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Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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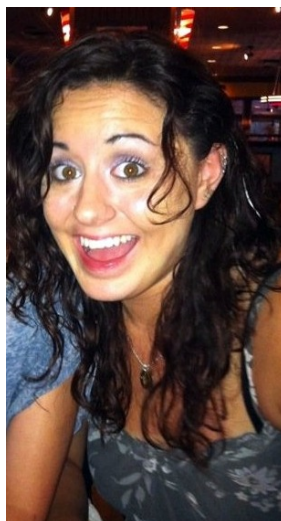


Kaitlynn Cornell

My Biography: What I am Bringing to AHRC NYC

I'm Kaitlynn Cornell (or Kait if you prefer), and I am a transfer student at Pace University, and it is unclear at this point as to whether I am an 'upper' sophomore or junior. My major is currently psychology, but I am auditioning for the BFA/BA Acting program for the spring semester. Before Pace, I attended SUNY Ulster County Community College, where I received my A.A in Theatre Arts. Acting has been my passion since I was five years old, and I genuinely can not see myself doing anything else. Along with my obsessive involvement in theatre, I also volunteered for Breast Cancer Options, an organization fighting against breast cancer. I have also performed in several benefits, raising money for various causes such as HIV/Aids prevention to rebuilding a women's shelter in Kingston NY. After hurricane irene, several others and myself drove up to Margaretville (a town that was nearly completely destroyed) and aided the townspeople by cleaning up the wreckage, repairing homes, and providing those who completely lost their homes with a place to stay. I very much enjoy helping people. I also have experience with people with autism. My cousin is on the higher scale of autism. He is the sweetest, most brilliant person I know, but not everyone sees this when they look at him. I hope to use my experiences with my cousin and my theatre background when working with those of AHRC NYC

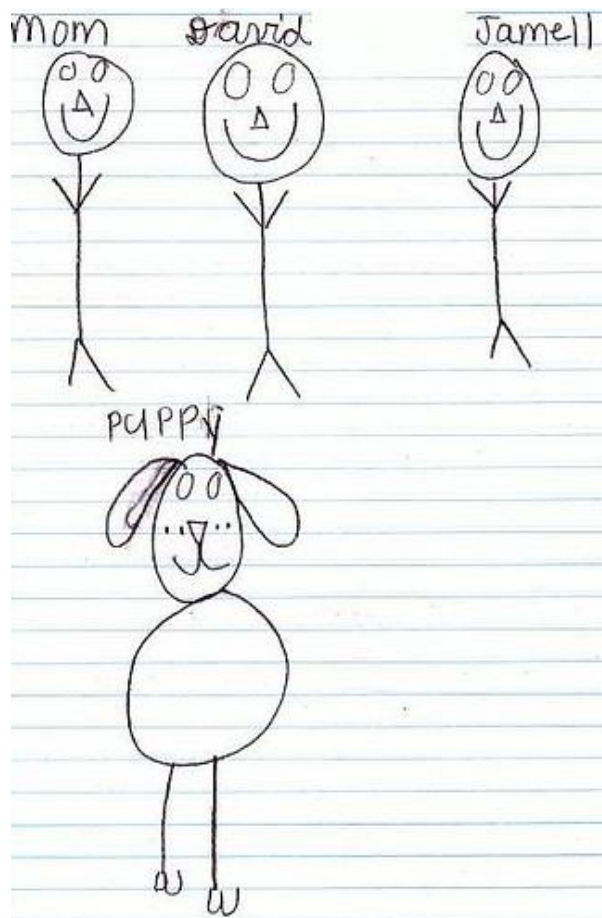
Me



My Projects at AHRC

Below I will show the progress my partner Olga and I make throughout the course with David. The first week we learned about David's interests. He is a very happy-go-lucky type of person. He is excited to do almost anything. Olga and I have decided to split up our responsibilities: I will focus on David's future career path whilst Olga focuses on his future education. We found that David enjoys drawing very much. We plan on contacting a professor in the fine arts department at Pace so that we may possibly bring David to a sketching class here at Pace.

A drawing David made



My Mid-Term Reflection Journal

In first signing up for Web Design for non-profit organizations, I had no idea what to expect. I transferred in to Pace and had the last orientation date, and did not have much say in my classes. However, I am extremely happy that I was put in this class, and wouldn't want it any other way.

I was expecting the class to be exactly what the title states: Web Design for Non-Profit Organizations. Although I frequently volunteer, and love helping other people, I am so far from being technologically sound. I can barely turn my laptop on, let alone design a web site. I was relieved to find that the title of the class is misleading. When we were first told that we would be partnered with the students from AHRC, I was a bit nervous. Although my cousin is autistic, he is on the lower end of the spectrum. So I had a little experience, but I stress the word little. Planning my own future has been a difficult task, let alone being responsible for someone else's. However, I no longer feel that sense of nervousness. I am more confident in what we are trying to accomplish in this class, and I credit this to David. Upon first meeting David, he was very quiet and often did not respond to my or Olga's questions. I half expected this, for I know people with autism tend to have trouble with social interactions. Olga and I tried to make David more comfortable with us, and get to know him better. Our second meeting with David, we took him to the Pace University bookstore where he picked out a baseball cap, a t-shirt, and a drawstring backpack. David was elated by these items, and seeing the smile on his face reassured me that he was getting more comfortable with Olga and myself. This time when the three of us said goodbye, we hugged instead of shaking hands.

I am very grateful for my partner Olga. She is extremely intelligent, and driven. Being a psychology major, she looks at the situation with that as her foundation, which has been very helpful so far. The next visit we had with David, we tried to find out about his family, interests, and what he would like to do after AHRC middle high school. Getting information from David had definitely become easier than from the first initial visit, but it was still slightly difficult. David tends to repeat the question, instead of answering it. Olga and I came up with a creative way for David to answer questions. We found that David loves to draw. So, when we ask David a question, we ask him to draw his response. Olga brought in crayons, and we had David draw several pictures of different people in his life. We then asked him to put a triangle over the people he goes to school with, and the people in his family. Afterwards David, with a huge smile on his face, showed everyone in the class. Seeing him so happy, and proud warmed my heart.

Finding out David's interests was a little more difficult than asking him who his friend's and family were. Some information was easily given more so than other facts. David loves the Star Wars movies. This was something I found easy to talk about with David. My brothers are also big Star Wars fans. David and I talked about his favorite Star Wars movie, and character. Within this discussion, I found that David and his brother, Jamell, often pretend to be the Star Wars characters, and play 'light sabers' outside.

David has a very happy go lucky soul. He seems willing to take on any task, and does not pick favorites (colors, subjects) because he genuinely enjoys everything. I admire his spirit, and outlook on life. It saddens me that people discriminate those with disabilities. In *Disability Land* by Alan Brightman, I read an excerpt in which he describes patients of the older institutions living in plain, undecorated rooms, with no toys to play with. Some patients ended up chewing on the rugs as a form of stimulation. The institution would have these patients' teeth removed. I found this extraordinarily upsetting. Conditions are better, but some people still have the same attitudes as to when these institutions were still running. People with disabilities are no different than you and me. They have hopes, dreams, and goals that they wish to pursue. If anything, people with disabilities have more conviction and heart, because they know no other way. If only we all had this outlook, this innocence.

Olga and I hope to come up with a plan for David's future. I am currently focusing on potential employers, whilst Olga focuses on a potential college education. I have been researching what kind of jobs are beneficial to those with autism, hoping to enhance David's skills along with putting him in the work force. I believe that David would do very well with a Data Entry position. I asked David to take a typing test, and data entry test. Although his speed is not very high, he is extremely accurate. After practicing a few sentences, his speed improved. I believe data entry would be a good position for David especially because of his love of computers. He is more efficient with a computer than I am! Olga has been researching schools, looking into computer classes, and drawing classes. This would combine two of David's interests.

I am so happy that I signed up for this class, as serendipitous as it was. Being that I hope to pursue a career in Drama Therapy, I am now looking into working with children with Autism within that field. I believe this class will give me the tools, and understanding that I need in order to do this.

My Final Reflection Journal

I could not be happier that I took Web Design for Non-Profit Organizations. I have learned so much within this course, and have recommended two of my friends to take it next semester. I am most definitely going to miss everyone from AHRC Middle High School, and am so grateful to have met them, and spent time with all of them.

Olga and I started out with David working on getting to know him. It was a slow start, but I believe once David became comfortable with us it was much easier for him to open up. We learned that he loves sports, the Star Wars movies, computers and drawing. Olga and I took David to an art class at Pace so that he would be able to see what a college course would be like, and if he would want to possibly attend Pace if and when he decides to go to college.

Since there were two of us, Olga and I decided that she would focus on the college path, whilst I focused on the career path. Olga looked into programs at Kingsborough Community College, and Pace University. She found many different programs the David may participate in, and different ways David may pay for his schooling.

I looked into the job market for David. Because he had expressed several times that he wanted to one day own his own toy store, I looked strictly into toy stores for possible careers for David. I found four toy stores in a decent distance to David's home that he could be able to work at: Toys R Us, Toy Space, Forbidden Planet, and Target. I lined up the skills David has with skills he needs for these jobs. David would need to be organized, which he is fully capable of. David is a very good listener, and follows directions, two skills definitely needed to be successful in the job environment. David dislikes spontaneity, so problem solving may be an issue, but with help from his co-workers, he would be able to overcome this struggle. In a store like Toys R Us or Toy Space, David would need to be outgoing. He is very shy at first, but I believe that once he is comfortable in the workspace, it will be easier for him to open up, and help customers. Olga and I also would like David to participate in travel training with the adult center of AHRC. This will help David be able to travel to work or school independently. It will also help David with his problem solving skills, and his people skills. Two things needed for him to be successful in a college or work environment.

Working with David has made a huge impact on me. He is so open-minded and warm hearted. He looks at the world in the most beautiful way, and has taught me so much. Even though he has a disability, he does not let it define him. His disability is not who he is. David has struggles, just like everyone else, but he is not afraid to overcome them, and try new things. I wish I had as much strength and courage that David possesses. I will never forget my time with the members of AHRC, and hope to work with all of them again in the future. They have taught me so much more than I ever thought was possible, and I will carry that with me for the rest of my life.