

The

Spotlight*

Meghan Maynard



Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee is proud to present 2016 Self Advocate of the Year Meghan Maynard!

The girl with the long blonde hair stepped to the microphone to speak to hundreds of people in a crowded church hall, and everyone listened. Her hand shook a little, even though she was somewhat used to being the face and voice of Down syndrome to many. This night, though, was a bit different. Everyone was gathered specifically to celebrate those with DS for the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee's annual World Down Syndrome Awareness Day Celebration. The young lady at the microphone was accepting DSAMT's 2016 Self Advocate of the Year Award, for her seemingly tireless presence out in the community demonstrating to Middle Tennesseans what it means to live a full life with Down syndrome.

"Hi. My name is Meghan Maynard, and I'm so happy to be here tonight. I am 16 years old, and I am in the 10th grade. I go to Siegel High School where I am a cheerleader. I am also the Buddy Director of Best Buddies at my school. I am a dancer with VSA..."

The list is quite a bit longer. Meghan is more active than most people, with or without Down syndrome.

"It's a great problem to have," says Jen Maynard, Meghan's mom. "She's out there doing stuff. She's just got that personality where people enjoy being around her. Part of the reason she ends up doing stuff like that is she's just a charming person. She's very kind and polite and just a joy to be around. She puts herself out there, and she's up for anything. I'll ask her about something new we can try, 'You wanna do this?' 'Yup.'"

In addition to cheerleading, Best Buddies, and dancing, Meghan is also a Girl Scout in Troop 5383, a tennis player with Buddy Up, and a Speedboat Swimmer. She's also a frequent traveler and effective self-advocate.

Just a week after accepting her award from DSAMT, Meghan flew to Washington, D.C. with her mom, DSAMT Executive Director, Alecia Talbott, and Jennifer Heflin, Co-Chair of the Down Syndrome Policy Network of TN, for the National Down Syndrome Society's Buddy Walk on DC, for her first "official duty" as DSAMT Self-Advocate of the



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Year. In DC, she not only learned about important advocacy issues alongside many other selfadvocates from across the county, but also spent an entire day at the Capitol meeting with Senators Alexander and Corker and our TN Representatives - telling them her story and asking them each to join the Task Force on Down syndrome and support two important pieces of legislation: ABLE to Work

Act (S. 2702/H.R. 4795) and Accurate Education for Prenatal Screening Act (H.R. 3441).

That was not her first time to D.C. in the role of self-advocate. It will probably not be her last, either.

As extraordinary as Meghan is, though, she's also a typical teenage girl. She loves music, including pop and soundtracks, and sometimes sings Christmas songs in summer. If she has a spare hour, which is not often, she flops across her bed with her phone and video calls with friends. She loves restaurants. All of them. Perhaps most typical, though, is that even with all of her activity, and all of the times she has spoken up for people with DS, or just spoken up for herself, she can still get nervous in front of a crowd, as Jen noticed when Meghan wrapped up her award speech.

"When I graduate from high school, I want to go to fashion college and design clothes. Thank you so much for this award."

Jen, who noticed Meghan's hand trembling, asked, "Were you nervous?"

"My hand was!"

DSAMT is proud to have Meghan Maynard as our 2016 Self-Advocate of the Year. Meghan represents the Down syndrome community brilliantly simply by being active and being herself.

Her mom puts it best in this message to new parents:

"You're in for a beautiful ride. She's literally the best thing we've ever done. She's the best of all of us. She's just a light."



Down Syndrome Association
of Middle Tennessee

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DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE IN THE DSAMT SPOTLIGHT?

Meghan is receiving \$100 and a special gift for being our Spotlight focus! Do you know someone who wants to be our Spotlight of the Month?

Email a photo and a short explanation why to lisa@somethingextra.org.

Winning submissions will receive \$100 and a special gift!