

mélange

October 2020

Accessibility for All

Magazine
Vol 1. Issue 1



FORMER CONGRESSMAN

Tony Coelho

Co-Author of the
AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT
A Lifelong Disability Advocate

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER

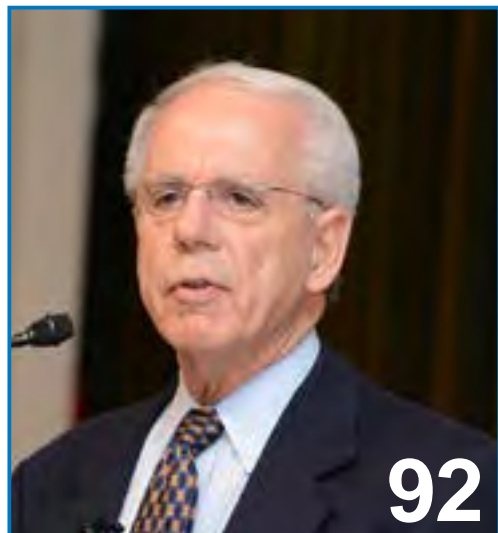
Gabi & Jules,
Handmade Pies
Canada

Jean Claude Mbonigaba
talks about the lives of
People with Disabilities
in RWANDA

ISSN 2563-5697



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month



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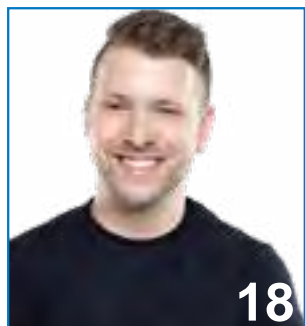
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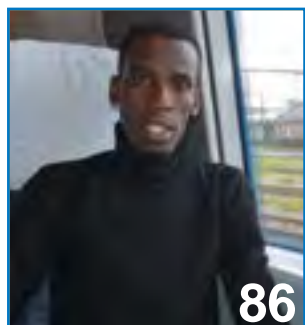
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Editor's Note

Greetings! Welcome to our very first issue of Melange, Accessibility for All, magazine! It was a dream of mine to be involved in such an endeavor for many years, but it was the vision of Debbie Austin of [Mélange Magazine Publications](#) who made this a reality.

I was paralyzed from the chest down when I dove into shallow water just before starting college. After months of intensive therapy, I continued on to get my degrees and became a corporate executive. I now have my own disability-serving consulting business, am a partner with [Travel for All](#), and am here as Editor. It's been a long journey, but one filled with the richness of people and culture, places around the globe, and experiences sometimes too unbelievable to speak about.

We hope that you, the reader, will enjoy Accessibility for All magazine. Every three months, we hope to bring you stories of people who are making a difference in the world, and some may even have a disability. We'll have articles about organizations and programs that serve people with disabilities and how you can get involved. And, yes, we'll also feature destinations from all over the world that are accessible, or at least claim to be, and give you real-life feedback from travelers to those places.

We want to make it all real, all relevant, and we certainly appreciate your thoughts. If you have an idea for an article, or you want to invite us to visit your city, country, resort, or place of interest so that we can write about it and share it with our audience, please let us know at fmaahs@readmelange.com.

Thank you for reading. We hope you enjoy!

Warm regards,

  @FredMaahs



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 - Contribute an article
- email:** editor@readmelange.com

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

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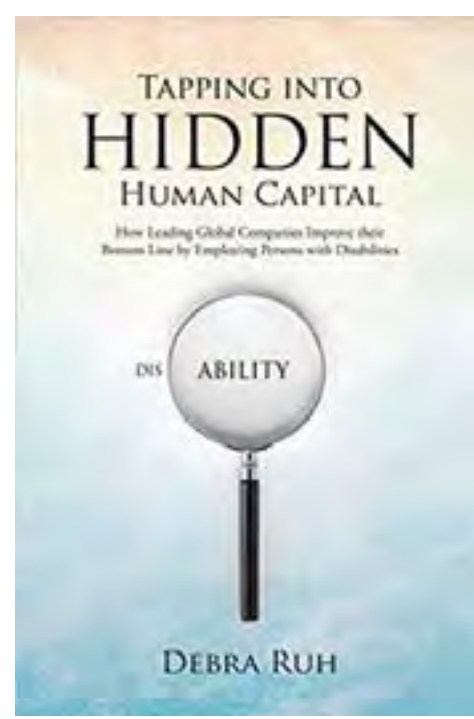
BE AN INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER
and hire People with Disabilities.

THEY ARE:

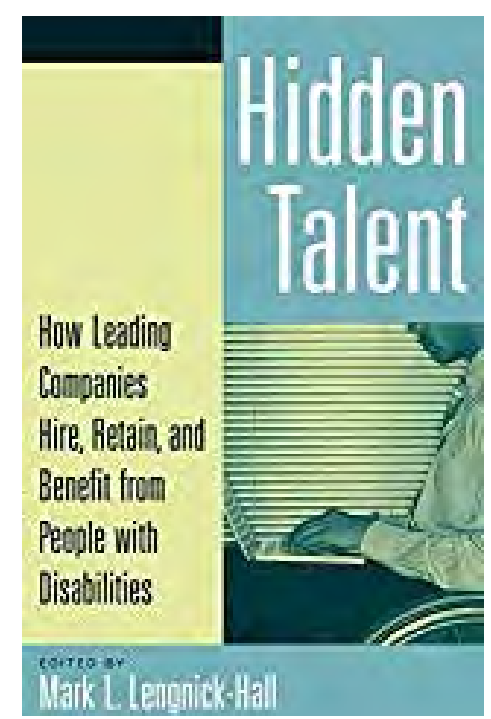
- An untapped labour pool
- Educated. A high percentage are post-secondary graduates
- Productive employees
- Innovative, with unique abilities
- Hard working
- Committed to their jobs

Over 85% of people prefer to do business with a company that hire people with disabilities

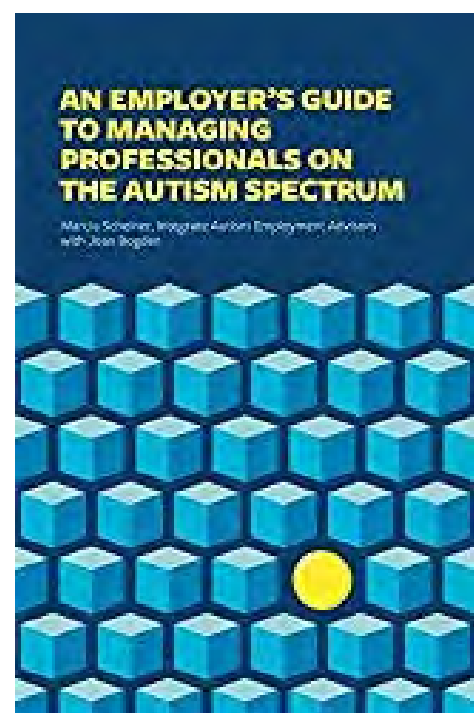
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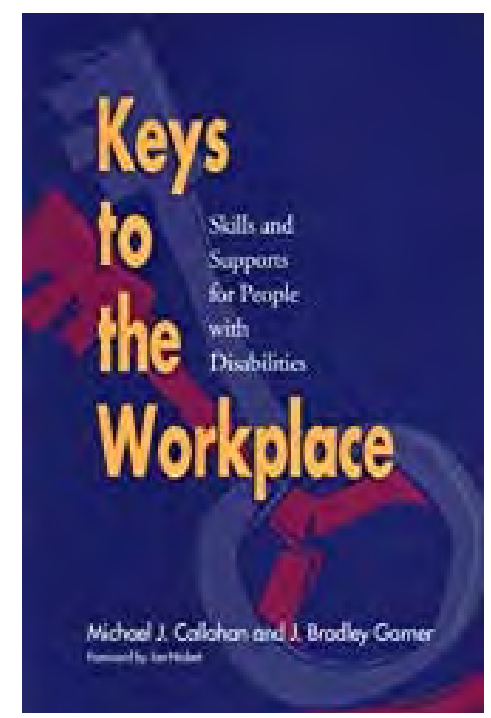
Tapping into Hidden Human Capital:
How Leading Global Companies Improve their
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Hidden Talent:
How Leading Companies Hire, Retain, and
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An Employer's Guide to Managing
Professionals on the Autism Spectrum
[More >>>>](#)



Keys to the Workplace: Skills and
Supports for People With Disabilities
[More >>>>](#)



Inclusive Employer Gabi & Jules

In Port Moody, just 30 minutes from downtown Vancouver, a large pink sign on the 'building of baked goodies', tucked away at 2302B Clarke Street, heralds your arrival at Gabi & Jules Handmade Pies. On the street, you may see a parked van, colourfully wrapped in images of some of the delicious treats that await behind the building's welcoming pink door. Patrons consuming finger-licking baked goodness at the elegantly-modest seating area bordering the

street, will further indicate that you have arrived at that special place in Metro Vancouver.

On entry, a cordial greeting will be extended and, as you survey the offerings, seemingly baffled by the many delicious choices, a staff member will pleasantly ask if help is needed.

This is Gabi & Jules, an employer who considers people with disabilities to be not only employable, but valuable members of their team!



A Conversation with Lisa Beecroft co-owner of Gabi & Jules

MÉLANGE: What inspired the decision to hire people with disabilities?

GABI & JULES: We decided while we were building the bakery that we wanted to create an environment that was inclusive of individuals of all abilities. This decision was inspired after hearing from a customer about [SAP's Autism at Work program](#) which is a global initiative aiming to have 10% of SAP's workforce be individuals on the autism spectrum. When I heard about that program I thought, "why can't we do that?" and given that the bakery was named after our two daughters, and our eldest daughter, Juliana, is on the spectrum, it just made sense. Starting with this intention really helped though we have learned a lot over the past four years and continue to improve our inclusiveness.

MÉLANGE: How do you feel seeing the increase in self-confidence of your staff as a result of being employed?

GABI & JULES: Providing individuals with opportunity and purpose certainly is something that everyone needs and contributes greatly to self-esteem and confidence. Seeing individuals thrive and grow here at the bakery is amazing and at the core is our intention to create

provide meaningful employment, meaning that individuals are contributing to our teams in important and critical ways, so they are truly valued by their peers.

MÉLANGE: Gabi & Jules is considered to be a welcoming place. How do you create that environment?

GABI & JULES: Creating a welcoming environment has been something that we have seen truly evolve and grow as inclusiveness and ultimately kindness has become more and more a part of our culture. This doesn't just apply to those with disabilities. We strive to create a place where everyone can feel welcomed, safe and valued for their unique value. Leading with inclusivity has ultimately helped us cultivate an environment that in general is welcoming to everyone and is hopefully just a nice place to come to work each day.

MÉLANGE: Share with us some of the positives your employees with disabilities bring to your business.

GABI & JULES: There are many positives but I think seeing the gratitude for the opportunity

and the joy and positivity individuals bring to work has really helped contribute to a pleasant work environment. In addition, retention and reliability is an added bonus that we've seen.

MÉLANGE: How do you decide what roles are most suitable for an employee with a disability?

GABI & JULES: We approach hiring by identifying roles we need filled and what tasks will be required. We then work with our partner agencies to see if they have any clients they think will be a good fit. I find that working closely with agencies who have taken the time to get to know our business ensure that clients they recommend will likely be a good fit, as they are invested in ensuring placements are a win/win.

MÉLANGE: What are some of the challenges you've faced, or continue to face, if any?

GABI & JULES: We've faced many challenges and continue to always learn how to be more effective in our inclusive practices. To name a few, I would say especially in the past two years we've been working hard to ensure we are striving towards true inclusion rather than tokenism. I think initially there was a bit of an approach by managers to just put up with individuals with disabilities rather than really invest in getting to know them, challenge them (and themselves) to excel and to ensure the individuals were truly a part of the team. We made changes to improve on this and have seen how individuals really can grow when they feel they are a valued member of the team. In addition, I definitely learned to identify agencies whose values align with ours, they are committed to supporting their clients as well as us in order to make placements successful. There isn't a cookie cutter approach to training and

ongoing job support, so finding agencies and job coaches who are committed to long term success is really critical to our inclusivity. As a small business, we do not have an HR / Training department so we rely heavily on the support of job coaches / employment specialists.

MÉLANGE: How has your diverse staff helped you to improve the service you offer to customers?

GABI & JULES: I think the diversity of our team and our inclusivity has enriched our business in such a way that our customers are more loyal and supportive because they appreciate this aspect of our business.

MÉLANGE: What tips can you give to other employers who may be considering hiring someone with a disability but have not yet done so? Canadians with disabilities are not hired as often as those without a disability. What are your thoughts on this?

GABI & JULES: My first piece of advice is to find a great local agency to work with. Interview them and ensure that they are taking the time to fully understand what your needs are and how your business operates. If they approach job placements by ensuring a mutual fit for their client as well as your business, then likely it will be a good relationship. I also think setting intention is super important. Getting support from existing team members and management and then just don't be afraid to fail. Breaking down the barriers and fear of failure here is very important as I find many employers are afraid of having missteps in this process and therefore don't try. I try to be honest as possible with everyone involved so that we continue to break down barriers.



MÉLANGE: Do you hire persons on the autism spectrum only? What % of your staff is a person with a disability?

GABI & JULES: While initially we were motivated to create employment opportunities to individuals on the spectrum, we really have expanded this to include anyone with a disability given they are the best fit for opportunity. Prior to COVID-19, 35% of our employees had a disability. Unfortunately we've eliminated a few of those positions given the change in our operation (reduced hours, no café seating inside). I am hopeful as our business continues to evolve in this new reality we'll find new opportunities for individuals with disabilities but they might just be different than the previous positions.





Nico de las Alas

The Gabi & Jules journey began five years ago when they started selling at their local farmers market. Their bakery on Clarke Street, Port Moody was opened one year later. One team member, **Nico de las Alas** has been with them for over three years, *"and to me he is such a perfect example of how inclusive enriches the workplace,"* Lisa said. *"Not only is he a phenomenal dishwasher, but he brings such positive energy to work!"*

One of Nico's favourite things is '80's J-Pop so everyday he is allowed to change the music that's played in the bakery during the last 30 minutes of his shift. *"We had initially done it as a way to motivate him to finish up his dishes but now he is so proficient he doesn't need the motivation. It's more just a ritual of the day,"* Lisa shared.

Nico enjoys being a part of the team. He said, *"My favourite part of working at Gabi and Jules is the friendly atmosphere that embraces me while fulfilling my tasks for the day. I have co-workers and an employer that are very supportive and understanding. We are like a family here. For me, doing something that I love and being appreciated is a rewarding job. It gives me that self fulfillment that I am part of a team in giving the best service that our customers deserve."*



Nico de las Alas. Proud member of the Gabi & Jules team



www.gabiandjules.com

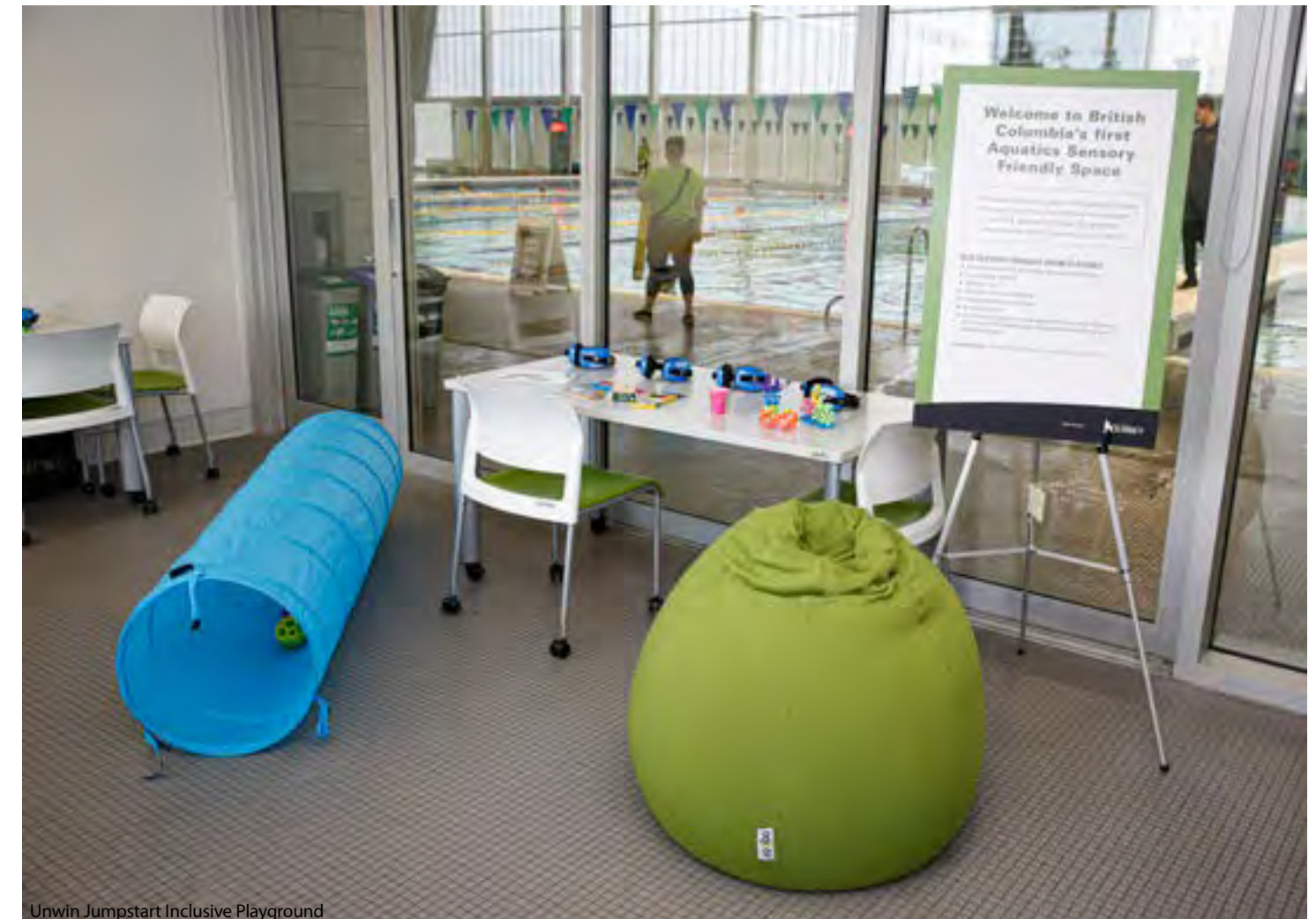
Observing COVID-19 protocols, they are open on:
Tuesday – Friday: 10am-4pm | Saturday: 9am-5pm | Sunday: 10am-4pm.

Other than a few items that are only available on Saturdays or weekends, almost everything listed on their website is available everyday except on Mondays when they are closed. If you see something there that you absolutely need, you are advised to pre-order to avoid disappointment!



Unwin Jumpstart Inclusive Playground

Accessible Metro Vancouver CANADA



Unwin Jumpstart Inclusive Playground

Metro Vancouver B.C., Canada, can boast of embracing accessibility, and rightly so. From one's arrival at the [Vancouver International Airport](#), with its universal design, fully accessible washrooms, a welcoming environment for certified service and guide dogs plus ready assistance from Green Coat volunteers, accessibility continue into and throughout its suburban cities.

SkyTrain and Ferries are easy to navigate and you will find bus drivers to be accommodating and polite. Ramps are lowered and drivers will wait patiently for passengers to settle down safely prior to driving off. Audiovisual notices for the sight and hearing impaired provide safe, helpful commutes. Also available if needed, are wheelchair accessible taxis, car

rentals and even limousines. In many ways, Vancouver has embraced the concept of universal design supporting a diverse range of its population regardless of age, physical or health circumstances, ability or disability.

The City of Surrey, one of the municipalities of Metro Vancouver, has a higher than average number of people with disabilities, and one of the highest rates of autism in British Columbia. Karin Pasqua, Surrey's Accessibility and Universal Design Specialist said, *"friendly, sensory spaces have been created to support individuals and provide safe spaces that are calm and quiet,"* she explained. Through a partnership with [Canucks Autism Network \(CAN\)](#), pre-COVID-19, when major events took place throughout the city, these sensory spaces, be it a room or tent, were on site to provide a reduced sensory environment

from the overstimulating environment. Noise-cancelling headphones, backpacks with kits containing stress balls, fidget toys etc., are on site and are available to those who need it. Karin recalls a child being able to comfortably enjoy fireworks *for the very first time* thanks to wearing one of their noise-cancelling headphones! Post-pandemic, these sensory kits will be available in all recreation facilities in the city. *"Recreation Centres in Surrey are continuously upgraded to make them more inclusive and so far, 5 of these have achieved the [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification](#),"* Karin shared.

A vast majority of people may not be aware of accessibility issues unless it impacts them personally, however, seamlessly integrated universal design ensures usability for everyone. According to Karin, *"making information available in as plain language as possible; using fonts that are Sans Serif are easier for all to read; encouraging less noisy, public environments; decreasing the use of items like strobe lights in public spaces; having appropriate floor markers and barriers which a cane user will be able to detect, and overall, just implementing as many modalities as possible with the aim of being as supportive of as many people as possible,"* should be the focus.

Ramps are obvious adaptations to accommodate wheelchair users, however other subtle enhancements are also utilized to create a more inclusive environment. Some of these



are in place throughout Metro Vancouver, resulting in an array of accessible dining, outdoor adventures, transportation and accommodations in what is proudly one of the most accessible cities in the world. ■

Metro Vancouver’s Translink has made an online tool available that will help people with disabilities comfortably navigate the transit system. Tools include videos and a virtual bus tour. [CLICK HERE](#) for more.

What is the definition of disability under the ADA?

The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person's association with a person with a disability.

What does "regarded as" having a disability mean?

"Regarded as" means that the person either:

- Has an impairment that does not substantially limit a major life activity;
- Has an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity only as a result of the attitudes of others toward them; or
- Does not have any impairment, but is treated by an entity as having an impairment.

What does "record of" having a disability mean?

"Record of" means that the person has a history of, or has been misclassified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, even though the person does not currently have a disability. For example, a person who undergoes treatment for cancer then returns to work. Although the cancer may not be in remission, they have a record of having had it.

"Just treat me like a regular person. I don't need you to treat me any differently."

MARCO PASQUA

- . Inspirational Speaker
- . Accessibility Consultant
- . Entrepreneur



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MARCO PASQUA



A captivating speaker who happens to have a disability

Marco Pasqua has been speaking to audiences since he was 10 years old. Having Cerebral Palsy and using a manual wheelchair to get around most of the time, has in no way dampened his spirits, and his impact as an inspirational speaker is profound. When he speaks, people listen, not out of politeness because he has a disability, but because his first few words will inevitably cause you to stop and take note. Marco's delivery is energetic and he possesses the innate ability to light a fire in people, subliminally urging them find their own motivations, whatever that may look like for them.

The fact that he was born with a disability is of little consequence to Marco. In fact, he says, *"I think it's absolutely a hundred percent meant to happen. And if you asked me if I would change having a disability, my answer is no. I really feel like this is what I'm meant to do. This is why I'm here on this planet - to open up people's eyes and to share experiences from the perspective of somebody who has legs that don't work very well, which is okay, because I can now show people that this is not something to feel sorry about, instead, I am empowered by it because I get to share with others from this perspective."*

Although Marco is an inspirational speaker, being considered an inspiration to others is contextual. He is pleased to be considered inspirational about what he does as a speaker, consultant and entrepreneur, however, he does not want to be considered an inspiration because as a person with a disability he is able to get himself a cup of coffee, unassisted, etc. No applause is needed for this! Sadly, there is a public misconception that praise should be given when mundane tasks are being performed by a person with a disability, but he believes this is a myth that needs to be dispelled.

Marco's speaking engagements have touched a wide cross-section of people around the globe. Already gracing the stage since the tender age of 10 speaking to audiences informally, after losing his job in the video game industry during the 2010 recession, his wife, then girlfriend, encouraged him to start his own company through which since 2012, he now offers his services of Accessibility Consulting, 1-on-1 Coaching, Custom-Tailored Presentations and Emceeing.

One of the subject areas Marco covers in his presentations, in a way that's relatable to everyone, is Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles. He does this through the use of his

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[CUBE Principle](#), an acronym for “Creatively Utilize your Best Energy”. Marco initially created this system to showcase the ways in which people can authentically make connections with one another, and also advise how that would work in a business and personal setting. Accessibility consulting through the lens of his own lived experiences as a person with a disability has since been added to the suite of services he

offers and, *“it’s actually a fantastic combination because I think it helps to open people’s eyes about my own experiences and rather than developing pity for somebody with a disability, it actually provides them an opportunity to develop empathy and a greater understanding of the experiences that we all go through,”* Marco said. *“Not everyone can relate to having a disability but everyone can relate to going through challenges,”* he explained. Those who hear him speak will all admit that he is captivating, but Marco shared, *“I want to be recognized as a speaker but not necessarily as a speaker with a disability. I’m just a captivating speaker who happens to have a disability. And I want to be recognized for that first more than anything else.”*

Marco exudes utter confidence and his effervescent personality is difficult to ignore. He attributes the acquisition of this trait to his close-knit family and especially his father who has been one of his biggest inspirations. Coming to Canada from Italy as an immigrant, his father became used to facing adversity and had to overcome many obstacles as he settled into his new life. Marco shared, *“my Dad’s immigrant pride and spirit made my parents strong and this, I think, gave them the qualities to be the right parents to have a child with a disability.”* Marco recalls them encouraging him to be himself, and shared, *“I’m so blessed to have the parents that I do, because they always told me that I can be something more than I ever perceived myself to be.”* Marco recalls his sister never treating him differently or, like her brother with a disability, he was just her brother! He fondly recalls, *“she would say ‘Marco you be the goalie’ and even though I was crawling around on my hands and knees or even in my wheelchair, she wouldn’t go easy on me. She would tackle me. She would kick the ball at me. She didn’t care, because to her, I was just her brother and there was no difference.”*

The strength of his family bond encouraged him to not make his disability an obstacle, so too was

the influence of Rick Hansen whose work Marco has followed his entire life. Although he was just a baby when Rick Hansen’s [Man in Motion World Tour](#) took place in 1985, growing up, Rick’s ripple effect throughout British Columbia, the rest of Canada and the world, was continually felt. Today, Marco is proud to be associated with the Rick Hansen team. He is a designated [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ \(RHFAC\) Professional](#), and pre-COVID-19, saw him flying monthly (sometimes weekly) to different cities across the country, talking to architecture firms, design organizations and other businesses about the importance of Accessibility and Universal Design. *“This is not just about speaking inspirationally,”* Marco said. *“It’s actually about speaking inspirationally while providing practical tools and tips to organizations.”* Marco is equipped with practical knowledge about blueprints and is able to advise how spaces can be made accessible, not just for those with mobility challenges, but for people with vision loss, hearing loss and cognitive challenges.

People are at the center of Marco’s work, and changing public perception regarding disabilities is high on his list of priorities. Especially, he helps employers realize that a disability does not make someone different in a bad way, it actually makes them different in a unique way and being unique is never a bad thing because, *“your skill sets can be applied in a unique way in the workplace or in other environments where you might be able to do something better than your average employee, because you’ve done things differently your entire life, and it is **that different thought process** that actually makes you stronger,”* Marco advised.



Marco with his parents and sister



Marco and sister, Marina



Marco and wife, Karin with Rick Hansen



Marco at various speaking engagements



Marco and wife, Karin, on a 2016 cruise

Being considered 'different' for Marco extends into his romantic life. As an inter-abled couple, he and his wife Karin, often face abject public curiosity and downright rudeness. Together for 13 years, married for 6, during the early years of their relationship, being protective of Marco, Karin would wear her fiercely defensive armor when public encounters were imminent. While holding hands, people would draw the erroneous conclusion that she was Marco's nurse, caregiver or sister and compliment her for that action, "Oh, that's so nice". She was never ashamed of his disability, but hated being judged by others, and their often-expressed opinion that she "can do better than to be with someone with a disability". Karin eventually came to the realization that negative public opinions had to be ignored and, like Marco, start using their relationship to educate and inform. Karin has now learned to tune out the

stares, snickering and curious looks that assail them when they go out, and their outings are many! Among other things, they both enjoy rock-climbing, swimming and exotic vacations. One of their favourite vacation things to do is cruise to the Caribbean, where, although most of the islands are not very accessible, the genuine warmth of the people and their readiness to help has made all of their trips quite memorable. Of fond note are the islands of Aruba, St. Lucia and Bonaire.

Marco advises people with disabilities to do extensive research prior to booking that vacation! He suggests the use of Mayaan Ziv's [Access Now](#), which [pinpoints](#) accessibility around the world. People can search for accessible places which others would have rated and pinned on Access Now's map.

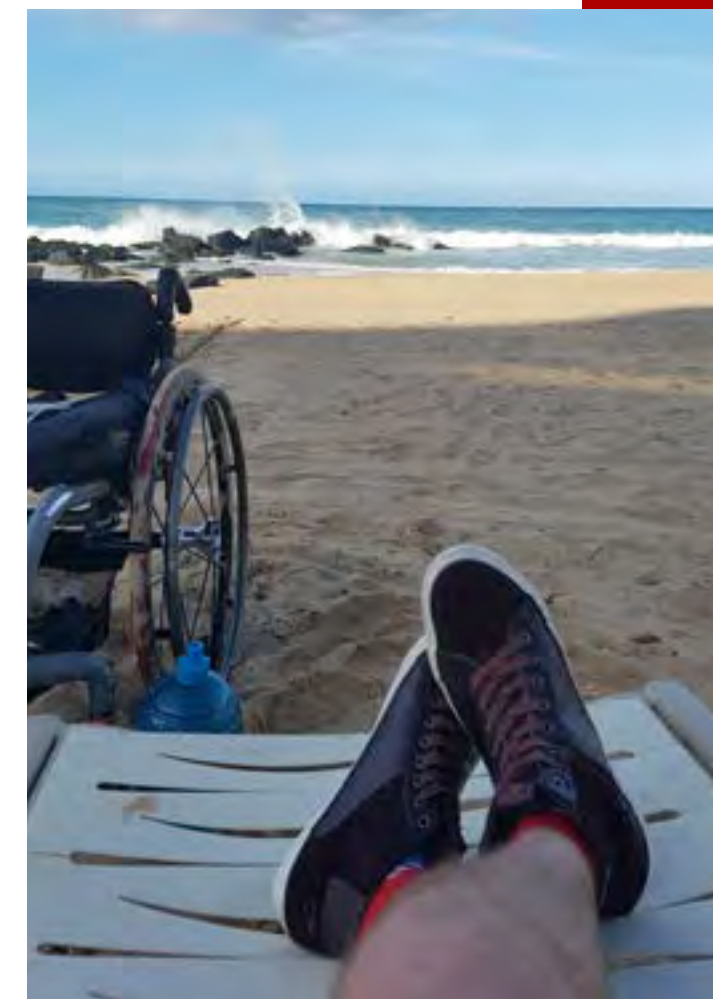
When speaking about accessibility, Marco is proud of his city, Surrey (a part of the Lower Mainland in British Columbia, only 25 minutes away from Vancouver) which is one of the most accessible in the world. He attributes much of this to the inspirational Terry Fox, Rick Hansen and other advocates who continue to influence change and improvements for people with disabilities.

Lived experiences in his accessible city, with a caring family and loving, supportive wife have aided the development of Marco's confident, authentic persona. "I've had 13 surgeries and spent a lot of time in the hospital, but I didn't let those experiences bring me down," he said, "I actually let them build me up. I think it all comes down to the way in which you choose to look at your life."

Marco passionately echoes the request of many people with disabilities: "Just treat me like a regular person. I don't need you to treat me any differently." ■



A visit to the beach while on a cruise



A visit to the beach while on a cruise



Rappelling off of a building for charity



11 Tips for travelers with disabilities

When you need to fly, you
can rely on us



I have travelled to many places around the world since I broke my neck and became paralyzed from the chest down. Since my accident, I use a wheelchair to get around, and if there is one thing I can tell you for sure, the word “accessibility” has different meanings just about everywhere you go. Hotel managers have literally told me, “Yes, we’re accessible for wheelchair users. We have rooms on the first floor and we have an elevator.” Well, I don’t know about you, but that doesn’t tell me a thing about whether or not I can even actually get into the room. So, in addition to avoiding issues with accessibility, here are some tips that I hope are helpful when planning your next trip as a person with a disability. Just remember, every person has unique circumstances even if they may have similar disabilities.

This is not “one size fits all” advice.

~ Fred ~

1. Do your homework and make sure you call ahead. If there is one thing I am faithful about is calling ahead, sometimes months ahead if it’s a long trip or out of the country so I have enough time leftover to go to Plan B, if necessary. If you’re working with a travel agency, most are required by law to accommodate travelers who have some type of special need. Just keep in mind that they will likely need additional to work on

your circumstances. If you’re calling a hotel, I would suggest calling at least a week or two ahead and be very specific about what you need – bed height, bath tub or roll-in shower, king or queen bed versus a smaller twin bed, etc. You may even ask for pictures of the “accessible” room. If the hotel wants your business, they will gladly send you pictures and some may even take measurements of doorways and bed height for you.

2. “Accessibility” takes on different meanings from place to place, so be very specific and very clear when describing your disability and specific needs. Not everyone is familiar with the terms used with accessible travel, or the medical terms for certain conditions. Give as many details as you can about what you can and can’t do. The more information your travel agent, hotel manager, or service provider has, the better they will be able to accommodate you. If they promise you certain accommodations make sure that you get any promise in writing.

3. If you have a severe disability or just feel you should get your doctor’s advice before traveling, make sure you are very specific about the details of your trip when speaking with your doctor. Remember, your doctor can prescribe ways to cope with long flights, limited medical facilities at your destination, and what to do if you run out of prescription drugs.

4. I think it’s always a good idea to take a note from your doctor describing your condition and their contact information in case of an emergency with you on long trips, especially trips out of the country. The note from your doctor should also include your medications and any potential complications. If you have a special condition requiring specialized attention, make sure to carry your medical alert information in a place that a medical professional or anyone who assists you will find easily (wallet card, necklace, or close to your identification).

5. Always pack extra medication. I always pack my medications in my stowed luggage and a few days supply in my carry-on luggage, just in case my stowed luggage is lost or delayed. And, don’t forget to keep the prescription for the medications with you in case you are questioned about carrying those medications!

6. If you are traveling to a new destination, I also think it’s a good idea to check out physician availability at your destination. Your doctor, health care provider, insurance company or local embassy can provide the names and contact numbers of physicians at your destination. For more information, see [Health Care Abroad](#).

7. If you want to make your travel planning much easier, consider using a specialized travel agent, such as Travel for All, based in Canada. These specialized agencies are adept with handling travel experiences for people with disabilities, and in fact, most of the agents working for these specialized travel agencies have disabilities themselves. Check the agent search feature at [TravelSense.org](#) to find qualified travel agents.

8. If possible, I avoid connecting flights at all costs. There are too many reasons why your connection can ruin your trip, e.g. the first flight is delayed, you need to use the restroom, you have to switch airlines for the next leg of your journey and the gate is in another terminal, etc. Remember, if you use a wheelchair, you typically board first, so if your flight is delayed



and you have a connecting flight with little time between connections, you may miss your flight! If it’s absolutely necessary to have a connecting flight, be sure to allow plenty of time between flights (I usually recommend anywhere from 90 minutes to two hours if you need to use the restroom – which may be busy between flights, or go through customs or security) to get from one gate to the next.

9. If you can, arrange transportation to and from the airport. If you have a wheelchair, make arrangements in advance to have accessible transportation pick you up in your destination city and get your confirmations emailed to you. There is nothing worse than getting to your destination and finding out there is no accessible transportation, or if it is available, the hours of operation are different than what you anticipated.

10. Too many times I have found it necessary to make a minor repair on my

wheelchair during a trip so I always bring spare parts and tools. Any type of assistive device, such as wheelchairs, scooters, or walkers can be damaged while traveling, so put together a small bag or kit of spare parts and tools for emergency repairs. For example, I always bring a spare inner tube for my wheelchair in case of a flat tire. When flying, make sure to inspect your assistive device and take pictures of it with your phone when you check it for stowage and as soon as it is returned to you after you land. Inspect for any damage or missing parts and report anything out of line to the gate agent right away.

11. Make sure that you know your rights before going through airport security and be aware of the [TSA’s rules](#) for travelers with disabilities and medical conditions. See also the U.S. Department of Transportation’s [Disability Resource Center](#). ■



Community Based Rehabilitation on the Caribbean island of Antigua & Barbuda

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), according to the [World Health Organization](#), involves the enhancement of the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, meeting their basic needs and ensuring their inclusion and participation in their communities. A stellar example of CBR in the Caribbean is the work done tirelessly by Bernard Warner and the committed team at the Antigua & Barbuda Organization of People with Disabilities.

Fostering respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities are the tenets they

follow, while attempting to promote positive attitudes towards this demographic throughout their island.

A variety of outreach programs are undertaken year-round which include food drives and distribution; delivery of personal care items; assisting with the repair of homes that have become damaged over time; social activities for people with disabilities among other things.

Funding is limited, but this vibrant group finds creative ways to raise funds as they continue to advocate for a barrier-free Antigua & Barbuda. ■



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The Barbados Council for the Disabled is on a quest to make the island accessible to all. Through its Fully Accessible Barbados (FAB) programme, this Organization is working with the private sector and government to create an inclusive, accessible island.

Barbados is a favourite of tourists from around the world and many of the accessible facilities that are now available for visitors to enjoy can be attributed in part to the work of FAB. Hotels, restaurants, beaches, places of interest, and activities are increasingly receiving FAB's accessibility stamp of approval. Investors wishing to build or upgrade a tourism property receive incentives via a Barbados Tourism Development Act, if the property meets the Fully Accessible Barbados accreditation standards.

In addition to accessibility improvements which both locals and tourists enjoy, a range of services are offered at the Barbados Council for the Disabled. They can assist with accessible transportation, braille translation, sign language interpreters, property assessments for accessibility upgrades, beach wheelchairs, among others. Disability Sensitivity Training is conducted on an on-going basis for service providers and the general public.

www.barbadosdisabled.org.bb

The Barbados government, having identified that the number of People with Disabilities on the island is increasing, is working through its National Disabilities Unit (NDU), to increase ramps on the island. More programmes for this demographic, aimed at empowerment and engendering independence are being implementing.

A REMINDER FROM
Barbados' [Broad Street Media](#),
an organization that produces media
by the deaf, for the deaf.

Appropriate Terminology

- Deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Deaf
- Deaf-Blind

Inappropriate Terminology

- Deaf and Dumb
- Deaf and mute
- Hearing impaired
- Pipi
- Nickname - Dummy

Be Respectful

Dr. Glenville Liburd and the Caribbean CBR



DR. GLENVILLE LIBURD, MBBS DA (UWI); FFARCS(Ire); FRCA(UK) has served as the Chair of the Caribbean Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Network's Steering Committee from April 2014. He is increasingly being recognized throughout the Caribbean as a critical resource on disability issues and has worked consistently in the assessment and support of persons with disabilities, serving from June 1996 as a Medical Consultant and Assessor for Disability Benefit Claims with St Kitts-Nevis' Social Security Scheme. Dr. Liburd also serves as a member of the CARICOM Advisory Committee for Selection and Supervision of CARICOM Special Rapporteur on Disability.

On-going since 2010, through a

collaboration with Enablement, the University of Applied Sciences Leiden Holland and the Nevis Island Administration, he supervises a three-month student internship program in International Health and Development to conduct research into various aspects of disability and related health issues. Among others, these internships produced the following reports: *Needs Assessment of Persons with Disabilities in Nevis* (2011) and *Looking at Raising A Child with Disability in St Kitts and Nevis* (2017).

As Chair of the Caribbean CBR Steering Committee, Dr. Liburd and disability advocates in the Caribbean meet at least once per week to discuss strategies and learn from each other as they attempt to improve the lives of people with disabilities on their individual islands.

Admittedly, there is a lot to be done in the Caribbean region for people with disabilities. Accessibility, inclusion, equality, employment, community awareness, the provision of social services, plus poverty-reduction are key issues they discuss with fervor and pursue

tirelessly via their various organizations, albeit with limited resources. Influencing policy and forging beneficial partnerships with the private sector and Caribbean governments continue to be a challenge for most, but they remain optimistic that the inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream social life throughout the Caribbean will be achieved.

Although Dr. Liburd devotes a significant amount of his time to disability awareness, he also runs his private medical practice, Eureka Health Services, on his home island of Nevis. In addition, he provides Anaesthesia Consultancy to Hospitals in Nevis, Anguilla, Dominica and St. Lucia plus Community Advocacy for multiple health causes including Renal, Mental Health and Cancer.

Every 3rd Friday of the month, between 7:00 am and 8:00 am EST, Dr. Liburd hosts a radio program where disability issues are discussed. Listen live at www.2020visionradio.com and phone in to lend your voice to the discussions.



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with Dr Liburd and Guests
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Travelling When on Dialysis

For many patients who are on dialysis or have had a kidney transplant, the ability to travel is important to their self-esteem and lifestyle. Working patients may need to attend business meetings or conferences. Older patients may have dreamed of traveling during their retirement. A family event such as a wedding, graduation or family reunion may require travel away from home. At times, emergencies such as illness or a death in the family may require travel.

Is it possible for kidney patients to travel?

Yes, most patients who receive dialysis or have had a kidney transplant can travel safely and continue their treatment while away from home. Of course, you should always consult your doctor before planning to travel. Most doctors encourage travel if the patient's health is stable. Traveling can give a big boost to a patient's morale and sense of well-being

It is important to start planning at least six to eight weeks in advance. More time should be allowed for popular vacation spots or travel during holidays. Be flexible about the dates for your trip as space in dialysis units may be limited. If you would prefer your treatments on specific days and at specific times, let the center know in advance. The unit may not always be able to honor your request, however, because space may be limited.

Travel-for-All will investigate the name & addresses of the Dialysis Centers where you are visiting. Many times, if you are on Peritoneal Dialysis we can arrange for you to send your 'liquid' for Dialysis to the travel supplier who is working with us to coordinate your vacation.

Many dialysis centers make every effort to accommodate patients in the event of an emergency such as illness or death of a family member. Dialysis records can be faxed ahead, or you can hand carry them with you.

Most dialysis centers require the following information to assess your health and plan for your treatments with them:

- The dates you need dialysis treatment
- Your name, address, phone, etc.
- Medical history and recent physical exam reports
- Recent lab results
- Recent EKG
- Recent chest x-ray
- Your dialysis prescription and 3 to 5 recent treatment records
- Dialysis access type
- Special needs or dialysis requirements
- Information about your general health
- Insurance information
- Where you will be staying in the area
- List of the medications you take during treatment and at home

This information will be sent to your destination center for review. It is important for the doctor and transient center to know as much about you as possible to care for your needs while visiting their center. In addition to mailing your records to the center, you should hand carry a copy with you.

Don't overdo it! Be realistic when planning activities. Allow enough time to enjoy sightseeing outings and activities without becoming overtired. Also, be sure to watch your diet and fluid intake. Before you begin your trip, you will most likely have a doctor assigned to you by your transient dialysis center. Find out how to contact the doctor when you first arrive. If you do become ill, call the dialysis center or doctor as instructed.

Travel-for-All strongly recommends that prior to travelling while on dialysis you consult with:

- a) your physician
- b) your insurance provider ■

GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY SPECIALISTS

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Joshuanette Francis

Antigua & Barbuda



Osteoarthritis is a degenerative disease. Although diagnosed with osteoarthritis at the age of 24, Joshuanette's effervescent, optimistic personality does allow her to wallow in self-pity. Every day, she continues to live her best life in whatever way her disease allows her to, on that day.

When she first received her diagnosis, two years ago, Joshuanette did not fully understand the seriousness of the disease, and continued her life as usual. She did not do the required follow-ups with her doctor, no therapy or exercises, and her eating habits did not change. Now that the disease is taking a toll, affecting the way she operates, she is forced to do what was initially recommended. She is a Principles of Accounting teacher at Antigua's All Saints Secondary School and a supervisor at one of Antigua restaurants. Mid-April 2019, she fell while on duty at the restaurant and was placed on two weeks leave. As her knees continued affecting her daily operations, she visited several doctors on the island and in October 2019, travelled to Atlanta, Georgia to visit the Peachtree

Orthopedic Center. Upon her return to Antigua and Barbuda, for a while she adjusted certain aspects of her life, she once took for granted, but once again in December 2019, Joshuanette's health played second fiddle, was placed on the back burner and therapy was no longer done. A fall in April 2020, however, finally changed her outlook on this disease she took way too lightly.

According to [Mayo Clinic](#), Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis, affecting millions of people worldwide. It occurs when the protective cartilage that cushions the ends of the bones wears down over time. It is a degenerative disease, characterized by chronic joint pain and stiffness which can become so severe at times that daily tasks become difficult to accomplish.

Two years after her diagnosis, 26-year-old Joshuanette's legs are now constantly swollen, she no longer moves swiftly and walks with a painful limp; can only go sideways down the stairs and lives with the knowledge that there may come a time when she can no longer use her legs and a walker or wheelchair will be her

mobility aid. She is fearful that her position at her second job as a restaurant supervisor, may come to an end in the near future as her knees been to fail her. She has been with the establishment for four years working 8 and sometimes 12-hour shifts but her knees may no longer allow her to continue.

In spite of it all, Joshuanette remains in high spirits. "I have my good days and my sad days," she said, but no one will ever know which is her sad day as her buoyant demeanor always belie her pain and discomfort. As the effectiveness of her knees begin to fade, her outlook on life has shifted. She remembers her pharmacist saying to her, "you are taking this disease exceptionally light now, but someday you may not be able to walk. This disease has no cure, and it only gets worse." Having always made light of her disease, thinking, "I am young so I've got time on my side," her knees have given her a reality check and since her fall in April, working on a healthier version of herself is her focus. She is also on a path to "do the most," she says, and if she ever gets to the stage where her mobility is lost, she wants to be able to relive her life via the content she would have created. This content is now being memorialized on an-going basis in what she calls, "Joshuanette's World," her YouTube Vlog.

"I live on one of the world's most beautiful islands - Antigua and Barbuda. It is known for sun, sea and sand, an island surrounded by 365 beaches," she said. Her doctor recommended physical therapy, incorporating exercises on the beach and even bike riding. Her Vlog, "Joshuanette's World," documents her trips to the beach for physical therapy - she intends to visit all of the 365 beaches on the island! The Vlog highlights places she venture on her walks as part of her physical therapy. She will be visiting historical sites and other interesting places, one day at a time to explore as best she can, document and share it with the world.

Joshuanette wants to publicly share her journey to let people know, especially those on her island, that many others are living with Osteoarthritis and there is no need to be ashamed. People have many misconceptions about disabilities and she sees herself as an educator in this regard. As a teacher, young eyes and ears are entrusted to



her, and frequent opportunities arise where she can talk about disabilities with her students.

The first Video goes live on Joshuanette's World Wednesday October 28th, 2020. This date is significant as it marks one year since her doctor's visit in Atlanta. As a year has passed and her life is changing, she believes that sharing her story will ensure other know they are not alone.

Joshuanette has appeared on the breakfast morning TV show, Good Morning Antigua Barbuda and several radio broadcasts, where she spoke about her Vlog, her T-shirt line and a Walk for a Cure for arthritis. Her t-shirt line and walk are all geared towards assisting in finding a cure for arthritis.

She gives thanks every day that despite her disability, she is still able to live a fulfilling life and hopes that her story will inspire others. ■

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Save our Youth Foundation Curacao

The work of a few impacts many . . .



RINGO HARRIGAN, a young man on the island of Curacao, who loves nature, agriculture, art and music, remembers quite vividly when he first became interested in the lives of people with disabilities. He was only 16 years old working at a McDonald's restaurant

when a person with special needs came in on a wheelchair. From then on, he was moved to learn more and do something to improve their lives.

While Ringo and the [Save our Youth Foundation](#) he founded does their small part, he believes more can be done by those in authority on his island of Curacao to provide opportunities for people with disabilities. "They do have the same rights like everyone else. They have the right to participate in their community and their homes must be made accessible for them," said Ringo. His organization's goals are poverty reduction, empowerment of the youth and single mothers, supporting seniors, and improving the lives of the disabled on the island. Much of the programs run by this organization, which was started in 2009, is funded out-of-pocket by Ringo. He uses his private car to transport

people with disabilities and is one of *the* main advocates on the island for people with special needs. Construction, yard clean-up, sale of agricultural products including fruits, and sale of his art made from leather, wood, aluminum, stone/iron, plastic and also his paintings go towards helping the marginalized on the island.

Over the years, the Save the Youth Foundation have undertaken a number of social projects. One of their most recent is the building of a greenhouse at Mc Piar School on the island. Other [projects](#) include:

The Kortjin Project: The home of two seniors and their grandchildren was destroyed by fire. The Foundation rebuilt the house, furnished it and provided clothes for the family.

The Leliberg Project: The roof of a house occupied by a family with children including a two-month old baby was blown off and away by a small cyclone. The Foundation built them a new roof and supplied clothes and other much-needed items.

Leetje Kindergarten: After the passing of Tropical Storm Tomas in 2010, the organization restored the Leetje Kindergarten school. Ringo said, "the beauty of this project was, when the kids resumed school, there were big smiles on their faces."

On an on-going basis, the Foundation provides food to those in need.

Securing a beach on the island so people with disabilities can use it for therapy has been an 11 year lengthy discussion with the Government, according to Ringo. A beach has not yet been secured and to date, there are no accessible beaches designated for their use. The organization is also trying to purchase an abandoned building from the Government which they can restore themselves to use as a Rehab Center for people with disabilities. So far, Ringo said the response from Government has been, "no".

Ringo is of the passionate opinion that those in authority need to give more attention to improving the lives of people with disabilities in Curacao, but while his frustration with the authorities continue, he and his team are forging ahead with the projects they identify and can complete themselves.

In the homes of many disabled people on the island, shower grab bars are lacking. Ringo and his team are trying to purchase and install these in as many homes as they can. Assistance in obtaining grab bars is welcomed and any donation to assist with their work overall will be appreciated.

For information about Save the Youth Foundation, email:
info@saveouryouthcuracao.com

Some of Ringo's work as an artist under the signature, "Nature," is shown on the right. Funds generated from the sale of these go towards the Foundation and their social projects on the island.

www.saveouryouthcuracao.com





Martinique Access'île is the information source for everything accessible on the Caribbean island of Martinique. Noël Cicalini the President, founded this organization in 2010. As a paraplegic, travel agent and tour guide, he and his team specializes in curating holidays for seniors and the disabled. His non-profit organization also assists with tourism site development and collaborates with the local authorities to help improve accessibility on Martinique. Martinique Access'île is equipped with adapted vans and well-trained staff.



Post-pandemic, Noel and his team will be waiting to welcome you to their island.

For the visitors who love the sea, the beautiful beaches are a huge attraction, and although there are no accessible ones on the island, help will be available to get you there. Beach wheelchairs can be rented from Martinique Access'île and they will also arrange exciting diving excursions with handicapped-trained diving instructors. The more adventurous can participate in tandem parachute jumping and hike through the island's many trails, discovering tropical flora and fauna along the way.



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SITES MADE ACCESSIBLE BY THE NATIONAL FORESTS BOARD 



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History of ENAT

ENAT, the *European Network for Accessible Tourism* was founded in 2008, as a Belgian non-profit association, which promotes accessibility to tourism for the benefit of all citizens. ENAT began as an EU-funded pilot project which had the aim to mainstream the concept and consideration of accessible tourism and disability issues.

It was established by a number of organisations and individuals whose common goal was to make tourism accessible for all.

These included:

- EWORX S.A., Athens, Greece
- Fundación ONCE, Madrid, Spain
- Vzw Toegankelijkheidsbureau, Hasselt, Belgium
- Association National pour le Logement des personnes Handicapées asbl, Bruxelles, Belgium
- VisitBritain, London, UK
- Tourism for All in Sweden, Helsingborg, Sweden
- Work Research Centre, Dublin, Ireland
- Ministry of Tourism, Athens, Greece
- Disability Now, Thessaloniki, Greece
- ATHLA Onlus, Italy
- Turismo do Centro, Portugal

The demand for accessible tourism, in its wide conception of **Tourism for All**, was and still is now growing. It's now recognized as **an opportunity** for the tourism sector rather than

an obligation. If the tourism industry wants to maintain and develop quality, sustainability and competitiveness, it must support and develop tourism which is accessible for all.

However, almost always, when "Tourism for All" is taken into consideration by the tourism sector, the focus of all activities, promotions and offers is normally on tourists with disabilities as a separate "segment" of the market, to be managed as such, and therefore without genuine inclusion in a mainstream logic.

The founding members were the organisations which belonged to the Partnership for the development of the pilot project. Since the founding, many other members were accepted as full members. The Network is ruled by a Statute, approved by the majority of the full members and is led by an international Board of Directors. Its members are national and regional tourist bodies, public and private tourism companies, tourism professionals, academic and research institutions and non-governmental organizations of people with disabilities from more than 30 countries worldwide.

The goal of ENAT, since the very beginning, has been the promotion of accessible tourism in Europe and in the rest of the world, in an inclusive perspective of environments, products and services.

A Mélange Conversation with ENAT's President, Annagrazia Laura



Annagrazia Laura, ENAT President

As President of ENAT, share with us some of your history with this organisation

I was elected in June 2013, during the Annual General Assembly which was held in Avila, within the IV International Congress Tourism for All, jointly organised by ENAT and ONCE Foundation. My election was sponsored by the representative of one of our founding members, the Austrian organization, IBFT, Ms. Angelika Laburda, and I am proud to say that, when she retired from her professional life, she has been asked to remain on the board of directors as an Honorary Member.

My term, as for any other member of the Board, is four years and my second one will come to an end in June 2021. The Statute doesn't put any limit to being re-elected. The decision is on me, on the strength I will have to guide the Network for another term as well as the need to give space to someone else, to be open to new ideas and new challenges.

When I was elected, I focused on two main objectives: **"Consolidation"** and **"Development"**. After 5 years since the creation of ENAT, we had acquired a wide recognition and our aims and strategies are well appraised at international level. We will have to work hard to maintain our position as a recognised reference point for tourism

organisations, national, regional and local authorities and other networks with similar aims and strategies. Our opinion, advice and support has to be present in every situation when issues dealing with accessible tourism are brought up for important decisions on policies, promotion and product design.

We have recently decided to make greater efforts to engage with key organisations and decision centres, making our voice heard and representing our stakeholders at all levels. I am proud to say that our positioning now is following that roadmap and that ENAT is regarded as a primary organisation for Tourism for All by the UN World Tourism Organisation, many Tourist Authorities, public and private bodies, by tourism businesses and end users.

I am convinced, however, that these accomplishments shouldn't be credited to my presidency as such. In ENAT we are all used to seeing ourselves as a team, to cooperate and to count on each other, to make joint efforts to reach the goals we set and to share successful results.

Are all European nations represented at ENAT?

We have full and associated members in the majority of EU member states and in

Geographical Europe. Not all countries are represented. We are not looking for “country” representation as such. Our members have to be committed to share our principles, to adopt and follow the *ENAT Code of Good Conduct*, and to work in their own country and at the international level, within the activities that we promote: to promote and develop Tourism for All, aiming at the maximum inclusion of the end users both in terms of being able to enjoy leisure activities (*Art. 30 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities*), as well as to get job opportunities in the open labour market.

What is ENAT’s primary purpose?

Our primary purpose is, as noted above, to make Tourism for All accessible to everybody and to promote it in Europe and around the world. This general statement, however, is the headline for a lot of initiatives which are aimed at involving different stakeholders, both public and private, to act in their own field, towards the recognition of rights, the design of tourist products accessible and usable by everybody, to plan destinations to become more friendly towards people with specific access needs, including seniors who are representing a huge potential and real market in Tourism.

What are ENAT’s top five major accomplishments over the past ten years?

There are major areas where ENAT has been actively working to increase the confidence of travellers, as well as the competitive positioning of the tourism industry.

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

ENAT’s work on standards for accessibility in the tourism sector continues as we take part in two major International and European initiatives on this subject. An ISO Working Group on “*Accessible Tourism for All*”, was established

in 2017 under ISO Technical Committee 228 Tourism Services, to help develop a Standard on “*Tourism for All*”. This project is led by the UN World Tourism Organisation and Fundación ONCE, Spain, with whom ENAT enjoys a close working relationship, having developed several guidance documents with them for the tourism industry. The ISO Tourism for All voluntary Standard promises to be a valuable reference, that will help to align policies and practices in accessible tourism at international level. As such it should provide a much-needed technical basis for businesses and public sector bodies to invest and develop new tourism services to serve the growing accessible tourism market, within the broad framework of sustainable development.

ENAT is also acting as official liaison organisation with the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), in the Technical Committee for Mandate M/420 “Public Procurement for an Accessible Built Environment”. This work involves developing a new European Standard which is intended to support EU Public Procurement and the European Accessibility Act, which is expected to be passed by the European Parliament in 2018.

WORLD TOURISM FOR ALL QUALITY PROGRAMME

This unique certification programme is the culmination of several years of development, responding to the need for defined and consistent quality criteria for accessible tourism training, service delivery and marketing. The World Quality Programme will provide a guided pathway for service providers to improve and qualify their business, leading to the *Quality Label*, recognising their commitment to access and inclusion for all, enhancing staff competence and ensuring first-class customer service.

ENAT NTOS’ LEARNING GROUP

Established on the initiative of some National and Regional Tourism Organisations, brings together public sector executives working on accessible tourism policy, strategy, business support and marketing. These members, who represent the “cream” of Europe’s public bodies in accessible tourism, come together to share experiences, build a common understanding and set concrete goals for innovation and improvement in accessible and inclusive tourism. I am convinced that working side by side with the public bodies involved in the promotion of tourism is essential to share and develop a unified vision on how the tourism offer should be shaped to meet requirements and expectations of visitors and to plan together the most convenient and workable strategies to reach the goal.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

This represents another important area of intervention that ENAT promotes, linked to the improvement of the human resources skills in welcoming tourists with specific access needs and how to make this added knowledge beneficial for the tourism enterprises. Through our participation in several outstanding EU-financed projects we now have a wealth of online and face-to-face training offers which can be useful to smaller and larger tourism enterprises wishing to qualify their services and the quality of their offer. ENAT members are ready to support training initiatives both in Europe and further afield.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

We have recently completed a study for ILO, on the job opportunities for people with disabilities in the Tourism sector. Tourism, once stabilized again after the COVID19 crisis, offers an incredible opportunity for employment to people with specific access needs. These

human resources can make the difference in the tourism services by combining the technical skills to the personal experience they can put into the relationship with customers. In comparison with the timid , but constant opening of the tourist system to package “accessible” products, an element not to be underestimated in the offer of a quality product has been largely taken for granted: the ability of the human resources, who operate in the “mainstream” tourist area, to understand, use and manage all elements, both technical and behavioural, which identify a correct relationship between the service providers and a customer with disabilities.

The possibility to enter a paid job is not only a right recognised by the Convention on the rights of people with disabilities, but could have also beneficial effects on the whole system of the tourism offer by:

- increasing the quality of the service offered by providing a peer-to-peer relationship with customers with specific needs
- being able to have a better understanding of the requirements to be met
- being able to improve the offer to make it more inclusive and efficient

What are ENAT’s consistent challenges?

The main challenge is still the lack of a “destination” vision at all levels. There are many initiatives from different bodies, both public and private to improve and give visibility to the initiatives and results of single components of the tourism service chain (hotels, restaurants, cafes, museums, green areas, etc) but an overall destination strategy will involve agreeing on a roadmap and plans that will have a medium to long-term time frame.

There are many declarations, manifestos and documents at the European level, both from

the EU Parliament, the Commission and other relevant bodies, aiming to reach full inclusion goals. ENAT has supported many of these documents with the aim to get to sound and durable results. In Europe a common definition of accessibility criteria is still lacking but there are very few possibilities that a common basis will be achieved in the near future.

Another significant challenge is to have all EU Member States sharing a similar opinion about accessible tourism and the recognition of the visitor's needs and rights. Goodwill is often not enough for a satisfactory development of accessible products and proposals, but the European Commission has been very active from this point of view, launching calls for proposals to sustain innovative projects to allow inclusive participation for all.

Do you think Covid-19 will negatively affect European travel for people with disabilities?

COVID19 has hit tourism in a dramatic way all around the world. The very hard measure of the shutdown, adopted in many countries, almost stopped all tourism activities with the severe consequence of huge loss of income and of jobs. Many activities are still now at risk of being bankrupted. The possibility that the pandemic will gain force again in the Autumn is also preventing people to plan travelling again. This situation is much more difficult for tourists with disabilities who have specific requirements to make their trip safe and comfortable. They might risk not finding the required assistance, and have problems in case they need to go back home in an emergency and may also be blocked by quarantine.

The UNWTO has issued a Paper on the inclusive response for [vulnerable groups](#). ENAT and the ONCE Foundation have cooperated with

the contents within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding we have signed with UNWTO.

When do you anticipate tourism will resume? What type of "normal" do you envision?

All studies and market research made at national and European levels consider 2021 as the year when tourism activities will slowly go back to normal but that is only assuming that a vaccine or treatment will be found in the coming months. It all depends on the pandemic situation, if and when the whole planet will be "virus-free" in order to resume normal transport connections with all the countries and plan tourist exchanges. This is particularly important for Europe since 3 of EU countries (France, Spain and Italy) are in the top 5 list of the UNWTO as the major destinations of the world tourism exchanges.

'Normal' will be very different from the one we have known in the past: the need for social distancing will reduce the offer of the tourist facilities (hotels, restaurants, social events, etc.) thus the tourism economy will still be a critical issue. With less jobs and less economic possibilities, many tourist flows will be reduced. In our opinion this will affect more tourists with disabilities and specific access requirements for many reasons: a loss of income and a possible loss of Tourism for All offers, due to the reduced capacity of the tourism industry.

What organizations does ENAT work with in each country to ensure that its resolutions are helpful and enforced?

There are many at national and international levels, normally public bodies, particularly if they are committed to create a destination system for tourism activities and promotion. In this case the issues of Tourism for All are

brought to their attention in order to build medium and long term plans and define strategies to create an accessible destination management.

ENAT is cooperating to define tourism improvement strategies and references to help national and regional tourist boards include accessible tourism in their long-term goals. At an international level, the long-lasting cooperation with UNWTO and the European Commission has brought many important results. Our collaboration with UNWTO Ethics Unit has enabled us to offer the Tourism Industry valuable manuals on Recommendations on Accessible Tourism and on Accessible Information in tourism, among other guidelines. Some best practices in accessible tourism were outlined in the brochure that the UNWTO launched in Bangkok, to celebrate the World Tourism Day 2016, where the main topic was Accessible Tourism.

What has been the biggest obstacle that ENAT has been faced?

At the beginning we were just another organization dealing with Tourism for All. In any country, when some opinion leaders or stakeholders acknowledge that Tourism for All is an economic as well as ethical issue, they form an association which tries to be credited as "the one" at national and mainly at an international level. Recognition of the goals of the Network as compared to many other similar organisations has been one of the biggest obstacles, even if, our concept since the beginning was, and still is now, that we do not need or want **competition but cooperation, integration, working together**. Through cooperation and the signature of Memoranda of Understanding at national and international level was one of the methods to overcome

the initial challenges. Now we are working with a lot of public and private organisations, NGOs and associations for the rights of people with disabilities. This is the action line we are still following and it represents one of our top priorities in our strategic plan 2020- 2024.

If there was one thing ENAT could change globally, what would it be and why?

To reach a global understanding of the real meaning of Tourism for All, increase general and personal awareness of diversity as wealth, and make every one of us understand that barriers and disabilities are just a state of mind.

In Conclusion

When we started, we were confident that our ideas and concepts will lead to a different understanding of Tourism for All, of the customers and the environment. A lot was at stake: we struggled, we negotiated, we kept our confidence on a future being more inclusive for disability issues and, I am convinced, we won our bet...but we will not let our guard down. The final result has not yet been fully achieved. ■



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DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

by
Fred Maahs, Jr.

Fred's suggestions for interacting with someone who has a disability.

You may have heard this a million times, but it's true, we're all "people" first, so you should use "people first" language. This is an acknowledgement that a person's disability does not define them, but their humanity does. For example, instead of saying, "a disabled person" you should say, "a person with a disability."

Always speak directly to the person with a disability. If they use a wheelchair or if they are a little person, you should kneel down on one knee, or for extended conversations, you should sit in a chair. It's always best to have level eye contact with the person who has the disability.

Before you assume that a person with a disability needs your assistance, you should always ask first. If they do, they will let you know how you can best assist them.

It is considered rude to ask a person about their disability. If they wish to tell you about it they will, and you should take their lead on what is appropriate to discuss.

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who have artificial limbs can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is also an acceptable greeting.

Thanks for taking the time to read these suggestions which are just mine as a wheelchair user.

Others may have different opinions.

Remember, every person with a disability has very unique circumstances, so my suggestions may differ from someone else's.

... Fred



My Trip to Accessible Israel

By Fred Maahs, Jr.

I grew up attending Catholic schools and spent many hours during my youth studying the Bible, the Holy Land, and the origins of my faith during religion class or in church. For me, Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christ were places that were held with absolute reverence. I never imagined that I would actually visit these holy places, especially after an accident

that left me paralyzed from the chest down and using a wheelchair when I was scheduled to begin my first year at college.

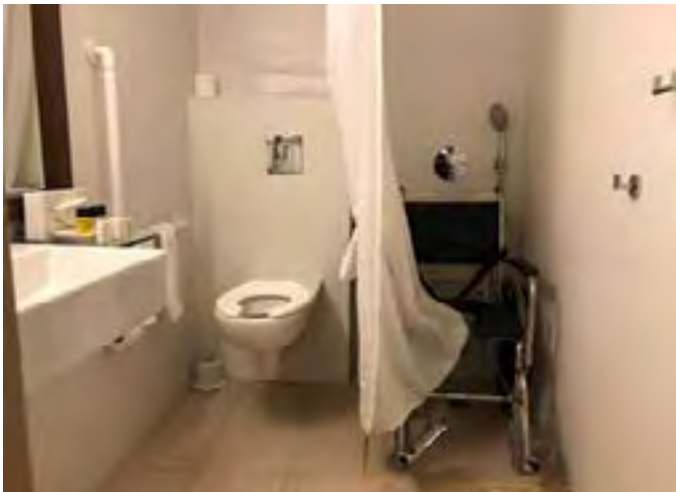
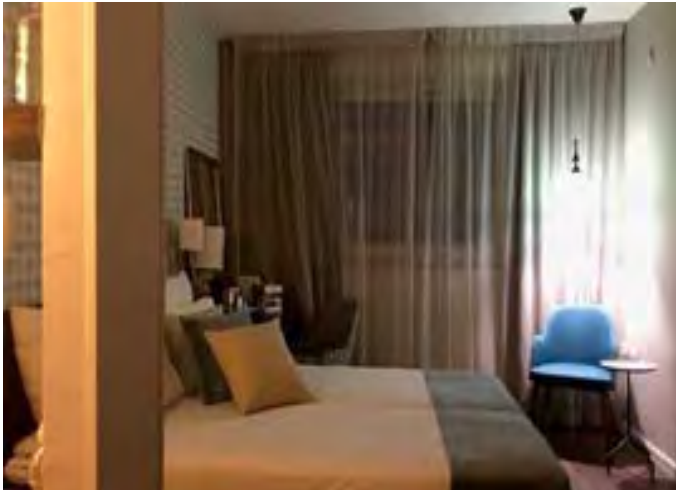
I've always been a firm believer that things happen for a reason. The purpose of my trip to Israel is yet another affirmation for me that God has a plan for all of us.

Accessible Israel . . .

Israel is working very hard to become a country that is accessible to everyone, and I was part of a group who visited as guests of the Israel Ministry of Tourism this past February. For many reasons, this would be a very special trip for me; informative, spiritual, and fun.

I flew from Philadelphia to Toronto, Canada on a small Air Canada Embraer jet. If you have bladder or skin issues, be sure to check layover times in Toronto. I had a five-hour layover, but you can easily spend some of that time at Pearson International Airport navigating the long Terminals and walkways from your arrival gate to the International Terminal. Plenty of accessible shops, restaurants, and kiosks lined the terminals. One thing to note for anyone with a mobility impairment, there are accessible dining spots located in the bars and restaurants but you have to move the heavy, steel chairs labeled with the international blue and white sign for disability. When it was time for our departure, the gate agents easily and efficiently accommodated anyone needing special assistance and early boarding. Business Class seating for a 10 ½ hour flight is the only way to fly, especially when you have a disability. You have room to elevate your legs which will help with circulation and swelling. You can recline your seat to a sleep position, and rest in a wider seat. Great food and very helpful flight attendant make for a pleasant journey.

Arrival in **Tel Aviv** the next morning was easy and friendly. The ground crew and staff at the Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv could not have been more helpful. Make sure to book accessible transportation ahead of time. About an hour after landing, I arrived at *The Prima Royal*



Hotel, located in a neighborhood setting in the heart of **Jerusalem**. My room on the 4th floor was a small, cozy space with some modern amenities. As a world-traveler with decades of experience, I can attest to the fact that one of the most important things to a traveler with a disability is the height of the bed, and although the bed-height in this hotel was a few inches lower than ideal, making transfer from bed to wheelchair challenging, and the bathroom was small with the commode situated next to a very small shower area, the staff was very friendly and accommodating.



One of the things I immediately had to get used to, other than the uncommonly cold and rainy weather the first two days in Jerusalem, was Shabbat. I didn't realize that just about everything closes down for Shabbat on Fridays in Jerusalem, one hour after sunset, for the next 24 hours – meaning no hot meals, modified elevator availability, basically nothing requiring electricity or gas was available during that time!

Saturday morning, I was greeted in the lobby by one of the friendliest, most knowledgeable people I have ever met, *Eli Meiri*. Eli would be our tour guide for the next five days. Once I was situated and secured in Eli's lift-equipped van, we headed to the **Israel Museum**. We were able to see amazing exhibits, including the Model of Jerusalem from the Second Temple Period (time of Jesus), the Shrine of the Book (exhibiting the earliest biblical texts) displays from the first cities, the first human bones and graves, and many other beautiful and historically significant artifacts.



Everything in the museum was accessible – flat, easy, with wide tiled floors with ramps and lifts where necessary. You could easily spend a day or more here to see all of the exhibits.

The weather was not cooperating so we were unable to visit the historical **Mehane Yehuda fruit and vegetable market** in downtown Jerusalem, so we went back to the hotel for a short rest before dinner.

We enjoyed a fabulous meal at **Adom Restaurant**, located in the **First Station**, a renovated Turkish railway station. The restaurant had a warm, cozy vibe, lengthy wine list, and delicious food. The rest of First Station was easy to navigate being in a mostly accessible location, although the parking lot could be repaved to ensure a safe, smooth walk to the Station.

Over the next few days, my tour mates, Stefano and Antonio from Italy, and Thomas from Germany, along with Eli as our guide, ventured into some of the most holy and sacred places in Jerusalem, then east to the **Dead Sea** and **Masada**, and finally to **Tel Aviv** and the beautiful **Mediterranean Coast**.

When we left Jerusalem with its lush trees and grass, we literally descended for miles and miles to the desert. On the mountainsides, we could see flocks of goats being herded by their shepherd and a smattering of settlements in the valleys. The beautiful green landscape of Jerusalem was quickly replaced with the tan and brown hues of the desert, also known as the **Judean Wilderness**. Jerusalem is about 800 meters above sea level and the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, is 400 meters below sea level. We traveled south along a winding road with the Dead Sea shore to our east and the mountains and cliffs to our west. Incredible sights in every direction.

We passed farms along the way that contained rows of thousands of palm trees growing on many acres of desert sand. These palm trees originated from thousands of years ago and was once a crop grown in the Kingdom of Judea as a source of food, shelter, and shade. Unfortunately, the palms were destroyed by the Roman Empire in an attempt to ruin the Jewish economy and they all completely disappeared by 500 A.D. In 1963, an archeologist excavating **Masada**, a fortress built on a mountaintop by King Herod over 2,000 years ago, found the ancient seeds in a clay jar. The jar was kept at a university in

Tel Aviv for 40 years until 2005 when a botanical researcher planted a seed to see what would happen. Now, thousands of these palms grow in forests producing dates, a popular fruit enjoyed around the world. Who knew?

As we continued along the road to Masada, we could see the mountains of Jordan climbing above the Dead Sea shore off in the distance, until we finally reached our destination – Masada!

The enormity of Masada doesn't really hit you until you are standing in the visitor drop off location and looking up! There were hundreds of visitors entering the welcome area of Masada and its curb cuts and ramps can be easily navigated by anyone with a mobility impairment. Once you enter the



welcome area, there are escalators and elevators and the lines move quickly. After you arrive on the next level you must purchase a ticket for the cable car ride to the top. If you have a disability, there is a special ticket counter to purchase your ticket but it is very crowded and directional signage is difficult to find. For the very brave, you do have the option to hike very steep and narrow trails to the top. We took an elevator to the cable car entrance. Each car fits about 50 people. Space is a premium but anyone with a disability is given priority boarding and moving from the platform to the cable car is level and safe.

Ascending Masada in the cable car was breathtaking! The jagged rocks that form the foundation of Masada seem so close you could touch them, and the Dead Sea and Jordan were clearly visible. We reached our stop in just a few minutes. Once you exit the cable car you follow a wooden pathway built on the side of the mountain up to an archway carved into the rock. As you move through the archway you are taken onto a somewhat paved pathway covered in small gravel. A little tricky possibly, so be careful.

From there, hiking on the pathway to the top takes some time, some energy, and maybe a little help. Thank goodness I had back-up with my tour mates. They certainly got their aerobic exercise as we pushed hard to the summit. Once there, it was well worth it! We were literally standing on ancient



ruins of the **Palace of Herod** in the **Judean Desert!** You can see for miles in every direction and for those who know and embrace this historically important place, I have to admit, they, like me, would need to close their eyes for a few minutes and imagine what it was like to have lived back when Masada was built. It is believed that Herod built Masada over a ten-year period using palms from the valley that helped to form a giant ramp from the ground to the top of the mountain.

We spent a couple of hours touring the mountain and then ate lunch in the cafeteria-style restaurant on site. There is also a very large gift and souvenir shop with many different items for sale, including plenty of beauty and health items from the Dead Sea. You can navigate most of the sites on Masada by using the paved pathways with caution as some are very steep. There are a number of areas that are not easily accessible and others that can be reached with some help. When coming to Israel, Masada is definitely a place you must visit.

We left Masada and then ventured to **Ein Gedi** for a quick drive through to see the **David Canyon Nature Reserve** and then drove on to a hostel just north of Ein Gedi. We stopped for a quick tour of the facility which overlooks the Dead Sea. The manager told us there were 18 fully accessible rooms, accessible dining hall, and grounds. A beautiful, accessible property!



parking lot and huts look like any other small beach resort – bright colors, palm trees, literally a handful of shops and restaurants, and plenty of people! To get to the beach, there is an accessible walkway down a long hill to the shore. There is also an accessible path into the water for anyone with a mobility impairment. We didn't go swimming in the Dead Sea on this trip but many other people swam in the water which was very warm. It is believed the Dead Sea water has healing powers and by the looks of the crowds, everyone seemed quite content with their adventure. You are able to access Kalia Beach year-round, just be sure to check the hours it is open.

We left Kalia Beach and traveled back to Jerusalem for dinner at **Medita Restaurant** with Ms. Gura Berger, the Tourism Adviser to the East Jerusalem Development Company and the Old City Development Project. We enjoyed a fabulous family-style dinner in an easily accessible location. Parking may be a little tricky so be sure to arrive a little early to ensure you have accessible parking.



The next morning, we enjoyed breakfast at our hotel and piled our suitcases into the van for a long day of touring. We left the hotel and in just a few minutes found ourselves in the heart of the **Holy City**. Somehow Eli was able to navigate our

van through the narrow and crowded streets to the **Mount of Olives** which overlooked the Old City, the oldest Jewish cemetery, and the **Garden of Gethsemane**. The view was breathtaking and I reflected on my many religion classes and the Bible which reminded me of the importance of this area more than 2000 years ago.



After our tour of the Ein Gedi Hostel, we continued north to the **Qumran Archaeology Park**. This was a popular tourist spot, but more importantly, it was an active archaeological dig about 1.5 km from the Dead Sea, near the Israeli settlement and kibbutz of Kalya. It is best known as the settlement nearest to the **Qumran Caves** where the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden. The property has an accessible board walk winding through and over the ancient ruins and bath houses which date back to the Hellenistic Period. Easy to navigate set in a beautiful vista overlooking the cliffs and caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden.

After our tour at Qumran, we drove toward **Kalia Beach** which is located on the Dead Sea. When you arrive at Kalia Beach, the



After leaving the Mount of Olives, we parked in an accessible parking garage at the Mamila Mall near the **Tower of David**. We toured the Tower of David and found it to be fairly accessible. Cobble stone-like pavers were used to help make the site more wheelchair-friendly on walks and ramps, but take it slow. The pavers are still bumpy. The Director of Tourism and PR was quite accommodating as she took on a private mini tour and shared that soon the upper levels of the Tower will be accessible via an outside elevator. Quite an impressive site and the accommodations were very much appreciated.

From the Tower we trekked over to get inside the walls of the Holy City. Not only was it surprisingly accessible, but most of the storefronts and restaurants and even holy places were, too. I found it fairly easy to push my wheelchair around inside the Holy City mostly unassisted. Being adventurous with a never say never attitude, I did venture off the beaten path with the others from time to time and although I encountered very steep small streets, alleys and even stairs, my tour mates jumped right in and either pushed or lifted me to make the inaccessible possible.

Once inside the Holy City, I was taken back in time – centuries to be precise. The original stones and wood were still in place. We walked along the **Via Dolorosa** – the Stations of the Cross - and entered the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** which can take your breath away. The church is in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and contains two of the holiest sites in all of Christianity: Calvary, the site where Jesus was crucified, and the tomb of Jesus where he was buried and resurrected.

The **Aedicula**, a nineteenth century shrine, is built around the tomb and is guarded by Greek Orthodox priests, a tradition since the 12th century. There were hundreds of people waiting in line to enter the Aedicula but as soon as the Greek Orthodox priests knew I wanted to enter, they asked the line of people to wait so that I could go in. The inside is very small, literally room for just a few people, very ornate and adorned with candles and small paintings of Jesus on the walls.

The entrance to the tomb of Jesus is quite small, with literally just enough space to squeeze my wheelchair through the opening as I leaned forward to clear the short height of the entrance carved into the huge stone. Only one person at a time is permitted inside the tomb for just a couple of minutes. For me, it was a lifetime of reverence, belief and faith shooting through my body as I quietly recited the Lord's Prayer while my



hands held tightly onto the slab of marble sealing Jesus' tomb. No words can possibly come close to adequately describing the emotion I felt right at that moment. It's a moment that will remain with me for the rest of my life.

After our time in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, visited the **Muslim Quarter** and **Arab market** (shuk), then on to the rebuilt **Jewish Quarter**, then to the **Western Wall** or **Wailing Wall** – Judaism's most sacred site. It was quite accessible and very heavily guarded. The Western Wall is about 488 meters long. The highest point of the exposed wall at the Prayer Plaza – above ground – is about 19 meters. The Western Wall serves as a Jewish synagogue.

Once we left the Western Wall, we met Eli at our van and began our journey through the **Judean Hills** to Tel Aviv which took about an hour. Like most major cities, Tel Aviv has its share of rush hour traffic and many new, modern office buildings, condominiums, apartment buildings. By far, the accessibility and accommodation for people with disabilities is much better in Tel Aviv, however, when we checked into the Savoy Hotel, just across the street from the Mediterranean Sea, that wasn't the case. As with most of my travel plans and after decades of experience using a wheelchair and requiring an accessible room on my travels, I had contacted the hotel via email weeks before my trip to ensure it was equipped for my needs.

The hotel claimed to be a boutique hotel with modern amenities and accessible rooms. The first thing we noticed was the lift to get from the sidewalk to the lobby entrance outside of the hotel was not operating, so I had to traverse up the drive to the back of the hotel, move through an assemblance of an outdoor kitchen or staging area, and enter through a back door into a hallway that was stacked with tables and chairs! Once inside the lobby, I asked if the room was, in fact, accessible. I was assured that it was and took the elevator to my room only to find a regular room with portable grab bars placed in an *inaccessible* bathroom. I knew within



just a minute this room was not, in fact, an accessible one. I contacted the front desk and asked for the manager but she was busy. There were multiple issues with the room, mostly in the bathroom and some with the position of the bed. I didn't want to create a scene, especially since we were there at the invitation of the Ministry of Tourism. With some help, I had the furniture rearranged and rented a shower wheelchair. I met with the manager two days later and walked her through the room identifying each issue. There was really nothing she could do, other than raise the mattress

height by adding another mattress which was way too low. She told me that other people with disabilities have stayed in that room and never said anything was wrong. But, after walking her through what made the room inaccessible, I think she understood. My only hope is that the room is much better now for future guests!

That evening, our team met in the hotel lobby for dinner. We drove to the **Messa Restaurant**, just a short ride from our hotel. It was a modern restaurant and the accessible seating was located 3 steps above the ground floor. The staff met us with a portable ramp consisting of two separate aluminum planks that had to be held down because the floors and steps were marble and slippery! Just be very careful if you have to use the “accessible” seating, but the meal and service were outstanding. I would definitely recommend Messa as a place to dine – just make sure to call ahead if you have any special needs.

The next morning, we ate our complimentary breakfast in the hotel lobby and met for our next adventure – the **Mediterranean Coast!** We drove to **Caesarea National Park** to see the remains of a Crusader City, a former Roman Capital city built by Herod the Great. The entire site was accessible with

paved paths and ramped areas where there were inclines. The park had such a beautiful setting – literally right on the Mediterranean Sea. It included a Roman amphitheater, a hippodrome for racing horses, a bath house, a Herodian port, and an aqueduct system. Parking was easy in spaces reserved for people with disabilities and the entrance gate was wide. The park also incorporated modern, disability-friendly, drinking fountains! Well done!

Our next stop on our tour was in the **Kiryat Tivon** area, to the award-winning Tulip Winery, a 90-minute trip. The winery was situated adjacent to the **Village of Hope** “kibbutz” established in 1964 for adults with developmental and cognitive disabilities. The winery employs about 50 of the



250 residents of the Village. I was compelled to support the winery and the Village and purchased a few of their best vintages! (yes, they did make it back to the US intact!)

We enjoyed our time and the wine tasting at the Tulip Winery and then drove on to **Akko**, an ancient Crusader seaport which was declared by UNESCO as a world heritage site, toured the ancient walled city with subterranean Knight’s Halls, a fisherman’s port, and bazaar. We had no issues touring the entire property which



featured smooth floors, ramps, and even a lift and elevator. There was plenty of lighting in the subterranean portions of the site and the architecture was amazing.

After an educational time in Akko, we traveled back to Tel Aviv to **Pua Restaurant** to meet and dine with **Yuval Wagner**, a friend and one of the most recognized advocates for people with disabilities in Israel. Yuval is the President and Founder of *Access Israel*, a nonprofit organization focused on promoting accessibility and inclusion to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and the elderly.

Pua is in the Old Jaffa section of Tel Aviv. The food was simple and delicious with an atmosphere that was a blend of eclectic and “homey.” The mismatched chairs at the tables and mismatched glasses and flatware added to the charm. The staff were very accommodating to the needs of our group which made it very pleasant and memorable, and I will definitely return. There is easy access to the dining area and restrooms.

The next morning, we traveled to the **International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) 2020** at the Expo Tel Aviv, for a business-to-business meeting with about 40 travel agencies from Israel. Each group wanted to meet with us and discuss ways to partner and collaborate, and mostly be educated about the accessible tourism market. So, for a couple of hours, I had the chance to meet some great and enthusiastic people!





After our meetings we drove through Tel Aviv then on to the **Carmel open-air market** with plenty of stands to purchase spices, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, clothing...you name it, all at one level, all accessible, and very crowded for a Wednesday at mid-day.

We left the market and went back to the hotel for a rest before dinner but some of us crossed over to the beach along the Mediterranean. The walkways were very accessible with ramps down to the sand and enough spots for shade. We found a small beach bar and restaurant and had a few Israeli beers while watching the waves. It was peaceful. It was my serenity. It was the perfect way to relax at the end of a truly remarkable visit to Israel.

Later that evening, we drove to our Farewell Dinner

at **Port Sa'Id Restaurant**. This was definitely a spot for the younger crowd with loud music, outdoor tables, good food and drinks. We met *Ms. Dana Gazit*, the Director of Accessible Tourism Brand, Ministry of Tourism for Israel. It was a great way to thank Dana for our experience in Israel.

The next morning, each of us left for our trip back to our homes. Eli drove Thomas and I to the airport and he made sure I got safely to the security ticket counter. We did not say goodbye, but instead we said, "Shalom!"

I began this article by stating that I am a firm believer that things happen for a reason and that my journey to Israel was yet another affirmation that God has a plan for all of us. I do believe that the reason I had an accident and became

paralyzed right at a time in my life when I was at my best – my strongest – physically, emotionally, psychologically, intuitively. God knew I could handle it, and his plan, which became my passion, was to help others by becoming the voice and an advocate, a champion of sorts, for people with disabilities. Perhaps it was for those who didn't have the means, or the ability, or maybe the platform, to be able to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities. I was fortunate because I did, and it was my decision to do something about it.

So, here I am, helping to promote the accessibility of the Holy Land to you, the reader, perhaps someone with a disability. You see, things do happen for a reason and I hope my reason has, in some way, helped you to decide to visit Israel and experience for yourself all of the sacred and revered places you have read about, in the Bible or otherwise.

As [Travel for All's](#) COO, I was honoured to represent the company on this trip.

Israel is so much more accessible than you may imagine and there is much more to see and do than I have mentioned here. I hope to get back one day soon and discover everything else Israel has to offer. And, I'll be back here writing to you! Shalom!

My sincere thanks to the Israel Ministry of Tourism – you have a special place in my heart. ■





Vision-Enabling Spectacles

Israel can be justifiably proud of the progress they have made to create an accessible country for its citizens and visitors to enjoy. Over the years, many adapted products have also been created by Israelis which is an indication of the importance they place on discovering ways to improve the lives of people who live with disabilities.

For the sight-impaired, there is an exciting prospect looming. Israeli Professor Zeev Zalevsky and his research team have engineered a prototype that will significantly improve the lives of those who were born blind or are vision impaired to any extent. They have created a pair of spectacles which acts as the "eyes" of the wearer, allowing them to "see" using the tactile senses in the brain.

These unique spectacles are equipped with cameras which captures visual information. These images go through an array of micro

loudspeakers, generating spatial pressure waves. When these waves get to the cornea, the visual received is translated by the brain's tactile senses thereby creating a sensation which the wearer of the spectacles will then interpret.

The image seen by the camera bypasses the visual cortex of the sight-impaired wearer and instead, stimulates the tactile cortex, making a connection in the brain with the feeling that's associated with that image. By that process, a sight-impaired person can relate to what is being seen, but to correctly make this association, they must be trained to translate the spatial tactile sensation with the correct visual information.

During the spectacles' clinical trials, Professor Zalevsky said a group of subjects were trained to identify simple spatial shapes/objects. The training duration was less than 30 minutes after which they were able to accurately pair that "feeling" on the surface of the eye with what

the visual information the camera captures. Professor Zalevsky explained, "Symbolic imagery is what the spectacle-wearer uses. The camera captures the image and successfully translates that image into a symbol. We have now proven that it is possible to interpret visual spatial information by tactile spatial stimulation of the cornea. Basic symbols and shapes can be transmitted and identified by a subjects with a high degree of probability."

The use of these spectacles is not restricted only to the sight-impaired. It can be worn by anyone when faced with circumstances that may require engagement of the tactile senses. For example, at the scene of a fire, a fireman who wears it will be able to "see" through smoke if an infra-red camera is mounted on top of those spectacles; it can be worn by soldiers and by cyclists, and the list continues. . .

This non-invasive, revolutionary pair of spectacles is still in the prototype stage.

Additional funds are currently being sought by Professor Zeev Zalevsky and his research team to take them through the next stage of their research and product development. It is hoped that these spectacles will soon be brought to market so that its benefits may be utilized – symbolic representation of objects imaged by the spectacles' camera, resulting in the achievement of the previously unattainable – "sight" for the sight-impaired! ■



Professor Zeev Zalevsky

Zeev Zalevsky received his B.Sc. and direct Ph.D. degrees in Electrical Engineering from Tel-Aviv University in 1993 and 1996 respectively. Zeev is currently a full Professor and the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering in Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

His major fields of research are Optical Super Resolution, Biomedical Optics, Nano-Photonics and Fiber-based Processing and Sensing Architectures.

Zeev has published more than 510 peer review papers, 330 proceeding papers, 9 books (6 authored and 3 as an editor), 30 book chapters and about 100 patents. Zeev gave 600 conference presentations with more than 200 invited/keynote or plenary talks.

Zeev is a fellow of many large scientific societies such as SPIE, OSA, IEEE, EOS, IOP, IET, IS&T and more. He is also a fellow of the American National Academy of Inventors (NAI). For his work he received many national and international prizes.

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Eli Meiri

Accessible Tour Guide Israel4All

Many people traveling with disabilities often find it difficult to navigate their surroundings when they are in a different city, and being in an entirely unfamiliar country makes it doubly difficult. There are certain places they may not be able to access safely and precious vacation time is wasted searching for what is accessible, resulting in frustration. Oftentimes, a place may be advertised as being accessible, but on arrival, the reality may be entirely different.

When it is safe to travel again, one place you can confidently visit as a person with a disability is Israel, and Eli Meiri comes highly recommended as the one who will create that dream vacation for you!

Eli was born and raised in Israel, but spent a short time living in the United States attending college, graduating with a degree in social work. After college, Eli worked in Israel for fifteen years as a social worker until his family's travel business opened his eyes to the possibility of helping people with disabilities truly enjoy a vacation without having to worry about being able to access the things they wanted to do or see. As a social worker, Eli interacted with people who were blind, had mobility impairments and cognitive disabilities, gaining as a result, a wide range of knowledge of the different disabilities that exist. He therefore knew the challenges they often face.

Eli remembers years ago, the Rotary Club in his city ran a camp for children and adults with disabilities. He assisted with that camp and wanted to take the group to a place recommended by a friend. Unfortunately, when they arrived, many could not get to the chosen location because of mobility limitations. It was then that Eli truly understood that each person with a disability may have challenges unique to them. It may be something as easy to overlook such as someone having a manual versus a power wheelchair, being a slow-walker, having to navigate bumpy versus smooth surfaces, flat surface versus an incline, etc. That an exciting outing so highly anticipated had to be denied to some was heartbreaking. Thus began his interest in being a tour guide.

To better understand the travel and tourism market for people with disabilities, Eli travelled to the United States in 1998 then again, a year later, attending conferences



where he learned a great deal, including how to encourage businesses and other establishments to help create accessibility for everyone. Even after attending these conferences however, and leaving more informed, Eli still felt there was something missing in the travel industry. He recognized that there was no one tour company that catered specifically to people with disabilities. He thought about how difficult it must be for someone to travel with a disability into a whole new world without accurate guidance. These travellers were entitled to enjoy themselves on vacation like everyone else! With this inspiration, and the guidance of Yuval Wagner the CEO of Access Israel, a travel group specifically designed to book travel for people with disabilities, Eli's tour company, [Israel4All](#) was born.

Creating tours planned with expert precision and careful thought for each traveller's needs can be a monumental task, but Eli enjoys each minute. That a traveller would entrust their precious vacation time to him, relying on his genuine commitment to make their vacation memorable is humbling, and as a result, he ensures that his services do not disappoint.

But, how does he do it? As he explained, it all starts with an email from a potential traveller indicating their desire to use his services. Eli would then provide them with a comprehensive questionnaire, advising that answers should be as accurate as possible. They

will tell him where they would like to be picked up whether it be at the cruise ship port, at a hotel, the airport, etc.; he'll ask about the places they would like to visit or activities they would like to participate in. He will then work on a detailed, customized travel plan for them, including possible rental wheelchairs, equipment and adapted transportation. Eli works with local medical equipment providers which provides an extra layer of comfort to the travellers, knowing that their every need can be reasonably met while in Israel. His tour groups consist of no more than 10, allowing him to dedicate individual attention to each person. Tours to nearby Jordan and Egypt can also be arranged, but the most popular among his travellers is Jerusalem, which is also the most accessible city in Israel.



Eli explained that before 2005, there were not many accessibility laws in place to help those with disabilities in Israel. But, since then, [Israel's Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law](#), similar to the [Americans with Disability Act](#) in the United States was established. Over time, it led to 60-70% of



Many people dream of travelling to Israel, a place of historical and religious significance, but are hesitant due to disability limitations. When international travel resumes, that trip can be confidently booked, and with Eli and his team's guarantee of 'Travelling Without Limits', you can dare to dream, because – they will make it happen! ■



locations in Israel becoming accessible to all. Although these numbers are promising, he thinks there is still much work to be done to get the last 30-40% up to the proper accessibility requirements. Along with infrastructural changes, there are also societal changes needed to help people with disabilities become fully integrated into the society. He believes there are still prejudices and misunderstanding surrounding that demographic, but it is a stark improvement from what it was like ten to fifteen years ago.



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SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



Osaka Castle

Accessible JAPAN



Meiji Jingu



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Meiji Jingu



Meiji Jingu



Mt. Fuji



Hideto Kijima



Ritsurin Garden

Facilities for people with mobility challenges in Japan are becoming more widespread as the country embraces accessibility. This is likely due in part to over 28% of their population being 65 years and above. Throughout the country, public toilets are wheelchair accessible, so too are the train stations, whose staff will provide help as needed. Adapted taxis and car rentals are also available.

Wheel chair users can navigate city streets with relative ease as the sidewalks are sufficiently wide with curb cuts. Outside of the city areas, however, this may be a bit risky as the streets are narrower and may not have dedicated sidewalks.

When planning a trip to Japan, the [Japan Accessible Tourism Center \(JATC\)](#) is a good resource. Founded by world wheelchair traveller, **Hideto Kijima**, this non-profit organization provides accessibility information in multiple languages. Kijima was 17 years old when he suffered a spinal cord injury playing rugby in high school, which left his lower body paralyzed. Being a wheelchair user with a passion for travel, Kijima knows how important information is for people with disabilities, therefore, he founded the non-profit to help make their navigation through Japan a bit easier.

He considers his country to be a great destination for

wheelchair travellers and through his [Lift Taxi Tours](#) takes guests in his adapted vehicle which is equipped with a lift, to among others, Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and Mt. Fuji.

Kijima's favourite accessible place in Japan is **Osaka Castle**, the only wheelchair accessible castle in the country. He is proud that every guest can get to the top floor! **Meiji Jingu** in Tokyo is also a popular accessible tourist attraction.

Large shopping malls in the city and most tourist attractions should, by law, be barrier-free although this may not always be the case so it may be advisable to check with JATC for guidance.



When planning trips to Japan be mindful that most hotels built after 2005 will have at least one accessible room while others built before that time may not.

Kijima has travelled to 175 to date. On his journeys he has found people to be very kind. Namibia stands out to him as the country with the most memorable tourism product - wild animals, desert, peaceful and accessible. He also considers South Africa to

be very accessible. "My dream pre-Covid was to take my 3 kids to Namibia this year. Although I travel extensively, 2019 was the first time my family and I took a foreign trip. We went to New Zealand which is accessible with kind people" he said.

This world traveller also finds time to write books and his solo wheel chair adventures have been documented in four books written in Japanese with one translated into Chinese as text

books and children's books:

Flying Wheelchair, 2001

Love Wheelchair, 2005

Wheelchair Traveler Across Japan, 2008

Wheelchair in an Unexplored World ", 2014.

"It is my hope that everyone can go anywhere they want," Kijima said. "Understanding differences, respecting personalities, giving equal opportunity to all. I wish for peace and a better society, full of love and smiles." ■

[Japan Accessible Tourism Center \(JATC\)](#)

Discover Japan's Hospitality

www.japan-accessible.com

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International Association for Universal Design Japan

Mr. Keiji Kawahara, Executive Director

Mr. Kawahara's Research

My research theme at university and graduate school was 'Design for the Handicapped'. In 1970's, Sweden was the leader in this field, and I was also studying design journals and academic papers published in Sweden and other European countries.

At that time, the concept of 'The Handicapped' was a generic term for people in various situations, such as the physically handicapped, the elderly, the sick, pregnant women, infants, people pushing a stroller, and travelers with heavy luggage. It was a very convenient term. In other words, 'Design for the Handicapped' was a concept very close to the current 'Universal Design'. However, over the years, that term was misunderstood and now people have gradually stopped using the term handicapped in a generic manner, because it means physically handicapped or disabled.

Touch Me Table Clock

'Touch-me' was designed when I was studying at graduate school (Royal College of Art) in the UK and was commercialized after returning to Japan. It was designed as a table clock for the visually impaired, but most people can use it and they were buying it as a fashionable clock without being aware of who it was actually designed for. This was exactly what I was aiming for - it was a product that represented a universal design.



Initially, I was working as a freelance industrial designer, but as the work load increased, I set up a company and hired some designers to work on our many projects. As the manager, I shifted to running a comprehensive business and was eventually able to concentrate on plans and proposals mainly to large manufacturers. Although there were various fields of interest such as medical/welfare equipment, information technology equipment, home appliances, housing equipment, and industrial/machinery equipment, I always worked with human-centered design in mind.

During the product development process, I was able to interact with a variety of people including wheelchair users, visually impaired people, and people with hearing difficulties as users of products and equipment. I was also able to work with more people with disabilities in the establishment and operation of the International Association for Universal Design (IAUD).

Universal Design

I think Universal Design is a term and concept coined by Ron Mace and his colleagues in the Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University, around the mid-1980's and it was introduced to Japan in the beginning of the 90's. Ron used a wheelchair himself and was taking on a role of a Director to lead many activities on universal design, but unfortunately passed away in 1998.

There was an international conference on universal design named 'Designing for the 21st Century' held in New York 1998. It was said to be an epic event attended by various researchers and scholars from all over the world. I missed it

but was able to participate in the second one held in Providence 2000 and thought to host the third one somewhere Japan. I started to organize an Executive Committee with some leading Japanese manufacturers. They were just beginning to realize the importance of universal design for their businesses. After several negotiations with *Adaptive Environments*, the original host of Designing for the 21st Century, we finally agreed to cohost our own international conference.

In November 2002, we were able to hold the 1st International Conference for Universal Design in Yokohama close to Tokyo. It was a great success and Prince Tomohito, the Patron of the conference, suggested we inaugurate a new association concentrating on the study of universal design to realize better societies for everyone. International Association for Universal Design (IAUD) was therefore established in November 2003, exactly one year later. More than 100 companies became members.

I took on the role of Executive Director and have been there for 17 years.

Universal Design Benefits Everyone

IAUD defines that Universal Design (UD) is the creation of designs for equipment, buildings, and the immediate living environment that can be used by as many people as possible irrespective of age, gender, race, culture, customs, nationality, or ability. In this sense, it should benefit not only people with disabilities but also many people in various conditions. In order to achieve that, designers or manufacturers have to create things and environments that are usable and accessible to as many people as possible.



Universal Design Projects

There have been various research activities for projects and working groups in IAUD for the past 17 years as illustrated in the figure above. Some are complete while others are still ongoing.

It can be said that IAUD members have enjoyed benefits for years, being able to incorporate the knowledge and know-how learned into their companies. However, memberships have been gradually decreasing as economic conditions decline especially since the financial crisis caused by the Lehman shock. The interest in Universal Design seems to be shifting from manufacturing to service, therefore we should now concentrate

our efforts on the field of service design. Currently the most successful is the International Design Award business, which started in 2010. Every year, high quality entries are awarded, but it is a shame that it is not so well known internationally. We have to focus more on promotion.

I think that we should go back to the starting point and carry out activities focused on the international conference business. However, it is difficult to hold international events such as the Olympics and Expo in this pandemic situation, so we must incorporate methods such as online meetings on the Internet and international conferences as well.

Network



IAUD collaborations

We collaborate with various persons with disabilities, and elderly people among member companies are also eagerly participating in IAUD activities. In addition, we also have some organizations of people with disabilities as members, so we collaborate according to the content of our activities.

We are always thinking about contributions to world peace through the realization of a universal design society that respects each person's humanity.

IAUD is building a network (see Figure above) with Universal Design-related organizations

and research institutions in each country who have been involved with activities such as international conferences and international design awards. In addition, some representatives of the organization have been appointed as IAUD counsellors.

Funds for the work of IAUD

In the past, funds were generated through membership fees and profits from various businesses, but membership fees have decreased as the number of members has decreased, so we are now focusing on international conferences and international design awards from now on.

For more information about the work of IAUD, visit: www.iaud.net/global ■

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Jean Claude Mbonigaba

Jean Claude Mbonigaba

Rwanda

- **His life**
- **The life of People with Disabilities in Rwanda**
- **The work of HVP Gatagara in Rwanda**
- **Government Assistance**

Jean Claude is a computer engineer who lives in Rwanda. He is the co-founder of an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) company, also based in Rwanda, where, among other things, he maintains the ICT infrastructure of HVP Gatagara Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Hospital. In 2019, he successfully published his Master's degree thesis which focused on Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities, particularly visual impairment.

Jean Claude's parents were refugees in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and this is where he was born. As a baby, he received no vaccinations as there were none available for refugees, and as he grew, it was discovered that there was no mobility in his legs and right arm. He used crutches until the end of secondary school when he received medical assistance (orthopedic and rehabilitation) which allowed him to walk independently. After completing his Bachelor's Degree, he returned to the place that gifted him his mobility, HVP Gatagara, where he is now dedicating his life to helping others who are disabled.



HVP Gatagara Entrance

Jean Claude's Story

I was born 'different' and going to school was not easy. My memories during most of my primary school years in the Congo consists of students all crowding around during break, looking and laughing at me, because I was 'different'. The teachers laughed too and also the people in the refugee camp where I lived. My school was far away from the refugee camp but my brother was determined to go to school so he carried me on his back over the almost 7km every day, both ways, because I was unable to walk.

After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, my family returned to Rwanda and I completed my primary school there. As a person with a disability, I was sent to the HVP Gatagara Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Hospital and attended its special school. I felt very comfortable at this school because there were other children here, also with disabilities, and I was able to get medical treatment, orthopedic devices and start

my rehabilitation. It was much easier for me in this place, although emotionally it was sad because my family abandoned me, forgetting about my existence. I continued to live as an orphan until I completed secondary school. Outside of the school and Gatagara Center, the community only focused on my disability. I was discouraged at every turn, with people telling me I would not complete and further my studies. I was always a good student and because of the special, caring education and self-confidence boost I got at HVP Gatagara, I was able to prove them wrong and completed my Bachelor's and Master's degrees. My only concerns and challenges at that time were the lack of accessibility amenities and infrastructure at the places where I studied.

Although it was not easy during my primary school years and some of my college years, with students, instructors, the lack of caring environment and mind set of parents and the

community into which I was born, I persevered and did not let this dull my vision of what I wanted to accomplish. I received a bursary from the Government and attended the University of Rwanda, where I obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science and Systems, then I continued on to the University of Kigali in their Science and Information Technology Master's program, graduating December 6th, 2019.

I am a scout leader in Rwanda's Scout Association. I represent special needs scouts as a volunteer for inclusion and diversity, and for the past 5 years, I have been an advocate for inclusion and rights of children and youth with disabilities. I mentor children with disabilities at school and at home, and I am also a voice for improving accessibility for them.

Every day, many hours are spent at HVP Gatagara Hospital where there are a lot of patients with disabilities undergoing orthopedic and rehabilitation treatment, and children with disabilities attending school, like I did many years ago. Because I grew up at the Gatagara Center and was educated here, I know how to interact with the patients so my days are very fulfilling as I am able to make a difference in the lives of those I interact with daily. When I lived here, I thought I could never be a leader because of my disabilities, but now I know differently and I can share this insight with the people I meet here. Over time, I realized that anything is possible

even if you have a disability, so I joined HVP Gatagara staff and discovered I too can make a direct contribution and help to promote the rights of people with disabilities.

Currently, my expertise in the field of Information and Communication Technology allows me to contribute to the education of children with disabilities. It also provides me the opportunity to assist with finding solutions to demonstrate that a high potential exists in Rwanda to dramatically improve the education of children with disabilities who are being raised at HVP Gatagara, and elsewhere in the country, and that a digitalized HVP Health Care service to align with the new technologies that exists is necessary.

HVP Gatagara

HVP Gatagara is a non-governmental organization, founded in 1960 in Gatagara, the "Hill of Hope." It was the first and is still now the only center in Rwanda for inclusive and special education, medical care and re-integration into society of children and adults with disabilities. It is the only Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Hospital in the country. Today, HVP Gatagara is located in six Districts in Rwanda. Their work is expansive and includes a school for the Visually Impaired; Day Care Center and School for Children with Mental Disabilities; Hospital; Physiotherapy; Care for People with Disabilities; Orthopedic Surgery & Orthopedic

Care; Occupational Therapy; Community-based Rehabilitation and research activities related to the provision of care, education and reintegration into society of persons with physical disabilities and the promotion of health, education and reintegration.

Government Assistance

The government of Rwanda has helped people with disabilities by creating policies which support them in order to facilitate social integration. They also helped to set up a National Council for People with Disabilities and they employ people with disabilities. The Government implemented a building accessibility program and also promotes and encourages sports for people with disabilities. However, they lack the skills required to implement all of the above programs. They are unable to get people with disabilities to participate socially like other citizens. They are also not able to alter the mindset of families and communities about their perception of people with disabilities.

Negative opinions based on culture, society and personal stigma are still attached to people with disabilities, because many of the Rwandan people are uneducated and not able to see beyond a person's disability.

The Life of People with disabilities in Rwanda

Overall, people with disabilities in Rwanda are not treated well. They are treated as though they



Children with Disabilities



Orthopedics

have no rights and are beggars, a problem to their families and, if they are fortunate to work, they are seen as a burden.

Sadly, they are not treated equally, even now that we have a National Union for People with Disabilities, a 13-member organization consisting of advocates for different types of disabilities in Rwanda representing our five categories of people with disabilities, namely: Physical, Hearing, Albinos, Little People and Intellectual Disabilities. The government policies are clear but there is a severe lack of advocates and resources to implement these policies and people with disabilities suffer as a result.

Not all have access to medical attention, because



Therapy



Orthopedic Surgery



Orthopedic Therapy



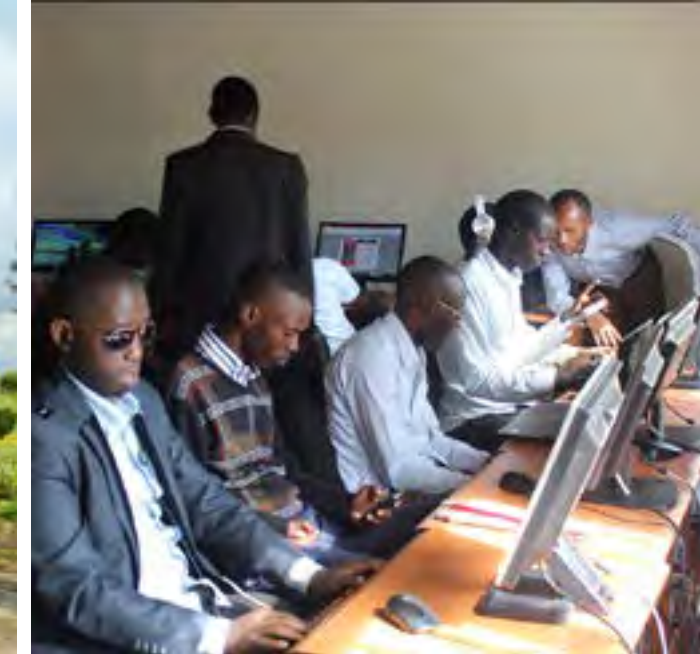
Students with Orthopedics



Student with no accessibility device



HVP Gatagara Hospital



Activity for the visually impaired

healthcare for people with disabilities is expensive. We have community-based health insurance for all Rwandans which helps, but this is not enough because for the disabled, their special needs go beyond what is basically provided.

They have access to education like other students, but schools are not accessible and there is a lack of adequate teachers for special education. The schools' infrastructure is not adapted and assistive technology is very new in Rwanda, therefore not available to the majority of the disabled. This type of technology is necessary to ensure that no one who is disabled is left behind.

They have housing, but it is not accessible. There is a high unemployment rate among people with disabilities because work places are not accessible in Rwanda.

Access to information and community environment are not conducive to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic among people with disabilities.

Rwanda is developing its tourism services but the biggest issues are that it is not accessible for people with disabilities.

Public transportation is not accessible, Disability Awareness is lacking and there is a high number of social and community isolation as a result of the many limitations that exist in Rwanda for people with disabilities.

My hope for people with disabilities in Rwanda

My first hope is to have a government that will hear us.

I also hope Rwanda will develop organizational structures surrounding advocacy for children and youth with disabilities.

I hope for help for HVP Gatagara. Their infrastructure is very old as most were built before 1960 and an accessible, modern building for their Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Hospital, being the only specialized hospital for people with disabilities in Rwanda is urgently needed. Currently, they cannot accommodate all of the patients who need help, because of the lack

of a modern building. Patients come from all over Rwanda and sometimes from Burundi, Congo but sadly they cannot be helped due to the facility's limitations. HVP Gatagara receives assistance from the Rwandan government to pay only some of their staff's salary. Help is also received from UNDP and humanitarian support is received for some clinic materials, but much more is needed.

I hope for assistive technology for HVP Gatagara in their six school branches in the country. Fortunately, students with disabilities who attend these schools are fully funded by the Government of Rwanda, and the parents who can afford it, pays a little for school feeding because HVP Gatagara is a boarding school.

I hope for assistive devices for people with disabilities. These are not affordable here in Rwanda and is not available from the government.

I hope for training in Disability Awareness and being taught appropriate skills from developed countries which we can implement in our context here in Rwanda. We want to learn from others - this is not available from our government. I hope people with disabilities in Rwanda can have good health, improved well-being, reduced

inequalities, respect and kind partnerships to help us to achieve these goals.

For more information about HVP Gatagara,

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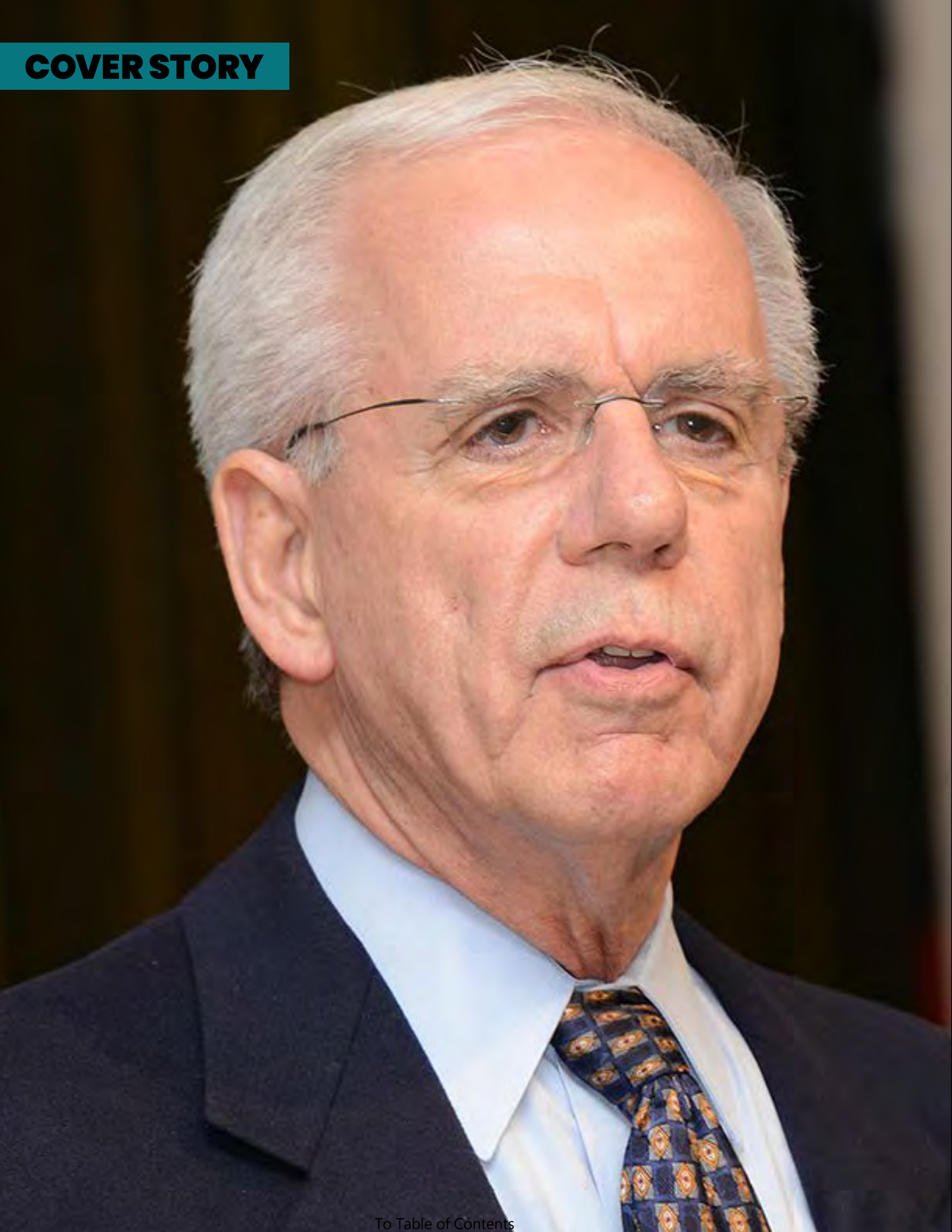
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Tony Coelho with President George H.W. Bush

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and this year marks the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush in 1990. Since then, many physical barriers that once prevented people with disabilities from having the same access to public buildings and establishments as everyone else, have been removed. But, there is still a lot more work to be done, and no one knows this better than my friend and mentor, former Congressman Tony Coelho, co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Frankly, I could not think of anyone more appropriate to be featured as our cover story for the inaugural edition of this magazine.

Former Congressman Tony Coelho

Co- Author of the Americans with Disabilities Act

by Fred Maahs, Jr.

Tony was born on June 15, 1942 at home in Los Banos, California, to a poor, Portuguese family. He and his brother would wake up at 4:30 each morning to help milk the nearly 300 cows on the dairy farm, rush home to clean up then run to school. The teachers knew they would be late every day, arriving by 8:30 AM, so the teachers kindly

arranged their first class to be study hall or library. Both boys would attend classes all day and get home by 4:30, just in time to start the evening milking of the cows. When they finished at 8:30 pm, they would eat a quick meal and his brother would head off to bed while Tony stayed up to study. He loved to learn and wanted to go to college someday.

Perhaps the most significant piece of legislation credited to Coelho is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which he co-authored.

The Act, signed into law by President George H. W. Bush on July 26th, 1990, prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities

During his junior year in high school, he was riding in a pickup truck with a friend on a gravel road that ran beside a canal. His friend lost control of the truck and crashed into the canal. As the truck turned over in the crash, Tony hit his head. He was ok and felt fine at the time, but about a year later, he was in the family barn, bending over the feed-bin to get food for the cows, when without warning, he passed out, waking up later to see his parents speaking with the doctor. The doctor told his parents he passed out because he had epilepsy and that he had suffered a grand mal seizure, but they did not share the diagnosis with him. Instead, his parents, who were very strict Portuguese Catholics, believed he was possessed by the devil and took him to many other doctors who also diagnosed him with epilepsy, but they still refused to believe. They finally took him to three ‘witch doctors’ to essentially “exorcise the devil” from their son. Coelho remembers it being one of the strangest experiences ever as a young man but, his “passing out spells”, as he referred to them, kept happening.

Around this time, Coelho heard of Loyola University and having a keen interest in the Jesuit community, applied and was accepted although his “passing out spells” continued. In 1963, at the end of his junior year, he became Student Body President. He remembers this quite clearly as it is the same year President John F. Kennedy was shot. The Head Jesuit priest at Loyola relayed the sad news and asked him to ring the large school bell to gather the students to the square on campus to pray for the recovery of the President. When JFK died, it had a deep impact on Coelho who was studying to be a trial lawyer at that time.

His interest in law waned in the second half of his senior year when he decided to become a Jesuit priest. Part of his process for entry into the priesthood required him to take a physical. On completion he was told his results consisted of “good news and some bad news.” The good news was that he had epilepsy, was classified as a “4F” and therefore not eligible for active duty in the service – it was after all, 1964 and the Vietnam War was taking place. Medicine will help with his seizures, he was told and this was, understandably a relief. It was the very first time he was actually told he had epilepsy! The bad news, however, was he could not become a priest because a clause in the Catholic Church’s Canon Law dating back to 400 A.D. prohibited men with epilepsy or being possessed by the devil from being priests.

With his dream of becoming a priest shattered, after Coelho graduated from Loyola he applied for many jobs and recalls that one of the questions on every application asked if the applicant had epilepsy. He, being a strict Catholic and always honest, would check the box and didn’t think anything of it. After not hearing back from many potential employers, it dawned on

him that he checked the box thereby disclosing he had epilepsy! He was now not able to challenge their decision to not hire him because of his disability. This was years before the Americans with Disabilities Act came to be.

Coelho felt conflicted, divided and rejected – divided from his family who could not accept the thought of their son having epilepsy and its implications, divided from his church because he could not become a priest due to his epilepsy, and rejected from getting a job because he had epilepsy. He started drinking heavily and fell into a deep depression. Life lost its meaning, and one day, while observing children at a carnival happily riding on a merry go round, standing there in his depressed, drunken state, at that moment, decided he was going to take his life. As his forlorn gaze hypnotically followed the children’s movements on the merry go round, he remembered hearing a voice in his head quite clearly saying to him “Like those children on the merry go round, you can be anything you want to be. You can do anything you want to do.” This heralded the turning point in his life.

Coelho walked away and never felt depressed again. He decided to live, and promised himself to do something meaningful with his life. And, he did. Thereafter, a friend, a Jesuit priest, introduced Coelho to Bob Hope and his family. Yes, THE Bob Hope! Coelho remembers going to the Hope mansion and meeting with them. He was invited to live with them and was initially given a room over their two-car garage while his room in the home was being set up. Coelho remembers walking up the stairs to his temporary room which was “the most beautiful room I (he) had ever seen, with fresh flowers and a bowl of fruit” waiting for him!

He spent a lot of time with Bob Hope, playing golf – which he did not succeed at, and enjoying time including dinner, with the family. One day, Bob told



Tony Coelho addressing constituents in House Chamber in 1987

Coelho “a ministry wasn’t only in the church, but in business, entertainment, and government.” He specifically suggested that Coelho get involved in politics. So, on that advice, Coelho wrote a letter to then Congressman Bernie Sisk of California requesting a job. He was granted an interview which he was told would be for only 20 minutes – it lasted 45 minutes! He was hired a short while after on April 1, 1965 as an Agricultural staffer in Washington, D.C. During his time working for Congressman Sisk, a close friendship developed. Sisk became like a father to him, close to Coelho, his wife and family. When he would have seizures, Sisk was always sympathetic and made sure Coelho was ok. Eventually he became Sisk’s Chief of Staff.



Tony Coelho with President Ronald Reagan

Coelho and Bob Hope lost touch for many years and it wasn't until 15 years later that Coelho, now a Congressman for the state of California, ran into Hope during an event in Modesto, California. A staffer approached Coelho and said, "Bob knows you're here and he'd like to see you." He met with Hope and remembers Bob saying to him, "Why haven't you called?" Coelho reminded him that he promised not to use their friendship to his personal advantage.

Congressman Tony Coelho increased his advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities. In 1986, he met with the Chair and Vice of President Ronald Reagan's Council on Disability and pursued the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) draft. In 1987, as House Majority Whip, he was gaining more support for his ADA legislation from Members who did not like the way people with disabilities were being treated. The rights of people with disabilities were increasingly gaining bi-partisan support.

During his tenure as the Majority Whip, he travelled with his delegation to three places that left an indelible impression. The first leg of his trip took him



Tony Coelho with Bill Clinton in the Oval Office

to Portugal – his homeland – where he represented the U.S. as the highest-ranking Portuguese member. The second leg of his trip was to Morocco for Middle East negotiations between Portugal, Israel, and the Arab States. The third leg of his trip was to the Vatican to meet with Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul). He recalls standing at the podium giving his speech which was pre-approved by both the Vatican and the State Department. At the conclusion of his speech, Coelho took the liberty of saying a few words of his own, directly addressing the Pope: "Your Holiness, as a young man I wanted to be a Catholic priest but was denied because of a Canon law established in 400 A.D. which would not allow me to be accepted because I have epilepsy. I think this is un-Christian of our Church and I wish you would look into it." Pope John Paul II thereafter delivered his own pre-approved speech with no mention being made of Coelho's ad lib request. When all the speeches were done, Coelho and his delegation took photos with the Pope. Upon leaving the meeting, the Pope blessed Coelho's wife but did not offer him any blessing. Instead, the Pope casually mentioned, "Young man, I heard what you said", then walked away. Coelho was devastated. Two years later, however, Canon Law was changed to accept men with epilepsy into the priesthood. Coelho does not take credit for the change, but feels his request to the Pope may have made the difference.

Perhaps the most significant piece of legislation credited to Coelho is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which he co-authored. The Act, signed into law by President George H. W. Bush on July 26th, 1990, prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities, and required employers to provide them reasonable accommodations. The Act also imposed accessibility requirements on public buildings.

Coelho's passionate pursuit of rights for the disabled continued throughout Bill Clinton's Presidency. He was offered the Chief of Staff position, but Coelho could not forget his poor childhood. Being Chief of Staff had always been his dream, but he turned down this

opportunity because his position on Wall Street meant he could provide financially for his children and grandchildren. Clinton kept him busy, however, appointing him to several jobs - pro bono! He appointed Coelho the Chair of the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, which he led from 1994 to 2001. He also appointed him to the Co-Chair of the President's Committee on Adults with Disabilities. While in that role, he was able to finally get the Federal Contractor's Act implemented for those with Disabilities. Women and people of color were also covered by the act but the data on people with disabilities was never developed.

The Act mandated Federal contractors to recruit and hire people with disabilities. It was a lengthy, involved process that required Census Bureau data, statistics from the Department of Labor, and a clear definition of "disability" from the Office of Management and Budget. It took 25 years, but President Obama signed an Executive Order to implement it in 2016.



Meeting at the White House - Federal Contractors Act Executive Order

Coelho was also appointed the United States Commissioner General at the 1998 World Expo in Portugal, and then Co-Chair to the U.S. Census Monitoring Board, a position he held until his appointment as general chairman of the Gore



Tony Coelho with Al Gore on Air Force 2 in February 2000

Presidential Campaign. In the summer of 1994, Coelho was the principal Democratic political strategist during the run-up to the mid-term Congressional elections. Officially, he was Senior Advisor to the Democratic National Committee. Coelho's life continued smoothly until June of 1989 when he was accused of receiving a loan from a savings and loan executive to purchase junk bonds with his campaign funds. It was not true and he was never charged with any crime as the FBI closed the case. He resigned from the House after serving six terms, moved to Wall Street as the CEO of an asset management company, then started a few businesses.

The end of Coelho's political career did not mean an end to his advocacy work on behalf of people with disabilities. Today, he serves on the National Board of the American Association of People with Disabilities. But that's not all. In 2018, with the support of major funders, the state of California, and his alma mater, Loyola University, he opened the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation to help lawyers with disabilities become judges or serve in public office, and other disability programs.

Opening the Center was especially important to Coelho and was directly related to his diagnosis with epilepsy. When he was elected to Congress, he

realized that people in the disability community did not have basic civil rights. They could openly and legally be discriminated against and it was lawful, because they were not legally covered under Civil Rights Legislation. Coelho wanted to do something more than what he already did with the ADA. The Coelho Center brought visibility to the lack of people with disabilities in the state and federal courts. He found that law schools did not recruit or get credit for having students with disabilities. It was the same with law firms. While bills were being passed to help the disability community, it was up to the courts to interpret them. And, as the Supreme Court had done with challenges to the ADA, they ruled the ADA did not cover all disabilities. So, Coelho and others worked hard to get the ADA Amendments Act passed.

The Center has a program for high school students with disabilities, but primarily college students who are interested in legal rights for people with disabilities are the ones admitted. The Center then helps them get into law schools. The goal is to assist these students after they graduate, to get jobs with law firms or to serve as judges on State or Federal Courts.

Amidst all of the important responsibilities in Coelho's professional life, huge changes were taking place in his personal life. It all started with the purchase of two horse racetracks in 1998, an investment undertaken with friends. For many years, he remembered seeing a winning horse and its jockey receiving the winner's trophy from an elected official or beauty queen. At his racetracks, however, someone with a disability presents the winner's trophy!

While seeking out persons with disabilities for this task, he met Bobby who was then running a group home for individuals with disabilities. Coelho's life changed dramatically – he came out as a gay man. He admits losing close friends because of this but said,



Tony Coelho and Bobby



President Obama with Tony and Bobby at the White House

"life goes on." Coelho added, "I am very open about my sexuality, and as far as my business opportunities and relationships go – it has been very positive." His daughters have accepted Bobby with open arms and his ex-wife remains one of his best friends.

Thanks to Coelho and others who supported him, the ADA is a civil rights law and it was a good start, but he believes it is only good when the civil rights law is enforced. Coelho has very strong feelings about President Trump. "Under the current administration, you have a President who mocks us and wants to take away some of our critical needs - like Obamacare, which impacts anyone with pre-existing conditions." In order for people with disabilities to live in a more inclusive society, Coelho goes on to say, "We need to do more work on creating opportunities for employment, housing, transportation, and expand health care. The problem is, that only happens if we beat Trump and win back the Senate."

Tony Coelho is a wonderful example of someone who has lived the American dream. He was born into an immigrant family. He studied hard, went to college and graduated. He worked hard and devoted his life to his passion, and, like others who were fortunate enough to realize their dreams, he finds ways to give back and to help others realize their own dreams. As a result of his passion to help people with disabilities, thankfully millions are now able to live their lives more independently. ■

In 2018, The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation was opened. It helps lawyers with disabilities become judges, serve in public office and other disability programs.

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**Please support Easterseals' COVID-19 Relief Fund
at Easterseals.com/melange.**



Easterseals' Employment Services throughout the United States command attention during National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is recognized as
National Disability Employment Awareness Month
throughout the United States

Easterseals, a leading service provider and advocate for people with disabilities in the U.S., is driven by its purpose to change the way the world defines and views disability by making profound, positive differences in people's lives every day. For more than 100 years, the non-profit organization has accomplished this through the delivery of critical services and powerful advocacy focused on ensuring that the one in four Americans living with disability today realize their potential so they can fully participate in life. Its National Network of 67 Affiliates provides a variety of home - and community - based services to children and adults with disabilities, veterans, seniors and their families - regardless of age or ability - throughout the country.

One of Easterseals' key programs offers workforce solutions designed to secure meaningful employment for people with

disabilities, including veterans and older adults. "Only 19% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 66% of nondisabled people," said Angela F. Williams, Easterseals President and CEO. "Plus, significant disparities in the median incomes for people with and without disabilities still remain. According to the 2015 U.S. Census, median earnings for people without disabilities were more than \$30,469 compared to the \$20,250 median income reported for individuals with a disability. Easterseals is committed to changing these inequities."

Partnering with job seekers to identify their interests and assess their skills, Easterseals then provides training which prepares the candidate for employment interviews and additional supports as needed including resume writing, practice interviews and coaching. Easterseals also works with the employer to



"Only 19% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 66% of nondisabled people" *Angela F. Williams, Easterseals President and CEO.*

assure the candidate's success once hired including workforce accommodations, assistive technology, job coaching and transportation.

Many U.S. corporations are realizing quantitative and qualitative benefits by hiring people with disabilities, captured in a 2018 Accenture Study: Getting to Equal. Among Study findings: companies deemed "Disability Inclusion Champions" realize higher shareholder returns and were, on average, two times more likely to outperform their peers in terms of total shareholder returns. These same businesses achieve 28 percent higher revenue and 30 percent higher profit margins compared to companies that do not include people with disabilities in their diversity and

inclusion strategies. The qualitative benefits are equally impressive: higher retention rates among employees with disabilities, by up to 30 percent, when a well-run disability community outreach program is in place; increased productivity as reflected in a DuPont employee survey that found when employees with disabilities are graded on the same scale as nondisabled employees, 90 percent of them received performance ratings of average or above; enhanced overall employee morale as evidenced in studies that reflect nondisabled employees' expectation and appreciation of a more inclusive work environment which they believe is better for everyone.

Persons with disabilities bring strengths such as problem-solving skills, agility, persistence and a willingness to experiment to the workplace – all qualities essential for innovation. Such has been the experience of Cincinnati-based Procter & Gamble. The company approached Easterseals when it sought individuals on the autism spectrum to expand neurodiversity in its workforce. Neurodiversity is the concept that people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD),



dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other neurological differences process information in ways that bring strengths to the workforce. Among skill sets of these individuals are data analytics, working with systems, and high productivity.

“P&G makes a variety of products to serve a diverse consumer base, so it would be impossible for us to know what is best for those consumers without working side by side with a diverse and inclusive employee base,” said Megan Lavine, P&G Associate Manger of Human Resources who works on diversity and inclusion initiatives. “P&G considers diversity and inclusion a company pillar and responsibility. This program is just one of our latest ways to ensure we can deliver those goals.” To improve the success of the hiring initiative, P&G brought in two nonprofit partners: Specialisterne and Easterseals Serving Greater Cincinnati. Specialisterne facilitated training for the core functions of the job while Easterseals job coaches worked with the participants to address the soft skills of navigating a corporate office environment.

“Before starting this program, if I’m being honest, I didn’t think any company would truly care about my disability or how to utilize it in a way to bring out the best in me,” said Danny Lakes, one of four managers hired by P&G to expand neurodiversity at its headquarters office after completing a five-week program there. They were hired for a team of Robotics Automation Software Developers and started their full-time jobs nearly a year ago. “Without this program, I was honestly lost,” Lakes continues. “I didn’t know if I was ever going to be able to move out on my own or if I was ever going to be independent. This program essentially gave me the opportunity of a lifetime.”

One of the Easterseals job coaches was David Tunney, who got to know the candidates and how they functioned under employment conditions. He determined their strengths and identified areas where they could use support. “For some it was developing techniques to work through stress and anxiety or to establish a work/ life balance given the amount of work assigned and pressure to perform,” Tunney said. “Others benefited from facilitation to enhance social



skills both in team settings as well as in initiating interactions among themselves and with P&G managers. Nearly all worked through periods of self-doubt regarding their abilities and received frequent encouragement to continue to do their best.” explained.

He continues to meet with the four hired individuals and their IT manager regularly to assess how they are adjusting to their new jobs, to discuss their progress and to work on strategies to address any challenges they may be facing. Tunney also attended follow-up meetings with candidates who did not make the cut at P&G to help them with the next steps in their careers. “I’ve worked in this field long enough to appreciate a time when employers were apprehensive of even considering employing an individual with Autism,” said Tunney. “I found it gratifying to be a part of something that

represents progress in the change in our culture. Not only the acceptance of those with Autism but the recognition and recruitment of the considerable talent they can offer.”

Lavine expressed the value in sharing with the candidates P&G’s need to learn from them and believes that their willingness to do that “helped to build trust and make the experience more authentic for everyone involved.” She said she has met some amazing people that P&G’s traditional talent program may have screened out and wants to learn more about what she can do to expand inclusive hiring practices. “This project has been a passion for everyone involved on the team. I personally feel that this is not only the right thing to do for the community, but it’s the right thing to do for business. I am very pleased with the outcome, and the team is off to a great start here in Cincinnati. As we continue to support them, we



are also looking forward to continuing this work in many cases, the most valuable support that in other areas of the company,” she said. a veteran can receive is a job coach or mentor.

Easterseals offers these services throughout the country by staff who are often veterans and military spouses. In many markets, Easterseals also matches candidates with employers seeking assets, delivering leadership skills, organizational expertise and an exceptional work ethic with a

relentless pursuit of achieving goals, whether working independently or collaboratively. Older adults of 55 years or older can turn in teams. So, it’s no surprise that employers to Easterseals for training and employment frequently leverage Easterseals Military and Veterans Services to tap into this talent pool in their communities.

largest federally-funded program for older adults who seek employment and training assistance, as well as civic engagement. Through this transitional employment program, Easterseals offers these services throughout the country by staff who are often veterans and non-profit organizations and government agencies to provide participants with training opportunities to update their skills. During their time in SCSEP, job seekers work with Easterseals staff to target and achieve personal employment goals.

Older adults of 55 years or older can turn to Easterseals for training and employment opportunities through its Senior Community Employment Service Program (SCSEP), the largest federally-funded program for older

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Month is observed,
corporations and individuals
committed to advancing
greater inclusion and diversity
in the workplace – and in
society in general – are
encouraged to visit
www.easterseals.com
to learn how they can
engage with Easterseals to
accomplish these goals.



360-Access is a service which maps and shares accessible features of public spaces. It is not crowd-sourced nor contains vague statements such as a mere “we’re accessible.” This service asks simple but detailed questions based on the ADA guidelines. See public restroom section shown here:

*Unique Public Restroom ID:

ADA Restroom

Number of Stalls:

Number of Accessible Stalls:

Stall Interior Width (Inches):

Stall Interior Length (Inches):

Features

☒ Accessible restrooms are unlocked

☐ Accessible restroom key in accessible location

☒ International accessibility sign displayed

☒ Route to accessible restroom free of obstacles

☒ Accessible restroom entrance is obstacle free

☐ Restroom door has ADA auto open switch

☐ Restroom door activation switch is clearly marked

☒ Restroom door hardware can be used with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist

☒ Restroom door may be opened with no more than 5 pounds of force

☒ Restroom door threshold is no more than half inch

☒ Restroom door has at least 32 inches clear passage width

☒ Room has 60 inch clear turnaround space

☒ Has 36 inch wide clear path to fixtures (sink, dispensers, etc.)

☒ Has at least 27 inch clear knee space under sink

☒ Sink knee clearance is 19 inches deep

☒ Sink counter no more than 34 inches above floor

☒ Sink is at least 6.5 inches deep

☒ Faucet controls are lever operated (push or a touch-type control)

☐ Faucet controls are sensor or touchless operated

☒ Soap dispenser mounted at least 15 inches above floor

☒ Soap dispenser mounted no more than 48 inches above floor

☐ Accessible dispensers serviced regularly (kept filled with soap or products)



Madonna Long



Joanne Peterson

Photos

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or
Browse Files

Drop files here to upload
or
Browse Files

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or
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Save

Madonna Long and Joanne Peterson are the founders of 360-Access. An auto accident rendered Joanne less than fully mobile. After learning to walk again, she used canes and crutches to get around and have recently added a scooter and oxygen to her devices. When Madonna was 18 years old, her High School bus was returning from a skiing trip from Utah back to Wyoming. On its way down the mountain in Utah, the brakes failed. Her best friend died in that accident and she was left paralyzed from the waist down.

When Joanne plans trips or attempt to take people out for a meal, she first makes calls to verify information about the facilities, which is time consuming and not always helpful or accurate. On one of her recent trips to Pittsburgh, she arranged a lunch for Madonna, and three others. The place boasted of valet parking but on arrival, there was no valet or convenient parking at lunch time. They were scheduled to be next door to attend a conference but the side doors of the building were locked and they had to navigate their way to the front of the building to gain entrance, which was yet another barrier as covering distances was an issue.

Madonna’s many years of navigating accessibility throughout Wyoming, Nevada and the places she lived proved difficult. She found there was a 30 to 50 percent chance that places were accessible or a restroom or restaurant was free of barriers. It really was apparent to them that a system to map accessibility was definitely needed.

Joanne and Madonna first met at a networking event. During a conversation, Madonna casually mentioned that Visit Pittsburgh once asked her whether it will be possible to show which of their member companies were accessible. She said her response to them was “no, because it would take technology and a database” to get that done. Joanne however explained it would be relatively easy for her to do because her day job involved developing systems that report on legislative or regulatory compliance!

The 360-Access project was started soon after, with two other contributors Amy Malmgren and Andrew Neilson. Sadly, they both passed away in 2018 when they the project was about 90% complete. Losing these two key contributors caused them to regroup and pivot, ultimately going live with 360-Access on July 26th in celebration of the ADA turning 30.

Madonna & Joanne

SPOKE WITH MÉLANGE
ABOUT 360-ACCESS

How does the 360-Access tool promote universal accessibility?

1. It will attract attention to the size of our community our discretionary buying power; who wouldn't want us as loyal customers?
2. It gives us a reliable tool to find places that are accessible based on our needs, because there is no one disability. There is no magic fix, tell us what you have so we can decide if it works for us.
3. It will educate corporations and small businesses on what accessible means and why it is important
 - Bringing in sales
 - Bringing in job applicants
 - Informing their constituents how to navigate their facilities
4. Directly connect PWD consumers with the businesses that want to market to them in a safe and effective way.
5. Give businesses a connection to share events, opportunities and special offers with the disability community and show ROI for their ADA compliance

- There's a potential tax break to companies to map and advertise (<https://blog.360-access.com/ada-tax-credits/>)

How does 360-Access work and how are the participation fees structured?

There are no fees to use the information. People with disabilities and others don't need to create an account to search. If they want to write reviews or receive special offers, they can create a free registered user account.

Business and non-profits have annual licenses and a percentage of every sale is donated to disability support organization partners:

- Non-profits can register their first facility for free, \$29 for each additional site
- Small businesses register for \$49 (up to 10 licenses)
- Large businesses register for \$149. We negotiate discounts with large businesses that want to purchase multiple licenses (e.g. retail, restaurant, banking, hotel chains)

Can this be implemented by any business anywhere in the world?

Now, only for businesses in the United States but this Fall international businesses will be able to use it.

In how many languages is 360-Access available?

This is a good question and not one I can answer at the moment. Because this is 100% self-funded,

additional languages will have to wait until we have cash flow

How are the differences between the US' Americans with Disabilities Act and the accessibility requirements of countries outside of the US addressed?

It has taken us 2 years to quantify ADA-based questions into understandable questions that have a yes or no answer. I would love to incorporate guidelines from other countries, and we can begin doing so in 2021.

How does 360-Access screen reviews before they are posted, to ensure potential controversial language or issues are removed?

We trust, but verify. The goal is to hire local and regional people with disabilities to verify. I think there is a stark difference between corporations with facility managers who design for inclusivity and a harried pizza shop owner who just says yes without checking. Plus, the pizza owner is likely to be a renter without the clout to change the physical space.

About the accessibility features of the 360-Access. Can anyone use it?

Anyone can use the application.

There will be a downloadable version of the registered user portal and search feature this Fall.

The application service is fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) accessibility standards, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Section 794(d)). We're also compliant with WCAG 2.0 and WCAG 2.1 (backwards compatible to 2.0) at the Level AA accessibility standards.

What happens when a customer/patron arrives at a place of business

or destination and they find the desired destination does not meet the accessibility standards it claims to?

The patron/customer reports it to us and we would remove those items from the business' profile. And, we call them to try to understand if there was confusion in the way the question was asked – to see if it was intentional. If appears intentional, we remove the business location.

What does the future hold for 360 Access? Any cool new features we can expect to see?

First, we need businesses to sign up!!

Goal for Phase 2 – SMS messaging and emergency services. Right now there is no way to know where the nearest accessible shelter might be in case of flooding or a tornado, or whatever. We would like to be able to allow government agencies and non-profits communicate through our portal to PWDs, sort of like an Amber-alert. Never giving their contact information to these institutions but making it possible for them to communicate critical information to us.

How does one contact you to purchase 360 Access for their business?

On our website: www.360-access.com
Click on **MAP NOW** or **SIGN UP TO MAP MY FACILITY**

By email to sales@360-access.com

By phone: 1-412-271-5922

(800-544-1210 in the US)

How does one sign up to use 360-Access?

On our website: www.360-access.com
Click on **BECOME A REGISTERED USER**

By email to customerservice@360-access.com

Spotlight on the lives of two disability advocates

Judith Heumann & Fred Maahs, Jr.

in a conversation with
Debbie Austin, Editor in Chief,
Mélange Magazine



Judy Heumann got polio when she was 18 months old. At the age of 18, **Fred Maahs, Jr.**, had a diving accident which rendered him a paraplegic. Although they were born only 15 years apart, their experiences growing up in the United States as people with disabilities were as different as much as they were similar. I had the opportunity to speak with both of them recently to learn more about how they became advocates for people with disabilities.

Growing up

JUDY: I was born in Philadelphia in 1947 and grew up in Brooklyn. I think I learned from birth how to be an activist because I faced discrimination early on, such as my denial of the right to go to school. At that time, in the 1940's and 1950's, there were no organizations composed of families who had kids with disabilities other than United Cerebral Palsy, so when I was eventually allowed to go to school, I was the only child there whose disability was not Cerebral Palsy. Camp Jened, a camp for children with disabilities in New York, was a much-anticipated part of my teenage summers and it was also where the need

to be a voice for the disabled was born. The Netflix documentary, [Crip Camp. A Disability Revolution](#), provides some insight.

FRED: Mine was a standard childhood, attending elementary and high school in my Wilmington, Delaware community. However, at 18 years old, while on vacation with my family just a few days before I was due to start college, I dove into the bay from a boat and hit my head on a sand bar in a foot of water. My seventh vertebrae was broken, I was immediately paralyzed from the chest down, and my life as a person with a disability began. It was 1980 and it was 10 years before the Americans

with Disabilities Act was signed into law. After spending seven months in the hospital and completing my physical therapy rehab, I came home and started to live my life. But I wanted to go to college as I had planned.

The importance of advocacy

JUDY: I attended Long Island University and was interested in going to that university because it was small and I didn't have to cross the street. I registered to live on campus and was living in a dorm that was not accessible. My roommate was to be my personal assistant but that summer, I received a call from the head of the dorm letting me know that the lady who was going to help me had backed out. It turned out she backed out because the head of the dorm had told her ridiculous things about me, such as I frequently fall out of my wheelchair, which of course was not true. I was able to find somebody else but I decided I was going to call the President of the university and Head of the Board to complain. Everyone thought this was a crazy thing to do, but I did get to the Chair of the Board's office, who referred me to the Dean of Students, who called out the lady in charge of the dorm. The Dean of Students came with me the day I moved into the dorm in my sophomore year! I was at that time beginning to learn that I should not just accept what was given to me. This was important even though at that point, it was scary!

I graduated from Long Island University in 1969 with an undergraduate degree in Speech Communications and a minor in Education. My Master's Degree in Public Health was obtained from the University of California at Berkeley in 1975.

When *Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act*, which was the first disability civil rights

law to be enacted in the United States, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal financial assistance came into being, I was the President of [Disabled in Action](#), an organization I formed in 1970 with friends, aimed at ending discrimination of people with disabilities.

FRED: After my accident, college was delayed for about a year because I had spent so much time in the hospital for physical rehab and the college I had originally planned to attend was not adapted and not wheelchair accessible. So, I enrolled in a small local college, Widener University's Delaware campus. I took a few summer courses at Widener and helped to adapt the college campus because I was the first student to use a wheelchair and graduate from there in 1983. I remember the biggest class I had might have had 15 students in it. I was a commuter student and had friends on and off campus. Parties and dances were held on the second floor of a building that only had stairs, so I would be carried up and down the stairs by friends. When I transferred from Widener In Delaware to West Chester University in Pennsylvania, I became a voice on campus, advocating for it to be made more accessible. This was at the time when *Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act* was already passed, therefore colleges and universities that were not complying were actually in violation of the law.

Not socially isolated

JUDY: I was active on campus, a member of a sorority and student council. I was a bit of an activist even then, involved in anti-war demonstrations; there was a big issue going on in our campus around tuition being raised and there was a student movement against pollution, and I was involved in those activities. I also held a number of jobs on campus. I worked in the president's office and the alumni office.

So, I was always active although there were not many other wheelchair users on campus. My social life was centered mainly around my sorority and the various projects they undertook.

FRED: I too had an active social life in college. I made many friends. We would go to the movies, go bowling, go to parties, or they would come to my house. I was commuting to classes every day and my dad, who was building an office building less than 10 minutes from my college, would drive me to class or have one of his workers take me there, and would pick me up at the end of class.

Barriers in the workplace

FRED: I started working in a corporate setting during my first year of college. Encouraged by my father, I attended a job fair. I recall there were hundreds of people in line, but I applied and they literally hired me on the spot. Ironically, my

company was in a two-story building with no elevator. My office was on the second floor and the accessible toilet was on the first floor! Either my dad or one of his workers would drop me off at work every morning after my classes. The guard would come out, he would call upstairs and two guys who ended up being my best friends would carry me up and down the stairs as needed.

JUDY: When I left college in 1969, I applied to be a teacher but was denied. It was in the 1960's in New York where applying for a teaching position required taking a written and oral exam plus a medical exam and if you pass those you can get a job. I passed my written and oral. I failed the medical only because I had polio and could not walk! I sued the Board of Education of the city of New York, which was settled and I was given my license and was hired as a teacher. I then became the first wheelchair user to teach in New York City, which I did for three years.

After **JUDY'S** teaching career, she moved on to hold various influential positions, such as:

- The first Advisor on Disability and Development with the World Bank
- Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services in the Clinton Administration
- The deputy director of the Center for Independent Living, California
- Special Advisor on International Disability Rights for the U.S. State Department in the Obama Administration

She helped to develop legislation that became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; with friends, formed the Disabled in Action (DIA) organization; is the recipient of numerous awards and have appeared in many documentaries.

Her book: *Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist*, speaks about her struggle for equality as someone who lived paralyzed from polio and "her lifelong battle to achieve respect, acceptance, and inclusion in society. . ." It is available on [Amazon](#), [IndieBound](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), as well as in audiobook format on [Audible](#), narrated by Ali Stroker.

Also insightful is the Netflix documentary, [Crip Camp. A Disability Revolution](#) which gives a glimpse into the summer lives of kids with disabilities at Camp Jened in upstate New York during the 50's -70's. Disability rights activists later emerged from within the camp-goers, Judy being one of them, organizing and fighting for an end to discrimination against people with disabilities.

Follow Judy on:

Facebook: [@ Heumann Perspective](#)
and Twitter: [@judithheumann](#)

After spending more than 30 years as a Corporate Executive for Fortune 100 and Fortune 50 companies, **FRED** founded *FJM Solutions, LLC*, where he now focuses on serving underserved and under-represented populations, especially people with disabilities. He is a passionate, recognized leader in the international disability community and in Corporate America. As an advocate for people with disabilities:

- He is a Board Director and a Past Chair of the American Association of People with Disabilities
- He is a Director and Past Vice Chair on the National Easterseals Board of Directors
- He served on the Board Development Committee for The Arc of the United States
- He has served on three panels at the White House regarding issues that impact the lives of people with disabilities
- He has been the subject of many publications and for his accomplishments as a person with a disability and for being a devoted champion for the disability population
- He is an internationally renowned accessible travel expert and keynote speaker
- He has delivered remarks on the world stage, including Dubai, Israel, and Canada
- He continues to consult with countries that include Israel, the Caribbean Islands, and will soon add a number of other countries to this list
- He is the Chief Operating Officer and partner at Travel for All
- He serves as Editor of *Melange, Accessibility for All* magazine

Although having somewhat different experiences while growing up as people with disabilities, both agree that there is much more to be done for this demographic in the US and around the world.

The American with Disabilities Act prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities with respect to employment, public transportation, access to public buildings, and access to state and local programs and services. It removed most of the physical barriers that prevented people with disabilities from entering into most places, but, people with disabilities still face challenges.

Attitudinal barriers prevent people with disabilities from being employed. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is more than double the national average unemployment rate in the US. And, sadly, it is legal to pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage, in some situations.

Disability advocacy therefore continues. ■



Judith Heumann

Fred Maahs, Jr.

Follow Fred on: Twitter: [@FredMaahs](https://twitter.com/FredMaahs)

Nic Novicki



. Actor

. Comedian

. Producer

In the complex world of Hollywood, success is not guaranteed, especially so if you are a person with a disability. But one of the few who have been able to achieve that sometimes-elusive success, is Nic Novicki.

Nic attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, the school of Film and Television, UCB Theatre, and Temple University's Fox School of Business. He is an actor, comedian and producer, residing in Hollywood, California.

NIC WANTS ...

To do as much as he can to create more opportunities for people with disabilities

Standing at three-feet ten inches, Nic admits breaking into the film industry was not easy. He found it difficult to get an agent early in his career and when he did, he was only given opportunities that were specific to his height. He then made a decision to create as much content for himself as possible, which he did, and it proved successful.

Nic shared: *"I started acting and doing stand-up comedy in 2001, so I've been in the entertainment business for almost 20 years. I have performed all over the world as a comedian and done countless shows and speeches. I've also worked in virtually every position available in terms of my career as an independent producer. When you work as an independent producer you also learn how to do almost everything on set due to the lack of resources."* He now has an impressive list of career accomplishments, having to date been in over forty TV shows and movies. As a stand-up comedian, Nic has performed

on *AXS Gotham Comedy Live* and travelled the world, including doing several tours through *Armed Forces Entertainment*, performing for troops in Kosovo, England, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, France, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Portugal and Spain. He has performed on six continents and as an actor, starred in notable shows like *The Sopranos*, *Boardwalk Empire*, and *The Good Doctor*, among many others. He has produced several feature films, television pilots and web series for companies including *Sony*, *CBS*, *Air China*, *Maxim* and *Universal*. Nic is an active member of the *Producers Guild of America's Diversity Committee* and is also dedicated to helping others with disabilities achieve success in film.

Recognizing that of the 57 million Americans with disabilities, this demographic is still the most under-represented in entertainment and media both in front of and behind the camera, Nic launched the Film Challenge in 2013 aimed at giving aspiring filmmakers the opportunity to showcase their work and provide them with

NIC BELIEVES ...

"the more exposure people with disabilities receive in all industries, including film, the closer the world will become to being more inclusive and welcoming for everyone."



meaningful exposure. It was hugely successful and in 2017, Nic joined forces with Easterseals of Southern California – the nation's leading nonprofit in the United States supporting people and families with disabilities – to expand the event which is now known as the *Easterseals Disability Film Challenge*.

During the Challenge, registered filmmakers – with and without disabilities – are given a span of 55 hours over a designated weekend to write and produce short films (three-to-five minutes) that Help Change the Way We View Disability. Films are judged by a noted and diverse group of entertainment industry talent. Award categories are Best Film, Best Filmmaker, Best Actor and Best Awareness Campaign.

Since the Challenge launched in 2013, aspiring filmmakers from around the world have created more than 150 films which have been viewed online and at festivals.

Past winners include **Jamie Brewer**, who won Best Actor in 2017 for her role in *Whitney's Wedding* - she was acclaimed for her role on *American Horror Story* and was the first model with Down Syndrome to walk the runway at New York Fashion Week; **Dickie Hearts**, Best Filmmaker winner in 2015, who went on to win an *HBO Project Greenlight* digital series competition; and **Jenna Kanell**, winner of Best Film in 2015, who went on to give a TEDx Talk about her experience.

After careful review due to COVID-19, a Home Edition version of the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge was relaunched this July, with Film Challenge participants making documentary short films from the safety of their homes. This year a record-breaking 87 documentary short films were created! "We

are so proud of all the amazing films that were created this year!" Nic said.

Judges for the 2020 Film Challenge were: **Col Needham**, IMDb Founder and CEO; **Sheri Linden**, film critic for *The Hollywood Reporter*; filmmakers **Jim Lebrecht** (*Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*), **Alice Austen** (*Give Me Liberty*), **Kat Coiro** (*Marry Me*) and **Jenni Gold** (*Cinemability*) and **Steve Martini**; Actors **Danny Woodburn**, **R.J. Mitte**, and **Mark Povinelli**; Comedian **Kevin Jordan**; Disability Activists **Lawrence Carter-Long** and **Richard Propes**; **Nicole Castro**, HollyShorts Film Festival Managing Director, and **Jenn Wilson**, Film Independent Nominations Manager.



Nic was the emcee for the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge: Home Edition Awards Ceremony. The winners are listed below.



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS



Best Editor
Autism Ability
Scott Klumb



Best Film
The Fish Don't Care
When It Rains
Jennifer Msumba



Best Awareness
Campaign
HOW MUCH AM I
WORTH?
Rachel Handler



In addition to film and comedy, Nic loves to travel and has been lucky to do so both as a comedian and a speaker. With his wife, he has visited many countries, including India, Thailand, Cuba, Mexico, Japan, and Kenya among others. On their travels, however, Nic admits that there have been accessibility challenges. "I am three feet ten inches so I usually cannot reach the sink in the bathroom, and frequently have trouble getting off and on the bed and changing the temperature in the room. This can usually be fixed with a step stool and at times numerous stools, although I frequently encounter hotels that do not have stools on site! I also can't lift things, so I travel with a small rolling bag. Luckily I'm really good at packing my bag with essentials which usually includes a suit."

Nic wants to do as much as he can to create more opportunities for people with disabilities, and, being a part of the entertainment industry, he wants to continue using this avenue to raise awareness of the need for an inclusive, accessible world. "I feel really proud of the work we are doing through the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge. We have so many talented participants that take part in the film challenge and they are getting opportunities, based on their work. I think people with disabilities are the most underrepresented population in the world and the more exposure we get the more inclusive the world will be."

When Nic is not busy working, you will find him swimming or watching movies. "I am a fan of movies," he said. "I love the classics."

BEST BUDDIES
CHAMPION
OF THE
YEAR

2019 Best Buddies
PA Champion of the
Year,
Annie Gable
celebrates her victory
with a big hug from
her Buddy,
Ian Curly,
from the Best Buddies
chapter at Haverford
High School in
Havertown, PA.



Best Buddies

For over 30 years, Best Buddies programs have helped to create more inclusive communities across the United States and around the world. When founder, Anthony Kennedy Shriver developed the first Best Buddies chapter at Georgetown University in 1989, he likely never imagined that this social club for students with and without disabilities would become the global volunteer movement it is today.

With a mission to foster friendship, leadership development, integrated employment and

inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), Best Buddies now has programs in all 50 states and over 56 countries around the world, impacting over 1.3 million people with and without IDD.

The elementary through college level School Friendship programs are bridging the social gap that exists between students with and without disabilities and fostering qualities such as leadership, empathy and kindness in young people who will become the thought leaders and decision makers of tomorrow.

Through Best Buddies' Ambassador program, self-advocates and leaders are emerging to give voice to the next era of the disability rights movement and help to change antiquated perceptions of one of the most marginalized groups in our nation.

Much like their School Friendship programs, the Best Buddies Citizens program addresses the isolation that people with disabilities experience as adults by making friendship matches with members of their own communities. And with its newest pillar, Best Buddies Living, the organization is taking things a step further, fostering an integrated experience for people with and without IDD to become active, contributing citizens who live independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive.

Now, in the time of COVID-19, Best Buddies is needed more than ever. In Pennsylvania and across the country, Best Buddies Programs are being adapted to meet the demands of this moment and ensure that no one is left isolated and alone. Across Pennsylvania's 125 school chapters, students are learning new and creative ways to stay connected. Innovative events and activities are hosted through platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. From talent shows and movie nights to bingo and yoga, the ties of friendship remain strong among participants.

e-Buddies, Best Buddies' pen pal program, seems made for a time such as this. Through the simple act of sending an email, members are giving each other the gift of belonging, making it easier than ever to impact someone's life from the comfort and safety of your home.

The Best Buddies Jobs program has seen significant growth over the past few years by tapping into the unique talents and abilities that participants can offer and engaging

corporate partners to find innovative and mutually beneficial roles for them to play. Much like countless members of the work force around the world though, 475 Best Buddies Jobs participants across the country have been negatively impacted as a direct result of this pandemic. For them, it is crucial that Best Buddies continues its work to build their skills and help them achieve greater independence.

Like many nonprofits, Best Buddies has been hard hit by the financial fallout from this pandemic but remains committed to moving its mission forward. In Pennsylvania, many in-person events have had to be reimaged, but they will go on in new and innovative ways to raise the crucial funds needed to support programs that are a lifeline for many Pennsylvania residents. In reality, this shift to virtual platforms has made Best Buddies' mission more accessible than ever before.

With a spirit of resilience and determination, Best Buddies Pennsylvania is gearing up for its first ever statewide virtual **Champion of the Year** event on **Friday, November 13, 2020**. Twenty-one Champion candidates from across the state have been identified. These mission movers will rally support for Best Buddies over the course of a 10-week campaign. This dynamic lineup of nominees range from middle school chapter leaders to business executives but one thing they all have in common is their passion to create a more inclusive world.

Learn more about the *Champion of the Year* nominees and find out how you can support this event and Best Buddies at: www.bestbuddieschampion.org/pennsylvania.

———— // ————



A Mélange Conversation with

REBEKAH BUNDESEN

PRESIDENT OF THE
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTHCARE QUALITY

MÉLANGE: How challenging is it for you as a professional in Corporate America, being female *and* having a disability?

REBEKAH: It is challenging, but I find that I am a bit more resilient to barriers than some other demographics because I am a female and, I haven't always had a good income. I'm used to doors slamming in my face.

I still have issues remembering that I am disadvantaged. Doctors have ignored my pain many times, some to the point where I would have organ damage. I learned to be extra bold when describing my pain and not taking no for an answer. Even though I am in the medical field and have a good position, I am still subject to this type of treatment.

I do also recognize I have privilege as a white woman and there are much more barriers for people of color with disabilities. I try and remember that as I advocate for myself, that it isn't just for me, its for everyone who has a disability.

MÉLANGE: Why do you think people with disabilities are often considered to have lives that are less then fulfilling?

REBEKAH: I definitely have seen that perception and I would argue that our less fulfilling lives are NOT because of our disabilities, rather the ableism around us!

They are not allowed to think that my life is less fulfilling if they also do not make sure I have wheelchair access

in the same places they do. If you want my life to be fulfilling, why not allow me into the same restaurants you go into?

MÉLANGE: Your guiding principles - what insights can you share specifically in relation to your career and personal life?

REBEKAH: Be nice to yourself, be your own best friend. Remember, your organization needs you just as much as you need them, so never be subservient to them, rather be their partner in achieving mutual goals. The minute they fail to meet your standards or they are not accommodating to you, time to move on!

MÉLANGE: Disability advocacy – share with us the contribution you are making in this area

REBEKAH: I work in population health and am pursuing my PhD in Epidemiology and often times I am the only person in a room who has a disability. I strive to be unapologetic about it to pave the way for others with disabilities to be in my position too.

I mentor students and am contributing research into the field. Many people in the disability community have more health disparities than able-bodied individuals, so I hope my research can highlight this and invoke change.

MÉLANGE: How accessible is your city of Waterford, Michigan?

REBEKAH: It is ok, I wish it was better. Some of the sidewalks have barriers on them and there isn't always adequate parking. Nearby cities in some of the historic downtown spots don't have wheelchair accessibility at all so there are some buildings and restaurants I cannot enter unless I choose to go without the wheelchair.

Rebekah has Ankylosing Spondylitis, a condition that causes the body to attack the spine, joints, ligaments, and organs. Eventually her spine will bend and fuse completely as well as damage my vital organs. She uses a wheelchair whenever she is out of the house because being on her feet too long triggers a pain flare. Her use of Humira suppresses her immune system and slows the disease's progression."

THINGS ABLE-BODIED PEOPLE SHOULD NOT ASK OR DO . . .

// People will walk up to us and ask us if we can have sex. If you wouldn't ask an able-bodied person this question, don't ask us. Also, it is a ridiculous assumption. We can and do have sex just like anyone else.

Don't ask us if we are really are as sick as we seem, or just faking.

If we get up out of our wheelchair, don't assume we are not disabled. The person may be an ambulatory user.

If you see someone parking in the disabled spot and they have a placard, leave it alone. It is not up to *you* to decide how they use that parking accessibility. You have no idea if the person is in pain, since individuals with disabilities live with pain 24/7 and, we obviously can't be screaming and moaning the entire time.

Do not approach. Individuals with disabilities are often fearful because they get physically attacked, stalked, and otherwise harassed by able-bodied individuals who believe themselves to be the experts of their disability. Leave it alone.

IF YOU WANT TO HELP, don't just do it. It's ok to ask us, but respect us if we say no thank you.

Please, stick to the rules of how *you* would like to be treated. //

TO YOUNG, ASPIRING PROFESSIONALS WITH DISABILITIES, REBEKAH SAYS:

**“NEVER DEVALUE
YOURSELF, NOT EVEN ON
THE INSIDE**

**WHEN AN EMPLOYER
‘ACCOMMODATES
YOU’, THIS IS A LEGAL
REQUIREMENT AND
NOT AN EXCUSE TO PAY
YOU LESS OR DENY YOU
BENEFITS**

**NEGOTIATE DURING THE
HIRING PROCESS!”**

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