April 2022

mélange

Accessibility for All

CHRISTINE CHAMA

"Self-acceptance
is the key
to happiness.
Accept yourself.
Nurture
your abilities.
I like to say
my disability
is my strength."

ISSN 2563-5697
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Autism Awareness Month

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Older Americans Month

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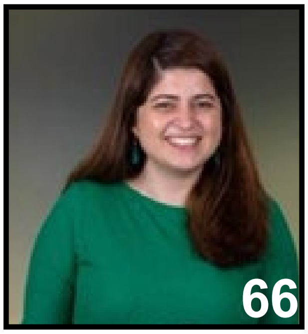


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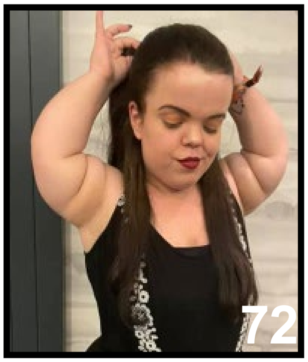
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Editor's Note

Fred J. Maahs, Jr.

Greetings!

Welcome to our April issue of Melange, Accessibility for All magazine.

We are very excited about this issue. The following pages contain great articles about people, organizations, and technology from the United States, India, Dubai, the UK, Israel, Portugal, and more! We continue to bring our readers stories from all around the world that are relevant, interesting, and hopefully make a difference in their lives.

The past several months have given us a lot to think about and a lot to look forward to. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the unprovoked attack on Ukraine. Sadly, thousands of innocent Ukrainians have been killed and a disproportionate number of people with disabilities living in Ukraine were either left behind or had no way to flee to safety. Thankfully, organizations such as Access Israel, and Friends of Access Israel traveled to the war zone to help in the evacuation of Ukrainians with and without disabilities. The organization, Joni and Friends, is also helping Ukrainians with disabilities flee to safety. But, they cannot do it alone. If you would like to help support these ongoing efforts, please visit www.faisr.org (Friends of Access Israel) or www.joniandfriends.org

On a much more positive note, in the shadows of Covid-19, the world is beginning to open up as more people have been vaccinated and many have received their booster shots. With many countries relaxing their travel restrictions, people around the world are traveling by plane, train, cruise ships and by car nearly in numbers not seen since 2019! The travel industry expects to see a considerable jump during the Third Quarter this year. Mask regulations will continue to be enforced as necessary and may become the new "norm" to some degree.

And, don't forget. We're excited about our newest magazine, Melange Accessible Journeys, which was introduced in March! In this latest digital magazine, we share stories from all around the world about accessible travel destinations written and experienced by people with disabilities. In each issue of Melange Accessible Journeys, you will find personal, firsthand accounts of what each traveler experienced during their journey. It will be a resource for anyone of any ability who wants to take an accessible journey! We hope you enjoy it!

We will continue to make it all real, all relevant, and we certainly appreciate your thoughts. Let us know if you have a product you want us to try and write about or if you want to invite us to visit your city, country, resort, or place of interest so that we can write about it and share it with our audience. You can reach me fmaahs@readmelange.com.

Warm regards,

Fred J Maahs Jr

@FredMaahs - Twitter

Fred J. Maahs, Jr. is an internationally-renown disability and civil rights champion who believes in and advocates for the rights and access for all! A recognized leader and former corporate executive, he's also an International Keynote speaker, collaborator, and an international accessibility travel expert.

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- Share a story
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We try to present information that is current and accurate, but errors can occur. If you've found an error in the magazine, please **email:** Fred Maahs, Jr.
fmaahs@readmelange.com

Mélange Accessibility for All magazine is published four times per year by:
Mélange Publishing Group 300-3665 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5R 5W2.


Izzy Camilleri

Photo Courtesy: Izzy Camilleri

IZ Adaptive

solves clothing conundrums for people with disabilities

Izzy Camilleri has been in the fashion industry since graduating fashion college in 1984; working in high fashion, collections, and making custom wardrobes for the film industry. Now she focuses solely on adaptive clothing.

It began in 2005, when a Toronto journalist, who used a wheelchair, asked her fashion editor to recommend someone to make her a shearling cape. The editor thought of Izzy, knowing she worked in leather so would know shearling—leather with wool on the inside. Izzy recalls, "It was the first time I worked with someone in a wheelchair. This journalist was paralyzed from her neck down, she couldn't move anything. It was a very eye-opening experience. I learned about her challenges, things I had never thought about before, because I had to get it right."

Having never considered what it took for a wheelchair user to get dressed, or their limitations as to what they could and couldn't wear, Izzy learned through this collaboration. After success with the shearling cape, the journalist pointed out the challenges that pants presented her. Izzy says, "I realized if she had all these clothing issues, a lot of other people did too. That led me to create the adaptive line, IZ Adaptive."

By this time, Izzy was a well-respected Canadian designer, featured in magazines and worn by celebrities. "When I ventured into the adaptive area, it was - hey - what?" Many people couldn't understand why she would leave her shiny career to move into a new area. But it was clear to Izzy. "I felt like there was so much out there for the able-bodied community but nothing for the disabled community, so I felt good about putting my talents there. It felt right; I felt propelled in that direction."

From the beginning, IZ Adaptive focused on wardrobe basics like jeans, track pants, coats. They made them to be comfortable and stylish, something people could dress up or dress down. Their most popular item is the Game Changer jeans, Izzy adds, "because I solved a problem I thought was impossible."

People wanted a pant that had no seam down the back, a seamless bottom and no back pockets. Izzy learned that when people sit all day on a bulky seam, they can develop pressure sores. These can lead to an infection, which can turn into sepsis. People can die from a pressure sore; even if they do heal, which could take a year, the odds of it coming back are up to 80%. The problem is more complicated for people who are paralyzed and don't feel the discomfort.

Izzy reflects, "I didn't think it was possible to create a pant with a seamless bottom. That seam is integral to the construction of the pant, separating right from left, front from back." Seamless pants using a drop crotch create another problem: sitting on bulky layers of fabric can also create a pressure sore. "Garments are like puzzles, all the pieces fit together to create the right shape," Izzy says, detailing the many challenges and considerations in creating adaptive clothing. "You have to understand the issues and obstacles or you could potentially hurt someone."

The now-famous brand took time to gain acclaim. In the beginning, no retailer or department store would carry her line. They didn't understand it, didn't think there was a market for it. "The ball got rolling in 2018, when we were featured in The Guardian and Forbes. People started to see this was an untapped market. The media found me because there were so few players in this market. The press and social media spread the word about us."

"What makes our brand different is that we focus only on adaptive clothing, have years of experience and a strong base. Wearers can enjoy more freedom and independence, can spend a couple more hours in their chair without worrying about what they're wearing."

But IZ Adaptive is about more than clothes, it's about self-esteem, comfort, a sense of self. "People tell me that they couldn't wear jeans until they found mine, or they always wanted to wear a trench coat and now they can. People with disabilities are starting to be heard more than ever and so are their needs. They have been deprived of clothing options; my brand provides those options."

IZ Adaptive is available online. A visit to their Toronto studio is available by appointment. The retailer, Every Human, carries their items in Australia and New Zealand.

New Video Series Features Disability Inclusion

That's My Easterseals…

We are creative. We are diverse.
We are one in four Americans.
We are people with disabilities.
And, we created a brand new video and PSA series!

Nicole Lynn Evans (actor, Superstore, Special)

People with disabilities are underrepresented in almost every industry, especially in entertainment, media and advertising. That stops today! Because Easterseals brought together and employed a phenomenal cast and crew to create a series of unprecedented PSAs that are directed, written, and produced by a team made up of 70% people with disabilities.

In her directorial debut, Nicole Lynn Evans (actor, Superstore, Special) leads a star-studded cast of talented actors, influencers, and disability advocates featured in the Easterseals PSAs, including:

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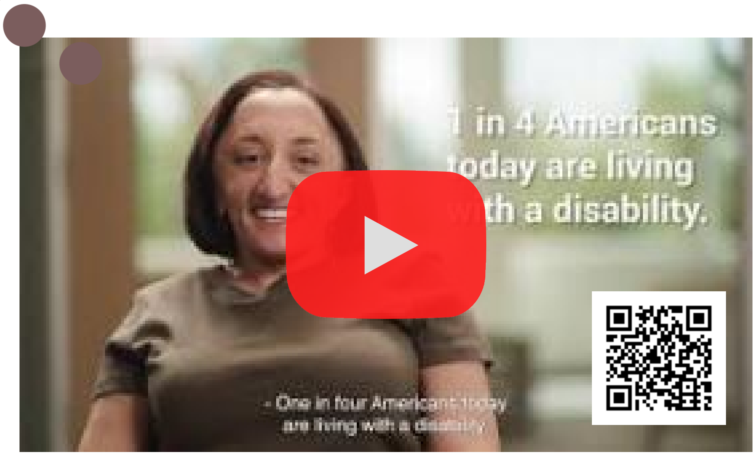
- Jamie Brewer (actor, American Horror Story)
- Sofiya Cheyenne (actor, Loudermilk)
- Wesley Hamilton (activist and influencer)
- Danny J. Gomez (actor, New Amsterdam)

Each offers timely, personal insights on Easterseals' important work to advance equity, inclusion, and access in the areas of education, health, employment, and community.

For this awareness series, Easterseals was intentionally inclusive, proof that we can flip the script on inclusion and authentic representation. Plus, the PSAs offer a bold challenge and hopeful, realistic message that inclusivity is possible and can be done. This is the real story behind this new PSA video series. If that's not a compelling reason to watch and share, I don't know what is.

Check out each of the PSAs here:
www.easterseals.com/psa.
And, learn more details on the campaign here.

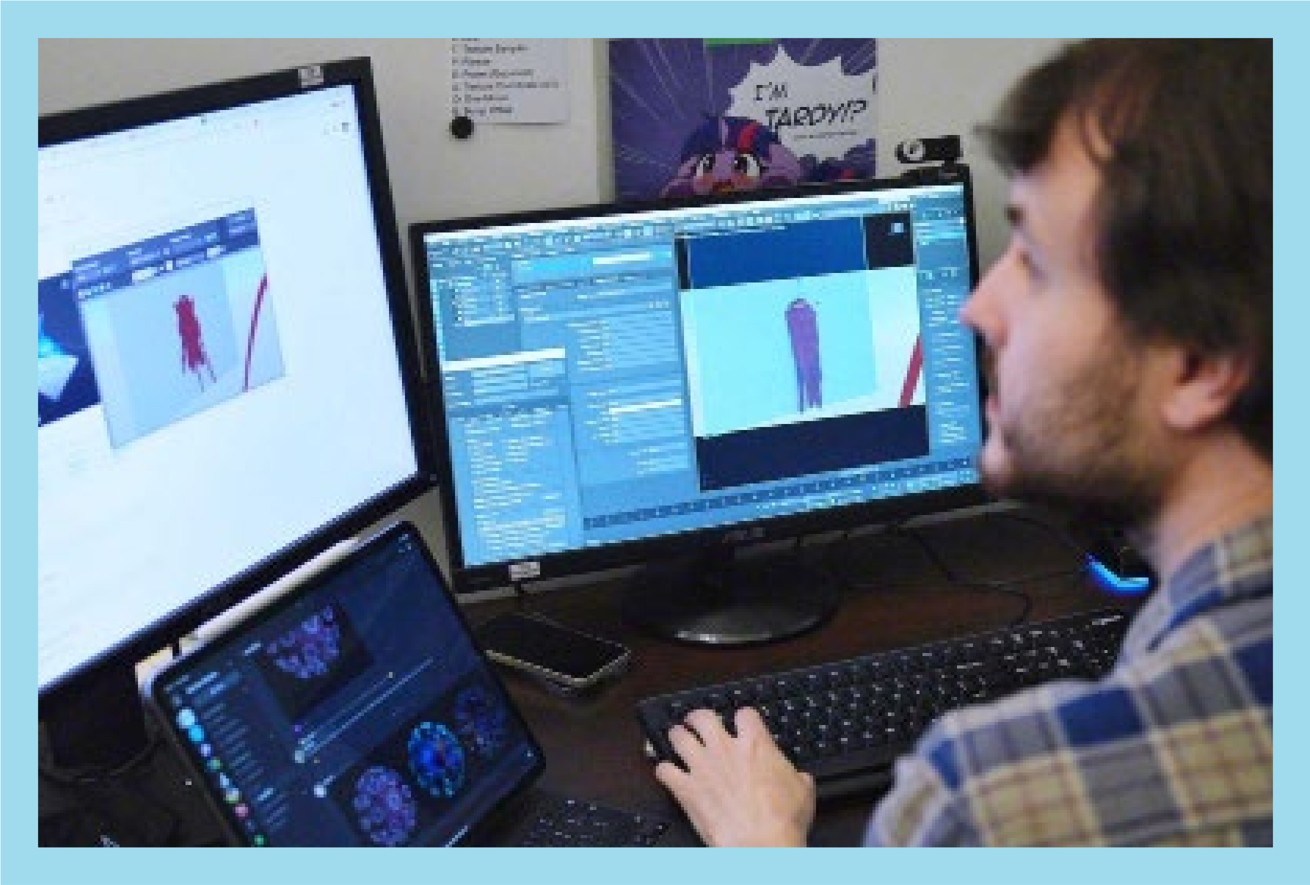



Jamie Brewer (actor, American Horror Story)


Sofiya Cheyenne (actor, Loudermilk)


Wesley Hamilton (activist and influencer)


Danny J. Gomez (actor, New Amsterdam)



Realwheels Theatre

"Hell is other people."

This classic line from Jean-Paul Sartre's classic *No Exit* has seen a lot of milage over the years. Used bitingly, it's often sighed by those who feel they have to suffer through the actions or company of those they dislike, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

In actuality, "Hell is other people" refers to the inescapable gaze of others in how they perceive you, their never-ending judgement and scorn and how this can eventually restrict your freedom, leading to an isolated and lonely life.

Judgement, scorn, and isolation are three things that the disability community faces on a daily basis. With 25% of Canadians identifying as disabled, they face constant systemic exclusion from much of the world around them and seclusion has become a much bigger problem for the disability community in the past few years due to the ongoing pandemic.

From Zoom to Google Hangouts to Skype to Facebook Live, there's almost no limit to the ways we can, pardon the old phrase, reach out and touch someone. It's how we make daily connections, have work meetings, or connect with our families. Even live entertainment has turned to online meeting platforms, theatres and clubs offering virtual performances. While they can help unite us, online meeting platforms can also remind us that we are quite alone, trapped in little boxes or bubbles while still lacking that fundamental human contact.

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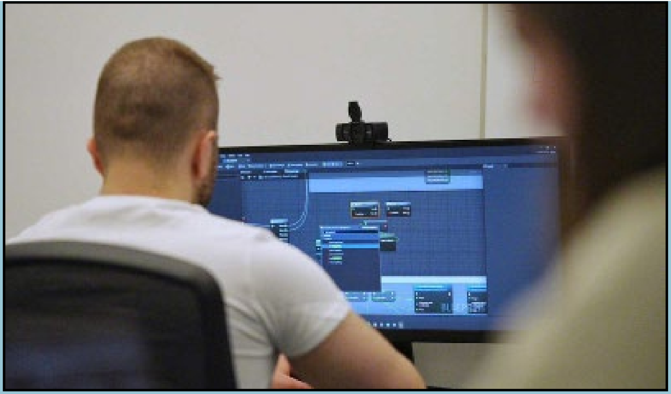

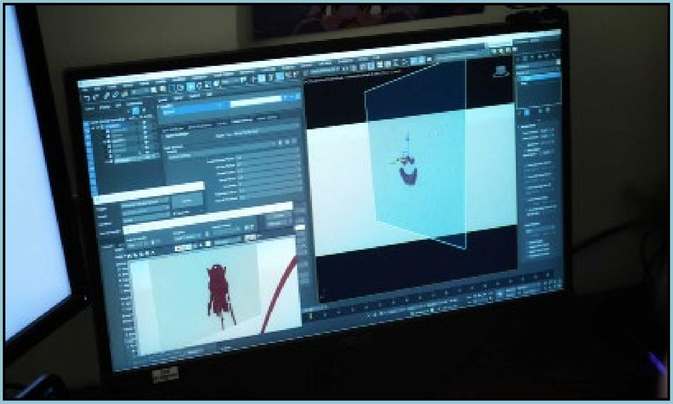

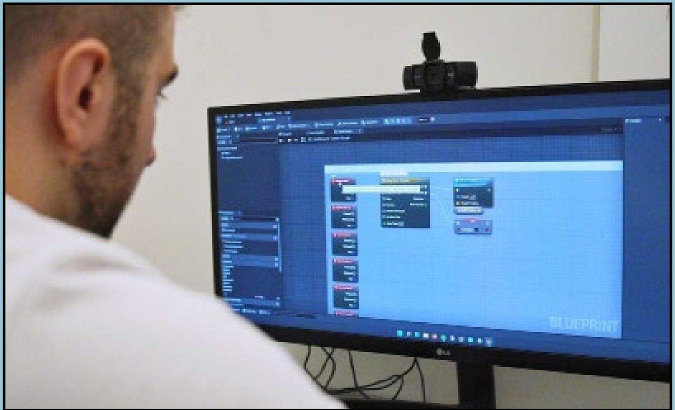

Realwheels Theatre hopes to tackle all these issues and more in its reimagining of Sartre's masterpiece. Now titled ***In Camera*** (the direct translation of Sartre's own original title for the French play – *Huis Clos*), conceptualized by Realwheels' new Artistic Director, Tomas Mureika, and sporting a brand new translation by French-Canadian actor and playwright, Cory Haas, it will be set in the midst of the onset of the global pandemic in 2020. The idea came to Mureika one day when he wondered what it would be like if Hell were a never-ending online meeting. What if you pressed on the *leave meeting* and absolutely nothing happened? "It's the ultimate symbol of the global lockdown, the ideal metaphor to look at human relations, connections, and isolation during the pandemic," he says. "What if the platform itself is one of the instruments of torture the characters are looking for?"

Sartre's classic is still oddly relevant, especially in this day and age, but it needed to be refreshed while perfectly capturing the playwright's original plot, characters, dialogue and philosophy. It was imperative to return to the original French (as opposed to the stale WWII-era standard version) to ensure the subtle—and not so subtle—were kept in balance and made Sartre's masterpiece more accessible to a new audience.

Haas was excited to work within the context of Hell being an online meeting, but stressed it was important to maintain the type of language the original play uses because it's vital to knowing where the characters are coming from. "I think the most important job of the translator is to not so much translate literally, but maintain the meaning of the play in the translation," Haas says. He also acknowledges the parallels between Sartre's work and what's happening in the world today. "We're now two years into the pandemic. A lot of people have gotten the digital route --which is great, but I think we're still pushing that boundary of what it can be."

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Pushing the boundaries is what *In Camera* is all about. The show will be a marriage of digital media and theatre -- thanks to a grant from the Canada Council whose challenge was to do a digital adaptation of a classic work of theatre in a novel way for the COVID era. *In Camera* will be shot digitally and live action performances will be integrated simultaneously and in new cutting-edge experimental fashion with pre-visualized computer animation – effectively, in this new production, the performers (an inclusive, classic integrated Realwheels cast of mixed abilities and diverse backgrounds) will effectively be acting *seamlessly with the special visual effects* in a bold and ambitious new kind of technology. But who would be able to transform this artful magic into believable and breathtakingly barrier-breaking heightened surreality…?

The Centre for Digital Media (CDM), a uniquely creative and artful division of Simon Fraser University, came on board to help bring Realwheels' bold new vision to life -- developing and rendering the cutting-edge technology for the digital, mixed-reality Hellscape: the unspoken fourth character of *In Camera* in which Estelle, Garcin, and Inez exist. Within that atmosphere, the main three will be able to merge, become transparent, and be transported into each other's online "boxes" while still maintaining the feeling of an inescapable purgatory, one in which they are forced to confront and torment each other until the end of eternity.

Valentina Forte-Hernandez is CDM's Digital Media consultant for *In Camera* and describes herself as a bit of a translator and a bit of a jack-of-all trades when it comes to simplifying communication between teams of experts. She is a graduate of the CDM program and collaborated with Realwheels on a project when she was a student, so she knew this was going to be a perfect fit. "It seemed like a natural fit for me as someone who understands the inner workings of CDM student teams and Realwheels productions," she says.

Forte-Hernandez explains that CDM students and Realwheels are soon going to entering a beta testing phase, where technology and actors will meet for some serious world-building. Fairly enough, she was hesitant to share any specific effects, but did mention a few things audiences can look forward to. For example, certain glitches may seem annoying at first, but may have thwart the characters in control of the digital platform? When is the digital platform is in charge of the characters?"

An integrated cast and crew are helping bring this project to a computer screen near you. The show will have ASL, closed captioning, and audio description for those who identify as People with Disabilities (PWD).

In Camera is a limited five-show production slated for June 2-5 this summer -- and **admission is completely free for anyone who wants to attend virtually.** "We've all been through ***a lot*** recently," offers Realwheels' A.D. Mureika,"So we wanted to end this challenging season with a gift to showcase the bold and ambitious new work being accomplished by Realwheels Team and the CDM students working together to give our audiences something they have never experienced before…"

The Realwheels Acting Academy

The Acting Academy finishes its first year in early 2022. A unique program—and one of the only one of tis kind in Canada—that is open to those who self-identify as being disabled. This inaugural program saw the students learn about professional techniques of acting, voice, and movement. Once the semester is over, they will continue their education in the form of discussion panels, which are built around such topics as finding an agent, learning about casting calls, and other professional integrated cast acting and related arts-specific knowledge.

As the year draws to a close, we met up with Acting Academy Director Hannah Pearson to ask her about what Realwheels was able to take away from its foundational year. "We've learned a ton," she exclaimed, "and will continue to learn!"

Her highlights included the first term, which saw the students learn about the building blocks of acting from Shawm Macdonald and the second term, where they were instructed on the one of the actor's most powerful tools: their voice. "I saw huge confidence in the students and was extremely impressed by the quality of work they presented," says Pearson.

She is enormously proud of both the students and the faculty at the Acting Academy, lauding their achievements as the driving force behind the success of the program, saying the "care of the instructors and Realwheels staff…and the curiosity, passion, and talent in our amazing first cohort" is what kept the Acting Academy strong.

Congratulations on a wonderful first year!
(Anglia Redding)


Hannah Pearson

In the next issue

Our exclusive behind-the-scenes look at ***In Camera*** will continue, spotlighting the magic of the actual production phase and talk with the extraordinarily multitalented integrated cast and creative Team about bringing this uniquely daring production to a dazzling new life and eerily timely relevance…

Please visit Realwheels Theatre's webpage, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook for more information.

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3 ways music educators can help students with autism develop their emotions

Author: Dawn R. Mitchell White

Many children with autism struggle to find the words to express how they feel. But when it comes to music, it's an entirely different situation.

Evidence suggests children with autism may enjoy music and show an early desire for music education.

I am a mother to three young adult sons with high-functioning autism. I got them involved in music from a young age, and they learned to communicate their emotions by playing bassoon, French horn and baritone. As a doctoral student and music teacher, I have seen the emotional transformation from music happen in both my music classroom and my home. I'd like to share what I have learned.

The backstory

From 2003 to 2018, I owned and operated the Center for Education School of the Arts and Sciences in Tampa, Florida. It was a K-12 school of the arts for students with learning and developmental disabilities.

Everyone in the school was required to join a music group, such as concert band, musical theater, jazz band or chamber ensemble. They all studied in private lessons on their instruments with me, as the school's music teacher. I saw what I believe to be incredible musical and emotional growth in students with autism after they began to study music.

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For example, there was one student who was unable to speak but could hum melodies. I gradually realized that she hummed different tunes for the emotions she was feeling, even though she couldn't communicate them verbally. Her eyes always matched her emotions as she hummed the story she couldn't tell.

Another student with Asperger's disorder took private piano and composition lessons with me. He could talk, but he couldn't explain how he felt. On days he felt sad, he played a piece of music he had composed to express it. Likewise, he had composed pieces for happy, angry and lonely.

Studies show that children with autism can understand both simple and complex emotions in music and are more responsive to sensory stimulation compared with other children – especially in music, even over speech or noise. This may explain why some children with autism are musical savants.

Musical emotions aren't understood the same way as regular emotions. They don't require complex facial expressions or a "tone of voice," which are particularly difficult for children with autism to recognize. Musical emotions are easier for children with autism spectrum disorder to grasp because they are a less socially complex.

Incorporate music in everyday lessons

Music can have a positive impact on children with autism in several ways. Educators can use songs to reinforce speech in students with autism that struggle with language. One technique is to sing with vocabulary cards in order to teach vocabulary skills. Research shows that singing can considerably improve language skills in students with a type of autism that has language delays.

Educators can also use music to help a child with autism recall important information when the information is linked with a musical sound, like a melody or rhythm. One critical study found that music can be used to focus students' attention, keep those with disabilities on track and decrease their anxiety from stress. Just as important, providing opportunities for positive emotional responses to music for children with autism can help them reach their social and language goals.

Consider teaching from an elemental perspective

The musical elements are pitch, melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, structure, texture and expression. When children hear a piece of music, the combined musical elements are inside it. However, some children with autism have auditory sensitivity, causing them to experience a lack of tolerance to everyday sounds, which can impact their ability to handle loud or complex music.

One way to assist children who struggle with this sensitivity is to simplify their music by using separate musical elements. Let me share one possible teaching example. Beginning with a song, the educator could teach in stages by isolating pitches on the piano first. As the student becomes comfortable with the first element, the educator could slowly introduce the others one at a time.

If one element became too much for the child to tolerate, the educator would remove that element from the mix.

Once the child could accept all the elements, that would signal that the child was listening to whole music, was ready to move to more challenging music and could begin again with the element cycle. Using this strategy, both the educator and the child learn what musical sounds the child can handle.

Educate your child with music online

Resources are available online

for use with children with autism. They are exciting programs and easy to obtain. To introduce your late elementary or older child to the orchestra's instruments and timbres, I recommend:

Khan Academy Music Unit: Instruments of the Orchestra. This will allow your child to emotionally connect to each of the instruments and the whole orchestra, and the child will gradually learn to express the emotions that a piece of music represents.

Chrome Music Lab, Easy Music iOS or Easy Music Android are ideal for young children with autism because several apps on this site allow the child to explore music by the musical element without the music becoming overwhelming. The child can experiment by adding elements a little at a time, as tolerated, allowing them to learn at their own pace and grow.

For an older child, Yousician and Flowkey are great places online where your child can have interactive music lessons. Children with autism may be able to express themselves through their instrument, even when they cannot speak the words they want to say.

From my experiences, I have discovered that although many children with autism may struggle to find the words to express how they feel, music can help them understand and experience emotions, while giving them an outlet to express themselves. I wish you success on your journey of discovery with your students and children with autism, as well.

This article was first published on The Conversation. Read the original article
Disclosure Statement: The author, Dawn R. Mitchell White is affiliated with the University of South Florida as a doctoral student in Music Education.

The Able Eyes App

is officially LIVE!

The world’s largest database of virtual tours for accessibility is now easier to access from ANYWHERE, at ANY TIME!

In 2017, CEO and Co-Founder of Able Eyes, Meegan Winters, took action on a dream to make the world more accessible through the use of virtual tours. Virtual tours have been used for over a decade to help businesses market their businesses by offering a walk-thru of their space. Able Eyes is a collection of virtual tours from around the world to help people of all abilities explore spaces beforehand from one website (www.Ableeyes.org), and now an easy-to-access App.

DOWNLOAD OUR APP

Download our app to find virtual tours of public places around the world!

"Know Before You Go!

Accessibility Plus Marketing

DOWNLOAD NOW

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Christine Chama

"Self-acceptance is the key to happiness"

"I was born in Kabwe, Zambia with a condition known as Osteogenesis Imperfecta. The second of four children, I hold the honoured position of being the only girl. My family has been my greatest support, never making me feel that I was any different to my siblings.

Perception of people with disabilities

People in my community and country have very negative perceptions about people with disabilities. It is erroneously believed that they are always looking for someone to help them; they cannot sustain themselves; cannot work, neither do they want to work because they prefer to be dependent on others. I want this perception to change and as a person living with a disability, I am determined to be the change I want to see. It all starts with me as a person. How I conduct myself, present myself to people and interact with them. How I make myself be inclusive and take the opportunities that are available. Positive perceptions about people living with disabilities should start with us.

Growing up in my community

It was difficult living in my community because people with disabiities were not a common sight. If I look around my neighborhood now, I think I'm the only person living with a disability so you can imagine how people would stare when I'm walking along the streets. Some would run away from me because I'm different from them.

Growing up with a disability had numerous challenges because there were not many people who were willing to interact with me. Myths also perpetuated this. Some believe if you interact with a person living with a disability, you will eventually have a disability yourself, or you'll give birth to a child with a disability.

Opportunities to educate

My own situation has given me an opportunity to educate people. I've taken it upon myself to use my voice to help others understand people with disabilities and how to accommodate them in every sphere of life. We may be different in some ways, but we are human with emotions just like any other person.

I'm often told that I'm a source of inspiration to others. When I receive feedback from people, I am motivated because this is a clear indication that I am on the right path. My life is a lesson to many, and I feel honoured to be able to change perceptions about people with disabilities through the way that I live my life.

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In my job as a social worker with the Social Affairs Department, I interact daily with people from different age groups and backgrounds. And, I use myself as an example when highlighting certain issues.

Acceptance is important

As a person living with a disability, it is important to accept your condition. It all starts there. Acceptance has helped me. I had to acknowledge that I could not change my physical being but there was a lot I can do with my abilities. When you've accepted what is, you should then start discovering your potential. What are you good at? You are a person with a disability, but there is something you are good at! Really pay attention to what you can do, and you'll find that when you enjoy what you are doing, sometimes you will forget that you have a disability.

It is important to pay attention to yourself. Accept yourself. Nurture your abilities.

I like to say to say my disability is my strength.

Accepting myself

I wasn't always this self-confident. It took several years to get here. My family made it easier for me to get to that stage. Growing up, my parents ensured that I did not see myself as being different from my siblings. That really helped me a lot, but I attended special needs primary and high school with other children with disabilities. My self-esteem challenges really emerged at college when I had entered another environment where I had to interact with students without disabilities. For a while, I had no friends. I would walk straight from the lecture theatre back to my room. I didn't know how I would ever be able to fit into the new environment.

Because my parents and siblings never made me feel

that I was different, I pulled on that knowledge while in college and gathered myself together! Frequent self-talks helped where I reminded myself that I always had this dream of furthering my studies. There were no universities in my country that catered only to students with disabilities, so I had to learn how to exist in this new environment. And I did. I eventually made many friends who were very supportive.

Limitations

I was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta so I use crutches and can't easily access staircases. My bones are soft, so I must be constantly mindful of where I'm stepping so I don't slip and fall. I fracture easily and these are very painful.

I'm short in stature so I need to be around someone to help me get things that are positioned higher than I can reach.

It's a challenge to have romantic relationships because of my disability. In my culture, interabled relationships are not common.

My greatest accomplishment to date

Obtaining my bachelor's degree has been my biggest achievement. It has always been one of my major dreams that I would graduate from a university one day. I graduated in 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Development Studies with Sociology. I am very proud of this achievement.

Volunteer Activities

I am actively involved in disability advocacy. Currently, I serve as a board member of the Women and Girls with Disabilities Rights of Zambia and was recently appointed to the National Executive for Women and Girls with Disabilities. I am invited to give inspirational talks at schools including two special schools in my hometown.

Challenges of people living with disabilities in my country

People with disabilities are not empowered so their disability challenges are multiplied, and they remain dependent on others. Few attain higher education. Literacy levels must be improved.

Those who live in rural areas of the country face additional challenges. Distance is an issue in terms of getting to health care facilities and accessing a basic need like water. Many do not have running water in their homes so wheelchair users, for instance - how can they travel long distances to get to water?

The government helps to a certain extent, but I think more should be done because the percentage of people living with disabilities is increasing. I believe that the private sector should also be involved in the process of helping to make the lives of people with disabilities easier.

Self-acceptance is the key to happiness!

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Retired attorney, Roger Chard talks about a life of Grit, determination, self-reliance and excellence

Part 2 of 2.
Read part 1 here

"The more we with disabilities can model the point that we are able to participate fully in society, including the workaday world, the more likely it will be that able-bodied people will be comfortable in associating with someone who has a disability and the less likely it will be that disabilities will be regarded with fear and apprehension."

Inclusive employment

When it comes to hiring, education of potential employers is critical. This is where messages from a magazine like this and steady, relentless messages from blind or otherwise disabled people in, or formerly in, the work force come in. We do not have time to patronize and marginalize our blind population and to waste resources that are found in it. Have we learned nothing from a similar approach to race and gender? They tend to be at least as educated and technically proficient as their sighted counterparts, but something in the neighborhood of 70 percent to 75 percent of working-age blind adults, as distinct from the visually impaired, are unemployed or underemployed. Hiring reluctance frequently is premised solely on stereotypical projection and assumption supported by scant, misinterpreted or no evidence. Before considering whether people with disabilities can find solutions on the job that may elude others who do not have a disability, consider how people with disabilities approach any job, especially where safety may be an issue. Massive studies covering thousands of workers conducted by the Veterans Administration after World War II showed disabled workers had better work safety records than their so-called normal counterparts, precisely because they thought about their safety. For instance, they did not reorient machines or tie back guards in order to achieve greater speed. Requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, together with expanding technological support, makes accommodating workers with disabilities easier and less daunting, and a combination of living experience and new technology increases the odds that a person with a disability will come up with imaginative ways to circumvent tricky work challenges.

From the standpoint of potential blind workers, we must be prepared to answer well intended questions about how we do or would do things, but not to stop there. We must make it clear that we want to show what we can do, to go to work, to work hard, to mingle and socialize like every other worker. We cannot be content with threshold matters of information gathering, idle curiosity, understanding, and acceptance, especially where employers and government are concerned. Knowing a little about our history can be valuable, too, knowing about some of the many successes of blind people can help our own self-esteem and to allay fear and deeply held convictions that a blind person cannot contribute to the work force.

Dr. Jacob Bolotin attended the Illinois School for the Blind in the late 19th century and went on to become the world's first licensed, totally blind physician.

Sabriye Tenberken was totally blind, she traveled, often alone, all over Tibet to challenge centuries of treating blind Tibetans as less than human, of denying them education, work, respect, or a role in their community.

There have been thinkers and doers like **James Holman, John Metcalf, Blaise Francoise**, and **Nicholas Bacon.**

Holman was a totally blind and solo traveler of the early 1800s, before Braille, canes, and guide dogs. When journeying across the steppes of Greater Russia to Siberia, he was so scrupulously observant that he was arrested by the Czar's police, charged with being a spy, taken to the borders of Austria, and expelled.

In the mid 1700s, **John Metcalf**, totally blind from childhood, was a successful road and bridge builder; a racehorse rider; bare-knuckle fighter; card shark; stagecoach driver; and ironically, occasionally a guide to sighted tourists of the local countryside.

Blaise Francoise was blinded during military service in the mid 1600s, just before he was to be promoted to the rank of field marshal. But he then wrote the definitive work on fortifications, and published other scientific works, including *An Historical and Geographical Account of the River of the Amazons* which included a chart that he drew after going blind.

Dr. Nicholas Bacon was blinded in childhood by a bow-and-arrow accident, but he obtained first place among his fellow students, got his law degree at Brussels, and became a blind lawyer of eighteenth-century France, despite ridicule of friends and professors.

Bernard Morin was a blind mathematician in the 1960s who showed how a sphere could be turned inside out.

Geerat Vermeij was a blind biologist who delineated many new species of mollusk, based on tiny variations in the shapes and contours of their shells.

Lisa Fittipaldi was a nurse and CPA who lost her sight, went into deep depression for two years, and took to her bed. But when her exasperated husband threw a set of watercolors at her and demanded that she get up, she used art to give herself mobility and freedom. She says: "People have a lot of misconceptions about being blind. There is life after blindness. First you have to learn alternative skills. And there's rehabilitation." Ms. Fittipaldi is hailed internationally as the only blind realist painter.

Michael May was blinded at 3, he went on to hold the world speed record for blind downhill skiers, to be a CIA analyst, and an assistive technology entrepreneur.

Henry Grunwald, the former editor in chief of Time, Inc., author of *One Man's America* and once the U.S. ambassador to Austria, went one day to pour a glass of water and totally missed the glass. Was it time for a new prescription for his eyeglasses? No. He was in the early stages of macular degeneration. He gathered all manner of information regarding the history of the eye, ranging from light-sensitive primitive organisms to the latest surgical wizardry. Along the way, he also learned that unknowns like **Henry James, James Thurber, Jorge Luis Borges, Michelangelo**, and **Monet** all suffered from a similar loss of sight.

And there are **Louis Braille**, **Jose Feliciano**, **Helen Keller**, **Ray Charles**, **Erroll Garner,**

Ronnie Milsap, **George Shearing**, **Alec Templeton, Doc Watson, Stevie Wonder,** or the totally blind, fifteen year old, World War II French underground activist, **Jacques Lussyran.**

But in his 1973 speech, blindness, "Is History Against Us?", National Federation of the Blind president, the late Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, offered this important perspective:
Like the sighted, the blind have had their share of solid citizens, namby-pambies, strong-minded individualists, squares, oddballs, eggheads, and eccentrics." Among the blind, as among the sighted, there are people who do remarkable and apparently very noteworthy things that are positive and negative, but that does not mean the vast majority of the blind strives for either extreme or to be regarded as capable of doing such things.

Technology as an equalizer for people with disabilities

I stop short of using the word "equalizer," but technology has dramatically and remarkably closed many gaps--travel, communication, tactile graphics, awareness of surroundings, to name but four. And the future is exciting. The reason for not going all in on the word equalizer is similar to why I always have avoided the word "overcome," relative to disabilities. I generally feel one can compensate, work around, largely make up for, but not fully overcome a disability, unless the disability itself is eliminated. But this view is in no way negative toward technology. I routinely refer to my 1980s computerization as a Life Changer, and I am sure various technological developments are viewed similarly by people with disabilities other than blindness. But a 2014 article I read in GeekWire contained this blunt, grounding statement from Steve Gleason, a former NFL player with ALS and with whom Microsoft was working to create a series of new features to make it easier for people to control a tablet with their eyes: "Until there is a cure for ALS, technology is a cure." Despite the phenomenal benefits from technology, past, present, and future, I doubt that technology can 100% overcome a disability. I am convinced, however, that gaps between inability and ability will continue to narrow unimaginably. In some ways, I was overwhelmed by the freedom computerization gave me.

Advice to people who are concerned about not being able to pursue a career because of their visual impairment

No matter when one becomes visually impaired, there are many resources to consult. There are vocational rehabilitation agencies, there are individual consultants, there is an endless array of reading material in accessible formats that are very helpful with training and with providing wisdom on whether one can get a new job, continue an old job, seek accommodations with either. Sometimes legal counseling is necessary, too. A person who wonders about seeking employment should be pretty settled as to what he or she wants to do, learn as much as possible about what a job in the preferred field entails, then apply. If already in the job, make the appropriate variation on this theme, such as thinking through and requesting appropriate accommodations. I do not favor denying or trying to downplay the disability. One must own it and be prepared to articulate how a job can be done, in spite of the disability. Perhaps one may have to make adjustments in a career because of a visual disability, but visual disability is not a ground for avoiding pursuit of a career.

If blind from birth or shortly thereafter, it is important for parents to encourage their child to be a full participant in the same school and extra-curricular activities as his or her classmates and friends, to not get in the way of their child. It is important for parents to support their child, despite bumps in the road, and to not assume blindness prevents

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Roger Chard, Parry Peak

being part of the gang. Kids themselves are generally good at figuring out what works, how to be inclusive, how to incorporate accommodations for friends who need to be accommodated. It isn't all that different than figuring out how somebody's little brother or sister can be part of a pick-up sports team, despite being smaller, slower, or not as strong as everybody else. And sometimes parents can suggest solutions when their child is struggling. Withdrawing the child from whatever it is he or she wishes to try is almost always a bad choice.

If a child loses sight later in life, say in middle or high school, it is critical for the parent to provide positive, sometimes tenacious support, to not allow the child to become discouraged or morose. Fitting in is often of critical importance at that stage, and it is easy enough to fall out of favor from one day to the next, regardless of any role a disability might play. That parents cannot fight their child's battles is no more or less true because the added element of a disability is involved. Any available professional counseling help should be sought. I have strayed into this territory because I think a child will be most comfortable with him or herself, have highest self-confidence if maximum involvement with classmates and friends is achieved.

Love for travel

I do enjoy traveling, and I have done a lot of it since retiring. Before retiring, I traveled to Winter Park, Colorado at least once a year for twenty-five years to ski with the National Sports Center for the Disabled; and I took a trip to South Africa. Since retiring, I have traveled to Portugal, Antarctica, Sweden, and Australia, and taken a one-month ship repositioning trip

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Roger in Antarctica

up the Atlantic from the bottom of Argentina to Hamburg Germany. For some years now, I have gone to Chautauqua, New York in the summer to participate in Chautauqua's annual summer program. If with someone sighted, as I often am, traveling is not a big challenge, but if on my own, there are moments when in an airport, bus or train terminal can be disorienting because they have large, wide open spaces, and train stations can be disorienting simply because of noise near the tracks. Getting right down to the most practical considerations, however, rest rooms are among the most challenging for a blind person, especially the very large ones in airports, train and bus stations. No two are set out in the same way where location of devices is concerned, they can be noisy and crowded--people talking and moving about, toilets flushing, sink water running, hand blowers running, maybe children shouting. They require utmost concentration. Eating establishments present similar problems, plus challenges of their own--reading menus, getting the attention of a waitperson, getting to a rest room, getting in and out of the restaurant. Usually there is guide help available to meet me at planes and trains, to assist with getting baggage and getting to ground transportation. Likewise, there usually is help when onboard.

In terms of accessibility, many of the places mentioned above have lacked accommodations of the sort that make travel easy when strictly on one's own. I enjoyed all of these places for one reason or another, but probably Antarctica was my favorite. It certainly was unique and was the most different venue of any I have experienced. Footing was a challenge, walking among noisy penguins, getting to and from little islands by Zodiac, and kayaking among seals and whales presented travel experiences that one typically does not encounter. Everything I did there was a first for me. I confess that I did not wander off on my own, and I don't think much of anyone else did, either. A close second favorite was a visit to the village of Kuranda, Australia, including the fifteen tunnels, tropical rainforest, forty bridges, and waterfalls between there and Cairns. I was extremely fortunate to be with my partner on that trip, for nothing was truly accessible. That does not mean that a blind person cannot engage fully in such adventures, though. Often the biggest challenge is convincing the person in charge of your capabilities, despite the lack of so-called accessibility. I ran into that for the Antarctica trip, until I told the doctor that I skied black runs in the Rockies. He decided I would be "fine." Even though people with disabilities are all over the place, a person who encounters us, frequently has never dealt with a blind person, a person in a wheelchair, a person who is deaf. Accessibility will vary tremendously from country to country, and some places are never going to be "accessible"--churches, palaces, castles, caves, cobble stone streets and walkways, or historic terrains.

In conclusion

Over four decades ago, a young man with a Ph.D. in organ performance from the University of Michigan applied for membership in an Ann Arbor health club. He was denied because he was blind, and the proprietor admitted it. His joining would be "unsafe" for him and other members. It's "common sense," he said. I sued the club to force admission. Negotiations went nowhere, and the case went to trial.

The club had not interviewed the plaintiff; not based its decision on any safety studies; had no complaints or other data against the application from its membership; and had no bad experiences with blind members at any of its other franchises. Its insurance risk evaluators did not, and could not, produce anything from within or without the club to support lack of safety, and no one else produced evidence supporting lack of safety. Better yet, there was a Michigan law defining health clubs as a place of public accommodation that was required to grant access to the blind, and it contained no safety exception; Plaintiff's case was open and shut, right? Wrong! The judge heard the testimony, he even visited the facility, he upheld the denial and dismissed the case.

So I needed a better way to tell the court of appeals what was at stake. We had all the evidence and the law, but we had been trumped by "common sense." In his previously referenced speech, Dr. Jernigan made many valid points, none more valid than this one:

In reality the accomplishments of blind people through the centuries have been out of all proportion to their numbers. There are genius, and fame, and adventure, and enormous versatility of achievement, not just once in a great while but again and again, over and over. To be sure, there is misery, also poverty and suffering and misfortune aplenty, just as there is in the general history of mankind. But this truth is only a half-truth and, therefore, not really a truth at all. The real truth, the whole truth, reveals a chronicle of courage and conquest, of greatness, and even glory on the part of blind people, which has been suppressed and misrepresented by sighted historians, not because these historians have been people of bad faith or malicious intent but because they have been people with run-of-the-mill prejudice and ordinary misunderstandings. Historians, too, are human; and when facts violate their preconceptions, they tend to ignore those facts.

My judicial panel was people

of sight with run-of-the-mill prejudice, ordinary misunderstandings, projections, and preconceptions. Why wouldn't its common sense be like the trial court judge's? I didn't have a victim or a star, I just had a blind guy who wanted to join a health club. Yet I thought there must be something in my own operational philosophy: "Don't over think!" And there was. Besides not seeing, how different was this blind applicant than any other applicant, each of whom had a variety of health club shortcomings. Blindness didn't mean he couldn't hear, dress himself, be educated, get to and from the club, think and look out for himself. Ability to think was the key.

If a sighted applicant noted on his/her application that he or she could not swim, should membership routinely be denied? Of course not. The application evaluator should presume the applicant was knowledgeable of those limitations and smart enough to not dive into the pool. Why, then, I asked, should it be presumed that a person who notes blindness on his application is ignorant of his experience, unaware of the role blindness plays in his life, will not be smart enough to seek or accept orientation to the facility and, instead, will barge onto the tennis court or free weightlifting floor? There was no justification to deny membership based on existing complaint, prior experience, known risk, or the law, and there was no reason to conclude that a blind person was less likely than a sighted person to think or to value his safety and the safety of others. Common sense made no case to so presume. I then borrowed some of the beatitudes that have circulated for years to belittle the baseless presumption:

BLESSED ARE THEY who refrain from shouting when they speak to me; BLESSED ARE THEY who talk directly to me and not to someone else; BLESSED ARE THEY who say who they are when entering a room and say hello to me; BLESSED ARE THEY who do not hesitate to say "SEE" when talking to me; BLESSED ARE THEY who laugh with me when I tell a joke related to blindness; BLESSED ARE THEY who wait for me to extend my hand before shaking it; BLESSED ARE THEY who offer me their arm so they can serve as my guide, instead of grabbing, pulling, or shoving me; BLESSED ARE THEY who place my hand on an object such as the back of a chair when telling me where it is, so I can seat myself; BLESSED ARE THEY who read me the menu and its prices and allow me to order my own meal; BLESSED ARE THEY who do not distract my guide dog from being my active eyes; BLESSED ARE THEY who treat me like a human being, for I am a human.

As I have said in a speech of my own to blind and other disabled listeners: There are many more beatitudes, and there is much more literature available today than thirty or forty years ago that openly tells your story, my story, our story with ever-burgeoning access to and communication of these stories, more attention will be paid to us, to what we do and can do. Barriers to full emersion into the social, political, and working parts of this society will weaken and fall, unless we forget to keep leaning on and pushing them. Edward Everett Hale said: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something I can do."

We, the blind and going blind, must remember that while we develop and implement strategies and set examples with our work and participation in social activities, with our deportment, speech making, demonstrating, lobbying, or our litigation, we always are learning, we always are teaching, and we always must be thinking.

The court of appeals reversed and ruled for thinking.

Roger in Australia

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Q&A
with
Ashley Lyn Olson

Author, Travel Enthusiast and Blogger

Q: Tell us about your writing.

A: I grew up wanting to be a writer although never thought it would be possible. Writing jobs are few far between, and there aren't many Stephen Kings in the world. So, I used my skills in PR and marketing. When I started traveling a lot, I documented it, so If I wanted to go back to a locale, I knew which hotel was accessible and good. Soon I realized I had to share this, to help other people and to raise awareness.

I started wheelchairtraveling.com because I can't go on every single trail, and I can't visit every country. For the past seven years it's picked up speed. It feels good that the site is creating change and inspiring people to share information. I encourage others to create their own blogs. We have to get that information out there, to make the world a more accepting place for people with disabilities. Mainstream media doesn't have this information and most able-bodied people don't think about these issues. When you go to a beach, you probably don't wonder if there are beach wheelchairs or an accessible pathway.

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Q: Blogging isn't the only writing you do, is it?

A: I've always written poetry. My first poem, circa Grade 3, Rapping Roger Wheelworm, was a Dr. Seuss kind of poem about the life of a worm who was a rapper. I had planned to incorporate poetry into the story of my pressure sore, plus talk about what I had gone through in the beginning stages of being paralyzed. It would have been a big book! But when the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 happened, I felt the need to push the book forward, to get it out there.

Q: Tell us about the resulting book.

A: Due to surgery for a pressure sore, I was confined to a bed 24 hours a day for eight weeks. Add to that the harrowing six months leading up to the surgery, it opened my eyes to this world we have inside. *Confined to Align* came about because, ironically, being confined to bed allowed me to align my well-being more than I had ever done or ever imagined. I thought that the experience was going to be horrific. Long before the surgery, I got into meditation and read lots of books and was looking to go on a short retreat. Then the pressure sore happened. It was like God said, "Oh, no, you wanted this. You really want to know what it's like, you want to really learn something?" I got to do it the hard way, got to see the whole picture, find the internal core of life. It had to be difficult on the outside for me to be able to find it on the inside. I knew I needed to document it, write it all down even if I wasn't having a good day. I didn't want to say, this is a horrible situation, but I did it and you can too! I needed to say that I had a hard time, that there was struggle, there were mental and physical things I had to go through to align my internal well-being.

Q: We were struck by the poem Summer Umbrella. What's its significance?

A: That was inspired when I returned to the place where my family had the car accident. It's in the middle of the desert so it's hard to pinpoint the exact spot but to me it was very clear. I got emotional thinking about how far I'd come since the accident. I'd used an umbrella to take a photo on this trip—it was super-hot with no shade, so I used the umbrella to take pictures. Then I realized it was a symbol for inner strength and our connection with God. The poem was also for my father who protects me too.

Q: How often do you travel, and do you always go alone?

A: I travel five to seven times a year. I have traveled in groups, with my boyfriend or with friends and I loved it, but I also love traveling by myself. I never feel alone. I'll be in the car listening to a book on tape that I've been wanting to listen to for ages but haven't had time. It's wonderful to be able to do my own thing, stop when I want, eat when I want. I don't have to keep tabs on everybody. There's a lot of freedom and I can cover a lot of ground when I'm by myself. A solo driving trip is therapeutic—the quietness of the road, watching the horizon, it's very peaceful.

Q: What advice would you like to share?

A: Get out and see the world. We're here on this journey, our spirits are on this plane to experience it. I want people to have the confidence to take on those challenges and be okay with exploring and expanding their own. Also, learn to accept what is technically and physically possible in this time in space.

wheelchairtraveling.com

How the travel industry still ignores people with disabilities

As restrictions are gradually lifted, traveling abroad will be a high priority for many people. But for a disabled person, getting away on holiday can seem like a distant dream – with or without a pandemic.

People with disabilities are still subjected to systematic discrimination when it comes to travel. They face barriers that non-disabled people do not, which can prevent them from going on holiday – or at least drastically limit their choice about where to go and what to do.

Even before COVID-19, one survey found that 52% of adults with a disability in the U.K. had not taken a holiday anywhere in the previous 12 months.

The reasons are well known. Disabled people are often deprived of three key things: good information, appropriate facilities and positive attitudes from other people.

To this end, many countries, including the U.K., have introduced specific legislation to address these inequalities. The United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities asserts the rights of disabled people to participate in cultural life, leisure, recreation and sports.

You might expect this kind of political action means disabled people have equal access to travel. But when I interviewed disabled travelers and people who work in ecotourism – in the U.K., U.S., Australia, Canada and Sweden – it became apparent that many holiday providers fail to value their disabled customers.

There are some for example, who merely aim to comply with regulations. They do not think there is a sufficient market for disabled guests, so they only made practical changes – such as investing in ramps – if the law strictly demanded it.

One disabled traveller told how he mentioned to an ecolodge manager: "You just need to fix a couple of things in the room and it'll be good."

The manager replied: "Why should we bother? We don't make enough money out of you guys to really justify it."

Other business owners found such changes expensive to implement, but were motivated by keeping up with "good practice". For this group, being disability-friendly made good business sense – but their efforts were often incomplete, only featuring in certain parts of the site for example, or for one particular kind of disability.

As one study participant noted, "Instead of having the whole place accessible, mobility-wise, we just make sure at least two of the units and the main public areas are. That's an alternative that seems to have worked."

It may seem odd that ecotourism – a form of tourism that values ethics and sustainability – does not appear to be leading the industry in tearing down barriers to disabled travel. But recent research found that even businesses with the highest level of ecotourism accreditation did little to accommodate the needs of disabled guests.

Universal Travel

With respect to information, only 2% of the websites in that study – which focused on Australia – had a detailed information pack for disabled people to download. And while some businesses considered themselves to be disability-friendly, facilities tended to only consider wheelchair access.

Even then, only 40% of all the websites provided any information to wheelchair users, while 6% mentioned visual disabilities and 8% referred to hearing loss. When it came to intellectual disabilities, only 8% even mentioned them.

Almost all of the websites failed to extend simply courtesies, such as using captions (known as alternative text) to explain to people with visual disabilities what is depicted in a photograph, or subtitling video material to help people with hearing disabilities. A quarter of the businesses required disabled people to contact them ahead of the visit to enquire about suitable facilities.

Thankfully, there are also operators who believe ensuring that disabled people have an equal quality of experience to non-disabled people is an essential condition of being in business.

This kind of approach needs to spread more widely. Disabled people will only truly have a right to a holiday when tourism businesses start to invest in adaptations for them. This means making provisions not only for wheelchair users but for all disability groups. It also means adapting business practices, updating websites and training staff to be able to serve their disabled guests appropriately and sensitively.

It is estimated that there are around a billion disabled people across the world, representing around 15% of the world's population. If the tourism industry is not willing to ensure these guests are treated as equals, that should make everyone uncomfortable. If society wants to see travel as a human right, it should be a right for everyone.

This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original here

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Dolls that reflect every ability and race


Andile

It all started when Andile was looking for a baby doll for her baby niece. She could not find the specific doll she had in mind, namely one that was not a barbie doll, one that was also reflective of her ethnicity – African descent. It was during her search on store shelves in Edmonton that she realized there were no dolls that reflected the people we encounter every day of our lives, and it was a shocking realization! There were no First Nations dolls, none of African descent, no Asians and none of people with disabiities.

Every day we encounter people of all abilities and ethnicities, she thought. Why is it that this is not reflected in our toy stores?

An idea was therefore born. Andile's first doll was of African descent with an afro-textured hairstyle. Her second was a batch of baby dolls and one of her first in that collection was a doll with Down syndrome. Andile is an early childhood educator and she has over the years, worked with children with disabilities. She saw this as a perfect opportunity to have them play with dolls that looked like them. She believes that to create societies that are accepting of every race and ability, children should be introduced to dolls of every race and ability! Dolls that reflect society is likely to remove prejudices, over time.

Albino dolls and dolls with vitiligo were later added to her collection, but her dolls with Down syndrome features are by far the most sought after.

Visit her online store, www.beeyoukids.ca

Bee You Kids

beeyoultd@gmail.com

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The amazing digital platform

SenseIT

Meet the team and hear their reason for the creation of this platform

Digital inclusion.

It is not a new concept, yet, it is a concept that is now “hot on the shelves” and being embraced by global enterprises and multinational organizations.

It is a concept that goes beyond the traditional “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” programs. It is about enabling all people to contribute to and benefit from the digital economy. Including everyone means we must level the digital playing field, especially for people that access technology and the internet differently than the “mainstream persona”. In the age of digital transformation, this mainstream persona is non-existent.

Your users are different. They engage with your product differently. They enjoy retrieving the content differently. They use various devices to interact with your product (mobile phone, desktop computer, tablet, assistive technology, etc.).

It is time we set aside that “mainstream” persona and begin designing and developing for people of diverse backgrounds and different capabilities. That is, let’s begin designing and developing for keyboard only users, assistive technologies users, users that may need different color contrast, etc. This, actually, taps into universal design and development principles of which accessible design and development is one of these principles to follow.

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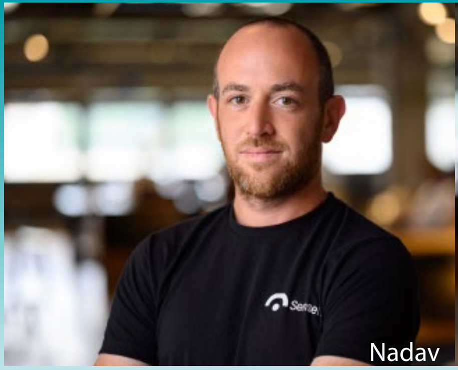
Meet **Nadav Bernstein and Tamar Schapira**

two entrepreneurs working in the accessibility space for over twelve years.


Nadav


Tamar

Tamar describes herself as an ambitious, motivated and results driven social entrepreneur with over a decade of experience in management and business development. She and her husband, Nadav, are passionate about identifying social problems and creating solutions that have the potential to become successful businesses and positively impact society.

Prior to developing SenseIT in late 2018, the entrepreneur couple owned an accessibility consulting firm working with clients in various sectors to ensure digital accessibility specifically for digital products defined as 'Software as a Service' (SaaS).

They worked endless hours testing and auditing software systems, e-commerce sites, complex web applications for accessibility. The process was agonizing. Mainly for their clients. But also for their team.

The agony is due, in part, to the time and dedication of both the client and team. Yet, it was also a time consuming and tedious process to ensure that a product was tested, remediated, and maintained, regularly. Tamar and Nadav understood that this process was inefficient and searched for ways to automate their work. It took years of research and development to get to where they are today.

SenseIT was founded to ensure that digital accessibility can be implemented as early as possible in the product development cycle. The company developed the product with the product manager and developer in mind. SenseIT is a Software as a Service automated testing platform that emulates the user with disability experience. This allows SenseIT to detect critical accessibility barriers since the tool knows to test a digital application from the user's perspective.

The company offers organizations the ability to test their product (website or application) early in development covering up to 70% of the requirements. SenseIT is an enterprise grade solution for software companies that are required to comply with global digital accessibility regulations. The product is built by subject matter experts and software engineers seeking to create an efficient and reliable solution for testing, remediating, and maintaining digital accessibility.

SenseIT integrates into the development system, meaning, the platform can test for accessibility before a product is released to market. The time and cost savings are enormous for today's organizations that are undergoing or underwent digital transformation. Whether the client is developing software in a highly regulated space such as the airline and hotel industry; or, our clients are selling to enterprises and organizations that require digital accessibility compliance (such as the financial and government sector), SenseIT meets their need.

SenseIT is looking to partner with companies that develop software solutions for the travel industry and have an interest in ensuring that these products are accessible, always.

For more information and partnership inquiries, email tamar@senseit360.com

Photo Courtesy: TravelAbility

Toby Willis

blind sailor, talks about acceptance and the power of the dog

By Nancy Baye

"I may have lost my sight, but I haven't lost my vision. I have a vivid imagination," Toby Willis says as he describes his congenital sight loss. "I inherited a genetic mutation, Leber's disease, which began expressing when I was very young. I tried to hide it because of the stigma, the barriers that people place on people with disabilities. But by the time I was in junior high school it was unmistakable." He did gene therapy, which restored only a bit of his sight—too much damage was already done to his retinas.

That bit of residual vision helps Toby's outdoor adventures—and there are a lot of those. He loves travel and any outdoor adventures: hiking, back country treks, technical rock climbing and sailing.

Growing up near water, Toby grew to love swimming and boating. When he moved to Seattle, he made friends with an optometrist, who understood his sight loss. Toby expressed interest in his sailboat, admitting he knew nothing about sailing. He recalls their first day on the water. "When my friend realized my phone had a compass with read aloud function, he said that if I could access a compass I could sail! I fell in love with it—it's fun and challenging and I've had this amazing teacher." The phone software lets Toby connect to the boat's instrumentation and get most data read aloud—the position of the boat, depth of the water, direction of travel. He can also operate the autopilot steering. "We've sailed in many parts of the world. Navigating the locks of the Panama Canal beside 900-foot-long container ships was quite a pinnacle for me."

An employee at Expedia Group

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for seven years, Toby has helped forward accessibility and inclusion for marginalized travelers. “Travel for people with disabilities is improving. I see progress and investment. Awareness has become more mainstream, the topic less taboo. I hope we are shifting from compliance to inclusion.” But, having faced discrimination while traveling with his service dog, he acknowledges that there is still a lot to be done.

When asked about his service dog, Toby lights up. “My beautiful German Shepherd guide dog attracts a lot of attention, which is cool since I love social interaction.” He admits that one of the hardest things about being blind is meeting people. “Think about being in a noisy bar or crowded restaurant; it’s not like we’re able to make eye contact across the room. But people will come talk to me about the dog.” Yet, there are days when even those positive interactions can be exhausting. “I have to remember that the one thousandth person asking to pet her doesn't know that 999 other people just asked the same question.” Guide dogs are not supposed to interact with strangers for fear of breaking their focus or the bond with their person. Toby feels lucky for a strong bond with his work-oriented dog, who is very focused on him. “But I've had people stop me on a city crosswalk asking to pet my dog and I think, ‘Excuse me, can we get out of the street first?’"

One of the Toby’s most amazing moments was when he got his first guide dog. Before that hiking was much harder; he’d stub his toes on roots and rocks. “The guide dog really opened up my world. She’s able to understand my gait and my stride, where I’m going to put my foot next, and she’ll position me where I have a solid step. It’s been so liberating to have a dog for those trails where it's appropriate.”

But before the outdoor adventures could start, Toby had to accept his disability. “The turning point for me was really accepting my blindness and leaning into that. This is who I am, this is the hand I've been dealt. I'm gonna play it to the best of my ability.”

He advises others to be confident, unafraid to ask for help and to embrace technology. “Acceptance is hard, but it's critical and something we must strive for. Accept and love who you are and be confident in your abilities to contribute to society. People appreciate that confidence and self-love. That’s how I found people willing to help me access the outdoors as I wanted.”

Then he’s back to gushing about outdoor adventure: his love for hiking, the smell of the air, the feel of the trail under his feet. “My inputs might be differently weighted because I have less sight, so I depend on my other senses more to fill in that mental image.”

When people ask Toby why he summits peaks, why he would climb a 14,000-foot mountain, “I tell them I like the view! That always gets a laugh but it's true, my view is just different than yours.”

> **“The turning point for me was really accepting my blindness and leaning into that. This is who I am, this is the hand I've been dealt. I'm gonna play it to the best of my ability.”**

MaahsTravels

Accessibility Refined

CONSULTING

At Maahs Travels, our Consultants make the world more accessible. More inclusive. We work across the globe to provide accessibility, diversity, and inclusion training for corporations, governments, resorts, and entertainment, media and advertising companies. We show employers how to recruit, hire, onboard, and train employees with disabilities – the largest untapped source of employees available.

We work with entertainment executives, city planners, government officials, corporate leaders, and ministries of tourism, to identify and define market potential and strategies to grow market share for our clients.

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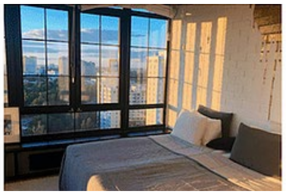
EXPERIENCES

Check out Fred’s travel log and relatable articles from other adventure travelers with a point of view. Read Melange, Accessibility for All magazine at www.readmelange.com, for ideas and inspiration on the places you can go!

Through our partnership with Travel for All, Maahs Travels makes it easier for you to plan your trip. We can book accessible travel, accommodations, tours and attractions, plus everything that you require to ensure your journeys exceed your expectations so you can explore the beauty of the world!

If you would like your resort or travel destination to be featured in Accessibility for All magazine, contact Fred and invite him to visit. He will share his experience with the millions of Acessibility for All readers in over 64 countries, as well as followers on his social media channels.



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FRED TALKS

Fred has shared his personal and professional journeys with countless audiences around the world from D.C. to Dubai; Greece to Georgia; Israel to the Islands of the Caribbean; and brings his inspirational story to every engagement with his passionate and empowering presence. He engages audiences both large and small, from corporate engagements where he speaks to hundreds of tourism professionals or smaller settings with senior leadership or government officials.

Contact Maahs Travels now to book Fred for your next event.

www.maahstravels.com

I am working on a special project about destinations around the world that are accessible for people with disabilities. In this project, we want to include airports, train stations, cruise lines, hotels, accessible taxis, accessible restaurants and museums, and accessible tourist and historic sites, as well as accessible beaches or lakes. If you know anyone who is responsible for accessible tourism to cities or countries around the world such as Ministries of Tourism, Convention and Visitor's Bureaus, "Visit" entities, adapted sports organizations, or tourism boards that would like to highlight their impressive accessibility or their efforts and progress to increase their accessibility, please contact me at Fred@maahstravels.com. I want to speak with them right away!







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Rosemarie Rossetti

Educator, Author, Universal Design Expert

by Taylor Mulcahy, St. Cloud State University Student

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Rosemarie Rossetti during a speaking engagement

Rossetti holds a double major in agricultural education and horticulture for her Bachelor of Science degree. She then studied agricultural education for her master's and doctorate degrees, finishing her final degree in 1982.

Rosemarie Rossetti grew up in Columbus, Ohio and earned her B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. at The Ohio State University. Rossetti's older brother, Richard, had a developmental disability. She frequently attended events with Richard and was introduced to many of his friends who also had intellectual and physical disabilities. Later, Rossetti acquired her disability, a spinal cord injury, in June 1998. She states that it was "my life with Richard that prepared me to be an advocate for people with disabilities."

Rossetti currently serves on the faculty part-time at The Ohio State University in the Department of Agricultural Education, since October 2018. Previously, she served full time from September 1986 to January 1997. It was then, in 1997, that Rossetti started her business, Rossetti Enterprises Inc. (www.RosemarieSpeaks.com).

She speaks to and consults with companies to ensure that their spaces are accessible for their employees and the public. Utilizing Rossetti's valuable lived experiences, over 250 companies and various organizations have hired her for speaking and consulting. Rossetti explains that she "survived and thrived after [her] spinal cord injury on June 13th, 1998," and her business transitioned towards motivational speaking.

Rossetti has many notable accomplishments including writing and publishing three books (The Healthy Indoor Plant, Universal Design Toolkit, and Take Back Your Life!) and received many honors (Ms. Wheelchair Ohio 2004, Torchbearer in the 2002 Winter Olympics, and National "Roll" Model in a fashion show in New York City - 2007). However, the most meaningful accomplishment may be her home that she built with her husband, Mark Leder.

She emphasizes that "My husband, Mark Leder, is a brilliant, loving, and supportive man. We were married on June 10, 1995. On June 13, 1998, he saved my life after I was crushed by a 7,000-pound tree while riding my bicycle. He is also my business partner, guiding me through the many life and business challenges and transitions."

Together with her husband, they led a design team and served as the general contractors to build their home: the Universal Design Living Laboratory www.udll.com, where they have lived since May 2012. This is the highest-rated universal design home in North America that is serving as a national demonstration home and garden. Universal Design is a framework for the design of living and workspaces and products that benefit the widest possible range of people in the widest range of situations, but without special or separate design. This framework is human-centered, serving to accommodate people of all sizes, ages, and abilities. Rossetti

Rosemarie Rossetti and husband Mark Leder

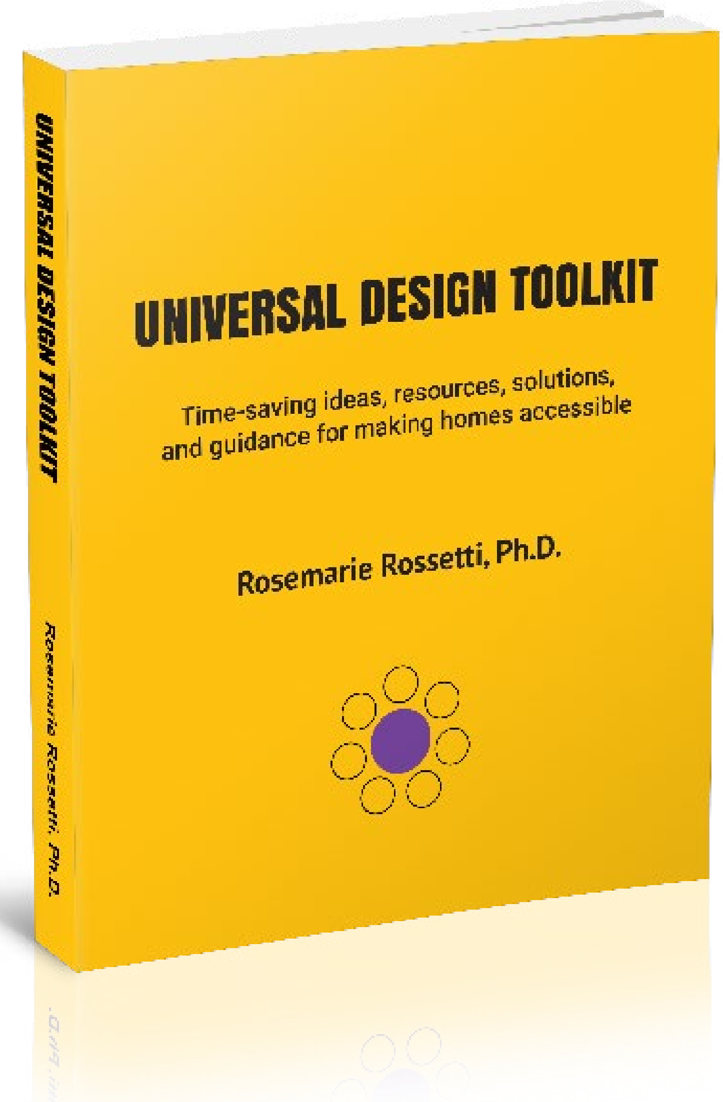
Rosemarie Rosetti-Universal Design Living Laboratory-Front Elevation

and her husband give tours of their home virtually and in person, as well as writing articles and books, and have given presentations using her home as a case study. She also consults with builders, architects, developers, designers, and consumers in regards to the implementation of universal design and accessible design features in their projects or products.

Rossetti explains the importance of inclusivity, “whenever decisions are made, people will be impacted by these decisions,” and that by having diverse groups of people involved in the decision-making process, the end result is more positive and productive.

Rossetti’s passion for accessibility for all was heavily influenced by her experiences with her brother Richard, and her spinal cord injury. She explains that the biggest misperception about people who have a disability is that disabled individuals do not have much to offer professionally or personally. Often, they are seen as underperforming– but if they are given support, some assistance such as assistive technology or accommodations, they can perform as well or better than their non-disabled peers. She states, **“There are many myths about hiring people with disabilities that need to be dispelled… people with disabilities are dedicated, hard-working, and require a very minimal investment in most cases to modify their work environment to accommodate them.”**

However, one way we can change this misperception is through the media and accurate representation. Casting people with disabilities as lead characters in film and television, as well as docuseries showcasing the accomplishments of many people with disabilities, will all serve to increase accurate and positive representation. Rossetti concludes, “I am passionate about the work that I do. My goal is to make a significant positive difference in the lives of others.”



Scientists are devising ways for people with paralysis to control computers, robotic prosthetics and even their own limbs with their thoughts.

CREDIT: WWW.WYSSCENTER.CH

Bypassing Paralysis

By decoding brain activity with electrical implants, computers can help disabled people move a robotic arm — or their own

By Tim Vernimmen | Q&A — Neuroscientist John Donoghue

What if a brain still worked, but the limbs refused to listen? Could there be a way to artificially translate the intentions of people with paralysis into movements? Over a four-decade career, neuroscientist John Donoghue, founding director of the Wyss Center for Bio and Neuroengineering in Geneva, convinced himself that he could do it.

In 2002, Donoghue showed that monkeys could move a cursor with the help of a decoder that interpreted their brain activities. In the decade that followed, he and colleagues showed that the system worked in people too: Individuals with quadriplegia could use their brain activity to move a cursor. That line of research recently culminated in the demonstration that people with paralysis could control a tablet computer this way.

Donoghue himself went on to further develop the system to allow people to open and close a robotic hand, and to reach, grasp and drink from a bottle by using a multijointed robotic arm. In 2017, he was a co-author on a study demonstrating how a similar system could help people do all those things with their own arms.

By now, more than a dozen patients have used the technology in experimental settings, but Donoghue's ultimate goal is to develop technology that they — and many others like them — can take home and use day-to-day to restore the abilities they have lost.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How do you find out which movements someone with paralysis would like to make?

We implant a small 4-by-4-millimeter microelectrode array into the brain's motor cortex, in a region that we know directs the movements of the arm. This array consists of 100 hair-thin silicon needles, each of which picks up the electrical activity of one or two neurons. Those signals are then transmitted through a wire to a computer that we can use to convert the brain activity into instructions to control a machine, or even the person's own arm. We are assuming that the relevant variable here — the language we should try to interpret — is the rate at which neurons discharge, or "fire."

Let me explain this using the example of moving a cursor on the screen.

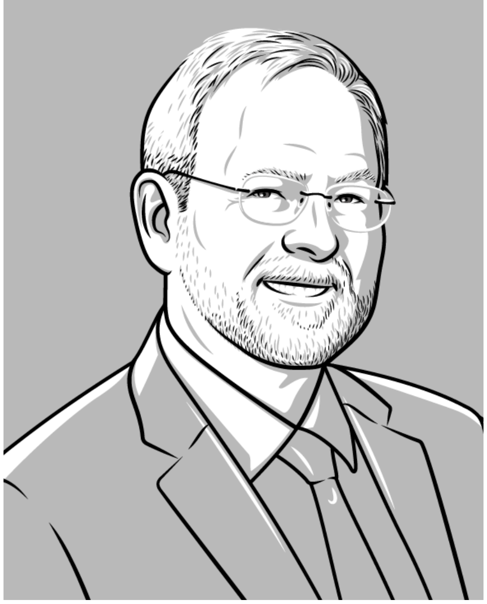
We first generate a movie of a cursor moving: say, left and right. We show this to the person and ask them to imagine they are moving a mouse that controls that cursor, and we record the activity of the neurons in their motor cortex while they do so. For example, it might be that every time you think "left," a certain neuron will fire five times — pop pop pop pop pop — and that if you think "right," it will fire ten times. We can use such information to map activity to intention, telling the computer to move the cursor left when the neuron fires five times, and right when it fires ten times.

Of course, there are other decisions to be made: What if a neuron fires just three times? So you need a computer model to decide which numbers are close enough to five. And since neuronal activity is naturally noisy, the more neurons we can measure, the better our prediction will be — with the array we implant, we usually get measurements from 50 to 200.

For the arm prosthesis, we similarly ask people to imagine making the same movement with their own arm. There were people who thought you would have to build separate models for "flex and extend your elbow," "move your wrist up and down," and so on. But it turns out this isn't necessary. The brain doesn't think in terms of muscles or joint angles — the translation of intentions into movement happens later.

How do you find the exact spot in the motor cortex at which to implant the array?

In fact, I don't think the exact location matters that much. There is also no need for us to know exactly what each individual neuron is trying to do, as long as we can dependably predict the intended action from their combined activity. That goes against the standard old theory that there is a separate location for controlling each finger, for example. If that were the case, it would mean that if you put the array in a particular place you'd get great thumb control, but nothing else. I've spent my entire scientific career saying it is not true that doing something only engages a small and specific part of the brain. All our neurons form parts of large, interconnected networks.



Neuroscientist John Donoghue
CREDIT: JAMES PROVOST (CC BY-ND)

Do people get better with experience in using the device?

Not really. The neurons often change their activity, which can corrupt the map, so we have to recalibrate the model at the beginning of every session. This means people have to work with a different model every day, so they don't get better at it.

And if, as sometimes happens, something goes wrong and we give them control that isn't very good, they don't get over it on that day, which can be very frustrating for them. It appears the brain isn't plastic enough to change the activity of specific neurons quickly enough to overcome such problems the same day.

Some scientists are developing ways to allow people to feel what the prosthesis is doing, giving them some tactile feedback to keep track of how things are going. Maybe this could help.

The system has also been adapted to allow people to move their own arms. How can a computer give movement directions to a real arm?

In the case of the patient that we've published about, it's electrical stimulation of the muscles themselves, which seemed the most practical. The energy cost is very high, however. It would be more energy efficient to stimulate the nerves that control the muscles, as they are excellent amplifiers of energy. Yet stimulating the right nerves in the right way is pretty complicated — you can't simply shock them into action.

Having a person move their own arm is an important achievement, although it is slow and definitely not as dexterous as we'd like it to be. To a large extent, I think this is because of our lack of understanding of the signals going from our brain into the limbs.

The number of limbs we can use is tightly constrained by our evolutionary history. Can you imagine that our brain could ever be adapted to using an extra limb?

In a way, we already do that today, by using extensions of our body such as tools, computers or cars. Some of those are quite complex and very different from our body, yet we learn to handle them reasonably well and largely without thinking. And just like the monkeys in our experiments — which were moving a cursor or a robotic arm with their brain activity, even though they still had functioning arms — people have a tendency to use their own bodies less if they can use a more efficient device instead.

Do you think that all of us might one day consider it practical to put an array into our brain so we can communicate with a computer or other devices more directly?

I don't. Evolution has given us such fabulous natural interfaces that I think the barrier of brain surgery will remain too high. There's always a risk of something going wrong, so I don't think we should use implants for pure augmentation like that. Some people will do dangerous things, of course, but fortunately, you can't easily stick an electrode in the right place in your own brain.

Have you heard of neurologist Phil Kennedy? He was the first person to implant an electrode in a human permanently, and he later had himself implanted in Belize, as no one in the United States would do anything like that. I find that disturbing — he's a perfectly healthy, very bright man.

I think the aim of the field should be to create the opportunity for people with paralysis to restore or achieve typical abilities. For people who want to be superenabled, I think we need some serious regulations, as that could be extraordinarily disruptive. It also raises other issues — if I am rich and you are not, and only my child gets a brain booster implant, this creates a very unfair situation.

How do you apply such ethical considerations to your own work?

I think we should always strive to make the technologies we create available to as many people as possible. That doesn't mean we should stop developing or producing them because they currently cost too much and we can't give them to everybody who needs them. But eventually, that should be the goal.

What is the biggest obstacle to getting this technology out there to people who need it?

One issue is that the arrays tend to degrade over time in the rather harsh environment of the brain. But as some have lasted for over five years, I don't think this is the main obstacle, as you'll probably want to get a new one anyway after that much time has passed.

If you ask me, the biggest problem is that people have a plug on their head with wires everywhere connecting them to a computer. For this to become a product people can use at home, it will have to be largely technician-free and located entirely inside the skull.

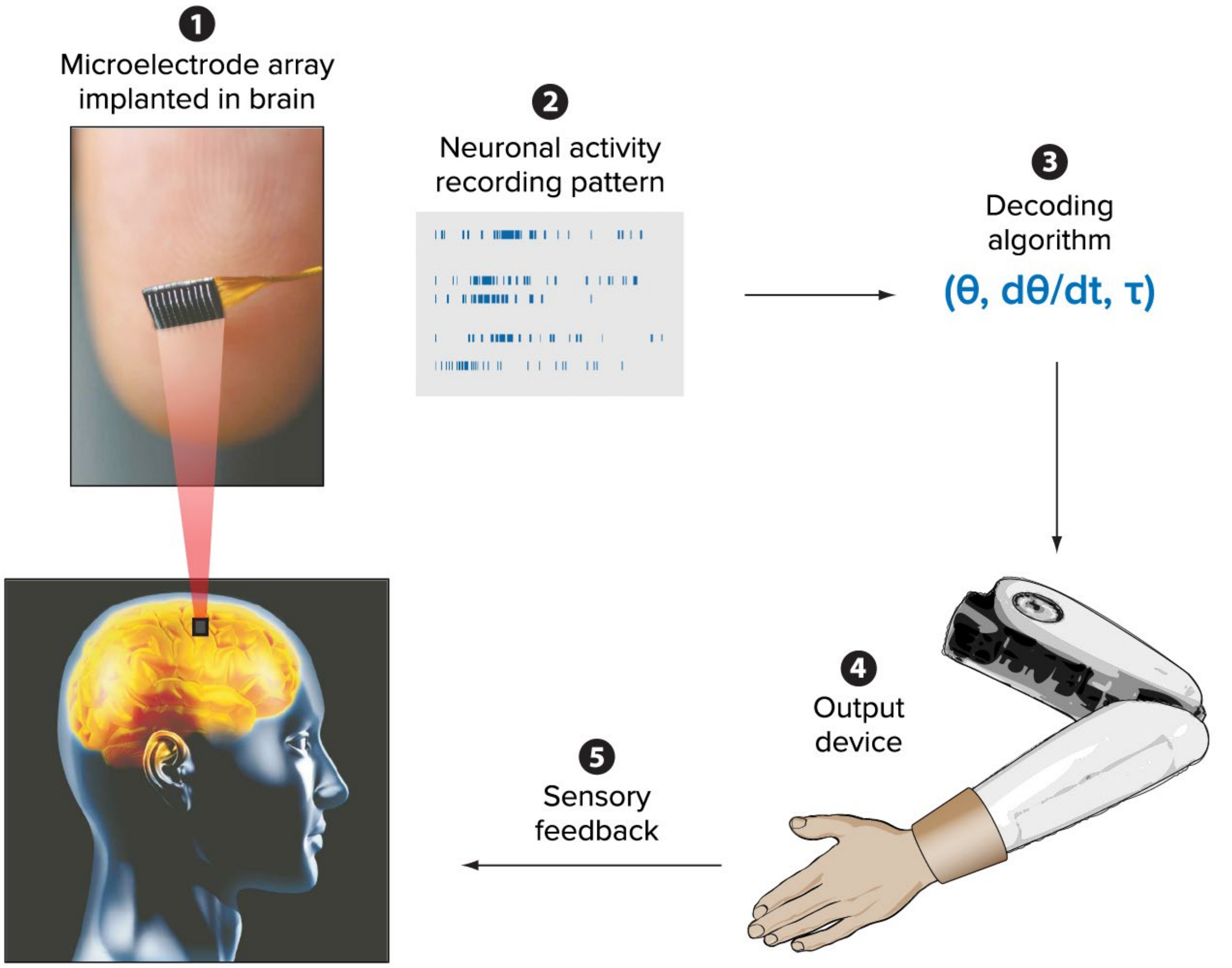
At the Wyss Center, we are trying to do exactly that: develop an implantable system that can radio out the signals. That is very hard, because we need to make the entire device small, and it will need a very good battery. If you can use this only 45 minutes a day to save power, it's not worth it. So that's what we are working on right now.

Tim Vernimmen is a freelance journalist based near Antwerp, Belgium. He writes about the science of life.

This article originally appeared in Knowable Magazine on 12.04.2018. Knowable Magazine is an independent journalistic endeavor from Annual Reviews, a nonprofit publisher dedicated to synthesizing and integrating knowledge for the progress of science and the benefit of society. Sign up for Knowable Magazine's newsletter.

From intention to movement

How the brain can control prosthetic devices



SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM N.G. HATSOPOULOS *ET AL / AR NEUROSCIENCE* 2009

knowable MAGAZINE
FROM ANNUAL REVIEWS

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower

by Crystal Vaughan-Gagnon, St. Cloud State University student

Paul White

The man behind the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower

"I have learned that the biggest element that exists across all people is to just treat that person as an individual."

Sunflower Lanyard display

Paul was raised in Harlow, Essex, England. His father had Parkinson's Disease. He grew up dealing with his father's disability and the challenges that he faced. He went to college to learn about the printing industry and in 1995 founded Tabbers Green, a printing and merchandise company. Paul explained that he enjoyed the printing business at first but that with business, it's easy to lose sight of what the company is all about. The environment over the years affected him overall in a negative way and he knew he needed to belong to something more. When the opportunity for The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower came along Paul had limited knowledge about disabilities and awareness of the challenges that someone might face with an invisible disability. He stated that the sunflower, "Reignited my passion. It's always good to learn something new. It broadened my horizons a little bit and kind of made me see that there's other things you can focus your mind on. It's helped me grow as a person."

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower company began with a conversation about how individuals who have an invisible disability might experience challenges and would benefit from support in the community. This is when Paul and his team began thinking about what they could create for people with hidden disabilities. The idea for a sunflower was developed. "That's what the sunflower really is," Paul stated, "it's just a simple tool to demonstrate that your disability is non-visible and for other people, businesses, and organizations to be able to give you the time and care that you may need." Paul utilized his marketing experience to bring the Sunflower product to market and promote their idea. Various products were created for people to wear, and Paul and his team now train front-line staff about the Sunflower. To spread awareness, they discuss what it symbolizes, ensuring that customers wearing a sunflower are asked what they need, how they can be helped, and support and kindness are genuinely extended. Paul expressed "Sunflower really is a helpful tool that helps us to recognize both customers and colleagues with disabilities that aren't visible."

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The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower organization was incorporated in 2019, and in these past 3 years, the business launched not only the UK, but also in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, and Ireland. Paul and his team have received an outpouring of messages from Sunflower wearers about the ways this simple item has changed their lives for the better. Paul's daughter received an anxiety diagnosis and wears the lanyard often, especially when traveling.

> **“I decided to dedicate my working life towards implementing the sunflower on a global level.”**
>
> Paul White

Paul and daughter Maddie on a flight

Affording Sunflower wearers the opportunity to travel independently and be silently acknowledged as a person with an invisible disability, not only in air travel, but everywhere they decide to visit and work.” In the next 10 years, Paul and his team hope to grow across different nations and cultures.

Sunflower Lanyard being worn

“I feel that we are making a difference. By raising awareness of invisible disabilities, we are helping to normalize it and demonstrate that a huge number of people are facing challenges every single day.” Paul continued by saying, “One aspect I am most proud of is that by promoting the Sunflower and by encouraging businesses to recognize the Sunflower, we are helping to create a culture within organizations where colleagues can feel comfortable to disclose their hidden disability.”

Visit their site at:

www.hiddendisabilitiesstore.com for more information on Sunflower and find out how you can get involved.

MIUSA
mobility international usa

by Justin Harford

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
A World of Opportunities for People with Disabilities

A while back I presented to a vision loss support group on international education, and the services of the State Department-funded National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), where I work. I was struck by the group members' thoughtful questions, their hunger to experience more of what the world has to offer and how much they were beset by self-doubt and anxiety. One older woman shared how she used to enjoy traveling in other countries without a tour group, because of the freedom it gave her to just explore and take things in, and while other members reminded her that she could go abroad with an accessible tour company, she longed to experience that sense of autonomy which she perceived to be lost to her declining vision.

If you think about it, the language around travel is very centered around the nondisabled experience. Travelers globetrot. They sightsee. They experience countries through the sights, the tastes, the sounds and the smells. Implicit in the language is the assumption that somebody cannot get very much out of traveling without a set of 5 functioning senses, a pair of legs on which to canter, a card of negative allergy tests, and a heaping dose of mental and physical stamina.

The thing about it is that countries are not made up of food, pollution, car horns, or paintings. They are made up of human beings, and the best and most accessible way to meaningfully experience those is through international education.

International education, which could include study, volunteerism or internships, is the perfect way for people with all kinds of disabilities to experience the world with as much support or independence as they might desire. Judy Jones (lower back pain and asthma) spent almost a year in Belize as a Peace Corps Response volunteer mentoring 2nd grade educators on best practices for teaching literacy after a career in education spanning more than 20 years. Johna Wright

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practices for teaching literacy after a career in education spanning more than 20 years. Johna Wright (blind) spent a few weeks in South Africa consulting with small business owners as part of Mercer University's Service Scholars Program. Hugo Trevino (spinal muscular atrophy) studied abroad in several different countries including Costa Rica, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Italy, 1st with Mobility International USA, which administers the NCDE, and then with his alma mater, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

For all three of these individuals, the world came to life through the impact that they made in their host communities, and the impact that their host communities made on them. It was not just about food and museums, which represent the trappings of culture, but culture itself that enriched their skills and perspectives.

Nevertheless, international education is no exception to the adage that anything worth having is worth working for. Johna and Judy had to advocate for themselves in the face of program provider doubts. All three of them had to confront challenges either related to their disabilities or lack of access. Johna learned to assert herself in South Africa's masculine business culture, while taking in the sport of cricket through the eyes of the bus driver that she befriended. Judy came to know an immigrant friend's home community of Belmopan. Hugo saw five countries before leaving behind an innovative scholarship program for study abroad participants to cover disability -related costs at the University of Illinois.

By the end of the support group I had shared about the many ways that members can study or volunteer abroad, and how they could learn more through the consulting services of the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange. One of the group participants suggested that they all might plan a group trip together, and everybody agreed.

What will you do?

Send your ideas and questions to **clearinghouse@miusa.org.**

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE)

Recognizing the need for greater diversity in people to people programs, MIUSA administers the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), a project to increase the participation of people with disabilities in all types of travel with a purpose.

Through our free advising service, trainings, and online resources, we are moving steadily towards making international programs - and the world - more accessible and inclusive for all. Explore our resources or contact us personally today to get your questions answered.

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange is a project of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, designed to increase the participation of people with disabilities in international exchange between the United States and other countries, and is supported in its implementation by Mobility International USA.

Holly Tuke is a disability blogger, freelance writer and disability advocate who works within the charity sector. She also does a bit of radio presenting!

Holly is registered blind due to a conditioned called Retinopathy of Prematurity. She also has ME/CFS.

Blogger, Holly Tuke, “Life of a Blind Girl”

> “I love going to concerts - I probably went to way too many pre-pandemic times. You’ll always find me listening to music. I’m a bit of a bookworm as well.”

"The older I got, I became much more aware of the misconceptions surrounding disability. I wanted to find a way of tackling those misconceptions and play a small part in breaking down the barriers disabled people face on a regular basis. I enjoyed writing and at the time I discovered blogs, so I decided to give the whole ‘blogging’ thing a go myself. Following that, I also discovered disability advocates using their social media platforms to share their experiences and educate society. I didn’t have any disabled role models growing up, and these were people that I started to look up to. I started to use my own social media this way. And things went from there.

My blog helps me to overcome barriers

It has made me so much more confident in talking about some of the more challenging topics surrounding disability, which has helped me become comfortable when facing barriers both online and offline. If ever I’m in doubt, my blog always reminds me of how far I’ve come, which sparks the fire inside of me to continue to jump over whatever hurdles I’m facing.

Using my blog as a platform to raise awareness and educate society gives me a ton of determination to do whatever I can do to break down barriers for the disabled community. Knowing that my blog posts have helped another disabled person feel less alone is a feeling that I can’t quite put into words.

Sharing my experiences and using my platforms in a positive way makes me feel empowered. As daunting as pressing that publish button can be at times, I’m always glad I’ve done it.

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Goals I've achieved

I'm a person that works hard and strives to achieve my goals. My time in education wasn't without its challenges. I'm proud of the grades that I achieved despite the uphill battle it was. These grades were the steppingstone to what was next.

Following my time at school, I went onto university. Receiving my degree is something that I'm extremely proud of. After university, it was naturally time to enter the world of work. I'd done some work for a charity and extensive volunteering, so that I was fully prepared for the world of work. I knew that getting a job as a disabled person was going to be difficult, but perhaps I wasn't fully prepared for how hard it was actually going to be. Less than 6 months after finishing university, I was offered a job as an Assistive Technology Advisor – a role that I did for four years. I'm proud of the determination I showed whilst job searching, and the professional goals I achieved throughout my time in the role.

Most recently, I started working within the charity sector. When I think about my achievements, this would probably be at the top of the list.

It's a job that I had my sights set on for years, but I thought it would just be a goal, rather than a reality. It's certainly one of my proudest achievements. Aside from professional goals and looking more from a personal perspective, when I was younger I had inner conflict in using my long cane. I always thought it made me stand out, when all I wanted to do was fit in. I made it my mission to change my attitudes towards my cane, and make my thought processes something positive rather than negative.
It took a long time, but I eventually started to see my cane as an extension of me which transformed everything for me.

My disability does not make me brave

To put it simply, I'm basically your average girl in her 20s who just happens to be blind. Honestly, I don't think that makes me brave. To be brave is to do something heroic. My disability doesn't make me a hero.

Being blind is my normal, it's my reality, it's my life. I don't let my disability stop me from living the life I want to. I don't think that makes me brave, it just makes me human.

I can understand why non-disabled people may see us as brave – they can only begin to imagine what it must be like. When they try to put themselves in my shoes, they're filled with fear. This fear brings out their assumption of bravery. But I promise you being disabled is not like that. Being disabled is wonderful.

Technology

I truly believe that technology can transform many aspects of our lives, in a good way of course. Technology plays a pivotal role in my life, I'd be lost without it.

Accessibility is a big factor. When something is accessible, it makes us feel included and valued. Disabled people should have the same access as everyone else. Accessibility has come a long way in recent years, but there's still work to be done.

Technology enables and empowers us. For example, I wouldn't be able to use a computer, phone or tablet if it wasn't for screen reading technology. My screen reader gives me the ability to do my job, my freelance writing and online activism work, keep in contact with family and friends, browse the internet and so much more. The fact that a lot of mainstream technology is accessible straight out of the box gives disabled people so much independence and freedom. We need more of this! There are always advances in technology, and things are being developed all the time, so who knows what's in store. I'm excited to see what's next in the world of technology.

Never be anyone but yourself. It sounds cheesy, but it's something we all need to remember.

As disabled people, we can often feel the pressure to do whatever we can to fit in. We try so hard to prove ourselves and show that we are just like everyone else. We may even feel the need to hide certain aspects of our disability at times.

Over the years, I've learned to love my differences, the parts of the person I am that set me apart from everyone else. That includes my disability.

I'm proud of being disabled. We should be proud of who we are, and should never be anyone but ourselves."

www.lifeofablindgirl.com

Bloggers with disabilities

Glenda Watson Hyatt
DISABIITY: Cerebral Palsy
www.doitmyselfblog.com

Mark Webb
DISABIITY: Multiple Sclerosis
www.onemanandhiscatheters.com

Elin Williams
DISABIITY: Visually Impaired
www.myblurredworld.com

Tania Dutton
DISABIITY: Ehlers-Danlos syndrome
www.whentaniatalks.com

Emily Davidson
DISABIITY: Visually Impaired
www.fashioneyesta.com

Barbara Stensland
DISABIITY: Multiple Sclerosis
www.stumblinginflats.com

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Dr. Daniela Ferdico says there's something about the senses...

by Jordan Radford, St. Cloud State University student

Dr. Ferdico and Izzi and Mateo Ferdico standing in front of the Cinderella castle smiling at Disney Paris after doing a sensory review.

Dr Ferdico, Izzi and Mateo Ferdico in front of ruins in Chichen Itza Pyramids in Mexico after doing a Social Guide

> "Every new theme park, tourist attraction and travel destination should create inclusion at the outset."
> Dr. Daniela Ferdico

Dr. Daniela Ferdico loves traveling, gets giddy going to the airport and being on a plane. Her experiences through her unique career path and personal experiences of disability have given her the knowledge to create and maintain the nonprofit she co-founded with her daughter Izzi Ferdico, Sensory Access.

Dr. Ferdico grew up in Berlin, Germany and moved to Seattle, Washington at age 11.

She attended Gonzaga for her undergraduate education in psychology and forensics. She became passionate about the brain/world interaction and obtained her doctorate in neuropsychology.

She has always been fascinated with brain functioning, specifically, the effect that sensory processing of the environment has on our behavior. Dr. Ferdico narrowed this passion in graduate school into helping people understand their strengths and areas of growth in how their brain processes different types of information.

Her first job out of doctorate school was as a neuropsychologist at a large government hospital working with roughly 25 patients a

She learned to value working directly with people through assessment, diagnosis, and treatment to restore the level of functioning they had before the accident, injury or event that caused impairment. The lack of community from colleagues, paired with the small clinically sterile office influenced her to change her focus in the field of neuropsychology.

She met a friend who wanted to start an event planning company, and decided to help out, having always loved events. This "temporary help" grew into her owning her own event planning and design company for ten years, including creating events for movie premiers, high profile weddings and music events all over the United States. Eventually however, Dr. Ferdico wanted to return to helping people, and opened her own clinic, focusing on neurodevelopmental assessment, where she actively assesses sensory and cognitive functioning. Through working with kids and their families with varying degrees of support needs, she can educate families and companies on how best to support the neurodiverse brains in the world.

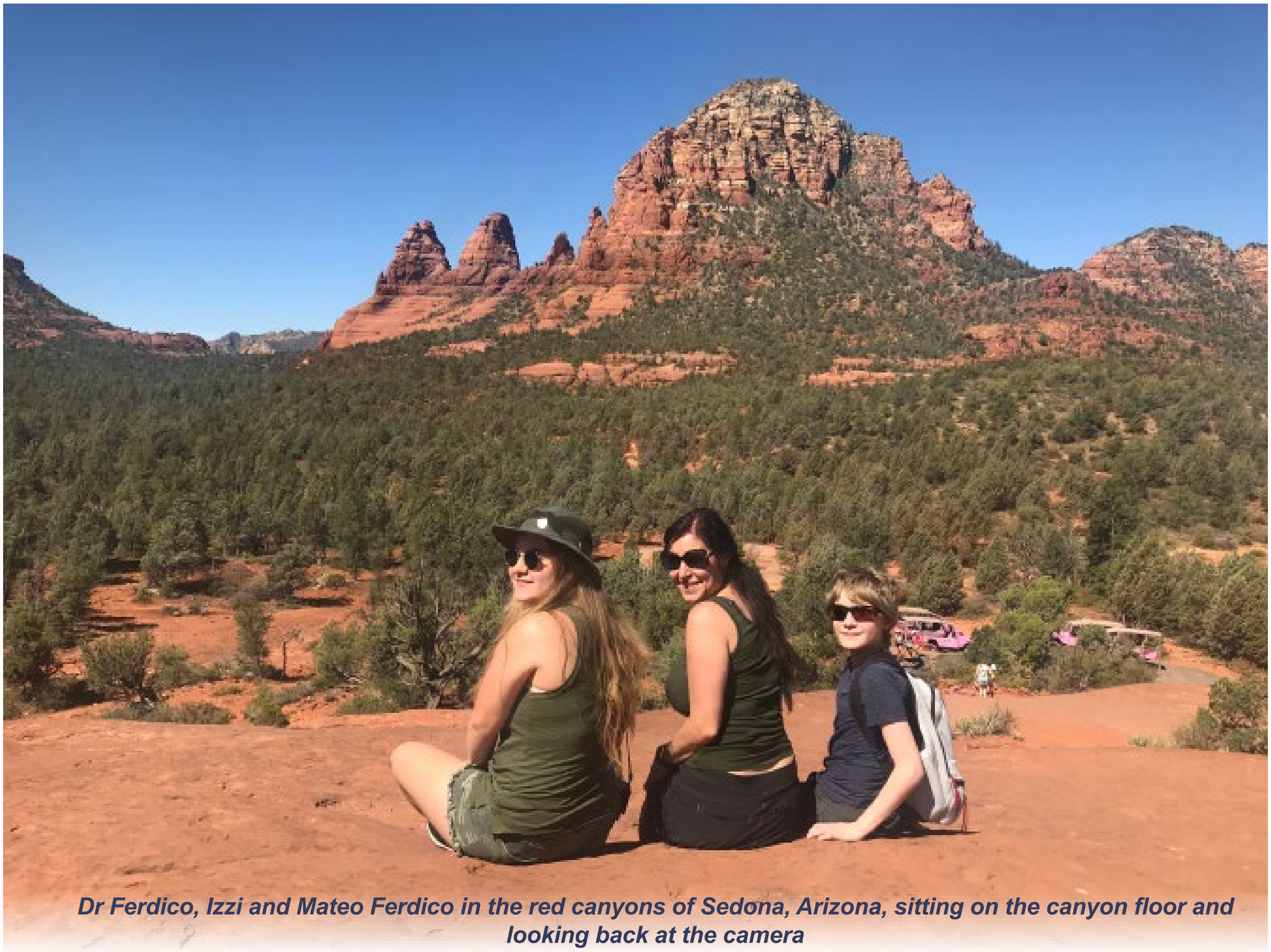
The amalgamation of varied life and work experiences have prepared her for her business, Sensory Access, which focuses on helping disabled individuals better access events and travel experiences.

While working on her doctorate in the late 1990's, she noticed that venues, organizations, schools, and public places in general claim accessibility-friendliness because of their wheelchair ramps and other accommodations based on physical disabilities. However, other forms of disabilities like neurological: hearing, visual, sensory, and cognitive are often overlooked because of their "invisibility." The first lesson Dr. Ferdico learned in college: people and organizations seldomly think of neurodivergent people when they consider disability inclusion.

Her neurodiverse family has allowed her personal experience with accessibility in the public domain. Having an autistic son, a neurodivergent daughter, and an auditory processing condition herself, hyperacusis, meant that this was more than an area of interest, it was a way of life. She talks a lot aout how neurodivergent brains often struggle during travel. All the different sights, sounds, linguistic differences, and overall aura of varying places disrupts familiar and rigid cognitive processes However, having a slow, safe exposure to different ways of doing things can actually improve cognitive flexibility for people with neurodivergent conditions. She gave the example of her son, who stopped speaking at a young age. Over time however, with support, slow exposure to travel, theatre and other experiences, he now leads trainings in front of large groups about his experiences as an autistic person. Dr. Ferdico bearing witness to this incremental exposure firsthand has influenced her perception of the growth that traveling offers neurodiverse people.

She then speaks about the negative connotations of "disability" based on society's misconceptions regarding the relationship between the disabled person and the built environment. She discussed that there is nothing wrong with how a neurodivergent brain processes information; it is just different. It is our society that is not built for different bodies and different brains, and that the idea of "Universal design", design built for everybody is the ultimate goal.

Dr. Ferdico speaks of her work with Tourism Boards and global events, such as the World's Fair in Dubai, which by March 2022 will have hosted an estimated 25 million guests. Sensory Access has developed the concept of a "sensory rating card" which allows individuals to have a quick preview of the sensory impact of a travel destination, event or themepark ride. The process utilizes a team of Neurodivergent auditors to provide both subjective ratings and objective measurement such as decibel levels and



Dr Ferdico, Izzi and Mateo Ferdico in the red canyons of Sedona, Arizona, sitting on the canyon floor and looking back at the camera

luminance across multiple domains of sensory impact, allowing guests to enjoy an experience safely by utilizing sensory tools when needed.

Many companies are often unaware they're not creating or building a product with universal design and diversity in mind. They lack the lens of neurodiversity or disability to observe their creations through building inclusion on the outset by incorporating people of different backgrounds for a more diverse creation.

She hopes employers will hire more people with disabilities and consult with neurodivergent professionals rather than institutions viewing universal inclusion as an afterthought. She foresees that over the next ten years, people in the accessibility field will be more of a part of the planning process of the architectural design to create something for everyone in mind than simply one subset of people. "Every new theme park, tourist attraction and travel destination should create inclusion at the outset and needs to include neurodivergent professionals in the creation of such accessibility efforts."

Dr. Ferdico wants to emphasize that we should move past "awareness" and into acceptance and inclusion. You can look at a person with a disability and see what they can't do, or you can look at your building, venue or travel experience and see what barriers exist and work on removing those barriers. When you do, the diversity of guests that enjoy and share their experience with others, your financials, and the guest satisfaction have will increase exponentially.

How Hafsa Qadeer followed her heart to Special Olympics

And what she's learned from her journey in MENA

by Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Hafsa Qadeer heard a whisper in her ear and followed it to Special Olympics. From Dubai, she currently works at one of the seven regional offices for Special Olympics as the Manager for Communications and Partnerships MENA, Middle East/ North Africa.

Qadeer grew up with her mother and five siblings. Her younger brother Ahmed Qadeer is her role model from whom she learns and from his actions in life, she gains tremendous motivation. Hafsa recognized Ahmed as a Person of Determination, a title given to those who identify as a person with a disability in the United Arab Emirates, (UAE). Qadeer constantly considers what her brother would do and has watched his wisdom and gratitude for the people and places around him. Although younger than her, Qadeer continuously learns from him and feels "lucky" to be his sibling. "He's my drive and motivation behind everything that I've committed my life to," she said. After living in Pakistan until 18, Qadeer moved to the UAE because she desired to learn and grow.

She said, "I feel like, in some communities, [people] have a very certain way and mindset of how women should choose to dream, how girls are told what they can and cannot dream about. And I've never had that mindset. I wanted to do something more with life and moved to the UAE to learn."

Qadeer and her brother Ahmed Qadeer

> **“I had a whisper in my head the whole time [telling me] you need to be doing something with all of this skill.”**

After beginning her college career at Middlesex University UAE campus, studying International Business, with a focus on Innovation Management, she worked on larger event projects outside of school. In her first year of college, in parallel to her full-time bachelors degree, she earned a professional diploma in Event Management and Innovative Marketing. Since school, Qadeer worked on several community service projects and planned many events. From her time while being a student at university, she recalls the project with “the government of Ras Al Khaimah,” where artists from across the world could come together and share stories that connect with their communities.

Through her university studies, she was taught multi-layered skills and advocacy for projects on a large scale. Although Qadeer gained tremendous satisfaction and felt passionate about her work, she wanted to do more. She set future goals to use her passions and energy to do something that would significantly impact her brother’s future. It wasn’t enough for her to work at meaningful events; she desired to have a long-lasting effect and influence on the world.

While working at a communications agency, she heard that the largest humanitarian event of the year was coming to Abu Dhabi soon, and it was the 2019 Special Olympics. After hearing this news, something changed in Qadeer’s mind, and the whisper she heard came back. She said, “the whisper that I’m talking about…this calling, all of my flags [were] up. It was like, I’m sorry, [I] need to go to this. I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I’m not going to lie. I was driven.” This loud whisper in her ear led her to take off from work for five days to volunteer where she knew she wanted to be.

"That became everything. I completely changed," she said. This experience forever changed Qadeer's life and led her to her "dream job" at Special Olympics. After those five days, Qadeer wrote several letters to Special Olympics Local Organizing Committee in an effort to work there. She persisted and knew what she wanted, and eventually was hired.

Working towards Special Olympics Games in Abu Dhabi, she gained an understanding of the perspectives of the people and their feelings on inclusion. Qadeer began to recognize the gaps and opportunities present in society and knew that a range of possibilities existed in the Middle East. She had goals and ideas and wanted to be a part of these changes; her passion stemmed from this cause being so close to home. When starting her position, she had the opportunity to work in the legacy team with the Chief Strategy Officer of Special Olympics, World Games, Abu Dhabi 2019, where they welcomed 7000 athletes from over 200 countries across 7 emirates.

Soon after joining the team, she assumed the role of Manager, Host Town Program as part of the Local Organizing Committee. "This was pretty huge because [I was] managing a multi-layered program at 24 years old. I organized over 10 live-scenario workshops in collaboration with the planning team in readiness of the Host Town Program. To get to utilize and sharpen all my skills was like living as a kid in a candy shop."

Qadeer also learned about the impact of inclusion in the education system, a framework that is being implemented across the world through Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program.

While meeting with government officials every day, she also ran a hospitality workshop for more than 100 directors of hospitality on what inclusion truly means. She was one of the team's youngest members at the time. "It eventually made me realize this had been my calling all along," she said. The Managing Director and Regional President of Special Olympics Middle East/ North Africa (MENA), met with her in the final days of the Games and interviewed her for her current role.

Prior to joining the regional office, Qadeer founded an initiative that helps People of Determination find jobs in the UAE through an online portal, and it became so successful that now People of Determination dominantly run the program in the form of a social enterprise.

Today, her work at Special Olympics MENA comprises of developing fundraising, marketing, partnerships, and communication programs for a region that consists of 22 different countries. She works with team leads from sports, youth, health, athlete leadership and inclusive education programs.


Hafsa Qadeer at her office during the World Games 2019

Her work leads her to receive powerful stories from numerous athletes and community. Resonating with one of her favorite stories from a youth leader from Special Olympics Lebanon, she echoes that nothing can be done halfway in the work of disability, inclusion and advocacy.

Qadeer feels that complete immersion and dedication are necessary in her field for people to understand all aspects of accessibility, stigmas, and barriers. Over the years, Qadeer has noticed a change in the Middle East, as people in the community or organizational leadership positions are starting to understand disabilities and the importance of inclusion. Companies are beginning to be defined by their awareness of disability inclusion.

"We as allies to disability inclusion and advocates should know that People of Determination can and should speak up for themselves," she said. “I learn every day from athletes, in fact, athlete leaders present alongside our teams

The Host Town Program hosting the trending hashtag #UAEHostsTheWorld during the Games. detailed representation of inclusion using home DIY tools., Hachicho shared in his story with SO MENA team that inclusion is a long-term process.

at strategy and development meetings with key partner accounts." She firmly believes that people should stand by Special Olympics' athlete oath, which states, "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Special Olympics athletes are being celebrated for their capabilities, as all athletes are. As equal members of our society, people with disabilities should not be put on a pedestal, she said. Qadeer's question is "What's the best version of you?" and believes that should be the focus for every human being.

More from Hafsa Qadeer's latest work with Special Olympics MENA athlete leadership team:
Omar al Shami, Vice President SO MENA Regional Athlete Leadership Input Council and SO UAE star swimmer, speaks to CEO, KPMG Lower Gulf, about inclusive leadership.

An able-bodied person's eye-opening experience

"I can just imagine how much people with disabilities can achieve with support and awareness." ~Joyana Riviere

My experience attending the Youth with Disabilities Caribbean sessions was indeed an eye opener!

This event is held every Sunday via Zoom from 2:00pm to 4:00 pm AST. Attendees consist of youths with disabilities through out the Caribbean, advocates, families and friends. Youths with various disabilites host these sessions and often invite industry professionals to share their expertise with the group, be it on mental health, healthy eating or other important topics.

What I thought would have been just attending a few sessions to complete an assignment for one of my courses, turned into disability awareness and a profound learning experience to which I returned Sunday after Sunday.

I came to the realization that we as able-bodied people cannot speak to or understand things we have no clue about, or have experienced from the perspective of a person with a disability. I was always aware of the little-to-no representation, accommodation and awareness people with disabilities endure in the Caribbean as compared to the United States and other regions, but I admire their strength and endurance, and they have earned my respect and admiration!

My attendance at these sessions allowed me to see how unique, gifted and talented people with disabilities are.

We have always been told "The Sky's the limit" and with the right support and awareness, indeed, the Sky is the limit for people with disabilities. I learned this from my attendance at these Sunday sessions.

It was amazing to see youths with disabilities make presentations and speak confidently to the Zoom audience, engaging in the discussions, playing trivia games and being very interactive. I can just imagine how much more they can achieve with support and community awareness.

There is so much more society can do to create awareness and advocate for people with disabilities.

As a society, our first step should be to speak up with them and not discriminate. I have decided to join the fight in creating awareness and advocating for people with disabilities.

My hope is to see inclusion acts for people with disabilities in the workforce and education. Everyone deserves an equal opportunity in life and their disabilities definitely do not define them.

I was in awe when an individual with a visual impairment created a presentation on his home island and gave a presentation on disability myths.

We need to make room for people with disabilties in the world. They deserve every opportunity that comes their way. I believe there is so much they can offer and teach us.

Let's fight for inclusion, accommodation and equality for people with disabilities. Let's all stand unified to fight for a worthy cause.

I have decided to join the fight in creating awareness and advocating for people with disabilities.

This experience was shared by Joyana Riviere on the Caribbean island of Dominica

Joyana is a Biology Lecturer at the Dominica State College. She is a proud graduate of Grambling State University, where she obtained her Bachelors of Science Degree in Biology and Dominica State College, where she obtained her Associate Degree in Biology and Physics. She was an active member in various clubs and societies such as The Dominica State College Literary and Debate Society, The Biology Pre-Doctoral Society and International Student Organization. She was a recipient of various President's honours awards. She's enthusiastic about educating the future leaders in Science and Stem. She lives in the nature isle of the Caribbean, Dominica. She enjoys nature and keeping up with the latest breakthroughs in scientific research.

She is now an advocate for people with disabilities.

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Dwarfism Awareness

with Danielle Webb

Mastering the basics- the reality of being a little person in lockdown.

As restrictions have begun to ease over recent months- and the covid world we came to knew has begun to fade- I have taken time to reflect on the last two years. A lot has happened in my life, I graduated from my BA hons degree, published my first book, moved into my first flat, started new jobs.... all of which made harder by the climate we all found ourselves in. I learned so much about myself, but truthfully, the one thing I learned was something I thought I already knew.

And that was how to be little.

Let me explain.

When lockdown began, I knew many challenges laid ahead. As I said- there I was with a degree to finish, a dissertation to write, a job which now needed to take place from home.... and all whilst being in a different country (technically) from my family. The first few days felt like a whirlwind as I'm sure it did for many, this was all new, what was I supposed to do? And how the hell was I supposed to feel?

I tried to build myself a routine, started to find my feet but often a few days into feeling organised, I'd lose my mojo and be back to the beginning again, I guess that's how lockdown emotions work, Somedays you feel like you have it all together, and others.... well.... you're lost. Lost in this whirlwind of uncertainly.

For all the reasons mentioned above, I knew lockdown was going to be tough. But before I could even comprehend facing my degree. Before I even thought about opening a textbook. Before I could even think about trying to thrive in this newfound environment, we had found ourselves in... I had to learn the basics.

Moving away from home was a huge transition for me, and a hurdle that made me jump higher than I ever thought possible. I learned the full extent of what it was truly like to be small in today's society.... or so I thought! Because lockdown- was about to reinforce that even further. For the last 7 months of living away from home, I had been blessed to live with the most supportive flatmates, surrounded by incredible support networks in the form of friends, colleagues, and tutors, who I knew should I ever need it, they'd be there.

Apart from this time they weren't. It was just me.

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So . . . how do I go about reaching the top shelves now? The jars which my hands are too small to open...... the washing basket that's too big to lift...... for the last 7 months my coping mechanisms for all these things had been in the form of another person, a person who wasn't there anymore. For 7 months we'd built ourselves a routine, I'd built a routine, and it felt like overnight all of that had been taken away.

It didn't feel fair. I was already under immense pressure, and so much was changing.... every day...... no one knew what the next day would bring. The whole world was worried, so you really think I wanted to spend even a semi-fraction of a second contemplating how I was going to open a jar? . . . But this was the reality I was facing. This was the full extent of what it was like to be small in today's somewhat slightly weird society.

Somedays . . . were easier than others..... as days passed, I started to find my feet, I found new places to put things, places I could reach with ease even if some did mean my kitchen looked a little messy. I found new routines which meant the washing basket never got too heavy. I learned how to do a one-woman cooking act... in place of the 4 people I usually have beside me. I learned how to master the basics all whilst trying to also master a degree.

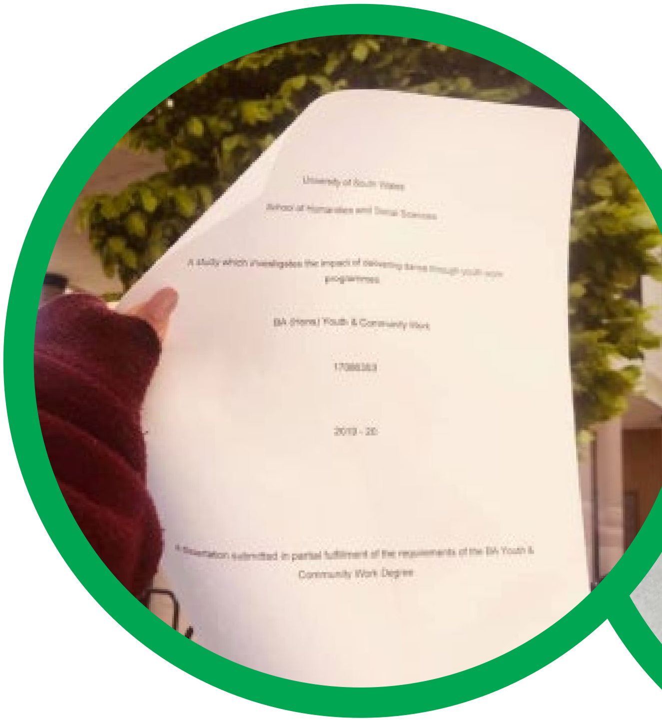
And some days I kicked ass.

Other days. It kicked me.

And that's ok. Because with every hurdle sometimes you fall at the first one...... sometimes you fall at the 1000th one! But you get up and you try again, why? Because we don't have any other choice. Other days.

We have no say in the cards we are dealt, only on how we play them.... and whilst I never imagined, opening jars, reaching shelves and cooking with step stools to be part of my game, I embrace each level- have I mastered all the basics? Most likely not.
But for now, at least.

I think I at least stepped up a level.


University of South Wales
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
A study which investigates the impact of delivering [illegible] through youth work programmes
BA (Hons) Youth & Community Work
[illegible]
2019 - 20
A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the BA Youth & Community Work Degree

Elderly woman from New Zealand and a canon at a fort in Jaisalmer

What if everyone could travel everywhere they wanted to?

Neha Arora is working towards this goal with her company, Planet Abled!

by Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Neha Arora, the founder of Planet Abled, has been working with intention and determination to create accessible travel opportunities for people with disabilities. Her motivation and drive derive from her personal frustration with the lack of accessibility her parents, who both have physical impairments, have faced.

Arora and her sister were born in Agra, India, but currently live in Delhi, India with their parents, who both have physical disabilities. Her father is blind, and her mother is a wheelchair user. Despite how uncommon it is for women to work in India and others' beliefs that neither of her parents could maintain a job because of their disabilities, they worked tirelessly to create a life for themselves and their children, starting from nothing.

Throughout Arora's childhood, travel and vacation opportunities were limited to visits to her grandparents' house and picnics. Young and naive, she believed that the lack of travel was due to it being a financial burden. As she and her parents became more financially secure, she assumed that travel would be more possible. Arora said, "I could not have been further from the truth because there are societal barriers, there are stigmas associated with people." Despite numerous attempts at traveling when Arora began earning more, the results were always the same, fighting, obstacles, and the realization that these places were not accessible and people were often insensitive. Arora's parents resorted to believing that they would never be able to travel, which infuriated her.

Neha with her parents on a trip to Singapore

She completed an Engineering degree in Electronics and Communication Engineering near her hometown while working as a software engineer for one of the multinational IT companies in India. Unable to afford Management college, she worked at several technology companies holding various positions in order to learn the different aspects to plant the foundation for her future endeavors in business. She worked in management jobs, pre-sales and enterprise sales, software development in the IT field, and held positions at small and large startup companies. Her work shifted from the IT industry to Telecom and then to Digital Media and Design (Adobe).

Several times, Arora attempted to start her own company but they were all unsuccessful beacuse she either "did not have enough skills, or simply lost interest," she said. All the while, she sought to learn and and broaden her sense of the business world. "I understand how big corporations work. I understand how startups work and how technology can enable many things if you are doing any work," she said. "And that is the most integral part of any business."

The idea of travel was always in the back of her mind as she fought the urge to travel with her parents until she decided that she could not accept the restrictions any longer.

When looking for solutions, she couldn’t find any that worked for her family. After gaining extensive experience in the business and tech industries, Arora considered starting a company centered on providing travel assistance to people with disabilities. Having never met another person who had two parents with physical disabilities, Arora's mother and father inspired her to use her unique position to talk about inclusion. She felt that she was chosen in this life to complete this type of work.

Arora was hesitant to start this business after previously failed endeavors and a lack of travel industry experience. This harsh reality led her to build a network before she officially started her company, Planet Abled. Attending tourism fairs and expos, she networked and learned as much relevant information as possible to gain clarity about this industry.

A family meal

When visiting hotels, people said, "People [with disabilities] don't travel; why are you even bothered? Why should we be training ourselves to cater to them because they're not coming?" Arora replied, "They are not coming because you're not accessible. It's not the other way around."

After learning more about how beneficial her company will be to the travel industry, and gaining enough confidence, Arora resigned from her job, knowing that she didn't want to push this off any longer. Her ultimate inspiration stems from her parents, and she said, "They've done better than most non-disabled people. All of those experiences, better or ugly, whatever they were, actually led me to start this company, to solve the problem for everyone."

With no savings left from previous business adventures, Arora took the leap and created Planet Abled in January 2016, taking it one day at a time. Six years later, she has created an incredibly successful business, making accessible trips for people with and without disabilities while teaching inclusivity. Prior to the group trips, Planet Abled teams visit the locations to complete "destination development," where they visit hotels and museums and look into transportation options to identify how accessible the plan is. They also consider which disabilities would be likely to take part in the trip. In addition, they train the staff at the sites on awareness and sensitization to understand how to communicate and what the necessary preparations should include. Arora said, "One wrong word and one wrong body language can spoil the whole travel experience. We make sure that everyone is prepared." They identify the ideal group of people for the specific destination. Planet Abled has even created 3D printed models of monuments in museums in order to provide people with visual impairments a physical model to touch alongside an audio tour, creating a more inclusive and engaging experience.

They also work with museum authorities to provide special access for disabled travelers, allowing them to touch the artifacts they would otherwise not be allowed to. Special hours are held for deaf and autistic travelers as well. In addition, the company works directly with various governments to train and provide consultations.


Neha signing to a deaf participant at Planet Ableds inclusive pottery workshop


Planet Abled receives National Award from Ministry of Tourism - the Government of India

Prior to COVID-19, trips were held in places like India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and across Europe. This pandemic has shown Arora that a separate travel provider for people with disabilities is not necessary. Planet Abled is working with hotels, museums, tourism boards, hospitality stakeholders, and destination management organizations to make sure they are accessible and inclusive for travelers with all types of disabilities. She believes that once educated and more inclusive, travel and access will be easier.


People from an iclusive group visiting the Taj Mahal in 2018

Using her background in the tech world, Arora is in the process of creating a platform to make travel possible for more as the cost is very high for those with disabilities. She is aware that expenses prevent many from exploring different cultures and experiences." What we're trying to do is to embark those lives in our small way [so] that they can afford it. We will still give them all the necessary means to travel and have that freedom of choice if they want to travel. It's like mainstreaming accessibility.

That's the goal. What if today [and] forever, we changed the way travel exists?"

Arora's continued motivation is fueled by the belief that many people think that individuals with disabilities cannot travel. She asks herself, "Why not?" and continues to create the opportunities to prove this wrong. She is continuously reassured by the feedback she receives from those who did not travel before but have since become travel addicts. She is often told "that Planet Abled gave them the best day of their lives" or "the company has changed the trajectory of their lives," which is her spark to create more. Hearing that people with disabilities have altered their thinking when comparing themselves to those with different disabilities. Awareness within the disability community has been created as one person with impairments doesn't have it harder than the next, Arora said. People without disabilities also attend the trips and say they have had a completely different experience going on a fully accessible and inclusive trip. More and more people are motivated now to create accessible workspaces and lives after being part of experiences with Planet Abled.

Arora is passionate about creating long-lasting change in this world. "The non-disabled community should realize that you're just one accident or one new birth, or a medical condition, away," Arora said. "So nothing is stopping you [from] being impacted.

Let's make it an inclusive world today. So that you're prepared when it happens to you tomorrow, whether temporarily or permanently, it will happen, it will come visiting your door."

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Spotlight on Entrepreneurs with Disabilities

MARGAUX WOSK

(they/them)

Margaux is an autistic self-taught artist and designer as well as an activist and advocate for people with disabilities.

"My online store is reflective of who I am and I use bright colours and creative, cute imagery. I offer autistic and neurodiversity pride items as well as a wide variety of things: patches, stickers and so much more."

Blog: www.navigatingjourney.com

Website: retrophiliac.etsy.com

www.retrophiliac.etsy.com

COLLETTEY'S COOKIES

Collette Divitto is a bright, caring, 30 year-old woman with a true sense of who she is and where she wants to go in life. She also has Down Syndrome, but this hasn't stopped her from her many achievements.

Read about her here and order some of delicious cookies from her website **www.Colletteys.com**

Do you know an entrepreneur with a disability?

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Yoocan's ecosystem is built of PWD members (storytellers)+service providers (NPO's, NGOs & ORG's) + vendors/product solution makers/providers.
By empowering diversity, equity & inclusiveness Yoocan has gained the trust of its members and is now offering you, the opportunity to introduce yourself directly to our community.

OUR REACH

Website: 600,000 visitors since 2016 | 100,000 Visitors in 2021
Website Subscribers: 30,000 | Newsletter Subscribers 11,000
Storytellers: 2200 from 105 countries
~1100 Service providers, organizations & companies
social media: 35,000 IG | 5,000 FB

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Job Search Engine Designed for PWD

Fully Automated Job Upload System

Designed by PWD, Accessibility, Diversity & Inclusion Organizations

Quick and Easy
In Hebrew/English
(Can be adapted to other languages)

We Are Seeking Partners For:

PWD Job Posting & Offering
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In the know

with Angela Lynn

I am Angela Lynn, a contributing writer providing Deaf Insights. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to share my viewpoint on the world of Deaf/Hard of Hearing communities globally.

In each article it is my intent to give you, the reader, a chance to experience a diverse perspective of differently abled people at large. I believe you will be surprised to see the similarities and differences that exist in cultures with individuals who are Deaf, Deafblind, Hard of Hearing, and latened Deaf.

I want to take a moment to help clarify the "D" and the "d" when it comes to the word deaf. The two spellings serve two different roles in the Deaf and the Hearing community. When the Deaf community describes themselves with "uppercase D," it is a cultural reference to the Deaf community. When the lowercase "d" is used, it is simply a reference to medical or audiological terms for hearing loss, regardless of severity.

My contributions to the magazine will be many, as I am a young professional minority woman; my independence has afforded me the luxury of traveling and living in various cities around the world. In return, I have had exposure to many cultures, Deaf and otherwise; these experiences lend credibility and interesting points of view for our readers.

In the July 2021 issue of Mélange, I was interviewed about my life as a Deaf minority TV host. When I began to write this introductory article about myself, I found it difficult and a little boring, and then I had a great idea! I decided to be inclusive and gather questions and comments from others to find out what they wanted to know about me as a Deaf person.

I realize many hearing people don't always understand what a Deaf person's life is like, or what the experience of being Deaf is like. So, I reached out to my hearing and Deaf fans, and I asked them what they would like to know about me. I am honored that I received so many responses and it is my pleasure to answer them.

Tom T. from Los Angeles, California USA / Spain

Q: What's one thing you wil like me to know about Deaf people?

A: Deaf people, for example, do not refer to themselves as hearing impaired. Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind are all acceptable terms in the Deaf community. When asked, the person will say they are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

P. Alex from Stamford, Connecticut, USA

Q: Do you like or prefer cats or dogs?

A: I like cats *and* dogs. If I got a cat, it would be a Balinese Cat. If I got a dog, it would be a teacup shar-pei or a teacup yorkie. I think that they are cute!

Vanessa B. from Las Vegas, Nevada USA

Q: What inspired you to teach American Sign Language (ASL)?

A: Many people are oblivious to the fact that everyone uses sign language to communicate non-verbally. Have you ever seen someone gesture to say someone else is crazy, they are sleepy, let's go or indicate they want something to drink?

ASL is a beautiful language. It is an artistic visual language. It is not monkey sign language; that is a myth. The gift of using our hands to communicate our thoughts and feelings is a wonderful gift from God. Teaching ASL has always been one of my greatest passions. As a result, I became a teacher and developed a passion for languages. As far as monology, phonology, semantics, and syntax are concerned, ASL linguistics follows the same rules as English linguistics.

Barton V. from Reno, Nevada, USA

Q: If you could be in any movie, what would it be?

A: I find that question hilarious. I also enjoy acting, which is one of my other passions. It would be an honor to act with Tom Cruise or The Rock in a movie since they are my favorite actors. One day, I hope to have a leading role in a film.

Hairani A. from Singapore, Singapore

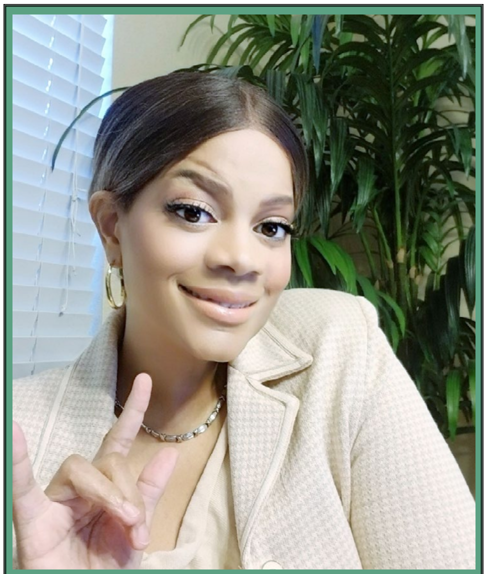
Q: Are you married and children?

A: Oh, my goodness. I'm not married nor have children. I was once engaged to a man who was not Deaf. The engagement had to end because of our long-distance careers. However, I would love to find the right man and get married and have a family someday.

Bala Gopal from Chennai, India

Q: What makes you happy?

A: I love that question! Love has taught me to live. Life has shown me how to love. To be happy, all I need is a dose of gratitude and ability and remember to not compare myself with others. My tagline for The Angela Lynn Show is 'Everyone Has a Story on Their Uncertain Path to Positive Success". For me, happiness encapsulates the concept, "Be the Change You Want to See". I believe that everyone is unique to themselves and their circumstances.



ANGELA LYNN "THE VOICE OF INCLUSION"

The three fingers spell I+L+Y (I Love You). Using ILY when saying good-bye shows care or love. In addition, it can be creatively playful, cute, romantic, or flirty when you sign off with the ILY handshape.

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"SENDING MY LOVE TO ALL"

Again, the ILY sign can indicate esteem, love, or a variety of other positive feelings. "I Love You" (informal sign) it's a common sign in Deaf culture.

Alexander F. from Kiev, Ukraine

Q: Did you ever face any challenges during your struggles in life?

A: Of course, everyone has faced challenges in their lives. I am blessed for the many challenges and struggles that I have had because it helped me to become a better person and as a Deaf female. I love sharing my struggles and frustrations with people. They look at me so astonishingly and realize that I have won most of my battles and wars in life. I do have my barriers, but I always try to break down my barriers by educating and empowering others. I am always working to overcome obstacles that come my way. That makes me one of a kind.

Sasha J. from Ankara, Turkey

Q: Do you eat weird food?

A: I can't recall the name of the place, but I went out to a nightclub with my friends while I was a student at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. The music was amazing, and we were dancing and having a great time. My friends got hungry and wanted to order some food. We looked at the menu and strangely looked at each other. We had no idea it was an insect nightclub. They served all different types of insects, crickets, worms, etc. It was kind of weird seeing people enjoy eating those insects. So, I have to admit eating insects is probably not my favorite form of sophisticated food. And, no, I didn't try any myself. LOL I'd rather eat chocolate hummus than insects.

Jessica N. from Quito, Ecuador South America

Q: What was the weirdest smell you've ever experienced?

A: As part of my visit to Kaula Lumpur, Malaysia, I stayed with a Deaf host family for a short period of time. I enjoyed the opportunity to sit on the floor and interact with others. I witnessed a servant serving us 'stinky' food that made me nauseous. It was Durian! It smelled horrible and pungent. Durians are considered by Malaysians as their King of fruits. The durian is distinguished by its large, thick "coconut" shape and by its thorn-covered rind. Durian isn't the only weird smelling food I have smelled, chitterlings come in as a close second.

Kellie D. from Las Vegas, Nevada USA

Q: What is the weirdest thing you have ever experienced?

A: When I was in Philadelphia, PA, with my mother, I met the well-known and legendary singer, Teddy Pendergrass at his home. I remember it being the weirdest thing I've ever experienced because he was so tall like my father. In addition, not only was he tall, but he looked, spoke, and acted like my biological father. The resemblance was amazing. The whole time I felt like I had two identical father figures. Tee hee!

Juan J. from Toronto, Ontario Canada

Q: What is one ability that you believe everybody should possess?

A: Aspire to altruism - You should always be altruistic so as to attract people who are generous, who care about others. An act of true altruism is one which is carried out without contemplating how we are going to profit from it or take advantage of it.

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It is important to act with your heart and soul without showing remorse in order to improve your relationships. This will contribute to your happiness and contentment in life. Only those who have learned how to contribute sincerely and unselfishly get to experience the greatest joy in life: true fulfillment.

Adlai H. from Des Moines, Iowa USA

Q: Why do you love Sunflowers so much?

A: Sunflowers began to capture my attention when I was 11. Over the years my love for them has grown. They always make me feel so positive. It's still a passion for me. Sunflowers have so many meanings to me. A sunflower represents my view of life… being able to have good and bad days and still they are STANDING beautiful and shining inside out. It is a gift from God. Positive people illuminate me with love and admiration. Sunflowers represent me because of who I am. Sunflowers are the inspiration for my song/poem "Yellow Rain" which will be released in this Summer.

Fran R. from Tuguegarao, Philippines

Q: Which country you wish to travel globally?

A: My dream is to visit Dubai, as I mentioned in the July 2021 issue of Mélange. As a Deaf international globetrotter, I would love the experience. The ability to travel around the world has provided me with countless experiences and lessons that I will never forget. Dubai is at the top but there are many others.

That's all I have for now. I am currently living in sunny Las Vegas, Nevada USA. Just like everyone in life, I have had my share of ups and downs. The important thing to remember is to get up and keep going regardless of what comes at you. Everything is possible. I always try to remember to be grateful for my family and friends and to thank God on a daily basis for all of my blessings, day by day.

So that's enough about me. In the next issue, I'll be talking about **DEAF CULTURE.**

If you have any comments or questions you'll like me to address in the next issue, please contact me at:
angelalynn@theangelalynnshow.com

Yours truly,

Angela Lynn

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Interview with Bart Vulliamy

Autistic, self-taught photographic artist

1.Tell us a bit about yourself A resident of East Vancouver, Canada, I have had a lifelong struggle with anxiety disorders.

To some people I'm considered a Lomographer (the act of taking photographs without thinking, and ignoring the established rules of "good" photography). I use cheap plastic cameras (Holgas) as my main devices, and I bring them everywhere. I love the look of the lo-fi film distortion and imperfections in every shot I take. My influences include Roger Deakins for his cinematography, Ansel Adams for his landscapes and Andrei Tarkovsky for his dreamlike photography.

2.What awakened your interest in photography and when did that interest begin?

I started film photography in high school, where I took a photography class. Back then, my teacher called my photography "weird".

I didn't pick up another camera again until 2020 during the first Covid lockdown. I had been watching a lot of movies and was working graveyard shifts downtown when there was nobody working due to lockdown. Seeing a busy metropolis stopped in its tracks when it's usually very busy was surreal. I knew that I had to capture these historical times.

3.Your photography is heavily focused on nature. Why?

I've always been very interested in nature documentaries and growing up in Vancouver I did and do a lot of hiking and nature exploration. That's when I feel my best, when I'm out of the city and lost in nature. One of my goals is to visit as many National Parks as I can. Canada has so much to offer in terms of natural scenery and I want to explore and capture as much as possible.

4.Your disability: what is it and how has it impacted your daily life?

I am Autistic. Autism is a neurological processing difference that affects how we process, engage with, and experience the world around us.

Some common traits of autism include difficulty maintaining and starting relationships, difficulty expressing and recognizing thoughts and feelings, social isolation, and emotional dysregulation. My autism impacts me daily. I rely on scripts, schedules, and all that stuff. It causes me to self isolate and because of my Autism, I have anxiety and Alexithymia (inability to navigate emotions/feelings). My photography has been a way for me to communicate, as verbal communication does not come naturally to me.

5.What do you hope people will learn from your work?

Photography for me is something I can't not do. I bring my camera with me everywhere I go. I would do it regardless of money. I truly enjoy the whole process – from researching cameras and film stocks, experimenting, and exploring new and old places, and presenting and showing people my art. Now that I do not have the scrutiny and cookie-cutter judgement of school classes, I have found that the most important thing about photography is that it fulfills me first and foremost. Everything else is just a bonus.

I have had the opportunity to share my work through the **Inclusion Art Show** last year, and via zines and other exhibits in the past few months, and I have discovered that there are people out there who enjoy the photos I take and want to see more of them or display them and see them day after day. It was quite a mind-blowing experience.

Having difficulty with emotions myself, I know that there is no one human experience when it comes to feelings. I'd love for people looking at my work to feel something that resonates with them. But

I also know that reactions to art to not have to always be profound – it can simply be a "oh, I like this photo".

If it helps the viewers understand that yes, people with disabilities also have voices that should be listened to, then all the better.

6.What are some of the barriers you have faced as a person with an invisible disability? How did you overcome them?

Like for a lot of people with invisible disabilities, I have had to deal with the societal mentality of "if it's not visible, then it's not there". Autism is still very much misunderstood and considered through the lens of the rhetoric that has been perpetrated by major organizations led by "carers" that did a lot of harm to the Autistic community. The stereotypes of "severely mentally disabled" Autistic people peddled by those organizations and the media are still prevalent today, which means that if an individual does not fit in that box, they are deemed able to adapt to society and do not have any specific needs.

As such, I find it hard to navigate life in a society that is very much ableist and does not understand – or try to understand – the spectrum that is neurodiversity, including Autism. I still feel the need to mask when out in public and it is quite taxing both mentally and physically.

Similarly, accommodations when it comes to schooling or work are still very difficult to obtain without jumping through hoops and going through complicated and lengthy administrative procedures, which can be overwhelming for people like me. I am glad that there are local organizations that can provide some support but there is still a significant need for disabled people to be considered by governmental agencies and for their needs to be considered.

I am trying to keep advocating for myself when it comes to school, work and my health, but it is A LOT. I still encounter barriers day in and day out – I do my best to go through them but, let's be honest, some days, I do not have enough energy or mental space to deal with being taken seriously because, to outsiders "there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with [me]"

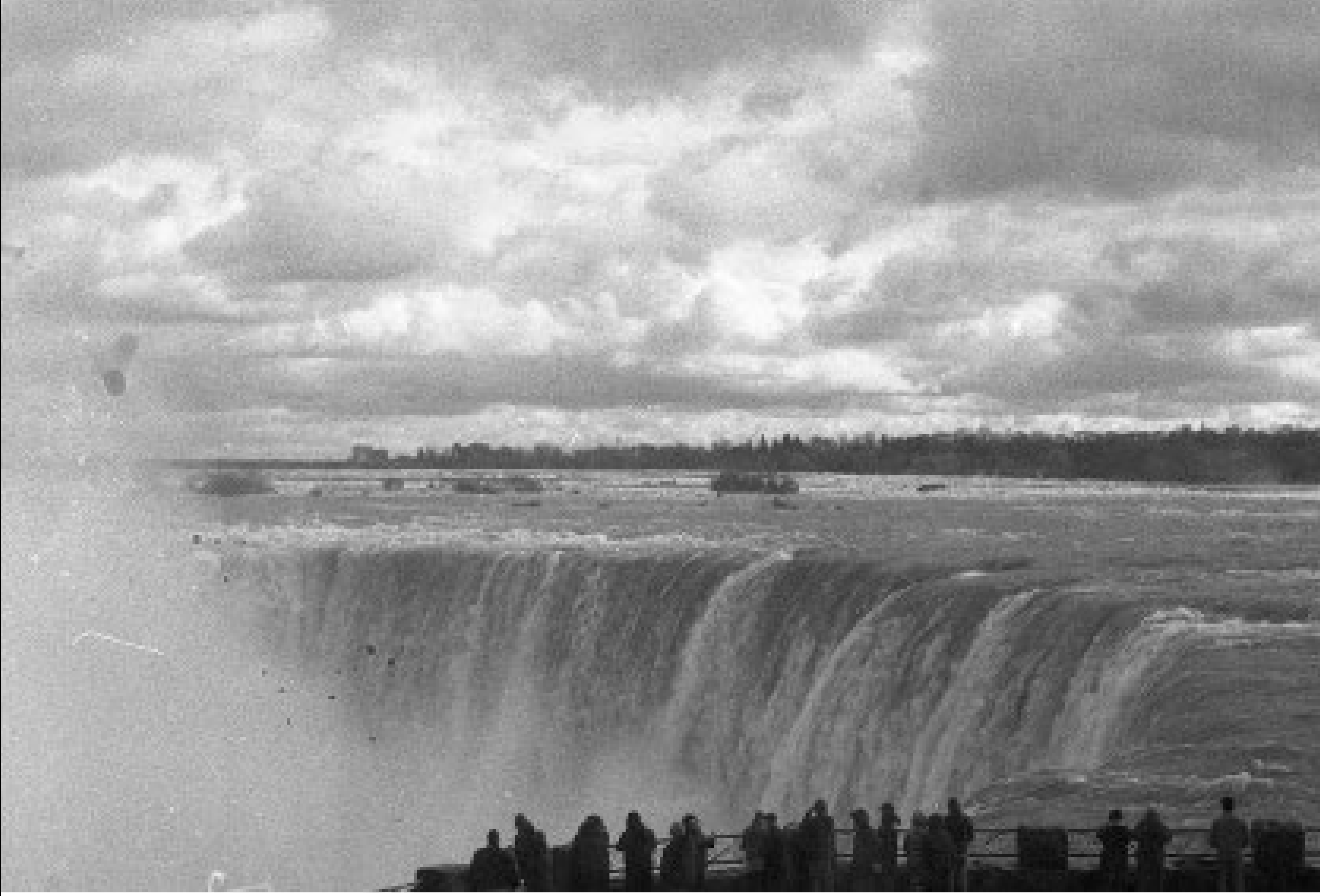
7. Share your observations about society as it relates to acceptance of people with invisible disabilities

It takes a lot to advocate against all the misconceptions surrounding Autism and neurodiversity. As with other marginalized groups, I feel like there is a lot of pressure put on us to teach others about the struggles we experience and what we think would help.

This can be even more taxing when not only this information is provided for free, but it is then ignored or brushed off as a one-off experience, and when there is a constant need for justification. I do not want to speak on behalf of other disabled people, and it is important to understand that no two people are the same experience when it comes to life with disability. I do however try to be open about my disability, when it is safe to do so – as it isn't necessarily the case – and to educate those around me when I can.

A lot of work is done by disabled individuals, mostly online. I would encourage people to educate themselves and look for relevant sources. The old school take on Autism is dated and does more harm than good. But there is a new wave of #ActuallyAutistic people, who put out content in various forms that should be listened to.

Finally, it is imperative that neurodivergent people be included in decision-making, especially in the fields of



education, medicine and employment laws, as they are crucial to us.

8.What or who motivates you to continue to pursue your passion?

I do this first and foremost for myself. I enjoy the entire photography process and I love taking my camera and going for walks when I can. I have been able to re-discover the Lower Mainland by seeing it through the lens of my camera, and I'm looking forward to more exploration, both locally and Canada-wide, to keep learning and shooting.

Having a community of photographic artists like Arlin French, Anna Starr, Jason Kummerfeld (grainydays) and the Lomography community has also been a source of inspiration and support.

I am grateful for the support I've received from organizations like **posAbilities** (Inclusion Art Show) and **Outsiders and Others**, to help me bring my photography to people locally. I am also grateful for the support of people who have interacted with me and my photography or who have purchased prints.

If readers would like to see more, they can check out my Instagram and my website, where I put up a lot of my work and through which I can be reached.

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Website: www.bartvulliamy.com
Instagram: @Photographieblack

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MISS
WHEELCHAIR WORLD

Second Edition: Mexico
October 2022

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Nic Zapko

Listen to what she has to say!

by Christina Douglas, a deaf St. Cloud State University Student

We all need someone like Nic in our Deaf communities.

Nic is from Scranton, Pennsylvania. She faced many barriers in her previous home state and decided to move to Minnesota. She found her true home here where she feels truly welcomed. Nic decided to advocate and educate other deaf and hard-of-hearing people to create better accessibility for themselves and others. Now a Deaf Interpreter and Deaf Mentor, Nic once worked as a dishwasher when she was younger. She wanted to be a busgirl but was not given this position because they doubted that she could communicate with customers. She accepted the dishwasher position then one day, a busboy called in sick and she asked to take over for him. Nic communicated with customers through hand gestures and body language. She found a way to break barriers during her job as a busgirl.

Nic eventually landed her dream job as a Deaf Interpreter and now works as a program manager for Sorenson Communications, advocating for the Deaf community in Minnesota. She handles all matters of communication and accessibility access in her company for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

I asked Nic what was the worst discrimination experience she has ever experienced. her answer was immediately, “Airports. They are the most challenging barriers".

I agreed, because I have the same experience when traveling to other states in the U.S. I forced myself to start communicating, letting airport workers know that I am deaf when I arrive for my boarding call at the gate. There were no signs that allows deaf people to know when their number is called to come to the entrance, as well as knowing what important announcements are made, such as when the airplane has a delay or has changed to a different gate. This results in deaf people becoming confused and overwhelmed.

Nic explained that she went to Dubai for disability-related events during World Expo in November 2021, at Dubai's airport, she had to keep her eyes wide open for any information and followed other people. She signed,

"Deaf people like us have to peel our eyes wide and find clues where we need to do and have to be assertive with our communication."

Nic signed that deaf people are struggling with accessibility nationally. Still, she is proud of her home state of Minnesota that they are doing great with their accessibility, that they have certified deaf interpreters to assist other deaf people. "The Governor, Tim Walz, is doing fantastic with his big heart to allow our disability accessibility grow to better improve deaf people's quality of life."

I asked Nic who is her role model. She signed with a smile, "My mother." Her mother taught her to find her true self and strengths for fighting the barriers. That is how she became who she is today. She met her goal to be a successful Deaf Interpreter on local news and in courthouse rooms.

Nic experienced a barrier when she was doing her local news for the deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals because she was shorter than her colleagues on the show. She mentioned to the newsroom that she was struggling to communicate properly because of the difference in height – compared to her colleagues. Her "voice" was heard because they added a wood box for her to stand on to add more height and for her to be equal with her colleagues.

Her comments is a good tip for us in the deaf community that we need to remind ourselves to speak up to be heard.

"We must remind ourselves to break barriers by speaking up to be heard and to create accessibility." she signed.

I asked her what her first wish was and she signed, "Accessibility would be much better with medical offices, law enforcement, law offices, and general offices if they requested an interpreter when a deaf person appears to ask for their service. Accessibility and education will help with effectiveness between service providers and deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

As a deaf person myself, I appreciated having this opportunity to interview Nic and being able to ask her to share her personal experience. We need more people like her in our Deaf communities.

I want to give final words to Nic Zapko. The best of luck with her endeavors and to creating more accessibility in our home state of Minnesota. I would recommend other people follow her steps to make our home state the best nationally for people with disabilities. No matter where we came from, we must be true Minnesotans to be helpful!

"My wish is for better accessibility so that deaf people do not have to ask for an interpreter at a doctor's appointment. **They should know to request an interpreter for her/his convenience."**

Nic signs "I love you"

Web Accessibility and its importance to travel businesses in 2022

Did you know that 25% of the global population has a disability or condition that affects their ability to use the internet?

That equates to around 61 million people in the U.S. and over 1 billion people worldwide who are unable to use the vast majority of websites. Couple that with this segment's $7 trillion spending power and it means that businesses everywhere are missing out on a massive portion of all potential customers and web traffic.

The solution? Enter web accessibility. It's the inclusive practice of ensuring there are no barriers to interaction on your website for those with disabilities.

Most people only imagine someone who is blind, deaf or in a wheelchair when they think of accessibility. However, web accessibility also helps countless others who have:

- ADHD, dyslexia and other learning disabilities
- A loss of motor skills
- Epilepsy
- Short-term memory loss
- Low vision
- Autism
- Adults with changing abilities due to aging
- And many other common impairments

Instead of falling behind the curve, hospitality businesses who prioritize web accessibility will reap the many benefits, as well as avoid the costly risks. So how is that exactly?

Drive ROI with Accessibility

Web accessibility is an essential adoption of the digital age—a trend that's only gaining speed as more of our lives moves online. This is especially true for the travel and tourism industry, which is heavily reliant on the internet. Current statistics show that 90% of travelers will do their research online and 82% will complete their booking online.

Not having an accessible website means that your business is excluding millions of potential guests. They're currently unable to read about your brand, explore its offerings, browse the photo gallery and ultimately convert. These digital interactions primarily take place on your website and play a crucial role in the decision-making process.

So flip the script. Instead of missing out on customers, an accessible website allows you to capture them, expand your reach to new audiences and drive new bookings.

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Optimizing your website for accessibility helps your business to:

- Increase market share by 25%
- Boost SEO efforts and conversion rates
- Dramatically increase bookings
- Build a strong and inclusive brand
- Enhance customer loyalty
- Create a better user experience for all

Avoid Costly Accessibility Lawsuits

At the same time, many business owners still don't fully understand the risks that come with a lack of accessibility. Web accessibility is no longer optional—and ignoring it is widely considered an irresponsible business decision as it opens up your organization to costly lawsuits and hefty penalties.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990 with the aim to protect those with disabilities and ensure they can participate in all aspects of society. That's why physical buildings are required to have wheelchair ramps, push-to-open door buttons and accessible restroom facilities.

Today the ADA extends to public-facing websites. As such, sites are required to be designed and coded according to official guidelines—otherwise your business is denying access to this massive segment of the population. Businesses who fail to comply are vulnerable to discrimination lawsuits, stiffy penalties and hefty legal fees.

Even more recently, the United States Department of Justice published its own guidance on web accessibility and its importance for businesses open to the public. This included how businesses can make their website accessible to people with disabilities and in line with the ADA's requirement.

This is a trend that's only exponentially increasing as the world goes digital. The number of ADA-specific lawsuits has increased by 1,100% since 2019, including organizations like Domino's Pizza, Netflix, Target, Nike and more. The consequences can be even more damaging for small businesses.

The good news? These lawsuits are completely preventable when working with accredited technicians, like our team at Access Design Studio. It's important to work with certified experts who understand official standards like the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and can implement long-term solutions to protect your business.

Is Your Business Accessible?

Web accessibility should be a priority for hospitality businesses. Just as you would accommodate guests with physical disabilities when they enter your establishment, it's also important to care for their online needs. At the end of the day, it's about delighting your guests and delivering an excellent customer experience.

Get in touch for a complimentary video review of your website today.

ACCESS DESIGN
STUDI♿

Q&A with Marlene Valle

Content Creator, Travel Blogger and Travel Photographer

She's passionate, adventurous, and creative

Q. Share with us a bit about your childhood/ background.

A. I was born in Los Angeles as a first generation Mexican-American, and I'm the only deaf child in my family. Since the age of 2, I learned American Sign Language (ASL) and grew up in both worlds: the deaf world and the hearing world (hearing refers to people who are not deaf, hard of hearing or have any hearing loss). I am now a content creator, travel blogger and travel photographer behind deafinitelywanderlust.com

Q. What influenced your decision to travel and share your experiences with the world?

A. Growing up, I've always been proud to be Deaf, yet I've also internalized some ableism and fears from other people, such as questioning whether it's possible for me to travel (even traveling with another deaf person). During my every childhood year, I visited Mexico along with my family and always wanted to explore out on my own. I was curious about everything, but my family were fearful due to different reasons (including due being deaf). When I was 18, I visited Hawai'i with my family - and it was just surreal. I'd never thought I'd be almost the other side of the world...to see a different walk of life, people living there, different nature and everything. It was the start of a wanderlust - I wanted to see more.

Fast-forward to after graduating as an undergrad, I decided to jump into my desire to see the world (along with another deaf person). I researched a lot through different travel blogs, there are a little to no information about traveling while deaf. I cannot just relate to abled and hearing travel bloggers about my fears, communication strategies, etc. Eventually, I came to realize that I could share my experiences with the world, including the deaf communities.

Q. What impact do you hope to have on your audience?

A. While there are so many reasons, it's ultimately because I wanted to start living my own life. I've grown up living for others, as well as internalizing others' fears - especially as a Deaf woman. Ever since I started traveling, I became so passionate into sharing with the world about the people I meet, the communication tools that I use to navigate - there is just not enough information about it online, nor do I really see someone that represent me in the travel industry. With my platform, I hope that deaf people are inspired and

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empowered to travel (if they have the privilege to), despite how the world is designed for abled community.

Q. You are a confident young lady, living an active life. To what do you attribute your confidence?

A. Thank you! I'm not always quite confident, to be honest - but I do often try to be and continuously work and learn on the go. This is a real good question. I think it's really come down to my personal epiphany, "do I want to keep living in fear and died with regrets? Or do I want to take a leap of faith and live with stories?". It's also really empowering to meet or connect with other deaf women who love traveling, whether solo or not. It's really empowering to see that!

Q. What are some of the travel challenges you have faced as an individual who is deaf?

A. The world is universally designed for the abled people, not for disabled communities. Thus, there are a lot of areas that need to work on its accessibility - such as having not having sign language tour for different attractions (especially when the attractions require tours) or even a closed captioning or transcript available. There is also transportation, such as bus or train. It's generally heavily audio-centric experience. They'd make announcement verbally or through the speaker, so I always have to keep my eyes open and study the behaviors of the local people and ask them directly about my transportation.

Q. Have you ever faced discrimination as a person with an invisible disability? If so, how has it affected your perspective of the world?

A. Yes, a couple of times in different situations. I was rejected to volunteer a local wildlife conservation in another country, whereas other abled travelers were able to experience - despite having some experiences myself back in the states. Another memory that came to mind is having staying at host's place, and that host wasn't respectful with me. He kept saying never mind when I asked him to repeat, and he made fun of sign language by mimicking it and laughed right in my face. At some points, it can be annoying because their behaviors can be dehumanizing, but generally - what I see is the local cultural beliefs and lack of awareness are some of the main factors that I cannot expect every single person in the world to know about it. Traveling allows me to meet different people, show them that we, deaf people, exist too - and share some educational information about our communities.

Q. What advice can you give to other young people who are interested in traveling the world but are hesitant because of their disability?

A. The world may be designed for the abled people - unsurprisingly, even your own region/state or country. Do take some steps that personally work for YOU, because you know what works for you best - such as starting to travel domestically/internationally with another friend, and research about other regions or countries to figure out the logistics to navigate the inaccessible world - but honestly, the world is worth seeing to face your fears and learn how to navigate it with your disability.

You can connect with your disabled community about traveling, even in other countries! That's one of the ways I do, and I still do!

Do feel free to connect with me on Instagram, @deafinitelywanderlust, to share your stories with me! We need more disabled travelers to be seen and heard in the travel industry!

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Portugal has a disability champion: Jose Antonio Bourdain

by St. Cloud State University Student, Tera Brooks

March 2022 will commemorate 34 years that Jose has worked with people with disabilities. It has been a long and winding road that he has traveled to get him to where he is today. Jose grew up in an asperous neighborhood in Lisbon, where, as a youth, he lost many friends. Because of the tremulous circumstances that surrounded him, at the age of 16, he made the decision to quit school and get a job to help support his family. It was during this time that he started to work at a college for people with disabilities. He soon found that he had a great interest and fondness working with this population. When Jose was 30, he attended the University of Lusíadas to obtain a degree in human resources management and at age 34, he attended the University of Lisbon and obtained his master's degree in political science. When asked what life experiences prepared him to be an advocate for the disability community, he simply replied with a smile, "almost none". He felt that it was by chance that he chose a profession working with disabilities, but when he reflected further, he believes that his first work experience attributed to his career path.

In 1998, Jose became the founder of a non-profit organization, CERCITOP, which is a major social cooperative and one of the biggest organizations in Portugal. CERCITOP provides homes for people with disabilities and offers home health care. They oversee two hospital facilities and a rehabilitation clinic. CERCITOP (non-profit organization) services receive funding through the Portuguese government. Customer's fees are based on their salaries, making it equitable for all clients.

Through Jose's work in this organization, he realized that his country didn't have services in tourism for folks with disabilities. He wanted to provide tourism for the Portuguese, as well other countries, to experience the travel opportunities in Portugal. Tourism for All was established in 2013 and it opened doors for many people as a travel agency and tour operator. Jose's plan was for everyone to travel without limits, including individuals with disease or disabilities. The organization consists of a fleet of vehicles, medical equipment, staff to assist with care and, of course, with knowledge to create leisure programs with accessibility. Some of the services Tourism for All provides includes accessible accommodations, daily care, monitoring by a nurse, physiotherapist or medical assistant, visits and tours, and various activities. Stephen Hawking, the well-known English theoretical physicist, has utilized Tourism for All services. When Jose was asked what his first venture was with this organization, he shared that they started on cruise ships. Initially they had one driver that was also a caregiver, and they operated as a tour guide showing buildings and monuments and explaining the history of Portugal. Jose says that as the CEO for CERCITOP, it is important that he manages the organization, but also


Jose Antonio Bourdain

Tourism for All team with Stephen Hawking
16 Sept. 2015

works in the field at Tourism For All (profit company) with customers so he can see what can be improved.

In order to stay abreast of what is relevant in working with individuals with disabilities, and to promote Portugal as an excellent accessible tourist destination, Jose attends tourism and abilities fairs and occasionally attends trainings in the United States.

Aside from being the founder of two organizations, Jose's major accomplishments have included being the President for the National Association of Continued Care Units. These are secondary hospitals who receive patients from primary hospitals, and they offer rehabilitation and long-term care for people with disease and disabilities. Jose's role with this association is to meet with the government, attend parliament, and conduct interviews with the media. Jose is currently overseeing projects that include building a kindergarten for children with disabilities and establishing a new home for people with disabilities. Jose views partnerships as building blocks for organizations. If people can work together, they can achieve better results.

When asked what excites him about being the founder of his company, Jose said he is very grateful to contribute and make a difference in people's lives. Whether it is a smile on a client's face or learning that 50-year-old man is traveling for the first time in his life, he finds it very rewarding. In regard to what the next 10 years look like for people with disabilities who want to travel independently, Jose sees biotechnology offering people with disabilities a better quality of life. He foresees people with disabilities will have the opportunity to parachute, parasail, and scuba dive in tourism. Jose feels that all of us need to be more inclusive. People don't want to be treated differently. They want to be treated like everyone else and have access to facilities to conduct their lives. This includes sidewalks, ramps, elevators, and rooms. It is about allowing people to live a free life. Jose strongly believes that the world is our home, and we must take care of it and take care of each other.

Isabelle Ducharme and staff
at Tourism for All

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Massiraa, Dubai

Marco Pasqua, Canada

BUSINESSES OWNED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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www.retrophiliac.etsy.com, USA

CERTIFICATION COURSES

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification, Canada

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JW Digital Inclusion, Dubai

DISABILITY-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

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Easterseals, USA

FONHARE, Haiti

Friends of Access Israel, USA

The American Association of People with Disabilities, USA

The Arc, USA

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The Slatin Group, USA

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Gabi & Jules, Canada

Lil E Coffee Cafe, Canada

Project Dignity, Singapore

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Yoo Can Find, Israel

LEARNING CENTRES

Achievement Learning Centre, Dominica

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Accessible Media Inc., Canada

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PRODUCTS & ACCESSORIES

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TRAVEL

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Accessible Indonesia, Indonesia

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A sampling of the top 10 innovations, technologies and products that make travel more accessible

Mains

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Preparing for tomorrow's baby boomers aging into a disability by being accessible for people with disabilities today

Sustainability

Using travel to elevate awareness about the effects of climate change on everyday life

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

How welcoming everyone will drive the future of tourism

Dessert

June 5
Evening Reception at Disney World Epcot Center

June 7
Evening Reception at Universal Orlando