

Tottenville High School
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8 year old Giana was a second grader who was learning how to write simple paragraphs. Her handwriting was surely improving and her vocabulary was slowly growing. She was mastering adding and subtracting numbers while trying to understand the difference between even and odd. Except, that's what should've been happening. In reality, 8 year old Giana was in a kindergarten class for her second year in a row, still learning how to write her name and only knew how to count to 10.

It was the beginning of my fifth grade year. Every year of my elementary school life, I've volunteered to become a teacher's assistant. But this was the first year I decided to volunteer for a special education class. I remember walking up to Giana at her table and squatting down to introduce myself. She instantly smiled from ear to ear, her dimples showing and her eyes sparkling. Immediately picking up the different techniques her teacher was using in order to teach her how to count and how to write, I soon took over. Using red solo cups and 10 popsicle sticks, I got her to pick up each stick and put them into the second cup as she counted them correctly. I rewarded her with words of encouragement each time she got one right. I sat, holding her hand, writing her name down with her, over and over again.

Some weeks in, I went over to Giana, picked up her red solo cups with 23 sticks inside. We sat, we counted, I held her hand, we wrote her name, we wrote mom and then dad. But with each time we hit 23, with each letter we wrote, m-o-m, I began to question my progression. *Was I really doing anything? My relentless devotion was giving me minimal results.* That night proved to be sleepless for me as doubtful thoughts circled through my head. Nevertheless, I went to school the next day and continued with my routine.

A week from the last day of school, I went over to Giana, picked up her red solo cups with around 95 sticks inside. She counted all the sticks and got 2 more. She wrote her name, some basic words and actions. At the end of the period, I was ready to leave but she called my name to stop me, handing me a letter written by her parents:

"Thank you for all you have done for our daughter. We didn't think she could make it past counting to 50 and writing her name as quickly as she did but here she is, almost at 100 and finally ready enough to move into first grade. This couldn't have been done without you. . ."

The days mattered. They mattered more than I could fathom from the perspective of a simple Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. They mattered in the perspective of a person who waited a year. Progress was not instantaneous, it was dreadfully long, but it was progress nonetheless. For a year, I was viewing this task as a daily one when in fact, it was a tedious one. The days showed no headway, but the result of a year proved to be life altering.

From that moment forward, I questioned my point of view on every goal I had. I began to structure everything I did around this idea of where my standpoint of accomplishment should be. If the task is a simple one, I know that I should look at the finish line as being within arm's reach. However, if the task was complex, I understood that the finish line will sometimes seem to be beyond the horizon and the only way to overcome that would be to push forward.

With that mindset, I have accomplished so much more in life than I would have ever believed possible. I no longer experience the world as a person who cannot see the end, I experience it as a person who is waiting at the destination.