

# mélange

Special Edition  
October 2022



MISS  
WHEELCHAIR  
WORLD

**Tijuana welcomes  
the 2022 Pageant  
Contestants**

“We are honoured to host  
such distinguished  
visitors in our city”

**Karen Rocha  
Miss Wheelchair  
World 2017  
&  
2022 Pageant  
Coordinator**

“I am very grateful for  
the confidence placed  
in me to lead this  
beautiful project”



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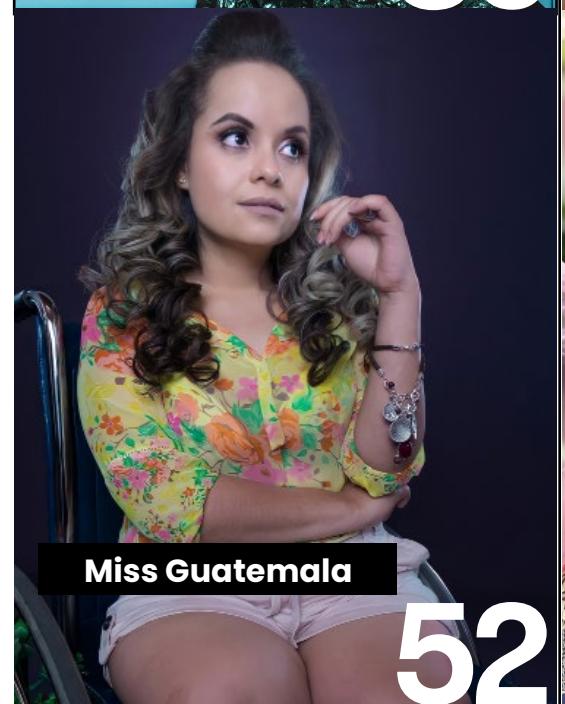
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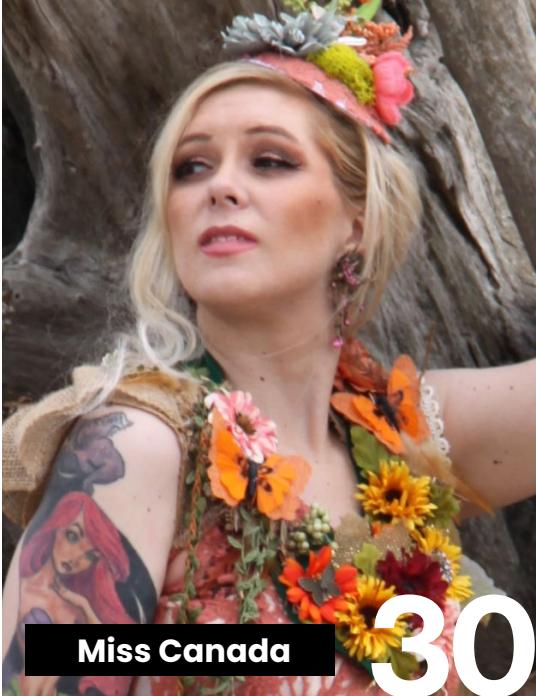
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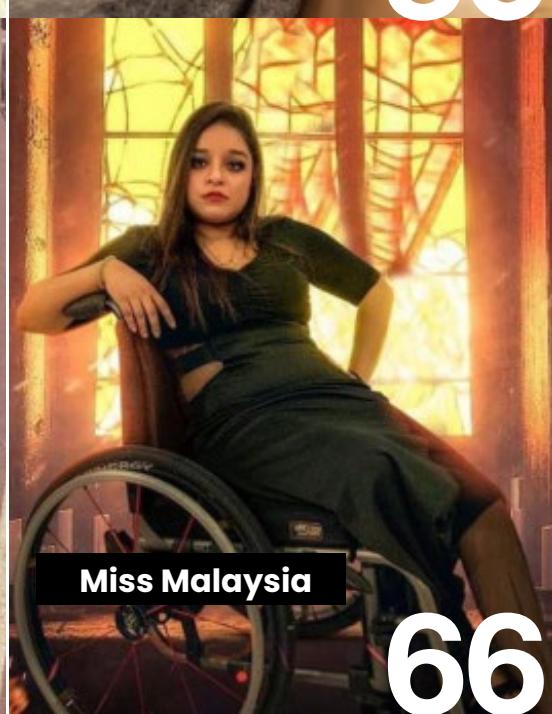
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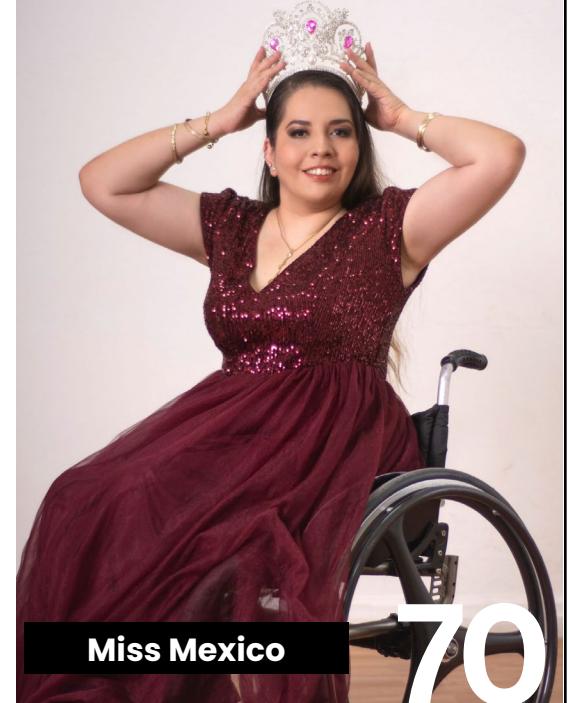
Miss Wheelchair World 2017



Karen Pamela Rocha Ruiz was born in Valle de la Trinidad, Ensenada in Baja California. She is an activist for the rights of people with disabilities, Paralympic athlete, President of the "Bufalos Adaptado" club in Mexicali and the first representative from Mexico in the "Miss Wheelchair World" contest for women with motor disabilities that was held in Warsaw, Poland in 2017. She held the first inclusion contest for women with motor disabilities at the national level in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz 2019 and is Director of the international contest "Miss Wheelchair World" 2022.

## ESPAÑOL

Nació Karen Pamela Rocha Ruiz en el Valle de Trinidad, Ensenada en Baja California. Activista por los derechos de las personas con discapacidad, atleta paralímpico, Presidente del club "Búfalos Adaptados" en Mexicali. primer representante en mexico en el concurso "Miss silla de ruedas mundial" para mujeres con discapacidad motora que fue celebrado en Varsovia, Polonia en 2017. Ocupó el primer concurso de inclusión para mujeres con discapacidades motrices a nivel nacional en Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz 2019 y es Director del concurso internacional "Miss Silla de Ruedas Mundial" 2022.



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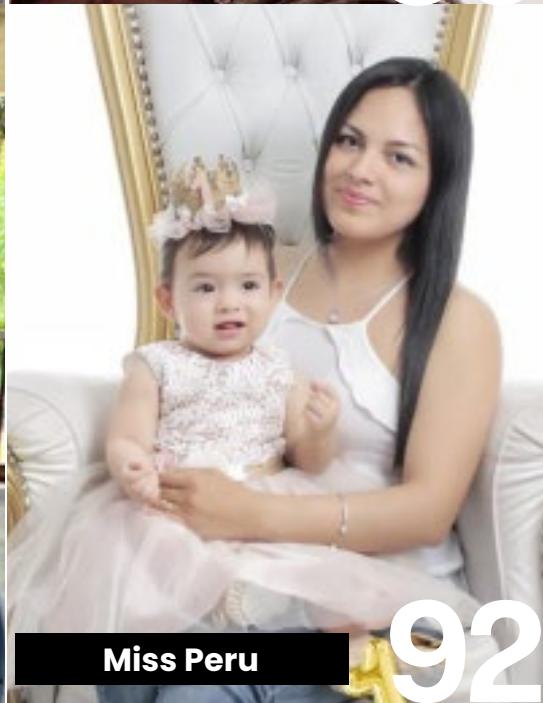
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# TIJUANA!



# Message from the President, Tijuana Convention and Tourism Committee

I am pleased to be able to greet you and, through the Tourism and Conventions Committee, to give you the most cordial

welcome to the city of Tijuana, the most important border in Mexico and the most visited in the world, characteristics that undoubtedly make it an excellent alternative for your business or leisure trips.

Tijuana offers the visitor extraordinary air and land connectivity. Its airport is the second most important in our country, with an average of 180 flights per day to the main cities of Mexico. The Tijuana airport has the first binational bridge in the world that connects with an airport terminal in San Diego, United States. In culinary art, Tijuana stands out for its delicious fusion of Baja Med flavors, whose pillars are oriental and Mediterranean cuisine and the variety of local products, such as vegetables, fruits, seafood, meat and poultry, combined with spices and Mexican chilies.

Tijuana's most famous contribution to world cuisine is Caesar's salad, created in the 1930s by César Cardini; Its mixture of vegetables, sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and bathed in olive oil, give it a unique and irresistible flavor that makes it one of the most requested salads in the world.



## **Lic. José Arturo Gutiérrez Sánchez**

The proximity between Baja California and the United States guarantees endless opportunities for fun and entertainment. Some options are theme parks, zoos, magical spaces such as the Wine Route that offers various attractions such as wine tasting in small and large wineries; country restaurants of the finest table, wine boutiques, art galleries, native culture and natural sites.

The gastronomic tourist corridor Puerto Nuevo is recognized worldwide for

its exquisite lobster in a unique style. La Bufadora is one of the few existing marine geysers in the world located in the beautiful cinderella of the Pacific: Ensenada, a port with great tourist attraction.

We appreciate this consideration to host such distinguished visitors to our city where we guarantee you a great stay in our destination.

# Mensaje del Presidente, Comité de Turismo y convenciones de Tijuana

**M**

e es grato el poder saludarle y a través del Comité de Turismo y Convenciones darles la más cordial bienvenida

a la ciudad de Tijuana, la frontera más importante de México y la más visitada del mundo, características que sin duda la convierten en una excelente alternativa para sus viajes de negocio o esparcimiento.

Tijuana ofrece al visitante una extraordinaria conectividad aérea y terrestre. Su aeropuerto es el segundo más importante en nuestro país, con un promedio de 180 vuelos por día hacia las principales ciudades México. El aeropuerto de Tijuana cuenta con el Primer puente binacional del mundo que conecta con una terminal aeroportuaria en San Diego, Estados Unidos.

En el arte culinario, Tijuana se destaca por su deliciosa fusión de sabores Baja Med, que tiene como pilares a la cocina oriental, mediterránea y la variedad de productos locales, como vegetales, frutas, mariscos, carnes y aves, combinados con las especias y chiles mexicanos. El aporte más célebre de Tijuana a la gastronomía mundial es la ensalada Caesar's, creada en los años treinta por César Cardini; su mezcla de vegetales, espolvoreada con queso parmesano y



**Lic. José Arturo Gutiérrez Sánchez**

bañada en aceite de oliva, le dan un sabor único e irresistible que la convierten en una de las ensaladas más pedidas en todo el mundo.

La cercanía entre Baja California y Estados Unidos le garantizan infinitas oportunidades de diversión y entretenimiento. Algunas opciones son los parques temáticos, zoológicos, espacios mágicos como la Ruta del Vino que le ofrece diversas atracciones como la cata de vino en pequeñas y grandes vinícolas; restaurantes campestres de la más fina mesa, boutiques de vino, galerías de arte, cultura originaria y sitios naturales.

El corredor turístico gastronómico Puerto Nuevo es reconocido mundialmente por su exquisita Langosta de estilo único. La Bufadora es de los pocos geisers marinos existentes en el mundo ubicado en la bella ceniciera del Pacífico: Ensenada, puerto con gran atractivo turístico.

Apreciamos esta consideración para ser anfitriones de tan distinguidos visitantes a nuestra ciudad en donde le garantizamos una gran estadía en nuestro destino.

# Q&A with the Head of Miss Wheelchair Beauty Pageant



I am Katarzyna Wojtaszek, born in Łomianki, near Warsaw. Currently I live in Ciechocinek en Polonia.

## **What is your position at the Miss Wheelchair World (MWW) event?**

I am pleased to be the president of the Jedyna Taka Foundation (The Only One Foundation) for 10 years and to lead an organization whose main objective is to counteract exclusion, create social and change the image of women with disabilities at the national level international. I am the creator and organizer of the 1st edition of Miss Wheelchair World held in October 2017 in Warsaw.

## **How and when did you start this project?**

It all started in 2013 when I opened the Jedyna Taka Foundation. I realized how women in Poland who are wheelchair users look and how they really live.

I too, after an accident, use a wheelchair and do not accept the fact that we are perceived through the prism of

a chair. People see us as clumsy, ugly and unfit to perform social roles such as wife, mother or partner. I myself, for many years was a very active person. I was a tennis instructor, but also a woman and a mother. I did not agree with the image of people with disabilities that existed in the media and in people's minds who, in most cases had no contact with people with disabilities. I didn't want to allow stereotypes to form opinions about us.

### **What are the objectives of the contest?**

The main objective of the Miss World Wheelchair contest is to fight against social exclusion and by changing the image of women at the international level. In addition, exchange experiences between countries to promote changes inspired by countries where the situation of people with disabilities is good.

### **Do you think this project helps empower women with disabilities?**

Definitely yes. The Miss World Wheelchair contest in 2017 allowed women to strengthen their conviction that despite their situation, they are women of full rights and disabilities; that they define their value as humans. The wheelchair is only an accessory for a person and does not define their personality.

### **What influence did Miss Wheelchair World have in 2017?**

I believe that the first Miss World Wheelchair pageant in 2017 has opened the eyes, not only to me, but also to the rest

of the participants to how much our situation differs according to the continent and the country in which we live. Some appreciate what they had while others realized that in their countries great changes are needed. During the contest, we published a guide on how to organize a national competition in each country. On this basis, countries where there is a need for change in society's mentality have created their own contests, among others Guatemala, Ecuador, South Africa and Mexico. I emphasize that competition is not only a simple choice of the most beautiful woman but it also brings with it a desire for change and the perception of disabled women as full women.

### **What do you think of Mexico as the current host country?**

In Warsaw, I had the opportunity to meet Karen Rocha, representative of Mexico, and a friendship started between us. The result of this was Karen's appointment to the position of Director, Miss World Wheelchair Contest. I think that in Poland over the years there have already been some changes in the mentality of society in terms of the rights of people with disabilities and the situation has improved, but Mexico needs change in this area and greater inclusion of women with disabilities in social life on an equal footing as other people.

### **Any words for the new participants of the second edition of MWW?**

Never give up, listen to your heart and don't let anyone tell you that something is wrong with you. You are just as

intelligent, beautiful and have the right to start a family and realize yourself in all the areas of life in which you desire. Disability doesn't make you worse, it only means that you move in a different way. You can be proud to be together with other participants creating positive images of women with disabilities. I'm glad that you are the change we want to see in the world.

### **What are the main values of MWW?**

I believe that to change the world, change must start with oneself and that is what we are doing. I believe a lot in the power of butterfly wings that is in the logo of the Miss World Wheelchair pageant and that we take small steps to change our situation and create a new quality of perception of women with disabilities and contribute to greater social integration.

### **What message would you give to all the women who view you as a role model and inspiration?**

Never let anyone tell you that you are worse. Look for answers in your heart to the question why you deserve love, a job and being a mother. In my opinion you are human and no wheelchair has the right to change that. I don't think any of us asked for being disabled and if we could, we would get up and leave. Disability can touch anyone, any human being, accidents and diseases are part of life. Live in a way that makes your life the way *you* want it to be and follow your heart. You have the right to be happy, you just have to believe it.

# Q&A with the 2017 Winner & 2022 Pageant Coordinator

**Karen Pamela Rocha Ruiz:** Karen was born in Valle de la Trinidad, Ensenada in Baja California. She is an activist for the rights of people with disabilities, Paralympic athlete, President of the “Bufalos Adaptado” club in Mexicali and first representative in Mexico in the Miss Wheelchair World contest for women with motor disabilities that was held in Warsaw, Poland in 2017. She held the first inclusion contest for women with motor disabilities at the national level in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz in 2019 and is the Director of the international contest “Miss Wheelchair World” 2022

As an activist for inclusion, Karen seeks to achieve greater empathy in citizens by giving awareness-raising conferences, and thus gradually achieving respect for the rights of all people under equal conditions.

As an athlete she has managed to stand out especially in the discipline of Paralympic archery.

As International director of “Miss Wheechair World” 2022, she conveys the importance of ensuring security and thus improving self-esteem in every woman with disability in her country and

sharing that beautiful experience with more Mexican women and also in other countries.

She is the author of “Viaje a un mundo desconocido”.

## **What are the biggest pending issues that your country must resolve in favor of women who are disabled?**

There are still pending issues regarding equality and opportunities in many areas for women with disabilities since we find ourselves in a situation of greater vulnerability due to the multiple discriminations we suffer because of gender and disability.

We have less political participation and less access to employment than men with disabilities, in addition we suffer gender-based violence and abuse in a higher percentage than other women. To fight against this situation, it is necessary to empower these women so that they know their rights.

It is necessary to guarantee equitable access to health services; implement employment policies that take into ac-

count the equality of women based on gender and disability; public recognition of the human rights violations that thousands of girls and women with disabilities have suffered in our country .

## **What does women empowerment mean to you?**

I understand empowerment as the ability of women to increase their self-confidence, the power and authority to be able to decide freely in all aspects that affect their lives.

The way to achieve this is through the development of their capacities, offering them the necessary support to determine their life's itinerary through the exercise and defense of their rights and the promotion of their autonomy and independence until they achieve it.

## **Do you believe the articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are observed in Mexico?**

We cannot make the visible invisible. The full enjoyment of human rights is violated by people and they also limit the social mobility of vulnerable groups.



In this country these issues are not and have not been a state priority. It is not yet possible to guarantee that people with disabilities can live independently and be included in the society.

Our reality is that Mexico continues to be an inaccessible country, without unifying criteria of access to public and private establishments and full access to public transport. Most of the UN recommendations remain unaddressed.

by the Mexican government.

**What message would you give to a girl with a disability who looks to you as an inspirational role model?**

Without a doubt, my representation in this event left me with a great social responsibility and for me I am proud that they can see me as being an inspiration. As you begin to become an inspiration,

you have to be braver and try to challenge yourself in some way every day. The truth is that no one will be inspired by a pessimistic person, without aspirations to be better every day, but they will be by a person who has a positive vision of things and has good virtues such as trust and integrity. This does not mean that I do not have not-so-good days or bad times and I see everything in pink. Life does not come with instructions on how we have to live it, but it does

depend on each one to decide where we want to take our destiny.

## **What can the whole world expect from Mexico as the host country? Tell us about Rosarito Lower California!**

I am very grateful for the confidence placed in me to lead this beautiful project which started when I was selected in 2017 to represent my country. What can I tell you about Mexico, it is a country of warm, cheerful, friendly people, it is a culturally rich country and I'm very happy that my state of Baja California is a part of this wonderful event and it is opening the doors to such a prestigious event.

The city of Rosarito and Tijuana will be part of the arrival of 26 women from different countries and there is much to offer! As a Baja Californian, I am proud to say that there is great ethnic wealth, missionary, culinary, civic and tourism delights in my state that deserves to be known and recognized by people from other countries. In addition, we have natural attractions that we cannot ignore, and this results in us receiving large numbers of foreign and local visitors in increasing numbers.

## **What are the main values of Miss Wheelchair World?**

All espouse the positive aspects that allow us to live with other people in a fair way to achieve global benefits as a society such as friendship, responsibility, humility, empathy, gratitude and solidarity among many.

## **Tell us a little about the pageant contestants. What message do have for them?**

In truth, I am very happy with the attitude, security and empathy that each one of us radiates. They are exemplary women!

The message I give them is that they should enjoy each stage of whatever they are doing to achieve their goal since each one will be carrying and representing the colors of their flag and that should be a source of pride for each person who steps on stage at this international event.

In addition, they take away friendships and the appreciation of their companions, believe me, nothing makes up for that. I wish they have an incredible experience in my country and that they are happy to be at this event.

I know that each of them will take on the great mission to continue working for inclusion and promoting human rights to empower future generations of stronger women both physically as well as mentally.



# Message from the 2017 Winner & 2022 Pageant Coordinator

## ESPAÑOL

**Karen Pamela Rocha Ruiz:** Originaria del Valle de la Trinidad, Ensenada Baja California. Activista por los derechos de las personas con discapacidad, deportista paraolímpica, Presidente del club "Búfalos adaptado" en Mexicali. primer representante en México en "Miss wheelchair world" certamen para mujeres con discapacidad motriz que se realizó en Varsovia, Polonia en 2017. Realizo a nivel nacional el primer certamen de inclusión para mujeres con discapacidad motriz en Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz 2019. Directora del certamen internacional "Miss wheelchair World" 2022

Como activista en pro de la inclusión busca lograr una mayor empatía en los ciudadanos dando conferencias de sensibilización, concientización y así lograr poco a poco que se respeten los derechos de todas las personas en igualdad de condiciones.

Como deportista ha logrado destacar y muy en especial en la disciplina de tiro con arco paralímpico.

Directora internacional de "Miss wheelchair world" 2022, he logrado transmitir la importancia de generar seguridad y así mejorar la autoestima en cada mujer con discapacidad en nuestro país.

Compartiendo esa bonita experiencia con más mujeres mexicanas e incluso en otros países. Escritora del libro "Viaje a un mundo desconocido" libro biográfico.

### **¿Cuáles son los pendientes más grandes que nuestro país debe resolver en favor de las mujeres con discapacidad?**

Siguen existiendo pendientes en cuanto a igualdad y oportunidades en muchas áreas para las mujeres con discapacidad ya que nos encontramos en una situación de mayor vulnerabilidad por las múltiples discriminaciones que sufrimos por su género y por discapacidad. Tenemos una menor participación política y un menor acceso al empleo que los hombres con discapacidad, además de sufrir violencia de género y abusos en un mayor porcentaje que otras mujeres. Para luchar contra esta situación es necesario empoderar a estas mujeres para que conozcan sus derechos.

Es necesario garantizar un acceso equitativo a los servicios de salud; implementar políticas públicas de empleo que tengan presente la igualdad de las mujeres por razón de género y de

discapacidad; que se reconozca públicamente las violaciones de derechos humanos que han sufrido en nuestro país miles de niñas y mujeres con discapacidad.

### **¿Qué podemos entender por empoderamiento femenino?**

El empoderamiento lo entiendo como la capacidad de la mujer para incrementar su autoconfianza, el poder y la autoridad para poder decidir libremente en todos los aspectos que afectan a su vida. La forma de lograrlo es a través del desarrollo de sus capacidades, ofreciéndole el apoyo necesario para trazar su itinerario de vida a través del ejercicio y defensa de sus derechos y la promoción de su autonomía e independencia hasta que lo logren.

### **¿Consideras que en México y el mundo se cumplen cabalmente los artículos de la Convención Internacional de los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad?**

No podemos hacer invisible lo visible, no sólo se violenta el goce pleno de los derechos humanos de las personas, también limita la movilidad social de



los grupos vulnerables. en el país no son y no han sido una prioridad estatal estos temas. Aun no se logra garantizar que las personas con discapacidad puedan vivir de manera independiente y ser incluidas en la sociedad.

Nuestra realidad es que México sigue siendo un país inaccesible, sin unificación de criterios de acceso a establecimientos públicos y privados y acceso pleno al transporte público. La mayoría de las recomendaciones de la

ONU al gobierno mexicano siguen sin atenderse.

**¿Qué mensaje le brindarías a una niña con discapacidad que mire en ti un modelo aspiracional?**

Sin duda mi representación en este evento me dejó con una gran responsabilidad social y para mí es un orgullo que puedan verme de esa manera. A medida que comiences a convertirte

en una inspiración, tienes que ser más valiente y tratar de desafiar de alguna manera todos los días. La verdad es que nadie se sentirá inspirado por una persona pesimista, sin aspiraciones de ser mejor cada dia, pero sí por una persona que tenga una visión positiva de las cosas y tenga buenas virtudes como confianza e integridad. Y esto no quiere decir que no tenga días o malos ratos y todo lo vea color de rosa. La vida no viene con instructivo de como tenemos que vivirla pero si depende de cada uno

hacia donde queremos llevar nuestro destino.

### **¿Que puede esperar el mundo entero de México como país sede? ¡Platícanos sobre Rosarito Baja California!**

Estoy muy agradecida por la confianza en mi persona para encabezar este hermoso proyecto del cual yo Salí seleccionada en 2017 para representar a mi país. Que te puedo decir de México, es un país de gente cálida, alegre, amable, es un país rico culturalmente. Muy contenta de que mi estado Baja California, sea parte de este maravilloso evento y este abriendo las puertas a tan prestigioso evento.

¡La ciudad de Rosarito y Tijuana serán parte de la llegada de 26 mujeres de distintos países y hay mucho que ofrecer! como Baja californiana me orgullece decir que existe una gran riqueza étnica, misional, culinaria, cívica y turística en mi estado que merece ser conocida y reconocida por muchas personas de otros países.

Además de los atractivos naturales que no podemos dejar de lado, y que gracias a ello hace que cada vez más reciban una numerosa cantidad de visitantes extranjeros y locales.

### **¿Cuáles son los principales valores de Miss Wheelchair World?**

Ahora sí que todos los aspectos positivos que nos permiten convivir con otras personas de un modo justo con el fin de alcanzar un beneficio global como sociedad como lo es la Amistad,

responsabilidad, humildad, empatía, gratitud y solidaridad entre muchos.

### **¡Platícanos un poco de ellas! ¿Qué mensaje les brindas a todas ellas?**

En verdad que estoy muy contenta de esa actitud, seguridad y empatía que irradian cada una de ellas. ¡Son mujeres ejemplares! El mensaje que puedo brindarles es que disfruten cada etapa que estén realizando para lograr su objetivo ya que cada una portara y representara los colores de su bandera y eso debe de ser un orgullo para cada persona que pisa escenario en un evento internacional. Además de que se lleven la amistad y el aprecio de sus compañeras, créanme nada compensa eso. Deseo que se lleven una increíble experiencia de mi país y que estén felices de estar en este evento.

Sé que cada una de ellas se llevará una gran misión de seguir trabajando en pro de la inclusión, fomentar los derechos humanos para forjar futuras generaciones de mujeres más fuertes tanto física y como mentalmente.

Gracias! Revista Melange por ser parte de esta segunda edición.





# Miss Brazil Ana Oliveira



Do not be ashamed  
of who you are.  
Love yourself. —



66

Hi, I am Ana, the Brazilian representative at Miss Wheelchair World!

My life with a wheelchair began in 1997 at 17 when I was shot during a sexual assault. I am now a paraplegic and fight for the rights of all disabled people.

Though I live in a city with no accessibility, I did not let it stop me from doing the things I wanted to do. I have gone on to graduate in social relations with a post-graduate in social media. Since 1999, I have worked for different Brazilian companies and saved money to buy a car to help with mobility issues.

In 2016 I weighed 110kg. I have always been overweight. Though I had stomach reduction surgery, I am still overweight; however, the 45kg I lost helped me improve my mobility and autonomy.

For me, Miss Wheelchair World is not about showing a person's beauty but showing that a woman with or without a disability can be and do whatever she wants.

I have done many things, including rappelling, riding a hand bike, and cosplays like Merida, from the Disney movie "Brave". I have gone to the beach dressed as a mermaid, done poi juggling and have fun in bars and parties. I have also traveled throughout Brazil and abroad alone.

On Instagram, I have approximately nine thousand followers. It is where I show my routine, videos and photos discussing accessibility and how important it is for the world to be inclusive, so we may all live as we wish to.

To be selected to compete in Miss Wheelchair World is a celebration of my work toward the visibility of disabled people. I come from Carapicuíba, the São Paulo state of Brazil and am a 41-year-old overweight woman. I am not ashamed to be who and how I am.

I want to say: Do not be ashamed of who you are. Love yourself, and do not be afraid to look for the best in life.





# Miss Cameroon Lilian Dibo Eyong

I want to see how much of a legacy I will leave on the earth before I leave. ■

Lilian DIBO EYONG  
First Runner Up Miss Wheelchair Cameroon 2019  
Wheelchair World 2022 finalist





I am Lilian Dibo Eyong, a polio survivor and wheelchair model. I am 28 years old and the youngest child from a polygamous family of 11 children. I am the eleventh and last child of my Dad and the seventh and last child of my Mom.

I was born in Lobe Estate and was a bulky and energetic child. At the age of 2.5, I was taken to the hospital with a fever. It was there I was infected with polio. This marked the end of my first story and the birth of a new, disabled story.

Frustrated with the fact of no cure, my mom welcomed all suggestions for possible solutions. The last straw came during a visit with a herbalist. He used 3 red hot charcoals to burn the underneath of my right knee, claiming that as the wound healed I would be able to stand and walk again. This never happened. Seeing how I suffered with such a wound at such an age my mom stopped her search, vowing to accept me as I was.

I grew up and attended my early primary school in Camp 9. My older siblings, friends and neighbors would take weekly turns to carry me on their backs to and from school. Upon my dad's retirement, we relocated to Bekora Barombi (Ndoro). There, I completed my primary school, finding myself at the top of my class. With the use of a second-hand tricycle, I was able to gain some mobility independence.

I went to Kumba to pursue my secondary education at Divine High

School (DHS) and once again my academic performance was top-notch. Though my eldest brother tried to protect me, I discovered I was pregnant in Form 5. Hoping the pregnancy would disappear on its own I kept the news secret until my eighth month. That day I saw my eldest brother cry. Upon my return to Bekora to meet my mother I saw disappointment on her face and tears running down her cheeks. Two weeks later I gave birth to my handsome son Nathanael through cesarean delivery (C-section). Nathanael's father helped by providing as much financial support as he could.

Three months after I gave birth, I returned to school. After successfully completing my primary studies I headed to the prestigious University of Buea (UB) to pursue a degree in Accounting. It was a dream come true.

I was the only wheelchair user during my stay at university and the barriers I faced were enormous. These included issues with infrastructure and communication, the attitude of others, and more. I kept pushing and found success with the help of a friend.

It was in Buea that I first saw life from a different angle. I experienced the worst form of discrimination, marginalization, blackmail and insults. I felt unwelcome and as a result, would stay on campus not wanting to go home after lectures.

During my second year at the University and coinciding with the

student's strike for presidential grants, the Anglophone Crisis broke out. The military stormed the campus and drove away students with tear gas. Some were brutally beaten while others were bundled into a military van and locked in a cell.

Due to rioting, I left Buea and headed back to Bekora. Even there it wasn't easy as the Anglophone Crisis spread all over the Anglophone regions. Due to the exchange of guns and stray bullets, my family and neighbors left Bekora heading for Lipenja and safety. We lived in my elder sister's one-room house for 6 months. I remember the way we used to pile ourselves at night like sardines.

When the shooting became intensified in Lipenja, I carried my son and his cousins to Kumba to live with my elder brother and his family.

For the second time in my life, I began thinking of committing suicide. I was in the midst of making plans when Agbor Matelot, a student psychosocial counselor, realized my problem. He believed the best possible way to help me was through counseling and prayers. Thankfully, this worked powerfully. Two weeks later, I told my elder sister that I wanted to attend a professional counseling institute, Gospel Outreach Counseling Training Institute (GOCTI) in Kumba. She sacrificed her first salary and enrolled me. There I obtained a Diploma in Trauma Counseling and I was awarded the Best Outstanding Student. It was in GOCTI that I

Lilian DIBO EYONG  
First Runner Up Miss Wheelchair Cameroon 2019  
Miss wheelchair World 2022 finalist



Miss



realized I had acute depression which would have eventually taken my life.

In 2019, I started writing a book titled "Living with Disability". I also hosted a radio program on Calvary Good News Radio, Kumba to this effect, educating the public based on my personal experiences as a person with a disability. In mid-2019 I got into the Miss Wheelchair

Cameroon Contest. I was nominated First Runner Up Miss Wheelchair Cameroon in December 2019. This provided an opportunity to advocate for the rights of women and girls with disabilities through media outlets.

In March 2020, I founded the Lilian Dibo Foundation (LDF), a women-with-disability-led organization passionate about the

issues surrounding women and girls with disabilities and ensuring their full potential is reached through advocacy, education and empowerment programs. Our motto: Breaking the Shackles of Disability.

Currently, I am a Digital Ambassador for World Pulse, a volunteer Disability Inclusion Development (DID) Officer at

**Lilian DIBO EYONG**  
Miss Wheelchair Cameroon 2019  
Wheelchair World Cameroon 2022  
WCA / (+237) 658 90 81 14



Rescue Women Cameroon (REWOCAM), the country manager for Project Peace Lights (PPL) and the executive director for Project Peace Lights Cameroon (PPLCAM).

I have won the Inspire Award from I Am Cameroon, the Spirit Award from World Pulse, the Most Dynamic Physically Challenged CEO from DREAMZ FM, and the Certified Storyteller from World

Pulse. I am also a 1000 Voices Fellow and Every Woman Treaty alumni, a Confident Coach, and Ankara and beads accessories designer (handipreneur). I am a co-author and have written and been featured in numerous articles for international organizations like Every Woman Treaty, The Conversationalist, New Mobility Magazine, EQUATE Magazine and more.

I have facilitated and coordinated countless online and in-person workshops on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Child Protection and Disability Rights.

The Lilian Dibo Foundation co-sponsored the National Outstanding Youth Empowerment Leadership Award (NAOYELA) 2020 and in early 2021, using electronic sewing machines, the foundation sewn and distributed more than 1500 face masks in Kumba and Buea to assist the government in preventing the spread of Covid-19. We have also carried out capability-building workshops on rape perpetrated on women and girls with disabilities as we realized they are underreported.

The foundation has provided capital for businesses to over 50 persons with disabilities to assist them in becoming financially independent and hope to create jobs for more than 10,000 persons with disabilities in the near future. We provide families of children with disabilities with mobility devices, assist with hospital bills and more.

Being part of the Miss Wheelchair World Contest 2022 is a long-awaited dream. I crave a global platform

where I could hold a microphone and discuss the plight of women and girls with disabilities in Cameroon, Africa and the World.

I want to build an inclusive multipurpose rehabilitation center for persons with disabilities. It will also serve as a shelter for displaced and battered women and girls with disabilities. I wish to create a lasting solution and I am determined to be the change I want to see.

"I want to see how much of a legacy I will leave on the earth before I leave"  
Lilian Dibo Eyong

# Miss Canada Melissa Exton



My disability changed my life, but it can't change the core of who I am, my character, or my values and support system. ■



It all started when I got out of prison. Now, I know that is a bold statement to make without context, so allow me to explain. I used to work as a nurse inside one of the largest prisons in Canada. I wanted to help the most disenfranchised people, and helping prisoners and officers in the prison system was the perfect way to do that. Growing up, I did missionary work, traveling to over 20 countries. For half of those, I also provided humanitarian aid. I volunteered locally at food banks and churches because I believe in the importance of helping others. Traveling the world and volunteering my time are some activities I am still passionate about today and spend a lot of time doing, even if they look a little different with me in a wheelchair.

When I was first injured and discovered a need for a wheelchair, it was hard to hear. My body and my ability to do good work were the most important things in my life. I was active and enjoyed competitive swimming, camping, hiking, and kayaking. Now I felt as if it was all taken from me. I became depressed and felt lost. I thought I would not be able to help others because now I was the one in need of so much help.

“People are too complicated to have simple labels,” wrote author Phillip Pullman. He was right. I had labeled myself a disabled woman and that is all I thought I could be. However, I then realized that didn’t need to be all I could be. My values and my goals didn’t change because of my disability. I just had to adapt.

This year I joined Radical Inclusion, a group of disabled people dedicated to supporting each other in seeking change. In a report submitted to the UN in 2020 by Radical Inclusion, one area of the critical need for progress in the disability community is access to justice. The international spotlight is currently shining on police and their interactions with the BIPOC community, but research shows disabled lives are at risk with police interactions too. My current project focuses on finding different ways to improve the quality and safety of police interactions with the disability community and in officer training itself.

I was lucky enough to marry a giant geek. If you get the chance to do that, I highly recommend it. Before becoming disabled, I would do more physical activities on missions, such as building projects, sports, water filtration and even clowning. Since then, I decided to try the nerdy things my husband likes. We joined a group that goes to comic conventions to do outreach. We use tabletop games and video games to create a community. We created a YouTube Channel with videos to help disabled people get into gaming and which review accessible content.

I thought I could no longer engage in sports activities but eventually learned of the different adaptable options available for disabled people. I can still swim. I bike with the use of a handcycle instead of a bicycle. I ski using a sit-ski instead of downhill or cross-country skis. I am even trying WCMX, a sport where wheelchairs get into skateboard half pipes and perform amazing athletic feats.

My disability didn’t stop me from becoming a mom, my latest adventure. We weren’t sure we could have children, but thankfully, we now have a great little boy.

Unfortunately, ableism is everywhere. When I was first pregnant and alone in the hospital, the doctor told me I had probably already made my child disabled or deformed due to my medication and disability. Thankfully, this was wrong. My son is an active, healthy, and thriving little boy. I want him to grow up without ableism. To him, I’m not his mom in a wheelchair I’m just his mom. That understanding gives me hope for the future.

My disability changed my life, but it can’t change the core of who I am, my character, or my values and support system. That is why I want to do Miss Wheelchair World. I want to use this platform to reach out and help more people globally. Disability affects all cultures, all people, all ages, and all economic groups. I dream of a better world where disabled women’s voices are elevated, in power and normalization. Where ableism is erased, accessibility is universal and disabled lives are not at greater risk in health care and policing. I truly believe Miss Wheelchair World is a platform for speaking loudly about the issues that touch the lives of those in the disabled community.

I am excited to represent Canada at Miss Wheelchair World 2022 in Mexico. I know I am a true Canadian representative, someone with passion, drive, empathy and diverse experiences to offer as Miss Wheelchair World 2022.



# Miss Chile

# Damaris Carrillo Samaniego.

“Over time, I realized that I am a self-sufficient person, capable of assuming new goals for the good of all.”





**M**y name is Damaris Carrillo Samaniego. I am 24 years old, of Chilean nationality born in the Comuna de Cunco, Araucanía Region. I currently live with my parents, my 13-year-old brother and my 1-year-old daughter, Isabella, in the heart of Melipeuco.

My primary and secondary education was carried out at the Bicentennial School of Excellence Adenauer, Melipeuco, where I excelled in dance and outdoor

sports. From the age of 15, I developed a passion for the Institución de bomberos de Chile (Firefighters Institution of Chile) and entered as a cadet to the First Fire Company of the commune of Melipeuco. It is here I give my effort and dedication to this beautiful work. Regardless of my disability, I continue to perform pumping roles.

I later continued my education at the Catholic University of Temuco, entering a career in Risk Prevention. During my first year, on December

31, 2016, my life took a 180-degree turn. At approximately 10:30 AM the bus taking me home, overturned. It was then life gave me a second chance.

While recovering from physical wounds I realized I could not give up and let myself be overcome by the temptation of self-pity. During my rehabilitation, I drew on strength I didn't know I had and faced my new condition with faith. One of my first opportunities to see life with hope was upon entering the Teleton

Rehabilitation Center in the city of Temuco. Here I developed a new vision and perception of the world, taking this second chance at life to live with the magic of letting myself be surprised by the most minimal and simplest things life gives me.

I never felt that I lost anything during the rehabilitation process. On the contrary. I was more and more amazed at what I could achieve with my new condition. It motivated me and gave me more strength to continue to take on greater challenges in my new life on wheels.

Over time, I realized that I am a self-sufficient person, capable of assuming new goals for the good of all. In May 2019, I founded Club No Limits, a club designed to lead people with disabilities in challenging their limits in the mountains safely and recreationally, breaking the social barriers and stigmas generated around disability and encouraging the development of interpersonal relationships and self-esteem to strengthen self-acceptance of their disabilities.

I am currently working at the Bicentennial Center of Excellence Adenauer, from which I graduated my high school studies. I developed the School Integration Program (PIE), where I work with students with special educational needs, to encourage motivation and demonstrate that despite having a disability they can achieve everything they dream of, regardless of what society often imposes on them. In addition, I am in process of furthering my education, studying social work

at the IACC Institute. My goal is to acquire tools to be able to meet and help people in different contexts and social realities.

In 2020, during the pandemic, I was told great news. Though doctors previously thought it impossible, I was pregnant. I enjoyed a wonderful pregnancy, however, within days of giving birth, I fell seriously ill and was back at the hospital. This time I had suffered a stroke. I couldn't believe what was happening. Even with my previous accident, I hadn't felt like I did this time. My only thoughts were about my new baby, making me cling to life for her. I became stronger and she became a warrior for not being able to be with her mother.

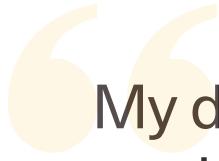
In 2021, I assumed the responsibility of managing the Department of Disability for the municipality where I live. We work to generate concrete actions within the framework of universal accessibility and in the creation of integration projects.

In 2018, a friend surprised me by registering me in the Miss Chile Inclusive beauty pageant, something I had not thought of participating in. This was the first time the contest would be held in my country. As the days went by I convinced myself to participate, a good thing as I soon received a phone call confirming that I had been selected. I did not think that at the close of this pageant I would be crowned as both Miss Popularity and the first Miss Chile Inclusive. This crowning opened the doors to today's new challenge, representing my country in the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 contest in Mexico, this coming October. I am thankful for this opportunity.

I seek to raise my voice for those who cannot do it, either for fear of facing discrimination or for not having the necessary tools to defend themselves. I also seek to empower women, especially those in wheelchairs, because, despite everything, our essence remains intact and we can change the stigmas that exist as we are agents of change.

This is a dream. I never imagined seeing myself involved in beauty pageants as I previously has only seen it on television where the women had slender, and why not say it, perfect bodies. Today that has changed. I will continue to change it because with my new disability I learned that above all, I must love and trust myself. In this way, I have unwavering self-love. More women need to feel this. We do not need to live complying with stereotypes or stigmas marked by society, much less have the intention of impressing anyone. We should only love ourselves for being us regardless of size or condition.

# Miss Columbia Vicky Mohroy.



My dream is to inspire and motivate other women to follow their dreams regardless of barriers. ■





Hello. Nice to meet you. My name is Vicky Monroy. I am the first woman in a wheelchair to represent Colombia in Miss Wheelchair World.

Previously, I was a high-performance swimmer who represented Colombia in international tournaments including the Pan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico 2011, World Swimming Championships in Montreal, Canada 2013 and the Pan

American Youth Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina 2013.

For the past 6 years, I have been a model with a disability working to break the beauty stereotype of the perfect woman and encourage others to see that we are all beautiful. In addition, I aim to highlight and raise awareness of the issues people with disabilities experience every day through my online vlog and Instagram profile.

My dream is to inspire and motivate other women to follow their dreams regardless of barriers, and to see all obstacles as an opportunity for transformation.

I have achieved many things thanks in part, to my disability. For me, my disability is not a negative but instead a motivator in everything I do. I would not be who I am today if I were not a woman in a wheelchair.





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# Miss Costa Rica

*Velky*  
Janina  
Sánchez  
Faerron.





I am Velky Janina Sánchez Faerron, the finalist from Costa Rica in the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 pageant. I am 51 years old and I was born with spina bifida (sequel to myelomeningocele).

Being born with a disability has never been an obstacle to achieving my goals. Though the process of achieving them was made longer and more complex than if

there was no disability involved, through perseverance and tenacity I continued working to achieve success.

When I was born, the doctors informed my mother of my medical issues, explaining that I was not expected to live long, nor would I learn to walk and I would have an intellectual disability. They suggested adoption as a possible option for her. Thankfully, my

mother did not agree. She helped me get ahead with therapies and medical care and taught me to walk by the time I was 2. Through preschool, then primary school, I was like any other girl. I was outgoing and participated in all the extracurricular activities available.

In high school, my disability began to progress. At the age of 15, doctors amputated the 5 toes on my left foot. I would go on to have



an additional 4 re-amputations. As a result, in 2010 I became a permanent wheelchair user.

I have gone on to receive a degree in Art and Visual Communication as well as a Digital Diploma in Leadership in Social Inclusion and Access to Rights from the OAS, among others.

As I was a scholarship student during my time at university, I

was provided the option for a free cultural workshop. I enrolled in swimming as it was a sport discipline that allowed me to strengthen my body. In 2013 I was selected for paralympic swimming representing Costa Rica in the San José 2013 Para-Central American Games. However, by the end of these games, I decided to withdraw from the competition. Instead, I recognized my dream of becoming involved with the organization itself and through costarrican delegations, to help others achieve their dreams. I began looking for opportunities to train in sports administration and management. The knowledge I gained opened the doors for me to hold an executive position in the Paralympic Committee of my country.

Below are some of my achievements in the sports field:

In 2013, I received the benefit to lead the NPC Sport Management Workshop, TO2015, Agitos Foundation. In addition, I served as Chief of Mission of the Costa Rican Delegation at the Parapan American Youth Games, Buenos Aires 2013 in Argentina. I also participated in various sporting events nationally and internationally during this time.

In 2014, the International Paralympic Committee allowed me the opportunity to be an Observer at the IV International Paralympic Sports Congress, Florianópolis, Brazil and the Santiago 2014 Para South American Games.

In 2015, I became an international observer at the Brazilian School Paralympics in Natal.

In 2017, I was a volunteer at the São Paulo Parapan American Youth Games. During this time I was chosen by the Social Protection Board to use my image on a lottery ticket commemorating the week of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Costa Rica.

In 2018, I participated in the VI International Paralympic Sports Congress in Sao Paulo.

In 2019, I participated in Agitos Woman in Sport Leadership Workshop in Lima Peru.

In 2021, I became a Paralympic attache of the Costa Rican Delegation at the TOKYO 2020 Paralympic Games.

For the past 8 years, I have been working in a state bank where I assist in the creation of advertising campaigns. In 2014, I was chosen to be included in the commemorative magazine of the institution's centenary, titled "100 Life Stories".

I believe that as women with disabilities we must continue fighting to break paradigms and establish bridges for those who come after. I believe one of those ways is the Miss Wheelchair World pageant as it aims to change the stereotypes of an ideal beauty implanted by a consumer society. Likewise, it is a means of social inclusion allowing women with disabilities to be visible and providing them with tools to become future leaders in favor of the fight for women's rights.

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# Miss Ecuador

Sara  
Cristina  
Llulluna  
Yanacall.



MISS WHEELCHAIR  
ECUADOR 2019

**M**y name is Sara Cristina Llulluna Yanacallo. I am 32 years old and was born in the city of Tena, Napo on October 31, 1989. I am the youngest member of a family of eight: my father Samuel Llulluna, my mother María Yanacallo, my three brothers: Wilson, Freddy and Luis, my two sisters: Sandra and Roberta. I am affectionately referred to as Sarita by my family. Others call me Cris.

I grew up in Cosanga, a small parish in the Quijos Canton. I began my studies here in kindergarten when I was 5. I enjoyed participating in all school events such as dances, theater and Christmas princess. I continued my studies at the Gil Ramírez Dávalos school. It was a school with limited resources but taught its students with great affection. Here I trained until I was 12 years old. My grades were outstanding and I was the standard-bearer of the Canton.

In 2002, I began secondary school at the Baeza Technical College. I remember this time of my life with great affection. As the school was 30 minutes from my home I traveled to and from school alongside my

classmates, by truck. Though mornings were cold, my desire to improve myself was so great that no matter the weather I was always in attendance. During my time here I opted to pursue studying for a tourism career as I enjoyed the adventure, crossings and experiences that come with this line of work.

In 2007, I participated and won, a local contest to become the queen of my parish. This was a step towards competing in the cantonal contest. Together with the other Queens, I obtained the title of Miss Tourism. This required me to carry out many activities. During these I learned how to work with the most vulnerable sectors, to be grateful for life and the many joys of children.

University life, in the beginning, held many fears for me: traveling to another city far from my mother and going from the countryside to city life to name a couple. Here I chose an engineering degree in Ecotourism and lived with my brother and nephews.

University was very demanding. From time to time I traveled to different

parts of the country, which I liked very much. One trip, in particular, was extremely difficult. In the seventh semester, we made an observation tour of the Altar in Chimborazo. This was a hard journey that required a long walk to reach a beautiful lagoon. We spent three days there. When we returned home on May 10, 2014, Mother's Day, we had a fatal accident. The bus fell 150 meters over a precipice. Sadly, eleven people lost their lives including friends, a teacher and a mother. Others were seriously injured. I had multiple fractures and, my ribs perforated my lungs. I required surgery to remove my lungs; however, the coma I was in prevented this from happening. Doctors were one step away from disconnecting my life support and in fact, were waiting for my brother to come say his goodbyes. However, like a miracle, I instead woke up with a spinal cord injury. This injury caused permanent paralysis of my legs.

In the beginning, like everything in life, I experienced difficulty understanding the reasons behind the accident and my disability. I spent two years at home visiting hospitals for different health problems. I want to emphasize that





my family, especially my mother, is a fundamental pillar to my moving forward. I had thought I would not be able to fulfill my dreams of completing my university career but thanks to God, who gave me the strength I needed, I was able to resume my studies and graduate in 2018.

After graduation, I returned to my hometown to find work. While hired as an assistant in a cleaning firm, I received a message on my phone from a good friend telling me about the Miss Wheelchair Ecuador contest. I was nervous about presenting myself and was undecided on whether to enroll

or not; however, shortly after submitting my application, I was accepted as a participant. I traveled to Guayaquil with my mother and met incredible women who taught me so much. I learned to introduce myself without fear of what people will say and to once again wear clothes I hadn't worn in a long time. On the final day, I achieved the longed-for triumph, I won.

Winning has opened many doors for me, but above all, it opened my mind and took away a thousand insecurities. This is why I decided to return to school to study a career that contributes and helps others through difficult times. I am

currently in my second year studying psychology.

Today, I thank God for the miracle of my life, for allowing me to continue in this world surrounded by all its wonders. I am happy to be able to represent my beautiful Ecuador. My wish is to carry a message of empathy, respect and self-love. Through my story, the Miss Wheelchair World pageant is an opportunity for women in wheelchairs to see the possibility of going out into the world and showing that they are strong, capable and wonderful. We can do it all!

# Miss France

# Magali Saby.

I am a professional actress and dancer and have collaborated on many multidisciplinary international creations.

For ten years, I have rubbed shoulders with so-called “inclusive” companies and other professional

artists, both able-bodied and with disabilities, in this field. My career took me from Paris to Indonesia, by way of Germany, England, Belgium, Scotland, Greece and Turkey.

Most recently, I founded BE TOGETHER and ALL MOOV. These

two artistic structures campaign for the professional recognition of artists with disabilities and encourage the creation and dissemination of inclusive shows in France and abroad.



# Miss Guatemala

# Maria de León G.

“I know we all go through situations that weaken us and constantly put us to the test, but our faith and self-love are the essential ingredients that fill us with strength.”



**F**rom the moment of my birth, I was a girl who was constantly diagnosed with little chance of life because I was born with myelomeningocele. I had a different childhood, one that, due to my constant health problem, resulted in educational institutions from elementary school to university, denying me access to education. In addition, until seven years ago, I had two homes in my life: 30 percent of the time I was at home and the remaining 70 percent in the hospital.

I have lived surrounded by angels who have supported me unconditionally for a little more than 31 years. Above all, I thank God for the strength he has planted in me and my mother because, without these essential elements, none of what I am now would be the reality that I walk and forge every day.

Before my second birthday, I underwent my first surgery. Since that moment I have used orthopedic devices to help me walk. Unfortunately, the operation did not help to correct the issues but rather worsened my situation. When I was 11, I began using crutches for support as the orthopedics had caused damage to my legs and my balance was poor. The most complicated part began six years later when, at 17, I was diagnosed with osteomyelitis in both lower extremities. This began my life as a wheelchair user. At the time, my situation was severe, with hospital visits intermittent for a period lasting 48 months.

Due to the severity of my condition I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life: to sign the authorization to have both legs amputated. I was 21 years old. Many did not agree with my decision. Others argued that it was a cowardly choice. From their point of view, I was taking an easy way out. But after spending so much time at risk, what could others know of the physical and emotional pain someone in my situation goes through?

I remember with amusement, that when I woke I felt happy and the first thing I said to the nurses was, "I am not sick anymore, it won't hurt anymore!" Unfortunately, my belief the hard part was over, was wrong. A couple of months after surgery I had a relapse. While I was receiving physiotherapy to start using prostheses, I injured myself resulting in nearly two years in the hospital.

I look back and I can say that this road has had many obstacles but I have persevered. I overcame two septic shocks, eight surgeries, constant discrimination and rejection. However, in return I have received so much strength, love, support and countless blessings, which have all brought me here today.

I am Maria: a Guatemalan publicist and communicator, a woman with a motor disability and wheelchair user, an introverted woman who loves life, who chose to be strong



and who even with adversity, has not stopped at achieving each of her dreams.

I know we all go through situations that weaken us and constantly put us to the test, but our faith and self-love are the essential ingredients that fill us with strength. It happened to me. It has been many hard years. Being born with a disease and adapting to live with it is not easy, but every day I realize how strong I am and how much I am worth.



## Miss Wheelchair

In 2019, I participated in the first inclusive beauty pageant in my country obtaining the title of Miss Wheelchair Guatemala 2019. Following this, I was accepted into the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 pageant.

I am motivated by the desire and eagerness to demonstrate the potential, strength and capabilities women have developed in any

field. I want to empower women and eliminate social exclusion. Though the spaces of inclusion are becoming more visible and I wish to use my participation in this pageant, to continue breaking the schemes and paradigms and make this a more inclusive world.

As a final message, I would like to emphasize that we should all dare to shine. People assert that we are not machines and therefore we can overcome obstacles.

If you tell yourself that you won't be able to do something, you surely won't do it. It's not because of those that try to limit us but because of our own will. It is crucial to believe in your strengths and capabilities and above all to motivate yourself to overcome the objectives or goals you have set for yourself.

You only need one thing to do everything you set out to do... and that is willpower.

# ESPAÑOL

**D**esde el primer momento en el que vi la luz, fui una niña a la cual le diagnosticaban constantemente pocas probabilidades de vida por haber nacido con mielo meningocele. Tuve una infancia un poco diferente, debido a que desenvolverme en un entorno adecuado a cada etapa de la infancia y adolescencia era complicado para mí, ya que el acceso a la educación era denegado por los establecimientos educativos desde la primaria hasta la universitaria, así como limitado por padecer de constantes problemas de salud... Hasta hace siete años, tenía dos hogares en mi vida y mi estadía se porcentuaba en pasar 30 por ciento del tiempo en casa y el 70 restante en el hospital.

He vivido rodeada de ángeles que me han apoyado incondicionalmente durante un poco más de 31 años. Ante todo, agradezco a Dios por la fortaleza que ha sembrado en mí y a mi madre porque sin estos elementos esenciales nada de lo que soy ahora sería la realidad que recorro y forjo cada día.

Antes de cumplir dos años, por primera vez, fui intervenida quirúrgicamente. Desde esa edad utilizaba aparatos ortopédicos para lograr caminar, esto no ayudo en nada y más bien empeoró mi situación; a los 11 años empecé a utilizar muletas para apoyarme, ya que la ortopedia me causó daños en las piernas y mi equilibrio no era muy bueno. La parte más complicada inicia seis años después; mi transición a la silla de

ruedas llega los 17, cuando fui diagnosticada con osteomielitis en ambas extremidades inferiores, mi situación era muy severa, desde ese momento durante un lapso de 48 meses mis visitas al centro hospitalario fueron intermitentes.

Debido a la gravedad de mi condición, cercana a cumplir los 22 años, tome una de las decisiones más complicadas que se me han presentado, firmar la autorización para que me amputaran ambas piernas. Muchos no estaban de acuerdo con mi decisión, otros aducían que era una elección de cobardes, ya que desde su punto de vista "era una solución o salida fácil", pero después de pasar tanto tiempo en riesgo, ¿qué podrían saber los demás del dolor físico y emocional que alguien en esta situación atraviesa...

Recuerdo con gracia, que cuando desperté me sentí feliz y lo primero que comenté a las enfermeras fue: ¡Ya no estoy enferma, ya no dolerá más! Pensé que todo había acabado, pero me equivoqué un poco, un par de meses después tuve una recaída. Mientras recibía la fisioterapia para empezar a usar prótesis, me lastimó y eso me generó una visita de casi dos años en el hospital.

Veo atrás y puedo decir: este camino ha tenido muchos obstáculos pero ¡los he sobrepasado! Me repuse de dos shock sépticos, 8 cirugías, de la constante discriminación y rechazo, pero a cambio he recibido

demasiada fortaleza, amor, apoyo e innumerables bendiciones, que hoy me han traído hasta aquí.

**Soy María, Publicista y Comunicadora guatemalteca, una mujer con discapacidad motriz y usuaria de silla ruedas; una mujer introvertida que ama la vida, que eligió ser fuerte y que aún con la adversidad no ha parado de alcanzar cada uno de sus sueños.**

Tengo claro que todos atravesamos por situaciones que nos debilitan, que nos ponen constantemente a prueba, pero nuestra fe y amor propio son los ingredientes esenciales que te llenaran de fortaleza. ¡Me ocurre a mí!, han sido tantos años duros, porque nacer con una enfermedad y adaptarse a vivir con ella tampoco es fácil, pero cada día me he dado cuenta de lo fuerte que soy, de lo mucho que valgo y que, a pesar de llorar tanto, de tener que sacar fuerzas para sonreír, cansarme, rendirme... y luego de unas horas o al otro día, debo respirar y decir:

"María es algo que vas a vivir todos los días, así que levántate, mira al frente, sonríe... no dejes que el odio de los demás te envenene y apague tu luz".

## Miss Wheelchair

En el 2019 participé en el primer certamen de belleza inclusiva de mi país obteniendo el título como "Miss Wheelchair Guatemala 2019", derivado de esto en días pasados fui notificada de mi aceptación en

el Certamen Mundial de Belleza inclusiva para mujeres en silla de ruedas denominado "Miss Wheelchair World 2022".

Mi motivación es el deseo y afán de evidenciar el potencial, fortaleza y las capacidades que las mujeres hemos desarrollado en cualquier ámbito, quiero empoderar a las mujeres y suprimir la exclusión social. Estoy segura que los espacios de inclusión son cada

vez más visibles y aprovecho esta participación para seguir rompiendo esquemas y paradigmas que me permitan lograr un mundo más incluyente.

Como mensaje final, quiero hacerles énfasis especial en que ¡Atrévanse a brillar más!. Las personas aseveran todo el tiempo, basadas en observaciones retrospectivas, pero no somos máquinas y, por tanto, podemos 'superar los obstáculos'.

Si te dices a ti mismo que no vas a poder hacer algo, seguramente no lo vas a hacer y no por 'limitantes' sino por voluntad. Es crucial creer en tus fortalezas y capacidades y sobre todo automotivarse para superar los objetivos o metas que te hayas trazado

Solo necesitas algo para hacer todo lo que te propongas... y eso es voluntad.



# Miss India

# Somya Thakur.

Achieving things, making my name and getting recognition in society were not easy jobs but I was determined to work and contribute my bit to making a difference in Indian society.





**H**ello everyone. I am Somya Thakur, Miss Wheelchair World India 2022. I am a wheelchair model, disabled activist, motivational speaker and HR professional. I am also the director of the Positive Abilities Rotaract Club. I was born in Himachal Pradesh, Solan, a small town, and have lived in Chandigarh Mohali for more than 20 years. I love to travel, cook, and explore new things, people and places. I love to create fashion trends and aspire to one day have a career within the fashion world.

I am passionate about life and take on any challenge that comes my way. I believe that what life throws at me will only make me stronger, wiser and more refined. I am a determined woman that looks to the brighter side of life. I'm inclined to look for solutions to problems rather than worrying about them and believe every person possesses an unaware ability within.

At 11 days old, I accidentally slipped from the hands of a caretaker. This resulted in a fracture of my right thigh. Unfortunately, the bone

couldn't be corrected and while the doctor tried to fix the break, he ended up stretching my leg so hard that it resulted in a dislocated hip. Further treatment brought the fracturing of my leg an additional three times.

Due to a lack of movement during my childhood, my muscles were unable to develop properly leaving me unable to stand or walk. Adjusting to this and the different challenges it brought, was difficult for both myself and my parents. My family gave me strength and helped me to educate myself like any other child. Education

helped me to develop and enhance myself so that I could contribute to society and reach all I have today.

In 2012, I completed my higher education at a regular educational institute. I graduated with a Bachelor in Computer Application (BCA) in 2015 and two years later, in 2017, with a post-graduate Masters in Business Administration in IT and Telecom from Panjab University (UIAMS) Chandigarh. During my initial school days, I had difficulty getting admission to normal and regular educational institutes. These institutions were reluctant to give admission to disabled students as they were unable to cater to their special needs.

In December 2018, I was a model and gracefully rode the ramp for Shalini visakan, a fashion designer for the differently-abled in the world's longest fashion show, an official Guinness World Record. The show went on for 25 continuous hours and was hosted by Shobhana Dhiman Entertainments. I have been a wheelchair model in many fashion shows and modeling events. I was also invited as a motivational speaker to inspire women and underprivileged students on many occasions.

I was awarded the Miss Million Dollar Smile at Panjab University, in 2017. I also won Smart Wonder Women and was crowned as Kozenoor Miss Punjaban India Runner Up, in 2019. I was invited as Chief Guest for the inauguration of the Boond Boond Bachana Ha initiative (Water Saving) by the late

Aneesh Bhanot, President of Rotary Chandigarh Shivalik Club, in 2019. I was invited as a guest of honor and social activist in Dandiya Utsav by Rainbow Club and a special guest in CHP in Raising Kid Star by Urban Odyssey in 2019. I have also been a jury member at various modeling and fashion events.

In 2020, I was awarded the Women Achiever Award by Tathastu Charitable Society and the National Great Icon Award by the Anti-Corruption Foundation of India. I was also selected as one of the finalists for Miss Wheelchair India 2022.

Achieving things, making my name and getting recognition in society were not easy jobs but I was determined to work and contribute my bit to making a difference in Indian society.

During my college days, I helped spread awareness of disabilities and their needs. I worked at writing letters requesting ramps to be built and making the educational infrastructure wheelchair accessible. I also worked in some NGOs for the upliftment of underprivileged disabled people. I have worked to make public places like markets, restaurants, hotels, educational institutes and corporate offices wheelchair accessible and disabled-friendly.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 crisis hit globally, making the world shut down and impacting people's livelihoods, health and food systems, I was forced to face one more battle and fight again. In February of that year,

I had a car accident and fractured both knees. Due to the pandemic, my treatment was delayed. This resulted in making both of my legs and knees too stiff to bend. Recovery was slow. For 2 years I remained at home, in bed receiving painful physiotherapy sessions. During that time, my health deteriorated with the pain and I lost a large portion of muscle and weight. I had lost all hope and any confidence that life would return to how it was earlier. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to continue the things I enjoyed, such as my job and modeling. With the grace of God and the encouragement and help of my mother, I fought back again and got healthier, recovered from my injuries and got back to the life I had achieved and loved.

With belief and hard work, I became Miss Wheelchair World India 2022. I am honored to represent India and make my country proud.

Using this platform I can encourage youth to do great things in the field of fashion and glamour and achieve great heights despite any disability. This opportunity has empowered me and given me the responsibility to spread awareness of the needs of disabled people, their abilities and if given an equal opportunity, the knowledge that we can do wonders.

As women, we face much discrimination and have had to work harder to get recognition for our achievements. Disabled women have even greater difficulty. But as said, if you have the ability and will to persevere you can shine through the dark and low times, and come back stronger.

# Miss Kenya Esther Nyakiuru Njugun.

“Proverb 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart for it’s the wellspring of life.”



**M**y name is Esther Nyakiuru Njuguna. I was born on October 13, 1996, in Embakasi, a town on the outskirts of Nairobi.

I am the oldest child in a family of four. My brother and I live with muscular dystrophy and use a wheelchair for mobility. We continue to live under our parents' care because of this.

I had a normal childhood and attended Lily Academy, kindergarten through primary school. At 6, I began experiencing movement challenges and frequently fell when walking. This caused me to avoid playing games that involved running. I also found I needed to hold onto another person for support when walking. These difficulties became a concern for my teacher and parents, and I went to the hospital for a check-up.

At first, I was misdiagnosed with kwashiorkor and given medication and supplements to help boost my muscle development. My movements gradually began to change; I started to stand and walk on my toes. To help correct this, my physiotherapist recommended I wear a splint at night during sleep. After a couple of months, things began to change, but not for the better. At this time, I also began to experience convulsions when tired. It was recommended I see a cardiologist for a heart check-up. Fortunately, they confirmed my heart was healthy.

When I was 7, hospital stays had become a regular occurrence

until one day, a pediatrician recommended we see a specialist in muscle development. Finally, doctors knew what was wrong. I was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.

At the time, little was known about disabilities. Receiving financial support, assistive devices, or medication was challenging and the level of discrimination was high. Now, there are non-government humanitarian organizations and the national government to help create awareness of the rights and abilities of persons with disabilities.

Despite my health issues, I continued my education at Lily Academy. The teachers were accommodating, supportive and caring. In the 8th grade, I transferred to Joytown Primary School, a disability-friendly academy. While there, I graduated and received the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination, completed my primary school and joined Joytown Secondary School for the physically handicapped.

In 2015, my mobility issues forced me to begin using a wheelchair. Through the help of a Christian missions institution known as Bethany Kids, I received my first wheelchair. It was a GEN\_3 Model from the humanitarian organization for persons with disabilities known as Free Wheelchair Mission.

I grew up watching my mother machine embroider, and with excitement, I began to learn this skill as well. Unfortunately, due to my mobility issues, things turned sour. One day, as I worked to pedal

the wheel, the machine fell on me, resulting in a fractured leg. This experience left me hesitant to continue learning, and I avoided anything to do with this craft. However, in my adult years, my interest once again peaked. This time I choose a skill more respectful of my mobility issues but still in line with my interests. I ventured into the world of tapestry and later turned my love and talent for this skill into a business.

In November 2018, I participated in a beauty pageant for persons with disabilities. Surprisingly, though it was my first experience, I was crowned Miss Wheelchair Kenya 2018/2019. At first, it was a challenge; however, through each achievement, I gained courage in being in the spotlight, facing and speaking to the crowd, and answering questions during media interviews. These events opened doors to better opportunities, such as dining with our Country's prominent leaders and attending national events like the 58th Madaraka Day. In addition, I took part as a curtain raiser during regular modeling competitions, those not for persons with disabilities, as it helped to create awareness for inclusivity.

I discovered a passion for being a counselor in high school, and in 2019 pursued further education and studied for a Counselling Psychology Certificate level at Amani Counseling College and Training Institute. This opened new opportunities to understand my personal and societal challenges. From this, I gained more understanding of how



it is also my responsibility to help create awareness about disabilities and the capabilities of the people that live with them. Unfortunately, the institution itself was not wheelchair-friendly, but upon my enrollment made the decision to change and built a ramp allowing for accessibility to my classes.

Proverb 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart for it's the wellspring of life." This taught me an awareness of what to hold on to and what to let go of in life. I

am an introvert who reflects greatly on events that have shaped my development, both positively and negatively. I love reading magazines and novels and watching National Geographic. I am a fan of wheelchair basketball and love being in the arena cheering on the game. I also participated in shotput and wheelchair racing, though only for fun and not for a professional competition.

Throughout my life experiences, the challenge of accepting my disability

and adjusting my social life has taught me the most. I have learned to be content with what I have, utilize what I have and never compare myself to others. It is the differences between each of us that make society beautiful.

# Miss Malaysia Ashikeen Binti Iqbal.

“ I am passionate about creating awareness about people with disabilities and their abilities.





**M**y name is Nur Ashikeen Binti Iqbal, also known as Kimi Black. I sustained a Spinal Cord Injury from a hit-and-run driver at the age of 17. After completing my rehabilitation in Singapore, I went on to further my education and graduated with a degree in Psychology from Wawasan Open University. In 2022, I graduated from the National University Malaysia with an MBA in marketing.

My boldness and confidence pushed me forward, and I participated in the Miss Wheelchair Queen Pageant 2018. That drive also urged me to continue, and I was crowned the first Miss Wheelchair Queen Malaysia Champion 2018. I also hold the title of Most Supporters 2018.

In 2019, I was crowned Ms. Charity Queen 2019 and, later, the Top 500 Beauty Queen Ambassador Brand 2019. This is in the Book of Records of Marlindo and Malaysia.

In 2020, I was an ambassador for Project57.

In 2021, I was crowned Saree Icon in Malaysia, making it in the Cholan Books of World Records.

In 2022, I was crowned an ambassador for Malaysia's Indian Supermodel and chosen to be the

finalist for Miss Wheelchair World 2022, representing Malaysia in Mexico.

I am the owner of a small start-up hoping to provide employment opportunities for single parents and women, especially the differently abled, in the future. I have a passion for singing, have sung at different events and have released three singles on YouTube and iTunes. I authored a fictional romance novel, *Wheels of Success*, available through Amazon.

I am passionate about creating awareness for people with disabilities and their abilities. I love seeing people change their minds towards disabled people, and women, in general. I want to be seen as an equal, not as someone with a disability.

My favorite quote is, "Why are you trying so hard to fit in when you were born to stand out?" All I can say is always follow your dreams no matter your situation.

I am passionate about advocacy, education, and policy. This has allowed me to encourage others to share their stories and use their strengths to impact the community. I will do all I can to fight for the rights of the disabled and women so that they may have access to the complex

rehabilitation they need and deserve!

I plan to travel around the world, speaking to people in differently-abled communities, individuals, medical professionals, lawmakers, and insurance companies, about my story and how I overcame my struggles. I also want to be a motivational speaker and brand ambassador.

I offer a unique, positive perspective on life, challenging individuals to realize that almost anything is possible with will and determination.

I will do my best to represent my country, Malaysia, in the grand finals of Miss Wheelchair World in Mexico this October 2022.

# Miss Mexico

# Karen Koch Ferrer Aquino.

I and all the other girls can be an inspiration so that more women who are in a situation of disability do what they are so passionate about in any aspect of their lives. ■





**G**reetings to all readers, first, I would like to deeply thank our friends at Mélange magazine for giving us the space to make known a little about who we are and what we do for our society.

My name is Karen Koch Ferrer Aquino, I am 33 years old, I am a finalist candidate and proud representative of the country of Mexico in the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 pageant for women with motor disabilities.

#### **Who is Karen Koch Ferrer Aquino?**

Well, I am a proudly Mexican woman who had to face situations, perhaps very hard for a girl, but as time has passed and through experiences, I have learned to value what is truly important, to pay attention to the significance of the simple details that life gives you; but, above all, to convert what for everyone can be a weakness, into pure strength to reach my goals.

I acquired my disability at the age of 10, due to a disease called Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), in medical terms known as radiculomyelopathy. It is an autoimmune disease, that is, the immune system is out of control due to various factors (among them, and as it was in my case, a recurrent throat infection and the excessive use of antibiotics), which causes neurological damage. where the neurotransmitter that covers the terminals as well as the nerve connections called myelin is affected and destroyed, this is called demyelination; thus, causing the loss of functions such

as the motor, sensitive and organic functions. The sequelae of GBS can range from mild, such as the loss of mobility of one or several areas of the body, to severe, such as loss of total mobility of the body (quadriplegia and vegetative state) and loss of lung function, for which the person may have a cardiac arrest. respiratory for which the intubation process is carried out, unfortunately in some cases of this syndrome people reach death.

In my case, I consider myself a very lucky person, because despite the fact that the consequences or the neurological damage left by the evolutionary process of the disease were severe and the prognosis for my recovery was always that I would never recover the ability to walk, I am a GBS survivor and being able to see the face of my mother and my father, who passed away two months ago, day by day, carrying out my personal and professional projects, is what makes me happy and move forward day by day.

And this, plus the support and love of my family, has helped me a lot to grow morally and spiritually as a person, to really generate empathy in many ways and give importance to situations and problems that as a person with a disability I live daily due to the social barriers, and that as a person without disabilities I was not able to perceive due to age and lack of information on the subject, since in 1999 the word inclusion was not known both in my country and in my state. For which I have dedicated myself to social activism for 7 years, for part of my professional career and for the defense of the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD).

#### **What are the goals and achievements you have achieved in your life?**

I have been with my motor disability for 23 years and that has not limited me to fulfill myself as a professional, I currently have a degree in Naturopathy, working in my private office applying alternative medicine, in which I apply therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, massages, physiotherapy, among others. I have a doctorate in Education, and I dedicated myself as a teacher to teach at some university institutions in my city. I work as coordinator of the health area of the Institute of Professional Studies of Sciences and Health of the Southeast (IEPCS), I am the host and collaborator in the organization of the "Friday of Sciences and Health" program of said institute.

In the field of sports, I practice adapted Calisthenics and is part of the Chiapas Wheelchair Sport Association, A.C., as well as the mixed adapted basketball team "Chiapas Selection", an association whose objective is to spread adapted sport to the municipalities of the Chiapas state.

I am a social activist in defense of the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD), a speaker and workshop facilitator whose objective is to raise awareness and sensitize society in general about the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities; work that I undertake independently and in collaboration with some municipal and government institutions. And I hope soon to be able to establish a civil association for the benefit of my social sector.

I participated as a state liaison in the National Movement of Persons with Disabilities and coordinator of the Chiapas committee before said movement originated in Mexico.

I have had the opportunity to participate in inclusive modeling catwalks and will soon represent Mexico internationally as a finalist candidate in the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 pageant for women with motor disabilities, in October of this year.

**Being 23 years old as a person with a disability, do you consider Mexico to be an inclusive country?**

No, it really isn't. Unfortunately, we are not yet close to being so, since in Mexico there is still a lack of interest in the social sector of PwD in many aspects, for which we cannot enjoy our rights as individuals, and neither can we have a "normal life". and accessible as possible", this could be due to the fact that many authorities who are the voices of the people continue to see us as the "minority", a small group that does not add or subtract from me, but we are not really a minor group, since globally we are 15% of the population, in my Mexican country we are approximately 20 million people with some physical limitation and 6 million people with some disability, which are not really accurate figures, since censuses are not carried out in all homes, due to various factors. And it is because of these data that I dare to ask each of the authorities if we are really the minority and if we will continue to be

a social sector that we will continue to leave aside or make visible what has been invisible for a long time? We must begin to generate a real awareness and capable of being able to generate empathy in general, because disability is not something you choose, it simply occurs, and not only due to an accident, illness or congenital origin, but that advanced age itself It will be physically limiting in a natural way and we cannot forget about temporary disabilities, such as fractures, dislocations, etc. Change and accessibility are not only for us, it is for everyone and that is what we need to reflect on.

**What difficulties do women with disabilities face?**

It could be said that women with disabilities have a double struggle due to gender discrimination, as well as physical condition. In a society where machismo, as well as prejudices have been maintained and have been instilled directly or indirectly for generations, it has caused labor and political opportunities for a woman with a disability to be truly scarce, violence and abuse to be more frequent in this social sector. The perspective persists where intelligence and abilities are conditioned by the physical, when it should be the opposite.

It is necessary that we begin to consider these shortcomings and misconceptions regarding what disability is purely and the true limitations that a person with a disability has; that we start talking

about equal opportunities and guarantees for the members of this social sector.

**What do you expect from the Miss Wheelchair World 2022 international project in which you will represent your Mexican country?**

That each of the finalist candidates who will be present at said event demonstrate their abilities and work for the benefit of their society, since the struggle of each one is the same in different parts of the world.

That as much as I and all the other girls can be an inspiration so that more women who are in a situation of disability do what they are so passionate about in any aspect of their lives, without fear, with the confidence they should have in themselves and in their abilities, that they stop endorsing the prejudices, taboos and stigmas that society itself has planted in us for a long time and that we really begin to see each other with a lot of love and courage. And I really hope that this project will be transcendent morally, spiritually and personally for us, but mainly for the

society without disabilities, that they can understand that we are all part of the same society, that anyone can find themselves with a condition of disability directly or indirectly and that For this reason, we must be more aware and empathetic, that this helps us to understand that if we really educated our boys and girls about what disability really is, outside of prejudices, then we would not be talking about inclusion but about coexistence.

That the authorities of my country begin to take real importance on the

inclusion of people with disabilities in all social aspects, and that we receive a dignified and equitable treatment.

I reiterate my gratitude to Mélange magazine for the space and its interest in knowing a little about your servant, as well as congratulations for being an inclusive magazine that is responsible for publicizing important issues on disability, continue as you have done up to now. have made. Greetings from Chiapas, Mexico.



# Miss Mongolia Lkham- suren Bold.

“Of the more than 30,000 children with disabilities in Mongolia, only 0.2 percent are being educated and live as other children do.



I am a citizen of the Hunnu Empire in the heart of Asia and the historical Mongolian emperor Genghis Khan. We have a traditional festival Tsagaan Sar to greet all the families, and our relatives, the Three Manly Games held During Mongolian Traditional Naadam and other unique traditions and customs and natural sightseeing of my homeland with four seasons.

My name is Lkhamsuren Bold.

I was born on May 27, 1984, in Saikhan soum of Bulgan province and raised in the warm love of mining workers-parents in Erdenet city with my three beautiful siblings.

My childhood included a busy 10 years of basic education, where I played, sang, and danced in kindergarten like any other child. I was striving to learn, curious, adventurous, and full of energy throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

In 2002, I had the opportunity to study at the Agricultural University of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, for a degree in Land Cadastre Engineering.

My student years were inextricably linked to volunteering. Because I took the few free hours I had left between classes to volunteer at the nursing home, the elders were full of laughter, joy, and gratitude. I washed their hair, washed their clothes and shared their feelings.

In 2005, I met the man I loved and soon had an extensive wedding. His happiness, the wedding guests that made us both happy, the holiday cake, the first night of the wedding, the hot days of the honeymoon, and the happy days continued. Unfortunately, those happy days did not last long. A few days after the ceremony, we were on our way to Erdenet to pay our respects to our parents when we had a car accident. This began the years that tested my strength and the strength of my loved ones. The bad news was that I could no longer stand on my own two feet. My heart, dreams and hopes felt meaningless and chaotic during the dark and sad days as they passed.

I had already spent five years in international hospitals in the United States, Japan and China, completely isolated from society, afraid of people's attitudes and views. Even though I didn't get back on my feet, one sentence filled my heart with joy, as if I was stepping back from those horrible five years of the past, and God gave me another new life.

A few years later, I heard the news that I was able to conceive and become a mother. Soon I gave birth to my first healthy baby boy. Now we are the parents of two beautiful boys. From that moment on, I believed life should start all over again, that we should not hide

behind the word disability but open up to society, grow together and live together.

Currently, I am a 37-year-old housewife from a mining family and a mother of two. I successfully opened my own children's clothing store, became a housewife, participated in the Miss Mongolia Wheelchair National Competition, and became the National Winner. Now, I am here to represent my country at the Miss Wheelchair World, to meet women from other countries, and to work hard to add light and hope to the future of Mongolia's wheelchair users. My goal: is to build a positive attitude, equal participation, and inclusive society.

Of the more than 30,000 children with disabilities in Mongolia, only 0.2 percent are being educated and live as other children do. Where do the thousands of children, born of innate and accidental actions, think and dream?

If I become Miss World, I will help children with disabilities in less developed countries to live, play, learn, make friends, go to the schools of their choice and be active in a non-discriminatory society. Little hearts will be exposed to society and will work diligently to live happily and equally.



# Miss Netherlands

Tirzah  
Lopez.



Looking back, I am thankful for taking good care of my body and health. I often think it's the reason I





**M**y name is Tirzah Lopez. I am 31 years old, born in The Netherlands and grew up on Curacao, a small island near the coast of Venezuela. My father was born in the Dutch Caribbean, and has Colombian roots. My mother is Dutch. My parents met while working at an orphanage house as volunteers. My mother is a teacher, and my father is a graphic designer. I have a younger sister and brother.

I have been drawing since I could hold a pencil. I won first place at age 5 in a drawing competition. My dream to become a fashion designer began when I was 11.

When my parents divorced in 2003, my mother brought my siblings and me back to The Netherlands. We lived with my grandparents for a few years. I had a difficult time as a teenager. I did not fit in at school and was bullied. I struggled with depression and low self-esteem

during those years. When I turned 18, I moved to a city to study Art & Design. My life's journey has had a lot of ups and downs, but I made peace with the past and started to focus on my future.

After graduation, I enrolled at the University of Applied Sciences to become a Textile Engineer. I worked as an intern at the headquarters of the Dutch fashion brand G-Star in Amsterdam. I also traveled to Barcelona for a minor in Fashion

Design at IED. In the summer of 2016, I graduated with a thesis and my own fashion collection.

After graduation, I spent a lot of time in the gym doing fitness, cross fit, and yoga while searching for a job. Looking back, I am thankful for taking good care of my body and health. I often think its the reason I survived.

In December 2016, I traveled to Barcelona for a weekend of skiing. Unfortunately, this trip also resulted in a traumatic accident that changed my life forever. I slipped away on ice and fell. The fall collapsed my lungs and broke all my ribs and my spine. I sustained a spinal cord injury resulting in the loss of use of my legs.

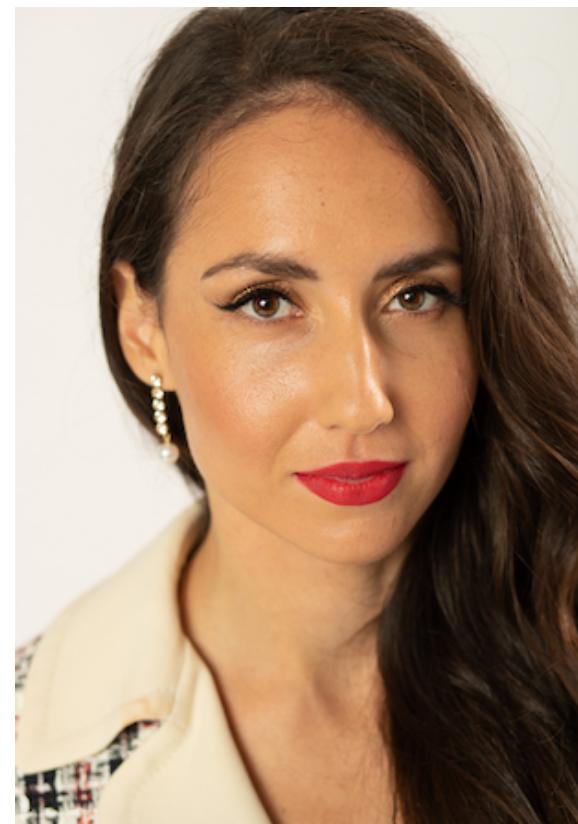
A month after surviving my accident in Spain, I transferred back to The Netherlands. My rehabilitation completed after three months; however, it extended as there was no place for me to live. I became homeless. My parents could not afford to support me, and the bureaucracy got me into impossible situations. After two years of struggling on the street, I finally found a living space where I could live independently as a wheelchair user. I faced discrimination, vandalism and lack of inclusion on multiple levels. With a lot of effort, I

now have a part-time job at a non-profit agency helping to improve living conditions for civilians.

During my rehabilitation, I began sharing short texts on social media sharing my situation. It was important to me to express myself through writing and drawing. I began searching for examples of other young women in similar situations, but I could not find much available. I decided to become the one I was looking for: a strong, independent woman in a wheelchair. I wanted to show the world that life does not end after sustaining a spinal cord injury. People often tell me I am either "Too pretty to be in a wheelchair" or "I would not want to live if that happened to me." Comments like these motivate me to change people perceptions of individuals with a disability. I have had many conversations with different people and hope that by addressing subjects like accessibility, disability, and inclusion to inspire others.

During the past five years, I have grown my online presence, and told my story in various famous magazines. I became a model though I know it is not something I can make a living on. I have noticed more brands and companies are starting to open

up to the idea of a disabled model, but it is still not common. I rolled down the catwalk in Rome one year after my accident. Last year I did my first commercial for Libresse. I also participated in a TV show where they challenged me to perform on a stage along with professional dancers. I take every opportunity that comes my way, and this year, I look forward to the Miss Wheelchair World event.



# Miss Nigeria Rita Ofili.

“

Despite the great tragedy I endured, I never lost sight of my dreams, plans, goals and life's purpose on earth. ■





**M**y name is Rita Ofili. I am the first wheelchair model in Nigeria, a motivational speaker, an actor, a disability activist and a counselor. I am a survivor. I am a social entrepreneur and advocate for people living with disabilities in Nigeria.

I was born and raised in Ibusa Oshmili North local government

area of Delta State, Nigeria. We are a family of 11, my parents Mr. and Mrs. Nkemcho, Asika Ofili, my eight siblings, and myself. When I was 8, I was briefly ill and taken to the hospital. There I was given an injection that left me paralyzed.

I have survived and conquered my disability, and I choose to dedicate my life to sharing messages of hope, ability, faith, and above all,

encouragement so that others will believe in themselves.

Despite the great tragedy I endured, I never lost sight of my dreams, plans, goals and life's purpose on earth.

I attended Santa Maria private school in Ibusa, the Federal Government Girls College in Ibusa and the University of



Lagos, graduating with majors in linguistics, African and Asian studies and the Faculty of Art.

I have been featured in numerous newspaper articles and well-known publications like The Nation, Punch, Guardian, National Life, National, Sunday Sun, and more. I have also been a television producer of mini-feature for LTV: "Children Hawking on the Street", radio, and

a guest speaker at numerous events and programs. These include the University of Lagos' Orientation and Matriculation program, Fresh UTME and Direct & Entry 2016/2017, the International Igbo Women Forum U.K. and Nwanyi Bu Ugwu (International Women's Day) held in Imo State in 2015.

In 2010, I entered the Miss Wheelchair Nigeria, crowned Ms Wheelchair Delta State. In 2017, I was awarded 2nd runner-up in the Mr and Miss Niger Delta Beauty Pageant in Port Harcourt.

I have shown my great talent on stage and, above all else, my passion for breaking barriers and making history in Nigeria. My story has been on many platforms reaching millions of people, both the differently abled and the able-bodied, with my continuous determination to succeed in life.

In 2012, I launched an NGO titled Epahaphata Hope Foundation. It is a non-profit organization driven by individuals and professionals from all walks of life bound with one common humanitarian focus to provide physically challenged individuals in Nigeria with free wheelchairs and other adaptive aids. In addition, the foundation gifts a scholarship to wheelchair users, empowering them through education, license and skill acquisition. It also creates awareness of the different issues affecting those with mobility issues.

Additionally, I am part of an inclusive entertainment firm designed to help persons with disabilities and those less fortunate. Through the

foundation, we have produced an inclusive drama series that ran from 2019-2020, as well as the "I am Rita Ofori" documentary drama housed on the YouTube channel.

I am proud to raise my voice for the things I'm passionate about and with purpose. My focus is on projects that will leave a mark on people's minds and hearts. I will continue to dream and, above all, fight for my goals and ideas, never give up, and when I fall, I will continue to get back up. I will break barriers and hope to inspire, uplift and motivate many along the way. I will help to create a disabled market, create greater awareness and strengthen my life journey in the fashion industry, entertainment, politics and social media channels within Nigeria and other African countries.



# Miss Panama

# Angeles Aguilar Vega.

Now, it's my turn to continue  
fighting to move on.



**H**i, I'm María de los Angeles Aguilar Vega. I was born on June 6, 1983, in Antón, a town located within the interior of Panama City. My mother's name is Praxedes Vega and my father's name is Omar Aguilar. On my mother's side, I have two brothers, Rafael and Raúl. On my father's side, I have a sister, Fátima. I am the youngest of my family.

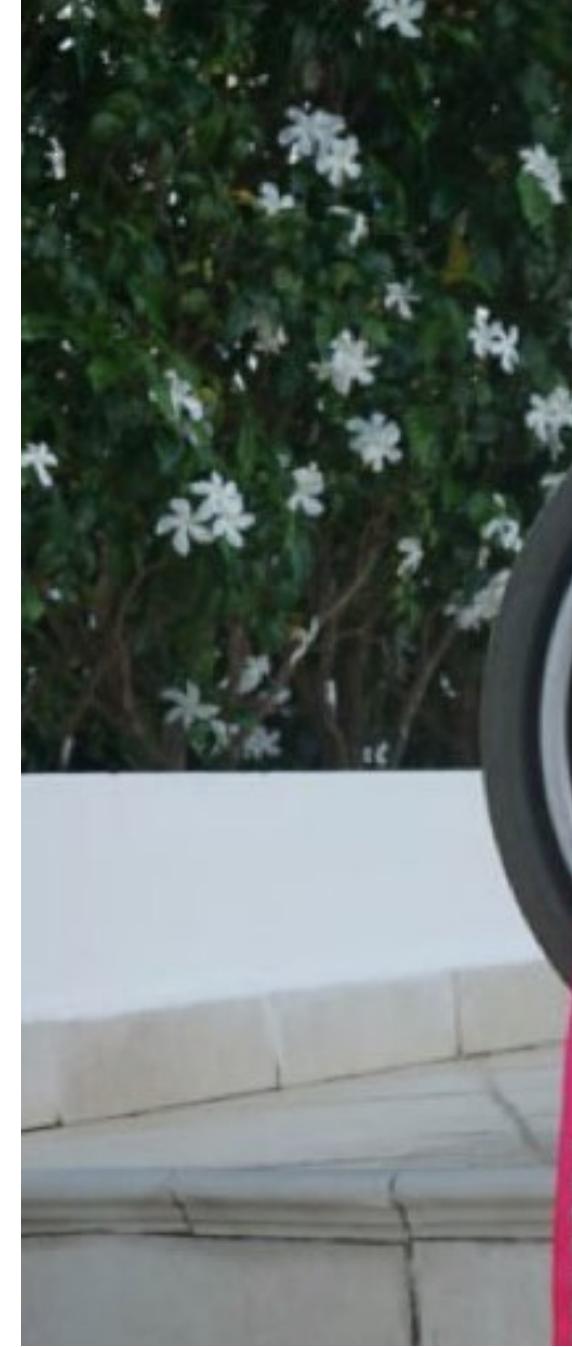
My pre-kindergarten studies took place at the COIF CAIPI close to my home. When I was a child on my way to school my mom would come out of the house to watch me on my way. She would later regale me with stories of my walking along the shore greeting people along the way. Upon my return home, my bags would be so heavy with fruit and vegetables gifted from those people she was unable to lift them. It's funny to hear, and beautiful too.

After I finished my secondary studies, I began university studying early stimulation with family orientation (to work with children with disabilities). It was during this time I experienced my accident. I was 23 years old, very young, and happy. The first thing doctors told my parents is that I would no longer be able to walk. Three months later, I knew it was true. I was in the hospital for nearly 9 months, my condition serious due to the trauma caused by the strong blows in the accident.

I had not received the news of my paralysis well, as you can imagine,

however, I understood my blessings. I still had my hands, my brain, and my eyes, all in working order. My father was very surprised by my response. My parents are very old. I am the captain of this ship, if I fall, they fall and that cannot happen. I have to give them strength. This is how my new story began, full of new challenges and starting from scratch. I needed to learn to move around while sitting in a wheelchair, therapies to learn how to dress, and more. I thank God infinitely for this new opportunity in life. It hasn't been easy, at all, but each one of my steps has been deeply worthwhile. I value so many things, including each part of my body.

In this new part of my life, I have met many people. Among them is the physiotherapist Hugo Lombardo, a fighting man who's fought from day one for adapted sports, to whom I will be deeply grateful. I am involved in wheelchair racing. It has led me to leave my country and to stand out in the area of athletics. My forte has been discuss throwing, shot put, and my favorite, javelin. Javelin has taken me to Costa Rica, to the Special Olympics where I won a gold medal in three categories. I've also traveled to El Salvador and stood out very well in this for many years. Afterward, I went back to the university where I graduated with a Bachelor's in Human Resources Administration. I currently work in the Ministry



of Environment, working on behalf of the environment, forests and animals.

In 2019, something beautiful happened in my life, something I never thought would happen. I became pregnant with a beautiful boy. It was not an easy experience and at 6 months I gave birth. Thankfully, God allowed me to hear and feel my son. These were the most beautiful minutes of my entire life. Sadly, these minutes were all I



was able to share with him as he passed away shortly thereafter. He had many complications and could not survive but he gave me the joy of becoming his mother. That will always be with me, in my heart.

Now, it's my turn to continue fighting to move on. If you ask me right now what has been the most difficult thing in my life, I would say losing a child, without a doubt. If you ask me what is the most wonderful thing, I would say it is becoming

one of the finalists to participate in Miss Wheelchair World 2022. I am grateful to be able to represent my beautiful country, Panama. It is a great opportunity to show that my fears and obstacles have been worth it and to know this will open doors where I will have the opportunity to help many women with disabilities know that we are all beautiful, inside and out, and that together we can go far. I am excited to be in Mexico and meet all the girls. I am a volunteer for an association that helps people

with drug addiction. I love to be able to help motivate others. It fills me to know that I leave a grain of sand in each one of them.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell you a little about myself. Thank you for this valuable opportunity.

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**Miss  
Peru**

**Sandy  
Fiorella  
Izquierdo  
Tafur.**

MIRAFLORES  
CIUDAD HEROICA





**H**ello, I am Sandy Fiorella Izquierdo Tafur. I am 32 years old and was born in the region of Lima Provinces, Chancay. I lived with my parents in Irrigación Santa Rosa, a valley dedicated to agriculture and the cultivation of citrus and other fruits. My parents are the greatest example of perseverance, respect and love and have helped me become the woman I am today.

At the end of my school years, I traveled to the capital of Peru, Lima, for university studies. I decided to study for a career in education and contribute positively to the development of people. I graduated with a degree in education, then I did a master's degree in Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Quality. I believe it is my vocation for education that has allowed me to grow as a person. In my time as a teacher, I've had the opportunity to work as an educational coach for a team of teachers of the Innova Schools network. Education is the fundamental piece to generating change in society.

I am married to David Melgarejo, a wonderful person who, for 15 years, has taught me the meaning of love. We met at university and since then he has become my life partner. Together, we have a daughter, Thais. Thais is a wonderful little girl who gave me the joy of becoming a mother, who is my strength and my greatest reason to enjoy life and follow my dreams.

2016 was a year of great change in my life. In January, David and I married and started a new life with hopes of forming our own family.

Seven months later I suffered a car accident that resulted in a spinal cord injury, and incomplete paraplegia at the T11 - L1 level. From that moment my life changed. It has been a process of acceptance and adaptation to my new physical condition. I must admit, the beginning was very difficult for me, but for family and friends. I had to learn to perform daily activities such as sitting alone, changing and the use of a wheelchair. In the beginning, I had not yet considered the wheelchair as part of my life.

After a period of months, I had to face, with greater strength, a return to independence. I had to face the reality of society and know that in my country we must still work for the improvement of people with reduced mobility.

As the months passed, I became pregnant and started a new adventure waiting for the arrival of our daughter. With a lot of care and all the illusion, my little girl was born. Finding myself in a wheelchair was not an obstacle, nor a reason for sadness because we learned to adapt together. She is an incredibly independent and full of love little girl who enjoys her childhood. In our home, we try to live with respect and equality, knowing that having a disability does not limit you from doing everything you want to.

This is how the opportunity arose to participate in an inclusion event, Miss Wheelchair Peru. In charge was the Asprod Association led by the activist Alan Cooper, who gave us a space to share with different girls of our country, living together and learning from their courage to

face all the adversities in their lives. This event was a wonderful experience for me. From it, I strengthened my goal of seeking a more inclusive society, without stereotypes, with respect and equal opportunities. Today, being the voice of women wheelchair users in my country, I seek to participate in various projects that help people with disabilities fully integrate into our society through education.

Never stop, be constant, sure of your convictions and you will be able to achieve all your goals.

The wheelchair will not be an obstacle, but your compliment to teaching you to value diversity and show only your ability.

# Miss Poland

# Ania Płoszyńska

“We never know when everything can change, so we need to enjoy the little things and get the most out of life.”



**H**ello. I am Ania Płoszyńska. I am 24 years old and live in Poland. I am a person who has struggled with adversity from a young age. When I was 6, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Unfortunately, after two years of fighting, my mother passed away. After that, my father raised me alone.

As a teenager, I began my adventure with karate. I took part in numerous competitions throughout Poland and Europe. I won many medals, including the Polish Championship and the European Cup. Karate was my passion, an opportunity for development and self-realization. Unfortunately, a tragedy happened in 2015 when I was at karate camp. I had taken part in outdoor training. One of the competitions was rope climbing. The rope was suspended at the height of the first floor, tied with one end to the fire escape stairs and the other end to a tree and gently fell down. I was supposed to go up the fire escape stairs, cross the railing, hook the rope with my hands and feet, and walk towards the tree. While doing the exercise, my arms let go of the rope and I fell on my back. In the hospital, I learned I had broken my spine with its fragments stuck in the

spinal cord causing paralysis of my legs. I, however, did not break down. I took up intensive rehabilitation, which made it easier for me to cope with the difficult situation in which I found myself. At the same time, I was cheerful, my smile never leaving my face to this day.

For 2 years I have been running a blog about my life to motivate others, to convince others that if you really want something, you can achieve it. I have supported others with my attitude and am always ready to help.

A year after the accident, I decided to take part in the Miss Wheelchair Poland contest organized by the Jedyna Taka Foundation, to prove to others that beauty has no barriers. I treated the elections as a great adventure and an opportunity to meet new people. I took third place, thus winning the title of 2nd place Miss Poland in a Wheelchair 2016.

A year after the accident, I passed my driving license, and to high school. I graduated with great grades, and thanks to the results of the matura exam, I got into the Medical University of Lodz. During this time, I started working with children with motor disabilities at the Foundation

of Active Rehabilitation. To this day, I run classes for children, helping them to cope with everyday life, teaching them how to move in a wheelchair, sports and interpersonal communication.

During my studies, I also became interested in dancing. For a year and a half, I trained in ballroom dancing and took part in numerous shows at university events, such as the Gala of Sports and the Gala Miss of the Medical University. In addition, I took up professional swimming, and to this day, train and take part in competitions. Twice I won 3rd place at the Polish Championship, proving to myself that hard work brings results. During my studies, I also took the position of the staroste, joining an organization dealing with equality and combating discrimination. I am trying to develop all the time. Currently, I work as a dental technician in the 3D design of dentures. I am also writing my master's thesis.

I think that everyone's life is fleeting. We never know when everything can change, so we need to enjoy the little things and get the most out of life.



# Miss Romania Alivia Petrea.

“Everything is possible  
as long as you really  
want it and work for  
your ideals. ■

Sumitru corpora

PAESE

Dulcem

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PAESE

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el - Restauran

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LaCasteLro



**M**y name is Alivia Petrea and I represent Romania in the Miss Wheelchair World pageant. I am 25 years old and was born in the city of Galați, near the Danube river, in Romania. My father is Romanian and my mother is Moldovan, from the Republic of Moldova. I spent my childhood in both countries and studied high school in Galati. When I was a child, my teachers discovered my artistic inclinations and talent. I enjoyed painting, making origami and inventing stories. In high school, I played theater on the stages in Sighisoara and Galați.

At the age of 19, I moved to Iași to study biology at the University of Life Sciences Iași. In 2018, I graduated with a specialization as a biologist. I also attended the first psycho-pedagogical module at the Department of Teacher Training in order to become a teacher. I had several jobs in parallel with college and in my free time, I volunteered to provide material and emotional help to children and help organize charity shows. I then graduated with my first master's degree at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi in the field of biology, specializing in Environmental Counseling. In parallel with my first master's degree,

I took interior design courses as I missed doing something creative.

In 2020, I started my second master's degree at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi in the field of molecular genetics. It is a master's degree I am still pursuing. During this time I completed psycho-pedagogical mode II, which allows me to teach in higher education as well.

In 2021, I graduated as an interior designer and started practicing my passion for managing my company Consilio Phantasia.

In 2019, I began participating in the Atipic Beauty Wheelchair Fashion Shows. These were organized by Magda Coman and held in the big cities of Romania: Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj and Timisoara. They allowed me to show the world that people with mobility disabilities have many skills, can practice different trades and can do what they want. Through these actions, I motivated wheelchair users not to give up and to show the world that beauty is in us, not in appearances. On stage, I was accompanied by artists, journalists, politicians, and entrepreneurs who support the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. As a model on stage, I presented

dresses created by Romanian clothing designers and gave speeches on accessibility, non-discrimination and social integration. I am proud of the Atipic Beauty team in Romania made up of models from all walks of life.

Sometimes, I collaborate with photographers as a photo model. In 2020, I participated in the presentation of the hat collection Atemporal II, the concept of Mella's Hat where I embodied a character called Innocence and wore the creation of the artist Mihaela Iacob.

I am currently taking master's courses and working on a project to highlight the need to make the infrastructure accessible. In my free time, I volunteer, especially with children, and offer high school students meditations in biology.

I am an ambitious young woman who wants to do good things in society. My motto is: Everything is possible as long as you really want it and work for your ideals.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to tell you a few things about me.



# Miss South Africa

Tamelyn  
Bock.

“I am currently focused on changing negative perspectives society has towards disabled women, inclusiveness and breaking stereotyping barriers.



I am Miss Wheelchair South Africa 2021, Tamelyn Bock, from the Northern Cape, Nababeep. I was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and benefit from the use of a wheelchair on a daily basis. I attended St. Cyprians Primary and completed my grade 9 studies at Nababeep High School. I extended my school journey from grade 10-12 at Athlone School for the blind in Cape Town. I studied for a Degree in Corporate and Communication Management at Varsity College in Rondebosch, Cape Town. I worked for Barloworld CAT in Kathu as a Receptionist on a contract basis as well as at my primary school as an administration clerk, also on a contract basis.

I am currently focused on changing negative perspectives society has towards disabled women, inclusiveness and breaking stereotyping barriers. My aim is to work closely with the Mayor and Councillors to put my hometown on the map as an accessible tourist destination. I also aim to focus on accessible transportation and accessible working environments for disabled individuals with the goal of permanent employment. Radio NFM 98.1 will also assist me with my projects as my aim is to work closely with the youth and social issues.

I enjoy fashion and beauty, watching reality shows, cooking and listening to music.

### **My achievements:**

- Miss Wheelchair South Africa 2021
- Module distinction in Corporate Communication 1A
- Module distinction in Corporate Communication 2A
- Module distinction in Project Management
- Top academic achiever Grade 10-12
- Top academic achiever Grade 8
- RCL Grade 7-8

### **My volunteer work:**

- Motivational speaker at schools to raise awareness about disabilities to raise funds for Casual Day
- Sunday school teacher
- Performed administration duties for church
- Assisted with the registration of participants for the annual marathon of MDSA
- Assisted with fundraising and marketing tasks for Out of Africa Children Foundation
- Assisted VC cares in fundraising for causes and participants in community outreach projects





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# Miss Spain Silvia Arbelo Gonzalez.



**H**ello, my name is Silvia Arbelo Gonzalez. I'm from Spain, more exactly from the Canary Islands, and am 40 years old. I had my son when I was young; he is now 24 years old. I have been in a wheelchair for 20 years as a result of an accident.

I was a welder and one day I was climbing on a roof of an industrial building installing metal plates. I stepped on one in bad condition and fell 7 meters. I suffered polytraumatism and a spinal cord injury that left me in a wheelchair.

After being in the hospital for 9 months, I started my new life. I began with sports and first tried basketball. It didn't convince me, so

I followed my dreams with dance. I met Zumba fitness and my life changed. At first, the instructor told me she didn't know if I could do it in the wheelchair, but she didn't discourage me. I said, "I'll try," and found I could do it with time. I became a Zumba instructor for people with, and without, disabilities and I realized that I could achieve anything I wanted.

I was chosen to train as a rally driver, and of course, I did it by using an adapted car. Then, I was chosen to join a theater group, and to this day, I am still an actress. I am passionate about theater.

The world of beauty has always been in my life as I've always

been very flirtatious. Being in a wheelchair doesn't stop me from wanting to dress up. I model for a store, another one of my hobbies, and have participated in women's contests for more than 30 years. I fight for inclusion as I am the only one in a wheelchair. I believe nothing prevents us from achieving our goals and objectives.

I am thrilled to have been selected to participate in Miss Wheelchair World 2022, representing my country, Spain. It is a dream for me. I am also very happy for the rest of my pageant partners.





# MISS WHEELCHAIR WORLD

[www.misswheelchairworld.org](http://www.misswheelchairworld.org)

