



2015 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Writing & Multimedia Contest

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Maumee Valley Country Day School
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From the time I was in the second grade I have been fighting to help eliminate a common birth defect that afflicts millions of children throughout the world: cleft lip and palate. It is a birth defect caused by a genetic mutation that, fortunately, I do not have, nor have I ever personally know somebody who has had it. It is not a disease that spreads throughout a community, but something that happens when the child is forming in the womb. I have a dream that one day in my lifetime that the world will be rid of this, so that kids in the near future never have to experience the suffering caused by this. A child born with a cleft lip or palate does not just have to deal with the medical complications, but also the social horrors of being different. Sometimes, in certain countries, when parents see their child is born with a cleft, they're named a curse word. Kids with clefts suffer through more than just medical symptoms, but also the social horrors. Kids born with clefts have difficulty getting into a school and making friends. Some communities exclude kids with clefts. This needs to be fixed, and I have a dream to do it.

I have worked to raise money to pay for corrective surgeries for children afflicted with a cleft. Over the past six years, with the support of others, I have raised the money to pay for cleft surgeries for 25 children. I raised the money for this a variety of ways, all of which involved communicating the message about clefts to others and providing people a way to personally help. I have a dream to change the lives of the 7,000 children born each year (smiletrain.org) with a cleft. Before I graduate from college, I want to go into communities that have children afflicted with clefts and work with community members to improve the lives of those children. Then, by the time I'm forty, I dream of a planet completely rid of the suffering caused by cleft lips and palates.

Until I am old enough to go into countries where clefts are a common problem to create a better life for kids with clefts, I want to continue to raise funds for surgeries to repair clefts by getting the word out to people about the condition and promote ways that people can personally and easily help. My past success in fund raising to make the dream come true is because I communicated to people about the problem verbally and with educational materials and I marketed ways that people can donate.

In the beginning, I grew vegetables in my garden and sold them door-to-door out of my wagon. I sold lemonade and told customers that their money would go to the Smile Train to help pay for surgeries and I provided brochures about clefts and Smile Train. It took a whole summer to raise the money for one surgery (smiletrain.org). Later, in the year, my teacher let me tell my classmates about cleft palates and then I had my entire second grade class participating in three days of festivities, including pajama day and crazy hat day that raised money for Smile Train. I communicated the message at school with posters and I did a TV interview where I told people watching about clefts and how they can help. I had a birthday party with my baseball team and instead of asking for presents, I communicated in the invitation about clefts and asked for donations to the Smile Train charity instead of presents (which had been where all of my contribution had gone to).

In third grade, I held a golf tournament and continued it for another two years to benefit Smile Train. To communicate my dream of ridding the world of cleft palates, I showed videos on the subject and passed out literature at the golf tournament and told the golfers what the funds would be used for. At that point, communicating my dream to others and promoting ways they can help, it brought the number of surgeries that I raised the money for to 25. I can still do more through the power of communication.

The high school I'll be going to have an experiential program called Winterim. I want to take one of those opportunities to go to the places where clefts happen and changes people's perspective towards children with clefts through communication. I want to go into the real world and change the lives of kids with clefts, not just by raising funds for repair surgeries, but I dream of the day when we figure out how to prevent clefts altogether. Cleft lips and palates are caused by a genetic mutation. I see myself going to college and getting advanced degrees in genetics, microbiology, eugenics, or nanotechnology. I dream of figuring out how to modify our genome so that children are no longer born with clefts. I know this will not be possible without well-funded research and the effort of many people combined. Communicating to others about clefts will be part of the path to realizing my dream of eliminating clefts.

"I Have A Dream"

