mélange

FALL 2022

Accessibility for All

Deaf Research Scholar

Xiaorong Zhou

She's bright.
Talented.
Funny.
Shy.
Oh, and she just happens to be Deaf.

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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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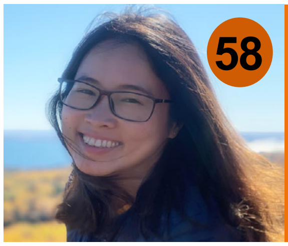

Cover Story

Xiaorong Zhou.
Research Scholar at St. Cloud State University.

Oh, and she just happens to be Deaf

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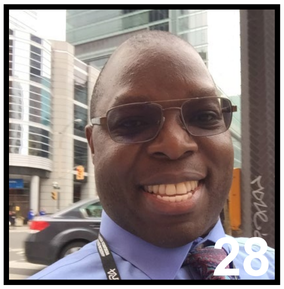
USA.

Jani Nayar
BRAZIL.



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Editor’s Note

Fred J. Maahs, Jr.

Greetings!

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

It’s fall here in the United States and we are very excited about this issue of Melange Accessibility for All. There are so many great articles about people, organizations, and technology from the United States, Africa, Brazil, Israel, India, the Netherlands, and more! If there’s one thing that is constant in the disability community it’s that there is always something or someone new and interesting to read about and learn. Speaking for myself, I try to learn something new each day and whenever I have the incredible opportunity to interview one of our subjects for Melange or to edit all of these wonderful articles, I always discover something that captures my attention and my imagination. I hope it’s the same for you, our readers! International travelers will no longer need to show proof of a negative coronavirus test before boarding flights to the United States. Travelers who are not U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, lawful permanent residents or traveling to the United States on an immigrant visa must still show proof of vaccination before boarding their flight. Requirements for masks have mostly been eliminated. Hopefully, the world is on its way to a safer and Covid-free future.

This year, after a long hiatus on in-person meetings, the number of conferences and summits for topics related to accessibility, disability, equity, inclusion, and innovative technology is back on track. People and organizations are meeting once again and many more gatherings are planned for the rest of the year. From the Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit to the Global Accessibility and Inclusion Leaders Summit in Tel Aviv, to the Harkin Summit in Belfast, and the TravelAbility Conference in Orlando and the Zero Project in Vienna – people are meeting, talking, and making important decisions that will help shape the future of people with disabilities and their ability to live, work, learn, recreate, and travel. It’s important to remember that everyone’s voice matters. Your voice matters. When you have the opportunity to attend or participate in these meetings and discussions, you can decide what’s important to you and how it may impact your life. I encourage you to get involved. Sign up for a conference or attend virtually.

And, don’t forget our newest magazine, Melange Accessible Journeys, which was introduced in March! In this latest Melange digital magazine, we share stories from all around the world about accessible travel destinations written and experienced by people with disabilities. In each issue of Melange Accessible Journeys, you will find personal, firsthand accounts of what each traveler experienced during their journey. It will be a resource for anyone of any ability who wants to take an accessible journey! We hope you enjoy it! We will continue to make it all real, all relevant, and we certainly appreciate your thoughts. Let us know if you have a product you want us to try and write about or if you want to invite us to visit your city, country, resort, or place of interest so that we can write about it and share it with our audience. You can reach me at fmaahs@readmelange.com. Thank you for reading!

Warm regards,

Fred

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. fmaahs@readmelange.com

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My hope for Ukranians with autism

By Chrystina Dolyniuk
Associate Professor, Rider University

To think that what we are witnessing now in Ukraine is far removed from the world of autism would be a huge mistake. I was fortunate to travel to Ukraine twice to conduct research, train specialists and give lectures about autism. I am fluent in Ukrainian and worked directly with families and professionals who provide services to children with autism. On both occasions, in 2011 and 2014, I was there at pivotal moments in history and heard parents and professionals tell me firsthand that they cannot go back to how things used to be.

During Ukraine's Soviet past, children with all types of disabilities, including those with autism, were either institutionalized or abandoned in orphanages. After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, it was still common for children on

the spectrum to be institutionalized or remain at home with their families. Until 2011, few, if any, attended school. This was because there were few, if any, trained professionals confident in their ability to provide services to these children. There were also few, if any, national policies that encouraged educational inclusion and community integration. At that time, parents were absolutely desperate for information and support.

Over the past decade, Ukraine has made tremendous strides in its attempts to raise awareness and improve services and support for children on the autism spectrum. Those strides resulted directly from historical shifts that allowed for advocacy, progress and change. In 2013, the world first witnessed the Euromaidan movement, Ukraine's peaceful demonstration of the nation's desire to join the European Union and to have a chance for broader opportunities, more education and greater freedoms.

Unfortunately, the Euromaidan was brutally crushed at the start of 2014 and resulted in a bloody massacre now known as the Revolution of Dignity. Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasions of the Donbas regions followed. Since that time, Ukraine has been continuously engaged in an ongoing battle with Russia, as its people continue to strive for all the democratic values we cherish in the West.

When I first arrived in Ukraine in 2011, a center in Lviv hosted one of my lectures for professionals on the diagnosis of autism. Desperate parents from neighboring regions pooled resources and hired a bus to travel to Lviv so that they could ask questions about their own children in their native language. Over the past week, that same lecture hall that was filled to capacity then is yet again filled to capacity. But this time it is a triage shelter for refugee families. Unfortunately, the children with autism who normally attend sessions at the center — which had become a leader in providing support, raising awareness and providing early intervention using evidence-based practices — are now being asked to stay home to accommodate children with a variety of physical and intellectual disabilities.

As I think about that image, my heart is broken, and I am incredibly angry. Since 2014, new government policies implemented across Ukraine encouraged inclusion and education of children with disabilities. Autism awareness events had become common in major cities and were widely promoted on Ukrainian social media. Training for professionals had increased significantly. But all of this was the result of Ukraine's closer tie with the West in recent years, and Ukraine's clear and active commitment to reforms in health care, education and social policy. It was the direct result of a movement away from old Soviet standards.

Come 2022. Progress thwarted.

Yes, this is a war, but it is not Ukraine's war. It is Russia's war against Ukraine.

And it goes far beyond territory or borders. This is war against Ukraine's democratic ideals, against the desire for progress, against the opportunity for change. And it is a crime against Ukraine's children. This is evident in the fact that Russian forces are targeting orphanages, schools and children's hospitals.

This barbaric act is a crime against children who have every right to go to school and the parents who fought so hard to get them there. It is a crime against the teachers and psychologists who have strengthened connections with the West so that they might learn new methodologies and evidence-based practices. And it is a moral injustice that some professionals are now being forced to make the most difficult choices — grappling with the decision of whether they will support children with autism or help traumatized soldiers and civilians on the front lines.

In the United States, we greatly value the will of the individual and self-determination. We are inspired by stories that demonstrate courage in the face of hardship, and we celebrate those who persevere. Although some of us may be equally inspired and disheartened by what we see in Ukraine, I fear for what will happen to those who have historically been overlooked.

Already there is concern that humanitarian assistance is not reaching the most vulnerable. In response, the European Council of Autistic People and Autism Europe put out a joint statement calling for humanitarian protection of Ukrainians with autism. Already there are concerns about how children with autism might be adjusting in these unstructured and terrifying circumstances. There is also worry about who will care for the vulnerable if their caregivers are killed. And what about children and adults with autism who are able to escape the war but are misplaced and misunderstood by those who receive them?

> **As I write this reflection and think about autism in Ukraine, I ponder on what I have seen and what is yet to come. It is inspiring that Ukrainians will not give up this fight for freedom and democracy. At the same time, it remains unclear what will happen to people with autism, regardless of the outcome of the war. I am very aware that the most vulnerable can often be lost in the crossfire.**

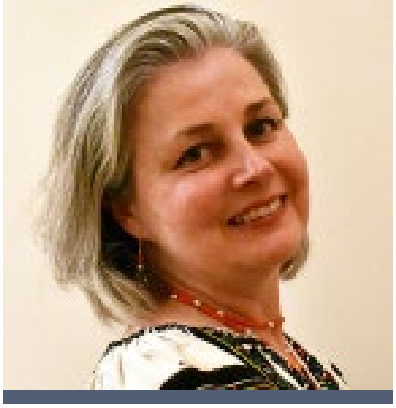
There are no easy solutions to any of these concerns. Only emotions.

In the end, I know that Ukraine is a more inclusive nation than Russia, and I pray Ukraine wins. I pray that Ukraine maintains sovereignty and territorial integrity. But I also think about everything Ukraine has already lost. Children with autism are being misplaced and forced to live in frightening and unstructured circumstances. They are not able to attend regular therapy sessions with the teachers and therapists who understand them best. Their parents are challenged with new circumstances and survival. In many cases, this means abandoning everything that is familiar to flee to safety.

Ultimately, I am left with the realization that although progress results from the circumstances that allow for societal change, it is also a mindset. With great hope, I think that maybe, just maybe, progress has not been thwarted. I pray that instead, progress has been only temporarily halted as a determined people fight for truth and justice. And that belief is further strengthened when I hear of heroes such as my friend Natalya, who works at another center in Lviv. She tells me that despite the constant sound of air sirens, she will be returning to the center this week to work with autistic children. Though I fear for my friend, I am also inspired by her courage and determination.

Professionals and parents in Ukraine understand that separating autistic children from their peers or putting them in custodial care is simply not an option anymore. Maintaining consistency and providing normalcy, even in dire circumstances, is the only hope for making progress.

When Ukraine wins this war, we must unequivocally ensure that the country's most vulnerable people are accepted, supported and celebrated. As the Ukrainian nation will inevitably need to rebuild, I pray that the resources that are most needed for those with disabilities are not the last available, and that people with autism are encouraged to find their voices in a better Ukraine, just like they have been in a free and democratic U.S. Quite frankly, that is the only way any of this senselessness will make any sense.



Chrystina Dolyniuk is associate professor of psychology at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. She holds a Ph.D. in educational and developmental psychology and was awarded two Fulbright Specialist grants to travel and work in Ukraine in 2011 and 2014. Her research focuses on the community integration of people with autism.

This article was originally published on Spectrum, the leading site for autism research news.

The new neuroscience of stuttering

By Amber Dance

The cause of stuttering lies in the brain. Pinpointing the problem is leading researchers to better treatments.

CREDIT: BRIAN STAUFFER / THEISPOT

After centuries of misunderstanding, research has finally tied the speech disorder to certain genes and brain alterations — and new treatments may be on the horizon

Gerald Maguire has stuttered since childhood, but you might not guess it from talking to him. For the past 25 years, Maguire — a psychiatrist at the University of California, Riverside — has been treating his disorder with antipsychotic medications not officially approved for the condition. Only with careful attention might you discern his occasional stumble on multisyllabic words like "statistically" and "pharmaceutical."

Maguire has plenty of company: More than 70 million people worldwide, including about 3 million Americans, stutter — that is, they have difficulty with the starting and timing of speech, resulting in halting and repetition. That number includes approximately 5 percent of children, many of whom outgrow the condition, and 1 percent of adults. Their numbers include President Joe Biden, deep-voiced actor James Earl Jones and actress Emily Blunt. Though those people and many others, including Maguire, have achieved career success, stuttering can contribute to social anxiety and draw ridicule or discrimination by others.

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Maguire has been treating people who stutter, and researching potential treatments, for decades. He receives daily emails from people who want to try medications, join his trials, or even donate their brains to his university when they die. He's now embarking on a clinical trial of a new medication, called ecopipam, that streamlined speech and improved quality of life in a small pilot study in 2019.


Many famous people have a stutter or did so as a child, including (left to right) President Joe Biden, actor James Earl Jones and actor Emily Blunt.

Others, meanwhile, are delving into the root causes of stuttering, which also may point to novel treatments. In past decades, therapists mistakenly attributed stuttering to defects of the tongue and voice box, to anxiety, trauma or even poor parenting — and some still do. Yet others have long suspected that neurological problems might underlie stuttering, says J. Scott Yaruss, a speech-language pathologist at Michigan State University in East Lansing. The first data to back up that hunch came in 1991, Yaruss says, when researchers reported altered blood flow in the brains of people who stuttered. Over the past two decades, continuing research has made it more apparent that stuttering is all in the brain.

"We are in the middle of an absolute explosion of knowledge being developed about stuttering," Yaruss says.

There's still a lot to figure out, though. Neuroscientists have observed subtle differences in the brains of people who stutter, but they can't be certain if those differences are the cause or a result of the stutter. Geneticists are identifying variations in certain genes that predispose a person to stutter, but the genes themselves are puzzling: Only recently have their links to brain anatomy become apparent.

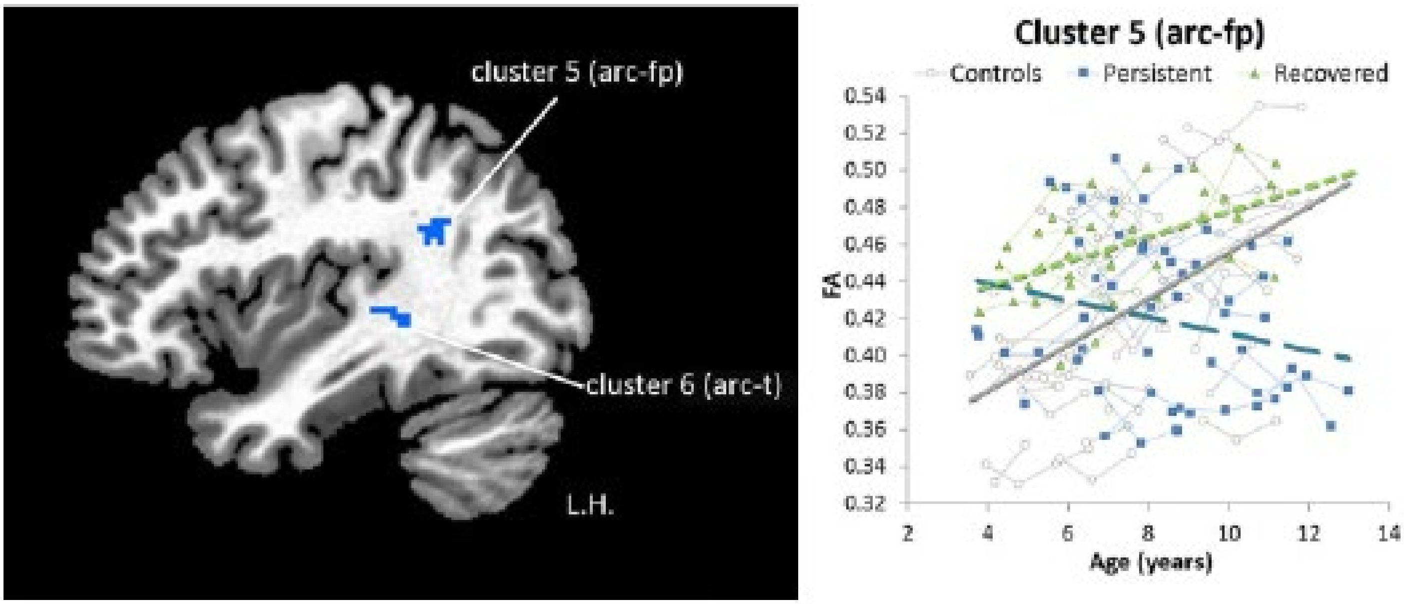
Maguire, meanwhile, is pursuing treatments based on dopamine, a chemical messenger in the brain that helps to regulate emotions and movement (precise muscle movements, of course, are needed for intelligible speech). Scientists are just beginning to braid these disparate threads together, even as they forge ahead with early testing for treatments based on their discoveries.

Slowed circuitry

Looking at a standard brain scan of someone who stutters, a radiologist won't notice anything amiss. It's only when experts look closely, with specialized technology that shows the brain's in-depth structure and activity during speech, that subtle differences between groups who do and don't stutter become apparent.

The problem isn't confined to one part of the brain. Rather, it's all about connections between different parts, says speech-language pathologist and neuroscientist Soo-Eun Chang of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. For example, in the brain's left hemisphere, people who stutter often appear to have slightly weaker connections between the areas responsible for hearing and for the movements that generate speech. Chang has also observed structural differences in the corpus callosum, the big bundle of nerve fibers that links the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

These findings hint that stuttering might result from slight delays in communication between parts of the brain. Speech, Chang suggests, would be particularly susceptible to such delays because it must be coordinated at lightning speed.



On left, a brain scan shows the location of a brain region that is implicated in stuttering: the arcuate fasciculus in the frontoparietal lobe (arc-fp). A second region involved in stuttering, the arcuate fasciculus in the temporal lobe (arc-t), is also shown. The graph on the right shows changes in a measure of nerve-fiber connectedness called fractional anisotropy (FA) in the arc-fp as children age. Connectedness of the arc-fp increases for non-stuttering children (gray line) and recovered stutterers (green line) but does not improve for persistent stutterers (blue dashed line).

CREDIT: H.M CHOW & S.E. CHANG / HUMAN BRAIN MAPPING 2017

Chang has been trying to understand why about 80 percent of kids who stutter grow up to have normal speech patterns, while the other 20 percent continue to stutter into adulthood. Stuttering typically begins when children first start stringing words together into simple sentences, around age 2. Chang studies children for up to four years, starting as early as possible, looking for changing patterns in brain scans.

It's no easy feat to convince such young children to hold still in a giant, thumping, brain-imaging machine. The team has embellished the scanner with decorations that hide all the scary parts. ("It looks like an ocean adventure," Chang says.) In kids who lose their stutter, Chang's team has observed that the connections between areas involved in hearing and ones involved in speech movements get stronger over time. But that doesn't happen in children who continue to stutter.

In another study, Chang's group looked at how the different parts of the brain work simultaneously, or don't, using blood flow as a proxy for activity. They found a link between stuttering and a brain circuit called the default mode network, which has roles in ruminating over one's past or future activities, as well as daydreaming. In children who stutter, the default mode network seems to insert itself — like a third person butting in on a romantic date — into the conversation between networks responsible for focusing attention and creating movements. That could also slow speech production, she says.

These changes to brain development or structure might be rooted in a person's genes, but an understanding of this part of the problem has also taken time to mature.

All in the family

In early 2001, geneticist Dennis Drayna received a surprising email: "I am from Cameroon, West Africa. My father was a chief. He had three wives and I have 21 full and half siblings. Almost all of us stutter," Drayna recalls it saying. "Do you suppose there could be something genetic in my family?"

Drayna, who worked at the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, already had a longstanding interest in the inheritance of stuttering. His uncle and elder brother stuttered, and his twin sons did so as children. But he was reluctant to make a transatlantic journey based on an email, and wary that his clinical skills weren't up to analyzing the family's symptoms. He mentioned the email to current National Institutes of Health director Francis Collins (director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at that time), who encouraged him to check it out, so he booked a ticket to Africa. He has also traveled to Pakistan, where intermarriage of cousins can reveal gene variants linked to genetic disorders in their children.

Even with those families, finding the genes was slow going: Stuttering isn't inherited in simple patterns like blood types or freckles are. But eventually, Drayna's team identified mutations in four genes — GNPTAB, GNPTG and NAGPA from the Pakistan studies, and AP4E1 from the clan in Cameroon — that he estimates may underlie as many as one in five cases of stuttering.

Oddly, none of the genes that Drayna identified have an obvious connection to speech. Rather, they all are involved in sending cellular materials to the waste-recycling compartment called the lysosome. It took more work before Drayna's team linked the genes to brain activity.

They started by engineering mice to have one of the mutations they'd observed in people, in the mouse version of GNPTAB, to see if it affected the mice's vocalizations. Mice can be quite chatty, but much of their conversation takes place in an ultrasonic range that people can't hear. Recording the ultrasonic calls of pups, the team observed patterns similar to human stuttering. "They have all these gaps and pauses in their train of vocalizations," says Drayna, who cowrote an overview of genetics research on speech and language disorders for the Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics.

Still, the team struggled to spot any clear defect in the animals' brains — until one determined researcher found that there were fewer of the cells called astrocytes in the corpus callosum.

About 80 percent of kids who stutter grow up to have normal speech patterns, while the other 20 percent continue to stutter into adulthood.

Get help today

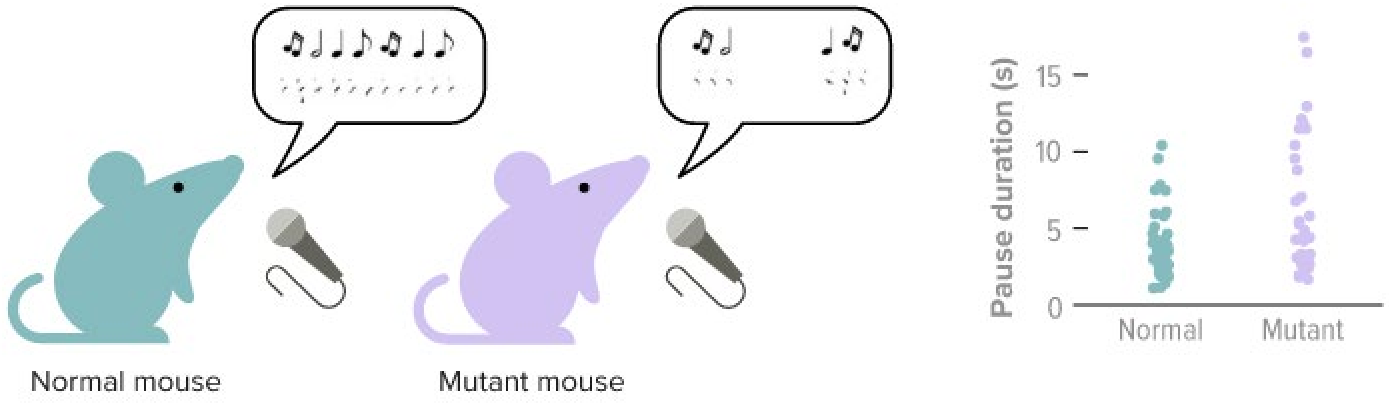
If you're worried about your child's language development, schedule an appointment with a speech-language pathologist sooner rather than later, advises Michigan State University speech-language pathologist Scott Yaruss.

Therapy is most effective if it's started early and nears completion around age 6 or 7, a time when the young brain is still malleable. But therapy can certainly help older people handle their stutter, too. For more information:

- Stuttering Foundation
- National Stuttering Association
- Friends: The National Association for Young People Who Stutter
- SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young

—Amber Dance

Mutant mice that stutter



SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM T.D. BARNES *ET AL* / *CURRENT BIOLOGY* 2016; T. HAN *ET AL* / *PNAS* 2019 KNOWABLE MAGAZINE

Researchers created mice with a mutation in a gene that, in people, is linked to stuttering. The mutant mice vocalized haltingly, with longer pauses between syllables, similar to what's seen in human stuttering.

Astrocytes do big jobs that are essential for nerve activity: providing the nerves with fuel, for example, and collecting wastes. Perhaps, Drayna muses, the limited astrocyte population slows down communication between the brain hemispheres by a tiny bit, only noticeable in speech.

Drayna's research has received mixed reviews. "It's really been the pioneering work in the field," says Angela Morgan, a speech-language pathologist at the University of Melbourne and Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Australia. On the other hand, Maguire has long doubted that mutations in such important genes, used in nearly all cells, could cause defects only in the corpus callosum, and only in speech. He also finds it difficult to compare mouse squeaks to human speech. "That's a bit of a stretch," he says.

Scientists are sure there are more stuttering genes to find. Drayna has retired, but Morgan and collaborators are initiating a large-scale study in the hopes of identifying additional genetic contributors in more than 10,000 people.

The dopamine connection

Maguire has been tackling stuttering from a very different angle: investigating the role of dopamine, a key signaling molecule in the brain. Dopamine can ramp up or down the activity of neurons, depending on the brain location and the nerve receptors it sticks to. There are five different dopamine receptors (named D1, D2, and so on) that pick up the signal and respond.

During the 1990s, Maguire and colleagues were among the first to use a certain kind of brain scan, positron emission tomography, on people who stutter. They found too much dopamine activity in these people's brains. That extra dopamine seems to stifle the activity of some of the brain regions that Chang and others have linked to stuttering.

Backing up the dopamine connection, other researchers reported in 2009 that people with a certain version of the D2 receptor gene, one that indirectly enhances dopamine activity, are more likely to stutter.

So Maguire wondered: Could blocking dopamine be the answer? Conveniently, antipsychotic drugs do just that. Over the years, Maguire has conducted small, successful clinical studies with these medications including risperidone, olanzapine and lurasidone.

(Personally, he prefers the last because it doesn't cause as much weight gain as the others.) The result: "Your stuttering won't completely go away, but we can treat it," he says.

None of those medications are approved for stuttering by the US Food and Drug Administration, and they can cause unpleasant side effects, not just weight gain but also muscle stiffness and impaired movement. In part, that's because they act on the D2 version of the dopamine receptor. Maguire's new medication, ecopipam, works on the D1 version, which he expects will diminish some side effects — though he'll have to watch for others, such as weight loss and depression.

In a small study of 10 volunteers, Maguire, Yaruss and colleagues found that people who took ecopipam stuttered less than they did pre-treatment. Quality-of-life scores, related to feelings such as helplessness or acceptance of their stutter, also improved for some participants. Ecopipam isn't the only treatment under consideration. Back in Michigan, Chang hopes that stimulation of specific parts of the brain during speech could improve fluency. The team uses electrodes on the scalp to gently stimulate a segment of the hearing area, aiming to strengthen connections between that spot and the one that manages speech movements. (This causes a brief tickle sensation before fading, Chang says.) The researchers stimulate the brain while the person undergoes traditional speech therapy, hoping to enhance the therapy's effects. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the team had to stop the study with 24 subjects out of a planned 50. They're analyzing the data now.

Connecting the dots

Dopamine, cellular waste disposal, neural connectivity — how do they fit together? Chang notes that one of the brain's circuits involved in stuttering includes two areas that make and use dopamine, which might help explain why dopamine is important in the disorder.

She hopes that neuroimaging can unite the different ideas. As a first stab, she and collaborators compared the problem areas identified by her brain scans to maps of where various genes are active in the brain. Two of Drayna's genes, GNPTG and NAGPA, were active at high levels in the speech and hearing network in the brains of non-stutterers, she saw. That suggests those genes are really needed in those areas, bolstering Drayna's hypothesis that defects in the genes would interfere with speech.

The team also observed something novel: Genes involved in energy processing were active in the speech and hearing areas. There's a big rise in brain activity during the preschool years, when stuttering tends to start, Chang says. Perhaps, she theorizes, those speech-processing regions don't get all the energy they need at a time when they really need to be cranking at maximum power. With that in mind, she plans to look for mutations in those energy-control genes in children who stutter. "There are obviously a lot of dots that need to be connected," she says.

Maguire is also connecting dots: He says he's working on a theory to unite his work with Drayna's genetic findings. Meanwhile, after struggling through med school interviews and choosing a career in talk therapy despite his difficulties with speech, he's hopeful about ecopipam: With colleagues, he's starting a new study that will compare 34 people on ecopipam with 34 on placebo. If that treatment ever becomes part of the standard stuttering tool kit, he will have realized a lifelong dream.

This article was originally published in Knowable Magazine

The Scholar-Practitioner and Professional Stranger

Dr. Jonathan Kaufman

Q&A with Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Kaufman uses a combination of first hand experience as a person with a disability along with his passion and knowledge to influence the work he does when he "goes to play."

Jonathan Kaufman is not only a lifelong learner with a Ph.D. and several master's degrees obtained from Columbia University, the University of Chicago, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Oxford, but he is a leading force in the disability world through the many hats he wears. Kaufman aims to effect change in this space through his work as an executive coach and consultant at J Kaufman Consulting; as a writer for his column at Forbes, 'Mindset Matters,' and as a speaker across the globe. He has spent his life navigating the world as a person with a disability, cerebral palsy, since he was born. Kaufman shared his current work and interests, goals for the future, what he has learned, and the changes and advancements he is working towards within the disability world.

Q: You've had an extensive education, what impact has this had on your career path? How have your own experiences being a person with a disability influenced your work?

A: It's a combination of things. I think of myself as a scholar-practitioner. I thought I was going to be a full-time academic. The level of advocacy was one thing, but I looked at it and said, okay, how can I shape the future? That [was] where the most important stuff was. Partly taking from my own experience as a person living with a disability [cerebral palsy] was one thing, but I recognized early on that it was only my experience. So, [I thought] how do you look at this world without truly understanding it? There's a saying that anthropologists have, we are the professional strangers. That's been fun for me; it's never boring; it's always interesting. Now, we're on a global stage, the internet has allowed us to be in this global marketplace and global meeting, so there's a lot of cross-fertilization of ideas, thoughts, and thinking. I look at understanding

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the disability economy and that ecosystem. My role as a consultant, as an executive coach, and as someone living the life in this world is how can I participate and how can I engage?

Q: You have been in a unique position as you're engaged in so many different aspects and areas of this world through your writing, speaking, consulting, executive coaching, and personal experiences as a person with cerebral palsy. For about ten years, you have been a consultant and executive coach. Can you share more about this?

A: I think in terms of [the] therapeutic end of it, I'm interested in the human condition. The one thing that I learned about is understanding people's experiences, and not just [through] traditional psychotherapy, it's the therapeutic aspect of it, which is about psychic trauma. It's about how you navigate the world and that relationship; it's combining the therapeutic side. My work as an anthropologist was always looking at the anthropology of work and studying businesses as a culture. So how do you integrate that concept? From both a cultural aspect and the therapeutic side of it, what are the challenges of everyday life? How do people navigate their world every day? When you're talking about the disability community in the disability space, there are multiple challenges because the environment and world was not created for us in mind. How do you navigate through that, and what needs to be said? I've learned from this that you can mine the disability experience as a really rich tool and as a value that adds to that human story. From a therapeutic side of it, particularly in the last two and a half years, that's been my real focus because COVID hit the world. It was more a matter of how people navigate trauma; enormous challenges were to be had. How do we work and function?

What was fascinating for many people in the disability community is that we've already dealt with this for a long time. What are the lessons that can be learned from this lived experience? How can it be incorporated into living in a pandemic world? That was interesting for me to be able to navigate that. People wanted traditional psychotherapy, but companies said, how do we reevaluate the future of work? How do we look at how we as an organization function? What is it that we need to work on with our staff, with our employees, and what are the challenges? Companies have to reevaluate how they think about it from a mental health standpoint. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, so it's a big time to amplify some of the issues of the future of work and why mental health is so important. I am [working] with both individuals dealing with teams dealing with organizational structures; it allows me a fascinating perspective of helping to shape and augment the future of organizational culture.

Q: Have you always worked with companies, teams, and individuals, or is this a new advancement due to COVID?

A: It was always part of the plan and the philosophy. I was interested in the anthropology of work, from a psychotherapeutic standpoint, from a coaching standpoint, and how things are structured. So when you look at things from a systems model, which I do, it's always about how we make it better? How do we make it more efficient? How do we make it so that people can have a pleasurable time at work? Work isn't always pleasurable, but how do we function within an environment that people want to be in? How do we build teamwork?

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That was certainly part of it, but there's the disability lens; diversity, equity, and inclusion. So [with] the DEI standpoint, I could bring my anthropological training into. Then, the disability piece is the centerpiece. It was always something I was interested in. I study businesses for a living, and I'm fascinated by businesses as an organism; it's living and breathing; it's not just spreadsheets and data points. There are people behind it, and it's really about human work. I think businesses, just like any other institution, succumb to human frailty, and how do we navigate that? That's something that's always been fascinating [to me].

Q: You work with many different people, companies, and groups. What are common things, the future of how business works, and your future goals?

A: Technology has come forward and the idea that accessibility in itself is not marginalized. It's something that has to be embraced. The value proposition of that impacts the human story. When you're talking about disability, you're talking about human variability. All of us, we're all different. So the question is, from a business standpoint, how do we embrace diversity and inclusion? How do we embrace the inclusive idea, not as an afterthought, but [as part] of the business philosophy of business practice?

So what you're finding out now is whether it's around diversity and inclusion. Industry investing is the idea that environment and social governance have value; it is important to the organizational structure, and it is important to how organizations build their companies to be sustainable.

To say we understand our community and the employees we work with, we also [need to] understand externally the market we serve. There is absolute change and evolution in diversity, inclusion, and disability. I've always said, disability is the essence of diversity. It runs across race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomics, and sexual orientation. It is the only other minority group anyone can join at any time. So when you look at disability, it is the centerpiece or should be the centerpiece of any diversity conversation. I am a true believer when it comes to that philosophy.

Q: What are your future goals in terms of your executive coaching?

A: I still want to continue to do what I'm doing within the disability and diversity space; it's very important. One of the things I want to focus on, and my Forbes column certainly feeds into that, is the notion of understanding and defining the disability economy and what that ecosystem looks like because it is so broad and vast and is constantly changing and evolving.

Being able to organize the market, shape it, define it, and define the entrepreneurs in it; to help define the areas of focus that make up this framework. This is public knowledge; one of the companies that have been phenomenal about this is Microsoft; they have from the beginning. Satya Nadella, the CEO's son Zane, has cerebral palsy, so it's this intimate connection for him. Just recently, they launched an adaptive lab. All of these adaptive tools will be coming out of that lab. There is a flurry of young entrepreneurs creating new technologies in the adaptive space. Now, the adaptive area is an umbrella term.

Then the other side is representation. There's representation in film, television, and music movies. Last year during the heart of COVID, it was the first time in Oscar history that they had a wheelchair ramp ever seen in a 93-year history. There's also the clothing side; VO business wrote that the adaptive clothing market is $400 billion. Now, companies are recognizing that this is a community. To call it a community is diverse by nature, but it's a community. Nonetheless, that's a billion people. It's more significant than the size of China. If you consider families, it's half the planet.

One of the essential things is understanding what the disability economy looks like. I coined the phrase, disability economy. So, how do you define it? How do you organize it? How do you shape it? How do you own it, and who is a part of it? It's ever-growing; it isn't just about the individuals; it isn't about the organization. It's about that matrix that creates it. That is what's exciting for me, to be a voice there, whether helping private equity firms, young entrepreneurs, coaching, or consulting. I turned 50, and I realize I'm here; what do I do with the rest of my life? I have to say to myself, what is it that I want to be doing? What do I want to spend my time and focus my attention on? This is certainly part of it. I believe in being adaptable; I am in spaces where I can consult, teach, write, and use all my skills.

I'm lucky that I don't go to work, I go to play, and that's how I look at my mission and job. I was very lucky to have a father who loves what he does. He taught me and still asks me, 'Are you going to play?' and I say. It's exciting for me, and I hope that my work can benefit others because I'm in the helping profession.

Q: Mindset matters, your Forbes column, you have been writing for over three years. Can you share with me what it is all about, why it means to you, and the goals you have for its future?

A: It's become my laboratory; my focus is really on that intersection between business, disability, innovation, leadership, and culture. Looking at the disability world through those lenses and figuring out it isn't just the silos; it's the interconnection between them. That interconnectivity is so important and eventually evolves the culture itself. The world of work, the future of work, technology, culture, film, and television. It allows me to have that 30,000-foot view of culture, bring in what I do for a living, and then explore other ideas.

Q: When you are planning your column, choosing topics, or finding inspiration, how do you go about finding an inspiration or decide what you want to focus on since it is just a constant thing?

A: It can be based on where my thinking is at the moment and things I want to share. It can be very topical. As things in the world happen, I'm like, I need to write about this. I find now that I'm writing two or three articles about the same topic thematically. I like that I can let an idea percolate, play with it, and think about it.
I want people to engage with it. The goal is for my column to be a springboard to dialogue because I'm a firm believer in critical thinking; I don't like taking things at face value. Talk to me; if you disagree with me, that's great.

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Let's have an honest and thoughtful dialogue. We're in a moment of polarization. You can agree to disagree with somebody; that's okay. You may disagree with them all the time, but at least you can have a level of respect, and I think it's important to have that. I don't want groupthink at all, I've never really liked it, and I didn't grow up like that. I want people to engage with it and learn from it. Hopefully, my readers can engage with me, and I learn from them because it's a back and forth experience.

Q: How are you engaging with those readers?

A: If readers reach out, I always respond. I want to hear their ideas and experiences from people because I'm one person again. I want to be able to learn. I will always be a student for the rest of my life. There's always something to learn. My mother always told me that you could learn anything from anywhere, and she was right. I love the fact that I learn from people from different generations. I want to be a sponge. I don't know everything, and I know that I can't learn everything, but I'm going to damn well try. This is a way to be a voice that can help guide people on their journey; whatever their journey is, agree with me or disagree with me, it's a conversation.

I never think of myself as a journalist, though some people call me that because I do other things. It's just a part of the larger piece, but I think of myself as a commentator; I'm commenting on life and the experiences where my expertise lies.

Q: You are an influential person to so many people; who is one person that has made an impact on you, your life, and your career?

A: My parents. My mother was my first real champion; as someone with cerebral palsy, I remember that when I was 15, I had to spend six months in a hospital, going through numerous surgeries. Even before that, my mother was always the champion, who always believed in me and said, you can do anything. She just always pushed me. I was lucky enough to have a lot of advantages, but I recognize that, and I said, because of that, I always have to give back. That is important to me; she showed me that giving is critical.

I always figure myself living in two worlds. I live in the disabled and the able-bodied world because I can walk with an orthotic, but then there are days I can't do anything. I have to make sure, okay, how do I navigate it? It's a constant negotiation. My family has always been there, from the beginning, and has been most grounding and has given me the lessons. I was lucky enough to know all four of my grandparents into my 40s. Gaining their knowledge about their life experience certainly allowed me insight into generations past and hopefully be able to push that forward in some way.

Q: Any exciting projects or things you are working on that you would like to share in the future?

A: I think it's being able to be in a position where I can help shape the narrative of the disability economy and what it looks like. Whether that's in an applied way, consulting, coaching, speaking, or writing. I want to work on a book. I have had the idea of expanding a lot of the Forbes columns and being able to coalesce all of that together.

I want to be able to get back to speaking. I haven't done it in the last couple of years because of COVID. We are in a pivotal moment because we're coming out of COVID. I'm rethinking business in general about what I want to be doing and what I don't want to be doing. It goes back to those buckets of consulting, coaching, writing, speaking, and perhaps other things. It's interesting because a lot of the stuff I'm looking at now is the future of work, how we work and how we reimagine our entire work life.

Q: Mental health continues to be left out of the disability conversation. What are your thoughts on this, and how are you bringing it into the conversation?

A: Mental health is a non-apparent disability; you can't see it. It's a spectrum, and these are issues that people face. This falls under neurodiversity, [which] is a large spectrum. Particularly now, in this age of COVID. When people are dealing with this level of uncertainty, what's been amplified? It is our need to understand both mental health and mental fitness. How do we navigate our day-to-day lives?

What are the things that are barriers in our lives? How do we deal with those challenges? If we frame it as part of the larger disability culture, the larger disability narrative, then it becomes something that we can destigmatize and say; this is part of the human experience.

It's part of the human experience; we can evolve in terms of how we approach it from a needs basis and how we think about the value proposition of a human being because ultimately, what you want is that disabilities, in general, become a descriptor. I'm African American; I'm Latina. And look, those descriptors define lots of things. Ed Roberts, one of the great champions of the disability civil rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, talked to a group of black civil rights leaders. They were talking about Rosa Parks and the importance of who should play a role in the movement. Roberts, and I paraphrase, said, 'you wanted to get to the front of the bus; we want to get on the bus.'

It's a fundamental statement that people with disabilities want to participate in society. What are the tools that are needed so that we can be inclusive? Mental health is one of those areas, and light needs to be shed on it. It needs to be destigmatized and seen as part of the human experience, which is important for the entire disability conversation.

Jani presenting a project at the Brazilan Senate

Impactful work in Brazil and beyond its borders

Interview with Jani Nayar

By Tera Brooks

From India to Brazil, Jani Nayar's life journey is nothing short of amazing. When we first met, pleasantries were exchanged which is customary in interviews, but by the time we were done, I felt like I had been talking to a close friend. I could not help but be drawn to Jani's kind and welcoming demeanor. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and you could see her passion for the work she does with the Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH).

Jani was born and raised in Trivandrum, which is the southwestern state of India. She lived with her parents and four siblings. In her home, family was very important - years later her parents would take in her uncle's children when he passed away. She reminisced on the happy times with her siblings and cousins whom she adores. Jani attended one of the biggest high schools for girls in Asia and performed well academically, later attending Maharajah College for Women. Many of the women in her family attended this college. Jani obtained a degree in home science. This degree concentrated on language, psychology, physiology, sociology, diet and nutrition. Although she enjoyed academics, Jani had a desire to be active and so played tennis and field hockey. At that time, in her culture, women obtained degrees but did not work outside of volunteering unless they had a prestigious career like a doctor.

Jani's professors encouraged her to get a graduate degree, but she did not pursue this. Jani commented on how this is one of her biggest regrets in life.

After college, Jani had an arranged marriage to her first husband, and they had a son and a daughter. Her generation of women were accustomed to arranged marriages. In 1979, she moved to Brazil. She could not speak the language, so she decided to learn it. Jani and her husband moved to the Amazon jungle for his work at a mining company. While Jani lived in the mining town, she was asked to teach English for adults. In time, she met a friend who ran a travel agency. The man was traveling and he needed someone he could trust to run his business. It was at this point in her life that she fell in love with tourism. This was the first time she was a paid employee. Later she started her own travel agency with a friend. Jani was recognized as one of the top agents who sold tickets on British Airways to India. During the interview Jani said that she did not have any formal business training and she ran it with her heart and not her head which was the demise of her business.


Jani at SATH conference

The next chapter of Jani's life included finding a niche market related to travel. She visited New York and met with the organization Big Apple Greeters which is a non-profit where real New Yorkers provide tours in different areas of the city. Jani met with Alexander Wood who ran this organization and he encouraged her to meet with Murray Vidockler, the founder of the Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicap (SATH). Jani met with Murray and she was sold on disability travel within 10 minutes of speaking. It was this moment in time that Jani found her niche. In 1993, Jani designed her business to provide travel opportunities for individuals with disabilities. She has completed many presentations for SATH on how to travel. She later devoted her time to this organization on a volunteer basis as they do not have paid staff. Today, SATH is known as Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality as handicap is no longer a politically correct word.

Jani is a major contributor to SATH, a membership organization where the public is encouraged to participate. SATH does not rely on grants as they do not want to be regulated by laws. They participate in trade shows and promote travel for individuals with disabilities.

The organization also educates the public on travel resources SATH promotes disability friendly hospitality sites.


Jani at SATH booth

One tip that Jani shared is to call the hotel directly versus an 800 number to ask direct questions about the services. Jani feels that if a business has put in the time and effort to make a place accessible give them the money. It is a win-win situation for everyone involved. If they do not promote accessibility, she simply states "don't spend your money there".

Jani feels that the future for people with disabilities is looking good. They are no longer viewed as people in the corner looking for a handout. Many people with disabilities are working and earning and they have money to spend. Jani states, "if you build it, they will come" and she gave an example of a resort that developed a website which provided measurements of their hotel rooms to accommodate people in wheelchairs. This marketing expanded the resort's business greatly.

Today, Jani lives in Brazil with her second husband and enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren. She continues to promote SATHS' mission around the world and is a tour de force in the disability community.

SATH conference Trade show booths

http:// Snippets from the www

Disability is not a dirty word

. . . Disability doesn't have one face, shape or name. People with disabilities are unique, diverse and vastly different from each other. It's an umbrella term, and fun fact: People with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world, and they are discriminated against, marginalized and face specific socioeconomic barriers simply because they have a disability. It's also the only minority group anyone can join at any time.

So, to those out there who think disability is a dirty word, it isn't — it's an accurate descriptor. And as far as being afraid to utter the word? Don't be. The more we include it in our common vocabulary, the more normalized the term becomes.

Excerpt from CHRONICALLY CATHERINE: DISABILITY IS NOT A DIRTY WORD Read the full article.

UN expert lauds Jordan's efforts on disability rights, encourages international support

The UN expert on the rights of persons with disabilities on Thursday welcomed Jordan's commitment and political will to include people with disabilities in all aspects of society, following a 10-day official visit to the country. Read the full article.

What Doctors Don't Understand About Disability

BY MIKE ERVIN

When it turns out we're not interested in being 'cured,' health professionals often write us off as a lost cause.

Every year, I do a gig where I, along with other disabled folks, talk to first-year medical students at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine as part of their curriculum. Prospective doctors ask us questions about how we navigate our days. I'm happy to take part in this because I think that anything that gives doctors a better understanding of disabled folks and how we operate is well worth a shot. Why? Because I also think that some of the deepest and most dangerous ignorance of, and disregard for, disabled folks is exhibited by doctors and others in the medical profession. Read the full article.

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Theo Ressa

By Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Theo Ressa, Professor at Wayne State University of Detroit, Michigan, Disability Rights Activist, Educator, and Researcher, is making significant strides in the lives of his students and in Kenya, where he was born and raised.

Ressa uses a wheelchair, crutches, or braces depending upon the environment. He spent much of his time and energy learning how to "navigate different environments full of barriers" throughout his life in Kenya, as accessibility issues are prevalent there. Despite these barriers, Ressa never strayed away from creating a life for himself, one in which he partakes in world-changing work, leading him to where he is today.

Growing up, he went to a rehabilitation school around Lake Victoria in Kenya and then attended Maseno University, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in Education, Special Education, and Teaching of English Language Arts.

Although Ressa's parents valued education deeply, being born in a small village with minimal to no accessible environments made schooling in the community schools that much more challenging. "I had to be carried on the back of my mom and be taken to the bus station to wait for a bus that would sometimes come. Sometimes we would not come back for a whole day, or you are being rained on," Ressa said. "Going to school was always not something that I was always assured of. So looking at that itself is always an impetus." In addition, Ressa's father invested in his education as well. Both of his parents who are now retired teachers sacrificed a great deal to ensure he could receive it, and he was able to attend a special school that was a Catholic Institution. His teachers were typically African people and European nuns, which broadened his understanding of the world.

"But after I graduated [from Maseno University], I realized there are more than physical hurdles, economic hurdles, social hurdles, these are real cultural hurdles. And the way I define culture is people's programs of survival, how you treat someone to survive, or how you use the same knowledge, practices, beliefs, ideologies to destroy another one."

Trying to find a job after he completed his undergraduate degree was a struggle for Ressa because of natural and built environmental barriers.

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Traveling to work seemed almost impossible because vehicles that were accessible to him didn't exist, and within the buildings themselves, accessibility was non-existent. Buildings with ramps, elevators, or other accommodations to meet the needs of people with varying disabilities were virtually nonexistent.

In 2007, Ressa was offered a Ford Foundation Scholarship to further his studies, receiving a master's degree at The Ohio State University in Special Education and Teaching grades P-12, which he completed in 2010. For the next six years, he worked to receive his Doctorate in Teacher Education with the focus on Inclusive Education, Equity Studies, and Disability Studies.

Taking all of the education he was immersed in, Ressa became a visiting professor in Rhode Island at Roger Williams University. He then transitioned into his current job in Michigan, where he teaches Special Education courses through "a more inclusive perspective," he said at Wayne College of Education at Wayne State University. His work is primarily geared towards working with teacher candidates to prepare them to become highly qualified educators, committed to building inclusive learning environments in their schools and community.

Inclusive education, a course he is fond of teaching, Ressa said, is the class that trains both Special and General Education teachers to create learning environments for students with and without disabilities in their classrooms, schools, and local and global community.

He said that the History of Special Education is a required course that he teaches. "It helps to widen their scope of understanding where we are coming from and where we are headed. People who forget about their history are bound to make mistakes," he said. "Knowing where the history of Special Education comes from and where we are headed is so critical for them so that they can be champions of inclusion."

He discussed how people with disabilities are at the bottom of the hierarchical human chain and are often invisible. It is essential to take care of their future, well beginning, and the broader society. In turn, his teaching involves crucial components such as employment, secondary education, community participation, independent living, and reactions that can help to transition people with disabilities into a successful and productive post-secondary life.

Ressa believes that his personal life, training, and work are intertwined like a Venn diagram; they overlap in the middle. Throughout his life, he has experienced the lack of inclusivity and accessibility in the world as a person with a disability, which has been one of the leading factors pushing him to work as a disability rights activist, teacher, and educator.

He shared that people with disabilities do not typically have the opportunity to attend high school, see the walls of a university, or make something out of their lives because of societal barriers. As a young child, he had the opportunity to attend school. When he watched other children with disabilities, they were often innovative and creative, "you can imagine how many human resources go to waste, especially by not tapping into the experiences of people with disabilities," he said.

As a beneficiary of the Ford Foundation through the scholarship that Ressa received to pursue his Master's, one requirement was to be involved in advocacy work. This meshes very well with Ressa's upbringing. He grew up in a low-income country but has also experienced life in a western country with different barriers, principles, and living standards.


Ressa with families living in the Turkana Desert

In 2019, when the Black Lives Matter movement was at its height, Ressa was part of a group of people with varying abilities and disabilities working towards disability awareness in Detroit, Michigan. Through this work, they were not only fighting for the lives of black people but black disabled people as well. "We were very involved, not necessarily in condemning the law enforcement but saying, well, this is a great opportunity to expand the dialogue about coexistence and reciprocal relationship. How can law enforcement learn from people with disabilities?" he said. Light was shed on police violence, but they extended the conversation by mentioning the treatment of people with physical and cognitive disabilities. Disabilities are not limited to one race or culture, but Ressa brought to light the treatment that especially Black people with disabilities face regarding their interactions with law enforcement.

Working towards universal accessibility, awareness, and opportunities for people with disabilities betters society as a whole, Ressa said.

Ressa's work doesn't end in the United States; The Ford Foundation wanted Ressa to be a transnational disability advocate. Ressa has worked head-on, especially in the Kenyan desert. Mostly in the Turkana desert areas, people with disabilities are left behind and even killed as infants.

Resources are rich but education is scarce, and as families are nomadic and move with the season, mobility is often an issue that many face. Ressa works to create awareness of the problems within the area, even though these low-income countries do not have the finances for many changes like high-income countries have. Inclusive education is vital in Ressa's mind; he wants to create mobile schools around those areas; in turn, students with disabilities and families can more easily obtain the education they deserve and need.

Ressa said, "When you grow up with challenges, it gives you an opportunity to innovate." He is persuading the government to invest in mobile schools so

Ressa and friends strolling through the park in Michigan

children with disabilities can receive an education even if their family relocates. He finds interest in engagement activism because it directly connects to Ressa's professional knowledge and personal experiences. Originally from Kenya, Ressa has been traveling back there for months at a time, typically in the summer, to complete his work in disability awareness and research. Although he began working in this community in Kenya in 2017, working within disability rights is something that started when he was a child, he said. He has attended conferences in Nairobi Kenya, like in July 2017 when he was a part of a Disability and Social Justice in Kenya summit organized by people with disabilities in Kenya. Alongside scholars from other institutions like Arizona State University,

Ressa represented Wayne State University. In May 2022 he was again involved in the 3rd Inclusive Africa Conference. This came after his participation in the April Society for Disability Studies Virtual Conference in the USA. When COVID began, though, things turned remote, but that didn't stop him from following up with his colleagues, having meetings via Zoom, and connecting with people through WhatsApp and Facebook to ensure that his work was moving forward.

Last summer, he was able to travel back to Kenya and be a part of a group involved in disability awareness, especially in the northern desert area. This summer (2022), after he completed teaching his courses, he traveled back to Kenya to broaden his scholarship scope. "It's so critical for me to go, to see that what I had initiated is taking root and is getting a try in the community so that we can break the sedimented culture of deficits that is in that community," Ressa said.

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Ressa attending a baseball game in Detroit Michigan

He Ressa strongly believes that access should be the start of the conversation instead of diversity, equity, or inclusion. "Access is critical because people with disabilities are being left behind. Unfortunately, diversity, equity, and inclusion tend to be framed minimally. Nondisabled rights activists tend to forget about the most marginalized group, yet disability makes people with disabilities the biggest group when it comes to diversity. People with disabilities virtually fall in all realms; disability is intersectional." He said that viewers typically believe that a space is accessible because it has an elevator, and many believe that makes the building accessible. Accessibility encompasses the street you take to enter the building, the entrance itself, access within the space, and more. There are many elements and components to make a space fully accessible. In addition, by putting ramps or entrances for people with disabilities in alternate locations from where people without disabilities enter, the site is not being inclusive, Ressa said.

Ressa said that the work he is continuing to pursue and the work that still has to be completed is a "communal responsibility" and cannot just be left to people with disabilities. "The fact that someone has a disability should not be a reason for them to be discarded. Their skills, knowledge, repertoires, and experiences should be tapped into until the day they leave this Earth."

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John's Crazy Socks

brings happiness to all their customers

By Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

The father-son team is making a mark with passion, drive, and a clear mission.

John's Crazy Socks, a father-son-founded company by John Lee Cronin and his father, Mark X. Cronin follows the simple mission of spreading happiness.

Throughout the United States, a person who has a disability is allowed to remain in the school system until they are 21 years old. Mark Cronin said that the immediate years following are considered the "21-year-old cliff." In turn, a large number of people with disabilities attempt to figure out the next steps of their lives, often facing growing frustration. With only 1 in 5 people with disabilities employed across the US, work often presents a challenge due to the lack of options and inclusivity.

John Cronin is a "natural entrepreneur," his father shared. He wanted to create a job for himself after struggling to find something after graduating from school due to the lack of options for people with Down syndrome. He came up with a handful of ideas that he shared with his father, one of which included a food truck. John eventually proposed starting a crazy sock company based on his feeling that socks are fun, creative, colorful, and an item that he has always loved. John's enthusiasm and passion were evident, and Mark loved the idea. The two immediately began planning as they both knew this was it; this was what they were going to build.

As this was John's creation, the name was simple to choose, "John's Crazy Socks," named after John Cronin. John and Mark brainstormed ideas and began their business in 2016. It was an unconventional start, as they had no investors, but instead, John and his father built their own website, created a Facebook page, recorded videos on their phones, and bought other companies' socks. Since the onset, their website has sold men's, women's, and children's socks.

Challenges arose quickly as suppliers were hesitant to sell to the team being that they had no prior customer base. They faced a tremendous dilemma; they needed socks in order to get customers. Together, they remain focused and determined and successfully secured some inventory that led to a customer following, allowing them to increase their orders.

On the first day from their temporary office space in Huntington, Long Island, where their business is based, the father-son duo already had 42 orders placed from friends and neighbors. As the orders were from those close in proximity, at-home deliveries were the method of shipping. Each customer received a neatly wrapped red box with their socks inside. But this was not the only item in the box. Each box contained a personal touch, a handwritten note from John Cronin, and Hershey kisses added to every order.

The responses were overwhelming as the neighborhood quickly took to John's Crazy Socks. People reposted videos, sock orders increased, and the business rapidly grew to $13,000 in revenue in only two weeks.

In addition to John's creative side, he enjoys sports and has been an active part of the Special Olympics for the last 21 years, beginning early in his youth. He has played a variety of sports, including soccer, and feels that he has learned more than just skills. "I learned teamwork and sportsmanship. I had to be a leader," John Cronin said.

As the Special Olympics means so much to John and his family, they decided from the beginning that they would donate 5% of all their earnings. John’s father, Mark Cronin, said, "Without the Special Olympics, there'd be no John's Crazy Socks because of all that he's learned and benefited from being a part of it." Over the years, the team has chosen to donate to several other organizations as well.

Today, with more than 4,000 sock options and growth each day, John's Crazy Socks brings in several million dollars in revenue. They have proudly shipped over 380,000 packages worldwide and raised over half a million dollars for their charity partners. As their customer's needs are always at the forefront of their work, they have received over 27,000 five-star reviews.

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Chelsie Packing

"Gratitude and giving back are important to us. We don't think it's ever enough to just sell stuff. You [have] got to connect, and giving back is very important to us," said Mark X. Cronin.

When John and Mark Cronin were researching World Down Syndrome Day socks at the start of their business, they weren't able to find a single pair. As that is such an important day to them, John created the first-ever World Down Syndrome Day socks, which happen to be his favorite socks they sell. John has since made several different versions and many other sock designs. In addition, throughout the years, the team has designed many awareness socks that have impacted their customers. They bring awareness to the cause, but they also help raise money and give people the opportunity to celebrate through their socks.

Not only are they bringing happiness to people with their socks, but the Cronin team has testified twice at the UN before the US Congress. In addition, they frequently travel to speak at conferences, partake in podcasts, and have received coverage on places like CBS National News, New York Post, CNBC, Microsoft, Google, and more. They are so grateful for all of the opportunities that they have been given, and they choose to make the most of everything they do to create a better world, the father-son team said.

Social media has been an essential part of their work, their accounts have over 160,000 followers across Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok. The team seeks to connect with its customers in many different ways. Since the pandemic began, John created a Facebook live every Tuesday night, spreading happiness and interacting with their viewers. They also have a Facebook live dance party each week, which they have continued doing. In addition, they send out a weekly email from John that has nothing to do with socks, creating a solid bond between the customers and employees because it is about more than socks for them.


Bush-Socks

In 2020 John's Crazy Socks signed a deal with a strategic partner, a third-generation family business that manufactures brands for department stores. "They gave us both the financial stability we need and the manufacturing strength, with the capabilities to support our growth. That will then enable us to move into the wholesale channel later this year." Selling socks in large department stores like Macy's and Kohls changes the interaction and process for purchasing their socks.

With the mission and goal to bring happiness and build connections with their customers, the business has continued the way it began. In every order, the team includes a handwritten note from John, a candy bag, and the name and picture of the person who packaged the order.

In addition, if the customer has diabetes, the packagers put in sugar-free candy. John's Crazy Socks showcases how much they value every order they receive.

The father-son duo has created 34 jobs in their company, and so far, 22 of them are held by people with varying abilities. Several employees are also Special Olympics athletes, coaches, or fans. As the team comprises many individuals, everyone is welcome to come up with ideas, suggestions, and designs. As the team works with 27 different designers, they have various colors and designs for their socks, making them perfect for various ages and customer types.

"John can't pick socks for everyone, so we want to be as inclusive as possible. Everybody in our organization helps pick socks. We have a diverse workforce. And that's important because we have a diverse customer base, and that enables us to connect. We take ideas from customers all the time."

In turn, their mission can be hard to continue pursuing when people are buying from larger corporations like Macy's and Kohls. "We want to be thoughtful, and the consumer experience is very important to us. We're working on how we make that happen in the

retail sector," said Mark X. Cronin. "When we sell directly to consumers…Just opening that package will make you feel good [and] will make you happy. We're working on how to do that in a wholesale setting."

Excellent service is at the forefront of their goals, the team also promises same-day shipping for all orders, which is extremely hard to come by. "We never want to lose sight of that," said Mark X. Cronin. "We have great people, we work with Andrew Neto, our Lord of the socks. He runs our warehouse and all fulfillment. He and his folks do a great job, and that enables us to go and do more things."

Creating more jobs is essential to the team. They have created JCS Champions, a program to allow people with varying abilities to start their own businesses by giving them a box of socks. It will develop micro-businesses where people can sell the socks they receive at flea markets, stores in their town, and more. Over the next five years, they plan to create over 1,000 jobs across the United States.

They are currently working with the University of Paris as well, planning to collaborate to have John's Crazy Socks in the French market or in the EU.

Viewers love the father-son team, so they chose to create their own podcast, 'The Spreading Happiness Podcast,' where the two of them tell stories and jokes and even update people on John's love life. Mark X. Cronin said, "It changes people's perceptions and understanding of what Down syndrome is and what people with different abilities can do. So content is a big part of what we do." The joke in the family is that John is the most hardworking man in the sock world.

The father-son duo typically works on the outbound aspects of the business, as they frequently speak in front of large audiences at a variety of speaking engagements. "We get asked, aren't you worried about what's happening [back at John's Crazy Socks]? The answer is no. We have a great team. Our job is to work for them, to put them in a position to succeed." As a robust team environment has been built, John and Mark Cronin feel that strength and reliability have continued to be present over the last few years.

By constantly considering the brand and mission in everything they do, John's Crazy Socks consistently fulfills their goal to spread happiness.

Sock man in action

Lagooni Wheelchair

By Alexandra Nava-Baltimore

Founded by industrial designer Paul Kampsoff, who, due to his own spinal cord injury, has experienced physical disabilities and knows what exists and works in today's market.

Kampsoff's experiences, knowledge, and masterful design skills led him to create the Lagooni shower wheelchair with a toilet function. Today, although various shower chairs exist, they all cater to a wide consumer range, not to each user's more specific individualized needs. This new shower commode wheelchair is different in its versatility for people of all ages and sizes due to the adjustability it offers without the use of tools and its ability to be used for travel. It can be used for personal use and in rehabilitation centers. "The focus is on independence and freedom," Kampsoff said. As the wheelchair can be adjusted, changes can be made to fit all sizes and body types. It can also be altered to serve one person

Lagooni is a new, advanced, user-friendly wheelchair that can be used for showers and traveling.

or multiple users. Not only is the individualized aspect a part of the design, but Kampsoff has created durable shower wheelchairs of high quality that are extremely functional and user-friendly.

The custom-made wheelchairs have a strong design using stainless steel, aluminum, and upholstery that the company can replace. Comfort is crucial, and the materials and cushion are at the forefront of their design.

Kampsoff said, "My own experiences challenge me to develop functional and useful medical aids." To stray away from the hospital-like feeling of most shower wheelchairs, Kampsoff's creation fits well into the design of your existing bathroom, made of neutral colors, blacks, and silvers. If these colors don't suit your taste, they can be changed, as there are a variety of options. As this wheelchair can be one of the first things you use to begin your day, the company wants to make it personalized and enjoyable. Kampsoff shared, "The wheelchair becomes an extension of yourself, and you often start your day with it. It also becomes a part of the bathroom."

Lagooni has created many types of commode wheelchairs for different people's needs, ages, and uses. The Lagooni Blue is one option designed for showering and toilet use. It has foot support and an adjustable backrest, as well as a compact size making it easier to transfer.

Other versions include the Lagooni Custom, Lagooni Extra, Lagooni Extra Special, Lagooni Junior, Lagooni Junior XS, Lagooni Life, Lagooni Life Special, and the Lagooni Trip.

The Lagooni Junior Special is perfect for younger people, as alterations can be made to the chair as the user grows.

This chair also has foot support and has been made for showering or using the toilet. In addition, it can be easily transported in the car and is self-propelled, to name just a few of the specifications. Every wheelchair on the website has specific features and specifications. In addition, You Tube videos are linked to each product to showcase the products further'. There are also several user video reviews for consumers to watch and read to gain insight into other users' experiences.

Lagooni Compact 20" Wheels, Lagooni Compact Swivel Wheels, Lagooni Traveller 20" Wheels, and the Lagooni Traveller Swivel Wheels have been made specifically for travel to ensure that the user faces minimal to no difficulties trying to make the hotel more accessible. These chairs are compact and come with a suitcase for the wheelchair to fit in.

Warranty options are available, and replacement parts allow users to use and grow with their wheelchair. A 5-year warranty is provided with purchasing a wheelchair and encompasses the frame, and a 12-month warranty is available for certain parts of the chair.

Through the site, customers can request a quote on the wheelchair and also purchase specific components, including armrests, leg and footrests, brakes, wheels, seat and backrest supports, and other accessory options. Delivery time is often short, allowing the user to have a faster turnaround time after creating customized choices.

Lagooni has created a unique commode wheelchair with user experience at the forefront of everything they do. Through high-quality, sustainable materials and personal customized options, users can purchase a shower, travel, and toilet wheelchair that is right for them, their needs, and wants. "My Lagooni gives me freedom," creator Kampsoff said.

Open Doors Organization

By Kelley Snyder

Have you ever traveled with a disability? Whether traveling with a wheelchair, a vision impairment, or hearing impairment, you know firsthand the barriers one must overcome to travel safely, and successfully. However, not everyone is aware of what accommodations are needed for the disabled community when traveling. It just may not be in their wheelhouse of expertise. That is why we (the disabled community) need to speak up for what we need when it comes to accessibility. We need to find the people and organizations that will help speak on our behalf and effect change. People like Eric Lipp, founder, and Executive Director of Open Doors Organization (ODO) of Chicago, Illinois.

The Spark for change

Eric Lipp knows firsthand the obstacles that travel can entail with a disability. Attending the University of Arizona as an able-bodied person came with a very personal and difficult life challenge. In his freshman year, his mother sadly passed away from an aneurysm. It was unknown at the time that she suffered from the same disease that would eventually impact Eric physically. After losing his mother, Eric struggled to complete college. However, his "never give up" attitude helped him find the grit needed to obtain his degree from the Eller Business School at the University of Arizona. Then, just before his 30th birthday, Eric was diagnosed with Von Hippel Lindau disease. This disease caused a tumor in the middle of Eric's spine known as the thoracic region. When surgery became the only option to absolve the tumor, his doctor explained they would have to sever nerves in his spinal cord, and as a result that he may never walk again. This was the catalyst for founding Open Doors Organization.

Eric_s Family - Jake, Andrea, Summer, and Eric

Open Doors Organization

Open Doors Organization specializes in accessible travel training for cruise lines, airlines, and passenger railway trains. Eric is not a lawyer, but he is well-versed in a few key accessibility laws nationally and internationally. His expertise includes the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Air Carrier Access Act(ACAA), and Complaint Resolution Official (CRO). This knowledge has served well in effecting change while working with the United States Department of Transportation (US-DOT). Eric's approach to meeting new challenges is not simply to complain to travel

Eric and Craig training on wheelchair handling at Dubai Airport

companies, instead, it is a refreshing 'how can we resolve this?" approach which has proven well for his business Eric humbly states how ODO is doing fifty new pieces of training this year nationally for Amtrak. ODO will be training Amtrak employees regarding accessible travel. One notable example of how effective training is done, Eric explains, is that ODO hires people with disabilities to personalize specific accessibility barriers when training the travel industry employees.

Technology is a key ingredient for accessible travel, Eric says. He describes a fitting example of this success is a system of digital monitors for the hearing impaired in airports. These display monitors in the airport visually announce updates. Think about an airport where the arrivals, delays, departures, and updates are all announced on the loudspeaker. This doesn't allow for the deaf community to easily access vital updates to air travel information. But these display monitors are a shining example of the types of projects that are making a difference for the disabled in travel. One of ODO's latest projects is with Uber Assist - a branch of Uber that is working towards better serving the disabled community.

Other ODO projects include

Eric's ODO non-profit has increased the number of its projects. ODO is involved with the arts in Chicago as part of a grassroots movement for disability inclusion. One of the projects he describes is with a local theater in Chicago. The theater made weekly showings available with audio descriptions for the blind and closed caption showings for the deaf. There are also local live-theater performances that allow for the blind to visit with actors before the performance and experience tactile displays of the stage or meet with the actors beforehand.

Thoughts to take with you

In closing the interview Eric reminds us that although the travel world is not perfect for people with disability challenges, the only way to create a more inclusive space for accessible travel is visibility - speaking up for what is needed, and then acting. He advises anyone with a disability who is apprehensive about travel to explore the world, don't be afraid to be vulnerable, and speak up about what your needs are for accessible travel. If you are not heard, you know you can always reach out to non-profits like ODO for assistance.

Citations:
Lipp, E. (n.d.). Eric Lipp, executive director. Open Doors Organization. Retrieved May 21, 2022, from https://opendoorsnfp.org/about-us/our-staff/eric-lipp-executive-director/

Eric and Craig with Cassie (Red Cap from Amtrak training in Portland

MaahsTravels

Accessibility Refined

CONSULTING

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

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

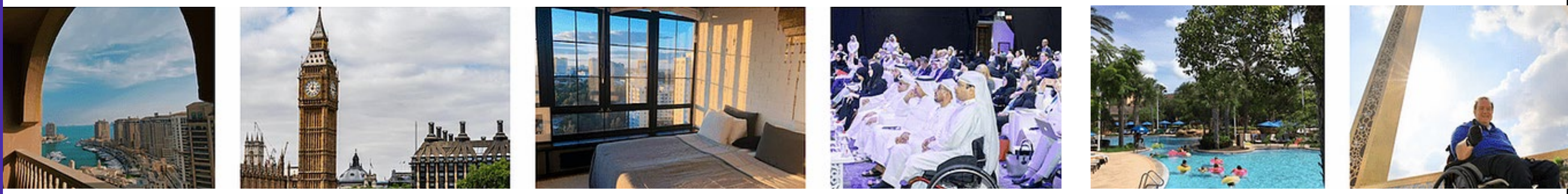
And, our global team of experts provide on-site and virtual audits and assessments to determine the level of compliance of accessibility for businesses, parks, cities, and municipalities, and travel destinations around the world.

EXPERIENCES

Check out Fred's travel log and relatable articles from other adventure travelers with a point of view. Read Melange, Accessibility for All magazine 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 Accessibility for All readers in over 64 countries, as well as followers on his social media channels.



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FRED TALKS

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

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

www.maahstravels.com

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

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Accessibility. It's more than a ramp.

As an expert in the accessible travel and tourism market industry, Maahs Travels works with Ministries of Tourism, tourism boards, governments, hoteliers, business owners, parks and recreation, and entertainment venues around the world. Not only do we assess and audit the accessibility across disabilities for a destination, business, or venue, but we also work with each entity to develop strategies to attract more market share. It involves a lot of analysis of data as well as collaboration across many stakeholders, but the outcomes are certainly worth the time and effort put into the project.

In 2019, I was invited to speak in Dubai at the inaugural Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit about accessible travel and tourism. After listening to ½ day of presentations by many talented and recognized leaders, it was evident that everyone was focusing on the actual "accessibility" of the location and things like ramps, audible signals, the use of braille and tactile information, but no one was speaking about all of the things that are necessary for a location, business, or destination to truly be inclusive and accessible. I decided to change the topic and the message of my third presentation for that Summit to fully explain the infrastructure that is necessary for any destination to be sustainable, inclusive, and accessible for people with disabilities. The title of my presentation was, "Accessibility. It's more than a ramp."

Assuming that recent data points are correct, there are about 1.4 billion people in the world living with some type of disability. According to a recent study, those 1.4 billion people who have some type of disability comprise about 20% of the world's population with access to about $8 trillion US in disposable income. But they are only spending about 43% of that total because places are either not accessible, or they are not promoting the fact that they are accessible, therefore people with disabilities are not aware of their options.

If we look beyond the ramp, in order to attract a bigger market share, we must look at things that help make a destination inclusive, for people with disabilities to travel to that destination, identify the types of information that is necessary for people to rely on and that destination, as well as the safety of people with disabilities and that this nation and the enforcement of laws protecting them.

First, in order to be truly

inclusive, business owners, city planners, mayors and others must ensure that people with disabilities are included in the strategic discussions, planning, design, implementation, and oversight of any project, structure, or plan that benefits all people. Further, the public and private sectors, transportation services, and general businesses must have the proper standardized training in disability etiquette. People with disabilities must be visible to the public and senior levels of organizations and as business owners, included in the news and advertisements, and their stories included in the media. We must also be in front of and behind the camera of news broadcasts, TV and film productions, and other forms of entertainment. By doing this, you help to normalize people with disabilities.

When we speak of the support services necessary to be in place for people with disabilities to travel to a destination, or frankly live in it, people with disabilities must have a direct phone number to call for assistance in an emergency, must have accessible transportation for taxis, buses, trains as well as vehicle rentals. Tourists with disabilities must have access must be able to obtain a blue placard that identifies that they have a disability for their rental vehicle. And, there should be free and available Wi-Fi services for Internet connectivity for people who need access to help find the support services that they need. In addition, travel nurses or caregiver services must be readily available and affordable to people with disabilities. These individuals must be trained to provide personal care such as feeding, bathing, and other very specific needs. Volunteers can be trained to provide these services for anyone with any type of disability. And, very importantly, people with disabilities must have access to medical equipment and assistive devices for rental or repair.

People with disabilities rely on specific information probably more than any other demographic for various reasons. Therefore, we need to make information more readily available and accessible to all. People with disabilities must have access to accessible digital formats of information, materials that are printed in braille, as well as materials that are printed in large print. The signage on streets, paths, buildings, vehicles, etc. could include digital tags that help people who are blind or low vision. At the very top of that list, websites must be accessible to all.

People with disabilities are the most vulnerable and most bullyed population in the world. Therefore, it is critical that laws and penalties for those who take advantage of people disabilities, discriminated against, or violate any law or regulation that protects the rights of people disabilities, must be enforced.

These are just a handful of things critical things that help form a necessary infrastructure so that any destinations can be more inclusive to all people, including those with disabilities. Remember, it’s not only right to implement these processes, it’s also good for business! Maahs Travels will work with you to help educate your employees about disabilities and accessibility, and then we will identify strategies to help build your market share.

Contact us:
www.maahstravels.com.

Improving accessibility for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

By Jennifer Quigley, TranslateLive

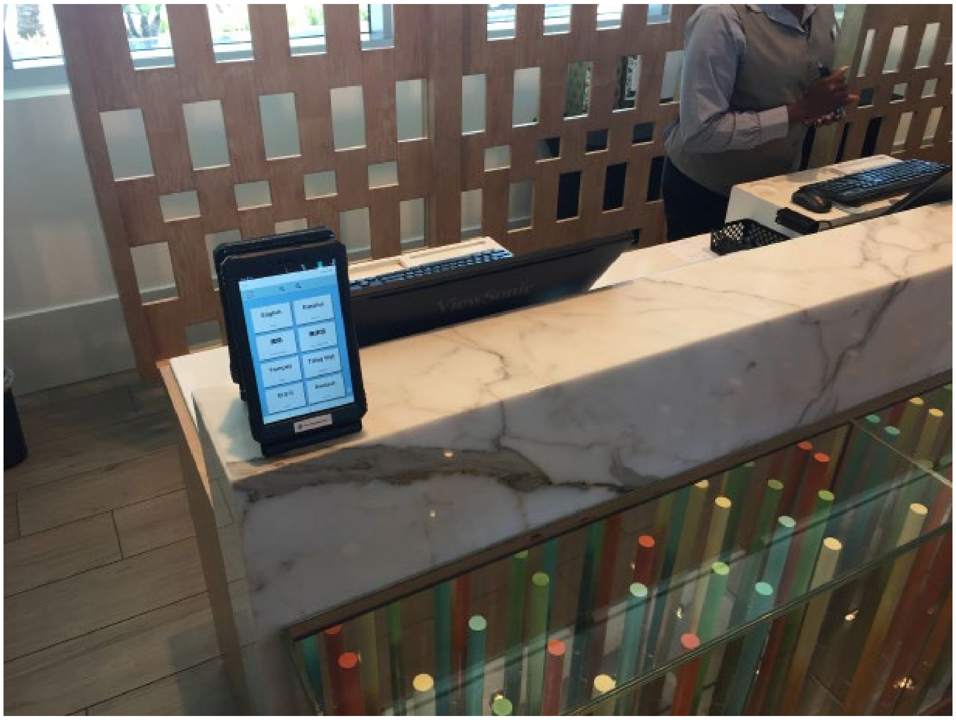
For the past 30 years, I have witnessed great inequality and inaccessibility in all areas of life for those with hearing loss. Advocating for equal access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals within the workplace and in the community as a whole has become one of my life's missions. I would not have chosen any other journey. Have we traveled by leaps and bounds in the past 30 years? Sure. That being said, we still have a long way to go as far as accessibility in the travel and tourism space.

When asked by Fred Maahs, Jr. of Maahs Travels to write this article, I went straight to the source - people I know who have firsthand experience in this space. Their insight as individuals with hearing loss has been immeasurable and I am grateful for the time taken to share with me their experiences.

I had the pleasure of recently meeting Angela Young, MEd. through a weekly show on diversity and accessibility. Dr. Young herself is deaf but is not fluent in American Sign Language. The assumption is often made that all people who are deaf are fluent in ASL; this is inaccurate. Dr. Young relies heavily on lipreading for communication when she is traveling. Now that people are starting to travel again after Covid-19, some are still wearing masks. Dr. Young points out that it is essential that staff need to be aware of the limits to communication that come with wearing masks. Dr. Young states, "I think within the tourism industry, we especially need awareness regarding the fact that mask-wearing creates so many problems for people with hearing deficits, and that patience, compassion, and empathy should be at the forefront of all we do for others." Dr. Young also added that visual signifiers that are able to alert a deaf or hard of hearing guest that someone is at the hotel guest room door would be a huge help.

I also had the opportunity to interview Maria Block, Accessibility Specialist for William Paterson University in New Jersey. (I can't go without mentioning that she also happens to be one of my best friends!) Maria, being profoundly deaf herself, was able to provide additional insight as she and her husband love to travel. Maria states, "Most major chain hotels have been accessible during my travels; restaurants and resorts not so much. However one company that went above and beyond would be Royal Caribbean (RC) Cruise line. They provided interpreting services 24/7 as needed and it was one of the first and maybe the only time I was able to fully enjoy every aspect of my vacation." Maria added that being provided with fully accessible rooms, enjoying ASL-interpreted shows and comedy club shows (she was never able to enjoy in the past) turned her into a Royal Caribbean fan who will surely return in the future. Maria added that the RC staff made sure she was happy and comfortable and aware of what was going on in ALL aspects of the cruise, from the entertainment to the safety measures.

Melissa "echo" Greenlee, Founder & CEO of Deaf-Friendly Consulting, has created a successful company and career partnering with companies, including many hotels and restaurants, whose goal is to provide a more "deaf-friendly" experience for their guests. Her company provides training to ensure staff understand how to make all of their guests feel more comfortable.



"There have been several hotels across the nation within the Marriott and Hyatt brand of hotels that have invested in Deaf-Friendly Customer Service training to learn how to properly engage with deaf and hard of hearing guests", states Melissa. "Because of of their investment in training, these hotels learn how to communicate with us effectively at the front desk, inside their restaurant and bar, at the concierge and/or spa. Housekeeping as well as food and beverage know how to properly enter the room of a deaf or hard of hearing guest. In addition, all of them provide free wifi and in-room text solutions so that deaf and hard of hearing guests can order room service without barriers. These hotels understand that being welcoming and accessible to us is not only the right thing to do but is profitable and solidifies our loyalty to their chain of hotels."

Melissa offered a few key points for businesses within the tourism & hospitality space to keep in mind when interacting with deaf and hard of hearing guests:

- Make eye contact - This makes people feel addressed and respected. Deaf and hard of hearing people especially need good eye contact since they are reading your face while communicating with you.

- Be flexible and willing to communicate in a variety of ways - Communication does not fit all tidy in a box. There is no one way to communicate. It's important to be open and flexible to receiving information in a variety of ways. That might mean writing back and forth, gesturing, using sign language, speaking clearly, using speech to text apps. Be creative. Experiment with communication. Think of communication as being fluid. It changes from one person to the next.

- Get comfortable with being uncomfortable - People of all kinds are going to approach you. They are going to communicate differently. They are going to look differently. Their energy is going to be different. The more you can learn to work with your own discomfort, the less it is projected onto your guests.

A key takeaway here is that one size does not fit all. No two people with hearing loss are alike, and to label them as so does an injustice. Preferences for methods of communication are quite individual, just as we as human beings are each different in our own way. Communication, along with food and shelter, is a basic human need. I think at the end of the day we as human beings just want to be able to communicate with each other for the short time we are together here on this big floating rock we call Earth. With today's technology and knowledge in the accessibility space, there is simply no more room for excuses.

Some resources for upping your accessibility game:

Motionspot: Creating inclusive spaces with accessible products. Motionspot | Beautifully Accessible Products & Design

TranslateLive: The ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere no matter the language nor disability. Home - TranslateLive|Interpretation and Translation Software

Deaf Friendly Consulting: Helping businesses create Deaf-friendly experiences. Deaf Friendly Consulting

WelcoMe: WelcoMe for Business (wel-co.me)

Trailblazers in the Providing Accessible experiences for their guests:

Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines:
www.royalcaribbean.com

Hotel Brooklyn, Manchester UK: Hotel Brooklyn | A Taste of Brooklyn in Manchester Hotel Brooklyn is a trailblazer in setting a new Industry Gold Standard for Accessibility.

The Schoolhouse Hotel, West VA, USA: Home - The Schoolhouse Hotel (theschoolhousehotelwv.com)

Mesa, Arizona is America's first Autism Certified City! Experience authentic Arizona fun with confidence knowing your needs come first.

AUTISMTRAVELMESA.COM

VISIT MESA

RIGHT HEAR

RightHear's mission is to make the world accessible. They believe that everyone, everywhere should be able to explore their environment confidently and independently. To do that, buildings, cities, public spaces, and transportation networks need to apply universal design to be truly accessible and inclusive.

How it works

RightHear's "talking signs" solution works both indoors and outdoors, as it does not require any GPS or internet connection. It's supportive of any industry, sector, or size of venue, from a Safari Park to a university campus to a hotel to a local eatery, and everything in between. It's easy for businesses to install, easy to program, and even easier to use.

The solution has 3 components:

1. Bluetooth-enabled beacons are strategically located throughout the premises. These allow precise location identification to guide users through the venue. And they help identify key points of interest such as restrooms and exits. They can also read out information such as emergency evacuation procedures, menus, or inscriptions on a plaque.

2. An online portal allows the business or organization to program their signage and gain valuable customer insights. Companies can pre-set RightHear notifications or make updates in real-time. They can also analyze the anonymous data to enhance the customer experience.

3. The free app is available on both Android and iOS. It is accessible in **26 languages**, including Arabic, English, and Spanish. The app also includes a Live Assistant feature so users can instantly connect to someone who can assist them in person.

RightHear is the only accessible wayfinding solution that focuses on navigation and orientation. Navigation is about getting from point A to point B as efficiently as possible. Orientation, however, is about knowing where you are in relation to your surroundings. It puts the user of the RightHear app in control of their environment.

Why it's needed

Accessibility for physical spaces generally focuses on mobility challenges such as access ramps, automatic doors, and designated parking spaces. Even the international symbol for accessibility is a person in a wheelchair. But that's only part of the story. If we want to be universally inclusive, we need to broaden our definition of accessibility. RightHear helps people with all types of mobility and orientation challenges.

Braille signs are one solution helping the blind and visually impaired, but only 10% of this community can read braille and you need to know where the sign is located in order to read it.

As Covid-19 restrictions ease, we're still very much in a "no touch" era. RightHear's contactless accessible signage is yet another example of how businesses can leverage technology to create inclusive, sanitary, and accessible customer and employee experiences.

Where it all began

From a very young age, Idan Meir, CoFounder and CEO of RightHear, found navigating and orienting himself in public spaces frustrating. He struggled to create mental maps, determine cardinal directions, or even get his bearings from landmarks.

During his Army service, Idan undertook extensive orientation training but always came last because he got lost and disoriented; every single time.

Fast-forward a few years and Idan, alongside his business partner Gil Elgrably, were building a retail couponing business. Whilst scouting opportunities in the local mall, Idan kept getting lost. That's when they realized they could serve thousands of people who need help navigating and orienting themselves in public spaces. Immediately they set to work. And in 2015, RightHear was born.

Looking to the future

Society is still not quite ready for hoverboards or flying cars, but RightHear is working on the next best thing. They're developing a Proof-of-Concept in conjunction with Volkswagen Group to make autonomous vehicles more accessible to the blind and low-vision. As the winners of the VW Konnect Startup Challenge 2021, they're making Mobility as a Service accessible and inclusive.

With regards to office workers, we're now entering "The Great Return", which provides an opportunity for office premises and work facilities to become fully accessible.

As lockdown restrictions are easing, more businesses and services are opening back up. Businesses have a huge opportunity to create inclusive and accessible experiences.

Want to learn more? Visit Right-Hear.com, or follow us on social:

GREEN THERAPY

for Seniors (and you!)

By Shana Jones

It's 3:36pm and I trudge through the regular afternoon energy slump to squeeze out the last few words of my article. The words come laboriously and tagging along, the mistakes. My brain drifts off to Nowhere but is quickly called back by a small voice saying, "Get out of here for a minute and then regroup." Through the front door of the office building. The sunlight hits me and I pause for a minute, taking it in. The breeze charges at me and pretty soon I'm on a brisk walk around the property, drinking in the fresh air and fresh new ideas. It's almost like a drug, this getting-outside-for-a-minute thing. Twenty minutes later I've come alive and my fingers are flying across the keys with renewed vigor and a happy confidence. Not realizing it, I've just given myself a shot of ecotherapy and gotten back my mojo. Looking at the word "ecotherapy", it's easy to see that it involves the use of nature in the healing process. For Barbados-based neurologist Toni Nicholls, it's "where ecology meets psychology": it involves bringing a patient in contact with nature to foster positive feelings and behavioural changes in the patient. It can include anything from taking a walk on the beach to looking at pictures or videos of nature. Numerous studies

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Mindfulness is encouraged, and because ecotherapy embraces a harmonious co-existence with nature, so is environmental awareness. Respect for the natural environment is foundational here, says Nicholls: "you can't have ecotherapy and not care about ecology".

Like the conventional clinical methods it supports, a patient's ecotherapy program is carefully tailored to his or her needs, taking into consideration personal preference, access to nature, mobility, and affordability. "Forest bathing" (mindful walks in the forest) and walks along the beach are optimal, but for a patient living in an urban centre, a walk through a local greenspace or simple star-gazing at night can be just as meaningful. Likewise, nurturing a house plant or journaling about scenes of nature can shift the mood of a house-bound elderly patient. In all cases, the experience elicits positive feelings such as peace, calm, and security (some patients report a feeling of security simply from leaning against a tree), which then manifest in behaviour later on.

It's no wonder, then, that the American Psychological Association has recognized ecotherapy as a valuable tool in conventional therapy for many neurological (brain-related) conditions. Anyone can benefit from ecotherapy, but it can be especially valuable for the elderly, who are prone to suffering from depression, anxiety, dementia, Alzheimer's disease and psychological disorders such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. As such, they prove to be excellent candidates for ecotherapy interventions and the additional side benefits of increased social interaction and physical activity. Ecotherapists might recommend joining a walking group, birdwatching or feeding at a local park, going on picnics, or kite flying. Meditating to nature sounds and sitting outside or near a window with a view can be beneficial to less-mobile people. Such activities have been shown to sharpen focus and memory, increase energy levels, boost immunity, induce feelings of relaxation and motivation, and improve mood in elderly patients[1].

Most of Nicholls' elderly patients have suffered a stroke, have early dementia or experience "pseudo-dementia", a perceived state of dementia brought on by depression. She works with each individual patient to find out what works and pairs it with traditional therapy methods. In some sessions, she watches nature videos with her patients; in others, they work with rocks and leaves. Her less-mobile patients are encouraged to grow small plants.

The importance of nature in our healing and well-being cannot be overstated, but it seems that rather than discover a new therapy approach, all we've done is finally appreciate the value of something that's always been there. Over time, we humans have forced ourselves away from nature and into chemical-filled, machine-saturated, non-green environments and then turned to synthetic (sometimes harmful) solutions to restore order. Says Nicholls, "our brains are not built for 4 walls [or] screens; our brains are built for nature", which is why we feel unexplained harmony and peace when we engage with it. What's more, with an appreciation of the natural environment, we become more mindful of its needs and how we should co-exist with it. So, whether you're a workaholic, a "tree-hugger", or a senior struggling with depression, know that you have at your fingertips the oldest, easiest, most universal remedy for your condition: Mother Nature.

1. Benefits Aging Adults Get from Spending Time in Nature

Easter Seals Celebrates 100 Years of Impact and Being UnstoppABLE® in Canada

A Centennial Anniversary Celebration from Coast to Coast to Coast

It's not every year an organization turns 100, nor is this an event that everyone gets to witness during their lifetime. But in celebrating its centennial year throughout 2022, Easter Seals is working hard to make sure every Canadian knows about this special milestone and feels the excitement.

All this year, provincial Easter Seals organizations across the country have been planning and hosting a multitude of events that bring together the community, participants, families, sponsors, supporters, and regional stakeholders. Dave Starrett, President and Chief Executive Officer of Easter Seals Canada, notes, "We are a network of provincial associations – 10 strong – across our great country that provide supports and services for Canadians living with disabilities. And we have come together to celebrate the 100 years of impact Easter Seals has had across Canada in communities nationwide.

In 2022, we are toasting a century of advancing disability awareness, accessibility, and inclusion while leading the path forward towards an even better Canada, where those living with disabilities no longer have to face obstacles to full participation in communities, schools, and workplaces."

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Highlights of Easter Seals' centennial year include:

- A renewed focus on advocacy and awareness
- Local and regional awareness events and activities
- The illumination of major public landmarks around the country in Easter Seals red
- A month devoted to celebrating the role of alumni (Ambassadors) in Easter Seals history
- A national celebration in Ottawa in late September
- A special 100th anniversary website (easterseals100.ca)
- A fresh, dynamic look for the iconic Easter Seals red stamp

The organization is also focused on embracing digital by design in its approach for the future, with nine different social and digital media campaigns on various topics, including inclusion and diversity.

As it looks to build towards its next 100 years, Easter Seals will be launching an awareness campaign for schools in fall 2022.

"This is a time for celebration, for appreciation and applause, but also a time when we need to be a stronger voice than we have before," reflects Starrett. "COVID-19 has changed our world, and we know that we need to tell our story with greater impact in the years ahead. The pandemic has created additional challenges for those living with disabilities in our country. But over the past century, we have seen the determination and resilience of the disability community through the polio epidemic, the Great Depression and other downturns in the economy. We know that being UnstoppABLE® will be a critical part of the next 100 years – both for Easter Seals and for our community."

For more information about Easter Seals and its 100th anniversary, visit www.easterseals.ca and www.easterseals100.ca.

Deaf research scholar at St. Cloud State University

Xiaorong Zhou

By Fred Maahs, Jr.

I have had the pleasure of working with Xiaorong Zhou at St. Cloud State University over the past two years during my interactions with her colleagues, Dr. Kathryn Johnson and Dr. Amy Herbert Knopf. I was told by Dr. Johnson that Xiaorong was excellent in computer, design, and web site skills, and an outstanding research scholar.

She's bright.
She's talented.
She's funny.
She's shy.
Oh, and she just happens to be Deaf

Please tell me about the place where you grew up

I was born in a beautiful place called Wenzhou, where I have a lot of fond memories as a young girl. I used to visit many small stores with my Deaf sister, always being warmly welcomed by the shop owners, getting our hair braided, and giving us small treats. We then would go with many of our Deaf friends to visit old bridges that span small creeks and rivers, catch fishes as we go, and chat freely in Chinese Sign Language. There were once many ancient Chinese homes with large backyards where a lot of kids would play in and celebrate holidays together under the shades of the mandarin groves.

What was life like in China as a Deaf person?

Even while I grew up in a safe enough environment as a Deaf girl, there were still a lot of discrimination, oppression, and misconceptions about Deaf people in China, including poor families discarding Deaf girls in favor of boys. The hearing people in China often assumed that Deaf people were ready to steal things every time they walk into a shop to buy something. In addition, there was a serious lack of quality educational opportunities for Deaf people, causing them to end up working in a factory after graduating from high school (if they got that far in school). Today, Deaf people can work at the factory, as a teacher at school, at a local business, or for the government. Back then, many Deaf people would gather for community events, but nowadays, there are a lot fewer Deaf people attending community events.

Interpreting for Deaf Chinese in South Korea

What was your first job and what was interesting about it? I remember my first job was helping my father in his paint shop when I was a young girl. One day a customer came in and wanted a specific color of paint that was on the shelf behind me. I nervously grabbed it and said with both my voice and sign language, "Baba! How much?" Father replied with two fingers up. I quickly looked at the customer and said, "Two yuan!" and put my palm out. The customer smiled widely and quickly paid for it. It was one of my fondest memories working in my father's shop because I felt so proud for making a sale for baba!

Why did you want to come to America? I have always aspired to come to America because I have heard a lot of stories about Deaf people going into higher education like the famous Deaf university, Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C. During my youth, Deaf people were not allowed to go into higher education, and I have always yearned to learn as much as I can. One day, when I was 20 years old and attending Beijing Union University as a student, I met Dr. Kathy Johnson while accomplishing her Ph.D. dissertation on Deaf people in China. I became more inspired to go to America after watching several of Dr. Kathy Johnson's presentations about Deaf people in America. Unfortunately, life had different plans for me, with SARS spreading in 2003, preventing me from being able to go. I met her again 20 years later when she recruited a Chinese Deaf research scholar for her program. I gladly accepted her offer to come to America.

What college degrees did you obtain? I have a master's degree in Linguistics and Rehabilitation from South Korea.

Did your college experience influence you to become an advocate for the Deaf community? When I quit my job of 13 years in China due to being unable to advance through the ranks, I decided to start a new life by getting a master's degree in South Korea. I had to learn Korean Sign Language from a novice level. However, I also learned about the power of knowing a second sign language, which helped me to expand my global competency and cultural awareness.

During my three years at the university in South Korea, I became aware of the profession of Korean Sign Language interpreters. Professional interpreters were available in classrooms, hospitals, and the community. There was a strong sense of Deaf identity and advocacy in all of the Deaf communities in South Korea, which was a brand new concept for me to experience.

What excites you about your role with St. Cloud State University? Working as a Deaf research scholar for St. Cloud State University has provided me with so many opportunities to learn more about how American Sign Language was taught and used within the Deaf community, including the educational system. It amazed me to see all of the highly educated Deaf leaders working in their respective fields, advocating for the Deaf community in their own ways while being respected by their hearing peers.

What has your experience been like at St. Cloud State University? My experience at St. Cloud State University has been an amazing experience. President Wacker, Dr. Kathy Johnson, Dr. Amy Knopf, and many others have supported our projects. Although I have not had many barriers as a Deaf person at St. Cloud State University, I recognize the university has improved the access Deaf staff and students' needs in terms of visual communication. Within the university's Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy, many projects will continue to increase access for more awareness. I'm excited to be part of the team working on these efforts.

What have been some of your major accomplishments during your career? One of my proudest moments working in this field was when I successfully planned and hosted a seven-day International Week of the Deaf Chinese. This event promoted the rights to Deaf identity, Deaf advocacy, and Deaf culture within the Chinese Deaf communities. It took about a month to plan, recruit 30 presenters, and advertise the event across China's social media sites. However, I felt very fortunate that over a thousand people watched the week-long event and watched it have a

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positive influence on the Deaf communities.

Also, being honored with a STAR award from SupChina based in New York City for being one of the rising female leaders.

As an advocate for the Deaf community, what was your first project?

As a Deaf person in China, I had first-hand experiences of the barriers and limitations that impacted Deaf people's educational and work opportunities within society. Nevertheless, growing up, I was unaware of what I could do to help make changes until I went to the university in South Korea. While there, I learned the beginning of what Deaf advocacy meant. I became more involved by creating a play about recognizing that if there were no Deaf schools, there would be no Deaf communities. My play won second place in South Korea. Only when I came to America did I witness the full strength of the Deaf identities, including Deaf advocacy.

My first Deaf advocacy project was helping to set up a summer camp for Deaf students in Beijing. The goal of the summer camp was to promote Deaf identity and leadership by showing them the power of sign language and why they should be proud of it. While the Deaf summer camp was a success, finding financial support for it was somewhat difficult. In the end, the efforts were worth it, and I would gladly do it again if given the opportunity.

What have been some of your major projects at St. Cloud State University over the years?

I was honored to create a Deaf music video for the Zero Project organization, using their Zero Project Anthem song. We managed to recruit Deaf people from around 18 different countries worldwide and piece it all together into a beautiful music video. It is one of the projects of which I am incredibly proud. It would not have been possible without the support of so many Deaf people from around the world. It is amazing what we can do when we all come together and create positive influences for everyone to enjoy, regardless of whether we are Deaf or hearing.

I grew up with friends and relatives who were Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and people with disabilities in general.

What do you think is the biggest misperception about Deaf people? How can we help change this?

One of the biggest misperceptions in China is that since Deaf people cannot hear, they cannot be effective parents, cannot drive cars, cannot have higher education, cannot have strong reading and writing skills, and many more. Coming to America, I have learned that for many hearing people, the idea of not being able to hear is foreign or scary because they have not had positive exposure or experiences with Deaf adults. However, from interacting with the Deaf community worldwide, I have come to appreciate what Gallaudet President I. King Jordan once said, "Deaf people can do anything but hear."
One way to help is to connect with The Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy (CIDAD) which is a new Center through St. Cloud State University. Recently we have been focusing on a Deaf leadership and advocacy

certificate. The certificate program can help more Deaf to open the golden key to the global door and identify themselves. identity, improving one's knowledge, self-empowerment, self-advocacy, self-breakthrough, and other programs of disability. One of my favorite lyrics is from the Zero Project anthem is "Zero Barriers, Zero Walls, Zero Limits, Zero Boundaries." The Center is also developing programs that will focus on more disabilities. A goal if for society to be more inclusive, to integrate people with disabilities through partnership and create a world of access! Through this Center, we can work with deaf communities around the world.

How will innovation and technology play a role in the future of services for people who are Deaf?
There are current technologies that are a severe barrier to the Deaf community, such as Alexa from Amazon, which uses audio commands to function. At the moment, there are no similar technologies that use cameras to allow us to sign visual commands. However, new technologies are currently being researched to provide a similar experience for Deaf communities to enjoy. Deaf experts in technology need to develop ways of understanding the complexity of sign languages in a virtual setting. Visual technology would create more access to services and other job opportunities. Historically, the Deaf community has always been a leader in innovation. Deaf people created the baseball umpire's call signals and the huddle in football and were the first to create text from morse code. The Deaf community is uniquely positioned to be an innovative leader, creating new visual-based technologies for the world to enjoy by using the strength of our visual culture to create solutions. This is a concept called "Deaf Gain." Deaf Gain is a concept where the Deaf community creates a solution that benefits everyone. There are many excellent future opportunities for Deaf and hearing people to create bridges toward higher and more inclusive products, including artificial intelligent technologies.

Why is it important for the world to be more inclusive and to adopt a true concept of "Inclusion"?
Allowing diversity in life creates many new ways to experience life. Everyone has something unique to offer, but when we create barriers for them, we start losing out on potential innovations, fresh perspectives, and creative solutions. The only way to become fully inclusive is to include everyone as we strive for higher standards in life and avoid striving for higher standards at the expense or exclusion of others.

Who is your role model and inspiration? Judy Heumann and Senator Harkin. I am inspired by all they have done for the Deaf and the disabled communities through their decades of advocacy and supporting the implementation of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities) law.

FUN FACTS: What do you like to do outside of work? Hobbies? Interests? Favorite vacation spots?
I love to travel around the world, having been to France, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Israel, America, Thailand, Switzerland, etc. As my hobbies, I love to do photography, cooking, and exploring different regions around the world.

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Bloggers with disabilities

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

Mark Webb
DISABIITY: Multiple Sclerosis
www.onemanandhiscatheters.com

Elin Williams
DISABIITY: Visually Impaired
www.myblurredworld.com

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

Emily Davidson
DISABIITY: Visually Impaired
www.fashioneyesta.com

Barbara Stensland
DISABIITY: Multiple Sclerosis
www.stumblinginflats.com

Chelsea Bear
DISABIITY: Cerebral Palsy
www.chelseabear.com

Carly Fidlay
DISABIITY: Ichthyosis
www.carlyfindlay.com.au

Priscilla Hedlin
DISABIITY: Paraplegic
www.wheelchairmommy.com

Holly Tuke
DISABIITY: Vision impaired
www.lifeofablindgirl.com

Gemma Orton
DISABIITY: Spinal Muscular Atrophy
www.wheelescapades.com

Gavin Bollard
DISABIITY: Aspergers

www.life-with-aspergers.blogspot.com

Read their blog!

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St. Cloud State University – Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy (CIDAD)

Written by: Kathryn E. Johnson, and Sherri Rademacher

CIDAD Certificate in Deaf Leadership and Advocacy

St. Cloud State University (SCSU) hosted the first cohort of 3 Deaf Chinese Student Interns, Zhiyuan Hou, Yukun Yuan, and Jiaxin Mai, in November 2019 for one year in partnership with Jilin Province Education Department in China. SCSU Chinese Visiting Scholar Xiaorong Zhou served as a co-mentor to this team during their internship. The internship aimed to educate American students on Chinese culture and Chinese sign language (CSL) at three schools for the Deaf, promoting students' global competencies.

The team studied American Sign Language (ASL) online before arriving in Minnesota. Learning life and culture in the U.S. for the team was an extraordinary experience while immersed in a different culture. It was also a professional development opportunity where they learned that all children are provided education and have equal accessibility in schools. In addition, they met school administrators and teachers who were Deaf. They learned about Deaf identity and culture, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The team completed their internships at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, Iowa School for the Deaf, and Delaware School for the Deaf. Then, COVID had the team shift to Zoom in the spring of 2020, where the learning continued. Shifting to a virtual platform presented challenges, but they persevered.

Through the experience of the pilot group of interns, feedback from school administrators, and reflections from the students in the schools, the goal of transforming the internship into a formal graduate certificate emerged. As a result, the SCSU Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy (CIDAD) has developed the goal of having a graduate certificate. Through innovative program development, a new graduate "Certificate in Deaf Leadership and Advocacy" is being launched in January of 2023, when ten new Chinese Deaf students are welcomed to the campus of SCSU.

The Certificate focuses on personal and professional development while learning leadership and advocacy from Deaf leaders in the U.S. There will be three phases of the year-long Certificate. Phase One consists of a semester of graduate courses on the campus of SCSU. Specialized courses taught by Deaf faculty have been designed that meet the unique needs of Deaf students from China. Phase Two consists of summer camps for U.S. students who are Deaf, providing opportunities for the interns to learn from experienced teachers/camp counselors how to work with and interact with American students. Phase Three consists of the formal internship at a school for the Deaf in the U.S. in the fall semester, where the interns will teach CSL and Chinese culture.

Sherri Rademacher, CIDAD Adjunct Faculty, and SCSU Visiting Scholar Xiaorong Zhou, in collaboration with Drs. Johnson and Knopf, have taken a leadership role in implementing this new Certificate. The vision is for students to become leaders in China, advancing CSL teaching and strengthening interpreter programs and deaf rights in China.

For more information, contact the Center for International Disability Advocacy and Diplomacy at cidad@stcloudstate.edu.

Things every person with a disability should know when traveling to Israel

By Fred J. Maahs, Jr.

I have been fortunate to have traveled to Israel a few times now and absolutely love the country, the people, the food, the sites, and of course, the deep, rich history of Israel. Each time I travel there I want to stay longer and I find it more difficult to leave. As a person who is paralyzed from the chest down, uses a manual wheelchair, and typically travels alone for business, I have some tips for people with disabilities when traveling to Israel.

1 Plan well in advance and ask questions. While Israel has made great strides to be more accessible and inclusive for all, you still have to do your pre-trip homework. It is required by law that each hotel has at least a couple of accessible rooms for people with disabilities. BUT, Israeli standards may be different than what you're used to. Contact the hotel directly and ask for pictures and measurements of the guest room and even the hotel property. Avoid surprises once you get there!

2 When arriving or departing from Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport, give your self plenty of extra time. This is especially true for departures. When leaving Israel give yourself a good three hours time at the airport. Trust me, it gets quite confusing there especially during peak travel times. When you arrive at "Departures" go to Door # 32 and look for the "PRM" Kiosk. "PRM" stands for "People with Reduced Mobility" – or, generally, People with Disabilities. I'm still not quite sure why they do it this way, but once you get to the kiosk, there is an attendant who will manually write down your passport information and flight information into a three-ring binder and then call one of their colleagues to alert them you have arrived and what type of assistance you require. I do not know why this is a manual process and why you are held in queue until the attendant decides it's your turn. Be prepared to wait a long time and even longer during holiday travel. It can be overwhelming and confusing.

3 Once you survive the "PRM" corral, you are off to the ticket counter and greeted by very friendly and helpful personnel. BUT, don't let that fool you because now you are off to TSA and this is where it gets even more overwhelming. They ask a lot, I mean a lot of unnecessary and repetitive questions. They ARE trying to catch you in a lie as it seems there are a lot of dishonest travelers out there who claim to have a disability who actually don't. I don't understand it personally because there are NO additional perks for having a disability at the airport. TSA is one reason why. I was asked no less than 15 questions about my disability, including why didn't I have a disability ID card? Why do I need a wheelchair and where is the wheelchair when I sleep at night? How long have I had this particular wheelchair? And so on. Be prepared for a rigorous and unnecessary intervention!

4 OK, now you probably need a break after you barely make it through TSA and now you're off to your gate. Just about every other airport I fly to/from ensures that people with a disability, people with children, or anyone with a mobility issue can pre-board. This means you get to board the flight before anyone else so that the entire flight is not held up while you get to your seat with assistance, including the use of an aisle chair. BUT, not here. For some reason we were boarded almost last, which means the flow of people in line who are boarding are interrupted. Which, inevitably, means the flight is delayed. Our flight was delayed by nearly 30 minutes as a result of poor planning, despite my numerous requests for all of us to pre-board. The ripple effect is obvious. Pissed off passengers and crew, less time for connecting flights – if you didn't miss them already, and so on.

5 Israel, in general, is a lovely place to visit aside from airport issues. If you need accessible taxis while in Israel, don't expect to see them on the street looking for you. Instead, you must plan ahead and book either private accessible taxis or public accessible taxis if you can find one. Accessible taxis are hard to find. You can opt for accessible public transportation, such as busses or even the train, but again, check schedules and availability.

6 The weather! Be sure to plan your tip during weather that is comfortable for you. I have traveled there during various times of the year and the weather can vary by location. For example, you can be in Jerusalem during a warm day in the late summer and travel to the Judean Desert, about an hour and a half ride, where it can be dramatically hotter. Upon your return to Jerusalem that evening, it can be quite cool. It's a good idea to check the weather forecast each day and to bring a light jacket during summer months for the cool nights. February and March in Jerusalem can be cold while Tel Aviv during the same period can be warm.

7 Currency exchange. Always a good idea to exchange your currency at an airport kiosk where commissions are zero or very low, or at a bank in the city. Hotels and other businesses will charge a higher commission to exchange your money – so it's worth a few blocks walk from your hotel to a bank or currency exchange location.

8 Have fun. Every time I have been to Israel has been an amazing experience. The food, the people, and the historical sites never fail to impress me. The progress made in the last year for accessibility in the Old City has been amazing. While it's not perfect – there are bumpy sidewalks and steep ramps (remember, you're in a city that is more than 2,000 years old), it is much more navigable than ever. Even the Tower of David has added an elevator – a feat itself! The real key to everything is to enjoy and don't be afraid to ask questions, maybe a lot of questions.

Accessible Travel Peru

By Kelley Snyder

At Accessible Travel Peru, their motto is "Travel without limits" because "We are specialists in Accessible Tourism". "Get to know the coast, highlands, and jungle of Peru with these tours specially designed for you" (Accessible Travel Peru, 2022).

Dreaming of traveling to mystical Peru? Maybe it's Machu Pichu, Lima, or Cusco that you're dreaming of visiting one day. Well, if you are differently-abled, this dream is now obtainable. This is possible now thankfully because of pioneers like Francisco Padilla, one of the founders, owners, and CEO of Accessible Travel Peru, (ATP). "The only company in Peru to specialize in accessible travel" (Accessible Travel Peru, 2022). ATP offers different options for tour packages. They are a young, innovative, and trailblazing company. Thinking creatively to find solutions for this service has come with its obstacles, but Francisco and his team have a vision, a plan, and a desire to take on this challenge. They are committed to finding ways to overcome the obstacles that keep anyone from touring their beautiful

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country. Traveling and touring with more than 120 passengers to date, ATP is dedicated to the cause of making Peru accessible to all tourists. They want to help you p overcome the obstacles that keep you from experiencing the alluring wonders, rich culture, and history in Peru.

Eager to answer the need for accessibility

Francisco decided early on that travel and tourism were his calling. He has a bachelor's degree in Tourism Management. Francisco studied at San Ignacio de Loyola University (Tourism Management). He has a certification from the Institute of Accessibility (IDA) in Spain) and he also studied at Cenfotur (Tourism Training Center) in Peru. With his education, Francisco was equipped to pursue his dream of being an outstanding tour guide. He knew he wanted to give people a next-level experience. He started to develop innovative ideas as he was working for a former employer and travel company. At first, he thought, a mystical tour with Shamans and Ayahuasca was going to be his signature tour. But, as he worked more in the industry he noticed that people with disabilities were not always included on the tours.

Francisco recalls a time when he came across a customer that had been taking notes along the tour he was giving. When Francisco curiously approached the man to inquire if everything was ok or if he could help answer any questions, the tourist seemed disheartened as he explained he would love to bring a disabled family member to Peru to see and experience the historical sights, but he wasn't sure how he would do that because his family member was a wheelchair user. Francisco could see the despair in this man to help his loved one travel safely. So, he offered, "If you bring them here I'm going to help you".

The two men instantly formed a friendship and began emailing each other. Time progressed and eventually the man and his family member returned to tour the sights of Peru. Francisco and his team made their dream a success. He remembers watching the sunset with the tourist and his family member. Francisco was feeling shocked and at the same time motivated, to create this type of experience for others. This epiphany came to him as they were all watching that beautiful Peruvian sunset, with glistening eyes, and the family member exclaimed: "Thank you! You've changed my life"!

The work begins

The streets, buildings, and towns in Peru are beautiful and rich in historical culture. Given they are an older country, prided in tradition, accessibility is a newer concept. Efforts have been here made to make the hospitality industry more accessible. They are the type of 4 and 5-star hotels that ATP affiliates. Even so, there are still many areas where finding accessible ramps in stores, hotels, or restaurants is not available. Many Peruvians who are disabled don't even have access to a personal wheelchair. This inspired Francisco and his team to ask the government for special permission to help people with alternative mobility needs access and tour remote places like Machu Pichu. In the meantime, ATP would need to find an alternative mobility device. Inspired by a special device Francisco had seen in France. Because importing these types of medical devices comes with a hefty tax, Francisco and his team created a prototype of a similar Touraine-friendly wheelchair. The prototype was 92 kilograms (Over 200lbs). With the weight of a passenger, this design was too heavy. They went back to the drawing board and came up with one that evolved only to weigh 35 kilograms (77lbs.) This lighter device gave a better ability to easily maneuver someone through the sand, rocks, jungle, and rugged terrain.

Formulating a plan for the future of Accessible Travel Peru

Francisco is ambitious, warm-hearted, and integral. He attributes his deep passion and success to the structure of ATP and its team. Francisco says at ATP they like to think innovatively. Fresh ideas are certainly at the forefront of this company! They have more in the works, ATP dreams of the day when they can supply accessible tourism at home and in other countries. The future of ATP is planning to expand to a sister company in Bolivia. They are also working on testing accessible travel for blind and visually impaired individuals. On average, accessible tours welcome groups of twelve people. But with a blind person, Francisco and his team are aware of the need for descriptions, smells, and sounds for them to experienced Peru tourism at its fullest. They plan to keep their groups at a maximum of four people to ensure that a blind person travels and tours the country to its fullest. He says in the future, the company hopes to branch off to create a non-profit. He would like to formulate a part of the Accessible Travel Peru to go to his non-profit. Francisco wants to do this so he can accommodate his Peruvian citizens, giving them access to the beautiful and marvelous wonders of Peru. Something so close yet so far if people don't have the means to visit them.

Yellow strip with bump dots on city streets that help guide blind or visually impaired individuals.

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MISS
WHEELCHAIR WORLD

Second Edition: Mexico
October 2022

Marking 55 years in my wheelchair, I am committed to “Finishing the Race”

By Joni Eareckson Tada

When a broken neck upended my life 55 years ago, leaving me depressed and devastated, the last people I wanted to be around were wheelchair users like me. They made me feel awkward and so I basically ignored anyone with a disabling condition. Imagine my amazement when a little over a decade later, God used my own affliction to birth an international disability ministry. Somewhere within that decade, I rose above my fears of the future, depression, and my disdain for others with disabilities. God transformed my heart, changed my attitude, and showed me that there are more important things in life than walking.

I couldn’t wait to tell others with chronic conditions what he had done. It’s why I started Joni and Friends in 1979. I knew there were countless thousands who, like me, were struggling with the same resentments and fears about their disabilities. I pulled together a team of like-hearted friends who, like me, wanted to do everything they could to make Christ real to people with disabilities around the world.

It’s the noble cause of Christ to which I’ve dedicated myself for decades and I can’t think of anything that gives me more joy. Even as I get older. Yet as I reach the milestone of 55 years of quadriplegia—not to mention surviving two bouts of cancer, severe breathing issues, coronavirus, and chronic pain—I hold tightly to Acts 20:24 for "I consider my life worth nothing to me except that I finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Aging with quadriplegia may be filled with extra challenges, but it doesn’t demoralize me. Instead, I hold everything lightly. I don't grasp at my fragile life, and I certainly don't coddle it or minimize my activities at Joni and Friends just because I am getting older, growing weaker, and dealing with more pain. Rather, I find great comfort and joy in 'dying to self' and living every day to serve the Lord Jesus and others around the world whose disabilities are far more profound than mine.

I live to serve. What else could be more important than practicing Christianity with its sleeves rolled up among the needy? When I do become tired, I'm inspired by the life of Jesus who, even as he was impaled on his cross and in great pain, nevertheless kept serving others (the thief on the cross, the needs of his mother, and the soldiers who needed forgiveness). Ephesians 5:1 tells me to imitate him. And so, I am heaven-bent on honoring my Jesus, serving others, finishing the race, and completing the task of testifying to the Gospel of grace.

Multiple Milestones

I sometimes wonder, "Who am I, God, that you have brought me this far?!" Lately, I've been whispering that question from 1 Chronicles 17:16. Who am I to enjoy a platform on national radio for 40 years? Who am I that I should be so blessed in a marriage with Ken for 40 years? And how did I ever have the strength to survive 55 years as a quadriplegic in a wheelchair?

Truth is, I do not have the strength. I still wake up every morning needing God desperately. I am like David who often confessed to the Lord, "I am weak and needy" (Psalm 40:17). Perhaps that's how God brought me this far. I cannot say, but I do know that "the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is searching high and low for weak people who love him so that that he can pour into them, his strength. Maybe that's my story but how I arrived here is not for me to say – I just keep praising my sovereign God with every milestone I pass.

And with this amazing anniversary marking 55 years in my wheelchair, I am reflecting on more than a few milestones through which God has done amazing things!

Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

I landed in a wheelchair at a time when there was very little access for people using mobility equipment. Back in the 1970s I would arrive at a restaurant, only to be told to wheel down an alley, past smelly dumpsters, and into a side door that led through a crowded, noisy kitchen, in order to reach my dining table.

I remember getting stuck in a boutique dressing room while trying on clothes. My wheelchair had become wedged tightly between the swinging door and the wall, and the store manager had to come and jerk me free. My wheelchair left scuff marks all over the dressing room and I was terribly embarrassed. That was the way things were in the early 70s, before the Americans with Disabilities Act.

With each passing year, I racked up more embarrassing incidents of being stranded, getting stuck, and navigating long, winding detours in order to get into movie theaters, restaurants, churches, and stores. Finally, I had my fill of embarrassing episodes. I began to actively advocate for myself and others with disabilities.

In the late 1980s, I somehow landed a position on the National Council on Disability under President Reagan. One of the first initiatives our Council tackled was lack of access in public places. Working with other disability groups, we were able to send to Congress a landmark bill to improve access for Americans with disabilities. Finally, in 1990, I sat on the White House lawn with other Council members and watched President Bush sign into law the Americans with Disabilities Act.

I don't often think about those days I served on the National Council on Disability. However, during a recent vacation in Yosemite National Park, Ken and I noticed that everywhere we went, the paths were paved and marked with access symbols. I was pleasantly surprised to discover miles of trails that I could wander. And for those who places I couldn't wheel, there were accessible trams.

At one point while wheeling along the Yosemite Valley floor, I stopped to reflect tearfully on the days when I would make my way through dark alleys and back doors. That was then. And now? Virtually the whole national parks system is open to me. This month marks the 32nd anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act into law. And I thank God that he used my wheelchair so many years ago to help bring it about.

Beyond Advocacy: A Vision for Belonging

Of course, people living with disabilities need more than just smooth sidewalks, lowered drinking fountains, and exit ramps. Here in the U.S., laws enforcing accessibility standards are helpful, but they cannot deliver the sense of 'belonging' that disabled people so often lack. Nearly one quarter of century has passed since the ADA and still, people with disabilities find themselves isolated and marginalized.

A higher law than the ADA is needed. Jesus tells us in Luke 14:13 to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed." At Joni and Friends, we take this directive to heart. We envision a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ. It's a God-sized vision; and by his grace, my coworkers and I are doing our part to make it a reality, one day at a time.

Here in the U.S. we hold Family Retreats where special needs parents receive much-needed respite and whole families discover that they belong, not just within a community that understands them, but in the Body of Christ. We are mindful of the thousands of veterans have returned from war struggling with physical wounds, moral injuries, and PTSD. So, we hold Warrior Getaways for these brave servicemen and women and their families. We are also aware of the desperate needs in communities like East St. Louis, Nashville, and Downtown Los Angeles. We are growing our programs and resourcing churches in the cities to bring people with disabilities into the fold…into God's house.

Global Reach for a Global Need

My heart breaks when I think of the one billion disabled people around the world, most of whom live in poverty and with little hope of things changing.

They feel forgotten by their communities. But Jesus hasn't forgotten them.

In developing nations around the world, we are distributing wheelchairs and Bibles through our Wheels for the World outreach. We've created Joni's House; that is, disability centers where we offer occupational therapy, provide medical supplies, hold Bible studies and discipleship programs, conduct job skills training, offer wheelchair maintenance, and more. We even partner with local hospitals to provide wound care, surgical support, and physical therapy.

At Joni's House, we "prove" the power of the salvation message with evidence of Christ-centered compassion. And I'm honored that our leadership and staff chose to call these centers Joni's House –to have my name "on the front door" is such a privilege!

Serving the Most Vulnerable in Ukraine

We were about to break ground on a new Joni's House in Ukraine when the war erupted in February. As Russian bombs dropped on Ukraine, disabled people became stranded in harm's way. So we started serving Ukrainians with disabilities, only not in the way we had originally planned.

Our Joni and Friends' in-country coordinator, Galyna, began organizing evacuation efforts, even as Russia stepped up its rocket strikes. Galyna, supported by her network of churches and Joni and Friends partners in Poland, worked tirelessly and courageously to track down people with disabilities and evacuate the most vulnerable among them—hundreds, to date.

Now, even as Ukraine gets fewer headlines, Galyna and members of the Joni and Friends network continue to provide housing and food supplies for Ukrainians with disabilities. We are even planning a Family Retreat later this summer for relocated Ukrainians with disabilities and their caregivers!

Heaven-Bent

From the dark basements in Ukraine, to the foothills of the Himalayas, to the streets of downtown Los Angeles, people with disabilities are suffering unspeakably. Their needs are urgent, and so I am running (or I should say, wheeling) the race that the Lord Jesus has set before me. There are too many people struggling as I once did, 55 years ago when I crushed my spinal cord and became a quadriplegic. But no one is beyond the reach of our mighty Savior.

So in the days to come, you will find me running the race with renewed vigor. Given the countless thousands who have yet to hear the astounding message of salvation in Jesus Christ, we are answering the call of Christ to, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full" (Luke 14:23).

So get engaged, be inspired, and join the movement…for we won't stop until God's house is full!

Nature is therapy

By Shana Jones

In 2014-2015, the Bangalore Environment Trust (named for the populous city in southern India where it is based) initiated a pilot project in ecotherapy for some of the city's 1,500,000 special needs children. The aim of the project was to see whether "exposure to nature in all its variety…has therapeutic value for special [needs] children"[1.]

The program combined activities such as going on walks, doing yoga and dancing outside with parental counselling and conventional therapy methods such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). At the end of the trial period, the children showed increased curiosity about their natural environment, greater self-confidence, and better interaction among themselves. Researchers also noticed positive changes in the attitudes of the parents towards their children.

Ecotherapy uses exposure to nature to bring about positive outcomes in patients with neurological conditions (anything from autism to depression to dementia).

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It comes from the idea that since the beginning of time, humans have been naturally inclined toward nature and can therefore benefit from connecting with it. It can be a relaxing walk along the beach or form part of a structured therapy program for children dealing with ADHD, for example. In all cases, people report positive outcome; in children, including those with special needs, it promotes cognitive development, calmer, more stable behaviour, and qualities of empathy, patience, and perseverance.

Such outcomes are no surprise to Barbados-based neurologist Toni Nicholls, who believes that "our brains are built for nature"; like many other mental health professionals worldwide, she integrates ecotherapy with conventional treatment for her patients. She stresses that anything in the child's natural environment can be stimulating: from her experience, gardening is a valuable tool for teaching planning and healthy ways of dealing with disappointment, while walks to a nearby pond can encourage focus and attention to detail.

Here are some other ways parents can engage special needs children with nature and witness positive results:

1. Go on a day trip to a park, forest, beach, etc.

2. Grow a plant or help with gardening

3. Spend some time with a pet or support animal or visit a farm or another environment where animals are kept in a safe and healthy way

4. Look at some photos or videos of nature scenes and draw a picture of them or sketch plants from around the house

5. Play nature sounds as a backdrop to naptime or the bedtime story

6. Do outdoor family activities such as picnics, games/sports, hiking and camping (camping can even be done in the backyard!)

7. If the child is in therapy, ask if a session can be done outside

8. Go outside at night and look at the stars

9. Read poetry or a story about nature to your child and have him/her talk about it. Have him/her write poetry about a nature scene.

10. Do homework in an outdoor setting

The list of possible activities is endless, so parents have to consider what's available, affordable, and interesting to the child. The key, as Nicholls emphasizes, is to simply get the child in contact with nature in any of its many forms (bearing in mind the child's unique needs). Although more research is needed to be able to predict and quantify the effects of ecotherapy, it continues to increase in popularity as an option in mental health therapy for all children. Consider also that putting a child in touch with nature encourages the awareness and concern about the environment so vital to our journey through the global climate crisis.

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1. Six Years of Ecotherapy for Special Children (2014-2020) – Bangalore Environment Trust

In the know

with Angela Lynn

Culture is a beautiful word

It may seem odd to you to hear that from me. People ask: What is culture? Cultures are comprised of groups of people who share a common set of values and beliefs. Culture is made up of several parts, such as: customs, which are traditions, rituals, and values (the values of a culture are the core principles and ideals on which they exist).

There were times when I laughed when asked what culture is, because I could continue to discuss culture and human culture indefinitely. As a member of a culture (Deaf culture), I consider it a beautiful and rewarding experience.

Culture is a compilation of all forms of art, of love, and of thought that have enabled people to live free. In order to live a fulfilling life, we must adhere to cultural values (principles and ideas). Our thoughts, behaviors, and personalities are shaped by our culture. Feeling sorry or pity should be avoided in favor of learning. It is not necessary. Despite our differences, we are all human beings. As a result of our interactions with others, we gain knowledge and skills. The phrase "the sea of learning never ends" is one of my favorite quotes. Learning new things every day is a necessity for all of us.

According to Price's Atlas of Ethnographic Societies, there are 3,814 distinct cultures as part of our Human culture. This number is considerably underestimated.

Of course, we don't all think the same way or believe the same way. We are very often more alike than we are different. It is for sure easier to accept differences if we know our own culture and keep an open mind when learning about others' cultures. Understanding cultures broadens our view of diversity. Cultures should be respected and appreciated.

In this section, we will discuss Deaf Culture, Hearing Culture, Hard of Hearing Culture, and the DeafBlind Culture. It is very

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common for people to be astonished when they hear the words: Deaf Culture. Deaf people cannot hear and as a result, they have developed a language and a culture of their own. The point I want to make is this, when you desire to enter the Deaf Community, you should also be prepared to learn about their culture. The culture is unique and should not be ignored.

A person's identity is more significant than the extent of their hearing or vision loss. We'll discuss ways to determine a few of the common labels given to people with hearing and/or vision loss. The most common labels are: Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind.

Deaf Culture

Deaf Culture is a set of social beliefs including activities that include art, literary traditions, history, values, and institutions, which are influenced by deafness and use sign language as a primary communication method, deaf culture can be defined as the set of cultural beliefs, behaviors, and institutions that are shared by Deaf communities.

A few pointers:

- Deaf culture has its own films, "music," dance, poetry, literature, and folklore.

- Deaf people are typically better drivers because they rely so much more on visual signals

- It is considered an ethnic culture because it is based on the division as a group of people depending on their culture and special characteristics in which he/she is born into.

- Many Deaf people feel a cultural bond with one another due to their shared language and experiences of oppression.

DID YOU KNOW: *Ludwig von Beethoven was profoundly Deaf when he composed the Ninth Symphony*

Hard of Hearing Culture

There are some similarities between Hard of Hearing and Deaf cultures. Depending on the degree of hearing loss, and different situations that arise. In some cases, they struggle with the question of whether they are Hearing or Deaf. They do not have a finite culture but tend to be part of the Deaf culture for a variety of reasons. The main difference between them is that some of their speech or hearing skills may not be equal to those of Hearing People. Some of them are capable of hearing and/or speaking very well, while others are not. When a group of hearing people are talking at the same time, they miss about 40 to 50 percent of what they know or understand from Hearing people.

A few pointers:

- "I'm not Deaf, I'm Hard of Hearing." This statement is often made by people with hearing loss who have a degree of their hearing loss. They may not consider themselves Deaf based on the severity of their hearing loss.

- It's common for Hard of Hearing people to use speech as their primary form of communication, while they also may be part of the Deaf community.

- This group can usually go back and forth between Hearing and Deaf cultures.

- The Hard of Hearing often have special communication needs that are overlooked as a result of misconceptions about hearing loss. Many speak well but are still affected by a percentage of hearing loss which can deprive them of fully understanding what is being discussed in their presence. Hard of Hearing people often form advocacy groups of their own.

DID YOU KNOW: *Thomas Edison was Hard of Hearing when he first invented the light bulb and phonograph*

DeafBlind Culture

Currently, the DeafBlind Culture is very limited, so I am not able to share many pointers at this time. But one common misconception regarding their culture is the idea that it is the same as the Deaf Culture. This statement is not accurate. The DeafBlind are currently developing their own culture. The outcomes have not been adequately reported to date. The key to understanding the DeafBlind Culture is to recognize its diversity. They have experienced both wonderful and painful experiences.

There are many of us who speak a common language through sign language, while others speak languages that are uniquely on their own. For the DeafBlind, their language of choice is tactile. The definition of tactile is "touchable or sensed by the touch". DeafBlind people and others benefit from understanding what it "means" to be DeafBlind. When properly identified, DeafBlind people develop self-awareness and will affirm that they are not alone, stupid, or victimized. DeafBlindness can be transformed from a tragedy to a positive narrative when they are proud of their identity.

DID YOU KNOW: *Julia Brace was the first DeafBlind person. It wasn't Hellen Keller or Laura Bridgman.*

Hearing Culture

In conclusion, the Hearing Culture has been identified to be "normal" since they are able to hear and speak a spoken language. People who do not suffer from hearing loss are referred to as Hearing. The term "Hearing Culture" refers to mainstream American/International cultures that are oriented primarily towards auditory experiences rather than visual experiences. It should be noted, however, that they may suffer from some degree of hearing and/or speech loss due to illness or advancing age and as they progress in life. While not Deaf or Hard of Hearing, the Hearing population also employs cultural gestures similar to sign language. Their "sign language" or gestures are collectively considered acceptable and normal; for instance, waving hello or goodbye. In different countries gesturing is also seamlessly incorporated into their spoken language.

DID YOU KNOW: *American linguist William C. Stoke (hearing) was the father of American Sign Language (ASL) and a long-time professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. His research revealed that ASL is an official language with the proper linguistic structure of a language or communication*

As a final note on cultures, I would like to point out that there are 7,139 spoken languages worldwide as of 2022. In addition, there are 300 different sign languages.

I hope you found this article very informative. I will discuss etiquette in my next article.

Angela Lynn

The Irony of Alexithymia

by Bart Vulliamy

In doing research for this article, I made the mistake of looking up "autism and empathy" online. Unsurprisingly, but still shockingly, the majority of the search results went along the lines of "autism and no empathy". It brought me back to my own experiences with medical professionals and other interpersonal relationships when I was still in denial of my own autism and ADHD diagnoses. In learning and doing my own research, I found the right word for this condition, and how long this debate has been going on.

From the Greek term "no words for emotion", alexithymia is still a condition that isn't very well known, although it is estimated that 50 to 80% of autistic people have it. Outside of the autism spectrum, research has shown that 10% of the general public also experiences it. The term alexithymia first appeared in 1976 and was considered a deficit in emotional awareness. It is now defined as the difficulty or inability to understand and identify your feelings or emotions or having feelings that you don't have words for. This can show up as difficulty attuning to your bodily sensations or being unsure of which words to use for what you're feeling.

While I am hyper-empathetic, when it comes to situations that trigger empathy, instead of having what some would consider a "typical" reaction, I tend to shut down from being overwhelmed. It does not mean that I do not feel. It means that the amount of feelings and sensations overwhelm me in such a way that I am not fully capable of processing them externally.

It also means that a lot of those who deal with alexithymia also have difficulty identifying their mental or physical health issues. Not only does it make emotional regulation harder, but it also can also exacerbate autistic burnout or prolong it, especially when treatments like talk therapy are unreliable. Mixed with the sensory issues, emotional dysregulation, and higher rates of co-morbities (anxiety, depression, trauma) that comes with autism spectrum disorder, it can make it harder for an individual to tend to their own practical and medical needs.

As with all types of disabilities, it is important not to generalize - not all people with autism are hyper-empathetic, but nor are they "incapable of emotions". Alexithymia ultimately doesn't have anything to do with experiencing feelings, but with how they are shown. And therein lies the entire debate, which in my own opinion, shouldn't be focused on how people express their emotions but on better care to help people with regulation.

Bart is an autistic self-taught artist. Check out his work at www.BartVulliamy.com

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

www.retrophiliac.etsy.com, USA

CERTIFICATION COURSES

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification, Canada

CLOTHING

Intimately, USA

IZ Adaptive, Canada

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

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

www.jwdigitalinclusion.com, Dubai

DISABILITY-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Access Israel, Israel

Easter Seals, Canada

Easterseals, USA

FONHARE, Haiti

Friends of Access Israel, USA

The American Association of People with Disabilities, USA

The Arc, USA

EMPLOYMENT

Bender Consulting, USA

HOSPITALITY TRAINING

The Slatin Group, USA

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYERS

Gabi & Jules, Canada

Lil E Coffee Cafe, Canada

Project Dignity, Singapore

GLOBAL PWD COMMUNITY

www.yoocanfind.com, Israel

LEARNING CENTRES

Achievement Learning Centre, Dominica

MEDIA

Accessible Media Inc., Canada

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Paratrek, Israel

PRODUCTS & ACCESSORIES

Izzy Wheels, Ireland

The Alinker, Canada

TRAVEL

360Access, USA

AccessNow, Canada

Accessible Indonesia, Indonesia

Japan Accessible Tourism Center, Japan

European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), Belgium

Four Season Travel & Tours, Nepal

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EqualWeb, Israel

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