



**ONE
Special
NIGHT**



BY HILLARY HOLBROOK

Serving those with special needs has actually done a service to these LDS teens.



The crowd erupts into cheers as Travis, wearing a classy suit, and Amanda, in a beautiful black dress, link arms at the archway decorated with white lights and streamers. Travis and Amanda, prom king and queen, proudly walk through and take their place on the dance floor, joining the rapidly growing circle of teens. Then another young man and young woman walk through, also joining arms. They are prom king and queen, too. In one big way, this dance is different. Everybody is prom queen and king for the evening.

Every year, LDS youth counselors from many stakes in American Fork and Lehi, Utah, organize a prom for teens with special needs. They believe that doing so gives these youth the opportunity to have a good time, like other teenagers. "It was a night full of fun," Jordan Scott says.

Actually, at least one night each week is filled with fun at special-needs Mutual.

Motivated to serve

Under the direction of the Area Presidency, teens are called by their stake presidents to serve as youth counselors at special-needs Mutual, which is held every Thursday night. Each young man and young woman who volunteers to be a counselor is paired up with someone who has a disability, and together they work on Scout badges or Personal Progress. In serving, whether at a prom or any ordinary activity, the counselors find that the person they have been paired with usually ends up becoming a good friend. And it's these friendships that motivate the teens to serve.

"Erica is so happy to see me every week," says Sadie, a youth counselor. "Each time I come she gives me a great big hug."

Stephanie Sheely agrees. She says that her friend Katie "is always cheerful and loves to participate." Stephanie smiled during the whole prom and made sure that everyone was included in the dancing. This is a trait she's learned from Katie. "She really loves everybody," says Stephanie.

For Mitchell Garcia, the motivation to serve didn't come immediately. At first, he felt uncomfortable at special-needs Mutual. But when he became more acquainted with Sean, his fears were put to rest. "He's always happy to see me," Mitchell says. "He's a good friend of mine, and he has a heart full of love."

Kai Fitzhugh's motivation comes from his family. He says that having a brother with special needs has motivated him to want to serve others with disabilities. The night of the prom was no exception. Like most high school dances, there's a photographer who takes photos of couples in front of a pretty backdrop. Prom night at special-needs Mutual was no different. Kai was more than happy to stand in line with a girl who had a disability and have his picture taken with her. "It's

hard to explain," he says, "but whenever I'm here serving, I just feel good inside."

Andee Rowley, a youth counselor, and Kristen sit together during the interview. "Kristen always makes me happy, and she has a cute personality," Andee says. Kristen blushes and hides her face, grinning from ear to ear. The two giggle. "She always has compliments to give out to everybody," Andee says.

Increased testimony

The youth counselors say that serving has made a big impact on their testimonies. Serving those who love Christ has helped the youth to draw closer to Him. Many counselors say it's helped them to be more thoughtful, patient, and loving.

Kai says that his friend Greg, whom he pairs up with each week, has a strong testimony that influences him. "Greg just loves the Church. He loves everything about it. That's a big influence on me."

Timothy Wood had a fun time serving at the dance. He made sure that everyone was having a great time, and even led a large group in a "train," where everyone lined up behind each other and snaked through the gym. Timothy says that serving is acting as Christ would and that doing so has built his testimony. "I act better when I'm here," he says.

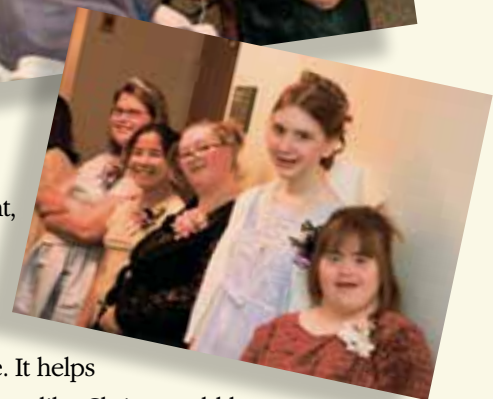
Even getting ready is great fun as the girls primp and curl their hair together.



"I'm calmer, more patient, and I think of others' needs

before mine. It helps me to be more like Christ would have me be." Timothy says that on some nights at special-needs Mutual, when he's waiting for his friend, Stephen, to arrive, he'll remember something he needs to get for the activity. But Timothy will wait for Stephen to arrive because he wants him to feel welcome when he gets there. "Being a volunteer helps me to care more for others," Timothy says.

Serving has increased Sadie Wilson's testimony, too. She remembers one activity when the young women watched a movie on the Atonement of Jesus Christ. "Afterward," she says, "our leader asked the girls why He had to suffer for us. My friend said, 'Because He loves us and had to die for us.' And I always knew that, but hearing her state it and knowing that she believed it reinforced my own testimony."



SERVICE THAT COUNTS

This is the service that counts, the service to which all of us have been called: the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Along your pathway of life you will observe that you are not the only traveler. There are others who need your help. There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save."

President Thomas S. Monson, "How Firm a Foundation," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 68.

WHY IS SERVING IMPORTANT?

In the Church, we're given callings and opportunities to serve others. Why is it so important, and how can we do it? Here's an excerpt from *For the Strength of Youth*:

"Service to others is one of the most important characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ. A disciple is willing to bear other people's burdens and to comfort those who need comfort (see Mosiah 18:8–9). . . .

"When serving, look to the Savior as your example. Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him.

"There are many ways to serve others. You can serve in your Church assignments and in your home, school, and community. . . .

"As you devote yourself to serving others, you will draw closer to Heavenly Father. Your heart will be filled with love. Your capacities will increase, and your life and the lives of those around you will be blessed" (38).

What does it take to be happy?

Not only have the youth counselors been able to build their testimonies, but they also view life differently and understand what it takes to be happy. Yes, they have served their friends with disabilities, but their friends have served them, too.

Meghan Andersen, a youth counselor, has learned that serving brings happiness to her life—a lesson learned at Mutual. Melinda, the young woman she is paired with, has taught her happiness through quiet ways. "She's really quiet at times, and very shy, but I can see a light in her," Meghan says. "She understands the scriptures so well. She makes me so happy." If Meghan is down, she thinks of the light of Christ that Melinda has, and she's motivated to serve others. "I'm much more happy when I'm serving than when I am in my own world," she says.

But Meghan's not the only one being taught a lesson. Other youth counselors are learning, too. Sean has taught his youth

counselor, Mitchell, what it takes to be happy. "I've learned that it takes an optimistic mind and good self esteem," Mitchell says. "This is something Sean's taught me, because he's always happy."

At the dance, Ashley Park displayed what it means to be happy. She had a nonstop smile on her face the whole time and made sure that everyone was dancing. Because Ashley is a leader over many girls, she doesn't have just one assigned friend. But she thinks highly of all those whom she helps. "They're just happy," she says. "They're content with life because they know they're children of God." A testimony that God loves all of us, Ashley says, is key to being happy.

Timothy Wood agrees. "All I need to be happy in life are two things," he says. "One, my own choice to be happy. Two, that warm burning in the bosom—that feeling that I get from the Holy Ghost, that it's with me and I'm not alone."

That warmth and happiness is something felt at special-needs Mutual each week. Whether at a prom dance or any ordinary activity, the youth counselors and their friends have learned "the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10). Just as everyone was prom king and queen for an evening at the dance, we are all kings and queens in God's eyes every day. **NE**

Access the Church's Web site on disabilities at <http://disability.lds.org>. Here you can find helps, resources, and additional information about various disabilities.

"Serving has helped me be more compassionate," says youth counselor Cami Jo Berry. "It teaches me more patience and understanding." Cami says that Sarah cheers her up on days when she's a little down by always smiling and giving Cami hugs. "She just makes me so happy," Cami says. And that showed during the dance. Cami smiled and laughed with Sarah the whole evening.

Below: Ashley Park and Ashley Lindsay smile while having a fun evening together.

