

Knowing What I Need

“Is this what you REALLY want?” This question surprised me, and made me think. A few months ago, I participated in a program hosted by Tokyo University called the DO-IT Japan Scholar program. This program primarily focuses on assisting disabled people to get higher education, to achieve in society, and to become leaders.

I have a disability, and it’s medically known as low vision. I can only see about a meter in front of me, even with glasses, and I have trouble reading a person’s expressions. I have been living with abled people for all of my life, and I was usually the only one in the room that had a disability of any kind. All of the types of disabilities, the people, and the tools introduced in the Scholar program were new to me.

I was in one of the classes in the Scholar program, and it was about asking for reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. We made presentations to ask for specific support or allowances, and I asked about bringing my iPad to class to take pictures of the whiteboard. When I finished my presentation, the teachers told me, “Is this what you REALLY want? You don’t have to be so considerate when requesting support. What about requesting a note-taker? There are lots of other options for getting the help you need. Getting rejected is part of the negotiation process. That’s how you find a middle

ground with someone.” I was surprised. I had never really thought of other options, especially having a note-taker. It turned out that I was ruling out options that require a person to alter their schedule to assist me. Maybe I was afraid to ask, to be a burden. I then realized that the word "can't" itself is a burden that I carry, that we all carry. This is especially true for our thoughts. It binds our minds and paralyzes us. I understood that I needed to break this mindset.

However, people can't live all by themselves. We need help from each other to succeed.

One of the other discussions I participated in was about dependence and independence.

The professor said that being truly “independent” is an illusion. No one is completely independent. A person who is considered independent, depends on many other people without realizing it. I believe these types of people generally tend to be abled, since the disabled often have to ask for help that requires more time and energy. However, if everyone can help each other out, even if the task is time-consuming or costly, it will make us all feel happier.

I listened to an online course from Yale University called “The Science of Well-Being,” and it said that to be happy, you should be socially connected with other people. Just the act of being with someone can change your level of happiness. It also taught me that helping others is the perfect way to spend your time. You not only make the receiver of

the kind act happy, you yourself become happier as well. One of the examples in the lecture was an experiment where the participants received five dollars. One half was told to spend it on themselves. The other half was told to spend it on someone else. All of the participants are surveyed later that day to measure how happy they are. The results were that the people who spent the money on another person ended up happier than the people who spent the money on themselves. This shows that helping others also improves your own happiness. I want to create, and be part of a society where everyone, abled and disabled, can use their strengths, and have someone else there to help compensate for their weaknesses. To achieve this goal, everyone needs to be open with each other and be willing to ask, offer, and accept help. Participating in the DO-IT Japan Scholar program and listening to the lecture from Yale University has changed how I look at asking others for help. This experience will become a starting point for me to start asking for the assistance that I truly need. [689 words]