



Best Buddies Arizona Project Narrative

Best Buddies' mission is to establish a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). With the support of the Tempe Diablos Charities, Best Buddies Arizona staff will continue to recruit, train, and guide student leaders in running successful Best Buddies School Friendship chapters at elementary schools, middle schools and high schools and colleges in Tempe. In Tempe, we currently have chapters at Arizona State University, Connolly Middle School, Corona del Sol High School, Marcos de Niza High School, Tempe High School, and Rover Elementary School. BBAZ also just launched our adult programs Best Buddies Citizens. We will also work to bring Best Buddies Jobs all to Arizona.

The BBAZ School Friendship program offers participants the unique opportunity to promote more inclusive school and community environments while establishing meaningful one-to-one friendships between those with and without IDD. For those with IDD, developing friendships with individuals without IDD is critical to their success in school and, ultimately, in the transition into adulthood. At each school, a faculty advisor and a special education advisor work with student leaders to recruit students with IDD (buddies) to be matched in one-to-one friendships with students without disabilities (peer buddies). One major key to the success of our project design is the one year commitment required of all buddy pairs. This continuity allows for meaningful friendships to develop while providing a mutually supportive community for participants.

BBAZ serves participants during their school years and beyond. Vital life and employability skills that are learned by participating in the friendship program benefit our participants both with and without IDD. Parents and teachers of children with disabilities recognize the social isolation children face, isolation that is well-documented by researchers who find that children with disabilities, particularly children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), are more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness than their peers without disabilities. Best Buddies' programs combat this isolation. The significant and unfortunate problem in our schools and communities is segregation as these children often sit alone in the cafeteria, separated from the rest of the student population with no friendships to call their own. By working to bring people together, we help to break down the barriers that divide us and create a world that is more inclusive.