



GWENYTH SZABO

is a freshman at Lake Ridge Academy. She loves sports, especially soccer. In her free time Gwen likes to knit and scrapbook and she is also a second degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Gwen isn't sure what she would like to do after she finishes her schooling and is enjoying her high school experience while she decides.

I remember hearing of a story where an elderly woman was bullied by a group of middle school kids on a school bus. A 68 year-old school bus monitor was reduced to tears while the middle school students continued to find entertainment in her pain, yet nobody stood up for her. I was horrified to hear this story, and I thought of my grandmother being picked on. It hurt me to think about it, and I was angry that those kids were so mean. They didn't even know her name! They didn't respect her as a person, and it made me wonder had the kids known something as simple as her name, would they have bullied her?

While my school has many programs to spread awareness of the negative effects of discrimination, such as this school bus incident, people need to be aware that it happens outside of school as well. There are many communities outside of school whether it's a sports team, neighborhood, or even a tiny group of people; for example, a small community outside of school is the school bus. I ride the bus an hour every day to school, and I realized that I didn't even know my bus driver's name! She is a major part of the busing community and provides transportation for many kids, and we don't even know her name. This incident and this fact made me realize that it's including people that matters, so I wanted to explore the flipside of the discrimination: inclusion.

As an active participant in my school's community, I include people by acting as a voice in the Student Senate, being a part of a club against bullying, and I include people by making new friends. The first step to include a person is by knowing a person's name. Knowing a person's name acknowledges them, and acknowledging someone makes them feel included. I plan to bring awareness of discrimination by using the first step of inclusion on school buses.

Not only would I personally like to stand up against discrimination and take a step toward inclusion, I would first like to ask the kids on the school buses to make a list of everyone on their bus. Then, I want to see how many include the name of the bus driver. After I've conducted the survey, I would explain the purpose and explain to the kids how knowing a person's name can be the first step toward inclusion. I hope that bringing awareness to how simple this is, will make people more likely to commit to it. Discrimination can take many forms, and it can be as subtle as excluding someone by accident. Knowing a person's name acknowledges them and gives them the well-deserved respect and identity that everyone deserves. The simplest forms of inclusion can make someone feel better, and it's those tiny acts of kindness and inclusion that can stop the hate.