

## Something Old, Something New . . . You'll Find it Here in 2022

It's hard to believe we are now two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. Yes, that is getting old! But with the old comes something new. Here at Disability Network we were able to adapt quickly to alternative ways of connecting with you and providing services to our customers. We continue to offer the same programming we did before COVID-19 and have even added some new programs. If you are looking for ways to connect to people in the disability community, are interested in learning more about disability, or need to connect to services, please contact us—we are here for you.

Our peer support groups and advocacy teams continue to meet online. We have even added new groups since the pandemic started. Our list of peer support groups includes: The Brain Injury Support Group, Phenomenal Women, and Autistic Adult Peer Support. The Divine Divas in St. Joseph is taking a break, although our staff continue to connect with the Divas individually. Our regular advocacy groups are Access, Transportation Advocacy Group (TAG) and the new Lake View Terrace Speak Up/ Speak Out group.

We have also added an online exercise program to our programming; Spirit Club meets weekly online to provide professional, accessible, alternative exercise instruction. This is a great way to keep moving, even during the cold winter months.

Our Independent Living staff and Social Security benefits counselors have been able to connect with even more people using online video conferencing than we did when we were traveling throughout eight counties. Our Information & Referral staff continue to meet with people needing to connect with services in their communities. We are meeting with people through video conferencing, on the phone and in person by appointment. We have also partnered with Urban Alliance to be on-site at their office in Kalamazoo every other week to serve our common customers in one location.

The Advocacy & Community Education team is doing more programming than ever before, and with video conferencing, we are reaching a much broader audience. We have many local participants as well as people from across the state, the country and even internationally!

Of course, we miss seeing so many of you in person. We are confident that at some point we will be returning to the level of in-person services we were offering before COVID-19. The silver lining to this situation is that we have learned new ways to connect with people and will now have more options for continuing to stay connected as we move forward.

Disability Network staff wishes you a very happy New Year and is looking forward to seeing you soon!



# New Faces on Our Leadership Team

## Yvonne Fleener, President & CEO

Yvonne Fleener is the new President & CEO at Disability Network Southwest Michigan. Yvonne has over thirty years of experience in human services and has been an active and dedicated advocate on behalf of people with disabilities in a variety of roles. Yvonne has been instrumental in ensuring critical changes in Medicaid health care in Michigan through her health policy advocacy and coalition building. She has been involved with advocacy to ensure voting education, rights and accessibility for people with disabilities and has spent years working in state institutions supporting people with disabilities as they return to community-based living. Yvonne's personal and family experiences with disability has been a driving force in her advocacy efforts.



## Sasha Boersma, Board Member

Sasha Boersma has joined our board of directors. Sasha is an attorney with Conybeare Law Office practicing Social Security & Veterans Disability Law and Worker's Compensation. Sasha is a native of Berrien County. Outside of work, Sasha volunteers in her community to advance political and social issues that are important to her.



## Bryan Zocher, Board Member

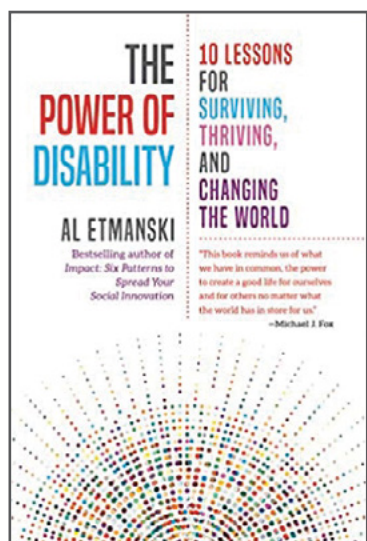
Bryan Zocher also recently joined our board of directors. Bryan has been a tremendous influence on Arts Education in the Kalamazoo area. He is the Director of Education for the Arts at KRESA. He strives to combine the arts, social justice, entrepreneurialism, and youth leadership development in his work with young people.



## Disability Network Online Book Club

Our Online Book Club meets online with participation available through a computer or a phone. All books have a disability focus and are available in alternative format.

Online  
Book Club



February 9 | 6:00 - 7:30 PM

**The Power of Disability**

**10 Lessons for Surviving, Thriving and Changing the World**

*Al Etmanski*

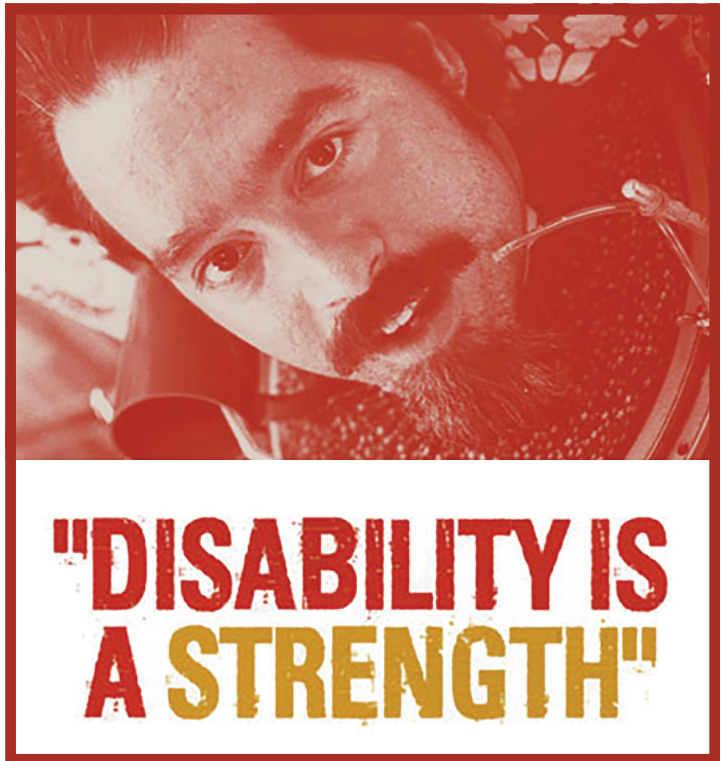
In this collection, Al Etmanski offers ten lessons to be learned from people with disabilities, illustrated with short, funny and thought-provoking stories of one hundred individuals from twenty countries.

To register for book club, visit our website or contact Tyler at [registration@dnswm.org](mailto:registration@dnswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x122.

## Ed Roberts Day

January 23 is Ed Roberts Day. Roberts, often referred to as “the father of the Independent Living Movement” became a legend in the Disability Rights Movement due to his persistence and successful advocacy work. As a result of contracting Polio when he was eight years old, Roberts was paralyzed from the neck down and required the use of an iron lung to assist him with breathing. He started advocating for his rights at a young age when his high school threatened to deny him a diploma because he had not completed driver’s education and physical education.

From high school, Roberts went on to college and eventually enrolled at the University of California–Berkeley where his advocacy work really blossomed. He organized a group of students with disabilities on campus to form a students’ disability rights group known as the “Rolling Quads.” Their success in advocating for disability rights on campus soon inspired them to move out into the broader community which eventually led to the creation of the first Center for Independent Living. This was the first independent living service and advocacy program run by and for people with disabilities.



“ *Our number one issue is still old attitudes toward us, and those old attitudes see us as helpless and unable and disability can make you very strong and very able.* ”

— Ed Roberts

## Vaccination Assistance

If you are a person with a disability and are having difficulty accessing a COVID-19 vaccination, we can help. Our COVID-19 vaccination assistance program can help with things like arranging transportation, finding a location near you and making appointments.

To have one of our staff members contact you, email us at [vaccines@dnswm.org](mailto:vaccines@dnswm.org), or call Lisa Brink at 269-345-1516 x111. A staff member will contact you to discuss your situation and provide resources and support to address your barriers to getting the vaccination.



# Publication Changes

We are switching things up with our e-publications. You will see some changes to both our e-newsletter and our disability rights e-publication. If you are currently signed up to receive these publications, no worries—you will automatically receive the new formats. We will also continue to offer our monthly Upcoming Education & Events listing. Please know that we respect your privacy; our mailing lists are not shared with anyone.

## The LINK & e-LINK Newsletter

The LINK provides valuable information and education to the community about disability topics. The paper version of The LINK will continue being published quarterly for anyone who prefers to receive a physical copy in the mail. The LINK is available in a variety of alternative formats. Beginning with this issue (January 2022), the e-LINK will be broken down into shorter, monthly electronic publications. The same great information, just divided into smaller batches making it easier and faster to read. As a bonus, the e-LINK will contain an article each month focused on the business community and how businesses can become accessible and welcoming for people with disabilities.



## DARE to Impact Change

DARE to Impact Change is a new e-publication focused on disability rights. DARE stands for Disability Advocacy, Rights & Education. In January, DARE will be replacing the Disability Digest; the focus is the same but the format will be different. For many years, the Disability Digest has provided collections of articles and videos found online that deal with disability rights. Our new DARE publication will feature a more in-depth look at a single topic. Each article will include information about the topic and how to get involved to impact change, as well as links to articles and videos for more reading on the topic. In addition to monthly educational issues, we will be issuing DARE as a way to keep you informed of timely advocacy issues that need your attention. We invite you to DARE to Impact Change with us!



## Upcoming Education & Events

We will continue to publish our monthly listing of upcoming programming letting you know about workshops, webinars, movies and other happenings here at Disability Network. Letting you know what's coming up will allow you to plan ahead and register early.



If you are not currently receiving our e-publications or want to add to what you are receiving, you can sign up online for our publications at [www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org); or contact Dale at [abbott@dswm.org](mailto:abbott@dswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x123. You can also find current and past issues of our publications on our website.

# Community Education Programing

We continue to offer our Community Education programming online. Participants can join using a computer or call in on a phone. To register for any of these events, visit our website or contact Tyler at [registration@dnswm.org](mailto:registration@dnswm.org) or (269) 345-1516 x122.

## In January . . .

### **Web-Movie: CODA**

As a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA), Ruby is the only hearing person in her family. When the family's business is threatened, Ruby is torn between moving away to pursue her love of music and her fear of abandoning her parents.

- Thursday, January 6 at 9:00 to 11:30 AM

### **Webinar: Disability & Intersectionality (NEW)**

This presentation examines the impact of intersectionality on people with disabilities. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how people's overlapping identities contribute to experiences of privilege and oppression.

- Thursday, January 13 at 1:30 to 3:30 PM OR
- Friday, January 28 at 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

### **Access & Inclusion Lunch & Learn: Housing Inequality (NEW)**

Grab your lunch and join us on Zoom to take a deeper dive into disability rights. This month we will be talking about housing inequality.

- Tuesday, January 18 at 12:00 to 1:00 PM

### **Webinar: Rise Up! Disability History, Resistance & Pride**

Many of us in the disability community are unaware of the depth of our culture and history and feel shame and stigma instead of pride around our disability identities. Family, friends and human service professionals also have a lack of knowledge of disability history and struggle to find ways to support our journey to disability pride. We will also be celebrating Ed Roberts Day!

- Friday January 21 at 10:00 to 11:30 am

**Coming Soon: Look for details on our website for these events as they get closer.**

#### **February:**

- Who Am I to Stop It (*movie*)
- Disability Language & Etiquette
- Access & Inclusion: Marriage Inequality
- Black Disability History

#### **March:**

- When I Walk (*movie*)
- Ableism 101
- Ableism 102
- Access & Inclusion: Income Inequality

Sign up for our Upcoming Education & Events email for a monthly notification of workshops, webinars and events coming in the following month.



## Spirit Club - New Schedule

**Mondays | 1:00 - 2:00 PM**

Spirit Club is an online exercise class that provides alternative ways to do each exercise to ensure that everyone can participate. Some of the trainers identify as having a disability and all are skilled at adapting exercises for everyone.

For more information or to register, visit our website or contact Lisa Brink at [brinkl@dnswm.org](mailto:brinkl@dnswm.org) or call 269-345-1516 x111.

## About Disability Network Southwest Michigan

### Office Locations:

- Kalamazoo: 517 E. Crosstown Pkwy., Kalamazoo, MI 49001, phone: (269) 345-1516
- St. Joseph: 2900 Lakeview Avenue., St. Joseph, MI 49085, phone: (269) 985-0111

For the accessibility and well-being of our employees and visitors, Disability Network Southwest Michigan is a fragrance-free office. Please do not wear perfume, cologne or other scented products when visiting.

This newsletter is available in alternative format upon request.



517 E. Crosstown Parkway  
Kalamazoo, MI 49001  
(269) 345-1516



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

2900 Lakeview Avenue  
St. Joseph, MI 49085  
(269) 985-0111

**BARRY • BERRIEN • BRANCH • CALHOUN • CASS • KALAMAZOO • ST. JOSEPH • VAN BUREN**