

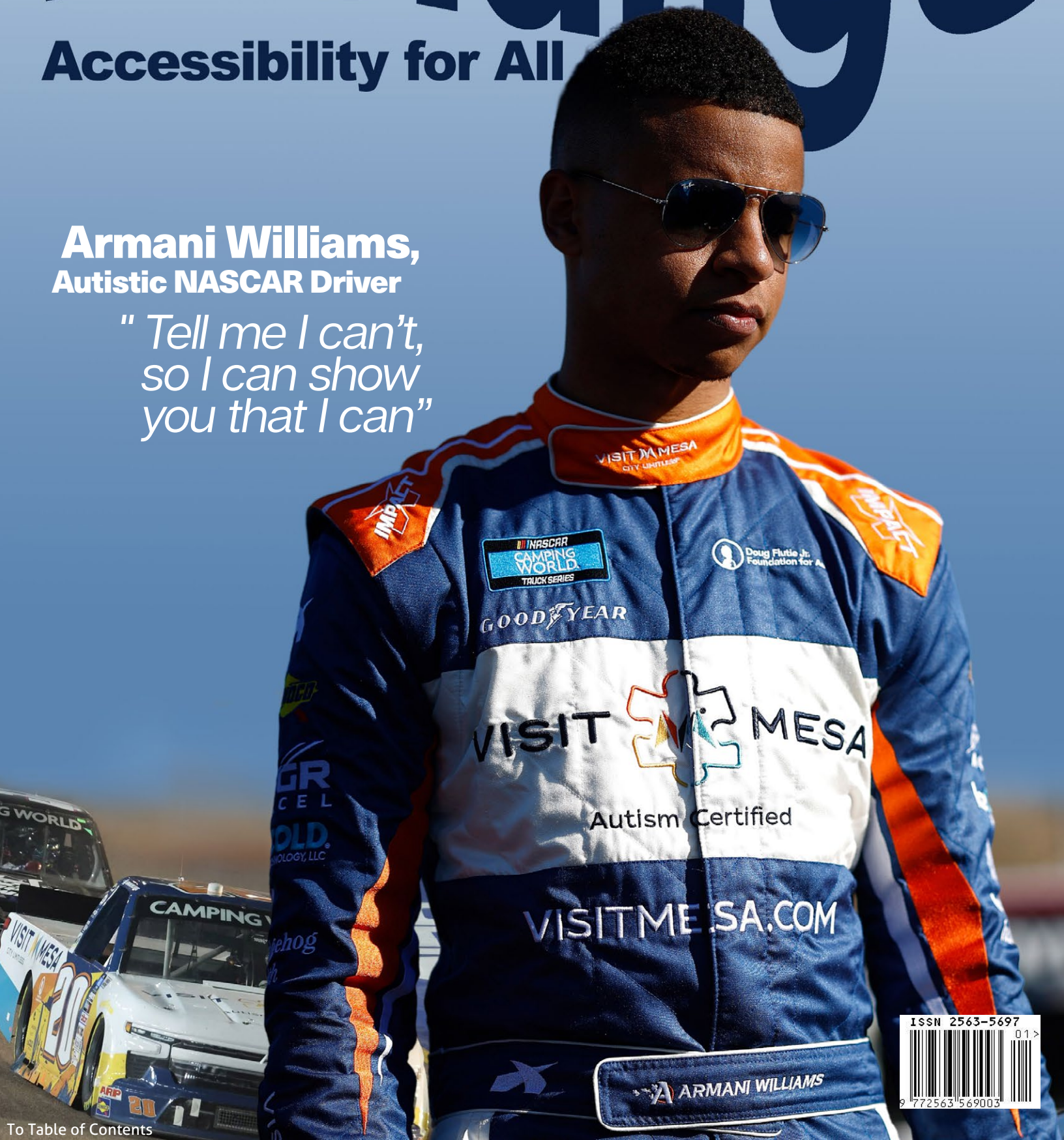
mélange

February 2023

Accessibility for All

Armani Williams, Autistic NASCAR Driver

*"Tell me I can't,
so I can show
you that I can"*



Disability Awareness Days

February 4

[World Cancer Day](#)

February 15

[International Childhood Cancer Day](#)

February 28

[Rare Disease Day](#)

March 1

[International Wheelchair Day](#)

March 12-18

[World Glaucoma Week](#)

March 21

[World Down Syndrome Day](#)

March 24

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[Purple Day for Epilepsy](#)

World Down Syndrome Day

March 21, 2023



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Armani Williams, NASCAR driver with autism

Photo: Getty Images



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Welcome

TO ACCESSIBILITY FOR EVERYONE

In Greater Fort Lauderdale, we're excited about welcoming everyone under the sun and providing access for all, from beach wheelchairs and accessible pathways to the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program at FLL airport. Learn more about local resources and plan your trip at VisitLauderdale.com/Accessibility.



Editor's Note

Fred J. Maahs, Jr.

Greetings!

Welcome to this February issue of Melange, Accessibility for All, magazine.

As I reflect on this past year I must acknowledge the increase in conferences, summits, symposiums, webinars, and other gatherings that discussed and even focused on accessible and inclusive travel, and even more broadly, people with disabilities. I honestly feel we are making progress. It may not be as quickly as we want, but it does feel like progress. There are a number of things we can point to that are creating more buzz. In my opinion, more people with disabilities and their advocates are standing up and speaking out about what's important and meaningful to them. I also feel more and more businesses are beginning to understand and realize the importance of inclusion and some even doing more to weave it into their business practices. I also feel many are finally realizing the impact of the Purple Dollar – the spending power of people with disabilities and their families and caregivers. Whatever it is, it's happening.

I also want to acknowledge the future and what's ahead of us. While there is still so much more work to be done when it comes to the rights of people with disabilities, inclusion, equity and access, I am optimistic and I feel 2023 will be a game changer for us. Already, Queensland has declared that 2023 will be the Year of Accessible Tourism and Purple Tuesday will expand its reach into more countries to help businesses better understand the customer experience and the value of the Purple Pound. The momentum is building and the future is brighter for us.

In this issue of *Mélange*, we celebrate the many people, organizations, and technologies that impact the lives of people with disabilities. You will read stories from Africa, the U.K. Nepal, Canada, the U.S. and more. We could not be more excited to bring you these stories!

And, don't forget our newest magazine, *Mélange Accessible Journeys*. In this latest *Melange* 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 *Mélange Accessible Journeys*, you will find personal, firsthand accounts of what each traveler experienced during their journey. It is a resource for anyone of any ability who wants to take an accessible journey! We hope you enjoy it!

The New Year will help get us closer to the success we all work so hard for – equity and inclusion for all. Keep using your voice and sharing your stories with us. Together we are stronger and we thank you, our readers. 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 write about. Invite us to visit your city, country, and place of interest and share it with our audience. You can reach me at fmaahs@readmelange.com.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fred J. Maahs, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

[@FredMaahs - Twitter](https://twitter.com/FredMaahs)

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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We try to present information that is current and accurate, but errors can occur. If you've found an error in the magazine, please

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Accessibilty for All 7

Opening young minds: how teaching children about disabilities shapes a more inclusive future



Kindergarteners are at a unique stage in their development where they are beginning to learn about the world around them. In these early years, they are forming their own beliefs and attitudes. By making them aware that there are people with disabilities living in our communities, we can help them to develop empathy and understanding towards others who may be different from themselves. Teaching them about this from an early age is crucial to promote societal understanding and acceptance now and in the years ahead.

Disability awareness from the Kindergarten stage and throughout the elementary school level impresses upon the young ones an understanding that disabilities are a part of the natural diversity of human

experience. Adults should explain that disabilities come in many forms, and are not limited to physical impairments. Children should also be shown how people with disabilities can lead fulfilling and successful lives just like anyone else and that everyone deserves to be included and respected regardless of their abilities.

It is also worth noting that children are curious and open-minded. They are not yet influenced by societal biases, therefore, educating them about the differences that exist in society at a tender age will help them to develop a sense of empathy and respect towards people with disabilities which they will be able to carry into adulthood. This is an essential step towards creating a more inclusive and accepting society.

This includes understanding the importance of accessible environments, such as buildings with ramps and elevators, and inclusive educational practices that consider the needs of all students.

Fostering empathy and understanding towards people who may be different can lead to a more harmonious and supportive environment.

Children should also be shown how people with disabilities can lead fulfilling and successful lives just like anyone else.



video



(Envato Elements image)

Bullying, racism and being ‘different’: Why some families are opting for remote learning regardless of COVID-19

By Rebecca Collins-Nelsen,
J. Marshall Beier and
Sandeep Raha

The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked a public debate about the value of learning online for elementary school students. Much of this dialogue has been negative, with a focus on the experiences that children are missing by not being a part of in-person classrooms.

In an effort to learn more about remote education at the elementary level, we collected

data from those with the most first-hand experiences — parents, students and teachers — in the form of a survey and interviews.

As we suspected, we found that the situation of online schooling is more complex than a simple “good” or “bad” — and the public dialogue is not telling the full story. We think it’s important to ask for whom and when is online learning a good fit.

Parent, student, teacher surveys

We are a team of multi-disciplinary researchers with an interest in children’s rights and education who collaborate with community partners to better understand how to improve the equitable delivery of engaging educational experiences.

Through our program, the McMaster Children and Youth University (MCYU), McMaster

professors and students from different faculties and departments offer public lectures and community-based workshops designed to appeal to children, youth and families.

We recruited participants through e-mail requests for participation distributed in collaboration with the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board to those who experienced remote learning during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Before the pandemic

Online schooling existed in limited formats long before the pandemic and has been valuable for certain students and specific circumstances.

In 2010, research reporting on national studies of school district administrators in the United States found the majority of “K-12 online learning is conducted at the secondary level where students are older and beginning to come into their own socially and emotionally.” It also found that the “basic reason K-12 schools are offering online and blended learning is to meet the special needs of a variety of students” — and that online learning is helpful for offering courses that are not otherwise available in schools and for reducing scheduling conflicts.



Students in remote areas, hospitalized students, incarcerated students, elite athletes, students with severe anxiety and students who learn differently are also among those who have often benefited from remote learning.

What students, families said

While this year’s version of online learning must be contextualized as “emergency remote teaching,” many still found advantages to this format.

Specifically, some students found the lack of bullying, peer pressure and social anxiety were a welcomed change that allowed them to better focus on learning.

Others mentioned the comfort of being at home, the reduced stress around the morning

rush, the extra time to sleep, the increased time with family and the ability to eat and have washroom breaks at will as all contributing to a more fruitful learning environment.

Fewer barriers, safer learning environment

One parent of a child with physical disabilities mentioned that their child preferred online learning because, “his physical disabilities aren’t a barrier to inclusion as much as they are in person.” This student already used a computer to learn, so they felt like they were no longer standing out as being “different.”

In fact, unlike the in-person experience, they were able to take on a leadership role that had previously been inaccessible. As explained by the parent: “He is very proficient online and this has provided opportunities for

him to help others when he's usually the one requiring all the help. He's having his best year with remote learning [...] now he's just another kid."

In another example, a parent mentioned their relief knowing that their child will not be around school-based racism: "Racism is there, bullying is there in schools for brown kids. So staying away from school and study[ing] from home helped kids to be safe and away from bullying and racism."

As a result, not all families are eager to return to in-person education and many are opting to continue with remote learning regardless of public health recommendations.

Some missed social interaction

Of course, this is not to say that the transition to virtual learning was a seamless fit for everyone. Many parents, students and teachers recounted the negative issues associated with online learning.

Most notably, participants highlighted the lack of social interaction, the limited physical exercise, the increased amounts of screen time and tech issues as all contributing to an overall negative experience.

The variation in experiences is perhaps the very lesson that should come from this unique

year: learners require many strategies and opportunities to learn effectively, and we should be sceptical of a one-size-fits-all model or even a one-size-fits-most model.

Include children in conversations

Additionally, it is important to include children in conversations about what is best for them.

At the onset of the pandemic, leaders, like the prime ministers of Canada, Denmark and Norway, made direct appeals to the children of their countries recognizing the importance of their participation.

But as we can see in reviewing debates about deciding on a return to in-person learning, children's voices were largely left out.

Failures of traditional classrooms

Based on our early findings, we caution against arguments that solely champion the need to promptly return to in-person classrooms, as these arguments glorify traditional learning environments and reinforce the idea that they are ideal for everyone. Our team continues to work on several papers related to equity and barriers to education to be published out of this research.

Rather than using this

moment to make a definitive call on remote education for elementary students, we should consider how we can be creative and re-imagine classroom formats to better meet all students where they are.

We are not advocating abandoning efforts at being inclusive and addressing power dynamics in the classroom. Rather, we must address the reality that testimony of positive experience in this alternative format demonstrates the need for multiple approaches.

Conversations about what post-COVID schooling looks like must consider the reality that traditional learning formats often fail marginalized students. We must create opportunities to bolster learning formats and processes that benefit students who face barriers to education via traditional schooling and delivery.

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The ABILITY Event goes purple

Submitted by St. Cloud State University Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy
www.stcloudstate.edu

St. Cloud State University Rehabilitative Studies Programs and the Center for International Disability Advocacy hosted the first Purple Tuesday event in the U.S. on November 1, 2022 in partnership with [SHL](#) in Minneapolis. Purple Tuesday was launched in the U.K. in 2018. It is a global social movement and the #1 brand for improving the customer experience for people with disabilities and their families 365 days a year.

The ABILITY Event Goes Purple was held on the SCSU Campus. Charlene Overend from Purple

in the U.K. kicked off the day with the announcement of Purple Tuesday in the U.S. In her welcome remarks, President Robbyn Wacker said, "Despite the ADA and other advances in human rights and social justice legislation, grave challenges remain for many individuals in our communities, our institutions and our world. Like other Civil Rights legislation, the reality of the lived experiences of persons with disabilities has not always lived up to its guarantee. Far too many disability-related complaints are still being filed with the federal agencies that enforce fair housing and

employment laws. And we know many businesses and institutions remain inaccessible to those who should be freely accessing their services."

Purple Tuesday Ambassador, Fred Maahs, Jr., served as the keynote speaker. Maahs also moderated a panel with Sherri Rademacher, Xiaorong Zhou and Darlene Zangara that focused on the unique aspects of customers who are deaf.

The celebration of Purple Tuesday transitioned to Paisley Park in Minnesota, the home of the late internationally renowned entertainer, Prince.

For the first time, a tour group of students who are deaf and teachers were able to tour Paisley Park and learn about the incredible history of the local legend. ASL interpreters joined the tour which included an opportunity for students from Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf to be the first to sign Prince's song, Purple Rain, in ASL and in the same studio where he originally recorded the song.

An evening reception was held at SHL where Fred Maahs, Elise Knopf and Stephen Letnes shared their perspective on how to improve the customer experience for people with disabilities. The event highlighted the fact that there are 1.8 billion people with disabilities in the world, representing 17% of the population with a spending power estimated at \$13 trillion annually.

For the first time, Purple Tuesday went global with official celebration events taking place in London, Dubai, USA, and Pakistan, reaching over 23 million people with nearly 40,000 interactions on social media throughout the day.

To learn more about how you can be a part of this movement, please email Charlene Overend at coverend@wearepurple.org.uk.



Isabel Aguirre, the woman behind Wheel the World's impact

by Shatia Mason



“Enjoy life. Life gives us many experiences. All of these experiences can have negative aspects, from which we have to learn, and also positive aspects that we have to take advantage of and enjoy.”

This quote personifies the resilience, positivity, and energy of Isabel (Polli) Aguirre.

As Senior Impact Manager of Wheel the World, (a travel startup that creates travel experiences for people with disabilities) she is extremely passionate about assisting the accessible community. She is no stranger to challenges yet has chosen to rise above and face obstacles with courage and positivity.

At 18 years old, Isabel was in a car accident. She's a paraplegic and uses a wheelchair to get around. Instead of dwelling

on having a “normal life” Isabel shined a positive light on her situation. “When this happened, I didn't let it beat my desire to continue having a “normal” life. I say it this way because when people see someone in a wheelchair, they don't believe that they can continue doing the same things as the rest. But with the help of all the people around me, family, and friends, I decided to continue with my usual plans.”

During this time, she rehabilitated,

obtained her degree and began working as a speech therapist. She started playing tennis professionally, and even represented her country, Chile, in two World Cups.

“Being able to play a sport that I was passionate about and being able to do it professionally helped me to improve my independence every day and therefore it



was part of my rehabilitation. On the other hand, this made me realize that my disability was not an obstacle but an opportunity to do and value more the things that one does.”

After seven years of playing tennis professionally, Isabel married Max, and started a family. In 2018, she joined Wheel the World as Product Manager and is currently a Senior Impact Manager.

“Impact is an area that represents the essence of

Wheel the World. Through our partnership projects with various brands, we improve accessibility, knowledge, and education around inclusion. We also give people with disabilities the opportunity to travel and explore the world without limits. Like each area within the company, Impact’s purpose is to make the world accessible with a focus on two areas—*infrastructure* and

change. One of our objectives is to bring that Impact to the US.”

The creation and execution of various impact projects in no easy feat.

“First, we research destinations and activities and consider what needs we’d like to address. After developing certain impact project ideas, we present them to various brands, refine the ideas, and determine how we can partner to complete the

project. Once the partnership is signed, we start planning all the details, including dates, finding tour operators that have experience with accessible tourism, obtaining necessary equipment, finding accommodations, securing transportation, sourcing attendees, and more. The most important component is that we have the full support of the tour operator to ensure everything is done safely and security measures are in place.”

Planning these projects can take anywhere from weeks to months but the social impact is significant.

“With these projects we generate a great social impact, as we involve the communities where they occur. Our goal is to always give back in these projects whether its in terms of accessibility or education. Our goal is to generate change and inclusion in this communities. For instance, donating walkways or equipment in beach communities, allows people with disabilities to now enjoy the beach, when they were unable to do so previously. Plus, people can use this equipment free of charge.”

In March 2022, Wheel the World partnered with Colombia Chile to host inclusive trekking at a park in Santiago Chile. A special trekking chair called a Jöelette was donated to the park so it

can be rented later.

"We had a launch day for that chair in which we did a trek to explore the trail and invited a child with a disability to take part. Thirty people participated in this launch, including participants with disabilities, guides, and helpers. After completing the trail, we had a barbecue to be able to share and comment on all the experiences that each of the participants had. It was a wonderful experience because in addition to being

able to take that tour and enjoy nature, we shared the joy that the child lived with his family. Seeing them enjoy, marvel and get excited about what they were achieving, it really was the most beautiful part of the experience."

As Wheel the World continues there are more exciting Impact projects on the horizon.

Being able to donate walkways or equipment so that people with disabilities can enjoy their beaches is something that generates a great impact.

For information on booking a trip with Wheel the World, visit their website at www.wheeltheworld.com





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Nepal is a destination for everyone!

By: Pankaj Pradhananga, *Four Season Travel & Tour*

Celebrations are an integral part of any industry as a manner of appreciating the progress, achievements and impact that they have made. When it comes to the tourism industry, one of the most important celebrations is the World Tourism Day, celebrated on the 27th of September every year. While tour and travel-related companies all around the globe celebrate this day in

their own manner the tourism industry in Nepal continues to mark the 3rd of December as an important date.

Inclusive tourism has been a major goal for Nepal-based DMC, Four Seasons Travel & Tours. Taking its enthusiasm to grow inclusive tourism in Nepal, a unique excursion was organized by the company. It started giving the gift of tourism to persons with

disabilities (PWDs), when it took a group of 35 PWDs and assistants to Godavari Botanical garden in 2015. This trip was named, Tourism as a Healer, as it took the PWDs who were in makeshift camps after a major earthquake.

This continued and in 2019, it organized a heritage hike for Nepali PWDs to the UNESCO heritage site of Patan. Going the extra mile, the trip did



The event organized by Kathmandu based [Four Season Travel & Tours](#) in partnership with Chandragiri Hill Resort, was a continuation of an accessible tourism initiative to promote Nepal as a destination for all. Nepal Tourism Board, eTurbonews, and International Development Institute were partners of the event.

This initiative of inclusive tourism kicked off in a collaborative and coordinated manner in 2014 after the visit of the late Dr. Scott Rains and eight years later it still continues to build the same, much-needed momentum and collaboration. Scott helped Nepal to open up for a new segment of tourism which was totally unknown to many prior to his trip to Nepal. "Nepal, despite infrastructural barriers, is a great destination that no one should miss," said Rains. Nepal will always remain grateful to Rolling Rains for his love and affection to Nepal and Nepali.



not only show the best kept secrets of Patan City, it also put up temporary ramps to take people on wheelchairs to the courtyard which was otherwise not accessible to wheelchair users. Needless to say, the local authority and stakeholders welcomed the PWDs with open arms and warm hearts.

As the activities got affected due to the pandemic, there were not many outdoor activities for two years. Hence it is important to plan

and organize the inclusive excursion again to bring back the excitement and give away a message to the world that Nepal is again open for all.

On December 3rd, 2022, a group of 14 PWDs which was comprised of wheelchair users, visually impaired, hard of hearing individuals, and amputees representing thousands of individuals similar to them, arrived 2500 meters above the sea level at Chandragiri hills via cable cars.

Nepal tourism has taken one big leap forward as it expands its service and its adventures to all regardless of their individual challenges. Inclusive tourism is enthusiastically growing to ensure that the beauty and adventures of Nepal can be experienced by every individual. Despite all the challenges, Destination Nepal is learning to get it right and position Nepal as a destination for all.

Be the change you want to see in the world

by Danielle Webb

Short Perspectives is not to be seen as a negative - or a platform for life's problems, but instead as a toolkit, that we can now tackle those 'problems' together"



Short Perspectives
is the voice of
my own personal
journey- but also
of others who have
walked similar paths
to mine.



My name is Danielle Webb, and I'm pretty much your typical 24-year-old . . . I work, socialise and everything in-between! The only difference being, I do it all at 3 feet 1 inches tall.

I was born with a condition called achondroplasia, a hereditary condition in which the growth of long bones by ossification of cartilage is restricted, resulting in very short limbs and sometimes a face which is small in relation to the skull. So, in other words- I'm short!

Achondroplasia is the most common form of dwarfism and is known as short limb dwarfism. Meaning my torso- is very similar to that of yours! But my limbs are short- this means that at 24 years old, I stand at the same height as your average six-year-

old. Whilst there are many additional health conditions and possible issues caused by having achondroplasia - The key thing is, I'm just short.

I grew up in an average height world - there is no one else in my family with the condition, and this meant as a child, I just did what everyone else did! I didn't really notice the extent of my condition until secondary school and then even more so when I went on to college and university. As my understanding of the world around me grew - I found my frustrations grew with it. But the thing about frustration - it does more harm internally. And having been that teenager who didn't want to be small - and lusted towards anything in slight relation to it - I now want to use those emotions for better good. Which is why throughout the last 12 months, I've been working on a project

called Short Perspectives which through the form of literature, visuals, film and conversation - I'm bringing education about Dwarfism to my local community.

" Having Dwarfism, one thing that I've found the most challenging growing up, is truly being able to communicate or explain what it is like to live with the condition."

Being born with achondroplasia has made me have



to think about things in ways no one around me needed to. It's highlighted things which to others, get no second thought and its created challenges in things most do with such ease. Whilst I do not feel bitter towards my condition, I've created Short Perspectives to louden the voices on the challenges that sit within it, so that others can improve in their awareness and understanding. Short Perspectives is not to be seen as a negative - or a platform for life's problems, but instead as a toolkit, that we can now tackle those "problems" together.

As a society, we tend to fear the unknown, and despite there being an estimated 651,700

people in the world who are affected by a form of the condition, dwarfism is seen to be just that. As a result of this, the world we live in often lacks the education and awareness to accept the differences we bring.

Through Short Perspectives, I wish to enlighten people of the world I live in, that, despite being so different, remains to be very much the same as each of yours. Short Perspectives first started when I was 14- as a school project, taking photos in the canteen to show my teachers that I couldn't reach the fridge! And ever since then I knew one day it would be something I shared with the wider world.

I don't want anyone to look at

Short Perspectives through a lens of pity but instead with positivity, as no challenge is ever overcome without being shared. This conversation aims not to highlight the problems, but instead remind everyone the power of facing those problems together.

Short Perspectives is the voice of my own personal journey and also of others who have walked similar paths to mine. It shares the laughs and tears of Dwarfism in the 21st Century and what life is like ... living in a world built for people twice your size.

You can find out more here:
shortperspectivesuk.blogspot.com



TSA Cares

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in the U.S. has a dedicated helpline that offers additional assistance to travelers with disabilities, medical conditions, and special circumstances during airport security screening. For travel within 72 hours, contact TSA Cares for help with your airport security screening process.

TSA Cares is designed to streamline the screening process and make your travel experience as seamless as possible.

They can also assist with in-flight and wheelchair needs.

The organization's ultimate goal is to ensure the safety and comfort of passengers. For pre-planned flights, fill out the [TSA Cares form](#) which includes your name, contact information, flight details, and any special accommodations or needs you may have. This includes any disabilities, service animals, religious items, or medically necessary items such as liquids over 3.4 ounces or ice packs for medicines that require refrigeration.

Make sure to keep medications in their original prescription bottles and be prepared for any items to be screened, which

may include testing a small amount of medication when feasible. Inform a TSA agent if you do not want liquids opened or x-rayed, but know this may result in further screenings for safety.

If you are uncertain whether your necessary items can be carried in the cabin or if there is an exception for certain liquids, this [document](#) will help.

[Request for TSA Cares Assistance Form](#)

[Check out their FAQ](#)



Florida's Space Coast is now more inclusive

By Fred J. Maahs, Jr.

For many, the concept of beach accessibility doesn't cross our minds because walking on the sand is easily done. But what about those of us who need wheels to move? I know I have often wanted to swim in the ocean or the sea while on vacation. Everyone deserves a chance to enjoy a sunny day on the sand by the salty blue sea. Florida's Space Coast has observed this concept with open arms and made beach accessibility a priority.

This destination goes beyond typical ramps by offering sand riding wheelchairs. Crabby's Beach Wheels is Space Coast's largest rental service with six beach chair varieties including a chair that can float in the ocean. They also offer free delivery service across the county and all ability beach strollers for young children. In addition to Crabby's Beach Wheels, Space Coast offers information about other wheelchair rentals such as the Satellite Beach Fire Department that just got a beach wheelchair in its facility. Safety and fun

really do go hand in hand. Space Coast goes beyond finding ways to provide accessible fun with beach wheelchairs. This place of adventures also has accessible accommodations, restaurants, and an assortment of fun activities. No matter the limitations, the Space Coast provides innovations for a fully inclusive vacation. Make sure to include Florida's Space Coast on your bucket list of accessible destinations!

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2023 Blue Badge Access Awards for Design Led Accessibility include a £20K prize fund



Back in 2016, two people met over afternoon tea and found they had the same ambition - that disabled people should enjoy life and be treated as VIPs or at least equal to the general population, whatever their disability. So, the Blue Badge Access Awards were created by amalgamating two separate award schemes from [Robin Sheppard](#), President of Bespoke Hotels and [Fiona Jarvis](#), CEO of Blue Badge Style. Both believe that the carrot of recognition rather than the stick of regulation will encourage greater inclusion.

The Blue Badge Access Awards celebrate exceptional venues, people and organisations that have thoughtful, design-led approaches to accessibility. They reward those who have gone above and beyond in their mission to achieve access for all. Established in the U.K., it is a global initiative rewarding innovative, stylish, and inclusive design.

The case for inclusion is well documented. It is estimated that in the U.K. the disposable income for disabled people is £274Bn and globally \$13TR. In the U.K. alone, pubs and restaurants lose £163m per

month by not including disabled people and their friends and family. Globally, disability touches 73% of consumers. U.K. tourism by disabled people is £15Bn with an average stay a third longer and a loyalty factor of 75%. Despite this, companies still rely on meeting regulations rather than creating exceptional experiences and customer delight. The awards aim to change this!

Our mission is to advocate inclusivity in the hospitality sector and beyond by making experiences more joyful for both disabled and



The BBAA Founders left to Right – (Josh Llewellyn Jones Interviewer) Robin Sheppard, Chairman Bespoke Hotels, Neil Heslop, CEO Leonard Cheshire, and Fiona Jarvis of Blue Badge Style



Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson and Baroness Celia Thomas, Supporters of the Awards

non-disabled guests and by encouraging designs that create places of beauty and practicality for everyone to enjoy. We want disabled guests to be treated as VIPs and not have to endure the indignities of entering an establishment via the garbage area or using a disabled toilet down the street from the restaurant.

Nominations are open for 2023/24 and are welcome from members of the public for accessible places they have encountered, from design professionals and from venue managers and owners who have achieved high

accessibility standards and introduced innovations.

Categories include Best Hotel, Best Bar, Above & Beyond, Best Access in a Historic Building, etc. The full list is on the website including the £20k prize competition categories of Best Guest Innovation and Best Conceptual Design.

It should be remembered that nowhere is 100% accessible to everyone so you do not need to be perfect.

Send your nomination to info@bluebadgeaccessawards.com

Because we're not all sheep.





Everything you wanted to know about autism in 500 words *(or less)*

By Bart Vulliamy

Unless you're autistic, it may be hard for people to grasp that there's a lot of misinformation and outdated science when it comes to what Autism actually is. Even for me, an Autistic person, growing up without any Autistic role models was very difficult. Also, growing up in the 1990's and early 2000's when the majority of society believed that autism was caused by vaccines and diets, was damaging to autistic people's psyche, and probably caused not just me, but other autistics to hide their diagnosis.

What is autism? Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by a range of traits, social differences, and diverse sensory profiles. It is genetic, meaning you're born with it.

Neurodevelopmental disorders are conditions that affect how your brain functions. Autism has always existed and is not a new trend. It has only recently, in the 1980's version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, become a diagnosable disorder. While it was in 1980 that Autism became a diagnosable disorder, it had already had a long and turbulent history. Autism was first used in 1908 to describe patients who were especially withdrawn and self-absorbed.

What is the autism spectrum? The autism spectrum isn't a linear line between more autistic and less autistic; It's more like a colour wheel of traits. This spectrum of traits allows many ways to express what autism is for each person. My autism is vastly

different than another person's autism. Some autistic people jump with joy and flap their hands, while I have a head tic when I'm uncomfortable or overstimulated.

What is masking? Masking is a social survival strategy that varies from person to person, but ultimately, it is the act of trying to behave in a socially desirable way. Masking can look like forcing eye contact and touch, rehearsing scripts, and pushing through sensory discomfort. This is all done to blend in and conform to societal norms.

Autism is a natural part of human life, and it's time we stopped excluding people because of labels and stigma. Learning about autism has helped me to learn more about myself, and why and where I



struggle because of it. It has not only taught me struggle though, it has also taught me strength and sensitivity and a different perspective of the world.

There is no cure for autism, no medication, and no way of changing one's neurotype. Accommodations can be made to help an autistic person, or the autistic person can learn or be trained to mask or camouflage their autistic traits that society finds bothersome. There is no simple way to describe what autism is because it would be like me writing about the entirety of human nature in under 500 words. Just like no Allistic person is like another Allistic person, no autistic person is going to be like another autistic person. The one thing I want people to take from this

article is that you should listen to autistic people and respect the individual.

Visit Bart's website
www.bartvulliamy.com



Bart Vulliamy is a self-taught photographic artist from East Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He is autistic and has a lifelong struggle with anxiety disorders.



Snippets from the

Wander & Ivy is official wine of 2023 Genesis Invitational

This disability and female-owned disruptor wine brand has cornered the market on single-serve bottles of global award-winning organic vineyards. It will be the exclusive wine served at the premier golf event, hosted at L.A.'s Riviera Country Club this February 16th – 19th. Wander & Ivy also enjoyed this prestige spot at the 2022 PGA Championship and 2021 Senior PGA Championship.

[Read the full press release](#)

Chartered Accountants of India Award winner pledges to support others

Shilpa Mehta, winner of India's Chartered Accountants Award, will support 100 people with disabilities to pursue their own chartered accountancy degrees. The polio survivor was recognised for her diligent, exceptional professional achievements. Mehta is a manager, inspirational speaker. She also co-founded the dJED Foundation, an NGO focussing on ecology, education and entrepreneurship.. [Read the full article.](#)

Welsh comedians use their humour to discuss disability

Jake Sawyers and Emily Nicole Roberts got tired of societal attitudes towards disabilities, so they decided to use their talents to create a new comedy show. In the BBC pilot, the comics explore the ways in which well-meaning able-bodied people treat those with disabilities. Expect the script to be flipped. [Read the full article.](#)

Students in wheelchairs experience walking, courtesy of technology

BBC One Wales reports on local students in wheelchairs who were able to access equipment which allowed them to experience the sensation of walking. While students had fun, the staff got emotional. [Read more.](#)

The Easterseals Disability Film Challenge keeps growing

Disabled comedian, actor and producer, Nic Novicki, started the Disability Film Challenge in 2013. He'd seen a gap, a big under-representation of disabled talent in film. In 2017, in partnership with Easterseals Southern California, the event grew. The event continues to help aspiring filmmakers and actors showcase their craft and both in front of and behind the camera, and gain access to big-name sponsors, and opportunities.

[Read the full article](#)

Japanese study shows how older adults stay well

Researchers from the University of Tsukuba have found that older adults who walk and cycle seem to prevent early functional disability and improve mortality. Declining physical health and cognition were found to improve when the adults expanded the distances they were willing to walk or bike. .

[Read the full article.](#)

Disabled Rabbi becomes an inspiration

Uri Yitzchak Shachor, 25, has cerebral palsy, but that didn't stop him from becoming a rabbi. He talks to the press about his milestone, and commitment to the disabled in Israel, who now have a rabbi who understands their struggles..

[Read the full article.](#)

Virtual reality improves empathy for disability support workers

At Melbourne's La Trobe University, a recent study used virtual reality technology to allow disability support workers to step into the daily life of their client. The VR program, IMercyVE, can be shared remotely and would make a great training tool, to improve understanding, communication and service.

[Read the full article.](#)

American professor and author challenges how we notice disability

English professor Stephanie Kerschbaum began her book, Signs of Disability, when she saw a local road sign, Deaf Person in Area. She wondered how a deaf person would hear an oncoming car, and that led to more questions, which she seeks to answer. [Read the full article.](#)

An innovative autism test diagnoses the condition using just one hair strand.

In a recent interview with NBC, the co-founder of LinusBio, Manish Arora, expressed excitement stating that they can identify the distinct rhythm of autism using only 1 centimeter of hair. [Read the full article.](#)





“Tell me I can’t, so I can show you that I can”

Armani Williams, NASCAR driver with autism

Armani Williams, from Grosse Pointe, Michigan, is a twenty-two old American professional race car driver in the NASCAR CRAFTSMAN Truck Series. He is also pursuing a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from Oakland University in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

Armani is easily recognized at the track with his famous high point faux hawk haircut. As well, he is neurodiverse and the first professional driver in NASCAR known to be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Given the challenges associated with autism, Williams’ rise to NASCAR’s top three national series is remarkable and considered extraordinary.

Williams enjoys a racing platform that gives him a unique profile and position to spread awareness and drive inclusion opportunities for families and children impacted

by neurodiversity and other neurological development delays. He has been a brand ambassador for several companies and organizations that promote diversity and inclusion, as well as supporting Autism. As a goal, Williams seeks to be a champion on the track, as well as partnering with corporations that have initiated Autism hiring and job programs for individuals on the spectrum.

Armani grew up racing short tracks in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. His professional career began as a 16-year-old participating in NASCAR’s Driver 4 Diversity Combine program. From there, he would go north and race in the professional NASCAR Pinty’s Series in Canada for Canada’s Best Race Team (CBRT). After successfully demonstrating that he could compete in Canada, Williams career moved back to the United States competing in NASCAR’s

regional series ARCA East and West, and ultimately for the premier ARCA Menards Series.

His success at the national ARCA Menards Series level opened the door for him to step into NASCAR’s national top-three series. Williams has seen both challenge and success on the track, requiring him to tap into an elevated level of mental strength. He is often quoted as saying, “Tell me I can’t, so that I can show you that I can.”

Armani Williams’ future in the sport is bright. He currently competes for Mooresville, N.C.-based Young’s Motorsports in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series.

His best NASCAR Truck Series national series finish came in 2021 for Reaume Brothers Racing where Williams finished 21st at World Wide Technology Raceway at Gateway, nestled outside of St. Louis, Missouri.



With Armani Williams

Q: What do you like best about racing?

A: What I like best about racing is the competitive nature of the sport. I love the fact that I can go fast in something, just feeling that sensation of speed and wanting to win at all costs. Then just being a part of the racing community when I get to talk with drivers, crew, team owners and business people that could be for potential sponsorship. It's a great sport that I'm just happy to be involved in.

Q: What has been your greatest challenges to date as a race car driver with autism?

A: Honestly, I don't see many challenges of being a race car driver that has dealt directly with autism. I believe my greatest challenges are also my greatest strength. Many with autism have a laser-like focus in whatever they are doing and that's what I use with being a

race car driver. The key is to not let anything distract you from reaching your goal in a particular race and so I don't see any greater challenge, it's more of a greater strength.

Q: Why did you decide to publicly disclose your autism diagnosis to the NASCAR community and the rest of the world?

A: I felt that at some point, I needed to open myself up to the world and not being afraid to tell people who I really am. It is important that when I try to build relationships, people understand me more than I understand them. To share my story and how my life has been with autism, it could help reach those who can relate and those who share that same connection and experience.

It could also help to bring out support along the way and so I felt that it was important that I shared my story publicly to see how the world reacted.

Q: What was the public's reaction when you shared that information?

A: Overly positive. I get messages on social media from individuals and families who tell me they themselves, a family member or a friend with autism are inspired by me based on what I have been able to overcome and my accomplishments which have helped them seek a way forward. It makes you feel good knowing that you're doing something that can change the world in so many ways!

Q: Who has been your support system throughout your autism journey and how has their support affected your life?

A: My family has been the biggest support system that I could ever have. When I was a kid and told my dad that I wanted to be a race car



Photo: Getty Images

driver, he could have said no, do something else, but he understood that was my dream, my destiny to be a race car driver. He was onboard as well as the rest of my family and without them I don't know if I would be where I am at today. Being diagnosed with autism, my parents helped me a lot throughout my life. I was a shy kid who never really talked a lot, never really wanted to socialize with anyone. So, my parents helped teach me the basics of communication and social interaction. They also helped me learn how to meet and greet someone, what topics

to talk about, knowing more about a person, even knowing how to talk to girls every which way. They taught me all of that and it has helped me get through life where I can show my personality a lot more than before.

Q: How does it feel being a mentor and knowing you are an inspiration to people with autism?

A: It feels amazing. It feels great that I can make an impact that has less to do with racing but more about being a

champion in people's lives. And so, anything that I could do to give them any sort of positivity, advice, etc. I will absolutely help in any way I can and I enjoy doing that.

Q: What's next for you?

A: Now that I am racing the NASCAR CRAFTSMAN Truck Series, I want to win races and win a championship in the series and see where that takes me from there. Whether it's at the NASCAR Xfinity Series level or the very top which is the NASCAR Cup Series. That's what I want to accomplish.



Photo: Getty Images

Q: How do you want to be remembered?

A: I want to be remembered as a driver with a unique story. Who had a dream of not only being an accomplished race car driver but a champion race car driver. A driver who understood who he was and what community he could relate to. To help give back in the most positive, influential, champion way possible to his community.

Q: What is one word that best describes you?

A: Courageous.

“To those who have been touched by autism, if you have a dream of something you want to do in life and be successful at it, go for it. Believe in yourself, stay encouraged, and work hard to accomplish your dream then anything is possible in this world. So, stay positive no matter what, work hard for your dream, and that dream will happen.”

~Armani Williams



TravelAbility partners with nation's # 1 Hospitality Management College to change the way travelers with a disability will be treated in the future

TravelAbility is delighted to announce a partnership with the Rosen College of Hospitality Management, which is part of the University of Central Florida, to develop "TravelAbility: Filling the Accessibility Gap in Hospitality." This self-paced learning module will be part of the college's experiential education program that is a requirement of graduation for all 3000 students.

"Perhaps more than any of the other projects we developed over the past four years," said Jake Steinman, Founder and CEO of TravelAbility, "This collaboration has the potential to make the most impact as it will infuse a new generation of hospitality supervisors and general managers with the awareness and empathy necessary to not only change the way people with disabilities are perceived, but also how they are treated." "All 3,000 plus students at the

Rosen College of Hospitality Management are introduced to the wider societal challenges that impact our industry through their courses, our incredible Internship program, and the opportunities to engage through their P.R.E.P. activities," commented Alan Fyall, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Rosen College of Hospitality. "Our partnership with TravelAbility represents an important milestone as the travel industry awakens to the significance of travelers with a disability and the steps required to both welcome and accommodate them in a seamless manner." TravelAbility will be contributing its expertise as well as content from "The Accessibility Playbook," a copyrighted compendium of business cases, tips, products, innovations, and 99 videos from prior conferences and events. The Rosen College of Hospitality Management was rated #1 academic level

tourism program in the U.S. and #2 in the world.

What is the Accessibility Gap?

Every disability has a spectrum. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) was written for the median. That means that even if hotels, attractions, and restaurants are fully compliant, they still work for only 50% of the people. The Accessibility Gap can be addressed by gathering and showcasing information online, providing training about accessibility needs and providing adaptive technology and innovations that are available.

The course will begin with the spring semester and allow the next generation of travel industry executives, meeting planners and event managers to learn how to be welcoming to all guests.



Join them for 2.5 days of panel discussions, workshops and presentations featuring industry thought leaders, and travel influencers.

[**www.travelability.net**](http://www.travelability.net)



A P N 2 0 2 3

Building Together

Building Together today for an inclusive tomorrow

As an increasing number of countries begin their accessibility and inclusion journeys, there is a critical need for knowledge about what meaningful accessibility is.

The Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) is excited to fill this gap through its Accessibility Professional Network (APN) Conference on March 1 & 2, 2023, with in-person and virtual attendance options. It is the premier

event for those interested in improving accessibility in their organizations, cities, and countries and includes inspiring plenaries and immersive technical and sector sessions.

The theme of #APN2023 is *Building Together*, which embodies the conference's goal of ensuring tomorrow is inclusive of disability by working together today to create inclusive communities. Accessibility can no longer

be ignored or considered an afterthought. An estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide experience disability. Disability inclusion includes removing barriers to participation, a fundamental human right.

Some of the fantastic industry leaders who will be sharing their knowledge during this two-day conference include Michael Gottheil, the Federal Accessibility Minister for the Canadian Human

Rights Commission, Stephanie Cadieux, Chief Accessibility Officer for the Government of Canada, and Darryl Condon, Managing Partner HCMA Architecture + Design – to name a few.

#APN2023: Building Together brings the accessibility community together. We will network. We will learn from national and international leaders. We will engage in thoughtful discussions about creating meaningful and barrier-free experiences for people of all ages and abilities. This conference will acknowledge the hard work done to remove the barriers in the built environment and recognize that there's much more work to be done.

#APN2023: Building Together invites everyone interested in accessibility and inclusion. Past conference attendees have included people from a wide variety of backgrounds, including architects, designers, planners, municipal staff, individuals working in human resources, Diversity, Equality, and Inclusivity (DE&I) specialists, occupational therapists and students.

"The APN conference sparked something in me, and I definitely will advocate for accessibility and spread awareness moving forward,"

said an APN 2021 conference attendee.

The Accessibility Professional Network is a reflection of the conference in that they're both one-of-a-kind entities. The network is a unique professional association created by RHF to connect members of the accessibility community with resources, training, networking, and job opportunities. Those interested in attending *#APN2023: Building Together* have the option of also joining the APN to continue developing connections and knowledge about the accessibility industry.

The in-person conference is held in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia, at the River Rock Resort. Those who wish to participate from the comforts of home without the barrier of flights, accommodations, and other related experiences, can do so through APN2023's online platform.

Learn more about this exciting conference and register today at www.RickHansen.com/APN2023.



Costa Rica



Costa Rica

Conquer travel anxiety with a Wheel the World group tour!

Traveling alone can be empowering yet intimidating. As a traveler with accessibility needs, many questions and concerns can arise. Will there be difficult terrain to navigate once arriving at the destination? Is the destination wheelchair friendly? Will the hotel meet accessibility needs? Are there accessible activities to choose from?

There are many questions to be considered as these potential challenges can easily dismantle the experience. Although people with disabilities make up 15% of the world's population, most hotels are not designed with accessibility in mind.

If you have the desire to travel, don't get discouraged! Many disabled travelers choose to travel with a caregiver or solo. However, traveling with a group is a great way to explore

without limits, within the comfort of a group.

[Wheel the World](https://wheeltheworld.com) is an online travel marketplace to find and book accessible places to stay, things to do, and multi-day trips. Dedicated to booking and coordinating travel for people with disabilities, the company is co-founded by Alvaro Silberstein, a C5 quadriplegic and the first wheelchair user to complete the W Patagonia Trek.

Travelers can choose from over 1,000 places to stay and 100 multi-day trips. However, the company's wide variety of group tours are a highlight for many travelers. Group tours host 8-10 people and include transportation, activities, accommodations, and most meals at an affordable price.

These tours allow travelers to enjoy a worry-free experience

while enjoying the fellowship and camaraderie of others. Skilled tour operators ensure traveler accessibility needs are met and assist with transfers, luggage, and other needs of the group.

If you're reluctant about travel, group tours are an excellent way to explore with accessibility in mind every step of the way! Forge lifelong friendships, while enjoying a trip that feels like a cruise on land.

With 2023 tour options including South Africa, Costa Rica, Morocco and more, there are many group tours to choose from. Visit wheeltheworld.com to secure your space on your next group tour. Companions and caregivers are welcome to attend.



South Africa



South Africa



Morocco



Portugal



Costa Rica



Morocco

The quest for autism's causes, and what it reveals about all of us

By Emily Willingham

The more researchers look, the more multifaceted the risk factors appear — and the more we learn about how the brain works and develops

As alarm grew over autism prevalence at the turn of this century, there was much public talk of a growing “epidemic.” That language has since softened, and it is now clear that many autistic people were there all along, their condition unrecognized until relatively recently.

But what is the cause? The emerging narrative today is that there is no single cause — rather, multiple factors, roughly sorted into the categories of genetics and environment, work together in complex ways. Because of this complexity and the hundreds of gene variants that have been implicated, developing human brains may follow many possible paths to arrive at a place on the autism spectrum.

And this may help explain

something true about autism: It varies greatly from one person to the next.

As clinicians view it, autism involves communication deficits and formulaic, repetitive behaviors that present obstacles to establishing conventional relationships. The soft borders of that definition — where does communication difficulty cross over into communication deficit? — suggest blurred margins between people who are diagnosed with autism and those who approach, but never quite cross, the line into diagnostic territory.

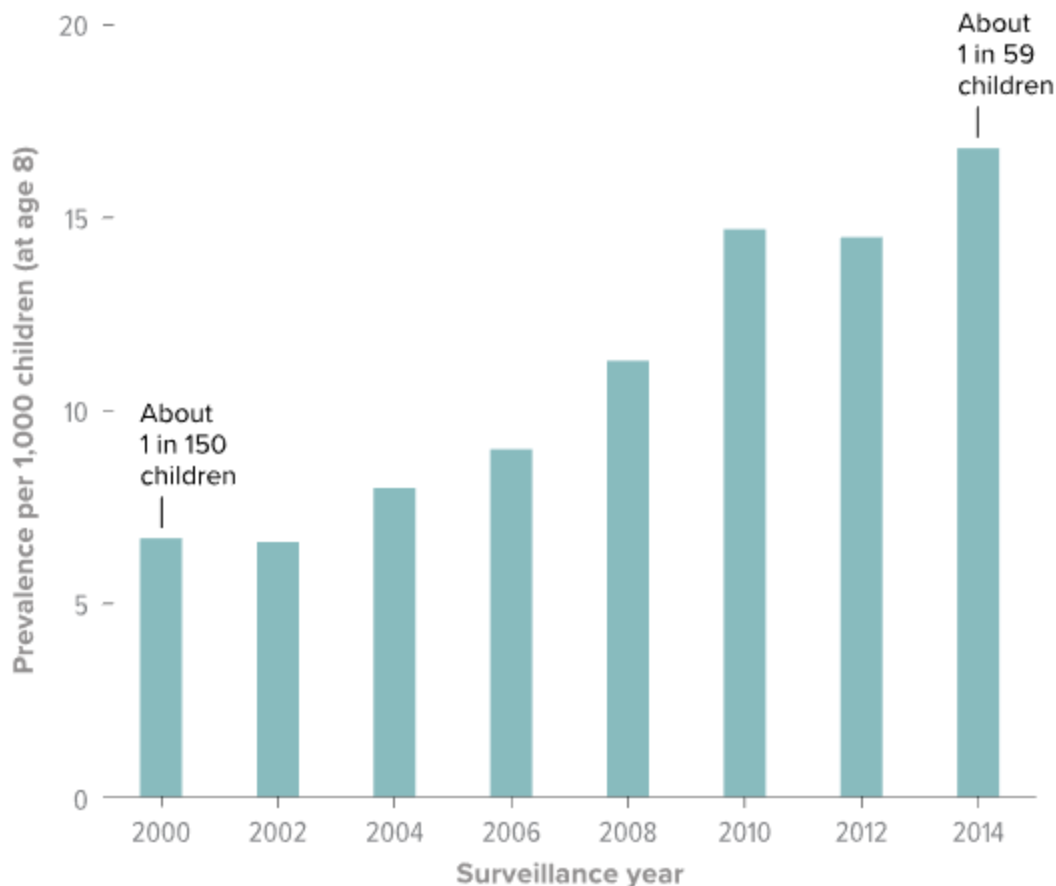
Those who do have diagnoses display behaviors on a continuum of intensity. Their use of spoken language ranges from not speaking at all to being hypervocal. They can have a unique interest in the finer details of window

blinds or an intense but more socially tolerated fascination with dinosaurs. As with many human behaviors, each feature exists on a spectrum, and these spectra blend in a person to create what clinicians call autism.

By pinpointing risk-associated genes and uncovering their roles, studying the roots of autism also is providing new insights into the development of all human brains, autistic or not. Here is a taste of what we now know, and what we don't, about autism's causes — and what that search is teaching us about everybody's neurology.

They know it when they see it. Despite the many and varied threads that may interweave to cause autism, the condition is largely identifiable. What clinicians are really saying when they diagnose autism, says James McPartland, a

A rise in autism diagnoses



SOURCE: CDC

KNOWABLE MAGAZINE

US rates of autism diagnoses have increased over the years, as shown in this graph. Numbers are averages of prevalence among 8-year-old children from several reporting sites of the CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network. Not all sites reported in each year shown, and the ranges can be broad (for example, in 2000 the average was 6.7 per 1,000 children, but the range from different reporting sites was 4.5 to 9.9). At least part of the increase is due to heightened awareness and shifting diagnostic criteria.

clinical psychologist at the Yale Child Study Center, is that they see a recognizable, if broadly defined, constellation of behaviors. "So really, there is something true about autism, and everyone who meets the diagnosis of autism shows these kinds of behaviors."

At the same time, the subtle differences in how each autistic person manifests the telltale features make it highly

individual, says Pauline Chaste, a child psychiatrist at Inserm U 894, the Centre de Psychiatrie et Neurosciences, in Paris. "We describe a specific behavior that exists — that kind of social impairment and rigidity. You can have more or less of it, but it definitely exists."

The more or less of autism could trace, in part, to the types of gene variants that contribute to it in a given person. Some of

these variants have a big effect by themselves, while others make tiny contributions, and any autistic person could have their own unique mix of both. One thing seems clear: Though there may be something true about autism, as McPartland puts it, the existence of "one true autism gene" or even one gene for each autism feature is unlikely.

Instead, there will be patterns

of gene combinations and the results they produce, says epidemiologist Elise Robinson of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and an associate member of the Broad Institute. People who have both autism and intellectual disability, for example, tend to have more big-effect gene mutations than people with autism alone.

Facial communication

Looking for these contributing gene variants isn't simply an exercise in scientific curiosity or in finding potential targets for drug treatments. Because most of these genes direct how human brains develop and nerve cells communicate, learning about how they lead to autism can also reveal a lot about how everyone's brain works.

For example, a key autism trait is atypical social behaviors, such as, sometimes, not focusing on "social" facial features like the eyes. Although the tendency to look into another person's eyes seems like something we might learn simply from being around other people, autism research has revealed that genes underlie the instinct.

In a [2017 study](#), the authors first showed that identical twins are similar in how they look at a

video with social content, such as faces. When viewing the same video, the identical twin pairs shifted their eyes with the same timing and focused on the same things far more than did two non-identical siblings or unrelated children. The fact that almost all twin pairs shared this tendency suggests solid genetic underpinnings for the behavior.

Having established a strong genetic contribution to this trait, the investigators, from Emory University and the Marcus Autism Center in Georgia and Washington University in St. Louis, then showed that the tendency to look at the eye and mouth areas of a human face is decreased in autistic children. They concluded that while not all of the inclination to look at certain parts of a face is genetic, much of it is.

Twin studies like this are powerful tools for evaluating how much genes dictate a feature, and such investigations reveal that the genetic contribution to autism is substantial. Autism also tends to cluster in non-twin family members: [One in five infants who has an older sibling with autism also develops it.](#)

Genetic determinants

Overall, genetics accounts

for about 70 to 80 percent of factors contributing to autism, says neurologist Daniel Geschwind, director of UCLA's autism research and treatment center. By comparison, a condition like depression has an underlying genetic contribution of about 50 percent, he says. Alessandro Gozzi, neuroscientist and group leader at the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia, weights the power of genes even more, placing the shared diagnosis rate between twins as high as 95 percent, depending on how strict the diagnostic boundaries are. But regardless of the precise value, he says that the "wide consensus" among autism researchers is that genetics is a powerful determinant of autism.

Going the next step — finding the specific genes involved — is a monumental task. It's also one that yields dividends for understanding brain function more broadly.

The candidate gene variants are today very numerous, but a few stand out for their potential to exert a large effect. Chaste cites [fragile X syndrome](#) and [Rett syndrome](#) as examples — both are genetic conditions (termed syndromes because they are defined by a cluster of traits) that are tied to variants of a single gene or chromosome

region and are closely associated with autism.

The gene linked to fragile X syndrome lies on the X chromosome. Its name, FMR₁, is easily forgettable, but the effects of its variants are not. Studies on the causes of fragile X reveal that the protein this gene encodes, FMRP, acts as a cellular shuttle for RNA molecules that are crucial for nerve-cell communication and plasticity of connections in the brain. In people with fragile X, cells don't produce the protein, or make very little of it. The FMR₁ variants underlying fragile X are the most common known genetic cause of intellectual disability and are implicated in 1 to 6 percent of autism cases.

Like FMR₁, the genetic changes involved in Rett syndrome also affect brain development. A gene called methyl CpG binding protein 2, or MECP₂, oversees the activity of many brain-related genes, turning them off or on. Because of this pivotal role for MECP₂, mutations that affect its function can lead to broad effects. Some of the resulting features look so much like autism that Rett syndrome was categorized as an autism spectrum disorder until 2013.

Other genetic syndromes also include autism as a feature.



Children with fragile X syndrome carry X chromosomes with an abnormality at the tip of one of the chromosome arms, as shown in this illustration (normal X on the left, abnormal X on the right). This affects a gene called FMR1, which carries instructions for a protein important for brain activity, such that little or none of the protein is made. Fragile X is associated with a range of developmental disabilities, often including autism.

CREDIT: MONICA SCHROEDER / SCIENCE SOURCE

Some are caused by variants in a gene called SHANK₃, which, like most genes implicated in autism, is involved in brain development and function. The protein that it encodes helps to coax nerve extensions to form and take shape so that a nerve cell can communicate with others. The SHANK3 protein also provides a physical scaffold for those cells to link up. In populations of people with mutations that prevent SHANK3 protein production or who are missing the segment of chromosome 22 that contains the gene, most will have autism or Phelan-McDermid syndrome, which often includes autism.

Yet another syndrome arises from the loss or duplication of a chunk of chromosome 16. Researchers linked this chromosomal change to autism

in studies comparing the DNA of people with and without the condition, singling out sequence alterations found only in autistic participants.

Despite their clear ties to autism, these syndromes are rare. "Collectively, they are found in about 5 percent of the total population of patients with autism," Gozzi says. That leaves a great deal to explain.

Inheritance on a spectrum

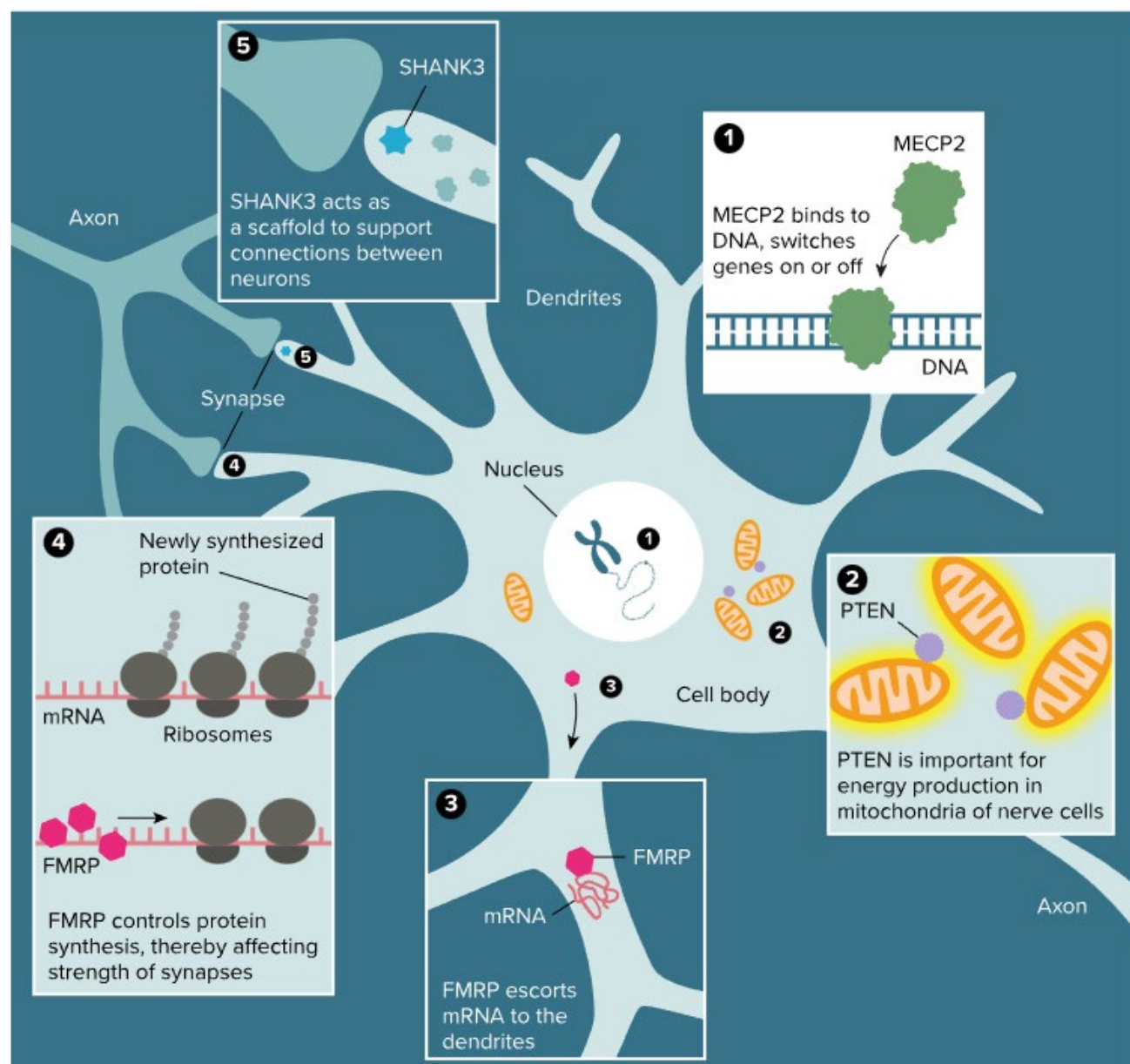
So where do the other autistic people come from, genetically speaking? Robinson says that their genetics don't neatly fall into two types of buckets, of either a few genes with big effects or many genes with small effects. "It's been well established at this point that it's not either-or," she says. In fact, says Gozzi, varying

combinations of big-effect mutations and lots of different, smaller-effect ones could explain the wide spectrum of differences observed among autistic people. The evidence supports such a range, he says: everything from a few heavy-

hitting variations in some people, to an additive dose from many variants in others, and with overlap between the two patterns in still others. Geschwind adds yet another layer of complexity: the role of the cellular environment

that all the other gene variants in a person create, known as the background effect. For example, someone could have a mutation conferring high risk that is either enhanced or diminished by the background input from other genes not

Gene variants linked to autism affect proteins with brain roles



SOURCE: KNOWABLE REPORTING

KNOWABLE MAGAZINE

Scientists have identified many genetic variants that are linked to a raised risk of autism. Often, these variants affect the function of genes involved in the development and activity of brain cells. Here are four such genes, each of which carries instructions for a protein (called MECP2, PTEN, FMRP and SHANK3) that has an important function in neurons. Studies like this, of autism's genetic causes, are teaching scientists more about brain biology.

directly related to autism, to create a gradation of autism intensity.

Environmental influences

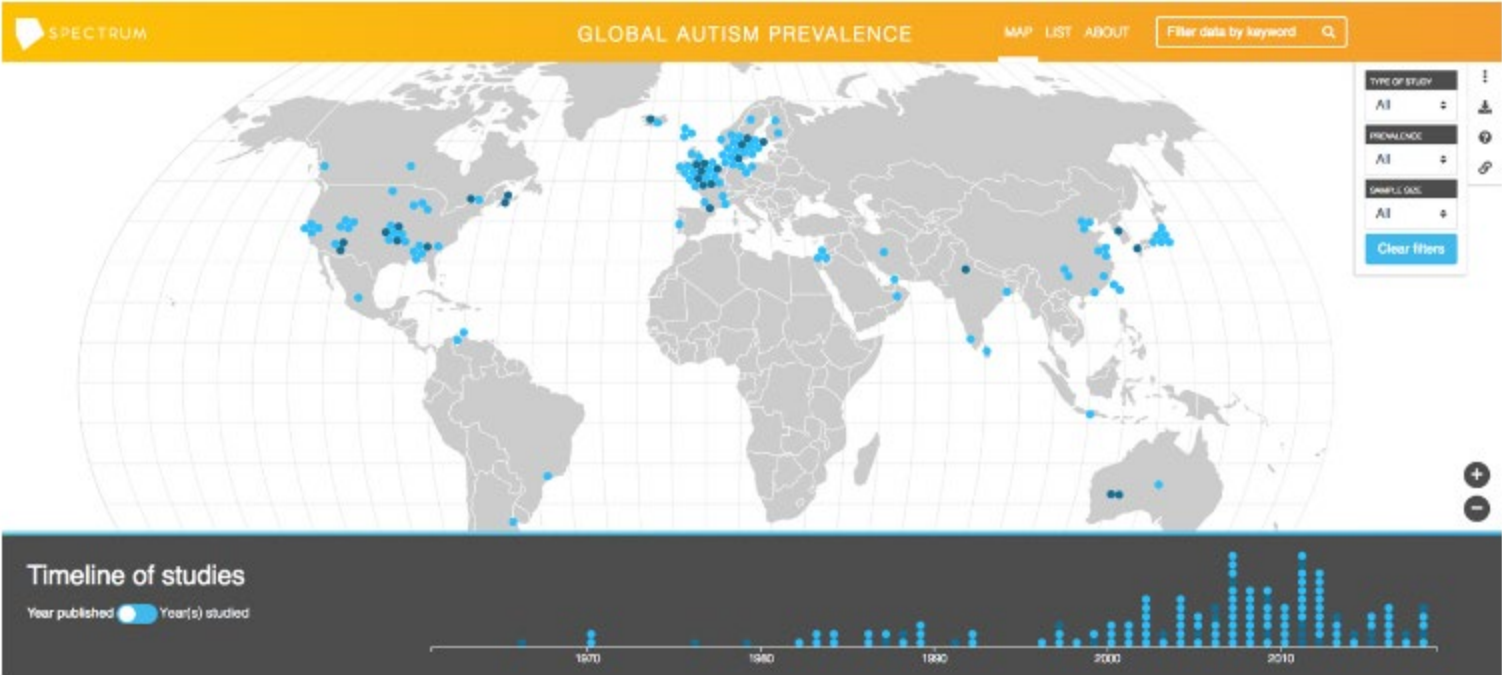
When researchers speak of environmental inputs to traits, diseases and disorders, they are referring to everything from pollutants in the air to subtle perturbations inside cells to cues from other cells. Finding such causative candidates for autism generally involves epidemiological studies that look for correlations between autism rates in a population and an environmental factor of interest.

These connections aren't easy to locate. In the case of genes, if a study involves enough

people, even rare genetic differences that make small contributions to autism can often be plucked from the pile. Not so for environmental influences if their effects are significant but small, says Robinson. Within those epidemiological studies, you have to be able to detect that slight signal and assess its power against the larger, background noise of lots of other variations in the cell, body or outside environment that you might not even be aware of and might not be relevant. "We don't live in a simple, single-exposure world," says Kristen Lyall, an epidemiologist at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

And even when a connection is made, its basis is still just math. That is certainly the first step in evaluating a link between an environmental factor and a condition such as autism: As one thing goes up, does the other follow? But two things that track together don't necessarily share a biological association. (One of the silliest examples to illustrate how misleading correlation can be is how tightly the number of people killed by venomous spiders each year tracks with the number of letters in the winning word of the same year's Scripps National Spelling Bee.)

In the case of genetic studies, gene changes with tiny effects



View this [interactive map](#) created by the team at [Spectrum News](#). The map displays autism prevalence studies conducted at different times and places around the world. Each dot refers to a study. Clicking on the dots reveals granular information such as the country, sample size, years studied, autism prevalence, age of children, diagnostic criteria and sex ratio.

CREDIT: [SPECTRUMNEWS.ORG](#)

can still be considered plausible if their usual role relates to brain function in some way. Environmental factors aren't as well catalogued, measured and tracked. But the better epidemiological studies do look for correlations with credible and pre-identified factors of interest (so, not Scripps Spelling Bee words).

For feasibility's sake, work on environmental factors in autism has tended to focus on inputs that have broad effects on brain development. Robinson points to [extreme preterm birth](#), which is related to many kinds of neurodevelopmental disorders — autism among them.

Eventually, studies can add up to connect dots and arrive at a plausible story of cause and effect. For example, along with preterm birth, [air pollution](#) also has been linked to autism risk. Another recent study found that when oil and power plants close down, [preterm births in the region drop](#). It's therefore a reasonable hypothesis that very preterm birth operates as an intermediate between air pollution exposure and autism.

Lyall believes that prenatal exposures to environmental pollutants that can behave like hormones are particularly strong candidates for involvement in autism risk.

These chemicals, collectively known as endocrine-disrupting compounds, [include pesticides and even heavy metals](#), and they are pretty much everywhere — in air, land, water, food and us.

Some research suggests, for example, that [exposure to the endocrine disruptor mercury in air pollution raises autism odds](#). The studies are few and the data haven't overwhelmingly showed increases in risk, Lyall acknowledges, "but I think that it's an interesting and important area for future research given the lack of regulation around these chemicals, their ubiquity in the environment and their known adverse effects on broader neurodevelopment."

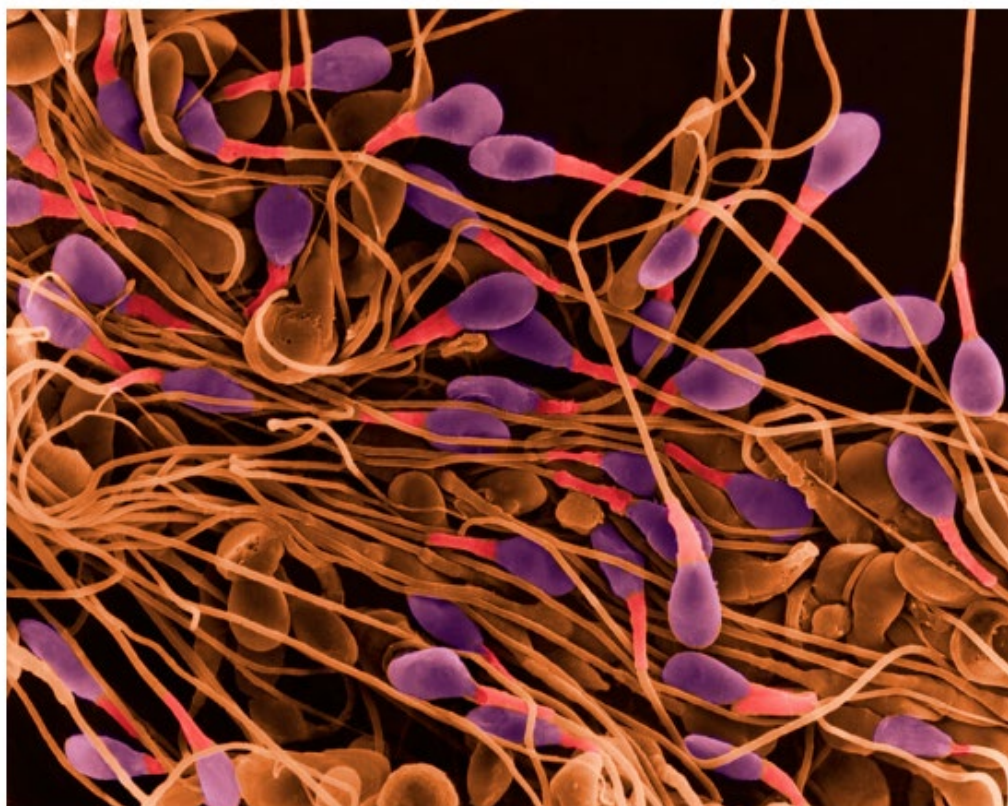
Researchers have also homed in on plausible biological bases for a couple of other potential environmental effects. Gozzi points to animal studies, [mostly in mice](#), that bolster human work linking autism in a child with [prenatal exposure to a mother's ramped-up immune responses](#) as a result of infections. Again, Gozzi stresses that the findings are far from definitive, and most studies involving humans have focused on infections [severe enough to require hospitalization](#).

Another unearthed link is to [paternal age at conception](#):

Studies find that autism risk increases with the age of the father, usually starting in the thirties or forties, although the age range and magnitude of the increase vary among different studies. The cells that give rise to sperm tend to [accumulate new mutations](#) over the years, so the sperm contain sequence changes that pass to offspring but aren't present in the father's own body cells. Some of these changes involve regions or genes already implicated in autism risk. Sperm also show [changes in the chemical tagging of DNA that controls the activity of genes](#).

Establishing environmental cause unequivocally is almost impossible, because of ethical constraints. It's one thing to examine blood or tissue samples for genetic variants that track with autism diagnoses. It's another thing entirely to manipulate factors to see if they induce autism or not. No one's going to deliberately infect a pregnant woman or have a group of men specifically delay fatherhood just to test how these factors influence autism odds.

Researchers instead are stuck finding correlations between these factors and then looking at available measures, such as changes in gene activity, accrual of mutations over the



One of the more plausible environmental links to autism is age of the father. Over a man's lifetime, genetic changes accrue in the cells that give rise to sperm, shown here in a scanning electron microscopy image. Among them are alterations in genes that can raise the risk of autism.

CREDIT: DENNIS KUNKEL MICROSCOPY / SCIENCE SOURCE

lifespan and studies of autism-like behavior in animal models. And as they look at these associations, they often make discoveries that are relevant beyond autism — ones that have now been extended to studies of [schizophrenia](#), [aging](#) and even [human evolution](#). The link between autism and having an older father, for example, has led to studies examining how changes in sperm over time affect brain development in later generations.

While most environmental candidates remain just that — candidates — Lyall says

emphatically that one factor is out of the running: [vaccines](#). “That’s pretty conclusively been shown to have no association with autism,” she says, noting the numerous large epidemiological studies that have reached that conclusion.

The settled vaccine question is a small point of clarity in an otherwise blurred landscape of autism cause-and-effect research. Every new finding seems to open up yet more pathways, some leading toward autism, and some toward broader revelations about the brain and how hormones, the immune system, the air

we breathe and more add up to make their mark on neural development. The network of genetic and environmental factors that converge and diverge to produce autism may reflect not only the multiplicity of ways of being autistic — but also, more broadly, of being human.

Emily Willingham’s work has appeared in *Forbes*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Washington Post*, and *Undark*, among others. She is the author of *The Informed Parent: A Science-Based Guide to Your Child’s First Four Years* (2016), co-written with Tara Haelle.

Read the original article [here](#).



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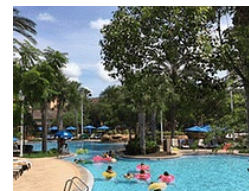
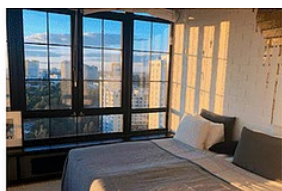
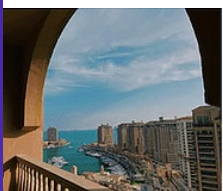
And, our global team of experts provide on-site and virtual audits and assessments to determine the level of compliance of accessibility for businesses, parks, cities, and municipalities, and travel destinations around the world.

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](http://www.readmelange.com) at www.readmelange.com, for ideas and inspiration on the places you can go!

Through our partnership with [Travel for All](http://www.readmelange.com), 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 Accessibility for All readers in over 64 countries, as well as followers on his social media channels.





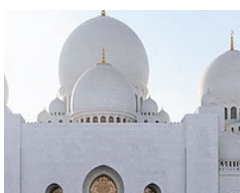
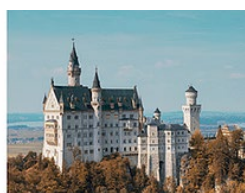
FRED TALKS

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.

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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!



Bloggers with disabilities

Glenda Watson Hyatt

DISABILITY: cerebral palsy

www.doitmyselfblog.com

Chelsea Bear

DISABILITY: cerebral palsy

www.chelseabear.com

Mark Webb

DISABILITY: multiple sclerosis

www.onemanandhiscatheters.com

Carly Fidlay

DISABILITY: ichthyosis

www.carlyfindlay.com.au

Elin Williams

DISABILITY: visually impaired

www.myblurredworld.com

Priscilla Hedlin

DISABILITY: paraplegic

www.wheelchairmommy.com

Tania Dutton

DISABILITY: Ehlers-Danlos syndrome

www.whentaniatalks.com

Holly Tuke

DISABILITY: vision impaired

www.lifeofablindgirl.com

Emily Davidson

DISABILITY: visually impaired

www.fashioneysta.com

Gemma Orton

DISABILITY: spinal muscular atrophy

www.wheelescapades.com

Barbara Stensland

DISABILITY: multiple sclerosis

www.stumblinginflat.com

Gavin Bollard

DISABILITY: Aspergers

www.life-with-aspergers.blogspot.com

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How my daughter changed my reporting

By Amy Silverman

By the time my second daughter was born, I'd been a journalist for more than a decade. As a general assignment reporter at the local alternative newsweekly, I didn't have a beat. I could pitch anything.

But as I looked at Sophie, tiny in her hospital bassinet, I realized that I had never written about Down syndrome. I had never met a person with Down syndrome. I wasn't even sure what it was.

That changed, slowly. For a long time, I couldn't do any research, didn't meet families of other kids with DS, couldn't bear the thought of what might be coming. Sophie was teaching me what I needed to know. And then one day I was talking to my boss at the time, and shared a story idea about Down syndrome that I had handed to a colleague.

"You need to do that story yourself," he said.

"I can't, because of Sophie," I said.

"She's why you need to do it."

So I wrote a story about a family in a Phoenix suburb that had three biological children with Down syndrome – then shared my own. As she grew, Sophie gave me idea after idea. I reported stories about charter schools that pushed out kids with disabilities and a Special Olympics program that put high school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) on teams with typical peers with the goal of true integration.

Now that Sophie's grown, I find myself increasingly interested in the lives of adults with IDD. This reporting isn't easy – and not only because people are afraid to talk and the state doesn't want to give up records. Every time I hear a new horror story, I imagine Sophie in the same position. I know I'm not alone. As journalists, we can't help but bring our hopes, fears and life experiences to our reporting.

To be honest, I hate it. So does Sophie. During the pandemic – with the whole family locked in the house together – she'd often wander into the kitchen where I was on a work call and

hold up a pad of paper. "Too much," she wrote.

She's right. It's too much. And yet, it's never enough. While there has been more awareness recently of the need to cover the disability community, journalists still aren't always interested in covering people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I get it. It can be hard to understand people with IDD, if they communicate at all. Family members are often hesitant to speak, or they have too much to say. Sometimes they're not around. It's delicate, messy work.

And too often, we either write stories about unimaginable tragedies or heartwarming events, like a girl with Down syndrome getting asked to her prom by the captain of the football team.

What about the grays? Like the rest of us, people with IDD don't simply have good or bad lives. Usually, it's a mixed bag. That is what drew me to this story – I want to show the real lives, including both the joys and struggles, of people with

IDD. Zainab Edwards gets joy from ice skating. She struggles after she's had a seizure. Both things are true.

I'm not saying I ever achieve this – but my goal is to tell nuanced stories that capture what real life is for a population that remains largely hidden. Even in 2022, more than two decades since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that people with IDD needed to be included in the community.

Spoiler: They are not included. Not in meaningful ways. If they are, it's rare.

But just writing these stories isn't nearly enough – I learn that every day, in different ways.

Sophie has taught me something I should have understood a long time ago, that people with IDD have their own narratives. After running a live reading series in Phoenix for five years, I started a storytelling program designed specifically for people with IDD.

With other journalists and academics, I've explored ways to make the news more accessible to people with IDD. A group of us pushed successfully to have a news story for a mainstream media outlet translated into "plain

language," which we've done again for Public Integrity, and now we're doing academic research to figure out how to take that work to the next level.

I've also learned that, like the rest of us, every single person with IDD is different. Not everyone can share their story in a traditional way, or consume the news the way others do. That makes reporting challenging – but not impossible.

It also means that – despite concerns from some in the disability community – it can be necessary to interview family members and others close to a person with IDD, particularly if the person cannot communicate. This gets really controversial, really fast.

I'm grateful to be doing this work, to have the space and grace to experiment with reporting and accessibility methods, to hear the stories of so many people with IDD and those around them. And hopefully, to make some good trouble.

But mostly I'm grateful to Sophie, who continues to be my teacher.



Amy Silverman is a journalist, teacher and memoir writer based in her hometown, Phoenix. She is executive producer for The Show, an original production of KJZZ, the Phoenix NPR member station. Amy's work has appeared in local and national outlets including ProPublica, Literary Hub, This American Life, The Guardian and The Forward. Her book, *My Heart Can't Even Believe It: A Story of Science, Love and Down Syndrome* was published by Woodbine House in 2016. Amy's work has been supported by the Economic Hardship Reporting Project and the Fund for Investigative Journalism; she's done fellowships with the Nieman Foundation at Harvard and the Annenberg Center for Health Journalism at USC. She's a three-time winner of the Arizona Press Club's Journalist of the Year Award. Amy is married to Ray Stern, state politics reporter for The Arizona Republic. They have two daughters.

Learn more at amy-silverman.com.

This article was originally published by The Center for Public Integrity. Read the original article [here](#).

5 ways to make your workplace more welcoming to people with disabilities

By Rebecca Moore | ablerise.net



Photo/Pexels

People with disabilities face many obstacles when looking for employment. But people with disabilities can bring valuable skills to the workplace, making important contributions to

your business and paving the way for workplace diversity and inclusivity. Everyone wins when businesses make a point of hiring the best people for the job – and often, that's people with disabilities! If you want to attract skilled

candidates with disabilities to your business, though, you must make sure that you're providing them with a fair, welcoming environment. Let's share some tips to help you get started!



Photo/Pexels

Prepare your business for new employees

Before you go about hiring new staff members, make sure your business is set up properly. For example, in the U.S., you must register your business with your state in order to obtain an Employer ID Number (EIN) and maintain tax compliance. You will need an EIN to collect payroll taxes and offer your employees a retirement plan. This is also a good time to set up payroll software, so you're ready to pay your new employees accurately and

promptly. Finally, be sure to also read and understand federal and state labor laws.

Additionally, preparing your business for people with disabilities is vital to creating an accessible and comfortable environment. Start by identifying what barriers exist and how they can be removed or minimized. Reassess current procedures, such as entering a store, ordering goods online, or using their services so that customers with disabilities can fully enjoy them. Additionally, consider equipping areas

used by customers with rental equipment such as mobility aids or auditory systems if needed. On top of the physical considerations, ensure information regarding your products or services is readily available for customers with impairments including visual and hearing difficulties. Additionally, make sure that staff are properly trained to recognize different kinds of disabilities.

Create a recruiting document

Ready to hire your first employees? Write up a recruiting document that focuses on inclusivity toward people with disabilities. Your recruiting plan should include descriptions of the positions you want to fill, your target audience, a list of outreach methods, and a timeline for the hiring process. Consider saving your recruiting plan as a PDF document for easy sharing.

Provide reasonable accommodations

As an employer, it is your legal responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations at your workplace to support people with disabilities. In job descriptions and throughout the hiring process, make it clear that

your company is committed to this responsibility. Talk to your candidates about the accommodations they need. These accommodations may include supplying special adaptive equipment, providing a distraction-free workspace, or changing office policies to allow for flexible breaks.

Support employee career advancement

Talented professionals want to work for companies that support their career growth goals. To attract people with disabilities to your company, make an effort to encourage career advancement among your employees. RobertHalf.com suggests several ways to do this:

- Ask your staff about their career goals and find out what resources they need from you.
- Promote training and development of your employees.
- Create a mentoring program and encourage job shadowing for new employees.
- Rotate employee roles, so everyone has a chance to work in different departments and positions.
- Encourage employees to test new ways of working and explore innovative ideas.

Identify unconscious bias

Even if you believe your business offers fair and equitable opportunities to people with disabilities, there's a chance you're exhibiting some unconscious bias in your recruiting and hiring practice. Try to identify unconscious bias in your job descriptions. Even subtle language can turn away talented people with disabilities, so avoid words like "walk," "stand," or "lift" if these are not essential requirements for the job.

Ability Magazine suggests also building awareness in the workplace to avoid unconscious bias. For example, consider scheduling training sessions and seminars to help your staff recognize and reduce unconscious bias in the office.

Attracting people with disabilities to your business is a great way to enhance your company culture and tap a largely overlooked talent pool. Take steps to prepare your business for hiring, like obtaining an EIN and preparing a recruiting document, then implement policies and practices to make your company more welcoming to those with disabilities.





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Accessible safaris in Kenya

By Kelly Snyder

Millennials Tour and Travel (MTT), based in Kenya, offers accessible safari tours, but Grace Mwangi, director, admits there are not enough organizations in the hospitality industry providing accessible services in Kenya.

A graduate of the Muranga University of Technology, Grace obtained a bachelor's degree in hospitality. She turned her passion for travel into a career in hospitality, travel, and tourism. She is enthusiastic about helping people make their travel

dreams come true. Inspired by Oprah Winfrey's wisdom, Grace strongly believes in "following your passion." She also believes that everyone, regardless of ability, should have the opportunity to travel globally. This is why she is making accessible and inclusive tourism available in Kenya.

Grace is working in conjunction with her local hospitality industry to remove the stigma regarding disability and by extension, embrace accessible tourism.

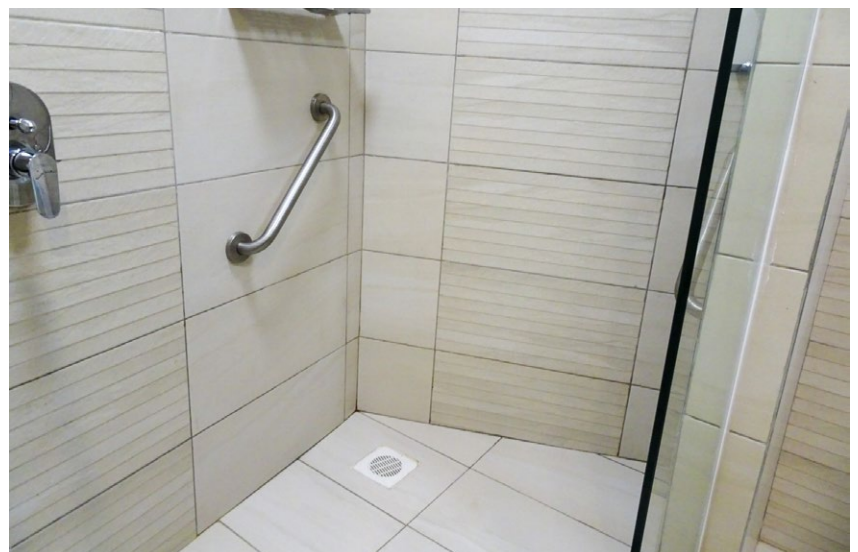
MTT offers over 42 safari packages which are inclusive! They pride themselves in offering more than a safari tour. MTT supports your needs from the booking stage and arrival all the way to departure. You're made to feel welcome, comfortable, and included. MTT is affiliated with local accessible hotels and accessible transportation providers.

Safari tours typically accommodate four people and each tour is unique to the traveler's needs. However, MTT



can also accommodate larger groups with advanced notice, and excursions are varied. Do you want to see elephants? How about sunbathing lions? Or the migration of the wildebeest? How many days do you want to explore? A 3-day tour? Or are you more adventurous and want to go all in for a 12-day tour? The choice is yours!

Safari trips can be lengthy at times and with the hot sun, it can make traveling with or without a disability exhausting, but extra breaks are incorporated.



Will AI tech like ChatGPT improve inclusion for people with communication disability?

By [Bronwyn Hemsley](#), [Emma Power](#) and [Fiona Given](#)

The chat bot [ChatGPT](#) – based on GTP3, a large language model – is a disruptive technology designed to [“provide human-like responses”](#) to user input. It is a form of artificial intelligence (AI), boosted by machine learning, is used by more than one million people and is [impressing educators](#).

It responds to the user’s questions and commands, and can draw upon its billions of words to process and generate text, appearing informative and knowledgeable.

Described somewhat poetically as producing

[“fluent bullshit”](#), its unchecked outputs may be plausible enough to score a pass mark on assignments and tests, while [bypassing plagiarism detection software](#).

If it becomes accessible for everyone, AI of this type could do more than disrupt exams. It could help people with communication disability and others who struggle with text, and could also significantly enhance rate of communication. People using speech generating devices are often limited to laboriously entering a [mere 10 words per minute](#) with word prediction only increasing that to [12-18 words per minute](#).

Communication disability can leave you lost for words – and excluded

There are many types of communication disability impacting a person’s ability to speak, understand, or write.

Impairments of speech, language and social communication are associated with [a wide range of conditions](#) including cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury, and motor neurone disease. Communication disabilities can impact the clarity of your speech and what you can say, your ability to understand others or express yourself, and your skills



in reading and writing.

A communication disability can mean you need to economise on what you say, as each word takes more effort and time to produce or write. If you have limited literacy, you'll need text simplified to make sense of it. You're also more likely to encounter more barriers to completing training, getting a job, forming relationships, managing your own health and life decisions, and participating in social networks.

How technology like ChatGPT could help

AI like ChatGPT can help pull information together in a neat text, and it can turn written text into a summary for readers with low literacy.

We already know that AI assistants like "Alexa" and "Siri" can help people with intellectual disability and speech impairments to communicate and speech-recognition software is improving. But ChatGPT looks

like it will be more inclusive of diversity by being able to understand poorly written commands, or sentences with several grammar or spelling errors. It can reportedly "read" poorly structured input, re-write and improve imperfect writing, and simplify complex texts into simpler summaries for early-stage readers. ChatGPT could be considered an "assistive technology" if it assists people with communication disability to get their message across more efficiently or effectively.



Envato Elements/GaySorn1442

A user perspective

As a qualified lawyer and a person with cerebral palsy and no speech, co-author Fiona Given relies on assistive communication technologies, including augmentative and alternative communication speech-generating devices. Fiona says:

[...] each word and message that I compose takes me substantially more time and effort than a person who speaks. So I economise on that, and my

written messages using current assistive technologies are often short and to the point. This can cause many problems, as I may be perceived as curt, if not rude, and I'm also not fully explaining what I mean.

Having tested the system, Fiona says ChatGPT could be particularly useful in adding the polite parts of emails and letters.

It can save me time and effort whilst maintaining my professionalism. One day, AI

like ChatGPT may be installed into my speech-generating device. Yes, it raises questions of authorship and brings in doubt over who did the writing. That's the case also with word prediction software – who thought of the word first? I see it as a type of co-authorship, and people like me will still need to be able to read and check it reflects what they want to say and edit and authorise the output accordingly.

AI technologies like ChatGPT may help people with

communication disability to:

- expand on short sentences, saving time and effort
- draft or improve texts for emails, instructions, or assignments
- suggest scripts to practice or rehearse what to say in social situations
- model how to be “more polite” or “more direct” in written communication
- practice conversations, including asking and answering questions
- correct errors in texts produced for a range of purposes
- write a complaint letter, including nuance and

outcomes of not taking action

- help with making that first approach to a person socially

Future AI must be inclusive and accessible

Given its potential for text-based assistance, it is important to know if people with communication disability will be able to access chatbots like ChatGPT.

We don’t know how many of the one million users testing the ChatGPT system now have problems with literacy, written expression, or spelling. But so far it looks like a game changer to help people produce texts with little or less effort.

The experiences of people with communication disability in using AI like ChatGPT are vital in the future co-design of assistive technologies. We need to know more about their views on acceptability, usability, and authenticity of the messages produced. With a screen reader, the ChatGPT output could become the user’s “voice”. So being able to check, edit, and confirm or reject AI writing is vital. Any incremental improvements to chat bots, that take into account what helps and hinders access and inclusion, are important if people with communication disability are going to benefit from advancements in AI.

This article was first published in The Conversation. Read the original article [here](#)



RESOURCES

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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[Massiraa](#), Dubai

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BUSINESSES OWNED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

[Collettey's Cookies](#), USA

www.retrophiliac.etsy.com, USA

CERTIFICATION COURSES

[Rick Hansen Foundation](#)

[Accessibility Certification](#), Canada

CLOTHING

[Intimately](#), USA

[IZ Adaptive](#), Canada

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

specialising in digital content (PDFs, ePUBs, eJournals, etc.)

www.jwdigitalinclusion.com, Dubai

DISABILITY-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

[Access Israel](#), Israel

[Easter Seals](#), Canada

[Easterseals](#), USA

[FONHARE](#), Haiti

[Friends of Access Israel](#), USA

[The American Association of People with Disabilities](#), USA

[The Arc](#), USA

EMPLOYMENT

[Bender Consulting](#), USA

HOSPITALITY TRAINING

[The Slatin Group](#), USA

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYERS

[Gabi & Jules](#), Canada

[Lil E Coffee Cafe](#), Canada

[Project Dignity](#), Singapore

GLOBAL PWD COMMUNITY

www.yoocanfind.com, Israel

LEARNING CENTRES

[Achievement Learning Centre](#), Dominica

MEDIA

[Accessible Media Inc.](#), Canada

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

[Paratrek](#), Israel

PRODUCTS & ACCESSORIES

[Izzy Wheels](#), Ireland

[The Alinker](#), Canada

TRAVEL

[360Access](#), USA

[AccessNow](#), Canada

[Accessible Indonesia](#), Indonesia

[Japan Accessible Tourism Center](#), Japan

[European Network for Accessible Tourism \(ENAT\)](#), Belgium

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