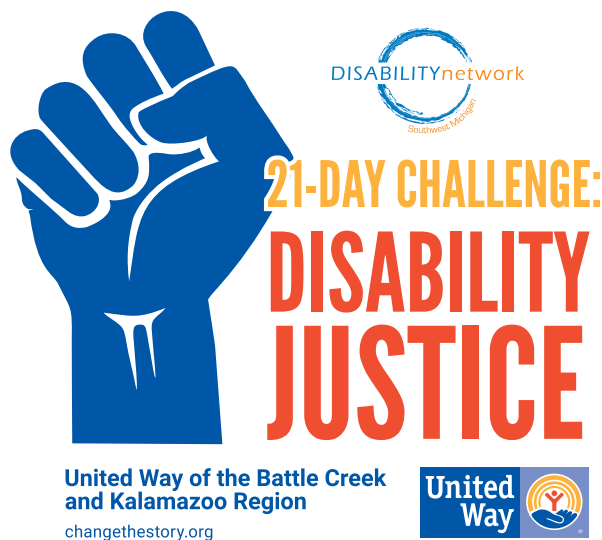


The 21-Day Disability Justice Challenge

Earlier this year, United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region invited us to partner with them in producing a 21-Day Equity Challenge focused on disability justice. The 21-Day Disability Justice Challenge will take place during the month of October and invites participants to learn more about disability from a position of equity and pride. It is designed to raise your awareness, increase your understanding and shift your perspective about disability in our culture.

Once registered, you will receive an email each week-day morning during October with information about various disability justice topics and opportunities to learn more by watching videos, listening to audio clips, reading articles and answering discussion questions. You are encouraged to take at least 15 minutes each day to review the material in the email, choosing the style of learning that works best for you. You may choose to explore this work on your own, with friends and family or organization-wide.

When asked what outcome he hoped to gain from the 21-Day Challenge, Joel Cooper, President & CEO of Disability Network Southwest Michigan



said, “This online virtual format provides an outstanding opportunity for a large number of community members to gain extensive knowledge of disability justice. It will raise awareness of the stigmatizing of disability and set up future interactions that can change behavior and add new voices of advocacy in our communities.”

Disability Network Southwest Michigan has been a long-time partner of United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region. Chris Sargent,

President & CEO of United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region said, “United Way works for a vibrant community where all people can realize their full potential. Awareness and understanding are important first steps in changing isms – racism, sexism, ageism, ableism. The feedback we got around our previous racial justice challenge was extremely powerful, we’re excited to see the same around disability justice.”

In addition to the online self-paced learning, two online community conversations will be held during October for participants to join in a group discussion facilitated by Disability Network staff.

To register for the 21-Day Disability Justice Challenge, visit www.ChangeTheStory.org and click on the Disability Justice Challenge image.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Removing Barriers opens new doors

Hailey, who is 22 and has spina bifida, has been connected to Disability Network staff on and off for the past 3 years. Throughout this time, her ultimate goal has remained the same: she wanted to find employment. Initially she was referred to Disability Network staff for soft skills training in preparation



for her employment search. Often while working with a customer, our staff identify other needs that our agency can assist with. The original pre-employment training led to Social Security Benefits Planning so that Hailey and her mom could better understand how employment would impact her benefits, including healthcare coverage. Additionally, our Independent Living staff assisted Hailey with travel training so that she would know how to use public transportation in her area.

Hailey and her mom, Sue, live in the house that Sue grew up in. When Sue's mom passed away, they moved back into the home to live with Sue's dad. This was a good arrangement because they could keep an eye on grandpa and he could be available for Hailey while Sue was at work. The only problem is that the house is a split-level; once you step in the door you must go up or down a short flight of stairs. Hailey uses a wheelchair which meant Sue had to carry Hailey up and down to get her in and out of the house, and Hailey needed to have a chair on both the ground level and upstairs in her living area. When Sue is at work, Hailey was trapped upstairs which made her options very limited for employment, social interaction, and anything else she might want to do outside the house.

Hailey realized her goal of getting a job would be unattainable until she addressed the barriers inside her home. The family had researched resources for funding

a stair lift that Hailey could use to "ride" up and down the stairs, however, many of these options were only available to particular demographics such as veterans, seniors, or children – Hailey didn't qualify for any of those. Disability Network was able to use a combination of funds to provide the stair lift that Hailey needed.

The stair lift got Hailey from the main level of the house to the ground level; yet there was still one more step to becoming independent – now she needed a one-step ramp to get out of the house. Through our Ramp Up program, we coordinated the installment of a small metal ramp in the garage which provided that last step to independence for Hailey.

Hailey is very excited about her new stair lift and ramp. Having the ability to navigate the stairs provides her with independence to enjoy her community; she is looking forward to going to the mall and catching a movie with friends. And now she can focus on her original goal of getting a job – the sky's the limit!

Volunteers of the Year

We presented our Volunteer of the Year award at the ADA Celebration in July. This year's Volunteer of the Year was awarded to two brothers, Brad and Dale Dyksterhouse, from Westwood Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo.

Brad and Dale have brought a great deal of talent, energy and commitment to the Ramp Up program over the past three years. During this time, they have built 23 ramps in seven of the eight counties we serve. They have also generously shared their knowledge and guidance in the training of three new building groups for our Ramp Up program. The brothers work closely with Jeff Monroe and Jack Westra on the ramp builds, as well as Ashley from the Pro Desk at Home Depot in Plainwell.



We appreciate Brad & Dale for their gifts of meticulous craftsmanship, work ethic, the grace they show even when building in less-than-ideal conditions, as well as their kindness and sense of humor.

Powered by Inclusion

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). The Department of Labor promotes disability employment awareness each year with a different theme. This year's theme is "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion." It reflects the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during the national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disability Network Southwest Michigan offers several services directed toward businesses to assist with being more inclusive of employees with disabilities. Visit the Business Services page of our website.



Kalamazoo On-Demand Transportation Millage

Voters in Kalamazoo County will be asked to support a tax renewal to support on-demand public transportation van services through the Metro Connect Program. This is not a new tax. "Public transit is an essential service here in Kalamazoo County. People need public transit to get to jobs, medical appointments, grocery shopping and services in the community," Metro Executive Director Sean McBride said. "Metro Connect is sometimes peoples' only option to get there, he said, and many of the riders are senior citizens and people with disabilities."



NOV 2
VOTE
YES

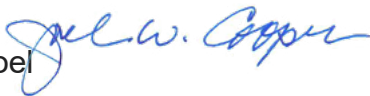
A NOTE FROM JOEL

Until We Meet Again

I am sharing with you, in this edition of our wonderful newsletter, my reflection of retiring from a career of 49 years in services supporting people with disabilities to be fully included in their community and a life of meaningful independence. The past 20 ½ years in my role at Disability Network has been indescribable in accomplishments alongside a talented and dedicated team of staff and disability advocates and devoted board members. In this reflection, I am reminded of all the different paths I have chosen and how the different circles in life experiences do come around to connect or reconnect in interesting ways. I know I can relate to my favorite poem written by Robert Frost that refers to 'the road not taken'. As I look back on all my diverse professional roles within the disability rights movement, I know "*I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*"

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to co-workers, volunteers, community partners, donors and colleagues across the state for embracing with me the values of being welcoming and kind, dedication to a role of making a difference and working together in collaborative ways to accomplish positive outcomes. Thank you for being present, so I could join with you, on many new and astonishing paths for us to experience together. I know the transition to follow my retirement will all be carried out with the highest integrity of ensuring our agency Mission will be ever present in achieving high quality of services to our communities and community members.

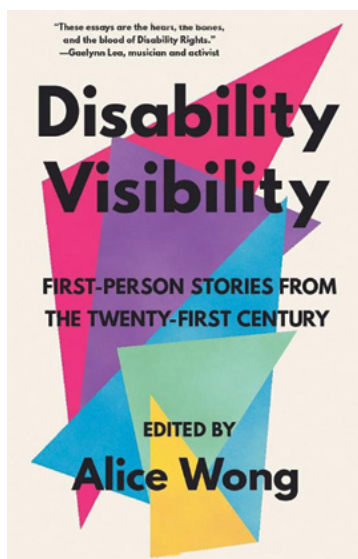
It has truly been my honor and pleasure to have enjoyed these memorable experiences at Disability Network Southwest Michigan and in the communities of Southwest Michigan.

Joel 



Disability Network Online Book Club

We are pleased to announce that we are bringing back our book club with a couple of changes. The book club will meet online using Zoom with participation available through a video internet connection or by phone. All books will have a disability focus and will be available in alternative format.



November 10 | 6PM

Disability Visibility

Edited by: Alice Wong

Activist Alice Wong brings together this urgent, galvanizing collection of contemporary essays by disabled people. This anthology gives a glimpse into the rich complexity of the disabled experience, highlighting the passions, talents, and everyday lives of this community. It invites readers to question their own understandings. It celebrates and documents disability culture in the now.

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

Community Education Programing

We continue to offer our Community Education programming online. Participants can join using a computer or call in on a phone. Register for the events you want to participate in and you will be sent the needed information to connect to the event. To register for any of these events, visit our website or contact Tyler: registration@dnswm.org or (269) 345-1516 x122.

In October . . .

Webinar: Inclusive Employment Practices (NEW)

Learn how your organization can benefit by utilizing untapped resources in the disability community. In this presentation, organizations of any size will learn how to respectfully recruit and retain employees with disabilities. The workshop will cover myths and facts about disability in the workplace, how and why to make reasonable accommodations for job applicants and staff, and how to write inclusive job descriptions to maximize your talent pool.

Thursday, October 14 at 1:30 – 3:00 PM OR Wednesday, October 27 at 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Webinar: Accessible Content

This webinar will discuss best practices for creating content that is accessible for everyone. By using accessible content, people with disabilities who may not be able to see your page, read your words, or hear your recording can still get your message.

Tuesday, October 12 at 10:00 – 11:30 AM OR Thursday, October 28 at 2:30 – 4:00 PM

Web-Movie: The R-Word

This documentary film confronts the word retard(ed). The film tells the stories of a diverse group of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have the same hopes & fears as everyone else and of their siblings who advocate on their behalf and turn their love and pride into action.

Thursday, October 7 at 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Virtual Exercise: Spirit Club (Extended through the end of the year!)

Spirit Club is a one-hour virtual exercise program that is specifically designed to present a range of options to suit everyone. Spirit Club is held twice each week, attend as often as you care to.

Tuesdays at 3:00 – 4:00 PM AND Thursdays at 10:30 – 11:30 AM

Coming up in November & December . . .

Look for details on our website for these events as they get closer.

- [Do's & Don'ts: Service Animals](#)
- [Disability & The Media](#)
- [Off the Rails \(movie\)](#)
- [Ableism 101 & 102](#)
- [DEEJ \(movie\)](#)

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.

Our Publications:

The LINK is our quarterly newsletter, available in print or emailed in electronic format and is available in alternative format upon request.

Disability Digest is a monthly e-publication focused on the Disability Rights Movement and upcoming Disability Network happenings. Available in electronic format only.

You can sign up online for our publications at www.dnswm.org; or contact Dale at abbott@dnswm.org or (269) 345-1516 x123. Current and past issues of our publications are available on our website at www.dnswm.org.

This newsletter is available in alternative format upon request.



Find us on
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