

## The See Me Project

Written by Elizabeth Barrett  
Friday, 21 March 2014 14:17 -

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Video made about people with disabilities.

One day in February, Bailey Koch was frustrated.

And very angry.

So the Gothenburg High School special education and Spanish teacher jotted down words and phrases to help her process how someone treated a student with a disability.

“And it turned into a beautiful message that students wanted to share,” Koch said.

The first week in March, the nine students in her marketing/entrepreneurship class launched “The See Me Project” on YouTube.

Using popular and upbeat songs, students with and without disabilities—and some affected by loved ones with disabilities—are filmed holding different signs the class made with the words and phrases coined by Koch.

“We want the world to see students with disabilities the way they deserve to be seen,” she said.

Nathan and Margeaux Belanger, siblings of senior Elizabeth Belanger who used to attend GHS, clutch a sign with the word “autism.”

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Elizabeth has autism and now lives in a group home in Beatrice.

Class member Levi Tripp likes the slogan “Encourage Me” on a sign.

“Everyone, regardless of whether you have a disability or not, needs encouragement,” Tripp said. “And people need to understand that people with disabilities are just like the rest of us. They find things interesting and show emotions.”

Most of the signs held by students say “Me” which is the project theme.

Koch said the video is about seeing the person and not hiding the fact that he or she may have a disability.

One sign reads: “Don’t Judge Me, Build Me Up.”

The video ends with student Bradley Gerbitz, who has a mental disability.

Koch uses an iPhone to film a grinning Gerbitz holding a “Me” sign.

“What do you want people to see?” she asks Gerbitz.



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“Me,” he replies.

By Monday afternoon, 2,772 people had viewed the piece on YouTube.

“It’s been well received,” Koch said.

She and the class want the video to go viral and are trying to figure out marketing strategies.

“We’re trying to get people to see it and share it,” James Shuman said.

So far, they’ve contacted “Good Morning America” but have not heard back.

The students said they’ve learned much from the project.

Beth Whitney said she’s learned that more people than what she thought care about people with disabilities.

“I never would have expected that,” Whitney said.

Tripp said he discovered that “our school has a big heart for people with disabilities.”

“I was happy to see how well students have responded to people with disabilities and other things,” he said.

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Band teacher Tom Belanger, who is also the father of the Belanger children, said he puts out the welcome mat for all learners at GHS.

“Not everyone has the same comfort level,” Belanger said.

Students with disabilities of any kind help the staff become better teachers, he said.

“And I’m not talking about Elizabeth being in an AP (advanced placement) class, just students and staff accepting the autism,” Belanger explained.

“The Me Project” can be viewed on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsSLIPG19tY> or by searching on YouTube for “The See Me Project.”



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