smiling faces drawn onto them, each one reminding me of the fun-loving children they represent. Printed next to each of the unique fingerprints are the names of the wonderful, hard-working children whom I have been truly blessed to know. These are the children who brightened my every day this past summer, and brought me knowledge I won't ever forget.

My thank-you card is pinned to a corkboard hanging on the painted yellow wall in my room. Surrounding it are pictures of the children whose fingerprints are stamped on that light blue card. The card is small, yet always seems to stand out from all the clutter of papers and cartoon strips pinned near it on the board. The big boxy letters on the front of the card that read "Thank You!" seem to come alive, breathing out every smile and laugh, and pumping the blood of hope and happiness through every black Sharpie pen outline.

These children, full of energy and perseverance, have cerebral palsy, a condition that makes it difficult for them to control their movements. Most of them are in wheelchairs. This summer I was a volunteer for a camp they attended which taught them conductive education, a form of physical therapy.

Each kid was different. Some spoke in sign language, while others interacted emotionally: a smile, a cry or a laugh were all that some of them could manage. Some were 2 and 3 year olds, while others were 8 and 9. Despite their differences, they all had one thing in common, and that was their determination. They worked as hard as they could to make their best effort at everything. After seeing how hard they worked and pushed themselves to do their best, my only wish is that other people could see how amazing and lovable these children are.

Through the course of my experiences, not only with these children, but with people I have met at my school, my hometown, and while traveling, I have noticed how many people in our society often "judge a book by its cover". Since the days when humans first began to interact, there have always been groups of people who have a strong dislike or discomfort around other, "different", types of people. Differences make people unsure; some people don't know what to do, how to act, or what to expect around people that aren't like themselves. This happens with every type of person in every civilization. People are discriminated against because of the color of their skin, the religion they practice, who they love, the way they look...even the way they move. The sad part is, a lot of this discomfort is merely confusion that could be resolved.

Every day, people miss out on the perfect chance to make a new friend, co-worker, or colleague, just because of their differences. When I talk to a person who speaks little English and has trouble saying a few words correctly, I don't complain and roll my eyes, I encourage them to keep going, because I respect how hard they work at it to make it sound just right. The kids I worked with are the sweetest people, and not everyone gets to see that because they are too scared to talk to somebody "different". When I see a person in a wheelchair I no longer pity them for what they can't do. I smile at them for having the courage to deal with life's hard situations.

I go to bed at night thinking of all these global issues, and then I realize that amidst all the sadness, I have my thank-you card. A thank-you card that hangs just near my bed, glowing in the darkness, and diminishing my fears...a constant reminder that hope still lingers in even the darkest of places. Old problems are already being solved, every second of the day, even as I sleep. I have a thank-you card-- a card from children who needed and received a little extra boost in life. These children are thanking me for helping them and making life a little easier for them. And as I look at the thank-you card, beyond the blue construction paper, beyond the fingerprints, I realize that in my heart, I owe them a big thank-you. A thank-you for showing me that even in the worst situations everything can turn out OK. All it takes is a little help and a lot of love.