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# Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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by **Cindy Guerrero**

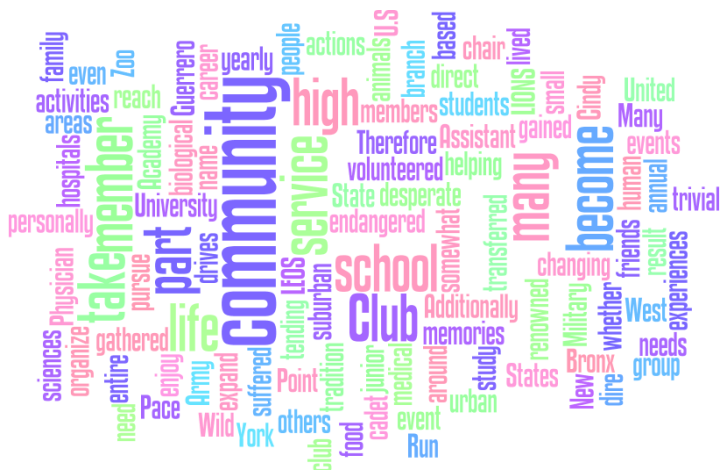
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## My Biography: What I Am Bringing to AHRC New York City

My name is Cindy Guerrero. I have lived in New York State my entire life in both suburban and urban areas. I was a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point. There I was a member of the U.S Army and gained many life changing experiences and memories. In high school I was a chair member of the community service based club, The LEOS Club. It is a junior branch of the renowned LIONS Club where high school students organize and take part in many community service events and activities. Many people are in desperate need, but what about the animals that have suffered or even become endangered as a direct result of human actions. Therefore, I personally gathered a small group of members to expand our reach and take part in the annual Bronx Zoo Run for the Wild. The yearly event has become somewhat of a tradition for my family, friends and I. Additionally, I have volunteered at food drives, hospitals, and around my community. I transferred to Pace University to study the biological sciences and pursue a medical career as a Physician Assistant. I enjoy helping others and tending to their needs, whether dire or trivial.

## My Biography



## (News Story) of 1/29/13

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Cindy Guerrero

1/29/2013

People with autism are typically looked down upon for having a "disability". But in cases like Lars Sonne, in "The Autism Advantage", and so many others that are drawing attention to their unique abilities rather than disabilities. Scientists have found that those with autism tend to have a superior ability at recognizing details and deciphering complex sounds and structures. As studies and stories of outstanding individuals with autism continue to grow, so will understanding and opportunity.

Lars Sonne, a child, was discovered by his father to have an incredible ability to recall error free detail merely using his mind. At seven years old he recreated a perfectly accurate map of Europe. His father Thorkil, recognizing his son's great ability, realized that other individuals with autism had similar detail oriented capabilities. He ran off with the idea and founded a business in which Autistic adults could put their talents to use as a career. Although fully capable mentally for the tasks placed before them, there was and will always be the social struggles of an occupational life. The work space calls for certain social behaviors and responsibilities that those with Autism may have a difficult time satisfying.

People never cease to amaze me. In the "Waiter Hailed as Hero..." article, the absolute nerve and arrogance it takes to make such selfish statements such as 'Special needs children need to be special somewhere else' is appalling. I have never witnessed such an outward display of hatefulness, but I have seen other less extreme signs of this behavior. Too often I see people stare disrespectfully at those that are physically disabled or even go as far as to move a "safe" distance away. Other times I have witnessed people have a complete change of behavior after realizing the individual they are dealing with is disabled. Throughout my life I have had a lot of exposure to individuals with disabilities. Whether their disability is physical or cognitive, neither grants you, me, or anyone else the right to belittle or mistreat these people. If I had been a patron at the restaurant and had witnessed this disrespect I too may have stood up. It is my hope that people, like the honored waiter Garcia, continue to stand up for what is right.

There are numerous websites available today that provide support and information on autism. One of which I found was the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.<sup>[1]</sup> It provides a very factual layout of the signs, symptoms, and help available for those with autism. The next site I came across was AutismSociety.<sup>[2]</sup> Rather than portray the feeling of autism being a disease, the site has provided methods of embracing and coping with autism, whether the person researching has autism, has a family member with autism, or is merely curious. The best website, however, was Autism Speaks.<sup>[3]</sup> The site provides information, support, advocacy opportunities, and events to spread awareness and aid for autism.

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[1] [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail\\_autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm)

[2] <http://www.autism-society.org/>

[3] <http://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Reference Links:

1. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/magazine/the-autism-advantage.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/magazine/the-autism-advantage.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

2. <http://news.ca.msn.com/top-stories/waiter-hailed-as-hero-after-standing-up-for-boy-with-down-syndrome>

## Blog (and News Story) of 2/19/13

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Cindy Guerrero

2/19/13

"Be a part in something bigger than yourself". That's something I've been told to do my whole life. And today, while visiting the Adult Day services at the AHRC, I heard it again. Movements, organizations, and groups are things that are larger than an individual. They give people drive and purpose in order to achieve a goal. I heard it as a child, as a young adult, as a military service member, and now as a student working hand in hand with individuals with disabilities. I realized today that besides teaching these special individuals to grow and be independent, ADS allows individuals with disabilities to feel that same drive and vigor that propels the world forward. They are all a part of something larger than their personal life. There is a civil rights movement proceeding right beneath our noses, and unfortunately most people are blinded by their own problems to see it. Today's visit to the AHRC ADS has made me feel proud and empowered to be a part of this great movement, as I'm sure so do the other members of the organization.

On the website [www.disabilityscoop.com](http://www.disabilityscoop.com), I found many inspiration stories. The first to catch my attention was the article titled, "Beauty Queen with Autism Makes Miss America History", by Lesley Young.<sup>[1]</sup> Alexis Wineman, an 18 year old girl, reigns as Miss Montana. As an individual with autism, she is the first to ever walk the Miss America stage. Although she did not win the title she

won over many people's hearts. She uses her popularity to advocate for the special needs community. Ms. Wineman's story is an inspiration to all young girls with disabilities. She proves that in a world that is so superficial and visual, any dream that is imaginable is feasible. The next article to draw my eye was that titled, "intellectual Disability No Barrier for Mom Raising Gifted Daughter", by Shaun Heasley.[2] A woman with an intellectual disability has succeeded in raising an intellectually gifted child. Her daughter, Myra, has aspirations of attending Cambridge in England. Although mother, Bonnie Brown, has a disability, their mother daughter relationship is like any other families. The Browns are living proof that individuals with disabilities can be fully capable parents. It is ADS services such as those provided by the AHRC that make the other more materialistic life responsibilities less complex for these individuals. Bonnie regularly meets with social workers to ensure bills and finances are in order. Otherwise she lives a regular life like any other individual. The last article I came across titled, "State Challenges School Using Shock Therapy", by Michelle Diamant, did indeed cause me quite a shock.[3] A Massachusetts center for children and adults with disabilities was found to still be administering shock therapy. Fortunately, the Rotenburg Center has been facing increased pressures against their methods. Recently, Medicare and Medicaid funding for institutions administering shock therapy has been eliminated. Hopefully this barbaric form of therapy will soon be eradicated and programs such as ADS with the AHRC will continue growing.

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[1] <http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/01/15/beauty-queen-autism-history/17078/>

[2] <http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/02/19/intellectual-disability-no-barrier/17329/>

[3] <http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/02/19/state-challenges-shock-therapy/17320/>

## Blog (and News Story) of 3/12/13

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March 10, 2013

"Do you have subway surfers?!" Those were the first words out of Laurent's mouth this morning to me. I had promised him last week i would download the subway surfer app on my personal ipad so that we'd be able to play today. Laurent made sure not to forget and neither did I. He showed me how to play the game and together we exchanged the ipad and watched each other play a couple rounds. We also took a little tour of the university. First we checked out the cafeteria with Albert and his two partners. Then afterwards we traveled down to the gymnasium and and sat on the benches while we watched people on the cardio machines. Laurent was eager to get back to the classroom so when we returned he excitedly showed me several new train videos he had discovered at home. Today was by far the most talkative and comfortable Laurent has been with me.

[1] - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NVYs5BXmvs>

Honorable Senator Carlucci,

The rapid approach of the sequestration budget cuts and the severity by which it is going to impact individuals with disabilities has just been brought to my attention. I write to you as a concerned New York resident and student of Pace University. Many students, including myself, are involved in an AHRC program where we interact and provide social support for children and adults with disabilities. All too often this portion of the population is forgotten. Their rights and needs are too quickly neglected, meanwhile thousands of individuals claiming welfare and other government aid are more than capable of being successful working citizens. It is disheartening to realize how restricted the life of an individual with disabilities truly is in our progressive world. A \$600 million cut from the special education program would be devastating. Not only will those receiving the benefits suffer, but also all the instructors and aids whom have poured all their time and energy into helping better the lives of those with disabilities.

I would also like to touch on military budget cuts. As a former United States Military Academy cadet, I know firsthand some of the conditions by which our army officers are subjected to within the academy. The state of the cadet barracks is appalling. They are entirely outdated with rusted pipes that leak toxins into the water, mold infested basements, and an overall theme of absolute squalor. Additionally, a perhaps more urgent matter is the quality of food. As cadets training their bodies and minds to become worthy officers, they must be able to properly fuel their body. Many times the cadets were served an indistinguishable type of meat, along with a plethora of carbohydrates and a great lack of fruit and vegetables. I suffered from more illnesses during my short span within the academy, than that which spans the rest of my twenty years. I am aware the government allocates finances as it sees fit, but I just wish to bring pressing matters to light which could one day sway aid in their favor.

Very Respectfully,

Cindy Michelle Guerrero

[1]-<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/03/05/disability-cuts-stay/17424/>

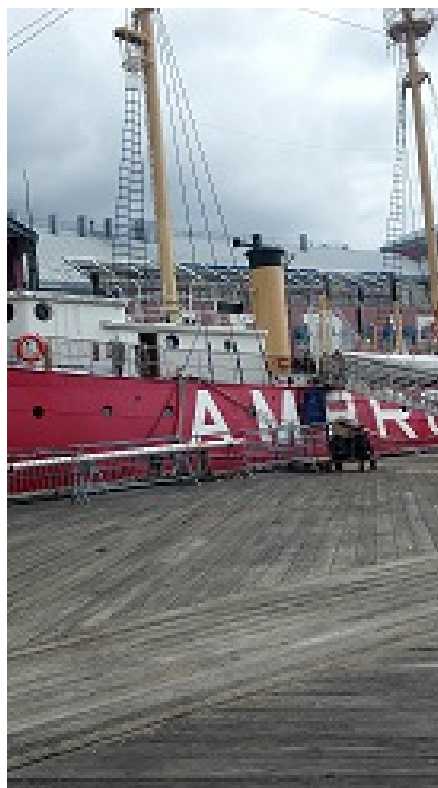
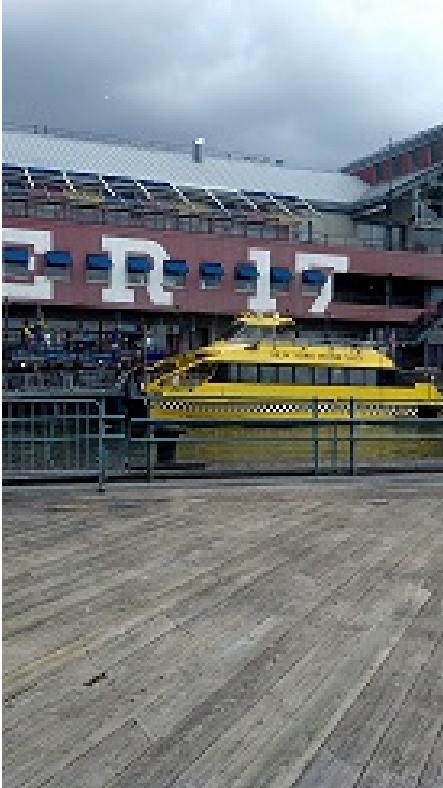
The article "The Hidden Potential of Autistic Kids", by Rose Eveleth, touches on the misconceptions of individuals with autism. All too often, in fact 70% to 80% of the time, children with autism are classified as mentally retarded. But Eveleth speaks of their hidden potential, potential that must be diligently sought out in these individuals. She's wrong in this too. Individuals with autism don't have hidden potential; their potential is out in the open. The problem is that people refuse to acknowledge their keen logical and problem solving abilities. Tests of intelligence such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children are far too concerned with social and cultural norms. As a science major I realize that I have a tendency towards facts, mathematics, and logic. I care little for social acceptance and cultural traditions. Perhaps I too would fail that "intelligence test" if I was put through it, but that does not mean I am autistic nor am I aware of having any cognitive disabilities. Individuals with autism see the world differently than "normal" functioning people. But in no way does that make these people mentally retarded. We are speaking of intelligence people, some with fantastic cognitive abilities.

The Museum of Natural History is truly a work of art. As soon as Laurent arrived at the museum we took off. I had him take charge of the map and decide where he wanted to take us. Our first stop was to the famous dinosaur exhibit. We looked in amazement at the gigantic size of these creatures that once lived and learned a lot of their names. The "Albertosaurus" and "Allosaurus" were new names to both of us. Afterwards, we hurried through the African Mammal section because Laurent told me the displays scare him. We lingered in the bird and primate sectors and eventually stumbled into the Native Americans. The tiny figurines of the Natives and their homes of wood and animal hides really caught Laurent's attention. He asked me many questions about the people and whether or not they did this or that. Luckily I have a hardy knowledge of Native American history and culture so I was able to answer most of his questions. Even though our time together today was short, we made the best of what we had. We saw many amazing things in the museum and took many pictures to document it all.

[1] [https://blackboard.pace.edu/bbcswebdav/pid-267658-dt-announcement-rid-3117690\\_1/courses/CIS-102W-21233.201320/0633\\_001.pdf](https://blackboard.pace.edu/bbcswebdav/pid-267658-dt-announcement-rid-3117690_1/courses/CIS-102W-21233.201320/0633_001.pdf)

## The Seaport

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## My Mid-Term Reflection Journal on [Book] Miracle Boy and Project

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'How do you stay so positive?' a question posed by Ben Mattlin's new attendant at the start of his memoir, "Miracle Boy Grows Up". At first Mattlin assumed that was a question framed from his state as an individual with a disability, and naturally felt a sense of bitterness. But in truth, how does anyone stay positive? The world is full of so much danger, hatefulness, sadness, and an unending amount of disappointment. It is quite astounding that anyone, especially someone with the additional life burden of a disability, can remain so passionate and cheerful about life. As I grow closer to my AHRC partner Laurent, I realize that amidst all the negativity of the world, there is so much for all of us to be grateful for. And for the reason Laurent and I have decided to focus our project on discovering the world around us.

Ben Mattlin, a "victim" of Spinal Muscular Atrophy has overcome a multitude of hardships throughout his life; one of which is being a victim of anything. He started the memoir with a powerful statement claiming he will not be seen as a patient. No one knows what is best for him other than himself. (pg. 9) He takes us on a journey throughout his life while cleverly paralleling historical progress and regression of the Disability Rights Movement. From infancy, to childhood, and finally to adulthood, Mattlin has never had an easy life. He struggled with the acceptance of others, physical inabilities, sexual frustrations, family struggles, and worst of all death. His mother, his mental and emotional support, fell victim to cancer. She had stayed strong for her son, always encouraging him to speak up and tell the world what he needed. She taught him that "Pity is useless, the enemy of self-esteem..." (pg. 36) Mattlin bore many of the same struggles that you and I have and will face throughout our life, with the addition of a physical disability. His dependence on his mother reminds me of Laurent and his relationship with his mother. I know nothing of Laurent's mother, other than the fact that he does everything with her. That alone is enough to tell me his absolute adoration and attachment to his mother. But when we are together, it is our time to discover Manhattan and the world surrounding us on our own. It is essential for Laurent to learn things about himself by himself. When we are together I am able to provide him with the independent dependency that Mattlin so often speaks of in his writing.

Ben Mattlin referred to himself as a pioneer. In truth, he and his parents addressed issues that were yet to become societal innovations for individuals with disabilities. At the time, most colleges and universities had never had a student with disabilities. However, Mattlin was driven, and paved the way for others to follow by enrolling in Harvard University. Although Laurent has never told me of aspirations to attend college and earn a degree, he has made his desire to be a train conductor quite evident. He speaks insistently of conducting the MTA Q train, reciting his vast knowledge of the subway system and expert opinions on all the subway lines. Mattlin's mother told him anything he wanted to do was possible. For the most part, whatever Ben Mattlin put his mind to he achieved. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for all individuals with disabilities. My visit to the AHRC Adult Day Services made me very aware of how unjustly limited an individual with disabilities is in reality. There may be limitations in Laurent's life, such as actually being entrusted the responsibility of conducting a real train. But he is free to live his dream through other means, such as visiting the MTA Transit Museum, and riding the busy subway system for transportation. Pursuing his interests will not only bring an overall experience of contentment and fulfillment, but also increase his autonomy and self-confidence, which is essential for a successful life. And Laurent has many traits and abilities to be successful. I watched him in amazement as he expertly navigated my iPad. He remembered my promise to download his favorite game, Subway Surfer, and quickly turned the game on to show me how to play. He was clearly well practiced in the game as he played for over 5 minutes straight without losing the round. Laurent has a fantastic ability to learn. He is eager to demonstrate his talents but perhaps not eager enough to try new things. Thus, I can assume that role. I can be the person that teaches him new things, shows him new places, and challenges his comfort zones in order to encourage his personal growth and discovery.

"Disability is my boot camp". Mattlin wrote that everything he did had to be strategically planned in advance, even put into practice. Spontaneity was not an option. However, Ben Mattlin faced a disability far different than my partner's. Laurent can afford to have some extemporaneity in his life in order to explore outside his usual boundaries. On my first meeting with Laurent we were both extremely shy. He abstained from answering the majority of my questions and refused to remove his eyes from the computer screen in front of him. The following week I decided to create a quick change of scenery. Laurent and I, and another group from the class ventured outside to the seaport. The unexpected travel was a bit of shock to Laurent, perhaps making him feel vulnerable, in which case he turned to me for help. Many times people need a moment of vulnerability in order to let down their walls and reach out to others. Laurent turned to me after several minutes at the seaport and asked me if we could return to the classroom because he felt cold. I was more than happy to walk him back to the class; that had been the first time Laurent initiated conversation with me. From that moment on Laurent and I have been growing closer ever since. If it was not for my enrollment in the class Laurent and I would have never met. Today we crack jokes with each other and are always laughing and smiling. Just as Mattlin has inspired countless readers, myself included, to appreciate ourselves and our lives, Laurent has also inspired me. He has inspired me to appreciate simplicity. The simple pleasure of silence, laughing, and even listening. I may be providing a service for Laurent, but in truth he is the one serving me and helping me to develop into a better person.

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## My Final Reflection Journal on Impacts of Semester

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I would like to begin by saying that this semester served as a reality check for myself. Up until my enrollment in Pace I was perpetually concerned about my own affairs and accomplishing my own goals. The opportunity I received to work with Laurent truly opened my eyes. I can only hope I succeeded in guiding him towards a life with more independence and confidence. I will never know; but what I do know is that Laurent taught me more than he will ever know.

Together Laurent and I explored the University, Manhattan, and his interests. I became responsible not only for his wellbeing but also his fulfillment. In many ways my relationship with Laurent became that of a sibling relationship. I am the eldest of three children, the youngest of which is only two years old. I am naturally accustomed to being the responsible party, and that meant responsibility for Laurent's growth and happiness. I did my best to encourage Laurent where I could and push him where he needed to go to experience new things. In the beginning of our partnership Laurent followed me as silent and diligent as a shadow. But as he grew more comfortable, Laurent began to assert himself. There were times I would purposely try to take him somewhere I knew he would not like to go in order to get a bit of a rise out of him. Laurent has a gentle demeanor though. He would politely tell me that he did not want to go there, or do that. The simple fact that he felt confident enough to tell me "No" proved to me that he was progressing.

Week after week Laurent grew more extroverted. He would come into class eager to share stories with me, tell me a quick fact about the subway, or even ask to do something with his friends. The beginning was tough, but when he finally broke out of his shell, Laurent and I had a lot of fun together. We took several trips outside the classroom to include the Seaport, City Hall Park, Domino's Pizza, gymnasium, cafeteria, and of course the Museum of Natural History. With each passing week Laurent's smiles grew bigger. By the time we met for our final trip to the museum Laurent seemed a different person than the timid boy I met on the first day. He led me through the exhibits and asked for me to take pictures of everything, even ones with both of us included. I can confidently say that Laurent grew as a person thanks to his cooperation with me and his participation in the AHRC program.

Laurent may have gained confidence, independence, and friendship, but I believe I have gained so much more. I have a tendency to be shy myself and have a hard time reaching out to form friendships. However, Laurent and I became fast friends. I saw in him a lot of my own personality and was deeply surprised by how much we have in common. Laurent prefers activities in solitude, he has an extremely meticulous nature and enjoys an environment where he can focus on his task. For that reason Laurent and I did many things together apart from larger groups. He likes to have his space, peace, and quiet. All of those things I often seek myself. But in order to guide Laurent towards his personal growth we both had to step outside our comfort zone. In the process of encouraging Laurent's social growth, I also expanded my own. I was forced to remove my focus and energy from myself, and direct it towards what needed to be done for Laurent's sake. The entire experience has made me a better person. I have gained everything Laurent gained in addition to patience and clarity. The most important being mental clarity. This program has helped me realize that I am not any more important than anyone else. I have been selfish with my attention, keeping it all to myself rather than sharing it with the people that make up my life. I always aspired to practice medicine. At first the idea was about prestige and wealth. But as I have grown, physically and mentally, I am realizing more and more I want to do it for the people. There are people out there that need help, and others that just need a friend. I have this program and Laurent to thank for my personal growth and for the great memories I have made.

## Certificate of Recognition

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