

From the Sidelines

SPREAD A LITTLE SPARKLE WHEREVER YOU GO.

REMEMBER GOING THROUGH RECRUITMENT, LOOKING FOR A sorority where you would be accepted for who you are, a sorority where you could fit in yet have opportunities to stand out?

"Folks in my community started to talk about the ripple effect The Sparkles were having on our school and community. Whenever people saw inclusion happening outside of the cheer team they would say, 'That's the Sparkle effect,' and so the name stuck," says Sarah.

Kappa has given us that.

Teens and pre-teens with disabilities also have found a place to belong and blossom as members of their school's inclusive cheerleading squad, The Sparkles. The squads are offshoots of The Sparkle Effect, a nonprofit organization that

incorporates students with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders and other disabilities into mainstream high school and college cheer squads.

Sarah Cronk, Whitman, founded The Sparkle Effect as a 15-year-old high schooler in Iowa after seeing how students with disabilities,

including her brother, Charlie, were excluded. As her cheer squad's captain, Sarah committed to helping sidelined students get in the game.

During the past six years, more than 120 Sparkles squads have popped up across the U.S., pairing special needs students with typically developing students who help them learn cheers, jumps and stunts.

"There are thousands of incredibly brave girls and boys with disabilities who, for the first time, are standing before their student body and performing and becoming total rock stars," says Sarah. "Without that kind of bravery, determination and leadership, nothing The Sparkle Effect has done would ever have happened."

Sarah and The Sparkle Effect have received numerous accolades over the years. Most recently, Sarah received the 2013 World of Children Award and the 2012 L'Oréal Women of Worth Award for improving the lives of others. In 2011, Sarah received a \$100,000 Do Something Award as the nation's best world-changer under age 25. She has

been featured in *People* magazine, appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*—twice—and was named to *Parade* magazine's All-America Service Team.

The list of awards and honors goes on and on. What Sarah finds most important, however, is the impact typically developing students can have when they create socially inclusive environments.

"The Sparkle Effect really is a group effort, a community of people working together to make inclusion the norm, not just something we hear about once in a while," says Sarah. "It really does take a village."

The far-reaching impact of The Sparkle Effect highlights an important truth: Whether in a sorority or on a cheer squad, whether at school or at work, everyone wants a place to fit in and to shine.

"When we give our time and attention to others and show them that they matter, it gives our life purpose," says Sarah. "Serving others enriches our understanding of other people—and ourselves."

—By Ruth Goodman



Want to know more?
Visit www.thesparkleeffect.org to learn more about Sarah, her service work and how to start a Sparkles squad.

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