

BULLYING AND ALIENATION LEFT A 17-YEAR-OLD WITH DOWN SYNDROME AND AUTISM WITHOUT A SINGLE FRIEND

KAREEM LOVES PEOPLE, BUT THEY HAVEN'T LOVED HIM BACK. NOW CHERAB IS ASKING WILLOW GROVE TO CHANGE THAT.

Pre-event interview opportunity: CHERAB Circle of Friends brings the community together October 25 to foster friendship, kindness, compassion and inclusion.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2026
1:00-4:00 PM

CRESTMONT PARK CLUBHOUSE
2595 Rubicam Ave.

WILLOW GROVE, PA 19090
Everyone is welcome.

WILLOW GROVE, Pa. - Kareem Bayoumy loves people. Music, dancing, Broadway, Philadelphia sports and his job at Chick-fil-A all put him where he is happiest: around others. Yet at 17, his mother says Kareem has never had a friend come to his birthday, never been invited to a peer's birthday party, and never received a call or text from a peer simply because they wanted to be his friend.

On Sunday, October 25, CHERAB Circle of Friends is asking the community to change that. From 1:00 to 4:00 PM at Crestmont Park Clubhouse, Kareem will be the guest of honor at an open-invite belated birthday celebration with live music, dancing, games, food and community participation. Everyone is welcome.

"I am not looking for material gifts for Kareem. If even one real friendship came from this event, it would mean everything to him, and to me."

Maryanne Bayoumy, Kareem's mother

Kareem, who turned 17 in June, has Down syndrome and autism. He has undergone more than a dozen surgeries and experienced bullying, disability-based harassment, exclusion and social isolation. He is also outgoing, joyful and eager to be part of the action whenever he is included. At Chick-fil-A in Willow Grove Mall, Kareem greets customers, offers refills and delivers meals to other mall employees. His mother says the job has given him confidence, purpose and belonging. His boss, Joe Tamasitis, is now helping bring that same welcome into the community.

For CHERAB, the birthday is the mechanism, not the end goal. For years, the Foundation has used open-invite community celebrations to bring people together around children who have been bullied or alienated, raise awareness about differences, and foster acceptance and compassion. Past events have drawn hundreds, along with local and national media coverage, including *Inside Edition*.

"The party itself is the mechanism. We bring people together around one child, raise awareness about differences, foster acceptance and compassion, and give children a chance to experience inclusion in action. The party lasts a few hours. The message and connections can last far longer."

Lisa Geng, President, The Cherab Foundation

THE COMMUNITY IS ALREADY SHOWING UP

The response to Kareem's story is already beginning to take shape, starting with the people already in his corner. Joe Tamasitis, Kareem's manager at the Chick-fil-A in Willow Grove Mall, was one of the first to say yes. Joe worked with Abington Township to secure Crestmont Park for the celebration at no charge, a rental that would typically cost hundreds of dollars for a four-hour event. Food and refreshments will be provided.

Additional cakes, pastries, desserts and baked goods are being generously donated by Weinrich's Bakery and Ann's Cake Pan.

Steve Grandizio, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Little Smiles PA, has stepped up for Kareem again, this time helping turn an ordinary birthday into a full afternoon of celebration. Steve is providing a limousine experience, snacks and live entertainment, including a two-piece band donating its performance. Organizers have also invited special costumed and cosplay character groups to participate.

"Kareem is a special young man and making him, and others like him, feel special and loved is core to the Little Smiles mission."

We put smiles on the faces of kids who need it most."

Steve Grandizio, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Little Smiles PA

Kristen Everett of The Brave Little Bears Foundation is also supporting the effort, helping with community outreach and photography coordination. Kristen has connected organizers with a local photographer who has expressed interest in photographing the October 25 celebration and is discussing the details with CHERAB.

The Eagles Autism Foundation has offered to put together a special gift basket for Kareem. Organizers are continuing to welcome community participants and donated goods and services, including decorating, face painting, photography, games, activities and entertainment.

The October 25 celebration will welcome families and community members, with invitations going out to first responders, cosplayers, local motorcycle groups that support anti-bullying efforts, businesses, entertainers, schools, nonprofits and other organizations that want to help create a day centered on friendship and inclusion.

To participate, donate goods or services, volunteer or help support Kareem, contact Lisa Geng at 772-919-1417 or lisa@cherab.org.

**For Kareem, a birthday is about more than cake. It is about knowing someone wants to celebrate you.
The biggest gift would not come in a box. It would be a friend.**

ABOUT THE CHERAB FOUNDATION

Volunteer-based since 2000, the Cherab Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supporting children with neurological, genetic, speech and communication challenges and their families.

CHERAB Circle of Friends brings communities together around children and teens who have experienced bullying, alienation or social isolation to foster friendship, acceptance and compassion. Past events have been featured in local and national media. Donations are tax-deductible. Federal Tax ID: 22-3685234. cherab.org