

# **Alan Bell Memorial Award Nomination Application**

In high school, I was immediately drawn to our mini-THON, a 12 hour dance event that raises money for the Four Diamonds Fund. Four Diamond's families are able to focus on their child's health without having to pay a single bill. My parents had paid for a lot of my brother's medical supplies out of their own pockets and I never thought this was fair. At a young age, I would compare my life to those around me and pity myself. Thankfully, as I grew up I learned to overcome my personal battles and use them to give back to the community. After two years of being a dancer at our mini-THON, I knew I wanted to interview to be a captain. I am grateful that the interviewers saw my genuine passion towards charity and decided to put me on the corporate committee. My job began early in the summer and ended after the event in November. My committee and I put in endless hours going out to businesses looking for sponsors. During family hour, it is touching to hear the different stories of personal battles and how our hard work was helping them. It was always very important for us to keep in mind that the amount of money we raised did not determine our success; the awareness that we spread with our dedication made all the difference.

Throughout high school I often asked myself, what was the purpose of my life if I never made an impact on someone else's life? So that is what I set myself out to do. From a young age, I was very understanding of differences whether it was mentally, physically, or even emotionally. It was my dream to work with young kids living with mental or physical challenges. My dream was fulfilled when I found the Extended School Year program at Murray Avenue School. I was able to work one on one with three young boys, two living with autism and the other Down syndrome. Each child was so unique in both their challenges and abilities. It was amazing to be able to learn to adapt and cater to each child's needs and especially to watch them flourish. While I was assisting them with their math and reading, they taught me to appreciate our differences.

This past summer, I overheard some friends of mine talking about a young boy with Down syndrome at their church. He is seven years old and causes quite a disruption in his Sunday school classroom. After expressing my interest in Aaron, the young boy with Down syndrome, I was asked to work one on one with him in his own classroom. I knew for a fact that I wanted to help but feared I would fail. After the first week, I was greatly surprised by Aaron's positive reaction to me. Now, I get to spend an hour and a half with Aaron for his class. Every day is a surprise which has helped me learn to adapt to his needs. Seeing him smile after finally completely a task he struggled with previously makes every moment of frustration worth it. Aaron's parents never fail to express their gratitude after class, but I will always be equally grateful, if not more, for all Aaron has taught me.

Back in 1997, my parents were very excited to be having their second son. Jake was just like any other baby. With a head full of hair and full chubby cheeks, Jake was a fan favorite. My mom only began to worry when he was about 5 months and had yet to roll over. Doctors explained that some kids were simply slower than others. My mother soon learned her instincts were right when Jake had his first seizure. After numerous tests, the doctors finally diagnosed Jake with a rare brain disorder called Lissencephaly which literally translates to smooth brain. This all occurred before I was born, so I have never really known what life without Jake, a "normal" life, is like.

Most doctors predicted Jake would only live a few years and in that time he would be in a vegetative state. My parents disregarded how the doctors dismissed Jake's life and chose to cherish and love him as much as they could. Today, Jake is 20 years old and has become the glue of our family. He suffers from many complications of Lissencephaly such as a weak immune and respiratory system, diabetes, epilepsy and asthma. Jake cannot walk or talk and requires 24 hour care. As a child this was all very hard to understand. Both my mother and father battled depression and I hated the way we lived. It was difficult to be a family as one parent always had to be home with Jake. Thankfully, my parents were able to help me develop a more positive mindset which led me to be grateful for everything I had. Now, I see nothing wrong with my family. I am proud to say that over the years I have learned, I would not want it any other way.

Jake has inspired me to give back to the community in many ways. I have decided to major in nursing at Drexel University to one day provide comfort and care to children struggling with their health battles.

Nominators Name: Jacinda Raju

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