

It is common to see a student being impacted by a FIRST team, but not common to see a student impact an entire team. Andy has Asperger Syndrome, a developmental disorder characterized by non-verbal communication issues. Team mentors and teachers have had to refine their skills in communication, management, and understanding. His teammates have learned to be more accepting, also learning teamwork and communication skills. He has made FRC1511 better because of it.

When Andy joined the team his freshman year, he would have seemed like an unlikely candidate for Dean's List. Three years later, he has come miles from where he was in his technical expertise, leadership, team member relations, and his passion for FIRST. If there is a stereotype for students like Andy, he certainly refuses to mold to it!

Andy is the first student in our school with an Integrated Education Program (a system for students with special needs) to take an Advanced Placement (AP) exam. What is even more spectacular is that he earned a score of 4. He currently takes 3 AP courses, including accelerated math and science.

Aspergers actually affords him several unique abilities one does not often see in his peers. He has the ability to step back and look at the big picture. He can analyze situations in an objective, pragmatic way. This foresight is especially helpful when he is programming our team's robot as one of the main programmers. He teaches this ability to the other programmers, which has definitely saved us from having some sticky situations in competition. It helps that he has recruited most of our programmers, creating an effective, well working team.

Andy is no stranger to programming, coding since age 7! He has written over 50 applications. This passion of his has led him to create and head a group of peers who produce video games. One of his future endeavors is to be CEO of a company that develops video games; in addition to being a software engineer and computer science professor. Knowing him, it wouldn't surprise us if he did all three! His entrepreneurial skills budded early. At 13, he received the 2007 Larry H. Clarke Jr. Entrepreneurship Award for demonstrating outstanding creativity and effort to conceive and develop the idea for his business and business plan. From early on, Andy had already been exemplifying the goals of FIRST.

Andy motivates his peers by leading by example. When the leadership subteam had a position open up for this school year, he jumped at the opportunity to join and blew us away with his professionalism and maturity in his application and interview. He has participated in our leadership training camps and organized team events, from our Mock Build Season (a 5-week session using VEX robots) to a robot demonstration and fundraiser for Autism Speaks. When he's not organizing events, he's participating in as many as possible, and that is quite a feat given our team has done 56 activities this year alone! From head to toe, he wears our team camo gear everywhere so that he gets noticed and has more chances to talk about FIRST.

Andy also volunteers at many local FIRST LEGO League events. Annually, he referees at qualifiers and Finger Lakes Championships, as well as at our team's postseason FLL competition. He mentors teams, teaching them to program during their competition season and in

the summer at our team's camps. His simplistic way of explaining concepts really helps the young students learn.

Andy said that before he joined FIRST he was, "just a large miasma of ideas with no clear purpose or skill. But FIRST has allowed me to focus that into a life plan, as well as expand my social circle from 4 people, to 40 people, almost overnight." It is clear he does not participate just because it will look good on a college application; he is hooked on FIRST for life. Just as he has had a major impact on the team, FIRST has had a major impact on him and his future.