



2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Essay, & Multimedia Contest

It only takes one voice to create big changes. Voices are powerful. Voices are intelligent. Voices are emotional. But most importantly, your voice is your weapon. While finding one's voice is not always a simple task, the outcome of using our voices is always very beneficial. Three years ago, I was fortunate enough to have the courage to speak out against something that truly matters. As a freshman in high school, I decided to join a nonprofit organization known as Friendship Circle. I committed to volunteering my time every Sunday to working with special needs kids. At Friendship Circle, every volunteer is paired with a special needs child to help them with basic activities like movement, art, and sensory activities. When I joined Friendship Circle, I had little experience working with special needs kids. But little did I know the tremendous impact it would have on my life. Not only do I feel like I am impacting my special friend's life, but I also feel that my special friend is impacting my life. My special friend is nonverbal which makes it very hard for her to communicate her feelings. Additionally, this makes it hard for my special friend to make other friends. Constantly at Friendship Circle, other special needs children deride my special friend. For example, a young boy wouldn't stop pulling my friend's hair. I knew that this hurt my friend, but she couldn't speak for herself. At Friendship Circle, every kid is looked at for their abilities, not for their disabilities. Therefore, I knew that I had to speak up to stop the young boy from hurting my special friend. First, I politely told the kid to keep his hands to himself. After he continuously kept doing this, I pulled him aside to talk to him about how my special friend has trouble sharing her feelings and explained that this hurt her. As a result of my voice, the young boy stopped pulling my friend's hair. Although this is just a small example of using my voice as my weapon, it has allowed others to see how they should treat their friends. Another example of how I used my voice was when I was notified by the owner of Friendship Circle that a new volunteer opportunity had opened up. This opportunity included a chance to help create an augmentative alternative communication (AAC) device for children with autism. This device is used to supplement speech for children who struggle with talking. The AAC includes symbols, images, letters, and numbers to help children with speech impairment share their thoughts and feelings. After seeing my special friend struggle with speech, I immediately decided to help create this device. My task was to read off a large list of commonly used words. This took several days because my voice had to be loud, confident, and clear. However, after completing this task, my voice had been linked to an AAC device and given to a special friend. As a result, my special friend is able to use my voice to speak for herself. This has not only allowed my special friend to communicate with her friends and family, but also to stand up for herself when she is treated unfairly. By using my voice, I am enabling someone else to be able to use their voice. Overall, everybody's voice is unique, important, and can make change in this world.

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