

ONE HEART AND ONE MIND

Everyone needs to feel accepted, loved, and included. The Savior taught that His people should be “of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Meaningful service can be received or extended by members with disabilities, and when that happens, Christlike love grows, as the following stories from members illustrate.

Dedicated Service

Our daughter Kelly is in her late 40s. She looks like an adult but has the mind of a small child. This special child of God demonstrates what it means to be pure and without guile.

No one thought Kelly would ever be able to hold a calling except our neighbor and Sunday School president, Glenn Hammer. He knew she was dependable, and he felt that with a few weeks of training, she could grow into her calling, as we all must do.

Brother Hammer recommended Kelly to be the Sunday School bell-ringer, and shortly thereafter, she was sustained in sacrament meeting.

We gave her a watch and a small card with the time and pictures of bells to represent the number of times to ring the bell: two short rings first, followed five minutes later by one long bell. At first, the loud sound frightened her, but she persisted and overcame her fear.

Kelly has been reliable and faithful in her duty. She doesn't know how to use the telephone, but if she is going to be out of town on a Sunday, she asks her father to dial

the number of Brother Hammer. With great concern Kelly asks him, “Who ring the bell? Who ring the bell?” Brother Hammer assures her that he will take care of it. She smiles and replies, “OK.”

Kelly's faithful service soon led to a second assignment. Our Relief Society president asked Kelly to distribute hymnbooks to the sisters before Relief Society. After the meeting she gathers the books and stacks them neatly on a shelf. The Relief Society sisters have done much to reinforce Kelly's feelings of self-worth. In turn, as Kelly offers faithful, Christlike acts to the best of her ability, her example is a powerful spiritual influence on others.

Kelly has come to understand that she is needed and that we all have something of worth to give in service to the Lord and His children.

Carol and Gale Wilson, California, USA

Kelly

Ward members have done much to reinforce Kelly's feelings of self-worth as she serves in her callings. She, in turn, offers Christlike acts of service to the best of her ability.





Ian

When I found the gospel of Jesus Christ, I was thrilled to learn that Joseph Smith taught that all minds are 'susceptible of enlargement.' It reflected what I had always felt for our son Ian, and we found a renewed hope and determination to help him grow.

Enlarging Capacities

When I held our son Ian for the first time on the day my husband and I adopted him, I felt certain he was a gift to me from Deity. When he was 10 months old, doctors informed us that he was legally blind and mentally disabled. I felt devastated as the specialist explained that it

would be best to expect little of his future. In my heart, I knew Ian was an individual with a meaningful purpose, and I could not believe that he was incapable of growth. Shortly thereafter, my husband and I divorced, and I was left to raise Ian on my own.

Six years later, after I had been introduced to the gospel and joined the Church, I met and married a man who became Ian's father in wonderfully supportive ways. We learned that Joseph Smith taught that "all the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement."¹ We felt the Spirit witness truth to our belief that there was someone of great worth underneath our son's disabilities. We found a renewed hope and determination to help our son grow.

By the time Ian was 16 years old, we were able to secure a place for him at a progressive college for the blind that

catered to all of Ian's disabilities. The college was a seven-hour journey from home. Although we had been working toward Ian's independence, it was extremely difficult to hand his care over to someone else.

My fears were calmed when members of Ian's new ward in Harrogate, England, proved to be true examples of the gospel in action. Each Sunday a different member of Ian's ward invites him to their home. As a result, he feels like a cherished part of many families. The opportunity to socialize and develop friendships has aided him in achieving his goals. This tradition has continued every Sunday for the past 21 years, and it has brought great comfort and joy to Ian and to his father and me. Words are inadequate to express our thanks for the ward members' selfless service.

Ian has come so far since his original prognosis, and the members of his ward have greatly contributed to his progress. He is now living on his own with limited help from caregivers. He takes care of his own household chores and offers valuable service to others with disabilities. After completing a specialized training program, Ian now works as an office assistant at a college for the blind as well as at an organization for the elderly. He also helps an elderly friend with her shopping once a week and participates in temple work. Ian is a valuable contributor to his community and has proved to be a great inspiration to those who know him.

Frances A. Lewis, England



Embracing Joshua

When Joshua was born with Down syndrome, he not only became our special family member but he was also embraced by our entire ward.

I realized how true that was one day when I was at the church building and Joshua—who was a young child at the time—wandered off. When I noticed he was missing, I asked myself out loud, “Where has Joshua gone?” A passing Scout heard me and hurried down the hallway to the Scout room to alert everyone else: “Joshua is missing!” Within moments, Scouts swarmed the whole building, and Joshua was found participating in the Primary girls’ Achievement Day activity. In accommodating Joshua’s needs, ward members were willing to be their “brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4:9).

When Joshua was preparing for baptism,² one of our home teachers, Brother Nye, brought colored papers representing the steps we must take to return to Heavenly Father. Brother Nye set them on the floor and had Joshua step from paper to paper as he described each step. Later, when Joshua was preparing to receive the priesthood, Brother Nye made blocks that fit together. They represented the offices of the priesthood. Brother

Nye’s creativity with these and other object lessons has helped Joshua understand many gospel concepts.

Our family has found that gospel learning is enhanced when we embrace everyone—including those with disabilities—as part of the ward family. We are thankful for the way all of our ward families over the years have embraced our son.

Sharlynn Traver, Idaho, USA

Joshua

From the time Joshua was very young, our ward members have loved and cared for him.



Kristine

In stretching myself in the Lord's service, my communication skills and confidence have improved dramatically. I have learned that the gifts of the Spirit are real.



Fulfilling the Dream to Serve

I've faced many challenges in overcoming disabilities, the most troublesome of which are a hearing loss and a speech difficulty. I was always terrified to be part of a group because I could not hear or speak well. Because of my hearing loss, I could understand only parts of group conversations, and I often felt confused when I tried to piece the parts together. But the Lord has helped me, and my family and many friends from my young single adult ward have been tremendous advocates.

Participating in classes and activities in the young single adult program has pushed me out of my comfort zone. As I have been included and encouraged, I have gradually become more comfortable interacting with others. Preparing talks for sacrament meeting has helped me with my speech problem and built my confidence. Over time, my communication skills have improved dramatically.

In December 2005 one of my life dreams came true when I was called as a Church service missionary for the deaf in the Connecticut Hartford Mission. One of my

assignments was to sign for sacrament meetings. This was a challenge because I had to listen so intently. When I interpreted a sacrament meeting for the first time, I was shocked that I could do it. I learned that the gifts of the Spirit are real.

The gospel is designed to help us become stronger people no matter what our circumstances are. I know the Lord loves all of His children and blesses us as we have faith in Jesus Christ and work hard to achieve our dreams.

Kristine Haswell, Connecticut, USA ■

The Disability Resources section of the LDS.org Web site offers helpful information—such as leader and teacher resources, family resources, material references, and frequently asked questions—about many different kinds of disabilities. The section can be found at disabilities.lds.org.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 6:311.
2. Church policy provides that priesthood leaders and parents should prayerfully consider the individual's wishes and degree of understanding before priesthood ordinances are performed for a person with a mental disability.

To learn more about helping ward members with disabilities, visit disabilities.lds.org.