

Inclusion Can Enrich Us All

By [HELEN HENDERSON](#) June 2, 2005

While today's Live 8 performers strut their stuff in the battle against world poverty, a young Toronto woman is getting ready to go to the United Nations with an equally important message.

Rebecca Beayni has cerebral palsy. She cannot walk or talk. But at age 23, she has already had a profound influence on family, friends, the kids she went to school with and the whole community in which she grew up.

Beayni's needs were considered too great for the special schools her parents initially thought of for their daughter's education. So, almost by default, she ended up in the public system.

Her family was uncertain how that would work. As her mother Susan puts it in a 12-minute film celebrating Rebecca's life: "At that point, I don't think we could dream big enough,"

It turned out to be the best thing that could have happened.

Everyone has gained through Beayni's inclusion in every part of community life. That much is evident in *Revel in the Light: A Quiet Life Will Shine*, written, produced and directed by Deiren Masterson.

A friend talks about travelling the subway with Beayni, about the thrill experienced when the train burst from darkness to daylight on a short stretch of track above ground. Everyone else just continued to read or talk or stare blankly into the near distance. "No one else saw what Rebecca saw," she says.

The film is also testament to the Ubuntu Initiative, a group of people with developmental disabilities, their families and friends who have banded together to create "a different more hopeful future, rooted in gentleness, interdependence and deep friendship."

Ubuntu is a Zulu word that may be roughly translated as: "My humanity is inextricably bound up in your humanity."

Gentleness, interdependence and friendship. These are the messages Beayni will be taking to New York City next month.

Inclusion International and the Canadian Association for Community Living have asked her to appear before the United Nations as part of a movement to develop an international protocol to promote and protect the rights and dignity of people with disabilities.

"As wonderful as Rebecca's life is, there are so many people who do not have such a happy story and who continue to be held captive by society's fears, misunderstandings and prejudices," says Susan Beayni.

The public debut of *Revel in the Light* is scheduled for 7 p.m., Sept. 22, at Cardinal Carter Academy, 36 Greenfield Ave., near Yonge and Sheppard.