mélange

October 2021

Accessibility for All

Niki & Jimmy

Profound mother/son bond

Disability . Unconditional love

"We fill our days with songs and lots of encouragement"

Danielle Webb

on Dwarfism:

"Accept yourself. Embrace you"

Able Eyes

Know before you go

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9 772563 569003

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OCTOBER
Disability Employment Awareness Month

Disability Employment Facts

People with disabilities:

- Are an untapped talent pool
- They bring a unique perspective to problem-solving
- They are reliable, committed and productive
- They are very detail-oriented

Information:

www.atworkaustralia.com.au

www.easterseals.com

www.easterseals.ca

www.nhs.uk

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OCTOBER
Dwarfism Awareness Month

Dwarfism Facts

- Dwarfism is a medical or genetic condition that results in an adult being of short stature, usually less than 4 feet, 10 inches (147 cm)
- There are over 200 different types of dwarfism
- Achondroplasia is the most common type of dwarfism
- Dwarfism is not an intellectual disability or a disease

For more information:

littlepeopleofcanada.com

www.littlepeopleuk.org

littlepeopleofbc.org

www.lpaonline.org

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Photo by Matt of @lunapr0ductions

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Niki & Jimmy

Love. Laughter. Happiness

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UK. Author

Meegan Winters

USA. Founder, Able Eyes

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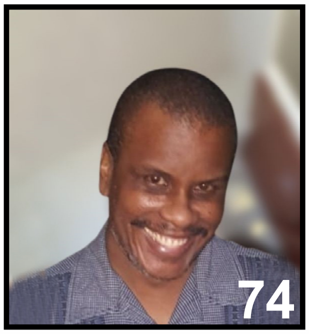

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Editor's Note

Fred Maahs, Jr.

Greetings!

Welcome to our October issue of Melange, Accessibility for All, magazine. Our First Anniversary Issue!

This has been an amazing year in many ways as well as a challenging year. Our magazine launched in October of 2020 – right in the middle of a world-wide pandemic. And, in each of our quarterly issues we were able to bring you stories from around the world about people, places, companies, and products that are changing the lives of people with disabilities and their families. It's been fun, educational, enlightening, humbling, exciting, and so many other things for us at Mélange, but mostly for you, our readers!

Over the past twelve months we've seen the number of people afflicted with Covid rise and many have lost their lives to this horrible pandemic. We've seen borders open, and close, and open again. Businesses have reduced staff, closed, and many re-opened with new and innovative ways to serve their customers. And, for perhaps the first time, we've seen the "working-from-home" taboo dispelled by, of all things, the pandemic itself as millions worked from home to keep businesses running. As a result, the silver lining was that more people with disabilities were now able to get or keep their job by working from home, whereas the whole concern of working from home in the past may have been an issue – but only for those who truly needed that type of accommodation.

This issue of Melange is special in many ways. It's been a labor of love and now, twelve months after posting our first issue, more than a million readers in over 64 countries open our magazine to read amazing and informative stories – and, we're just getting started. In this issue, you'll read some great stories written by students, thanks to our partnership with St. Cloud State University and Drs. Amy H. Knopf and Kathryn E. Johnson. You'll read about people who have overcome their adversity with a disability and have major responsibilities with a leading national nonprofit; an Israeli tech-start up that helps people with disabilities, and how the idea of helping a

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paralyzed father enjoy the great outdoors is now helping many people with disabilities "get their trek on"!

I also want to acknowledge the loss of two near and dear colleagues who passed away this year, both so very instrumental in serving the disability community – Mary Brougher and Marilyn Golden. Marilyn was a disability rights activist with a focus on transportation issues who played a key role in the development, passage, and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. She served on the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board from 1996 until 2005, and was most recently a Policy Analyst at the disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. Mary, President of Bender Consulting Services, joined the company in 1994. She was also a personal friend of mine. She worked closely with Joyce Bender, Founder and CEO, to help build their business to international acclaim, impacting the lives of countless people with disabilities. She oversaw Bender's product lines, corporate operations and customer and community engagement. Both Mary and Marilyn leave legacies that can never be replaced. They will be missed and our hearts and thoughts are with their families and those who knew them.

We dedicate this issue to Mary and Marilyn and we will continue to do our part to serve people with disabilities.

We want to make it all real, all relevant, and we certainly appreciate your thoughts. Let us know if you have a product you want us to try then write about. 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! Here's to the next year of telling 'your' stories!

Thank you for reading!

Warm regards,

Fred J Maahs Jr

@FredMaahs - Twitter

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

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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.
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Why it makes good business sense to hire people with disabilities

Authors:
Catherine E. Connelly, *Canada Research Chair and Professor of Organizational Behaviour, McMaster University*
Sandra L. Fisher, *Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer, Human Resource Management and Technology, Münster University of Applied Sciences*

Managers sometimes assume that hiring employees who live with disabilities will be more expensive. They worry that these employees will perform at a lower level, be absent more often, need expensive accommodations and will then quit.

But should managers worry about these things?

We present a way for managers to evaluate both the net costs and benefits of having employees with disabilities, and we consider all these factors. When we tested our method at one company, we found that it actually saved money by hiring people with disabilities.

To calculate the net value of employing people with disabilities, companies can run what is known as a utility analysis that takes into account direct costs associated with wages, benefits, training and accommodation. It also considers indirect costs such as turnover and absences.

Direct costs are easily tabulated, but indirect costs are based on industry estimates.

For example, turnover costs can be estimated as one to 2.5 times the annual salary of the worker who leaves, depending on how lengthy the search is for a replacement and how much on-boarding is required. These costs are balanced against the value provided by the employees, taking into account employee performance evaluations and pay rates.

Disabled employees were more productive

A food services company that runs hospital cafeterias and university food courts allowed us to analyze their internal data for one department with 46 employees. Our analysis suggests that this unit had $108,381 in added value that year by hiring employees with disabilities.

The employees with disabilities at this company performed at a slightly higher level compared to their counterparts without disabilities. Only 56 per cent of the non-disabled employees had average or above-average performance, but all the employees with disabilities met this standard. Similarly, the non-disabled employees had an average of 6.5 absences per year, but workers with disabilities had an average of only three absences over the same time period.

At this company, the employees with disabilities also had much lower turnover. In fact, none of the employees with disabilities left the company during the year of our study. In contrast, 18 per cent of the non-disabled employees quit.

Managers sometimes believe in false stereotypes that employees with disabilities are unreliable and likely to quit, but in this company they were loyal and reliable. This is consistent with what we have learned from our conversations with managers at other companies.

Several managers gave us examples of employees with disabilities who were dedicated and committed workers once they had been given an opportunity and welcomed into the company. One chain restaurant executive, in particular, started hiring more workers with disabilities because he noticed that they were very unlikely to quit.

What might surprise some managers is that the costs of the accommodations for employees with disabilities were quite low. One employee, a chef, was deaf and could not hear food orders - so the counter staff would write them down for him. The company estimated that the cost of the paper and pens to do this was just five dollars.

Most of the other employees with disabilities only needed some scheduling flexibility to deal with medical flareups or appointments. This was easily provided and these accommodations were similar to those provided to everyone else.

Providing accommodations

Naturally, employees hired by companies will have varying disabilities. Information on how to provide accommodations is available from a number of sources, including the Job Accommodation Network and local community organizations like the Gateway Association, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, the Neil Squire Association and the March of Dimes. Businesses should also ask their employees what they need to be successful.

Although the accommodation costs in our example might sound unusually low, the typical costs of workplace accommodations tend to be lower than what managers expect. According to industry estimates, accommodations actually cost less than US$500 in nearly 60 per cent of cases, or about $625 in Canada.

Why? A company may offer modified duties or flexible schedules to employees with disabilities. These are generally not expensive to provide.

And in instances where there is

a price tag for an accommodation - for example, an ergonomic mouse or standing desk - these are often one-time costs. More expensive investments, like wheelchair ramps, are rarer but can be amortized over several years.

Going beyond CSR

Many advocates for hiring people with disabilities focus on doing so to fulfil corporate social responsibility expectations. We agree that corporate social responsibility is important, but the financial component is critical to highlight to business leaders.

Companies can use their internal employee data to develop a plan that supports equity, diversity and inclusion efforts when it comes to people with disabilities.

Job applicants who live with disabilities represent a largely untapped sector of the workforce - unemployment rates among these workers tend to be about double that of non-disabled workers, with comparable age and education levels.

Managers who are seeking loyal employees who perform well should consider hiring people with disabilities. It's a smart business strategy.

employABILITY EXPO

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

9:00 am - 1:00 pm

IT'S VIRTUAL

Supporting Inclusive Employment for Manitobans with Disabilities

REGISTER NOW!

employABILITYmb.com

- **VIRTUAL EXHIBITOR BOOTHS:** Where employers, agencies and persons with disabilities can meet and learn about various opportunities and services. Only 20 booths available on a first-come first-served basis. Cost: $200; non profit: $150. Exhibitor Registration Form is available on our website, employABILITYmb.com.
- **LIVE VIRTUAL BUSINESS PANEL WITH INTERACTIVE Q&A:** A panel of forward-thinking Manitoba business leaders will talk about their experiences hiring employees with disabilities, including:
  - Why they believe in fostering a diverse workforce
  - What their experiences have been
  - Words of wisdom for businesses seeking to diversify their workforce for jobseekers with disabilities

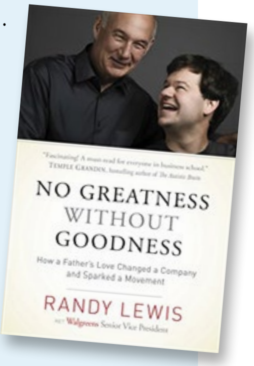
  Facilitated by Oly Backstrom, President & CEO SCE Lifeworks.
- **LIVE STREAMING PRESENTATION:** The Manitoba Accessibility Office (formerly the Disabilities Issues Office) will provide an overview of Manitoba's Accessibility Standard for Employment. The presentation will focus on how your business can create accessibility at all stages of employment and how to ensure a safe return to work following COVID-19.
- **DOOR PRIZES:** Over $500 in door prize giveaways.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RANDY LEWIS

Back by popular demand, Randy Lewis was keynote speaker at the 7th Annual employABILITY Expo in 2017.

Randy is an American businessman, a disability employment advocate, and author. Randy is the former senior vice president of a Fortune 500 company. He was the head of supply chain and logistics for Walgreens for 17 years until his retirement in 2013.

His book, ***No Greatness without Goodness***, was named by Fast Company as one of its "Ten New Books You Need To Read This Year." Hardcovers will be given free to each registered Virtual Booth.



For more info or to secure a virtual booth please contact
vhernandez@mtec.mb.ca

employABILITY EXPO
Celebrating DEAM

DEAM Disability Employment Awareness Month

Coordinated and hosted by MTEC MANITOBA TOURISM EDUCATION COUNCIL

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Easterseals is leading the way in building inclusive, equitable work environments for people with disabilities and the greater community. We're committed to collaborating with leaders across every industry to develop resources and tangible solutions.

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5 REASONS TO HIRE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

THEY ARE:

- ☐ **Innovative Thinkers, Ultimate Problem Solvers**
- ☐ **Reliable Employees**
- ☐ **Have Strong Work Ethic**
- ☐ **Increase Profits**
- ☐ **Customers Value Your Values**

Read more . . .

Ultimate Problem Solvers. Unlimited Potential.

Today, 1 in 4 people identify as having a disability. Your business can no longer afford to overlook this important, influential group with real buying power, tremendous talents, strong work ethic and valuable perspectives – plus, a distinct motivation to meaningfully contribute to a thriving economy.

— Make sure your company's diversity, equity, inclusion and access efforts include disability.

— Bring authentic disability representation into your branding, communications and culture at large.

— Embrace disability as the “D” in diversity.

Let’s go “All in for Disability Equity” with Easterseals.
www.easterseals.com/AllIn

Meet Meegan Winters
Founder of Able Eyes

"My story starts back in high school when I volunteered at an MDA Summer Camp. At this camp, I spent a full week assigned to a "camper" with Muscular Dystrophy caring for and creating memories in a safe space with all of the accommodations necessary to swim, eat, dance (prom), and participate in activities that campers may not otherwise be included in due to physical needs. The camper I was assigned to was Jessica, who ended up becoming a lifelong best friend. This experience was the moment I realized my purpose on this earth was to help people with varying abilities have the same experiences as their peers.

Jessica and I remained friends through the remainder of high school and into college where we lived together. Supporting someone in an all-accessible camp was one thing, but living day in and day out in a world that isn't fully accessible is another.

AbleEyes
Know Before You Go
www.ableeyes.org

People were kind, and always willing to help but we certainly had our struggles . . . especially in public restrooms that may not have been big enough for her, her chair, and myself to transfer her. It certainly would have helped if we knew beforehand what to expect.

I graduated and started my career as a special education teacher while Jessica continued her education toward counseling, (in hopes of helping others with disabilities navigate through life and the challenges that come along with it). Jessica had nearly completed her Master's Degree when she fell ill with what would probably have been a common cold for many, but due to weaker muscles in her chest was unable to cough hard enough to break up the mucus, leading to infection, and eventually to her passing in 2015.

During my earlier years of college (before Jessica joined me), I started working as a Behavioral Aide in the homes of children on the Autism Spectrum. These were children with significant needs at risk of being removed from their family home due to violent behavior toward themselves and others. My role was to create and implement behavior plans one-on-one to help alleviate the stress on the family; allowing the Autism Spectrum children to remain in their home. This was the chapter in life that started my interest in working with children on the spectrum (working toward a special education degree specializing in ASD).

After college, I immediately started my career as a special education teacher working with students on the Autism Spectrum. For 7 years I worked in the classroom, 1 year as an ASD Teacher Consultant, 2 as an Assistive Technology Coordinator, and 3 as an Assistant Principal. In all of these positions, I talked to parent after parent that struggled to take their children to the doctor, the dentist, the grocery store, and very few ever traveled or went on vacations as a family. One of the common characteristics of children on the Spectrum is a need for routine. Transitions to new, unexpected places or events would often cause significant anxiety leading to potential behaviors that not only could be dangerous but were also embarrassing to parents because people often can't "tell" their child has Autism just by looking at them. What if there was some way to help children and families prepare beforehand.

The idea for Able Eyes came to me during my time as a classroom teacher. I was attending a conference in Chicago (not related to virtual tours), but it was the first time I had ever seen a virtual tour and I thought "THIS IS IT! This is the thing that could help parents, help students, help people like Jessica to "Know Before You Go," creating opportunities for people to try new things, visit new places and live their best life.

Jessica knew of my dream and fully supported it, however, it took her passing to find the courage to leave the stability of the school district and take a chance on my dream in 2017. What I do, I do in honor of Jessica knowing that she is here with me supporting me and cheering me on to make my difference in the world.

Able Eyes and the need it addresses

Able Eyes is a virtual tour hosting website (App coming soon) functioning similar to YELP. A user can enter their location and category of interest to find virtual tours across the US (soon beyond). By having virtual tours accessible and easy to access, users can look at and explore a place such a restaurant, hotel, park, school, or any place open to the public from the comfort of home prior to visiting. Americans With Disabilities Act has certainly been a step in the right direction for people with physical disabilities gaining access to the community, however we have very few accommodations for people with invisible disabilities such as ASD, Anxiety, and PTSD.

The disabilities that benefits most from Able Eyes

Able Eyes really could benefit any person with or without disabilities however, the company was started from the heart of accessiblity and can help so many people feel comfortable both in their community and while traveling. Examples Include:

* Children and Adults on the Autism Spectrum (1 in 52 births)
* Children and Adults with Anxiety
* Wheelchair Users
* Veterans with PTSD
* Children and Adults with IDD
* Elderly
* Mothers with Strollers
* Children and Adults with Hearing Disabilities
* And after almost 2 years in a pandemic, people are more understanding and empathetic of isolation and the anxiety of going out into the public/ concerned about safety.

The types of businesses that can use Able Eyes

Basically any brick and mortar business open to the public or outdoor parks can use Able Eyes. Examples include:
*restaurants
* museums
* parks
* theme parks
* schools
* zoos
* community resources (Arcs, food pantrys, disability services, veteran services, etc.)
* doctor offices
* hospitals
* dentist
* retail stores
* grocery stores
* therapy centers

Every moment is a proud moment - one not more important than the other. For each new business we include in Able Eyes, I think "if even one child or person gets to experience this zoo, this museum, this park, or this college because of Able Eyes, then we are doing the right thing."

The future of accessibility

I'd like to think that Able Eyes is part of the future of accessibility. Imagine if EVERY business in the US had a virtual tour that visitors could view beforehand. Through this journey, I have met so many amazing people doing incredible things in the space of accessibility. If we could all come together to include virtual tours, audio descriptions, closed captioning, social stories, and accessibility evaluations in each business the world would instantly become more accessible to all.

Follow Us

www.AbleEyes.org

360° virtual tour

Able Eyes
Navigating your life.

Video Modeling

Video Modeling can assist in teaching a variety of skills (daily living, behavioral, school skills, community skills, etc) and are a cost-effective, simple and motivating method of presenting information.

These short videos allow for independent learning and can be preferable for those who learn visually. Because individuals with autism are often visual learners, these types of modeling videos can be an ideal fit for teaching all types of skills.

FREE

For ALL Users

The possibilities are endless, exciting, useful, and powerful in this digital and modern world.

360° Virtual Tour

Virtual Tours provide an opportunity for users to explore a location while helping bring public spaces to life on the screen, tablet, and social media.

This type of technology helps decrease anxiety by providing a predictable visual navigation of various community locations.

Accessibility Meets Marketing

Accessibility:

- Predictability for users on the Autism Spectrum, Anxiety, Victims of Trauma, and PTSD.
- Assessment of the environment for persons with physical disabilities (ramps, stairs, restrooms, elevators, etc)
- Parents, teachers and individuals with physical and invisible disabilities can help prepare for field trips, doctor appointments, community outings and much more!

Marketing:

- 97% of people search online before making a decision.
- People of all abilities are almost 50% more likely to visit a business with a 360° Virtual Tour.
- Businesses will receive a personalized QR code and full rights to the tour for use on website, social media, and marketing materials.

The mission of Able Eyes is to provide visual, state of the art experiences and teaching tools to children and adults with disabilities. Able Eyes provides a user-friendly platform to teach skills, and explore environments from several different perspectives. Our ultimate goal is to make businesses and public venues more accessible for people of all abilities by offering visual tours, making them "Able Eyes Accessible."

Mission Statement

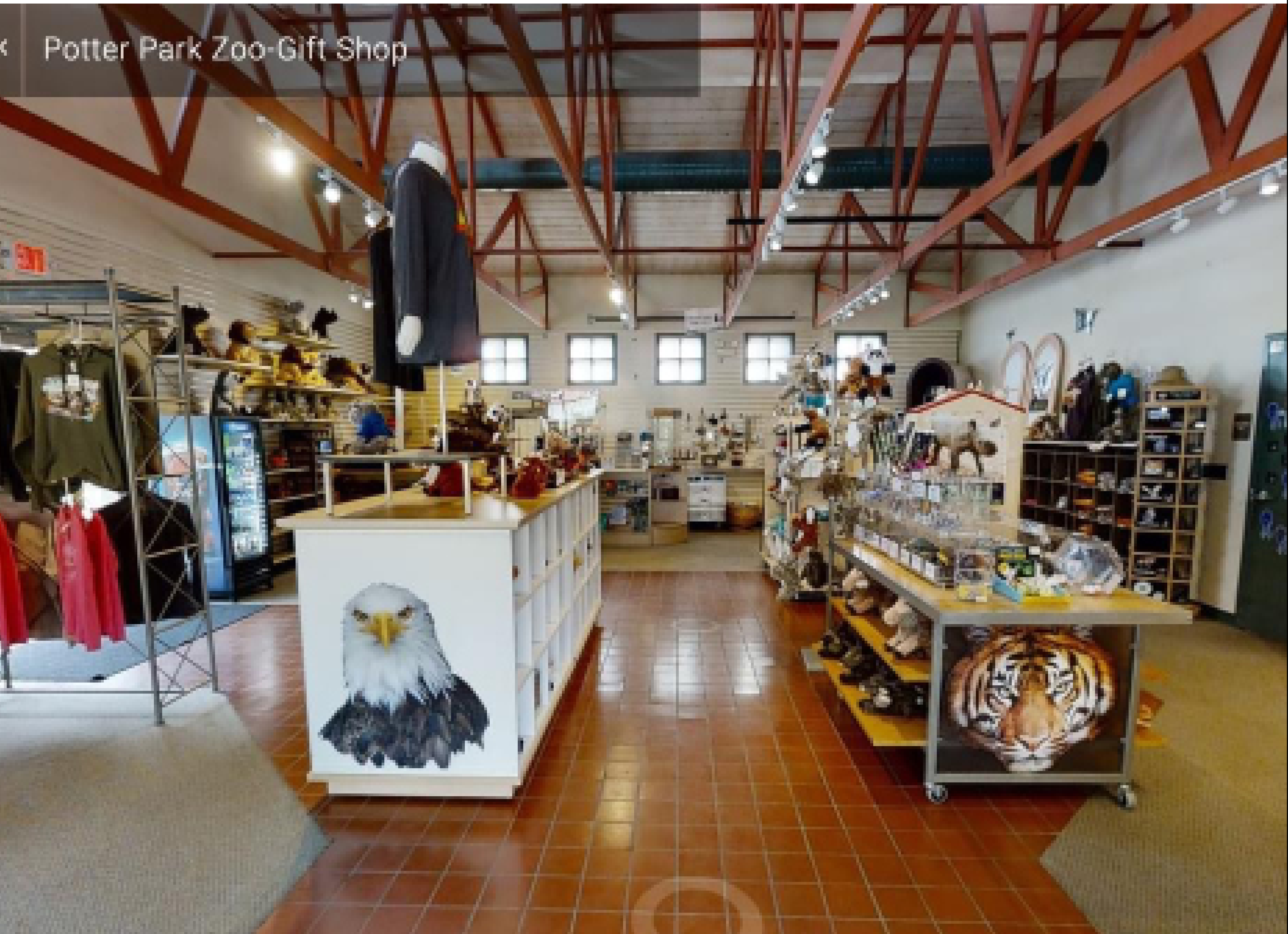
Have a Video Modeling or Virtual Tour Request?

Contact us at Info@AbleEyes.org.

You can find a complete listing of our current Video Modeling library and 360° Virtual Tours at

www.AbleEyes.org


Potter Park Zoo-Primate/Feline
Help | Terms
Matterport


Potter Park Zoo-Gift Shop

Able Eyes
Know Before You Go
www.ableeyes.org

In addition to being an accessibility tool, virtual tours are also an incredible marketing tool for the businesses we work with to attract customers of all abilities

There are 2 ways in which businesses can get involved:

(1). Able Eyes will create a virtual tour for you that includes accessibility features such as restrooms (all the way into the handicap stall), entrances, elevators, quiet areas, and anything that may attract a customer to that business. In this case, the virtual tour is added to the Able Eyes database AND provided to the business for website and social media use.

(2). Businesses that already have virtual tours can add their virtual tour to our search database. These may not include ALL accessibility information, but some information is better than none. Our hope through this Able Eyes movement is that it will inspire all businesses and all photographers to start including this important information both for their customer's comfort and to attract more customers by providing this type of information.

In both of the above scenarios, Able Eyes includes a marketing package to help businesses attract more customers of all abilities as well.

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Gestures

Web-Sight?

Gestures Ltd. Is Transforming the Way the Visually Impaired Access the Internet

> "When I think about our product, I see a revolution in the world of internet usage not just for the visually impaired, but among many people who want fewer screen hours or do not get along with the existing current user experience."


Eyar Shtabinski, Founder and CEO of Gestures Ltd

As Eyar Shtabinski, founder and CEO of Gestures Ltd., was researching the market for visually impaired people, he decided to investigate the area of smartphone usage. He wanted to see how with the help of some technological advancements he could improve the experience for the visually impaired smartphone user.

"When you consider a visually-impaired person's sensory problem, a smartphone has many 'senses' that can fill in the gaps"

Shtabinski adds, which drove him to start examining how the smartphone could be used with special services to help the visually-impaired.

"Today, our goal is to make the internet services accessible to the visually impaired and allow them to use a smartphone in a simple and intuitive way that even a sighted user would want to use our product."

The team at Gestures has developed a unique and innovative user interface that combines a personal assistant feature and the use of gestures and voice commands for browsing websites.

With natural language processing (NLP) technology and machine learning models, the application allows for maximum user adaptation and the development of a smart system for the simplest, most efficient web use possible.

As of today, the company is still refining the app, with the user interface patent pending. However, the company even closed an order for their app with one of the leading blind associations in Israel.

"Gestures up is looking for the right connections for partnerships, collaborations, and investments that will advance our mission of realizing this technological solution."

How did Eyar get to the point where he is developing technologies for the visually impaired?

Eyar had his first introduction to the challenges of the visually impaired while studying behavioral sciences and psychology at the College of Management in Israel. During his research methods class as he was investigating municipal traffic light communication, his future business partner shared with him how someone in his family was going blind. This family member was doubting his career progression and family life, let alone his own difficulty of leading everyday interactions. In hearing the difficulty of going blind, Eyar was intrigued to learn more about how he could help.

Turning the negative into a positive, Eyar and his partner chose to shift directions from traffic lights and focus their research on what solutions and technologies existed for the visually impaired. Eyar was shocked to learn just how little blind infrastructure and technological innovations exist for these people. *"There is a major problem for blind people, both in the house, and outside of the house, using the web…life is truly difficult at times for them".*

As part of his research, Eyar met with dozens of visually impaired men and women, ages 16-80, throughout Israel, to learn about the challenges these people face in their houses, in the external environment, and specifically, in using mobile phones and the web.

"We really wanted to understand these people's pain points and get to the core of the issues," Shtabinski emphasizes, "in this way, we could provide a more comprehensive solution for the end user"

Eyar's goal is to develop an app that is easy and intuitive for a blind person to use from the moment they download it. The artificial intelligence (AI) component helps simplify the process even further. The system even allows the user to create vocal and gesture shortcuts to help shorten activities and to help bring users the content they want, without excess information overload. Gestures is closing the gap and bringing a more accessible future for visually impaired internet surfing.

https://gesturesup.com/

Jake Steinman's TRAVELABILITY highlights the importance of Accessible Travel

Today, more than ever, the needs of people with disabilities are taking center stage in discussions at home, in communities and boardrooms. It is becoming more evident that someone with a disability should be able to enjoy the world in every capacity like the able-bodied. With this heightened awareness, possibilities for an enhanced quality of life for them moves closer to being an every-day reality.

With the disability population of the world at 15%, making travel accessible is a necessity. Enter Jake Steinman, the founder of TravelAbility, whose vision is fixed on making travel easier for people with disabilities. His website, newsletters and conferences are geared to stimulate thought and generate discussion about disability travel. At TravelAbility's recently held hybrid conference, innovators, thought leaders and travel industry professionals were brought together to learn from people with disabilities about the many ways better travel experiences can be provided for them. It turned out that implementing some much-needed accessible amenities are much easier than we initially thought.

In an interview with Mélange, Steinman admits that his transition into catering to the disability demographic was entirely serendipitous. In 1994, he started a media and event company in the travel industry space called, North American Journeys. They had two newsletters, a tour operator website and events. Their business helped destinations, attractions and hotels attract international inbound tour wholesalers. He sold this business in 2019, but his office was based in Sausalito, California, a suburb of San Francisco. In 2017, the city of Sausalito presented Steinman's company with an award, recognizing them as travel agent of the year.

Jake Steinman said: "It was a wonderful honor, except, I'm not a travel agent. Travel agents' job description, and the services travel agents offer were never something I've been familiar with. We never planned travel for anybody but I thought it was a nice honour. During the course of the year following the receipt of that award, people started knocking on my door asking for help to plan travel. And then I started to notice that every other person seemed to have someone with a disability that they were needing help with for the trip-planning. I found out that they wanted to know what a destination had in store for someone with a disability. They said, we like to go to Hawaii, what can we do there? How accessible is Hawaii? I started to realize, the first thing they asked about was the destination. The second thing they asked about was places to stay that were accessible. And the third thing they asked about was things to do that were accessible experiences. And so, I started to look into it, and there was really a complete lack of information about travel for people with disabilities."

Research then followed and from his discoveries he inevitably became an ally and advocate. TravelAbility was born.

"People have different ways of advocating," said Steinman. "The first thing we did was create a newsletter (Travelability Insider) and people with disabilities were the ones editing that newsletter. Then in late 2019, we hosted a live conference in San Francisco. I saw people leaving that event wanting to do more after listening to the people with disabilities who were on panels talking about all the things that were challenges and barriers to them. And these were things that industry people previously thought were actually accessible. I also noticed that people were very fearful of getting involved - afraid they're going to offend somebody, so they don't know where to get started. The conference acted like a bridge two groups that would not normally have an opportunity to learn from one another. As members of the travel industry started to understand what they needed, they went back and actually implemented a lot of the features that they did not know or did not think about before."

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has created some physical infrastructure to protect people with disabilities but there's no ADA that provides for information infrastructure for the travel industry, "and that's something I thought we could provide. So, we started a landing page initiative," Steinman shared.

“Since everybody's asking about destinations, we started researching the destinations that already had accessible landing pages, that is, content about their accessibility options right on their website, easy to locate.” During COVID, his team researched these landing pages, aggregated them, and placed it on their website. “It's like Wikipedia, a work in progress for accessible experiences. There is a disclaimer on the landing page that this isn't perfect, it’s just what we have found so far.” TravelAbility is now working with one of the most creative digital marketing agencies in the travel industry as a partner, creating a set of guidelines regarding what should be on the landing pages. This playbook will show people how to create their own landing pages. “This is one thing I'm really proud of,” Steinman said, “because I think it can help a lot of people, and our landing pages are free.”

Jake Steinman envisions that Travelability’s future will be one where they would metastasize their information and approach, while continuing to attract people to help grow the movement. “What started off as a newsletter and a conference has become an ecosystem,” he said, “We are collaborating on ExplorAble, a Podcast series; Landing pages and developing a Playbook as well as resources that will make our website useful for anyone wanting to become more accessible. We will continue adding to the hub so a robust set of resources will be available to any company in the travel industry.”

The future holds a lot for the accessible travel industry, and indeed for TravelAbility, as they seek to expand their frontiers while working assiduously to create guidelines that will ultimately better the travel experience for people with varying kinds of disabilities.

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HOWARD ROSENBLUM
leads a life of advocacy

Written by St. Cloud State University students:
Tricia B. Simon and Jaime L. Jensen

Howard Rosenblum is a man who has so seamlessly comingled his personal and professional missions of advocacy for the deaf community that he plans his vacations around opportunities to travel the world to meet deaf people, engrossing himself in learning their sign languages and the nuances of their respective cultures. From his very first job as a camp counselor for children with cognitive disabilities, to his current role as CEO of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Rosenblum has been dedicated to advocating for human rights, for not only those in the deaf community, but for all persons with disabilities.

How does a young man from Chicago come to lead the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by, and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States? He attributes it to having great parents.

At age two, Rosenblum lost his hearing due to a case of meningitis. His parents, who had not known any deaf persons prior to their son's hearing loss, immediately immersed themselves and their young son in learning about his new community and ensuring he had the educational resources to achieve any goal he set for himself.

Like many parents, Rosenblum's family had big dreams for their child. While they preached to him that he could be anything he wanted to be, they also not so subtly guided him toward becoming a doctor or lawyer. One of these *"nudges"* came when Howard was only 12 years old. In his words, Rosenblum's parents,

> ***"Dragged me to watch a presentation by Lowell Myers, one of the earliest deaf lawyers in this county. Seeing a deaf lawyer at that age inspired me to believe that deaf people could do anything including suing hearing people!"***

Despite a supportive childhood in Skokie, Illinois, the road to becoming a lawyer was not all smooth sailing. Rosenblum graduated from Evanston Township High School and went on to pursue an undergraduate degree in Computer Engineering at the University of Arizona. This experience was one of personal growth and self-discovery for Rosenblum as it was here he began to realize he had a calling to engage in advocacy work with the deaf and disability communities. Still unsure of what the future would hold, Rosenblum determined law school was a natural next step.

A CALL TO ACTION

While applying to law school and during his tenure at the Illinois Institute of Technology/ Chicago-Kent College of Law, Rosenblum remembers thinking he would combine his engineering major and law degree to go into the field of Intellectual Property (IP) Law. However, when it came time to seek out internships with IP law firms, no one was willing to give him a chance. Even after graduation, IP law firms were not forthcoming with offers. Instead, while he was a law student, Rosenblum accepted an internship with a disability law clinic at Northwestern University and subsequently passed the Illinois Bar exam in 1992, two years after the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law. Shortly thereafter, he began a decade-long stint at a small law firm focused on Disability Rights, Special Education Law, Mental Health Law, Non-Profit Law and Probate Law. Little did he know he was setting the foundation for much of what he does now as the CEO of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD).

In the early 1990's, Rosenblum was the only Culturally Deaf attorney in Illinois. Word spread quickly through the Deaf Community and soon Rosenblum found himself turning down a multitude of cases outside of the scope and practice of his firm. Even though the ADA required attorneys to provide Deaf clients with effective communication options, many were not aware of this obligation or simply did not care to comply.

Rosenblum recalls,

> ***"This lack of access to legal services bothered me greatly, so I decided to do something about it. At first, I would find friends of mine from law school who could take on deaf clients in various types of law and would be willing to provide a sign language interpreter for the communications of those deaf clients. But I began to get requests from more and more deaf people who needed legal representation that was accessible to them and not just from the Chicago area, but the state of Illinois as well as across the Midwest."***

Thus, the Midwest Center on Law and the Deaf (MCLD) was born with the mission to find "deaf-friendly lawyers to represent deaf and hard of hearing people from across the Midwest who needed legal representation in any area of the law." MCLD was the catalyst for Rosenblum later bringing this concept to NAD and building it into a nationwide service.

GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (NAD)

The NAD and Rosenblum were acquainted long before he became CEO. At the start of his legal career, Rosenblum developed an ongoing dialogue with the NAD and Attorney Marc Charmatz who has faithfully served the NAD since 1977. Rosenblum would occasionally check in with the NAD to discuss ongoing civil rights cases as well as legislative efforts.

Howard on a virtual call with his team

In 2004, the NAD invited Rosenblum to serve on a committee to propose changes to its operations and structure. Following that two-year endeavor, he served as chair of the Policy Committee from 2006 to 2011. In 2011, the NAD welcomed Howard Rosenblum as Chief Executive Officer, tasked with leading the agency's long-standing mission to preserve, protect, and promote the civil, human, and linguistic rights of all deaf and hard of hearing people in the country.

Today, Rosenblum and his team at NAD work tirelessly in their advocacy work to impact national and worldwide policy makers in an effort to support the human rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing through initiatives including early intervention, education, employment, health care, technology, telecommunications, and youth leadership opportunities such as National Deaf Youth Day, Youth Leadership Camp, College Bowl, Jr., and the annual Pitch Competition for young adults.

WORDS OF WISDOM

When asked for parting words of wisdom regarding his advocacy work and that of the NAD, Rosenblum shared,

> "Deaf people and disabled people do not want pity. We want education, employment, equality, and enjoyment of life. Include us in everyday life and respect us, that's all we ask. The National Association of the Deaf is here to work with anyone who wants to make their programs and services accessible to 48 million deaf and hard of hearing people. Failing that, we'll see you in court, smile!"

For more information on NAD's programs and services, or to make a donation, please visit www.nad.org.

2021 Donation Campaign

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There's no question that being physically active is good for your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Most people fulfill this need by going for a walk, joining a gym, or trying an exercise class. It's not that simple for people affected with physical, cognitive, and/or behavioral challenges. Getting access to fitness equipment and activities that are safe and suited to their specific needs and abilities is often times difficult, expensive, and isolating.

The IM ABLE Foundation mission is simple: We remove obstacles that keep people with challenges on the sidelines, providing them access to programs and equipment tailored to their needs and a community of adaptive individuals to support them.

>>> No excuses. Just move.

Danielle Webb

"I am 22 year old Danielle Webb. I live in Newport South Wales, where I currently work and study, but I'm from a town called Portishead, just outside of Bristol, UK. I grew up in an all-girls household with my Mum, Auntie and Nan, until moving out into a place with my Mum and her partner in my teens, then finally finding my own feet in 2019, and moving to Newport to focus on my studies.

- I am studying for my MA degree in Working for Children and Young People. I am also a part time Student Recruitment Officer for the University of South Wales, the same University which I have studied at for the past four years.
- I work as a Youth Worker and Youth Communications Officer for two organisations: G-Expressions and Urban Circle Newport

Youth Work has always been a huge passion of mine and I would describe myself as very career focused. I always love working on new projects and can very rarely fully relax, but when I do, my biggest hobby is time spent with friends. I love adventures and making memories, but my biggest love is dance, something I have always loved since I was 5 years old, but even more so since the age of 16. I have found my spark for it again and in recent years have competed in national competitions and community events across Bristol and Wales."

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Danielle is the Author of a children's book, "Mummy There's a New Girl"

that highlights diversity and teaches that it's ok to be different.

> **I always had doubts of whether university was for me, because everyone around me who I saw achieving their life goals were all twice my height.**


Danielle and family

Life with dwarfism

I am the only person in my family to have dwarfism and what many people don't know is 80% of people with dwarfism are born to average height families. I was one of those 80%. So, until the age of 13, I was the only person with dwarfism that I knew and saw. And that, being a teenage girl especially, did bring challenges with my self-esteem.

I loved primary school. I loved learning - and still do, but primary school was great for me because my size wasn't too noticeable. All children are small, so I didn't notice too much and neither did my peers. I found making friends was very easy in primary school and learning was the main focus for me. In secondary school however, I was the smallest amongst 2000 pupils, even when I was in my final year - I was still the smallest. This was when I felt I really started to learn what life with dwarfism was like - and it was hard at times. I did experience bullying for a few years and found it very hard to find a circle in which i fitted in - like i think a lot of secondary school students do regardless of their physical makeup, but having a physical difference made that even more emphasised.

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I had wonderful friends, who I still value to this day, but secondary school was hard. It was hard to focus on my education when it felt like there was so much focus on what I looked like on the outside. Sometimes it felt like I had to work harder than everyone else to prove myself. I'm not sure who I was trying to prove myself to, but that's the feeling that being on the receiving end of bullying can give you sometimes - that sometimes just being yourself, isn't enough - but this isn't the case!

College and University then were big steps for me, but university especially was a time in which I felt i could really reinvent myself. I always had doubts of whether university was for me, because everyone around me who I saw achieving their life goals were all twice my height. I never saw people with dwarfism going to university. But becoming part of the organisation Little people UK shone a light for me that: **we can achieve the same life milestones as everyone else**; I saw people with my condition go on to become doctors, teachers, lawyers, something which I hadn't been exposed to before, and it did give me hope, and the motivation to then move away from the negative aspects of my previous education settings and go out and chase the dreams of what i really wanted to do, and that was youth work.

Changes in public perceptions about dwarfism

Dwarfism, I do feel, has become more accepted over the years - compared to my teenage years, yes as a whole I am much happier within myself and do feel part of the wider community, but a lot of that comes down to my own self-growth. As a society, I believe we still have work to be done. Personally, and whilst I know I am biased, I don't see why someone being a different height to another person, should be looked at to any other extreme than someone who has a different hair colour, eye colour, shoe size etc. The only thing that seperates myself from those around me, is I am about 2ft smaller. The rest comes from people's perceptions and attitudes - that's the real barrier, that dwarfism, along with many disabilities still are seen as something to be feared, and it comes down to a lack of education. People fear the unknown, and dwarfism is still that. Dwarfism is still not something which is seen on the same level as wheelchair users, or visual impairments. Even though 1 in 25,000 people are born with dwarfism - and to average height families, so truthfully, any one of us could have a child, or know someone who is affected, yet it's still seen as something that is so distanced from what society deems as 'normal'.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is exactly what it says, and has to start from within. From someone who knows first hand, you can surround yourself with the best people, the most loving support - but if you don't accept yourself, then truthfully you're not going to feel accepted in where you are. The best advice I can give is to embrace it. Embrace you. The good, the bad, the ugly. That's what I strive to do, and I don't always get that balance right, but 90% of the time, I am a positive advocate for dwarfism, because I know and have understood now that dwarfism has made me who I am. Everything I have in my life, right down to my friendship groups, my job, my dance team, in some way, my dwarfism has led me to that, because dwarfism has led me to the person I am.

I don't think I would have such a big passion for helping other people, and young people especially had I not experienced some of the challenges I did in my own adolescence - therefore, I count my dwarfism as a blessing, even more so because it's led me to make some incredible friendships - through the charity I am involved in, Little People UK, it's brought me to some incredible experiences. Yes, it's brought its challenges, but ultimately it's shaped my life out how it is - and once you start focusing on the bigger picture, that's where you leave more room for the positives. Also, like my supervisor at work always tells me, 'Do you, because there will always be people looking to rain on your parade in some way. You could be 4ft tall or 6ft tall, a size 8 or a size 18, everyone has their own insecurities, and everyone has experienced some type of discrimination, ignorance or such behaviors, from the outside world. Therefore do you. Because it's always mind over matter, the people who are real and true don't mind. The people who try to bring you down in any type of way- they don't matter. Truthfully the only person whose responsible for your happiness is you - and we know ourselves what makes us happy - and that's the same that can be said for anyone, dwarfism or not. We are more similar than we think and confidence is something that should be promoted in everyone, not just in those with protected characteristics or disabilities.

Representation in the media

As someone who has always loved dance, theatre and drama, representation is so important to me. Growing up, that's the one thing I feel I didn't have. As a dancer and performer, I felt that I could never go into the media industry . . . not unless I wanted to play one of Snow White's Seven Dwarves or Tinkerbell.

Representation for disabilities as a whole.... has a long way to go! Massively. There is so much potential out there; people with dwarfism have talents like anyone else. Talents that if given the opportunity, are capable of more than just the typical 'dwarf' roles. Not to say these roles are bad, not in any way. I have friends who do panto, and I love nothing more than seeing them on stage - doing something they love to do, but is it any wonder that there is such a lack of education, especially with children, if the only time they are seeing dwarfs - are in a mythical or magical setting. Even in TV programmes, books, art,

Even now, over the last couple of years, admittedly I have been offered various TV opportunities, but 9 times out of 10, I've turned them away because it has been clear I have been wanted not for my ability, but because of my physical makeup.

anything . . . I don't see people with dwarfism represented.

In all of the books I had as a child, there were characters from different ethnicities and races, some characters with glasses, different hair colours, wheelchairs etc, but never one with dwarfism. As a child who was the only one in my family with dwarfism, that's something that has an affect, and as a performer/dancer, it made me really question if dance was a path for me. Did people with dwarfism belong on a stage just as themselves? No costumes or mythical powers? It took me a really long time to overcome that - and to realise that the answer was yes, we do - and that's something that I really strive to make a difference in, it's one of the reasons I wrote my book, but also - it's the reason I put so much into my blog and my social media accounts - now venturing onto TikTok and YouTube and visual platforms to share my journey, because there is more to our life than the media puts out there and people with dwarfism can and should have a platform to showcase what they want to do, without needing to try and 'be' a character other than themselves.

Her reasons for writing the book

My book, *Mummy, There's a New Girl* was published just over three months ago. It is a book that highlights diversity and that it's ok to be different. When a new girl joins the class, many of the children pick on her for her looks, but one brave little boy looks past her differences and learns that really - size is no big deal!

This is the book I wish I had as a child and even though, really, I've only been in the process of publication for about 9 months prior to it's release, this started for me when I was sixteen. Studying childcare at college, I worked in so many settings over my years in training and was very fortunate to work with so many children and families in that time, but not once did I ever have a resource that helped me to educate children on why even though I was an adult responsible for caring for them, some of them were still taller than me. I needed something and It didn't exist, so I wrote it myself and used it for five years as a learning tool, just on a PowerPoint presentation, and it wasn't until 2020, through my own development and experiences did I begin to think that maybe, this could be something that could help others. It's now published and it gives me great pride because there will never be a day again where a resource doesn't exist. There will always be a book available now for children to relate to, for someone to see someone who looks 'just like me'.

The book is available on Amazon, WHSMITH, Waterstones online - and also other small retail online stores.

Blog: Lifebeinglittle.co.uk

Facebook: Life Being Little

Twitter: @lifebeinglittle

Instagram: @lifebeing_little

To everyone out there

Educators, parents, whatever role you're in, please have that conversation with your children, about diversity and about difference, not just dwarfism but of all kinds of differences. Start that conversation early, because it matters, and it does have an impact on your child but also on the people your children will meet later on in their life.

Whilst my book does focus on dwarfism, everyone can relate to being the new girl, everyone can relate to sometimes feeling like they don't fit in, and everyone can relate to seeing someone, in class, at work, on the street etc., who looks different. Kindness and the message of accepting one another is something that everyone should value, even if you yourself is not directly impacted by dwarfism or disability.

You can surround yourself with the best people, the most loving support, but if you don't accept yourself, then truthfully you're not going to feel accepted where you are. The best advice I can give is to embrace it. Embrace you.

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Universal Expedition

through Rockefeller State Park, Central Park, and Bear Mountain with Friends of Access Israel (FAISR)

Written by Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Friends of Access Israel (FAISR) is a non-profit organization that works with countries around the world to provide universal accessibility for all people. Led by Executive Director, Jamie Lassner, they created The Universal Expedition. On August 1, 2021, The Universal Expedition, FAISR trip began trek #1 in New York. They collaborated with Paratrek and Access Israel for a two-week hike through Rockefeller State Park, Central Park, and Bear Mountain, welcoming a variety of participants. Together across 14 days, over 56 miles were hiked by people with and without cognitive and physical disabilities.

Through the collaborative efforts of Jamie Lassner and Omer Zur, founder and creator of Paratrek, the impossible for many were made possible for all. Zur and two team members traveled from Israel, and for the first time in the United States, debuted the 5.0 edition of the Trekker, which has successfully covered grounds as low as the Dead Sea and as high as Kilimanjaro. An all-terrain wheelchair, referred to as a trekker, allows people with disabilities to hike in non-accessible terrain or routes through the manual operation of the rider and hikers. On this trip, people using the wheelchair ranged in age from 12 to 82.

Colton Robinson and family enjoying a day out in Rockefeller State Park

Each day we hiked as a team; no matter who you were or what your story was, you became part of the group. On day 1 of hiking, Colton Robinson, his parents, along with another family member joined us. Robinson is a child model, appearing in a variety of ads, including those for Target. He is the first child who uses a wheelchair to be part of New York Fashion Week and has been interviewed on the Kelly Clarkson show. Despite his long accomplished resume at such a young age, Robinson is a selfless, passionate, and down-to-earth individual. When discussing his achievements and his future goals, Colton was humble and so fun to speak with. His strong spirit and determination consistently surfaced during the two intense hikes using the Trekker. It is his first time on it; fears, excitement, and questions about the unknown filled his face. As Omer Zur, Shir Segal, and Arnon Amit guided Robinson and his parents, they ensured the safety and comfort of this rider. That is always their first priority.

I watched his experiences evolve and change as his comfort and security

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increased on the Trekker. At the same time, he began to understand what he is capable of when society doesn't typically believe that this is possible. Colton shared, "When I got there, I did not know what to expect, and I was a little scared, but when I was in the trekker and with people I could trust, I was not nervous anymore."

When we went off-roading in various locations in the park and outdoor spaces with Colton, Arnon would show Colton what we could do: climb large boulders, navigate narrow paths, and cross over fallen trees. As Omer and the team showed him what had to be done, it allowed for Colton to be comfortable, secure, and honest in sharing what he wanted to and what he did not want to do. Colton dictated what he was comfortable experiencing. Pushing the rider out of their comfort zone is a major aspect of the hikes, as many have never even thought of attempting hikes on this type of terrain. We do this by keeping the rider's desires and comforts at the forefront.

The team and trekkers arrived in New York City's Central Park during the first week, where we were joined by the Honorable Consul General of the State of Israel in NY, Israel Nitza. Our group had the pleasure of hearing him speak while the team shared the incredible Trekker and all it can do for people and their experiences. This resonated with the Consul General as he said, "Israel is proud to push to make more inclusivity for persons


Colton Robinson and family enjoying a day out in Rockefeller State Park


The Honorable Israel Nitzan, Consul General of the State of Israel addressing group prior to hike in Central Park *(Fred Maahs Jr and Arnon Amit first row, Jamie Lassner Baseball hat)*

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Omer of Paratrek instructing Team Arnon on how they will traverse the stairs

Team Alan enjoying the views during the FAISR Universal Expedition

with disabilities. Hiking is part of nature, and everyone should be able to enjoy it, especially during a pandemic." The world is full of beauty, and hiking allows you to be a part of incredible nature. Nothing should prevent someone from doing and experiencing that, especially when a trekker can achieve that and more. He went on to say, "When hiking is accessible for everyone, it is a major victory for the world...We are bringing Israelis and Americans together, to support each other and to make this world a better place with innovative solutions that suit the needs of our communities."

During our hike in Central Park, Tamar Schapira, an accessibility advocate, joined us and shared, "It was an eye-opening experience for me to take part in the expedition. I feel honored to be part of a community


Chapel Haven Schliefer Center Family, FAISR Family and Paratrek Family celebrate the completion of 3 days of hiking together


The Chapel Haven Family getting off to a good start on day 1 of 3 hikes


Off-roading fun with Arnon Amit

of people that understand the meaning of diversity and inclusion from an accessibility perspective." Schapira is also the co-founder and CEO of SenseIT, an automated testing solution for digital accessibility, the first of its kind. She went on to say, "This same community is those that embrace change and welcome innovation in the accessibility space so that we can truly make a difference for people with disabilities in the near future."

The majority of our hikes took place at Rockefeller State Park Preserve, where the staff and team guided us through many trails each day. Peter Iskenderian, the Park Manager who worked closely with us during our hikes and led a few as well, shared, "It was such an incredible experience working with Jamie Lassner and the people from FAISR to help organize the Access Israel Universal Expedition. It

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showed me what amazing things could happen with individual commitment to a group effort." He shared his inspiration and goals for the future as this was the park's first experience of this kind. Typically, people in wheelchairs are limited to which trails and places they can experience. He went on to say, "From the team from Paratrek that created this incredible machine to the team from Chapel Haven that gives people with disabilities the freedom to express themselves and live independently."

Arnon frequently shared that 1,000 things make people the same; a trekker and a disability is one thing that can make people different. He went on to say, Why do we focus on what makes people different instead of what makes them the same? This statement was a guiding pillar throughout the trip for the team and me. Creating accessible places doesn't affect people that are not physically or cognitively disabled.

Chapel Haven Schleifer Center, a Special Education school and resident community center, joined the expedition during the second week of our trip. Beginning half a century ago, Chapel Haven works to assist people starting at 18 years of age, and as their website states, "empowering them to live independent and self-determined lives." Focus is placed on honing into each individual's specific needs in order to create individualized programs for its adults. Chapel Haven brought over 50 people, including residents, staff, teachers, and others who successfully hiked throughout Rockefeller State Park among various trails, including reaching the top of Eagle Point.

Having the pleasure of knowing Jamie for several years, I anticipated an incredible trip. And yet, I cannot even believe how life-changing it was. The people I met, the experiences we shared, and the teamwork we all took part in leading us from starting as individuals to bonding as a family by the end of the trip. Working together was so natural for us, and that showed in our ability to make the trip so successful for so many.

We were taken out of our comfort zones physically and emotionally as we completed morning and afternoon treks. Each day a new group was able to experience the expedition regardless of ability, race, religion, or age. After arriving as individuals, we left as part of a team working together for a total of 12 hikes, using communication, conversation, and a sense of togetherness.


Fred in the Trekker

BY FRED MAAHS JR.

I had the opportunity to participate in the International Expedition with Omer and team along with Jamie Lassner and Friends of Access Israel at Rockefeller State Park. The experience was personally rewarding and brought for me a sense of peace and serenity as we navigated the trails through the meadows and densely-wooded park. The ability to explore nature and finding ways to move around and over physical barriers during our trek, together, was moving. I cannot thank everyone who made this possible enough, especially those who were pushing and pulling me and my Paratrekker for nearly an entire day. Serenity found!"

Andrew Burbank in the Trekker

BY ANDREW BURBANK

From my experience, life with a wheelchair has not been easy, but I can do many activities on my own. When I was eight years old in 2004, that summer was special because I got to be away from my parents, and I have changed a lot because of that time. Seventeen years later, I have achieved an unusual goal as well: an unbelievable "accessible hike" thanks to Access Israel and the Paratrekker!

Jamie, Omer and their colleagues worked hard to make this experience unforgettable! My experience on the trail was extraordinary because the Team gave me an opportunity to be involved in a way I would not have been previously. Examples included going down to the river, being able to hike alongside my friends from Chapel Haven and having Shir help me be supported with a big blue cushion. It meant a lot to me to be able to get to the top without my parents, which I was appreciative of. This moment will remain in my brain forever!

In conclusion, an "accessible hike" is something I have always imagined myself doing. If people are interested, I would encourage them to try Universal Expedition at least once in their life. It is incredible! Happy traveling!

Deborah Margolis (pink hat in front) celebrates reaching peak of Rockerfeller State Park

BY DEBORAH MARGOLIS

I love showing people that I can do things that they think I can't do. Sometimes I have to show myself that I can do things that I am not confident about accomplishing. Hiking in the Universal Hike with Friends of Access Israel is an example that I wasn't sure I could do and people may not have expected me to do. It is a confidence boost proving that you can accomplish anything that you set your mind to doing and can show people that you can do things that people think you can't do.

Best of all, with the Paratrek Trekker, a wheelchair accessible for hiking, my friend with physical differences could participate. I especially like that it takes a team to use The Trekker because it is more fun to work together and enjoy the amazing sights on the hike together. I got to ride The Trekker and I felt like I was the queen of the universe.

The Universal Hike is not just about walking. It takes planning, like packing and physical fitness. I stayed in a hotel by myself for the first time, that took confidence and skill too. If given the opportunity, I would love to join another Friends of Access Israel adventure.

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> My goal in life is to share my story and life with Jimmy in the hope that what people see or read will help them through whatever may be going on in their world, and to love and trust that anything is possible!
>
> ~ Nicole Antram, Jimmy's mom

Photo by Matt of @lunapr0ductions

Niki & Jimmy

Disability does not interrupt their Unconditional love . Laughter . Happiness

Meet Niki

I was born in Perth, Western Australia but grew up in Bundaberg, a town in Queensland, Australia. When I was 13, we moved to the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, with my mum and two brothers. High school wasn't my thing, and I left at the end of year 10. Not long after leaving school, I fell pregnant with Jimmy and the young age of 17 years old. Jimmy was born in Nambour hospital via c-section on the 11th of April 1995, and we had a hospital stay for about three weeks. Everything was good, but I was so young, so there were just some things I did not pick up on. His grandmother noticed that when you would hold a toy in front of his face, he would not reach for it, nor would his eyes focus on it. So I went and had Jimmy's eyes tested. This was when he was around two months old, and not long after is when I found out, he could not see and would never be able to see. So I did what I needed to do, and that was to be Jimmy's mother regardless of finding out about his disability. When Jimmy was around eight months old, he ended up in the hospital, and we found out he would be diagnosed with epilepsy. Again I just did what I needed to do. Life goes on. When he was three, I decided to try to ween him of the epilepsy medications because he hadn't had one in a couple of years, and everything worked out; he never had an epileptic seizure again.
On he went to a special school. Then at the age of 17, he would be diagnosed with diabetes insipidus and panhypopituitarism.

I worked full time during his school years, but once he finished, I no longer had the support or care, so I dropped back working to only three days per week. During this time, Jimmy would have a few more seizures, and I worked out what was causing these and fixed the problem without medication.

Jimmy is now 26 years young, and I am 43; we both have learnt a lot and are always changing to better both ourselves. I now have more time at home with him, teaching him everyday skills and learning new skills myself. Our life has come with struggles, but we have overcome each one with our love and perseverance and determination to grow.

I have a blog that goes into more detail about where it all started the day Jimmy was born its an insight into our life; you can find it here. www.nikiandjimmy.com

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Social Isolation

I still feel like this at times. I have even said to my friends who have children it's not that I don't want to go to kids parties or gatherings with lots of kids, but over the years, I have watched children all play together, and Jimmy is always left out. He can't run/walk/play like the other children, so he has to sit with me the whole time. Though it doesn't bother him, I was once a child and I had those feelings of being left out, and I know he can hear them all playing and laughing together. This isn't anyones fault; it just makes me feel sad sometimes. I see their kids growing up doing the things that Jimmy never did or might never do.

Being mum, I think in itself you feel isolated from your friends at times. They are all out having fun, and there are times when you just can't be out with them. Being 17 and a mum was hard; I really didn't have other mums who were on the same level as me. So I didn't have people I could talk to about anything, and if I did, I would cry and have those friends say, "you always cry". I have been around women who talk about their children going to high school, then getting their licenses, jobs and then leaving home. I never know what to say; I just sit there because that won't happen to me. It's awkward for me when they do this. However, I would never take that away from them by saying how different my life is. So I just don't say much at all.

Sometimes I see blogs for parents who have "normal" children, and I see their struggles as we all have them, and sometimes it gets a bit much because some of those things that are being complained about I have never had to experience and never will. But I have noticed in recent times these feelings and thoughts have slowly disappeared, and I am not being triggered because I am working through my traumas which is helping me understand why these blogs/comments/ would make me upset. It has taken me a long time to get where I am today without feeling left out or secluded because I have a son with a disability and I have had a lot of different friend circles. I think once you find your tribe, you no longer will feel that way because they will love you unconditionally and make you always feel welcome. This doesn't happen overnight, but I promise you this if you can sit with yourself and understand that everything you feel is valid and the way people treat you has nothing to do with you or your family, and everything to do with the way they feel you will come to find that you will be much happier with life and everyone around you.

Fun things we enjoy doing together

Most mornings, we both are up early during the warmer months, and we head down the beach, I piggyback Jimmy, and he copies the birds chirping, he knows where we are once we get to the sand, and while I go for a sunrise swim, Jimmy sits on the beach. He is always so happy listening to the sound of the ocean. We also love going for bike rides where he sits in his trailer and listens to all the sounds around him, giggling away as we ride around. He also has his own three-wheeled bike that I push and steer for him, while his little legs go around like a "normal" bike, but I am doing all the work. My favourite part is when we ride past people, and he is laughing, and others notice, look up at me, then back at Jimmy, and the smiles on their faces bring me so much joy. Jimmy also loves showers, and swimming much like me and loves anything to do with water. But with the ocean, he can be a bit unsure as it is unpredictable, and unless it's calm, he can be quite nervous if I take him in the waves. He goes surfing for the disabled a couple of times a year, he takes a few times to get used to it, but once he knows he is safe, he will sign "more" to have another go with lots of "yays" and giggles. I used to piggyback Jimmy up a lot of mountains which he would really enjoy as well, but now he

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is a little heavier. I am finding it a bit harder, so we stick to easier things. Jimmy loves show rides, and even though he can't see what is going on when I'm with him, and he feels safe, he will laugh and laugh with anything that's fast or exciting. We fill our days with songs and lots of encouragement, and it's what makes everything fun.

If you haven't had the chance to meet Jimmy then you are truly missing out, he will change the way you look at life and you won't see it but you will most definitely feel it.
Jimmy is a beautiful soul. He goes to bed laughing, and he wakes a laughing. Some days if I am not feeling the best, I'll look at him, and he will be sitting there singing away or laughing. We laugh a lot in our home, which brings so much happiness. To be honest, sometimes I ask myself how can I be sad when I see Jimmy, my son who has never seen colours, clouds or rainbows and he is just sitting with a smile all the time. He gets excited when he hears my friends or his carers voices and gets up to give them big hugs. He has changed my life and made me realise that you don't need everything in this world to be happy because when you are laughing, smiling or giggling, all you need is love. We are all unique, and that is what makes us beautiful and that is enough.

I am now truly happy with my life I wake up every day knowing I am who I am and that is my best possible version of myself." I say this because I was 17 when I had Jimmy, and the day I found out about him being blind was the day I felt my heart break. The first few years of his life, I was trying my best but also, I was a bit of a mess. I was drinking out with friends a lot, and every time I would cry. I would say stuff like, why me, what did I do wrong. Though I loved Jimmy, I never wanted to feel that way, but I did and as hard as it is to admit that, I know now that was the truth. I was hurting, and it took a long time to overcome those feelings.

We all have traumas that we need to sit with and try to overcome; mine stem from a very young age right through to when Jimmy was born and being a young mum. It hasn't been easy, and I've been a terrible person at different times in my life, but I have always managed to push through everything and ask myself why have I have done that or been like this.

I have forgiven myself for feeling like I wasn't good enough and that I wasn't doing my best even though I was at that time. I wake up knowing that Jimmy is happy, so I must have done something right.

Today and every day I choose me, I choose a life that I want to live and give Jimmy because we both deserve everything. I go to work knowing I have a job that I love. Jimmy goes to care with carers who love him like family. I have friends that support us. I can be alone without feeling lonely. All of these feelings come from love; when anything bad happens, I don't focus on the bad I ask myself what can this teach me, what today's lesson is, how can I change so this doesn't happen again. Life is perfect exactly as it is, the good, the bad and even the ugly because that's what will help you grow. It is when we grow we start to heal.

Society's misconceptions about children with special needs: I think people put disabled children/adults in a box and assume that they don't know what is going on. Even though I use the word disability, I don't like it. Because I believe we all have an ability in one way or another. Jimmy is who he is, and from a young age, doctors have said "he needs to be this or that" because he doesn't fit in this category of height/weight/size/mental ability. But what I say who decided this who says your child has to be this or that. Why can't they just be, be who they are without being put in a box and labelled? In saying this, I also believe there needs to be more support out there for all families because no one child is the same; we all have different abilities/disabilities. Look at each child as a whole and what specific needs each one need to have. There is no one box that you can tick for everyone.

What has having Jimmy taught me

When I was 19, I had a friends father say to me; your life will get harder. I was always worried about this, and there was a point a few years back where I thought it was harder. When your child is young, you don't see the differences between others, but as they get older, you start to notice. I don't like to say what Jimmy can't do but rather focus on what he can do. I guess for me; I would say it's not hard in the way people think it would be.

Even though he is still in nappies, I have to feed him and shower him and basically help him with everyday living skills. He is my little shining bright star the smiles I get and the laughter I hear makes everything worthwhile. He loves learning new skills, and though it might take a long time, our persistence pays off. Jimmy is always so proud of himself, and I'm always there cheering him on. We have our bad days, but they don't outweigh our good ones.

From what I've shared, I hope parents will take away the following:

Understand that you are going to have so many feelings come and go some days are good other days are just terrible, but you get through this. It doesn't happen overnight, and to be honest, it wasn't until Jimmy was in his 20s when I really started to changes in myself and how I would deal with having an adult/child with a disability. Take time for yourself, because if you are looking after yourself, you will be happier and that will reflect on to your family.

I had a doctor say to me when Jimmy was in the hospital at a very young age that I should take care of myself because he has seen too many families put their lives on hold and end up giving up after a while because they never looked after themselves. You mustn't think that by putting yourself first that you aren't a good parent; what you are really doing is not losing who you are and being a better parent for it. It's harder to do this, than say, but don't feel guilty taking time for you—don't feel guilty for feeling any of your feelings. Life is a roller coaster, and we are meant to ride all those waves, the good ones and the bad ones, and each time you overcome one, you will get stronger, and it will get easier.

Just be unapologetically you, let your children be themselves. Find what you love and bring it into your family. Any obstacle you face, look at it from a different point of view. Not everything will be easy, but there is always a way you just have to trust yourself and step out of your comfort zone. Everything I have ever done with Jimmy, I always had to take that first step into the unknown, and every time, I have never looked back. We have travelled many places with friends and alone, and I have needed to put in the extra work to be able to do this, and all that work paid off. Trust yourself that you got this far and to be open to everything that comes your way, places, people, and life always works out if you allow it to flow, no resistance and always understand that what you do today has already shaped your tomorrow.

Interview with Charlie Hammerman:

The Disability Opportunity Fund and the world's first fully accessible hotel

- The Schoolhouse Hotel -


Charlie Hammerman

What influenced your decision to start the Disability Opportunity Fund?

From our perspective, what the disability market needed for growth in 2005/2006 was finance and capital to address the public policy needs of that market - housing, community centers, education, more employment etc.

DOF is a not-for-profit, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) certified by the US Treasury Department. We are one of 1000 CDFIs and there's just a handful of us that focus on disabilities as our mission. With that exclusive disability focus, we've identified that there are needs in the disability world and that capital is necessary to be able to meet those needs.

What are the most prevalent needs identified? Do you work with organizations only or directly with people with disabilities?

We work with both. But we do financing more on an institutional level with organizations or when we do work with individuals, it's typically individuals who come together to create their own organization or their own entity to own a house or similar initiative.

We started with **housing for people with disabilities** because it was the easiest to tackle. In 2008, housing was the number one challenge from the standpoint of who was willing to finance it. CDFIs finance what a bank or traditional financing won't, so

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the real goal was not for us to compete with the banks, but to teach the banks that they should be doing that type of financing. In 2008, we were really the go-to organization for housing. Today, banks have learned that housing for people with disabilities is a good business.

Education is the second category. When we got involved in financing schools in 2007, people didn't really didn't understand Autism or they didn't think that children with Autism could be educated or employed in the way that they are now. We became one of the financiers of schools, a special needs school started by parent groups, a very specialized group and no one else would take that chance. Fast forward a decade later. Now many traditional financing institutions like banks are financing special needs schools. So, we were early movers.

Employment is the third category. There is the question: can people with disabilities really be employed? Well, there are two aspects to it, especially here in the US. The policies for many years were that if you work, you lose your government benefits. Well, clearly that has changed. So therefore, we were an early mover of trying to finance and support companies that wanted to hire people with disabilities and wanted to take that chance. Again, banks and investors really didn't understand it, but we were there. Fast forward to today. Mainstream venture capital and social impact companies are very much involved. So again, we feel like we've done good work, because we took risks that nobody else was willing to take. And now everyone else is sort of catching up with us.

Do you now collaborate with banks on financing projects aimed at people with disabilities?

Yes.

One: In our funding stream, a lot of our funding stream does actually come from banks and financial institutions, because here in the United States, there is a Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) obligation so they will lend money to us at low rates, as long as we put it back into the community, and, to us, it’s our community of people with disabilities. We currently have over $40 million that we've borrowed from banks and other institutions, and they're entrusting it to us because they know there is a market and that we know what we're doing, so for over 13 years, we've brought them along for the ride. Now, they are also getting involved in projects, and because they have much bigger balance sheets, they're able to take on some of the bigger projects.

Two: Look at the advertising that’s been done and you'll see Bank of America and other financial institutions incorporate people with disabilities in their advertisement. From a marketing standpoint, we finally have reached that moment. This is the time that not just banks, but other companies are finally realizing that disability is bankable, that they're marketable, and people with disabilities are placed in advertisements at all levels. There's still a lot of work to do but we definitely think our partners in the mainstream financial institutions have come a long, long way and we’re pleased that they are at the table doing this alongside us.

Inclusive employment. How does your organization assist with ensuring that people with disabilities get employed?

When we provide financing for an organization, if it's for something focused on vocational training or job placement for people with disabilities, we will demand to get statistics about the number of people with disabilities they hire as part of our loan document. A perfect example of employment of persons with disabilities is Rising Tide Carwash in Parkland, Florida. A father and son started a car wash where all of the employees have a disability and they are a very successful business. They report back to us with the number of young men and women who are working at the carwash, their disability status, income levels and wages and we track that.

We actually do direct investing in companies that employ people with disabilities and become shareholders of some of these companies. One is called Ultranauts where 75 to 80% of their workforce has some form of neuro diversity. When they started with us, they had about 31 employees, now they have up to 90 employees. There are amazing stories of some people who were once on government welfare, and now are making 50,000- $70,000 a year at their jobs. We just invested in them, we took our capital, we believed in them. And this is a great example of the way we deploy our capital to help employment for people with disabilities.

In the first quarter of 2022, we will be opening and operating the world's first fully accessible hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. We will be hiring people with disabilities to work there. So, we're not only ensuring that people with disabilities are hired through our capital, we also hire them through our actual operations.

Would you say that awareness about the needs of people with disabilities has improved over the years?

Yes, absolutely and there's a very basic reason for that, and that's why we started DOF - supply is not keeping up with demand. Disability is not a fad or a gig economy of some sort. Disability does not discriminate socio-economically or geographically, between race, gender or anything else. If you're going to look at it purely from an economic standpoint, and you take away all of the discourse about disabilities, you'll see that it's just a market that will continue to grow and grow.

Autism was a little 'a', now it's a big 'A', and for the last 15 years, it has exploded into acceptance and parents are not going to want institutionalized settings for their children anywhere in the world. Employment. You know, now all of a sudden, a day habilitation, sitting around doing nothing, and being in a sheltered workshop all day is not acceptable - real employment, real opportunities are needed. There's a labor shortage around the whole globe right now so it's nice to have a whole new category of people who are willing to work and can work. We were just a little bit ahead of our time but now I think everyone is catching up to the fact that this has to be a public/private partnership. Taking a private mentality to a public sector problem. And that's why we created DOF in the first place. We're not saying we can do it without government benefits, or the government shouldn't be involved, it's just the government is limited in what it can do so bring the private sector to the table and between the two worlds you're going to get more supply of the things that people will need.

Are government officials open to working in partnership with DOF?

Yes, because imagine that you're the government agency, where resources are shrinking, and you have private entities coming in to say, we don't want money, we're actually we're bringing money to the table, come to the table and be our partner. We ask the government to cut the red tape; you have to let parents be creative with their models and let them do what they want to do and start crazy ideas. We ask the government, as long as it's consistent with public policy, and if we're willing to fund it, then why are you fighting it? And they've come a long, long, way. There is still be a long way to go but that's why we're excited about what we do because we have to continue to change the mindset of everyone. So therefore, we can just increase the opportunities for everybody.

What has been DOF's main success story to date?

This is on 3 levels: We started out by trying to **introduce disabilities to the CDFI world and vice versa** and we've done that very, very well.

Public policy - housing, employment, education. We've watched so much positives go on in the last 15 years, and there's so much more we can do, especially internationally, right? Because there are obviously many areas internationally that are still trying to catch up with some of the policies here in the US and we can learn a little bit from some international programs going on that are creative as well.

The hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, is really the pièce de résistance. This is where we walked into a community and there was a perfect combination: them wanting resources and us wanting to deploy resources and push the envelope one more time. We're putting together a showcase for the rest of the world, and we're calling it the first fully accessible hotel in the world. We also

want to be humble about it, because we know that we're about to do something no one's done before, we know that people with disabilities are going to show up and correct us. We think we've thought of everything but they will say: Well, what about this, and that, and we're not going to fight them. This is literally a teaching exercise. It's a showcase for the rest of the world and we've already started to make relationships with what we would call mainstream hotels, just like we did with the mainstream banks 15 years ago. So right now, while the rest of the organization continues to do its thing, we have the lending and we have the equity investments, our prized possession right now is our relationship with White Sulphur Springs, and then clearly our biggest investment, our biggest, exciting new thing that's never ever been tried before, is this hotel.

We're converting a 109-year-old building that was once a high school into a hotel but we are not changing the character of the building. It isn't about knocking it down and putting up a traditional hotel like a Holiday Inn or Hampton Inn, which would have been easy to do. We're trying to maintain that building, which meant less rooms, taking a huge gymnasium and turning it into a wedding/conference venue, figuring out where to put a restaurant, a bar and everything else, all ADA compliant within this old building, but being DOF, we do things that no one else has ever done before and the result will be the fully-accessible Schoolhouse Hotel.

We consulted with experts through every aspect of the design phase - experts from the visually impaired world, from the hard of hearing/deaf world, from the IDD world, physical disabilities, etc., and we've incorporated their recommendations in

there. The result will be less rooms, because we want bigger rooms and to make sure that everything is fully accessible. No matter who shows up, wheelchairs, scooter, or whatever they may show up with, there'll always be a room for that person. We are installing an elevator system in a 109-year-old building that never had an elevator, and we're actually taking it all the way to the roof top bar.

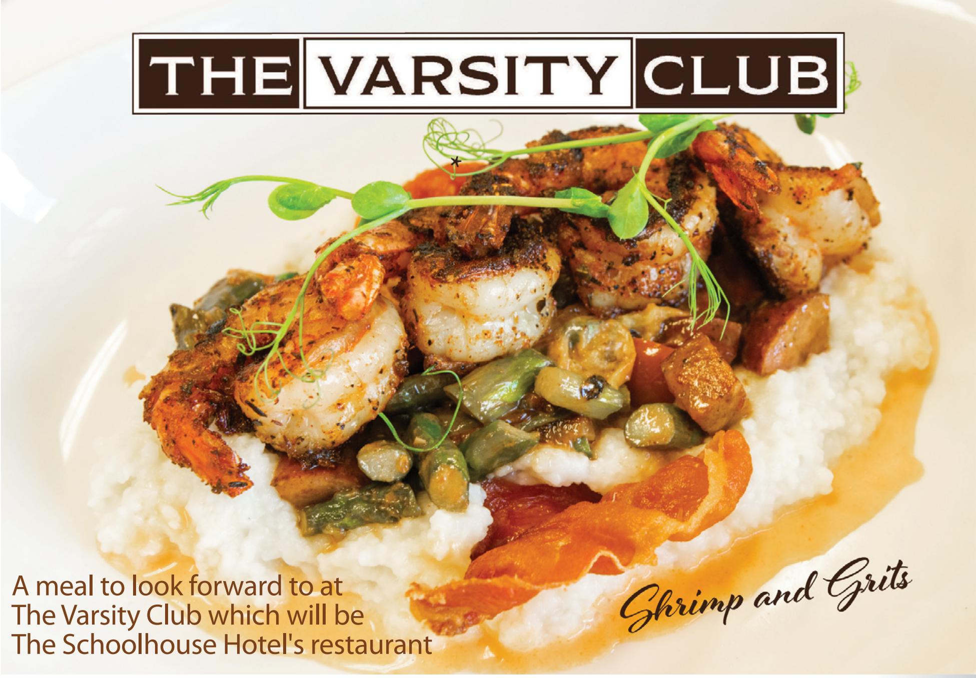
We invest in technology companies that serve people with disabilities and we're bringing a lot of technology into the hotel that's going to make people comfortable. We're working really hard to try to think of everything. We're coming up with something very creative with the bar, a three-sided bar. Not only will it have the usual tall stools that you'd find in regular bars but one side of the bar will be lowered. Someone in a wheelchair can come straight up to the bar and feel comfortable, and if their companion is not in a wheelchair, there will be a chair right next to them at the low level. The second aspect is the floor, which will be modulated so the bartender won't be looking down at the person in the wheelchair but will be at eye level with them.

If somebody checks in and they have hearing limitations, there will be an iPad right there at check-in, at the restaurant, bar and at other places in the hotel, where, with one push of a button, within seconds, they'll have a sign interpreter available to them. If someone drives into town, and they've had their service dog in their car for hours, there'll be an area immediately at the front door, so service animals can have a place to relieve themselves.

For family members with autism, we are taking that to another level. What was once the school's basement will be a fitness center, a conference room and a meditation/sensory room. It is nice for families to know that for a family member with autism in a new environment, located in the same building is a sensory room for their use.

We're catering to every type of disability. We're taking a lot of pride in the online reservation system where there's going to be questionnaires to gauge how we can make your stay more comfortable. All considerations will be there. If you have someone who is allergic to a specific type of pillow, if they want to tell us what room lighting would be better etc., we hope to have customized experiences for all of the people who are going to be coming to us. And, we are not just making the building accessible, but we're going to have people with disabilities as part of the staff. We're trying to think of everything and we will make a mistake but we will fix the mistakes and make the hotel the best possible.


Charlie Hammerman with West Virginia's Senator, Shelley Moore Capito



A meal to look forward to at The Varsity Club which will be The Schoolhouse Hotel's restaurant

Why White Sulphur Springs?

White Sulphur Springs, a city in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, has a population of under 2,500. They offer intimate experiences, but they also have a lot to offer in terms of activities. There is Lewisburg airport only 15 minutes away that gets direct flights from Chicago and Washington DC. There are cultural activities within 15 to 20 minutes from here so we're prepping the community that provides all of these activities and attractions because we want to make sure they're accessible. The people who come here won't be sitting in their room watching TV all day. We want them to get out and go off-roading, kayaking, on hikes and play adaptive golf. While we are not going to accomplish everything they want, we're going to try to anticipate everything as best we can. Everyone should walk away from the experience recognizing that we did our best and tried to accomplish everything they expected.

We are engaging the community and they embrace the hotel that is to come. Everyone on the project is local and have ties to the school for many generations - grandparents and parents were once students here. For many of them, the transformation of the school into the hotel is an emotional experience and they are already visualizing, with a lot of anticipation, what it's going to look like. We are injecting oxygen into a building that has been special to a community for many years. Their annual Dandelion Festival which was once held in the old school gymnasium, and has nothing to do with disabilities, will be hosted here on the same stage

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that was built 80 years ago – the very same stage, just freshened up a bit. This hotel will be part of the community!

Cindy Bennett, who once attended the school will be the hotel manager. **Adeyemi Allen,** the Executive Chef, also attended this school and was a star athlete. He has been working as an executive chef in North Carolina and now he's back and is excited about this opportunity.

We are also involved with the community on a quietly philanthropic level. A few months ago, we received a phone call from a family whose 19-year-old daughter went hunting and was left paralyzed when a tree limb fell on her. After rehab was finished, it was time to come home but she was in a wheelchair and her house was not fully accessible. We donated the materials that was needed to make it accessible and more importantly, our subcontractors donated their time, taking days off from working at the hotel. They descended on to this house and within two weeks it was ready for her when she came home. But will this 19-year-old ever going to be able to go hunting again? Sure enough, a company customized a wheelchair for her so she can enjoy the outdoors again with the big tires that were put on it, she can handle the woods.

Our involvement with the community continued with the distribution of school supply packs in August. Combining a bit of marketing in this situation, where the hotel will be in the building that was once a school, we gave away hundreds of school supplies to children in the community.

The Schoolhouse Hotel will be a showcase for the rest of the world and fully embraced by the community of White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

The
SCHOOLHOUSE
HOTEL

Opening the first quarter of 2022

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Easter Seals Canada

Inspired by the formation of the National Society for Crippled Children (later Easterseals) in the US three years earlier, Easter Seals in Canada had its beginnings in the province of Ontario on November 28, 1922, when 10 representatives from seven Rotary Clubs throughout the province came together to form the Ontario Society for Crippled Children (later Easter Seals Ontario). As was the case with their US counterpart, this organization's concern was the lack of services and resources available to children with physical disabilities, and its goals were to ensure adequate treatment and raise public awareness about the needs of these children.

Over the next 34 years, similar organizations that would eventually become part of the Easter Seals family were established across Canada. In 1937, the Ontario Government turned to Easter Seals for expert assistance following a devastating poliomyelitis (polio) outbreak. That same year, Easter Seals in both Ontario and Nova Scotia opened the first Canadian adaptive camps for children with physical disabilities.

Today, Easter Seals and its ten independently governed provincial affiliate organizations have offices and provide programs and services to people living with disabilities in provinces and territories all across Canada, and plans are well underway to celebrate Easter Seals' 100th anniversary in 2022.

Easter Seals
Newfoundland and Labrador

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Easter Seals Newfoundland and Labrador offers a number of sports programs, including **Sledge Hockey, Wheelchair Basketball, Boccia,** and **Let's Get Active,** a program for children who wish to develop and improve their fundamental movement skills to aid in physical literacy. In this program, children explore their balance, motor skills and flexibility using hula hoops, parachute games, balls, bean bags and more. Children are introduced to basic skills used in parasports such as baseball and wheelchair basketball. Also available are Swimming, Wall Climbing, Dansability, and Target Shooting programs.

The Easter Seals **Creative Expressions Music Program** offers an opportunity for participants to create and share music based on their interests and abilities. Common goals and interests within the group are identified and used to guide the program outcomes. The **Expressive Arts Program** offers the opportunity for participants to experiment with materials and hone their artistic skills using paint, clay, plaster cast and photography.

The **Horizons Program** provides a comprehensive skill enhancement and work experience for youth and young adults who face barriers to employment. Through the program, youth develop necessary workplace skills that facilitate personal growth and independence, enabling them to compete for meaningful employment opportunities. The **Opportunities Fund** encourages employers to hire job seekers of all ages who identify with a disability by providing employers with a subsidy of the current minimum wage rate to a maximum of 36 weeks.

www.eastersealsnl.ca

Easter Seals™ Timbres de Pâques^MD

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Inclusive employment programs and services offered by Easter Seals' Provincial members

Easter Seals Saskatchewan

(known as SaskAbilities)

Partners in Employment program provides supported employment services to job seekers with visible and invisible disabilities, as well as to employers.

Read more . . .

Easter Seals Manitoba (known as Manitoba Possible)

Employment Preparation

- Assessment Services
- Employment Services
- Employment Supports

Vocational Rehabilitation

Thompson Supportive Employment Program (local to the community of Thompson, Manitoba)

Read more . . .

Easter Seals Nova Scotia

Supported employment and training programs via its social enterprise, New Leaf Enterprises

Read more . . .

Karen Horne
on
The Future of Inclusivity in the Entertainment Industry

Written by St. Cloud State University students:
Michael G. Libby, Jr. and Hoaming Haung

Diversity is something you shouldn't have to check off, but numerous companies just attempt to hit their quota. There has been a trend in the entertainment industry only hiring actors with disabilities when those conditions are spotlighted. Individuals like Karen Horne, the Senior Vice President of Enterprise Inclusion at WarnerMedia, are advocating for change.

Desiring to make an impact in the media and entertainment industry, Karen majored in Broadcasting at Montclair State University. She got her first job as a receptionist on the executive floor at ABC in New York. Later, she transitioned to the ABC Sports network. There, she worked for someone who eventually became the president of ABC Entertainment, and she moved to LA to remain his assistant. That marks the beginning of her creative journey in the entertainment industry.

Karen had the opportunity to try out different roles: from running a non-profit film production company, to producing the Emmy Award-winning animated series, *Spawn,* to running several talent developments programs. Eventually, she positioned herself as the pioneer for diversity and inclusion. She has been a key role in championing the underrepresented community ever since.

One of the biggest misconceptions nowadays towards people with disabilities is that they are unable to perform as well as the general public due to their conditions. However, Karen believes that those people do not lack talent, but lack equal opportunities and resources. One of her missions is to focus on creating change within her community and workplace. WarnerMedia is currently partnering with a company to create a more inclusive market for the entertainment industry. Karen mentioned this wouldn't be possible if it weren't for companies like RespectAbility. They have helped create more inclusive hiring and training programs using workshops and town halls that they have sponsored. Through these types of events, it has made the inclusion process a lot easier for these individuals that are often overlooked because of stereotypes that they have lower ability. Like other stigmas, all we can do is constantly work to create a more inclusive world to change the uninformed misconception towards things they are unaware about and give them the chance to have these experiences to work alongside an individual with a disability. Karen understands that not everyone has been able to have the privilege to work alongside or know someone that has a disability. Still, with these opportunities, it's possible to create a more beautiful story. Therefore, companies and cities should strive to create a better environment and access for individuals with disabilities and remove the barriers that stop them from achieving their true potential.

As an individual, Karen has always looked up to people that champion our underrepresented communities. To her, it didn't matter if these individuals worked in entertainment, politics, or community service organizations. These individuals are attempting to make a change in our world. A lot of her inspiration is driven by these individuals and her children. She aims to create a better world for them to eventually inherit someday. Even with them being young adults now, their inspiration pushed Karen to continue to advocate for those who have had their voices constantly sequestered throughout history. She is an advocate for those with talent, no matter their background and ability level. She fights for equal opportunity for those who have been overlooked in the past, and she has brought that value into not only WarnerMedia, but the whole entertainment industry. She is more than an advocate. She is an individual that seeks change.


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These changes must start somewhere, and it's a path that she has been on most of her life.

Even though Karen has been focusing on and fighting for a serious issue for over 20 years, she still finds ways to maintain a work life balance. She is a ***"Foodie"*** who loves seeking new restaurants and cooking for her family. She loves riding her Peloton as a way to destress and express herself. The beach is one of her sacred spots for relaxation. Before Covid happened, she also enjoyed exploring different parts of the world. Japan is one of her favorite places visited and she would go back in a heartbeat. She looks forward to exploring Greece once it becomes safer to travel again.

In spite of systemic oppression against the underrepresented communities in the past, Karen remains hopeful that there will be a positive shift in the future. This is a reason she has spent so many years at WarnerMedia, and it shows. When asked what individuals should know about her work regarding individuals with disabilities, Karen stated that

"I'm super proud of WarnerMedia's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion . We've looked at the landscape that has been built on systemic racism and are creating systems to change that landscape. Quotas or mandates will only put a bandage on the wound that these systems have created. We aim to heal those wounds and provide access and opportunities both within our workforce and in our content."

Alan T. Brown

A Vacation in the Caribbean Changed His Life Forever

Written by St. Cloud State University students:
Michelle Buonfiglio and Jordan Radford

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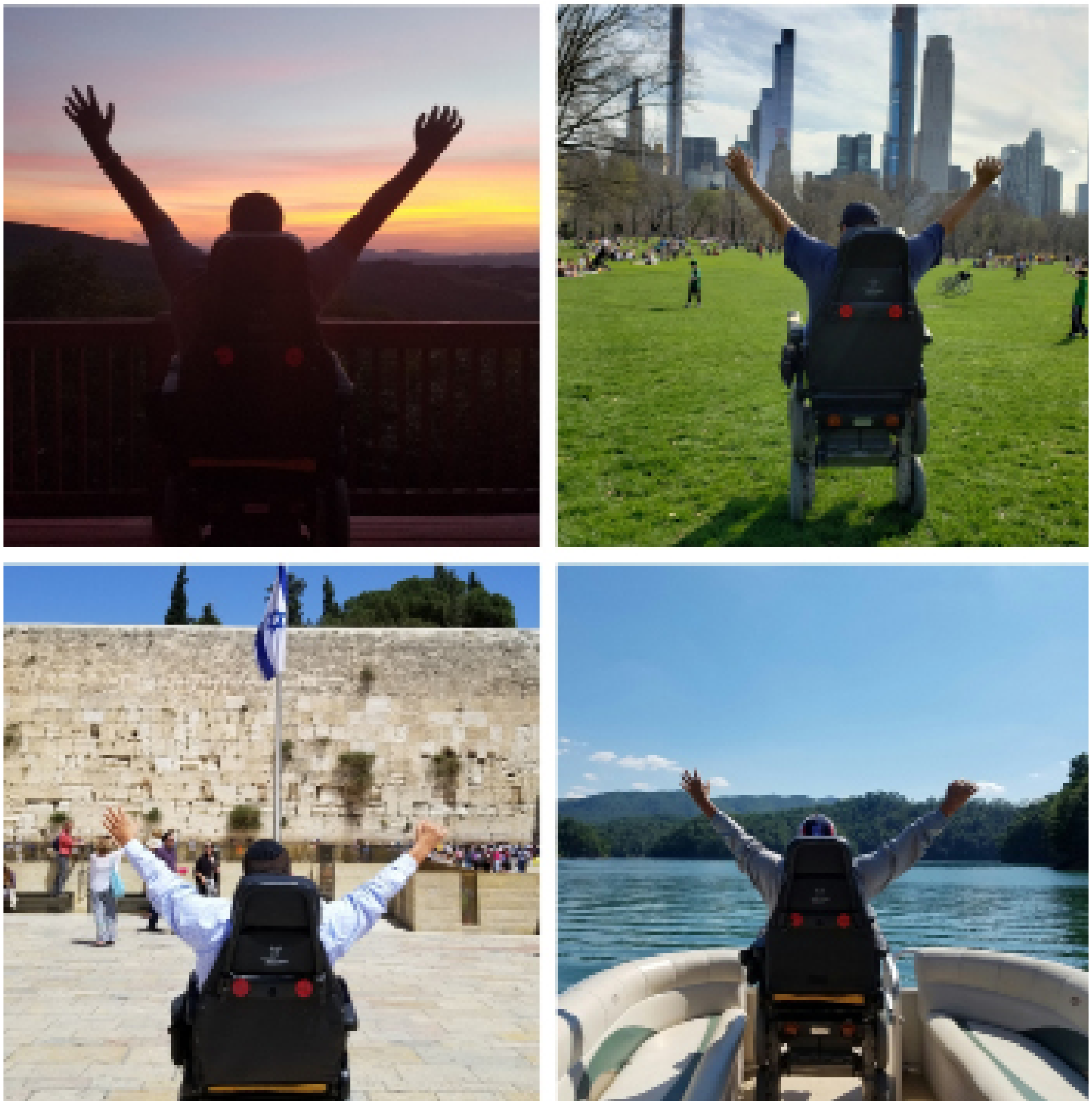

Alan T Brown at some of his travel destinations

Alan T. Brown is a man of action. For 30 years, he's advocated for people with disabilities and mentored countless individuals with paralysis through those first, important hours and days after injury. As charismatic as he is compassionate, the Director of New Partner Engagement for the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation brings together philanthropists, celebrities, and just about every new friend he meets to fund care and develop cures for people with paralysis. Spend a few minutes getting to know him, and it soon becomes clear: Alan T. Brown is nowhere near finished making change happen.

To understand what motivates and inspires Alan to help others, look no further than the people and events that influenced him as a young man.

"I was not new to understanding spinal cord injuries." In 1985, his best friend became a paraplegic in a car accident. It was their senior year in high school. *"When Danny got hurt, I just knew I needed to do something. Organizing a fundraiser at Sports on Broadway on the Upper West Side was just the beginning."* Alan raised $25 thousand in crucial funds for spinal cord research, and sent them off to Dr. Barth A. Green at University of Miami in December, 1987. What happened next changed Alan's life, and would impact the lives of thousands of people with spinal cord injuries for years to come: *"I ended up there six weeks later. Go figure."*


Alan T Brown with Christopher Reeve and former business partner, Steve Lefkowitz

Not long after, Alan and his brother took action in Alan's hometown of New York City to foment change for wheelchair athletes in the world-renown New York City Marathon.

He sets the scene: *"Back in 1990 when I did my first marathon, they started the wheelchair division about four hours before the race actually started. A lot of the streets were not closed in Brooklyn, and when I finally got to Central Park ahead of the lead runners, I was physically stopped and told I could not continue."*

He says this was his first taste of discrimination, and being stopped from finishing the marathon in 1990 was frustrating. *"I ended up being a little bit aggressive, and getting my point across, and they finally let me go."* Alan's brother, Dan Brown, an attorney, saw what happened, and was moved to lead a class-action lawsuit on behalf of a group of wheelchair athletes.

In 2000, Dan won the pro-bono lawsuit, and that year, the New York City Marathon introduced a separate wheelchair division that featured prize money. Alan clarifies the point of his advocacy for equity and change for wheelchair athletes: *"We are not on the course pushing 26.2 miles just to inspire other people, we are there just like everybody else: to finish a race. That was my first big push-back that I had to deal with. But in the end our solution paved the way for so many other individuals to participate."*

Alan credits his father with his drive to make things right, and to help people as a way of life. His role model, he recalls his father advising, "It's not about recognition, it is about getting things done." When he asked his father why anything should be done, the response was always, *"because that is what we do."* Still, Alan leaves one with the impression he loves not just the act of helping people, but the act of engaging with individuals and bringing them together.

People are drawn to Alan, as well. His longtime friend, Dr. Jason Cohen, praised Alan during a recent episode of his podcast, Gross Anatomy. *"Everybody knew and loved Alan growing up,"* Jason said. When Alan is asked about Jason's remark, he says he always was just a people person. *"I think it's just my personality and being a real New Yorker. My family was in the retail business and I was always working there as a child, interacting with individuals."* Alan says his commitment to helping others runs deep: *"I always saw the community in New York, coming up where I grew up, and our synagogue, giving back,"* he continues, *"and that is the fabric of who I am."*

It was only natural that Alan would become involved with another family whose commitment to service runs deep: the family of Christopher and Dana Reeve. After attending a conference in Washington, D.C. at which he first understood what the Reeve Foundation meant to people in the paralysis community, he met the Reeve children. Later, after they were introduced, a special friendship developed between Christopher and Alan. *"We went to hockey games and had many conversations together. I keep him and Dana very close to my heart all of the time. I am lucky enough to be friendly with all three of his children."*

Today, Alan serves as Director of New Partner Engagement for the foundation, and his own Alan T. Brown Fund, thrives within it directed by his mother. Alan is delighted by any opportunity to talk about the Reeve Foundation's programs focused on 'today's care, tomorrow's cure,' including their flagship National Paralysis Resource Center. Over 20 years the foundation has awarded $34 million in Quality of Life grants to nonprofits that need help funding programs to assist people living with paralysis. In addition, the National Paralysis Resource Center serves 100,000 individuals and families each year through free programs that include certified peer mentoring, advocacy, and research.

Alan shares that COVID has made it challenging for people dealing with new injuries to navigate their situation, and isolation presents a challenge. He's proud to note, however, that the foundation and its network of teams has been able to do much to mitigate that. *"During COVID, the foundation has actually done so much work to help educate individuals living with paralysis on so many different levels through the National Paralysis Resource Center."* Alan is a certified peer mentor in their Peer & Family Support program, which has helped approximately 11,000 people in 40 states.

When he considers the short term versus the long game, Alan would like to see more change that improves quality of life and opportunity for the more than 5 million Americans with paralysis. *"I have been hearing the word inclusion for decades, and hopefully now the world itself, and companies as well, are ready to be inclusive. Hopefully corporate America will start hiring more individuals with ability, and more people will stop seeing people's disabilities."*

As a frequent traveler, he sees a need to eliminate everyday challenges of navigating public facilities that people without disabilities often don't realize exist: *"We need to make sure that when individuals with a disability want to travel, they do not have to go through so many hurdles just for a trip that somebody else would normally take. It would be great to get on the plane with ease, check into a hotel knowing that the bed is the right height, and you can use the bathroom as well as public transportation."*

To address those challenges constructively, another foundation Alan co-founded,

"I have been hearing the word inclusion for decades, and hopefully now the world itself, and companies as well, are ready to be inclusive. Hopefully corporate America will start hiring more individuals with ability, and more people will stop seeing people's disabilities."

"Access Israel helps individuals without disabilities through experiential learning and interaction how to better work with and understand what inclusion is all about. Whether it's going into high schools, colleges or local religious communities of all ethnicities, the different programs that the organization runs change individual lives on both ends of the conversation."

Alan believes as part of improving their quality of life, people with paralysis can learn to advocate for themselves to counter misconceptions. *"Most people with a disability have amazing ability, and that is what people need to see. People should not look at others for what they cannot do but for what they can do."* Alan illustrates what he's learned over the years about the role of agency in improved quality of life: "When one becomes paralyzed, they need to make sure that they advocate for themselves. One should always stand up for their rights, and not be afraid to reach out and ask for help." *Alan's foremost advice? "Don't focus on the negative; focus on the positive."*

As a mentor and advocate, Alan wants to see change for people who are recently paralyzed: longer rehabilitation stays; better insurance benefits to assist overburdened families; and most important, coverage for proactive and preventive care to help individuals lead healthier lives.

As a man of action focused on the future, he's ready to do more to help people with paralysis, and to build connection and community among them and people who want to help find a cure. *"I feel the next few years for the foundation and the paralysis community are very bright. There is some amazing research on the forefront right now."* He is enthusiastic about epidural stimulation, which is implanted, as well as transcutaneous stimulation that is delivered above the skin. *"I have seen the results first hand, and it is amazing to see the progress individuals are making."*

What is Alan most hopeful about?

"I feel that people with numerous disabilities are going to benefit in many ways from what is going on. As we say at the foundation, 'Go forward every day.'"

Alan T Brown competing in the New York City Marathon

Learn more about Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation at

christopherreeve.org

Find or become a Reeve Foundation Peer & Family Support mentor here

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Problems at school: The role of ADHD & other factors

by Professor Andrew Martin MAPS, Professor of Educational Psychology
in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales

Australian psychologists are untangling the many factors that cause academic problems for students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

It is well known that students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience significant academic problems. What is less clear is the extent to which these academic problems are due to ADHD itself or due to other risk factors known to be associated with ADHD. One psychological study in which I have been involved has investigated this question.

ADHD is defined by the DSM-5 as "a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development". Researchers have identified significant executive function, self-regulatory, cognitive, neuropsychological, and biochemical impairments or deficiencies associated with ADHD and we know these can impede school performance.

My study, published in the journal *School Psychology Quarterly*, studied almost 4,000 Australian high school students: 136 with ADHD and 3,779 non-ADHD peers from the same classrooms and schools. It aimed to identify which academic problems are linked to ADHD itself and which problems are caused by other (related) difficulties.

Personal risk factors known to impede students' school performance were investigated. These included specific learning disabilities (such as with reading, writing, mathematics), low socio-economic status, low motivation, prior achievement difficulties, and even aspects of personality, such as low conscientiousness or high neuroticism.

Contextual risk factors that may also trigger academic problems were also investigated. These included socio-economic status, low school-average achievement, and poor staff-student ratios. These personal and contextual risk factors were explored, alongside ADHD, as potential predictors of academic problems at school.

Academic problems in this study included failing a subject, not finishing schoolwork, changing classes, suspension, changing schools, expulsion, and school refusal.

The first set of analyses examined the simple association between ADHD and these academic problems. It revealed that ADHD was a significant predictor of six of the eight academic problems: grade repetition, failing a subject, not finishing schoolwork, suspension, changing schools, and expulsion.

We then analysed the other personal and contextual risk factors experienced by the students involved. This allowed us to identify the role of ADHD in academic problems beyond the effects of other risk factors. After accounting for these other risk factors, ADHD continued to predict four academic problems: schoolwork non-completion, school suspension, school expulsion, and changing schools (with ADHD also having a partial role in grade repetition). Thus, beyond the other personal and contextual risk factors experienced by students, ADHD played a significant role in increasing students' academic problems.

Importantly, however, beyond the effects of ADHD, we found two other academic risk factors predicted students' academic problems: lower prior achievement and specific learning disability in mathematics, reading, and/or writing. More precisely, beyond the effects of ADHD, low prior achievement was associated with grade repetition, failing a subject, not finishing schoolwork, changing classes, suspension, changing schools, and school refusal. Furthermore, beyond the effects of ADHD, specific learning disability was associated with grade repetition, failing a subject, not finishing schoolwork, changing classes, and school refusal.

These findings have important implications for psychologists and educators. They help identify what factors are and are not relevant to intervention aimed at assisting students with ADHD.

This study shows that there are some problems at school for which ADHD intervention is advisable, but others where attention to other risk factors is also critical. For example commonly recommended ADHD interventions involving medication, executive functioning (e.g., working memory, planning, control), and behaviour (e.g., reward schedules) are likely to be effective for some adversities (e.g., schoolwork non-completion, school suspension, school expulsion). For other problems, greater attention might be directed to a student's specific learning disability or skill set relevant to his or her academic achievement.

These results illustrate that multidimensional intervention targeting ADHD and other related risk factors is necessary if we wish to get the best results for students in the school system who are at risk of significant academic problems.


Dr Amy & Dr. Kathryn, front row from left

A Story of Thankfulness

Drs. Kathryn Johnson and Amy Hebert Knopf

A theme of the collaborative work of Drs. Kathryn Johnson and Amy Hebert Knopf is ***"thankfulness."*** One of the most thankful aspects of their work was finding each other in 2013 at a conference in St. Paul. Though their life journeys were quite different, with Kathryn growing up on a farm not far from St. Cloud and Amy growing up in southern Louisiana, they both arrived at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota to begin their careers as faculty. Kathy started at SCSU in the fall of 2005, after serving as a teacher for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in St. Cloud Schools for over 15 years. Amy started her career at SCSU in the fall of 2013 after working in research and outreach for improving services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

It was not a coincidence that the conference where they met in the fall of 2013 focused on internationalizing teaching and learning within university classes, as their mutual passion for international work became evident over the next year of emerging friendship. Kathryn's international advocacy began during her first trip to China in the summer of 2000, where she joined a Gallaudet University China Delegation. During her three weeks in China, Kathryn fell in love with the country, the culture, and the people, inclusive of individuals with disabilities. Her trip to China was life-changing and compelled her to focus her dissertation research on Deaf education in China. In 2014, after numerous trips to China leading education abroad programs for students, teachers, and administrators during the previous 14 years, Kathryn finally convinced Amy to join her on a trip to Beijing. One of the goals of the trip was to assist a graduate student, Aaron, on his thesis research where he was assessing accessibility in Beijing. As a young adult who was a wheelchair user, the trip was an eye-opener for both Amy and Aaron in an area of immense need. Thus began the journey of advocacy for Amy within China. For Kathryn, this meant finally finding someone who was just as passionate, dedicated, and determined to make a difference in the world.

An area of mutual expertise for both is in working with individuals who are Deaf, with both being fluent in American Sign Language and having strong connections to the Deaf community. This connection has strengthened their passion for working on a global stage. They have organized and led delegations to China for teachers and administrators from schools for the Deaf in the U.S. In June of 2018, they collaborated with Changchun University on hosting a conference on Deaf education and employment in China. In addition, they facilitated a panel presentation of delegation members at the U.S. Embassy to a room filled with Deaf adults from Beijing. An outcome of this delegation was the initiation of the ***"U.S. China Deaf School Project."*** To support this initiative, the first cohort of Chinese student interns who were Deaf came to the U.S. to teach Chinese sign language and culture at three schools for the Deaf. This pilot team was supported by SCSU Visiting Scholar Xiaorong Zhou, who is Deaf. She has been researching and studying the teaching and learning of American Sign Language to help develop the learning of Chinese Sign Language. Kathryn, Amy, and Xiaorong have also been collaboratively researching the development of Chinese sign language interpreter education and certification in China, seeking partners for advancing this area of critical need within China.

Foundational to their continued work is advancing knowledge and understanding of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. With an emphasis on SDG #17, revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, Kathryn and Amy have worked hard to develop a strong network of partners to support their work, including The Harkin Institute. Through this connection, Amy served as one of the first George H.W. Bush Fellows in 2018, during which time she was able to complete her sabbatical in China researching Deaf education. The other George H. W. Bush Fellow was SCSU Visiting Scholar Dr. Xuan Zheng, who is also Deaf and the first Deaf person in China to earn a Ph.D. from a Chinese higher education institution, Fudan University. The opportunity for Amy to have dedicated time to research and study Deaf education in China contributed to and complimented the dissertation Kathryn completed 20 years

Senator Tom Harkin (ret.) and Dr. Johnson and Xiaorong Zhou at the US State Department for a meeting with the Office of International Disability Rights representatives.


Chinese Deaf Intern Zhiyuan Huo at Delaware School for the Deaf teaching American deaf students Chinese sign language

with The Harkin Institute and the Zero Project has opened the door to partnerships with numerous other global organizations, inclusive of Maahs Travels, the International Disability Alliance, World Enabled, and Global Minnesota.

Kathryn and Amy have both dreamed of creating a new center at St. Cloud State University for numerous years that would institutionalize and strengthen their global disability advocacy, research, and development. This dream is becoming a reality with the launch of the SCSU Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy in the fall of 2021. This Center will be housed under the Office of the SCSU President and will serve as an innovation hub with a mission focused on five pillars of development:

(1) strengthening cross-cultural knowledge and understanding through global academies;

(2) developing strategic networks and partnerships for advancing the U.S. CRPD and SDGs;

(3) promoting and advancing the rights of people with disabilities through education and training;

(4) promoting scholarly research, training and development; and,

(5) promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility at all levels of public policy and diplomacy. Kathryn and Amy will serve as the Directors of the Center, which will provide dedicated time and energy for grant writing, publications, and program development with partners.

The first significant event for the Center will be the Fall 2021 ABILITY Event that culminates in

December in Dubai, UAE, at the Dubai Expo 2020. A six-part speaker series during fall semester of 2021 will highlight the U.N. CRPD and SDGs, with prominent presenters from around the globe sharing their expertise on these two critical topics. Kathryn and Amy are part of the World Expo Disability Coalition that is hosting an #EndExclusion and #PromoteInclusion Festival and Celebration Week at Dubai Expo from November 28-December 3, 2021. The week will feature events focused on health and wellness, technology, arts and culture, education, employment, accessibility, disability policy, and advocacy for and with people with disabilities. The week will culminate with the U.N. International Day for Persons with Disabilities on Dec. 3 event held at the Expo. This story of thankfulness highlights the synergy and passion that exists within the collaborative work of Kathryn and Amy. Both are personally and professionally committed to advancing disability rights globally. Kathryn's personal connection is through having a child with a disability and growing up with a brother with a disability. Amy's personal connection is through having a disability herself. The intersection of their personal connections to their professional passion keeps the two grounded in practice founded upon research and data-driven decision making as university teacher-scholars. With so many challenges existing in the world today, it helps to pause, reflect and remember what we are truly thankful for each day. By sharing this story, it is hoped that you reach out to someone you love working with and remind them how thankful you truly are for having them in your life. For more information or to contact Drs. Johnson and Knopf, please feel free to email them at:

kejohnson@stcloudstate.edu and ahknopf@stcloudstate.edu

*Registration for the ABILITY Event may be found at www.scsutraining.com/ability.

His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al-Hussein presents with Dr. Kathryn Johnson at the United Nations Zero Project Conference in Vienna

In spite of his disability, Gregory Royer turns sorrow into joy.

Gregory Royer remembers quite vividly the day his life was forever altered. He was just 16 years old on September 2, 1987 when a vehicular accident left him paralyzed. He also lost the agile use of his fingers. Only his right thumb moves freely now, but being confined to a wheelchair with limited use of his hands did not daunt his spirits then, and still hasn't now, at 50 years old. Gregory Royer lives on the Caribbean Island of Dominica with his wife, Deborah, who he wed 12 years ago.

Theirs is a story that will warm many a heart. It is also testament to the fact that true love is not daunted by disability. They first met on the social network, Tagged, then started speaking on the telephone. During those frequent conversations, Deborah was not fully aware of the extent of Gregory's disability. She knew he had limited mobility but somehow thought it was a temporary situation. Their increasingly frequent conversations led to a deep connection, which at that time, was still only by phone. Eventually, they met in person, and his disability and dependence on others for most of his needs became fully evident to Deborah, but she was not deterred. Love had already set in. She is still happily at his side today.

Deborah's effervescent personality and Gregory's pleasant optimism are an endearing combination. "Gregory is stronger than I am. He turns sorrow into joy," Deborah said. And Gregory lovingly shares that his wife "has a good, caring heart" to which she responds, "when you're dating or married to someone with a disability, you have to be patient, and have love in your heart."

Before Deborah leaves for work every day, she ensures that Gregory has everything he needs. And while she's gone, on most days, he would create. His hands do not work like others do, but over the years, athough different, they have become very efficient. He creates purses, bags, jewellery boxes, plaques and vases with cardboard being the main material used. Masterpieces are created from popsicle stick and paintings are also done. Now during Covid-19, Deborah lends a hand with the creativity by making masks.

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Gregory never allowed his disability to inhibit his creativity. In 1989, he picked up a marker and drew a landscape piece. Someone saw it hanging on his wall and immediately purchased it. From then, he moved on to drawing school projects for children in his village. After getting married, he moved from his village and the school projects ended, but the craft-making began. Some of his work can be seen on his Facebook Page, Royer's Arts.

His work is usually made per order and pre-Covid, some items were purchased by tourist vendors for sale as souvenir items to visitors. With Covid's continuous presence dampening travel around the globe, his sales have ground to a halt, but he remains optimistic. "You live the life you have presently," he said and not the life you had or expect to have." A confident, eloquent speaker, Gregory's positive outlook on life is contagious, and a conversation with him results in moments of reflection and introspection. You see life from a different perspective and unconsciously rearrange your own priorities.

One of Gregory's pressing needs is to acquire a small lot of land on his island so he can build a house which is accessible. Housing for people with disabiities on Dominica is in very limited supply and especially so for those with mobility issues. He is a director of the Disability Orgnaizaton on his island and they continue to advocate relentlessly for the needs of people with disabilies, but assistance remains slow to elusive. Nevertheless, Gregory's optimism is unfazed. Armed with his winning smile, craft-making continues, albeit on a reduced scale: a phone stand and the odd purse here and there for a customer, all the while, thinking of other things he can create to make life easier for himself and others. Daily, his thoughts are occupied with finding a way to make a difference for people with disabiities on his island and to inspire people, everywhere.

Gregory can be contacted on Facebook or by phone/What's App **1(767) 245-6036.** He is a good conversationalist and will love to hear from you.


Knottsville Home

From serving milkshakes to

“BECOMING RentABLE”

Lorraine Woodward is blazing new trails

Written by St. Cloud State University student: Rebecca Petersen

Who is Lorraine Woodward?

Lorraine Woodward was born with Muscular Dystrophy and at the age of six, she and her family moved from her birthplace in Fresno, California with her parents, brother, and pets to begin a new life in Conway, Arkansas. Key to her formative years, Woodward had an active childhood. She was Vice President of her high school student body, involved in multiple clubs and was even the school’s mascot, a Conway Wampus Cat, a six-legged cat, four legs to fight with all my might and two to shoot around like the speed of light.

Lorraine did not travel far from home to go to college, located in Conway she attended Hendrix College, studied pre-law, and got her degree in Sociology. Lorraine remembers wanting to make changes for people with disabilities early on. In 1980, she wheeled herself into the President’s Hall at Hendrix to personally greet each board member from the bottom of the stairs to draw attention to the institution’s lack of accessibility. She has not stopped her advocacy work since then.

While Lorraine had many smaller jobs growing up, she was excited to become a Congressional staffer after college for Congressman Ed Bethune (Arkansas). She then moved on to the marketing department at Cumberland Hospital where she later created the National Barrier Awareness Foundation. After her experience on

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the Hill, Senator Bob Dole and George W. Bush co-sponsored legislation enabling President Reagan to declare May 7, 1988 National Barrier Awareness Day. Lorraine's early career gave her the opportunity to work with a childhood idol, Charles Schultz "Sparky", creating their logo with Snoopy beside a wheelchair.

Lorraine's career has been predominantly in the communications field but also an entrepreneur. In 1994, she started a communications firm. Most often when Lorraine found a need, she would find a solution. She found a of stock photos of people with disabilities, solution, the creation of Realistic Reflections. She saw another need, with canes this time. Lorraine started Lorraine's Canes so she herself and others would have the opportunity to have a colorful, fun cane that could showcase their personality.

'A Place of No Worries'

After having a family of her own, two boys both of which also have Muscular Dystrophy, Lorraine realized a new drive for her advocacy work. Her family had a hard time finding accessible places to stay while on vacation, so in 2015 she built her own accessible property in Carolina Beach, North Carolina. She knew as she was building the property that she would make it completely accessible and rent out the second floor for families that faced the same issues her family did in the past. She has been amazed by the number of families that come to stay at her property from all over the United States. Each family comes with a different set of disabilities, but each family raves about finding a place to stay that is truly accessible for them and 'A Place of No Worries' as her home is named.

Her Newest Project

Woodward's success with her accessible short-term beach property brought her to her newest venture, Becoming RentABLE. In her current project, she has continued in this effort by creating a T.V. show, still in the pilot phase, called "Becoming RentABLE." After looking for properties like hers and finding only one out of every 10,000 properties, her frustration grew. She knew it shouldn't be this hard to find a place to stay when you have a disability. Becoming RentABLE is a platform to educate and advocate for accessible short-term rental properties in the U.S. Lorraine and her team have created educational pieces, a national survey, and most impressive a television show in the pilot stage. The show, also named Becoming RentABLE, will feature the renovation process with many educational moments for property owners as well as feature a family that gets to enjoy the final accessible property. In addition they are renovating a "Gold-Standard" property (The Little Yellow House) in Conway, Arkansas, working towards an accessible short-term rental certification program and offering a consulting service for individuals and businesses.

What can I do?

Spread the word about Becoming RentABLE! You can follow them on social media (listed below) and check out their website for a lot of great information. If you own or have recently visited an accessible short-term rental property in the U.S., let Lorraine know about it so they can promote it. And lastly, they are offering cash and product sponsorships. If you would like to get more information about sponsorship opportunities reach out to Lorraine.

For more information visit about Becoming RentABLE:

www.becomingRentABLE.com
Facebook.com/BecomingRentABLE
Instagram.com/BecomingRentABLE
Tiktok.com/@becomingrentable?
Pinterest.com/BecomingRentABLE
Twitter.com/BRentable
Linkedin.com/in/lorrainebwoodward

Becoming RentABLE is currently offering cash and product sponsorship to include:

1. **Exclusive Naming Rights Sponsor:**
   - Gold Standard, Short-Term, Accessible Rental Property, Conway, Arkansas
2. **Room Space Naming Sponsor:**
   - Gold-Standard, Short-Term, Accessible Rental Property, Conway, Arkansas
3. **Education Modules Training Video Sponsor**
4. **Product sponsors for:**
   - Appliances to include a refrigerator, oven, microwave, dishwasher drawers, washer, and a dryer.
   - Building Supplies to include lumber, sheetrock, cabinetry, 36" doors, hardware, ramp materials, accessible driveway, kitchen cabinets, installation, gutters, flooring, and paint.
   - Smart Home products
   - Durable medical equipment to include a Hoyer lift, shower seat, electronic toilet lift, grab rails, electric chair for living room, HiLow bed-electric bed, and reachers.

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Maahs Travels, **CONSULTING**

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

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

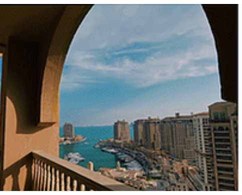
And, our global team of experts provide on-site and virtual audits and assessments to determine the level of compliance of accessibility for businesses, parks, cities, and municipalities, and travel destinations around the world.

Maahs Travels, **EXPERIENCES**

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

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

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



Maahs Travels, FRED TALKS

Fred has shared his personal and professional journeys with countless audiences around the world from D.C. to Dubai; Greece to Georgia; Israel to the Islands of the Caribbean; and brings his inspirational story to every engagement with his passionate and empowering presence.

He engages audiences both large and small, from corporate engagements where he speaks to hundreds of tourism professionals or smaller settings with senior leadership or government officials.

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

www.maahstravels.com

Peoople from the Kgotla community attending a campaign for the commemoration of the International Day for Persons With Disabilities

Challenges for People with Disabilities in Botswana

According to the Botswana Demographic Survey Report (2017) there are 90, 945 persons with disabilities in the country and the highest form of disability is Visual Impairment of 28, 000.

The main challenges people with disabilities face in Botswana:

- Unemployment and poverty
- Discrimination and stigma
- Limited access to education due to the one-size-fits-all education model. Where attempts have been made to improve access there are other limitations of curriculum which is not designed specifically for learners with disabilities
- Lack of assistive technology, both at home and in schools
- Exclusion due to communication barriers especially for the deaf community. It is difficult for them to make friends, share their challenges and problems. During the COVID-19 lockdowns many young people were so depressed that Botswana recorded more suicides among children as they now spend more time at home with people who did not understand their language.

- Limited access to services including: vocational training, medical rehabilitation and general accessibility, transportation etc.
- High child mortality rate
- Violence
- Generally, lack of effective human rights protection; the laws and policies are outdated


Parent of a Child With Down syndrome motivating the community on Disability Issues

Botswana has not ratified the regional treaties for the promotion, respect and protection of the rights of people with disabiities, for example: the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities,* and only on August 11, 2021did Botswana ratify the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities.*

Accessibility in the city

Access into the city is non-existent unless one has their own vehicle. Public transport does not cater for people with disabilities, there are no passenger assisted utility devices, no walkways etc. If you go into the city with your own vehicle, the few disability parking slots are often used by people without disabilities. There are no strict measures to reserve parking for people with disabilities and even at workplaces, designated parking for people with disabiities is used by everyone.

Inclusive employment

Very few companies employ people with disabilities. Qualified applicants are often immediately turned down when employers realize that the person has a disability but government is working hard to encourage mainstreaming of disability and reporting on the numbers employed. The issue of disability being costly to provide for is another excuse for not employing people with disabilities.

Attitudes of society towards people with disabilities

People with disabilities are subjected to negative attitudes/stigma/myths:

- Myth: having sex with a person with a disability can cleanse/cure somebody from HIV/AIDS because the belief is that they don’t or have never had sex
- Stigma: the majority of them are still hidden in the backyards as the belief is that it is a curse
- Name calling: usually derogatory
- Socio cultural norms: the belief that the mother or the child has been bewitched
- Socially: people with disabilities are not given the opportunity to participate in social events even when they are in their homes or within the family

Inclusive Schools

Government schools only started to be inclusive in the 1970s after the National Policy on Education of 1977 was enacted and revised in 1994. The most recent is the Inclusive Policy on Education (2011). The latter guides inclusion of learners with disabilities. The Ministry of Basic Education established the Department of Special Support Services to ensure that schools are inclusive. However, implementation of this policy has met challenges making inclusion non-effective. Some of the challenges include:

- Inappropriate curriculum that does not promote inclusion
- Inadequate and inappropriate resources, for example, furniture and equipment
- Teachers are also misplaced - there is no consideration of disability knowledge and awareness
- There is also poor match between technology and users

Member Organizations

Member organizations provide a variety of services to people with disabilities across all ages. These services include:

- Pre-school and day care programmes
- Primary School education; visual, hearing and moderate mental disabilities
- Vocational training and sheltered employment opportunities
- Rehabilitation programs: in the form of physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapy.

Special needs learners from a Junior Secondary School in Gaborone showcasing their school work during International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Orthopaedic Workshop

- Referrals for corrective and restorative surgery and orthopedic appliances for people with disabilities in residential, day care and outpatient units

"Advocacy and Action"

Botswana Council for the Disabled

On March 11, 2016, Botswana Council for the Disabled's office was gutted by fire and nothing was saved. It has been a struggle to rebuild as insurance did not cover the entire amount for the re-build.

Donations are kindly requested to help them rebuild and get back to providing quality service to People with Disabilities.

Contact them:

Email: admin@bcd.org.bw

Phone: +267 397 3599

[Facebook]

Front of burnt office

Back of office where the fire started

STORIES

Vietnam: Mi Aye Hla's Story

My name is Mi Aye Hla, I am 65 years old. I come from Myanmar where I witnessed fighting, heard shooting and saw people die in front of me. My sleep is still tormented by those visions and nightmares. Even during the day time, I feel scared and want to shout loudly to release my fear. More than that, when I think about my past experiences, I always cry because I feel afraid of the war.

I arrived to Umpiem temporary shelter in 2007 with my only son. I am an elderly widow so my son has to look after me and take care of our income. He is now 20 years but has started working since the age of 15. When I arrived to Umpiem, the Section Leader informed the camp-based hospital about my conditions and a Psychosocial Worker (PSW) visited me at my house. Later on, the PSW referred me to Humanity & Inclusion (HI).

After HI staff visited me, I was enrolled on their beneficiary names list and was introduced to a group of people with disabilities called *Self Help Group (SHG) by HI,* became a member and participated in their activities. Before becoming a member of the SHG, I felt lonely and demotivated about everything. Now, I feel better because I met with a group of people who share the same feelings and experiences like me.

HI supported me in many ways with my health issues and to improve my livelihood. SHG visits me very often and provides me peer counselling because when I am alone, I feel lonely and start thinking about my past experiences in Myanmar.

This has become even more difficult with the COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily before this outbreak, HI referred me to another organization to attend a training on gardening. During the camp lockdown, HI gave me vegetable seeds and some flowers (mainly rose) plants. Thanks to this support, I have become more skillful with the planting of vegetables and flowers. I keep myself busy with my garden so I do not have time to feel stressed or lonely. Gardening makes me feel happier and healthier than before.

Thus, I have to say thank you so much to HI and the SHG for making my life better.

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Disability around the world

15% of the world's population lives with a disability(1)

Globally, fewer than **20%** of people with disabilities are employed(2)

IN AFRICA, THERE IS AN AVERAGE **2** of one orthopaedic material production unit for million people(3)

More than **50%** of all children with disabilities do not complete their primary education(4)

IN SYRIA **5,1** million people live in places that are highly contaminated by explosive remnants of war

[1] WHO | [2] Time for Equality at Work: Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2003. | [3] World Health Organization World Health Report: Shaping the Future, 2003. | [4] UNICEF Report The State of the World's Children 2013. | [5] HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL Report "The Use of Explosive Weapons in Syria: A Time Bomb in the Making", 2015.


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International recognition

- HI was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize as a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.
- In 1996, the organisation received the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Nansen Refugee Award.
- The organisation has had special consultative status with the United Nations since 1999
- In 2008, the Nansen Award acknowledged the deminers working at the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre for South Lebanon. These included three teams of HI deminers.
- In 2011 the organisation received the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize for the its work with people with disabilities living in situations of poverty, exclusion, conflict and natural disasters.

International network

The Humanity & Inclusion network is composed of a federation, set up in 2009, and eight member national associations: the French association which founded the network in 1982, and the seven other associations which have joined the network: Belgium (1986), Switzerland (1996), Luxembourg (1997), Germany (1998), the United Kingdom (1999), Canada (2003) and the United States of America (2006). The Federation is responsible for implementing the federal network's social missions. The national associations contribute to federal governance and implement communications, campaigning, fundraising and advocacy work with their target audiences.

HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL
HUMANITY & INCLUSION
138, avenue des Frères Lumière
CS 88379
69371 Lyon Cedex 08 - FRANCE

www.hi.org

YAI **Seeing beyond disability.**

www.yai.org

Road to Independence: Latasha Hunter's Story

Latasha Hunter's family and friends threw her a virtual housewarming party via Zoom late last year. In the days that followed, gifts started arriving to her new address: bedding, towels, a toaster, vacuum cleaner, and can opener, among other household items. The celebration marked a milestone in the Bronx resident's life: living independently in her very first apartment – a dream she worked hard to achieve.

YAI recognizes that the road to independence and personal fulfillment looks different from person to person. Guided by a person-centered approach, the organization aims to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) identify and achieve personal life goals.

"If the person doesn't know what they want to do, a big part of our job is helping them discover it," said Dawn Albit, Bronx Regional Deputy Director. "When you have never been given the opportunity or asked what it is that you want, often times people don't have an answer, and that's where we come in – we help them find it."

Latasha Hunter is one of the people who YAI supported in her journey to independence. Hunter, 41, received YAI services for 12 years before moving out to her own apartment in

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October of 2020. Her story is a rarity in the I/DD community. According to Disability Digest Data, 16% of people with I/DD in the U.S. live in the community by themselves or with a roommate. Very few, however, transition from a supported residence to their own home with as much aplomb as Hunter, who moved from successive YAI programs, acquiring living skills with every move.

Hunter started her journey in 2008 at the 206th Street Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) in the Bronx, where there is 24-hour staff for residents who need more support. In 2012 she moved to Rochambeau, one of YAI's supportive apartments. Residents who live in supportive housing need less assistance than those living in IRAs. Hunter gradually learned the skills she needed to thrive there, with the help of dedicated staff and access to a diverse pool of YAI resources, proving she was capable enough to live on her own.

Because Hunter is also employed at the Bronx Zoo, where she has worked as a ticket taker and cashier for the past 10 years, her own home becomes a true sanctuary after work.

"Latasha is a standout and living her life on her terms and in the way she wants," said Albit.

During her time at YAI, Hunter mastered her cooking and cleaning skills and learned how to use the computer. Her studio apartment in the Bronx has the added bonus of a location directly across the street from her boyfriend's place.

The staff at YAI couldn't be prouder.

"I am so happy of the work we have done and what we have been able to achieve as team in Rochambeau with Latasha," said Lorraine Chance, Senior Supervisor of the Bronx region.

"It makes us feel great to see her accomplish all that she has," said Chance. "She exemplifies what YAI stands for and that includes being able to make her own decisions." Hunter's family is another component to her success.

"It's been amazing to see her grow and I know I couldn't hold her back because I won't be here forever," said Hunter's mother, Martha. "I knew she needed to be as independent as possible and her older sister and I just made sure we encouraged and supported her along the way."

The individualized plans set in place for each person YAI supports is what facilitates the decision-making process. The person can grow because the services cater to their specific needs rather than taking a generalized approach to all cases.

"People get frustrated with the service or bored with it when it's something they don't need or already have the skills for," said Albit.

Success is measured in a variety of ways for the 20,000 people who receive YAI services. While complete independence is one outcome, for others, achieving smaller goals set forth while in programs can be extremely gratifying.

"Whether it's learning to brush your teeth independently or even just choosing what to wear, success looks different for everyone, but it's always so exciting to witness someone reaching their goal," said Albit.

Latasha Hunter hopes to keep up with her healthy lifestyle and continue to improve on her skills.

"Moving to my apartment taught me how to be more responsible. It also made me feel good and that I accomplished my goal to be independent," said Hunter.

www.yai.org

DMC FINDER

Jo Joshi: Connecting DMCs and People with Disabilities

Written by: St. Cloud State University student Taylor Mulcahy, B.A. in Psychology

Jo Joshi grew up in Nottingham, United Kingdom, and attended De Montfort University in Leicester. Her parents are her biggest inspiration who taught her that: *"life is supposed to be a journey and not a final destination, keep learning, keep enjoying and always keep going."* She studied Computer Science and completed her MSC in E-Commerce Technology at the University of Derby.

While she enjoyed her time at University and never planned to be involved in the tourism industry, when she embarked on that journey, she loved it. Joshi worked in various hotels in the UK during the past 15 years in hospitality and corporate event roles. Pre-pandemic, she worked for a company where she represented global DMCs (Destination Management Companies) in the U.K.

A DMC is a professional company providing services in the travel industry. They possess specialized knowledge of local culture, activities, tours, resources, transportation and program planning logistics. DMCs are accredited by the Association of Destination Management Executives International (ADMEI), and held to high ethical standards by the Accredited Destination Management Company® (ADMC). These standards include accommodating the needs and goals of their clients and using their best efforts to meet those needs. Moreover, ADMCs administer surveys at the conclusion of programming in order to ensure quality control.

Joshi developed DMCFinder during the pandemic. It is a platform that easily connects event planners to global DMCs. They use it as a central database for key items such as venues and accommodations; to plan corporate conferences, festivals, sporting events, and more. DMCFinder boasts a very user-friendly interface with its virtual options. Additionally, the benefits of using DMCFinder is that it saves time and support is available every step of the way.

DMCFinder can be used to aid individuals with disabilities as they plan travel and search for accommodations. Event planners may need to find language interpreters, accessible hotels and those with modifications for Deaf or Hard of Hearing clients, amenities for travellers with developmental disabilities, adapted transportation, etc., and DMCFinder's database will have that information which is easily accessible. While DMCFinder was not initially created for the disabled population, it is a site they will find extremely useful.

Joshi feels that travel is both an education and opportunity to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of ability, and as the pandemic adjusts the travel industry, it is a great time to push for inclusion and change. Businesses should consider everyone's accessibility needs in order to make travel enjoyable and easier for all. She explains that, *"After the pandemic, I think there will be a new way of thinking about how to move forward. Everyone has a right to be happy and to be included in all the opportunities life has to offer."*

There is a widespread misconception that making changes to infrastructure and other things within the tourism industry, so it will be more accessible, would have a high cost, but the more options there are available for travellers, regardless of their ability, the more profits the industry will enjoy because everyone can now be accommodated.

The biggest misperception is that it is difficult for people with disabilities to travel due to insufficient accessible resources, but this can be changed with consistent education and awareness. The United Kingdom, the United States, Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, United Arab Emirates, Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore are some of the most accessible countries to travel to, in Joshi's experience. She explains that creating more awareness about what the disability community wants from the travel sector, and how they can help to make their journey easier – in both the corporate and leisure sectors, could really inspire change. With this, Joshi concludes with her own advice: *"I always feel you have to be grateful for life and you have to live it to the fullest everyday, and people with disabiities are no exception!"*

DMCFinder can be used by people with disabilities as they plan their travel

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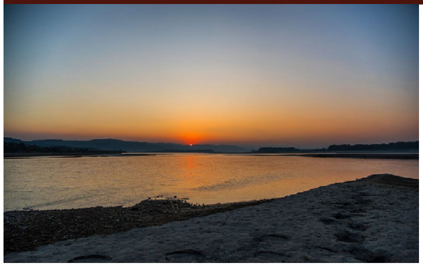
Your itinerary will be carefully desig

www.g

Nepal



Bhutan

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The pandemic highlights the importance of walkable and wheelable neighbourhoods

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of neighbourhoods and how they fare in terms of walkability and wheelability. Neighbourhood walkability and wheelability are defined as the "measure of how well a neighbourhood fosters active forms of transportation." Very walkable and wheelable neighbourhoods have built environments, or human-made surroundings, that support physical and social activity.

Built environment design features that characterize walkable and wheelable neighbourhoods can include sidewalks, curb cuts and pedestrian traffic signals. When appropriately constructed, these features can support inclusion and in many cases, neighbourhoods that are designed with this in mind are good for everyone.

Unfortunately, most neighbourhood built environments are not designed for everyone. They can in fact create exclusionary environments for people with disabilities and older adults.

The pandemic brings into focus neighbourhood walkability and wheelability by highlighting persistent inaccessibility issues. It also creates the opportunity to advocate for change and bring about rapid and innovative solutions.

Barriers and facilitators to mobility

As neighbourhood walkability and wheelability are impacted by the built environment, poorly maintained and constructed neighbourhoods can create barriers that prevent community access and eliminate opportunities to participate in local activities.

These barriers — like the condition of streets, sidewalks and crosswalks — can impact anyone but frequently affect those living with disabilities. Research finds that when streets are in even slight disrepair, people with severe mobility impairments are four times more likely to report difficulty walking compared to those living in "good" neighbourhoods (neighbourhoods without cracks in sidewalks and potholes). Even slightly increasing the quality of streets could help people both access and remain involved in their communities.

Simple measures, such as involving people with disabilities in research and planning, are found to create targeted solutions to barriers and enhance the accessibility of neighbourhoods.

In the past, there were limited opportunities for people with disabilities to have their opinions heard. With the recent rise of participatory research methods, however, they are increasingly working as "co-researchers." This helps create opportunities for collaboration with municipal officials and community service providers.

The shift towards participatory research moves us away from only researchers collecting data. Innovative data collection methods, such as user-led environmental audit tools, champion this shift. They help capture the users' perspective and provide a more holistic understanding of environmental features affecting walkability and wheelability.

Overlooked accessibility and COVID-19

Neighbourhood built environments create barriers to inclusion that have been intensified by the pandemic.

For example, added challenges that have arisen in response to the pandemic can include communication difficulties for those who are deaf and hard of hearing caused by plexiglass shields and masks, inaccessibility of hand hygiene products for mobility device users because they're placed too high and increased navigational barriers like those from pop-up patios.

As the pandemic draws on, it has become glaringly clear that people living with disabilities have been inordinately impacted. By and large, these strategies were intended to help us but they bring into focus our habitual pattern of overlooking accessibility and not consulting those with lived experiences.

A historical opportunity to advocate for change

Canada is at a historical crossroads to becoming barrier-free. The recent ushering in of accessibility acts, at both the federal and provincial levels, is creating the necessary infrastructure to enforce the creation of accessible built environments and the equitable inclusion of people with disabilities.

Post-pandemic recovery presents an opportunity for creating accessible environments as barriers have been exposed and the need to involve those with experience in creating solutions has been reinforced.

The alignment of research, public and political will and the pandemic-era realization that radical and rapid social change is possible creates the perfect conditions to create a Canada that provides access for all.

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Alison F. Chung is a research assistant at Simon Fraser University and co-authored this article. She is working with the authors on a project titled: Towards Barrier-Free Communities: A Partnership for Improving Mobility, Access and Participation (MAP) Among People with Disabilities.

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Early intervention crucial for autism

BY PSYCHLOPAEDIA
AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Identifying children with autism early - before age two - is possible and greatly improves their opportunities for development.

Most Australian children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are missing out on two years of vital early intervention due to a delay in identification and diagnosis.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, director of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) at La Trobe University says the centre's study of 15,000 children with ASD found the average age of diagnosis in children under seven is taking place at just over four years of age.

"We know we can reliably identify and diagnose autism as early as two years of age, so that means that children aren't getting access to much-needed early intervention," she says.

"They are accessing it two years later than they should be on average."

Professor Dissanayake, a member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) with more than 30 years' experience in autism research, says early intervention can make a huge difference to children with autism and their families.

"Intervention at any age helps but what you can do in identifying earlier, when the signs are more subtle because

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all of the manifestations haven't quite taken hold, is that you can prevent some of those manifestations from coming on board," she says.

"Early intervention has a focus on getting the child ready to learn. The earlier you intervene, the more likely that you are going to prevent a learning disability."

It's estimated more than one in 100 Australians are on the autism spectrum and living with the developmental condition.

How autism affects development

ASD impairs social communication and manifests with restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests, and also often includes sensory sensitivities.

Researchers are making headway into understanding ASD, which affects every person differently, and for which there is no single known cause or cure.

OTARC is using its expertise in the early behavioural markers of ASD in babies and young children with autism to promote earlier identification and diagnosis, and is working with the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) to pair those with early biomarkers (signs indicating possible autism) in a bid to achieve earlier and more accurate diagnoses.

Looking at what children are not doing

Professor Dissanayake says the onset of autism is variable in the first two years of life, with some babies showing signs right from birth that they're not engaging with people in the usual way.

Other babies seem to develop typically and then plateau in their development while others develop typically and then lose some skills.

"We need to educate people about what typical development looks like in those first two years and then what autistic development looks like," Professor Dissanayake says.

"In autism, it's the absence of behaviours that you are looking for.

"It's very easy to look for abnormal behaviours, the presence of things really marks itself but the absence of things is hard to look for and they are quite subtle in those early years."

Understanding, not labels

Professor Dissanayake says it's important for parents to understand that an early diagnosis is not about labelling the child.

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"It's about labelling their presenting behaviours so we can work to minimise the effects of these behaviours on the developing child," she says.

"We want to maximise children's outcomes, that's why we push for an early diagnosis.

"You could be changing that child's life, and clinicians saying to the parents – let's see how he is in six months, is absolutely careless because six months in the life of a developing infant's brain is a long time.

"The brain is shaped by the environment, by the input that child receives. Six months is a very long time if that brain isn't receiving the necessary social input it needs to grow and develop and to be able to learn."

The early signs of autism spectrum disorder:

What to look out for. Typically developing babies aged 12 to 24 months start pointing things out, gesturing and vocalising while looking at people as they engage with others, and also imitate other people. "A young baby with autism doesn't imitate and vocalise in the same way, doesn't share their looks and smiles with other people as often as babies without autism," Professor Dissanayake says. "It's not that they're not smiling but when they are smiling they don't look up to share that smile, to share their world, which is what a typically developing baby does."

Trust your instincts. Parents know their child best and often know when to be concerned about their child's development. Well-meaning family, friends and even health professionals often reassure worried parents which can delay an early diagnosis.

Take action. Professor Dissanayake advises any parents concerned about their child's development to visit their maternal and child health nurse, their GP or their paediatrician. "If they're still not reassured then don't give up – be proactive," she says. "We get second opinions on our cars, why aren't we getting second and third opinions on things that are much more important to us?"

Psychologists can help. Psychologists work as part of a team of health professionals to provide an autism diagnosis and to provide ongoing therapy for the child and their family. The APS Find a Psychologist Service can assist. The online, telephone and email referral service puts you in touch with more than 2,400 psychologists across Australia.

Find out more. Visit autism spectrum disorder websites, such as Amaze, the Raising Children Network and Autism Speaks.

PSYCHLOPAEDIA®
Psychology to live by

We rely on many sources of sensory information in our daily routines. ACOUSTIC INFORMATION has a major contribution to our ability to orient ourselves in our environment, address events, understand other people's behavior, be on the lookout for danger and more.

Once at the airport or train station, we need to quickly CALIBRATE OUR SENSES and especially our sense of hearing. All of us experienced the anxiety of a missed message or lack of understanding, leaving us pondering: Is that an important message? Does it affect my travel plans? What should I do now?

Most if not all transportation authorities are required to manage a public-address system. These messages are essential on the one hand, but their actual value is not prominent due to the acoustic environment and their performance model.

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The **hearoes** solution ENVELOPES every public-address message played with a comprehensive set of attributes that enables the transformation of such limited single sensory event into written text, image, haptic FEEDBACK, augmented replay, audit, log and more.

Our solution leverages a proprietary tagging algorithm, using statistical linkage between an individual and a fragmented voice messages to designated recipients in accordance with principles of data mining, geographical analysis, and optionally a preliminary user subscription.

Acoustic Protocol Inc. is a Maryland US based company which develops acoustic infrastructure that enables the mapping and integration of acoustic signatures. The company has formulated several technological models (patent pending) that provide a solid foundation for groundbreaking solutions in the field.

5268 G Nicholson Ln. Suite 121, Kensington, MD 20895 | T: 202-600-8104
acousticprotocol.com | inphase@acousticprotocol.com

ACOUSTIC PROTOCOL

Making messages loud and clear

Acoustic information plays a major role in our ability to orient ourselves, address events, understand other people's behavior and react to danger. Acoustic Protocol was founded with the idea of bringing sound and technology together.

Allowing computers to "hear" has many implications, however *Nir Aran* and *Yanir Gvirtzman*, the founders of Acoustic Protocol, decided to test-case their technology in applications that will benefit mostly the growing population of the hard of hearing and deaf.

They set their initial focus on public announcements. The idea was simple – when Acoustic Protocol AI based system identifies a public message, it sends it as a personalized message to smartphones. The system transforms the message from a single sensory (hearing) event to a multi-sensory event that can be replayed, read, translated, audited and archived. The system was appropriately named - ***hearoes.***

From the start, it became clear that transportation is one of the main sectors to drastically benefit from this technology. Most if not all transportation authorities are required by law to manage a public-address system. These messages are essential, but their actual value is not prominent due to the acoustic environment and their performance model. The law also requires a solution for hard of hearing and deaf travelers, however most often these solutions would require standing next to a specific screen, which most of the time is not detailed, clear or current as public announcements.

Travel is a mission-focused task with a very specific goal – to get you to your destination as quickly and efficiently as possible. Once at the airport or train station, we need to quickly calibrate our senses and especially our sense of hearing. Even though every piece of information related to our travel is important, we often find ourselves in a new environment that presents many acoustic challenges. Background noises, distance from broadcasting speakers or unfamiliar language and accents contribute to an anxiety all of us have experienced - the possibility of missing an important message. Even when we are able to intercept a public announcement it often leaves us pondering: *Is that an important message? Does it affect my travel plans? What should I do now?*

The hearoes solution envelopes every public-address message played with a comprehensive set of attributes that enables the transformation of the message to text, image, haptic feedback, augmented replay, audit, log and more. The user will get the message.

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Hearoes is simple and free to use. After downloading it to their smartphone the user goes through a simple registration in which they can define keywords such as "Downtown A train", choose from a list of locations they want to subscribe to, such as "Grand Central Terminal" – and they are all set. No user information is collected or stored.

The solution leverages a proprietary tagging algorithm using statistical linkage between an individual and fragmented voice messages to designated recipients in accordance with principles of data mining, geographical analysis, and optionally a preliminary user subscription.

In 2020, Acoustic Protocol was selected as a finalist by the New York Transit Tech Lab accelerator program for public transportation solutions. The *hearoes* solution was selected for a year-long pilot installation at the Grand Central Terminal in New York City. Metro-North Railroad installed the Acoustic Protocol *hearoes* solution, which processes over 300 daily public announcements.

Acoustic Protocol Inc. is a Maryland (US) based company which develops acoustic infrastructure that enables the mapping and integration of acoustic signatures. The company has formulated several technological models (patent pending) that provide a solid foundation for groundbreaking solutions in the field.

For further information:
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RESOURCES

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

ACCESSIBILITY CONSULTANTS

Maahs Travels, USA

Massiraa, Dubai

Marco Pasqua, Canada

BUSINESSES OWNED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Colletey's Cookies, USA

CERTIFICATION COURSES

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification, Canada

DISABILITY-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Access Israel, Israel

Easter Seals, Canada

Easterseals, USA

FONHARE, Haiti

Friends of Access Israel, USA

The American Association of People with Disabilities, USA

The Arc, USA

EMPLOYMENT

Bender Consulting, USA

HOSPITALITY TRAINING

The Slatin Group, USA

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYERS

Gabi & Jules, Canada

Lil E Coffee Cafe, Canada

LEARNING CENTRES

Achievement Learning Centre, Dominica

MEDIA

Accessible Media Inc., Canada

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Paratrek, Israel

PRODUCTS & ACCESSORIES

Izzy Wheels, Ireland

TRAVEL

360Access, USA

AccessNow, Canada

Accessible Indonesia, Indonesia

Japan Accessible Tourism Center, Japan

European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), Belgium

Four Season Travel & Tours, Nepal

Travel-for-All, Canada

WEB ACCESSIBILITY

EqualWeb, Israel

CLOTHING

Intimately, USA

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Embrace Differences

Let's build a more inclusive society

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