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If a social worker was to say to me “Tell me about yourself,” I would respond “I am a teen that struggles with Dyslexia.” Dyslexia is defined as a learning disability that impairs a person’s ability to read. Although I am dyslexic, I have not let dyslexia define who I am. My mother always told me I was just as smart as everyone else only my brain worked differently. However, that was hard for me to believe for many years. Over time, dyslexia has helped me become the hardworking, determined person I am today, but I have learned not to let it classify me as disabled.

Dyslexia has helped me to become the compassionate person I am today. I believe compassion is an important value for a social worker to have. People working in a helping profession need to understand the struggles their clients live through. Although my disability has never been a devastating struggle, I have often felt “different” than other students. I feel having these experiences will make me a better social worker. I also feel I am an accepting person. I do not judge people and always accept people for who they are. This is also an important trait for a social worker to have. A social worker can not judge their clients. They need to be open minded about each and every client and do the best they can to help them. I have been lucky to have a great support system throughout my life and I recently realized others have not been as lucky as me. Most of my life’s experiences have been positive and rewarding. My parents, brother and sister provided a loving environment for me and were always willing to help and support me in any way that they could. Sometimes I wonder where I would be today if I did not have

such a great support system. Early in my high school years, I realized there were many kids who had issues in their lives, but they were not lucky enough to have a support system at home like I did. It made me want to help those kids. I knew what it felt like to be different, but I also knew what it felt like to get loving support at home that I needed to get me through tough times.

Dyslexia has made my life a struggle; however, it has strengthened my ability as a social worker. Social work has six core values. They are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Dyslexia has helped me gain knowledge in many of these values. For example, dignity and worth of the person because I understand how it feels to get judged and labeled without people getting to know me. Also dyslexia has helped me gain knowledge in competency. Competency is defined as, "Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession." To continue to gain knowledge in the field of social work, competency, you have to be willing to work hard. I have learned to work hard to succeed from a very young age due to my dyslexia.

Dyslexia is something that I will live with for the rest of my life, but I believe I have gained more from my disability than I have lost. While reading will always be a difficult task for me, I have dyslexia to thank for my work ethic. I am not afraid to work hard for what I want, setting high goals and challenges for myself. I am a caring and compassionate person because I know what it is like to be different. I have learned not to be judgmental because everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. My weakness is

reading but my strengths far outweigh that weakness. I will be successful in the future not in spite of my dyslexia, but in large part, because of my dyslexia.

"Culture influences an individual's health beliefs, behaviors, activities and medical treatment outcomes." (Cultural Competency). Culture includes many aspects such as language, customs, values, norms, rules, and disabilities. Sean, the main character in the novel *There's a boy in here* lives a very different life from many other children. He was diagnosed with autism at the age of five. Autism causes him to have cultural differences, compared to other children. For example, he is likely to miss developmental milestones, such as speaking their first words or phrases, toilet training, and walking or crawling. Children with autism such as Sean may also struggle with interactions with people. This is common in autistic patients. This might cause problems in learning social norms and values. Many children learn norms from their peers, teachers and parents. However, Sean played alone most of the time so he did not develop friendships with other children. He played well with his sister, Megan, at times, but most times Sean would tease her. Children that play alone have trouble understanding social norms and values.

Sean struggled with autism. "Autism is characterized by impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, and usual, repetitive or severely limited activities and interest" (Autism Fact Sheet). However, autism is very difficult to understand because there are so many levels on the spectrum. Sean learned how to cope with his disability as he went through life. When Sean was young he would come home from school and be disruptive. Even though Sean did well academically, his

social skills were not good. He would act out in class to gain acceptance from other students, however, this just caused tension with his teachers. As Sean's education continued he became better at coping with his disability. He made it through high school despite little social interaction and was accepted in to college. After college Sean moved back to Ohio to live a normal adult life. Sean has many people to thank for his success in life. His mother was determined to find her son help and would not stop looking until she found the help, she then found doctor Rossi. Doctor Rossi put Sean on a retraining program to focus on developing movement coordination and communication. At first Sean refused to accept the treatment and would push and fight. Then all of a sudden the program began to work on Sean and he began to improve his movement coordination and communication.

If I was assigned to the case of Sean I would use many personal skills that I have learned in the past. I would use skills such as, compassion, enthusiasm, and a good sense of humor. Like I said before, "I know how it feels to be different." This gives me a sense of affection that many other people might never develop. However, there are personal values that might cause challenges and obstacles. For instance, a lack of patience on my part while working with Sean on certain skills would cause challenges. Also, there might be a lack of patience on his part if he can not complete the program or certain exercises. In order to work together successfully we would both need to understand the importance of patience. Another personal value that might cause problems in this working relationship might be a lack of wisdom. Being a young social worker you lack experience and without much experience you might lack wisdom in the working field.

Everyone has different personal biases depending on your past experiences with peers, teachers, and your family. Common biases people have about children might be, all children are social, all children have many friends, or all play with normal toys. However, this is not always the fact. Many children that struggle with autism such as Sean struggle with all these aspects. For example, when Sean was a young child he did not develop friendships with other children. This would cause him to act out in class to gain the acceptance of his peers; however it just frustrated his teachers. Also, he would often play with toys differently than other kids would. For example rather than using a toy for its usual purpose he would play a game where he would just throw the toy in the air rapidly. To be successful with a client such as Sean, I need to be aware that the biases of children are most likely not going to be true.

Social workers view race and ethnicity as very influential while working with a client. Many people view people as less because of the color of their skin, or their beliefs. However, people of the same races see each other as similar. This is not always the case. For instance, if I were assigned to Sean my experience as a Caucasian child growing up in a predominantly white school system my instincts might tell me Sean would be very similar to me. I might go into my working relationship with Sean with the attitude he is the same as all other white children. This could cause many problems with communication and competency.

Being brought up in middle to high class town from a young age I was never introduced to the so called "other side of the world." However, Sean was also brought up in a high to middle class neighborhood similar to me. This could propose some problems

because I have views of how children should act within that class system. Such as, he is very social and he has many friends. I have this view because my whole life I was brought up thinking all children had many friends and interacted often.

Sex and gender have a great influence on ones life. Sex and gender are very different from each other. Sex is never changing. You are born with the genes that make you either a male or female. However, gender is socially constructed based on values and is always changing. Gender controls what is acceptable to wear, say, or even the way you act. For example, what would you say if you saw a man wearing a dress in public? Would you be shocked? At a young age we are socialized into our gender. There are four ways one is socialized into gender. The four ways people are socialized are family, language, peers, and media. This might propose problems while working with Sean because children with autism struggle with language and interaction with peers. As a social worker working with Sean it would be difficult to make effective programs because of his confusion with gender.

As I mentioned before, living with dyslexia my whole life has helped me understand how it feels to be different. However, this might propose problems while working with a patient with autism, such as Sean. For example, I may go into the case with a strategy that worked for me, yet it most likely will not work with Sean because autism is very different from dyslexia.

Code 1.05 of the Code of Ethics states, "Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures." At a young age my disability taught me not to judge people because they acted

differently. Growing up in a small town in Northern Connecticut I was not introduced to a wide range of races, ethnicities, or classes. I attended a mostly white school, with at most five African Americans per grade. The community was mostly upper middle class families. While growing up I never realized how privileged I was until I started to attend Western New England University. During my first semester at Western New England University I interned at the Gray House. The Gray House is an organization that provides four different services for families in need. They provide a Food Pantry, a Thrift Shop, Community Education Support Program (CESP/Adult Program) and Kids' Club which is an After School and Summer Camp Program. I worked with the children at Kid's Club. While working at the Gray House I learned about poverty. Many, if not all the families that are involved with the Gray House are living in poverty. I have also learned that people are in poverty for many different reasons. For example, some reasons a person may be living in poverty include the inability to meet high standards of living and costs of living, poor education, and not enough employment opportunities. My culture competence has greatly increased since attending Western New England University, and it will continue to increase as my education continues.

Recently in class we have been learning about the concepts of empowerment, social identity, diversity, and multiculturalism, and how these ideas apply to the social work profession. This really challenged me to think differently than I have in the past because as a child I was never introduced to much diversity. However, learning about empowerment, social identity, diversity, and multiculturalism in class has made me grow as a social worker. Although I was raised in a small upper middle class town in northern Connecticut and not exposed to much diversity, due to my dyslexia I have learned not to

judge people. Dyslexia has brought many struggles to my life; however it made me the caring and compassionate person I am today.

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