



Kids are Kids Disability Awareness Program ©

**Visit us at our temporary location
during construction:**
12050 Arbour Street
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(Former St. Anne High School)
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Introduction

It can be difficult for children to make new friends. For children with physical disabilities, developing friendships can pose unique challenges. Research by McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller and Killip (2004) found that “students with disabilities are half as likely to report a sense of belonging, feeling safe or accepted, or viewing other students as kind, than are students without disabilities. They also report greater levels of interpersonal conflict at school, loneliness and isolation.” Research suggests that in order for inclusive education to be successful, children need ongoing education about disabilities and ideas on how to include classmates with disabilities both in the classroom and on the playground (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Odom, 2002; Rillotta, Nettelbeck, 2007).

Numerous studies on inclusion have recommended that disability awareness programs be an integral part of the integration process of children with disabilities (Armstrong, Rosenbaum, & King, 1986; Roberts & Lindsell, 1997; Voeltz, 1992). The most effective programs are structured, interactive, and designed to increase positive attitudes towards children with disabilities (Armstrong et al., 1986; Favazza, Phillipsen, & Kumar, 2000; Roberts & Lindsell, 1997).

The Program

The Kids Are Kids Disability Awareness (KAK) © program is a pilot project initiated by the John McGivney School Authority and Children’s Centre. The focus of the program is to help children with physical disabilities make the transition to community school as successful as possible. This program’s objectives are to promote disability awareness and decrease the impact of mobility and communication barriers between children with physical disabilities and their able bodied peers. The goals of the program are to help students develop empathy and understanding of children with physical disabilities and to provide teachers with the resources to help students develop skills for social inclusion.

KAK© program is a unique program because it can be tailored to address the specific disability of any child and is presented in an interactive format within the classroom. This program provides information about a student’s disability, facts and myths about disabilities, and opportunities for classroom discussion. It consists of a brief child friendly video (Kids Just Want to Have Fun by P.D. Associates) and an interactive question and answer discussion. Focus discussion questions include: “How are all children similar?, How are they different”?, and “Why do all kids want to have friends? Emphasis is placed on similarities among the child with a disability



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and his or her peers and promoting the class to come up with creative ways to include children with differences into their social activities both inside and outside of school. The presentation takes approximately 45 minutes. A package is also given to the classroom teacher with age appropriate fiction books about children with disabilities, suggestions for inclusionary activities, and additional classroom discussion material.

Next Steps

Initial research findings suggest that the Kids Are Kids Disability Awareness © program does improve the attitudes of children towards their peers with disabilities. Further research is being conducted to expand upon these findings. **For more information about this program please contact Kathy Soulliere, Education Consultant ext. 573 or Wendy Tavares, Social Worker ext. 242.**