Members of “The Don’t Laugh at Me Players” perform at a community event. For more than 15 years, ‘The Don’t Laugh at Me Players’ theater group has been spreading its anti-bullying message throughout southern Utah through skits and songs. Webster’s Dictionary defines bullying as ‘to treat abusively’ or ‘to affect by means of force or coercion.’ When we think of bullying, we can picture a little kid arriving at school and a big kid shoving him around, threatening him and taking his lunch money. It used to be that people would just say ‘buck up and handle it.’ Now the consequences have proven to be so severe that steps need to be taken to prevent bullying. We should no longer adopt the philosophy of leaving others to ‘handle it’ when being bullied. Bullying is a serious problem and needs to be addressed in all areas of society. Bullying can be stopped, but only if the victims and observers speak up, find ways to combat it and not let it continue in schools or work places. ‘The Don’t Laugh at Me Players’ is comprised of individuals with various disabilities under the direction of a Red Rock Center for Independence staff member with C 5-6 paraplegia and two talented volunteers. The program has two goals: to provide socialization and a sense of community for people with disabilities, and to educate the community about anti-bullying through songs and skits. The Players represent a wide range of disabilities including accidental, polio and stroke paralysis, developmental and cognitive delays, visual impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, Downs syndrome and hearing impairments. The targeted segment of this disability population and what brings them together is the collective and sincere desire to teach the community to respect people with disabilities, live independently and celebrate their uniqueness through music, skits and fellowship. The Players are invited to perform at schools and community events. Their message is universal: “People with disabilities live among us. They attend school, go to work, access public transportation and eat at restaurants, just like everyone else. Please treat us with dignity and respect. We will do the same.” This group clearly advocates for themselves and their peers in the disability community through a courageous method of advocacy that is both uncommon and empowering. The songs and skits are set to common themes and popular tunes and teach others how to treat people with disabilities with respect. The name of the group, and their theme song, comes from a song by Mark Wills: Don't laugh at me Don't call me names Don't get your pleasure from my pain In God's eyes we're all the same Someday we'll all have perfect wings Don't laugh at me

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