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CAC Corner: Arts for All Abilities

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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CAC CORNER: ARTS FOR ALL ABILITIES

February 27, 2012 by cpehrson

This CAC corner blog was written by Ben Ballam, a Vice-Chair of the CPD’s Consumer Advisory Council. Ben is a student at USU.

Some new opportunities are opening up in the Arts, for people with disabilities. There is a movement to offer inclusive art and drama classes for people with disabilities.

The famous Paper Mill Playhouse, located in New Jersey, now offers its first ever program for children with disabilities. This new class will include theater improvisation, storytelling, music, movement, and visual art. The series will "creatively address and include diverse learning styles and modes of communication." It is part of the Theater For Everyone Program. Their director of Education said, "We want arts education to not merely be the icing on the cake of a child’s education, but really the baking soda that helps all kids grow and explore ways of communicating."

Right here in Logan, Utah, we have some perfect examples of inclusive Arts Ed through the Utah Festival Conservatory for the Performing Arts and the Opera by Children Program. Shortly after it was started, I was one of the first kids to be in the program and write my own original opera, along with some of my elementary school classmates. When it was time to cast the show, I wanted to play the baker, which was a pretty big part, but I was worried that I couldn’t do it because I was in a wheelchair. When I came home, I talked to my dad about it, who just happened to be the General Director of the Utah Festival Opera Company and their arts programs (Michael Ballam). I asked him if he thought that a kid in a wheelchair could be a baker. His response was, "Ben, did you know that a President of the United States, President Franklin D.Roosevelt, was in a wheelchair? You can be anything that you want to be!" I played the baker!

That is the philosophy of the education programs at the Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theatre Company. Everyone is included. Differences are celebrated and young people of all abilities are encouraged to participate. There are lots of amazing stories of miracles that have occurred with children taking part in these programs. For more information, go to the Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre web site.

It is encouraging to know that lots of people in the Arts across America are beginning to advocate for those of us, who in the past, might been left out.

You can learn more about Ben Ballam and his love of basketball in a past CPD blog post.