



**2024 Recipient ~ Nigel Presume
Iona Preparatory School**

During the Summer of 2023 I participated in Unified Sports, a program that promotes social inclusion and respect for each other's differences. Over eight weeks, my high school, Iona Prep, designed this pilot program combining its students and those with disabilities and special needs from South East Consortium for Special Services (Mamaroneck, NY). As part of this program, Iona Prep invited differently-abled students, who may sometimes be excluded, to participate in sports and social activities held on Iona Prep's campus. Together, we played games from tag to basketball all while enjoying the commonalities in life. Looking back on my time in Unified Sports I believe this program aligns and supports St. Vincent's Hospital Westchester, and the Sisters of Charity, in the mission to have respect and compassion for ourselves and others, excellence in service, the dignity of human life and commitment to the community.

The main reason for the creation of this program was to give hope to youth with disabilities and offer their families a chance to see them make new friends, build self-esteem, and be treated just like others. What attracted me the most to this program was the opportunity to share the hope and love of Jesus through inclusion. An all-embracing Bible verse that guided our work at Unified Sports was Matthew 5:16 which states, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven." To me, respect and compassion for ourselves and others means accepting the love of God in your own life and allowing that to be the root of showing love and hope to others; a hope to be included and loved the way Christ loves us. Continuing St. Vincent's mission in valuing the dignity of human life was exemplified by the sole purpose of the Unified Sports program. At a time when those with disabilities, whether mental or physical, can be overlooked and ignored, Unified Sports was intentional in fostering a community where the participants knew that they mattered and where parents could see that student participants cared. Through Unified Sports I embodied this value by learning to be patient, and kind, and show empathetic love to the students.

Going into a situation where I initially lacked experience in working with the differently-abled, I turned to prayer not only for myself but also for all of the participants. Unified Sports allowed me to embody active love by choosing to love others who are different from myself, showing them kindness and patience in both word and deed. Unified Sports acted as a vessel where I was able to apply my gifts and what I have to offer as this program set a precedent for tangibly loving others focusing on the truth that no one deserves to be disregarded. These actions and my participation in Unified Sports allowed me to see that at our core, we all like to play, to talk, and even eat ice cream no matter what you look like on the outside. I believe my experience embodies the mission St. Vincent's strives for in their organization. I continue my work with the unified program throughout this school year as our school has created different branches of the "Unified" program such

as Unified Music, Unified Social, and Unified Arts. I am looking forward to Summer 2024 where Unified Sports kicks up again and we continue to work with the students from last year and those we have been with throughout the school year as we continue to commit ourselves to this community. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.