

JARC Florida's mission is to provide programs and services to empower and educate adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, including Autism.

(Em)Powered Up
By Fallon Gechter

The power button is pushed. I slowly come to life, ready to greet my friends for the day. Their instructor makes a list of the order they get to use me, the smart board in their room. They take turns using my many features. Some don't speak with words, but from this viewpoint I can see in their eyes and that tells me everything. He starts with a money game. Needing to put the correct amount of change from the cash register to the customer. He looks at my screen with a fierce intent. I can see him thinking, studying, deciding. He moves the coin over and he is correct. I make the game Zing! alerting him he got the correct answer. He doesn't exclaim "hooray" or "got it!", but his eyes light up like the fourth of July. Sparkles shooting in his eyes, he is proud of himself, he is happy to have gotten it right. But if you are not looking at him, not truly seeing him, would you ever know that?

Next up a young lady wants to watch a dance video on YouTube. She touches my screen until she finds the one she wants. The music starts, the dance instructor is shouting directions and off she goes. Shaking her hips, moving her feet and laughing. She is not following it exactly, but she doesn't care. She is dancing with her heart, feeling the music in her bones. Does anyone besides me see the joy in her? Do they see her clothes a bit mismatched, her hair a bit messy, her eyes a bit big? Are they missing out on the joy because they are focused on the wrong things? Are they focusing on what makes her different instead of what makes her unique?

They take turns all day, playing games, watching videos, learning new skills that I can teach them. Money games, spelling games, trivia games. As many as I can find that they want to play. Eager to learn everything they can. Have people not wanted to try and teach them? Have they seemed like they are not capable of learning? What a shame that they can't see them from my viewpoint. Looking into their eyes, full of wonder, full of life, full of possibilities. Some talk too loud, some are hard to understand, but they all smile so bright the electricity cursing through me dances.

I watch them working, eating their lunch, being with their friends. I am a small part of a big life. They start the day ready for whatever may come, and they leave ready for their next adventure. It is quiet when they are gone, too quiet. I miss their sounds, their movements. They keep me company, I keep them sharp. We work together to be better, to show the world what and who they are. They are smart, they are kind, they are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers and they are my friends.