

Cynthia Kidder: Recipient of Corp! Magazine's *Michigan's Salute to Diversity Award*

Cynthia S. Kidder is a national advocate for educating and employing children with Down syndrome and other special needs. She is the founder of Rochester Hills-based Band of Angels, a national outreach organization dedicated to helping children with Down syndrome and other disabilities reach their full potential. Under Ms. Kidder's direction, Band of Angels publishes high-end stationery products, developmental calendars and books celebrating life with Down syndrome. Ms. Kidder is also a sought after public speaker and resource consultant for parents seeking information, guidance and counsel on educational and employment issues and opportunities for children with Down syndrome and other special needs.

Ms. Kidder is the mother of three sons. Her youngest son, Jordan, was born with Down syndrome in September of 1989. In 1991, Ms. Kidder, a former sales executive and national account manager with Sprint, applied her sales savvy and marketing skills to create Kidder Resources, a private sector employment agency solely dedicated to finding career opportunities for persons with disabilities. The motivation behind this endeavor was twofold: first, to provide more meaningful employment for persons with differences than was currently available in the marketplace. Secondarily, Ms. Kidder wanted to acknowledge and thank the parents of special needs children, now adults, who had gone before and paved the way for the academic liberties that Jordan is able to enjoy. Because of the concerted initiatives of these parents of young persons with Down syndrome and other disabilities, Ms. Kidder was able to enroll her son in school knowing he would be in a positive, inclusive academic environment.

In its four year existence, Kidder Resources placed 32 persons with varying disabilities in occupations throughout the metropolitan Detroit area. Many still contact Ms. Kidder today to update her on their career progress and successes. One of the chief lessons Ms. Kidder learned from Kidder Resources, however, was that the corporate world was not quite ready for special needs children to integrate into the workplace. It was this lesson, though, that inspired her to literally start at the beginning.

In 1994, Ms. Kidder established Band of Angels and published the first Beautiful Faces calendar to visually help persons throughout America see and appreciate children with Down syndrome 365 days a year. To Ms. Kidder, these photographs of children with Down syndrome celebrating the everyday joys of life served as an initial foundation on which future community and employer acceptance could be built.

Thirteen calendar years later, Beautiful Faces calendars and other products are displayed and used in homes, hospitals, schools and corporate offices throughout the world. Band of Angels has spread a positive and informed message to more than 40,000 families, not only through the Beautiful Faces calendar, but with other high-end stationary products, books, developmental tools and the new parent Celebrate! welcome packages, which alone touch 2000 families each year in the United States and abroad. Further, Ms. Kidder's reach also extends to the thousands throughout the country who have heard her personal story and mission or obtained expert advice through her consultation services.

As an advocate, publisher and speaker, Ms. Kidder's strength is her experience-based vision, energy, creativity, and ceaseless devotion to the potential of each differently-abled individual. Ms. Kidder sums up her philosophy accordingly.

"I have never believed in anything more fervently than the indisputable truth that persons with challenges are whole and valuable people with much to give and much to gain by being part of the world community."

In growing Band of Angels, Ms. Kidder has also assembled an impressive Board of Directors who hail from such national and regional companies as Compuware, Macy's, Cadillac, Borders and Plante & Moran. With Band of Angels' Board support and that of other corporate and individual donors, the annual Band of Angels Starry Night Gala fundraiser garners approximately \$50,000 in additional funds for Band of Angels outreach efforts and scholarships.

Ms. Kidder's efforts on behalf of Down syndrome have been acknowledged at the state and national levels. In November 2006, Ms. Kidder was one of nine women in the nation to be named "Women who Inspire Us" by Woman's Day Magazine for her work with Band of Angels. In May 2007, Ms. Kidder was named one of 13 Michigianians of the Year by the Detroit News. Ms. Kidder is a native of Brackenridge, Pennsylvania and holds a Bachelor's degree in English from Allegheny College in Meadville, PA. She resides in Rochester Hills.

For additional information about Ms. Kidder or Band of Angels products, or to learn more about Band of Angels outreach efforts including bike camp, golf camp, and post-high school scholarships, please visit www.bandofangels.com.