

# Reclaiming Beauty: Moms On A Mission Push For Ads Showing People Of All Abilities



Four years ago, Katie Driscoll gave birth to her sixth child. While she was pregnant, she and her husband didn't know the baby's sex, but they did know their child had Down syndrome. The two were overjoyed to welcome their first girl, Grace, but Driscoll worried that others would pity her because her daughter had special needs.

"I wanted them to know that I was so proud of her," Driscoll, 40, told TODAY. "And so from there, I picked up the camera and ... one thing led to another."

As a way to document her love for her daughter and highlight her adorable looks, Driscoll began photographing Grace and posting the images to her blog. She also started the organization Changing the Face of Beauty with friend Steve English to persuade media and advertising to include more photos of children and adults with special needs.

"When I look at my daughter, I see a 4-year-old girl ... I see her beautiful blue eyes and I don't often see Down syndrome," she said. "I don't want people to think that I am sad that I don't have a daughter that is perfect in terms of typical ... She's perfect to me."

Recently, large companies, such as Target and Nordstrom, have included children with special needs in their advertisements. Eight-year-old Ryan Langston, who has Down syndrome, has modeled for both companies. And Diesel recently ran an ad featuring an adult model in a wheelchair. While parents of children with special needs are happy to see models like their children, they do wish it were more common. "It's popping up here and there. And that is a great thing, of course. It still uncommon enough, though, that whenever it does happen, it gets a lot of attention," says Ellen Seidman.

Seidman blogs about her son, Max, who has cerebral palsy, and in 2011 she challenged Twitter users to no longer use the word "retard." While many people told her off, others thanked her for educating them or took on the cause themselves.

Katherine Wintsch, CEO of The Mom Complex, a consortium dedicated to changing marketing toward mothers, says it's time to see special needs children and their parents in advertising.

"Companies owe it to mothers to reflect all different aspects of motherhood," she said. "The bond between a mother and child with special needs is so special ... [these parents] have every right to be disappointed not only that their children are not being depicted but their relationships [are not]."

While some companies embrace diversity, others remain fearful that something too different might spark controversy. Remember the Cheerios ad that showed a biracial girl and her parents? This ad reflects the American family, Wintsch says, but many companies shudder at the thought of backlash.

"[Big brands would] rather not offend anyone," Wintsch said. "I think the entire point of advertising is [saying], 'We understand you and we understand your needs.'"

She believes that moms like Driscoll and Seidman can play a huge role in changing media. For her part, Seidman says she blogs about Max to show others that he is just like other kids; he's funny and smart and misbehaving and maddening. She'd like to see more children like Max on TV or in movies — not as the character with a disability but as just another character.

"It would just mean that children like my son are an organic, natural part of the world," Seidman said. "Diversity includes people of all abilities."