

Raising a child is not an easy task for anyone, but that task becomes even more challenging when that child has a disability. Janeil was born a 'normal' child, but lost her sight at the age of six years. From that point onward, as parents, we have had to make several changes and adaptations in order to make her life as easy and enjoyable as possible. Due to the fact that Janeil is such a strong willed and intelligent girl, I think that our job was made a lot easier and the situation more bearable.

When Janeil lost her sight, we still wanted her to gain an education. Currently, the only educational institution that caters for the blind is the Irving Wilson School (formally the School for the Deaf and Blind). While the faculty must be praised for their efforts, they do not teach the same level of work as other primary schools, and there appears no real opportunity for advancement academically.

As parents, we made the decision to try to get Janeil into a regular primary schools so that she could have a chance at an equitable education and have an opportunity to advance to secondary and tertiary levels. Meetings were held with the heads of Janeil's then current school and the Wilkie Cumberbatch Primary School, which was located next to Irving Wilson. It was agreed that Janeil would attend certain classes at Wilkie Cumberbatch in preparation for the Common Entrance Exam. While Principals Straughn (Irving Wilson) and Ward (Wilkie Cumberbatch – now retired) must be applauded for their initiative in making such a bold move to allow Janeil such access to continue her studies, the attitudes of certain entities towards her inclusion was almost appalling. Fortunately, Janeil has risen above all challenges thus far and is excelling at her current school, Combermere Secondary.

Although Janeil is an extremely intelligent child, she needed several tools which would allow her to remain competitive in the classroom and aid in promoting independence, as far as her studies were concerned. That was where the Barbados Children's Trust came in. Thanks to that organisation's donation of assistive and adaptive technologies, Janeil has the edge needed to succeed. Without this technology, while it would still be possible for Janeil to do her studies, it would be a harder task.

I believe that in a society that is as developed as Barbados, we need to pay more attention to the disabled. The Irving Wilson School needs to be equipped to provide a higher level of instruction

so that students who have the capacity would take examinations and gain certification. Once a child has that ability to learn, their inability to speak, hear or see should not be an obstacle. We as a society seem to be willing to do just enough – but even that is not enough.

As I said, Janeil has been fortunate – but it is not that everything fell into her lap – it all had to be fought for, and that fight would not be necessary if proper facilities were in place.

Thankfully, Janeil has friends that take her out, family that helps, organisations and individuals that assist, but at the end of the day, we all have to put that extra effort in. There needs to be more public awareness and sensitivity towards the disabled. Janeil has encountered both children and adults that are just ignorant when it comes to the blind and to the disabled in general.

We are very grateful for the assistance that we have thus far received from friends, family, private and government interests. Janeil, at a very young age is a pioneer, and her journey has only just begun. Hopefully with open minds and hearts, there will be more like her in the very near future.

Written by Mrs. Odle