

# 'Fighter' Katie Meade motivated by challenges

Dignitaries from across the world listened attentively as Best Buddies International friendship ambassador Katie Meade said in a cheerful tone "I am a fighter, survivor, and an advocate for people with disabilities."

The Special Olympics athlete for 13 years, who was born with Down Syndrome and lived the first three years of her life in a hospital with related critical medical problems, was giving a keynote address at Shafallah Center's 4th Annual International Forum yesterday.

Meade survived two open heart surgeries, three cardiac arrests and multiple thorotomies to become one of the most dynamic, outgoing, determined and inspirational athletes in Special Olympics.

Thorototomy is a surgery that requires an incision to the chest wall. It allows the doctor to look directly at the lungs or other part of the chest cavity, and also examine the heart and aorta.

Although ordinarily a planned procedure, thorototomy is also used in emergency situations to control and assess internal bleeding.

"The challenges made me who I am," Meade said while declaring she was lucky to have a wonderful family and pointing out that her parents accepted her disability.

Meade graduated from high school in 2002 and has been working full-time at the Polk County Treasurers' office in Des Moines as a mail clerk.

"I wanted to make my own money," she said explaining the motivation behind her decision to work.

Meade is often described as a very powerful speaker who can motivate thousands with her energetic spirit and voice. She, however, credits Best Buddies for helping her to become a public speaker.

"I hope to break down the barriers that people with disabilities face out there," Meade said adding she believes in herself and so should others with disabilities.

Best Buddies International, founded by Anthony Kennedy Shriver in 1989, fosters one-to-one friendships between people with and without intellectual disabilities.

Buddy Ambassadors are participants with intellectual disabilities who earn their title through completion of a rigorous training curriculum provided by Buddies United In Leadership Development.

The programme enhances the lives of participants with intellectual disabilities by providing opportunities for leadership development and self advocacy.

Through her job, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics, Meade has made friends from all over the world. Her speaking bio includes travelling around the world as a Special Olympics Global Messenger, including introducing the globally acclaimed rock group U2 at the World Games.

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