



Elizabeth Conley / the Detroit News

2006 Michiganiaan of the Year Mother helps all children with Down syndrome

The news hit Cynthia Kidder hard.

Five hours after her son Jordan was born, doctors were almost certain he had Down syndrome, a genetic condition that meant he would be developmentally delayed and have physical limitations.

Doctors predicted he would never read, do math or have complex thoughts.

So many questions raced through Kidder's head about her youngest son. Would he ever have a full, rich life? Would he attend his senior prom or ride a bicycle? Kidder decided to take one day at a time, love her son and observe what he *could* do.

"So what if he didn't have a date to the prom?" she says. "I decided to celebrate who he was."

When Jordan was 3 and his older brother, Harper, was 4, Kidder took the boys to have their portrait taken by well-known Berkeley photographer Kendra Dew.

Other photographers rushed when they took Jordan's picture. But Dew saw him and captured his essence, his easy smile, his deep blue eyes and porcelain skin on film. Kidder had never seen such a beautiful picture of Jordan.

That photo in 1994 became the inspiration for Band of Angels, a nonprofit organization Kidder founded to show the beautiful faces of children with Down syndrome.

"There wasn't this visual acceptance of them," Kidder says. "I wanted to find a way to just show everybody the beautiful children with Down syndrome."

Dew remained steadfast with Kidder to portray the faces of children whose beauty many people cannot see. She began making tender sepia-toned portraits of children and hand-painted them. The images show soft and tender moments with children by the beach and playing.

Now 12 years have passed since those first pictures were displayed in a calendar she developed, "Beautiful Faces: Celebrating Life with Down Syndrome," which currently sells more than 7,000 copies annually. In 2001, she also co-authored the book "Common Threads: Celebrating Life with Down Syndrome" (Band of Angels Press, \$39.95).

Kidder is a national advocate for educating, employing and supporting individuals with Down syndrome and other special needs. Her organization offers support and education for new parents, bicycle camp for children, and golf clinic to young adults.

In November, Woman's Day magazine honored the Band of Angels founder and CEO with a "Women Who Inspire Us" award for her efforts.

"She speaks the word to everyone that people with Down syndrome are not a burden but a blessing," says Annette Liike of Wixom, who was inspired by Kidder to expect more from her 5-year-old son, Jon, who, too, has Down syndrome.

"She has taught me to look at the good. She's so accepting and wants to improve everything she touches -- and she does."

Kidder wants other children with Down syndrome to have a voice like Jordan, who read by the time he entered kindergarten, rode his bicycle to school starting in sixth grade, and learned the periodic table of the elements in the seventh.

"Children with Down syndrome need an advocate," Kidder says. "We're supposed to always represent those who might need a voice other than their own, and many children with Down syndrome need a voice."

Kimberly Hayes Taylor



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[A video profile of Cynthia Kidder](#)

Name: Cynthia Kidder

Age: 51

Residence: Rochester Hills

Occupation: Founder, Band of Angels

Education: Bachelor's degree,
Allegheny College

Family: Sons Harper, 18; Jordan, 17;
and stepson, Kevin, 26

Why honored: For her advocacy on
behalf of children with Down syndrome
and their parents