

# The Gift of Inclusion...



Every day at BCC small miracles occur. These moments, in the growth of children, are commonplace but still miraculous. Each day children reach out to each other and help each other on the path to being great human beings. All of the children do it, each in their own way.

Mr T. is a youngster who benefits from extra support at BCC. He uses few words, does not fully engage in the schedule of the centre, plays alongside but finds it challenging to fully engage with the other children. Mr T is a year older than most of his group, but is still learning many of the skills which his friends already take for granted.

Many of the children in his group have known him for at least a year and a half. Mr T has not called any of them by name, he has not greeted any of them when

they arrive or wished them a happy birthday or asked them if they are alright when they are sad or hurt. Despite this apparent indifference on his part, every day I see other children make a special effort to connect with T. Every day I hear friends complimenting T on managing tasks, encouraging him in his efforts, reminding him when he forgets rules, takes risks or disrupts their play. Every day I see him look away and often move away, unable to respond to their words or deeds or the gifts or approaches of his friends. And every day those friends are still his friends.

Today this happened. One child, and it could have been any of his friends, any of your children, simply rocked a boat while T balanced on the edge. Then stopped rocking the boat when he jumped off, allowing him to climb back on. T's friend waited as I helped him count, "1, 2, 3." Then the friend listened for him saying "go." And then they rocked the boat, as he balanced on the edge and jumped off again and again. Throughout all of this T only watched me, as he tried to make sense of the game. His friend watched T and me and followed his lead. Though the body language was unsure, the laughter from both children was clear and loud and infectious.

Over a couple of minutes the game moved a little; T sat in the boat facing his friend and they rocked together and I sang. This was too much for T, either the proximity or the face to face position or my singing, so he left the boat and lay on the floor, and I lay next to him. Slowly his friend came and joined us, lying on me and allowing me to guide our play with Mr T. His nervousness reduced again and the children giggled.

Looking to add to the connection I reached for a nearby tube. A simple cardboard tube, but if you pop your head at one end and point it at T, you have a direct connection with him. Once I had talked to and looked at T through the tube, his friend was right there. I was able to become the observer, while I held the tube and the two friends made the most direct contact I had seen Mr T make outside his own family or support team in the three years I have known him. And the two of them laughed and laughed and laughed.

Mr T does not easily engage in eye contact with anybody, but as his friend was staring down a hollow tube at him there was nothing else to do but stare back and giggle. I have only seen T make and sustain eye contact with one other child,

his little sister, and even then it is rare. Even with adults it is a cause for comment, and quite an honour to have him hold your gaze. Today a friend was added to the very short list of those who have earned that honour.

It is a sign of his great trust and comfort and interest when Mr T sets his eyes upon yours for anything other than a passing glance. It is a sign of the immense effort of this friend, and all his friends, that Mr T has taken this wonderful step forward and towards them and others.

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