

The LINK

Changing Lives.
Changing Communities.

A Publication of Disability Network Southwest Michigan

Learning About Disabilities: Why NOT to Do Simulations

Many groups and organizations want to learn more about the experiences of people with disabilities, and we here at Disability Network are very happy about that! There are many good ways to learn about the disability experience. There is also at least one not-so-good way that remains popular: the disability "simulation".

Our Board chairperson, Robyn Ingold, recently wrote a letter to the editor of the Kalamazoo Gazette that addresses this issue:



Robyn Ingold, Chairperson

A recent article was posted on mlive.com: "Otsego kids learn it's not easy being different at school's 'Diversity Day'," on Nov. 18, describing a disability simulation held at an elementary school.

While the intention may have been to understand and appreciate diversity, pretending to have a disability was a detrimental approach.

Instead of learning to understand the disability experience or learning from people who have disabilities, students learned "how they could help" people with disabilities.

Instead of understanding what people with and without disabilities have in common, students participated in activities focused on what people with disabilities can't do.

Students described their experience using negative terms such as "struggled," "difficult," "this is hard" and "weird." All of these sentiments evoke pity for people with disabilities. Pity is not productive.

Putting on goggles smeared with Vaseline, putting on noise-blocking headphones, or wearing gloves while performing fine motor tasks to "simulate" a disability for a few minutes does not in any way show how persons with disabilities live their lives.

And why should it be OK to "simulate" a disability to understand people with disabilities? As a society, we know it would be inappropriate to "simulate" being of a different race or ethnicity to enhance cultural awareness or ask heterosexuals to "simulate" being gay so as to erase homophobia. So, why do people still feel it is appropriate to "simulate" a disability? Disability simulations do nothing but reinforce negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities.

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We educate and connect people with disabilities to resources while advocating social change.

This issue is available in alternative format upon request.

www.dnswm.org

Disability Network is the first stop for people with disabilities and their families in Southwest Michigan.

Learning About Disabilities: Why NOT to Do Simulations, Continued

To learn about people with disabilities, involve people with disabilities. Ask them to share their story and experience. Learn how they may do things in a different way - not what they can't do. Read publications written by people with disabilities. Work with organizations, like Centers for Independent Living, that are run by and for people with disabilities.

Disability is a natural part of human diversity. Learning about and understanding this diversity are good things. Involving people with disabilities and asking them to share their experiences - instead of pretending for a few minutes to have a disability - can be a beneficial experience for all involved. Let's replace the pity with respect.

Robyn Ingold/Chairperson, Board of Directors, Disability Network Southwest Michigan, Kalamazoo



If your group or organization would like to learn more about people with disabilities and disability issues, contact Michele at (269) 345-1516 or Joanne at (269) 982-7761. We can suggest movies, books, articles, and blogs written by and about people with disabilities. We can also arrange a presentation to your group on a wide range of disability topics!

SMALL PROGRAM, BIG IMPACT

Last year 78 people with disabilities left nursing facilities and moved back into the community-based setting of their choice with the help of our Nursing Facility Transition (NFT) Program! If you or someone you know resides in a nursing facility and wants to move back into their community, contact our NFT program coordinator Mona Khaled at (269) 345-1516.



*Nursing Facility Transition Program Staff:
Lisa Hansen, Sheri Dubinoff, Mona Khaled, Dawn Frasier*

ATTENTION HUNTERS

Volunteers from the Turkey Federation are interested in assisting hunters with significant disabilities get out and get game this spring and fall. To learn more, contact Chris at (269) 861-1298 or by email at c3chambe@gmail.com.

ARE YOU A CRAFTY LADY?

All women interested in crafting are invited to attend **Crafty Ladies** at our Kalamazoo Office:

January 31, 2012
March 27, 2012
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM
517 E. Crosstown Parkway

Contact Miranda at (269) 345-1516 x 120 for more info!

We have supplies or bring your own.



THE DISABILITY EXPERIENCE IN FICTION: BOOKS WORTH READING & DISCUSSING

The Story of Beautiful Girl

by Rachel Simon

The Story of Beautiful Girl gets right under the skin and into the heart with the story of Lynnie, a young white woman with a developmental disability that hinders her ability to speak, and Homan, an African American deaf man with only his home sign language to guide him. Both were institutionalized in the mid-twentieth century, when people with disabilities were routinely shut off from society and left to languish without attention, forgotten.

Book description from amazon.com



Chattering

by Louise Stern

Louise Stern's stories are peopled with brave young girls out to party, travel the world, and go a little bit wild. The one thing that marks them out from their peers is that they have grown up deaf.

The author Louise Stern grew up in Fremont, CA, the fourth generation deaf in her family, and now lives in London.

Book description from amazon.com

The ADA & Segways

The use of the Segway as a power mobility device by people with disabilities is on the rise. Until recently, ADA regulations did not specifically address the use of the Segway and provided no guidance either for individuals or businesses about their use in public areas. The new 2010 ADA Regulations that recently took effect DO address the use of the Segway and in general says that if a person with a disability uses a Segway as their mobility device, they are allowed to use it where ever a standard wheelchair is allowed to be used.

From www.ada.gov, the Department of Justice's ADA website:

Wheelchairs and Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices. The rule adopts a two-tiered approach to mobility devices, drawing distinctions between wheelchairs and "other power-driven mobility devices." "Other power-driven mobility devices" include a range of devices not designed for individuals with mobility impairments, such as the Segway® PT, but which are often used by individuals with disabilities as their mobility device of choice. **Wheelchairs (and other devices designed for use by people with mobility impairments) must be permitted in all areas open to pedestrian use.** "Other power-driven mobility devices" must be permitted to be used unless the covered entity can demonstrate that the class of devices cannot be operated in accordance with legitimate safety requirements. This approach accommodates both the legitimate business interest in the safe operation of a facility and the growing use nontraditional mobility devices, such as the Segway® PT, by returning veterans with disabilities and other individuals with disabilities who are using these devices as their mobility aid of choice.



Janet Brode, Kalamazoo County resident pictured above, says "The changes regarding the Segway and other mobility devices is very exciting. I have MS and have had my Segway for three years; it's nice to know I will be able to use it anywhere!"

Sign up to receive this newsletter by e-mail! Contact Michele at mcgowenm@dnswm.org or (877) 674-5209.

Friends Honor John Felden with Gift to Legacy Fund Initiative

Longtime volunteer and Disability Network Southwest Michigan supporter John Felden passed away in September of 2011. John had been involved with Disability Network in many capacities, including serving on the Board of Directors and our Transportation Advocacy Group. Nearly \$2,000 was donated to Disability Network in memory of John from supporters of Disability Network, friends and family of John's and a group of John's classmates from Homewood-Flossmoor High School who raised over \$1,700 in his memory. This group of classmates designated their gift to support accessible transportation to Lansing, Metro County Connect passes for TAG members and to kick-off the **Legacy Fund**, a new funding initiative designed to *directly* impact and support Disability Network's programs and services for people with disabilities and their families, which John Felden has now officially been named as the founding donor.



For more information about the **Legacy Fund**, or any of our funding opportunities, please contact Kristen at 269-345-1516, ext. 119 or at pottsk@dnswm.org.

BARRY ♦ BERRIEN ♦ BRANCH ♦ CALHOUN ♦ CASS ♦ KALAMAZOO ♦ ST. JOSEPH ♦ VAN BUREN



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