

A second generation school friendship begins with compassion and continues with awe-inspiring kindness

Written by Leanne Christensen, RSD
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L to R: Cassidy, Jayda and Riley get ready for Jayda's first ride in the Wike. Courtesy photo. Salem Woods Elementary student Cassidy Miller and Stillwater Elementary student Jayda Gould have a very special friendship which began when they attended 1st grade together in the Riverview School District. Although each attends a different school in different districts today, their friendship remains, and is more meaningful than ever.

Jayda's mom, Kerry, explains, "As a parent of a child with significant special needs, one of many things you wonder about is if your child will have close relationships and connections like typical children and if those connections will last. Although they met as toddlers, (Cassidy's parents and I went to school together years ago) it wasn't until Jayda's first grade year at Cherry Valley Elementary that Cassidy and Jayda became friends. It was at this time, that Jayda began bringing home all kinds of drawings, artwork and notes from a student named Cassidy. It took a few weeks for me to figure out that I knew Cassidy and her family! Cassidy visited Jayda daily during her recesses or lunch."

Cassidy's mother Shannon adds, "When Cassidy attended Cherry Valley with Jayda she would come home each day with her 'Jayda Report'... sharing what accomplishments Jayda had made that day, and the activities they shared, and enjoyed making cards and gifts for Jayda. Cassidy has always been a child filled with a natural compassion, and a heart for others... and she has a very, very special place in her heart for Jayda."

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Cassidy, like many elementary age children, enjoys riding bikes, going for walks and playing outdoors with friends. When Cassidy found out that Jayda was in need of a special kind of bicycle trailer (a Wike) which would allow her to enjoy some of the same outdoor activities, Cassidy made it her personal goal to figure out a way to raise the money needed to help purchase a Wike for Jayda, so...she began fundraising. She created and delivered flyers offering her services for yard work to her family and all of her neighbors. She also volunteered at her school to raise awareness and donations. In total her efforts raised \$1,005.00!

With her mother's help they found a website and placed the order to purchase Jayda's special gift. With the help of UPS tracking, Cassidy was able to watch and log the lengthy "journey" of the Wike, down to the hours and minutes until its arrival! When it was finally delivered to her home, she began making plans and arrangements for the big day... the day when Jayda could join Cassidy and both of their families for an afternoon of bike riding!

That day finally came in August. Cassidy had prepared special signs, and made a colorful headband of "bling" all for Jayda! Both Cassidy's and Jayda's families were on hand to help with and participate in Jayda's maiden voyage.

Kerry expressed the following with regard to Cassidy's inspiring kindness: "Cassidy is an amazing young lady! The depth of this young friendship and the amazing act of kindness has blown me away. The Wike is awesome and will allow us to have an activity Jayda can enjoy with friends and family but the greater impact is Cassidy's on-going friendship and her dedication to helping Jayda get to experience that 'one more activity.'

"Cassidy has a huge heart that inspires others and gives me great hope of a wonderful future, and the bottom line is... Jayda is much happier because Cassidy is her friend. She lights up every time we mention her name and when she gets a letter in the mail from her. She knows her real friends for sure!"