

**Dream, Design,
Do**

I am Erika Kissel. I am a Self- Advocate with ENGAGE IL.

I am excited to be here at SPEAK UP SPEAK OUT!!

**I live in Naperville with my parents. My parents and sister and family are my
biggest supporters and cheerleaders. I also have the support of friends
and co-workers.**



As a person living with Down syndrome and many health challenges since birth, I am not defined by my label. I want to spread the message that people with different abilities have many gifts and talents to share, if

given the chance.



My family and I are strong advocates of inclusive education and living and working in our communities, with support where needed. I was fully

Included in all of my school years. I graduated from Neuqua Valley

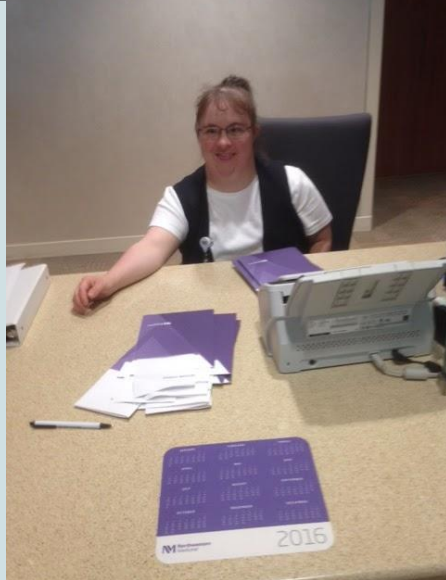
High School in Naperville.



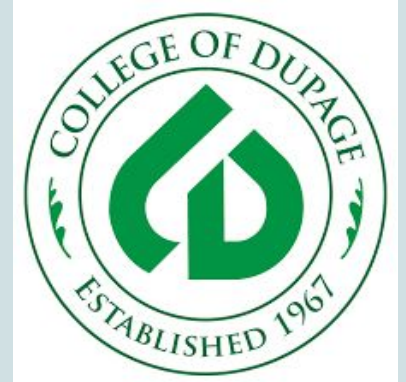
Working in my community has always been very important to me. My first paid competitive job was in 1998, as an assistant in a kindergarten summer school classroom. That was 27 years ago and I have been working ever since!!



I have had the opportunity of a variety of training and internships. I interned at a medical Clinic and also at Edwards Hospital Human Resource Department, doing a variety of light clerical work, just to name two. This gave me the opportunity to learn new job skills.



During the transition years, I worked for 3 ½ years at paid competitive employment at Jewel as well as taking classes at College of DuPage and Robert Morris College.



I have been working in the Food Service Industry since finishing my Transition school years. I am proud to currently work in competitive employment for ORGANIC LIFE FOOD SERVICES, at my alma mater, Neuqua Valley High School. In addition to serving the students I have also mentored other students at the workplace, who want to learn about food service. I enjoy being part of a team at work, as a loyal employee I enjoy going to work and being a contributing member of my community.



Of course, I also enjoy earning my own money !!

**It is also important that our communities see us, as people, who also have
gifts and talents to offer!**



**I am also part of the “ Just a Dollop “ team as the “ Food Safety Person”,
with my friends, Ashley, Rachel, Ruth and Bridget.**



Giving back to my community is also important to me. I

Volunteer at the DuPage Children's Museum, have volunteered at Northern

Illinois Food Pantry, volunteer at my Church, the Northwestern Cancer

Center and other volunteer positions over the years. I love the theatre and

have been in at least 9 to 10 plays over the years, such as in a

Community theatre group at North Central College.



**This is just a very brief snapshot of my life. I have a full and meaningful life
in my community. I want our communities and employers to know that we
CAN achieve, thrive and contribute, as we all have gifts to share.**

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak !

