

Discovering a Symphony Director

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In a Canadian city, a group of residents came together to discover ways that people labeled “disabled” could become contributors to their neighborhood. They called their effort Project Friendship. They would meet a relatively isolated disabled person and attempt to discover her or his gifts that could be connected to the community’s life.

One of these people was a man named Edward who had always lived in a wheelchair and did not speak. One of the members of the connecting group spent considerable time with Edward who seemed to be mainly silent and immobile. Then, one day she noticed that he seemed to come to life whenever classical music was played at the group home.

One member of the connecting group loved classical music and went to all the local symphony concerts. He began to take Edward with him to the concerts. It was obvious that Edward had found his joyful home in the symphony hall. Early on, at the end of a great moving symphony, Edward said loudly, “Wow.” It’s the first time anyone had heard him speak.

Because Edward so loved hearing the symphony, the connector began to take him to rehearsals so that even more music could fill his life. He would sit on the stage right by the orchestra. The symphony director noticed that he was moving his hands to the music. Therefore, he gave Edward a baton that he could use as the symphony rehearsed. Gradually Edward became able to direct the classical music with his baton. Therefore, the symphony director decided that on 100th anniversary of Mozart's birth, he would have a special evening called Edward's Mozart Centennial Concert. Somehow, they found a tuxedo that fit Edward and the evening of the Centennial, Edward sat on the stage and when time for the final number came, he was moved in his wheelchair to the Director's position and he conducted the symphony. At the end 800 people that filled the hall stood and applauded for more time than had ever happened at the regular symphonies.

Edward's hidden gift, made visible to the community, created a musical celebration like no other in the town's history. While he directed, his "disability" disappeared and the audience could see who Edward really is, and Edward also discovered who he is. Now he speaks and can tell his own story.