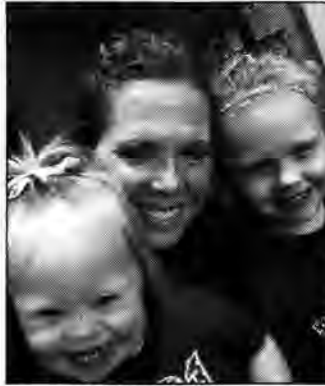


GUEST COLUMN

It is OK to be different

By now, all the kids are back in school and hopefully are falling right back into routine of the fall. Whether it is a new school, new grade and teacher or a whole new city, we all go through changes in the fall.



JACKIE FERRIER

I hope that those of you who read this really stress to your children and your entire family that we need to be a little nicer and kinder during these changes. It brings on a lot of stress and anxiety in my house. I know, and I have to practice this myself. I always tell my daughter Kennedy if she sees anyone new needing a friend, she should be that friend.

We should all work to be that friend.

On another note, I wanted to share some very exciting information. Well, it's very exciting to me anyway. I found out in July I was accepted into the Partners in Policymaking Class 36 through the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. This will consist of eight full weekends starting in September, one per month, of sessions on various topics regarding disabilities.

A few of those topics include inclusive education, round table discussion with the Minnesota Department of Education, community organizing and meeting with some members of Congress and many more.

I am looking forward to educating myself and hope to bring something back to our community to share with our schools.

Only 36 people get accepted each year into this program. I feel very honored and lucky I was chosen. In the program's 30 year history it has helped 980 Minnesotans become effective



advocates for themselves, their children and others with disabilities.

Lastly, I want to thank this amazing community for the outpouring of support from my family being featured in the May family issue of *River Valley Woman* magazine. I was very nervous and anxious for it to be published. It was extremely emotionally overwhelming with all the love and messages I've received.

I'm speaking in a few new locations this month and in October because of the article. I wouldn't have been able to reach these people without stepping out of my protected little bubble of this great community.

I hope that we shared enough for people to learn a little bit about Down syndrome. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

If there are any teachers or groups that would like me to speak in October for Down syndrome awareness month, please feel free to contact me at jaclynferrier@gmail.com.

I really believe it starts with educating our youth that is OK to be different.