

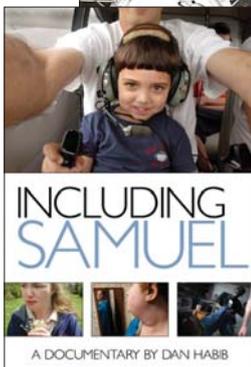


# Including Samuel

Review by  
Jan Carter Hollingsworth

Simply stated, *Including Samuel* is a “must see!” A must see for educators—from the grade school teacher to the university professor. A must see for elementary and middle school children, high school and college students. A must see for policy makers and community leaders, social service personnel and families—basically, anyone who wants and/or needs an in-depth look into the concept, current practice, and real-life experience of inclusion and integration for those with disabilities. And while inclusion is most often a buzzword framed around the classroom experience for children in grade school, *Including Samuel* implies the ideal that if society has finally recognized the benefits of inclusion in the classroom shouldn't the concept spill over into all aspects of life and community and shouldn't it be across the lifespan?

*Including Samuel* is a 58-minute documentary created by Dan Habib. Mr. Habib brings his 20 years of professional photojournalism skills to bear in creating this well-polished product, but the film's heart and soul is clearly a result of his eight years of experience in being Samuel's dad. Samuel, who was a second grader at Beaver Meadow Elementary at the time of filming, is a child with cerebral palsy. Samuel ambulates with a wheelchair and has difficulties with speech. But these are not the things that define Samuel. Samuel is an engaging, smart, and funny youngster whose zest for life



**Samuel Habib, age 7 (when this photo was taken), sits in his power-assist wheelchair and smacks a T-ball off of a batting T. His father, filmmaker Dan Habib, videotapes him in their Concord, NH, driveway. While making the film *Including Samuel*, Mr. Habib says he continually asked himself, “When do I play filmmaker? When do I just play with my kids?”**

Photo by Isaiah Habib (Samuel's brother, age 10), August, 2007. From the film, *Including Samuel*, [www.includingsamuel.com](http://www.includingsamuel.com)

jumps off the screen. From the time Samuel was very young, Dan and his wife, Betsy, were determined that Samuel would be included “in every aspect of family and school life.” Serving as narrator of the film, Dan comments in voice over that “ever since Samuel was very young, I just couldn't bear to see him left out of anything, since he so desperately wants to be in the middle of the action.” And this is the atmosphere that Dan and Betsy consciously create in their home and, to the extent possible, in their community. From playing on the T-ball team to poignant shots around the family dinner table, the film chronicles Samuel's experience showing him to be a very integral, participating member of the Habib family.

The film is filled with scenes from Samuel's infancy, toddlerhood, and now his days at Beaver Meadow Elementary where, with a dedicated

staff of school professionals, Samuel participates in every aspect of the school day. Beaver Meadow is the same public school that Samuel's older brother, Isaiah, attends. Perhaps one of my favorite scenes in the film (a split second snippet, really, that you'll miss if you're not watching closely) is of Samuel in the school hallway entreating his brother, who it's obvious he adores and who adores him, for a quick show of affection. With an impish smile characteristic of a boy his age, Isaiah makes a visual sweep of the hallway for potential onlookers and seeing that the coast is clear gives his little brother a big hug. Hey, even if you love your little bro dearly and have a super cool, forward-thinking family, you still don't want to be caught by your friends hugging your little brother. Come on... The film is full of sweet moments like this—glimpses into the life of a family, a family firmly grounded in inclusion.

This selection can be found at [www.epbookstore.com](http://www.epbookstore.com).

Obviously, Dan recognizes that his family's journey is but a snapshot of the inclusive experience, limited by the fact that Samuel is still a youngster and his family's story is still in its early chapters. No doubt wanting to show a fuller view, Dan explores the lives of four other individuals and their experiences with inclusion. Perhaps most compelling are the interviews with Keith Jones, a political activist and self-advocate. Mr. Jones, a man with cerebral palsy, grew up in the 1970s and 80s, just in the wake of the battle that gave all children, including those with disabilities, the constitutional right to receive a "free and public education." But at that time "separate but equal" was also the word of the day as children with disabilities, while attending a public school, were completely segregated, sometimes in public schools just for children with disabilities or in "special" classrooms within a larger public school. At age 12, in 1981, Keith began attending regular 6th grade classes at a public school, moving from classroom to classroom with his nondisabled peers in an inclusive environment. Here he thrived. In one of his interview segments, he comments, "You cannot box people up in a room, 20 by 20, eight hours a day, and then ship them off into the world and expect them to have social interaction skills."

The film interviews public education officials, teachers, principals, and self-advocates. It looks into the life of Nathaniel Orellana, an elementary school student with autism, who attends a school that is a current model for inclusion. It follows Alana Murphy, a teenager attending a fully inclusive high school in New Hampshire, through a typical day and includes the triumphs and struggles that she encounters. Interviews with Alana and her nondisabled peers are poignant and telling, and at this point, the film even begs the question: "Is inclusion easier for young kids like Samuel?" The film, while clearly heralding inclusion as the best course of action for the majority, does give time to telling the story of Emily Huff, a young woman with schizophrenia, who tried the inclusive school experience as a teenager. Struggling in this setting, Emily transferred to a

private school for students with mental illness and her mother comments that "it was only in an atmosphere that was both therapeutic and academic that Emily could begin to really learn." The film causes the viewer, at least this one anyway, to speculate that perhaps as inclusion becomes a more refined, understood, and available practice there will come a time when it can indeed begin to be all things to all students.

It is clear this film was created to be used as an educational resource and tool. The *Including Samuel* DVD comes with a hard copy Viewer's Guide, which offers a host of viewing accompaniments including:

- tips on using the Guide as a companion to the film;
- an introduction from filmmaker, Dan Habib;
- questions for discussion prior to and after viewing the film;
- a primer on the definition of inclusion and the laws that support inclusion;
- an interview with Samuel's classroom teacher, Barbara O'Brien;
- vignettes featuring other individuals included in the film;
- a discussion of person-first language;
- action ideas for families, schools, and communities; and
- other links and resources.

It is my pleasure, to assign *Including Samuel* the EP Symbol of Excellence and to encourage its viewing and use in classrooms, boardrooms, governmental meeting rooms, and family rooms. And it is my hope that other documentaries from this talented filmmaker, Dan Habib, will be forthcoming as his family's story continues to unfold. Inclusion is something that needs to be an ongoing topic of discussion in all aspects of society, especially as the concept evolves and its practice continues to be tested, refined, and improved. •

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For more information on *Including Samuel*, visit [www.includingsamuel.com](http://www.includingsamuel.com). *Including Samuel* can be purchased from the EP Bookstore at [www.EPBoostore.com](http://www.EPBoostore.com).