

My name is Khalid Branch. I was born with a developmental disability. When I was 3, I attended the Montclair Child Development Center, where I received services for a speech and other delays. Despite the challenges and many obstacles I had to overcome as a special needs student, I never let anything stop me from pursuing the goals I wanted to achieve.

During high school I was very focused on my education. I also played on the Montclair Mounties football team! Through the Montclair Public School District's Community Based Instruction program for students between the ages of 18- 21, I gained valuable life skills in real life settings. In 2016, I started working at the Geyer Family Branch of the YMCA of Montclair. That's when I realized I wanted to coach and work with children in the community. To fulfill my dreams I wanted to further my education, so I enrolled in Essex County College in 20___. During college, I received accommodation such as having an aide who helped me with some of the writing assignments. In 2023, I graduated from Essex County College with an associate's degree in science and physical education.

I always wanted to give back to the community that helped me achieve my goals, so I volunteered coaching for younger children. I have also volunteered at Montclair Child Development Centers, Family Engagement & Literacy Day, which was held at Glenfield Park in Montclair. I also volunteer for the Police Athletic League (PAL) helping with sports. This past summer, I had the privilege of coaching the Montclair Bulldogs football team, the very team that I once played for as a student! My next goal is to enroll at Montclair State University, achieve my BA, and become an elementary gym teacher.

Disability Pride is about celebrating the identities, unique experiences, abilities, achievements, and contributions of people with disabilities. It is a time to be proud of who we are! I am not finished making my presence beneficial to the world's children. Whenever I faced a challenge and was asked if I thought it was possible, I would always say, "I think I can do it". I want children to know that they can dream big dreams and achieve them, if they believe in themselves and have others who support them.

I am thankful for my family for their everlasting support and the community that has supported me.