

The Place of Fun Encounters

by Joyce Johnson

Where? The lush, green lawn of St. John's Episcopal Church 10:30 am, last Saturday; Me, two-year-old Scout, and her mom, Katelyn stood in the center surrounded by the busy vibe of Emigrant People's Marketeers, and the happy chatter of locals, vendors, and visitors from everywhere.



Scout is a very social little girl who had me and her mom following her around as she engaged with people until breathless, Katelyn and I just plopped down on the lawn... at Scout's level... got eye to eye with the adorable little girl. Mom clicked on her phone to a special song and Scout started to dance. Then I handed Scout my notebook and pen and she smiled at the face I drew and made exuberant squiggles around it. Mom and I were able to chat then, and she told me about her little girl, and the awesome support organization that

embraces parents and the individual needs of people of all ages with Down syndrome, everywhere.

She's a fun little love, that Scout, interested in everything, though a bit behind in speech development, so when she started "speaking," and teaching me with hand signals ("sign") I got a lump in my throat. I need to teach all my friends these hand signs because I am so hard of hearing. They are so much more beautiful than mumbled words. Scout hugged herself and pointed at her mom [which says I love you] and then me too! I told Katelyn that Scout is going to be smarter than both of us if this keeps up. Mom twinkled. I cannot begin to cover here all that we spoke of, got stinging eyes for, and signed, danced, played, laughed over, but I can share that my heart was permanently altered hearing what Scout's life with her beautiful compassionate parents and the support they found in DREAM. What a lucky kid!



DREAM, the organization that supports our Down syndrome

friends and kin, is not just for babies, although

that is, of course, first base. There are many individuals of all ages with Down syndrome. You may not know that they have wonderful support avenues in D.R.E.A.M., all are hands-on programs that form the basis for developing happy, productive lives.

The website says it best, the main fundraiser is the Buddy Walk (now nationwide) and Bozeman has picked up the torch. Behind this beloved event stands D.R.E.A.M. (Down syndrome Research, Education, and Advocacy of Montana), a 501(c)(3) non-profit devoted to walking with families from the moment of diagnosis and every step thereafter and supporting individuals with Down syndrome across their lifespan. They provide direct financial support, education, and advocacy to help families in Gallatin, Park and Madison counties navigate a journey that can feel overwhelming. This year marks the 15th Annual Buddy Walk in Bozeman, and we invite you to stand with them as a sponsor. Your support fuels more



than a single day—it fuels a mission that's changing lives.

Each year in Bozeman, the Buddy Walk (see picture) brings together hundreds of families, friends, businesses, and advocates for a short walk and day of celebration, inclusion, and hope. They walk not out of obligation, but out of joy—to honor individuals with Down syndrome and show the world the beauty of every ability and to encourage inclusion.

This year the Buddy Walk is September 20th, located at the Dinosaur Playground at Gallatin Regional Park in Bozeman. Register at 10 am. The walk begins at 11 am, tickets are from free to \$20. Please go online and register early if you wish at <https://www.dream-mt.org/buddy-walk>. Or google D.R.E.A.M. Bozeman, and Down syndrome, or go to Facebook for more: <http://www.facebook.com/mtdreamers>.

People walk away from the Buddy Walks feeling that there is great good going on in the world after all.