

## A SPECIAL IMPACT ON A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

There are always unexpected outcomes from any effort like this. This particular unexpected outcome was a jewel. The following is an edited response from the special education teacher who knows E well and spent the whole day helping her confront the many obstacles she encountered. Below is how she did with a few of them.

E is a child with autism and is selectively mute. She is served in the resource room about 2.5 hours per day. She becomes extremely anxious and refuses to speak but makes noises that can be quite disruptive. Her anxiety also keeps her from trying new activities and experiences.

E made it very clear (about 2 months ago) that she would not be coming on the field trip to see the whales. Her mom said it was fine if E stayed home. She didn't want her to be too challenging. Once we made it clear to her mom that we wanted her to come, but needed to know what she was fearful of, her mom did some investigating. Her mom and all of her teachers did everything possible to eliminate her anxiety and be sure she was fully prepared.

E had many obstacles she encountered and conquered throughout the day, one of which was walking the path to the lighthouse at Lime Kiln. She was fearful of falling but was not willing to hold my hand (not a fan of touching others). She at this point was ready to head back to the bus, but then she heard Mrs. Gordon say, "The whales are coming." Wow! E began to move!! At one point E said, "It's okay if I fall. I have lots of Band-Aids." So, she hustled along.

When we got to the rocks where we needed to perch, E struggled to walk on the rocks. Kids began to "Ooh" and "Ahh" at the whales and yet E began noise making and flapping in frustration. She could not walk on the rocks fast enough and could not figure out what the kids were looking at. After about 15 minutes of noise making, it happened! A whale swam right in her point of vision and she exclaimed, "Ooh!" She then began to clap and clap and clap. E kept her eyes on the water and continued to "Ooh" and "Ahh" like her class. She was even able to use her words and tell me she wanted to move so she could see more. After seeing the whales, E said to me, "This is the best field trip ever!"

Once the whales swam away, E was ready for more fun. Looking at the rocks, E chose not to explore until.... she heard that someone found a sea star. E then used her words and asked for help, so I taught E how to walk like a "kitty cat" and scamper down to where the sea star was. Happy girl!

The next stop in E's field trip adventure was the film of orcas in the light house. Bob asked a scientist to start the discussion. The woman asked the kids what their favorite part of seeing the whales was. E began noise making, so I handed her her communication notebook. She wrote, "When I saw their heads and some of their bodies." Then Bob asked the kids how they could tell difference between a male and female and E quickly drew in her communication notebook an accurate picture.

The day was great! E spoke to all of her friends, spoke to her teachers about all she saw and even independently chose to draw the picture for Mrs. Gordon. (This is huge by the way!).

On Thursday AM, E saw our classroom paraeducator and said- yes said- the following:

- E: "I got to see whales and you didn't."  
WA: "I know, I am so sad."  
E: "What did you do?"  
WA: "I did reading and writing. What did you do?"  
E: "I went and saw orcas."

This conversation is huge! E very rarely speaks to adults and for her to initiate a conversation is rare.

Upon receiving this email I asked E what her favorite part of the field trip was and she wrote: "Everything almost, except the toilets." Then I asked her to finish this thought... "I am happy I went because...." And she wrote, "it was actually fun."

Thank you for an amazing experience

