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As March is Disability Awareness Month, Radford University's Disability Resource Office (DRO) dedicated March 21 through 24 to The Elephant in the Room - an interactive week designed to educate students on the

presence of disabilities and the importance of seeing passed them.

The week consisted of multiple presentations, including a seminar on the technology used by the hearing impaired, a talk with Radford alumn and Delta Chi brother Garrett Brumfield, two presentations by keynote speaker Justin Graves, and an informative discussion by veterans living with disabilities.

All week in the Bonnie the DRO had a table giving away items such as stress balls and introduced students to the literal Elephant in the Room while encouraging them to write their own personal “elephants” on Post-It notes to share with their peers. Many students engaged in the exercise, writing things such as, “I don’t want to offend anyone by asking about their disability” and “I wish people would understand the impact a Traumatic Brain Injury can have on a person’s quality of life.”

“We wanted students to kind of think of what is their Elephant in the Room when it comes to disabilities. What are they afraid to ask? What are they afraid to talk about?” Jennifer Scott said, assistant director of the DRO.

Director of the DRO, Angela Devore-Greene, stated that the take-away for the week should be “see the person first, not the disability.”

She cited a moment in Justin Graves’ keynote speech in which he suggested that people should go up to the disabled - instead of ignoring them - and ask them, “What makes you awesome?” That one simple question has the power to start a conversation and maybe even a relationship. Another key moment in Graves’ speech was when he compared diversity to being invited to a party. In life, there are all types of people from different backgrounds, while inclusion is like having fun at the party. By this he meant, you can be a part of the community, but never truly feel like you are fitting in - especially if you have a disability. This is sort of like going to a party but being the odd man out.

“It’s all about relationships and you can’t even create one unless you go up and talk,” Greene said. “You see someone at a party and they’re all by themselves, do you just leave them? If you notice it, should you do something about it? That’s just being a good community member. That’s just being a good person.”

To any student who may not feel comfortable coming to the DRO with their disabilities, whether mental or physical, Greene and Scott want them to know that they should “come one time.”

“Just lower your walls just a little bit in order to come in and just see the terrain, see how the process works, see what you’re eligible for, see how it might be helpful to you, work with a disability specialist, and go from there,” Greene said.

They also want students to be aware of the Center for Assessment and Psychological Services, located in Russell Hall, where students can be tested for disabilities such as ADHD.

“We’re all able, just differently abled,” Greene said.