



NATIONAL DISABILITY INSTITUTE PRESENTS

25@25

25 @ 25

Introduction

To capture the importance of the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), National Disability Institute invited a short list of distinctive individuals with disabilities to share their personal experiences on how the ADA changed their lives and their vision of the next stage of ADA impact. We offer you their comments and reflections on a world that continues to become more accessible and inclusive. Some of the 25 individuals profiled are well known in the disability and financial communities, and some less so. However, all offer unique and dynamic perspectives that will help launch the next stage of financial inclusion and well-being for people with disabilities. In this spirit, National Disability Institute presents to you 25 portraits of individuals with disabilities in the economic mainstream: 25@25.

Despite a diversity of career paths, the 25@25 share much in common, including a fierce determination to succeed. They recognize that the ADA made it possible for them to dream, to accomplish and to contribute to the richness of inclusive communities. The 25@25 are role models and leaders whose everyday lives change the thinking, attitudes and behavior of others who meet them, work with them, listen to them and learn from them.

The 25@25 are representative of the strength of our nation: individual talent and human resource across age, gender, race, ethnicity and the spectrum of disability. They are optimistic about the advancement of economic mobility and security for their peers, and for the next generation who will benefit from the reach and impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To quote Bob Williams, distinguished activist, policymaker and public servant, “The ADA stands for the proposition that the American Dream must be accessible to all and within reach of those who seek it, and are willing to work violently hard to achieve their slice of it. It equips us with the opportunity, tools and obligation to make good on this principle. The rest is up to us.”



The individuals on the following pages were asked two questions:

1

How has the ADA helped you and/or others advance the freedom and economic independence of people with disabilities?

2

In 10 years, with ADA@35, what is your prediction for improved freedom and economic mobility for individuals with disabilities?



Josh Blue

Comedian

Perhaps best known as the comedian who puts the cerebral in cerebral palsy, Josh Blue centers much of his self-deprecating act around his disability. He exploded onto the national comedy scene by capturing the attention and endearment of the country as the winner of NBC's *Last Comic Standing*. Josh starred in *Comedy Central Presents: Josh Blue*, which received rave reviews from fans and critics alike and was named the 11th best special on the network in 2011. He has appeared on *Ron White's Comedy Salute to the Troops* and made his late night television debut on *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*. Josh is a former member of the U.S. Paralympic Soccer Team and competed in Athens at the Paralympic Games.

1

The ADA has had a tremendous positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities. By refusing to allow employers to discriminate against those with disabilities in their hiring practices, the ADA has empowered countless people to be productive members of the workforce and given them the ability to live independently. While this may now be seen as a basic human right, before the ADA was enacted many people were stuck in a position of dependence. I'm no economist, but common sense says this shift towards greater independence can only have a positive impact on the nation's economy. Additionally, accessible technologies have made my life much easier.

2

Most people neglect to realize that people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world, and incidentally the only minority group that you can join at any time. We are all just one bad bike ride away. While significant progress has been made, I'm even more excited about what the future holds. As our culture continues to adopt and expand on the principles of the ADA, and as better accessible technologies are developed, the economic disadvantages for those with disabilities will continue to dissipate. The future looks very bright indeed.



Bregitt Viviana Jimenez

Advocate Coordinator, DAWN

Bregitt Viviana Jimenez is a proud Latina deaf woman. Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Bregitt currently resides in Washington, D.C. and works at DAWN, a deaf-run community-based non-profit organization that provides blended services, domestic violence and sexual violence services to deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind survivors in the Washington metropolitan area. Bregitt is President of Latino Deaf and Hard of Hearing Association of the Metropolitan DC Area, Inc. (LDHHAMDC) and serves on the board of directors of Deaf Women of Color (DWC). She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies, a Master of Arts in School Social Work Specialization and a Graduate Certificate from Gallaudet University.

1

The ADA has helped myself and others in many different ways. In 2008, I visited Honduras where I was struck by the huge difference of having and not having legislation in effect like the ADA. In Honduras, deaf people are not treated equally. It was as if they doubted our ability to understand anything. The realization came to me that I am fortunate to have the same privileges as every other American. Not to mention, the ADA helped me get access to interpreters, note takers and CART services while in high school.

2

As an advocate coordinator for DAWN, I have noticed numerous barriers related to the judicial system, shelters, counseling services and domestic violence/sexual violence support group for deaf survivors. When we refer individuals to resources and other services, frequently they come back to us having experienced a lack of accommodations at other locations. Accommodations cost money – this is a huge barrier. Nonprofits struggle with finding room in their budgets to provide accommodations and specialized programs like ours at DAWN. I believe in the next 10 years more funding will be made available to nonprofit organizations so that they are able to serve deaf survivors the best they can.



David Egan

Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Public Policy Fellow

David Egan has always dreamed big. A native Virginian, when he was eight, David began swimming competitively in the Special Olympics. As he grew, he looked to bigger goals – having a job and finding ways to change attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities. David is an eager advocate for people with intellectual disabilities at the local, national and international levels. Most recently, David was accepted as a Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Public Policy Fellow, the first recipient with an intellectual disability. In addition, David was selected as a Sargent Shriver International Global Messenger, serving Special Olympics and participating in the 2015 World Summer Games.

1

The Americans with Disabilities Act has opened many doors for me as an individual with Down syndrome. When I was growing up, I asked my mom, “When will this Down syndrome thing go away?” She told me that it would be with me for the rest of my life, but that it would not stop me from achieving my dreams. Having a job has made me feel valued and included. To quote Booz Allen Hamilton CEO, Ralph Shrader: “Work provides more than a paycheck. It brings dignity, security, and community. When businesses open job opportunities to men and women with disabilities, everyone benefits – the individual, the company and society at large.”

2

I want to see even more people with disabilities in the workplace. I want to see a more educated corporate America that realizes and sees the possABLITIES of people with disabilities. In 10 years, I hope to see even more people with disabilities earning competitive salaries in mainstream jobs where they receive full benefits. Furthermore, I want to see disability legislation that includes verbiage that effectively addresses the needs of not just the physical disability community, but also the intellectual and developmental disability community. We need to act now to position legislation to be proactive rather than reactive. If we work together, we will make the next 10 years even better.



Wendy Crawford

Founder and Editor, mobileWOMEN.org

Driving to the airport for her first international contract at the age of 19, fashion model Wendy Crawford was struck by a drunk driver and rendered a quadriplegic. Wendy has since devoted her life to raising awareness of the particular issues women with disabilities face, including the challenge of self-image and self-acceptance. As a spokesperson and TEDx speaker, Wendy has developed many empowering initiatives including mobileWOMEN.org, an online magazine for women in wheelchairs, and The Raw Beauty Project, a photography exhibit that redefines beauty to include all women.

1

The ADA has leveled the playing field between those with and without disabilities, opening a world of possibilities. Accessibility has allowed me to be more independent, which is a priceless gift. This has transformed my life. Initially, after my accident, I did not want to be disabled. I did not one to be one of THEM. Fortunately, I was able to spend more time with other women with disabilities, which was vital for me to survive, grow and become productive again. Without the ADA, these women would not have been able to thrive, and I cannot imagine where my life would be today without their support and influence.

2

I envision accessible housing will become commonplace, so more individuals may live independently. I envision all medical equipment becoming universally accessible and people with disabilities having improved access to health care. In terms of economic empowerment, I envision a world where people with disabilities are included in every aspect of mainstream media. A blind newscaster, a deaf actor, a quadriplegic television host, a fashion model with Down syndrome— why not? Beauty will not be limited to a certain size, age, color or ability; and uniqueness will be celebrated. This increased visibility will help create a society more cognizant of people with disabilities, and in turn, generate more opportunities in every area, including employment.



Anil Lewis

Executive Director, National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute

Born in 1964, Anil Lewis did not acquire his disability until 1989, when he developed retinitis pigmentosa, a retinal degenerative eye disease. Following his diagnosis, Anil subsequently earned a Bachelor's of Business Administration in Computer Information Systems at Georgia State University (GSU) and a master's degree in Public Administration from GSU in 2003. A current member of the Greater Baltimore LEADERShip, Anil was most recently selected by President Obama as a member of the U. S. AbilityOne Commission. Anil is the Executive Director of the National Federation for the Blind Jernigan Institute and is responsible for the development and implementation of innovative projects and programs encouraging the full participation of every blind citizen.

1

Blinded in 1989, I became a person with a disability during a period of great excitement and empowerment, which fortified me with a positive self-concept of myself. The Americans with Disabilities Act, by mandating equal access to programs, facilities and information, removes barriers which limit full participation, and creates opportunities for us to be acknowledged as valuable, contributing members of society. More than a landmark piece of legislation, it is the spirit of the ADA, which promotes awareness and asserts the capacity of people with disabilities, that empowers all of us to seek freedom and equality.

2

Over the next 10 years, people with disabilities will continue to leverage the Americans with Disabilities Act as a vehicle toward the elimination of the barriers that prohibit our full participation. Each victory will create an opportunity that did not previously exist, and reshape society's perception of the capacity of people with disabilities. With a growing recognition that accessible programs, facilities and devices enhance everyone's life, more and more, the principles of universal design will become intrinsic to the development of all systems. Eventually, people with disabilities will be able to effectively acquire the educational training and respect to be recognized as beneficial, contributing members of society.



Amanda Thompson

Master's Candidate, Speech Language Pathology, University of Kansas

Amanda Thompson is a graduate student at Fort Hays State University, and the most recent winner of National Disability Institute's "My American Dream: Voices of Americans with Disabilities" video contest. Amanda is pursuing a master's degree in Speech Language Pathology, after previously earning a Bachelor's of Arts in Speech-Language-Hearing from the University of Kansas (KU). While at KU, Amanda was vice president of the student group, "Ablehawks and Allies," an Accessibility Ambassador, a member of KU's 2013-2014 Women of Distinction calendar and recipient of the 2013 Michael Lechner Advocacy Award. Amanda hopes, in the future, to aid in the recovery of individuals, like herself, who are living with traumatic brain injuries.

1

The ADA has impacted my life tremendously, as it has the lives of numerous people around me. If it were not for the ADA, inclusion and accommodations in a school setting would not be a reality for me, and I would be unable to pursue my chosen education/career path. As a person with an invisible disability, the ADA has not only personally affected me, but also the lives of chair users and individuals with physical or visible disabilities. The ADA allows me to reach for and attain my dreams, despite my disability.

2

Disability is THE movement of our generation. Our world has made remarkable strides towards inclusion and acceptance of people with disabilities, but much work still needs to be done. Completing higher education provides individuals greater economic mobility and improves their quality of life. In 10 years, I see a world where people with disabilities have access to the same educational and career opportunities as people without disabilities. I picture a world where people with disabilities control their own fate and the trajectory of their own life, a world where we are not people with and without disabilities, we are just people.



Robert (Bob) R. Williams

Senior Advisor to the Deputy Commissioner for Retirement and Disability Policy, Social Security Administration

Robert (Bob) R. Williams has advised many organizations on policy issues affecting the health, independence and economic well-being of Americans with disabilities. From 1993-2000, Bob served as commissioner on developmental disabilities and then as the deputy assistant secretary for Disability, Aging and Long-Term Care Policy at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1990, he worked on enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act, beginning his career as a court appointed monitoring team charged with closing Forest Haven, the District of Columbia's institution for people with developmental disabilities. Bob is a graduate of George Washington University and lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife, Helen Rader.

1

For the thousands of us, with and without disabilities, that worked together to gain its passage a generation ago, the ADA is a promissory note that we must continually pay forward. Few things continue to transform and make the physical, social, economic, technological and opportunity landscapes of America accessible to all its people like this law. ADA stands for the proposition that the America Dream must be accessible to all and within reach of those who seek it, and are willing to work violently hard to achieve their slice of it. It equips us with the opportunity, tools and obligation to make good on this principle. The rest is up to us.

2

Progress continues through the vigorous enforcement of the Olmstead Decision in negating the institutional and segregated employment biases inherent in Medicaid and other federal and state programs, funding streams and activities. The preponderance of such funds now help enable those with significant disabilities to live, learn, pursue good careers, fall in love and marry, raise sons and daughters, save and invest in the future, try, struggle, fail and get up to do it again in the thick of the fray of American life just like all others. Workers with significant disabilities and their families can obtain Enabling Independence coverage on a sliding scale in every State.



Lucia Rios

Community Access Specialist, Disability Network/Lakeshore

Lucia Rios was born with spina bifida. Lucia started her professional career at a local newspaper while working contractually at her local Center for Independent Living. However, her passion for disability issues grew, and she accepted a full-time position at Disability Network/Lakeshore. For the past 12 years, Lucia has provided technical assistance on accessibility to businesses, coordinating and teaching a work readiness program for youth with disabilities and providing disability sensitivity training to various groups. She also works as an active freelance writer and social media consultant. In 2013, Lucia won National Disability Institute's Third Annual "My American Dream" video contest. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Comparative Religion from Western Michigan University.

1

I was only 10 years old when the ADA was signed, but did not realize its positive impact on my life until I attended college years later. Because of the ADA, there was no question about attending a public and accessible university. When I joined the workforce, I applied for a job and was hired by a company that made accommodations without hesitation. Being able to hold full-time employment, provide for myself financially and own a home has given me the opportunity to be a contributing member of my community. I'm fortunate that my work allows me to take on an active role in helping eliminate physical and attitudinal barriers about people with disabilities.

2

In 25 years, there has been a lot done to eliminate discrimination of people with disabilities. In 10 years, I believe more individuals will see the value people with disabilities provide in the workforce and community. Part of this is because more populations of people are acquiring disabilities and providing positive messages – think Wounded Warrior Project, public figures talking about their disabilities, commercials showing ability in a disability. Also, with the advancement of technology, I believe there will be more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to live, work and participate in meaningful activities.



Tommy Fields

Lead Services Associate, Support Services, Bank of America

Tommy Fields works at Bank of America as a Lead Services Associate, Support Services. His daily responsibilities include assisting the Home Loans team, as well as helping on the loading dock or with other requests from his teammates and managers. Tommy volunteers with Special Olympics as a softball coach and is a board member of Special Olympics Delaware. He is also an athlete, competing in bocce at the Special Olympics summer games and winning a gold medal. Tommy is involved with Delaware People First and the Athlete Input Council, as well as the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) where he and others with disabilities work with state regulators to change the laws to benefit people with disabilities.

1

The ADA has opened doors that enable me and other people with disabilities to be financially independent. It's helped me to be a proud employee of Bank of America, a company that supports people with intellectual and physical disabilities. Because of that, I am able to live with my lovely wife, Tina, in an apartment on our own. I own a car and we can go on vacation, shopping, to the movies, mall, whenever and wherever we want to. I have medical insurance to take care of my medical conditions as well as Tina's. We are self sufficient – thanks to the ADA.

2

In 10 years, I would like to see more people with intellectual and physical disabilities to have jobs, which in turn will provide financial independence and help them have an apartment to call their own. I want to see people with disabilities stand up for themselves and know their rights and be respected as part of the community; and to have fun and be happy.



Donna R. Walton, Ed.D.

Founder and CEO, Leggtalk, Inc.

A cancer survivor and above-the-knee amputee, Donna Walton has more than 20 years of experience in employment and disability services. Donna is founder and CEO of Leggtalk, Inc., a company whose aim is to motivate and empower individuals to conquer their personal limitations and achieve their vision of success. In 2012, Donna launched Divas With Disabilities (DWD) to showcase the talent and abilities of women of color and to help shape the perspective of what “disability looks like.” Donna earned a bachelor’s degree from American University, her master’s degree in Adult Education from Syracuse University, and a doctoral degree in Counseling from George Washington University.

1

In 1976, at the age of 18, I was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a potentially fatal form of bone cancer. In my sophomore year of college, my left leg was amputated above the knee. In 1990, I shifted to advocacy to advance the freedom and economic independence of people with disabilities by helping women with physical disabilities achieve successful employment outcomes. The shift was imperative because, prior to the ADA, disability served as a major barrier to women of color – disproportionately being denied equal access to employment, housing and transportation. The ADA has become a powerful equalizer helping advance freedom and economic independence, not only for me, but others with severe physical disabilities.

2

My prediction, to borrow a line from President Barack Obama, is “Equal access, equal opportunity, and the freedom to make of our lives what we will...” This will take teamwork and the collective effort of thinkers, builders, employers and policy makers. As a society, we have come to expect accessible access to employment, education and information. For individuals with disabilities, the fear of not being able to fully participate in the American Dream is a direct threat to his/her quality of life. We must discover new ways to meet challenges and remove barriers. This will be critical for improved freedom and economic mobility for all individuals with disabilities.



L. Vance Taylor

Principal, Catalyst Partners

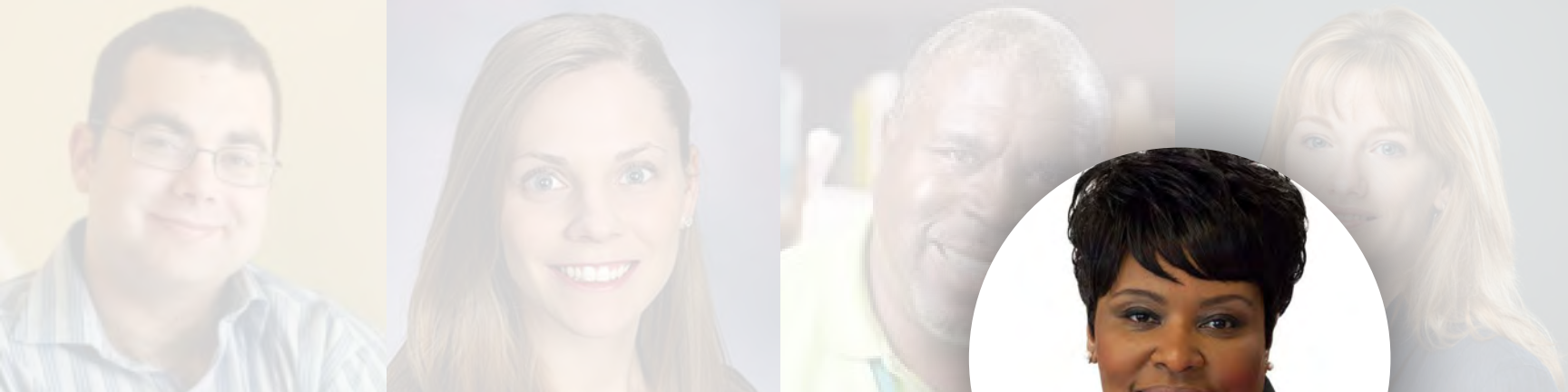
Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, L. Vance Taylor was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at the age of seven. In 2002, Vance moved to Washington, D.C. where he has advised two different members of Congress on issues ranging from immigration to the environment. Currently, Vance is a principal at Catalyst Partners, LLC, one of Washington's top-ranked homeland security consulting firms. In August 2015, he will assume a new role as Chief for the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) at the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. Vance holds a bachelor's degree in Communications from Brigham Young University and a master's degree in Homeland Security from the University of Connecticut.

1

It is because of the protections afforded to me through this magnificent law that I have enjoyed the opportunities of education, employment and independence which, while inherently afforded to the non-disabled population, have historically been unavailable to those within the disability community. By liberating our community, the ADA has empowered all those with disabilities to be fully invested, productive members of society.

2

Ten years from now, the notion that the rights and privileges of people with disabilities were once denied will be an unthinkable concept to the Millennial Generation who have grown up committed to respect and provide greater access to all members of our society. Indeed, when the ADA turns 35, I know there will be more students with disabilities enrolled at colleges and universities than ever before; more disabled members at all levels of the workforce than previous generations could have ever imagined; and a more dynamic, independent and productive disabled population than has ever existed. All this will be because the ADA has paved the way for our dreams to become a reality.



Ginger Miller

President and CEO, Women Veterans Interactive

A 100 percent disabled veteran, who beat the odds of homelessness, Ginger Miller is the President and CEO of Women Veterans Interactive, and has been recognized by the White House and Obama Administration as “Champion of Change for Women Veterans.” Ginger holds a Master’s Degree in Nonprofit and Association Management. She previously served as Chairwoman of the Prince George’s County Commission for Veterans and on the Maryland Commission for Women and the Maryland Caregivers Support Coordinating Council.

1

The ADA has helped numerous veterans with disabilities find gainful employment by raising the level of awareness on this unique population of citizens. Raising awareness helps society understand the employment needs of disabled veterans that, in return, helps them achieve economic independence.

2

Our nation’s service members with disabilities often live in silence. They go from serving our country with a huge sense of pride, to getting wounded with disabilities that are seen and unseen, ultimately believing they are damaged goods. These men and women deserve the utmost respect and opportunities to become productive citizens. In 10 years, with ADA@35, I see a world that will become even more understanding and accepting of disabled veterans. It is my hope, and I feel secure in saying, that in 10 years with ADA@35, disabled veterans will have more opportunities for employment and improved freedom and economic mobility.



John Robinson

Managing Partner and CEO, Our Ability

John Robinson is Managing Partner and CEO of Our Ability, a United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN) Disability Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE), specializing in diversity inclusion messaging, disability etiquette and video production. Outside of work, John is a motivational/inspirational speaker, whose travels have taken him to Italy and as far as Australia, and everywhere in between, discussing the obstacles he has overcome in his life. John is also the subject of a national documentary shown on the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS) titled, *Get Off Your Knees: The John Robinson Story*. He also authored the autobiography *Get Off Your Knees: A Story of Faith, Courage, and Determination*. In 2014, John, who was born with congenital amputee, was named a White House Disability Employment Champion of Change. John has been married for more than 21 years and has three children.

1

Because of the ADA, I have had more opportunities in the past 25 years than I could have ever imagined. Merely two decades ago, I could not find a job. Having lived under the ADA for the past quarter century, I can say our society as a whole has vastly improved. While we cannot eliminate discrimination totally, we are making strides and will continue to make strides in the next 25 years.

2

Over the course of the next decade, I see continued advancements in employment, entrepreneurship and opportunity for all people with disabilities. It will be essential for our economy to continue to expand economic outcomes for people with disabilities. Our society must create more tax paying citizens, rather than tax receiving citizens. I am proud to work with so many others at the forefront of this movement.



Deepa Goraya

*Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights
and Urban Affairs, Staff Attorney for the Disability Rights Project*

Deepa Goraya joined the Washington Lawyers' Committee as a staff attorney in July 2014 after serving as a volunteer attorney with the Disability Rights Project. During law school at the University of Michigan, Deepa completed an externship with the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, where she worked with disability rights attorneys and investigators to resolve complaints of accessibility and employment discrimination from persons with disabilities. She also interned at the Burton Blatt Institute's DC office, at the White House on Disability Policy, at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and with Disability Rights International. Deepa now serves as Vice-Chair of the Young Lawyers Division Minorities in the Profession Committee.

1

I think the ADA has really helped people with disabilities. It gave me access to opportunities I wouldn't have had before. If I couldn't get braille books I wouldn't have had equal access to an education or to employment. I would not have had equal opportunity for financial independence, or to be able to get off Social Security Benefits and have a job. Growing up with the ADA, I always knew I had an equal right to pursue everything that everyone else. That's something I'm thankful for every day.

2

In the next 10 years, my hope is that we would really see a dramatic improvement in the employment of people with disabilities, and that more employers will look at the qualifications of a person and not their disability. I hope technology improves across all applications. Mobile apps need to be accessible. For instance, there is no technology currently that makes mobile apps accessible to the blind so there is still a big gap in that area. As technology improves in our everyday lives, it also needs to be accessible in the workplace so that people with disabilities can do their jobs and have an equal shot in the workforce.



Joshua R. Beal, MBA

Managing Partner, Schwarz Financial Services LLC

Born deaf, and raised in California and Hawaii, Joshua graduated from the University of Hawaii with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. After starting his professional career at World Bank, Joshua returned to school at Rochester Institute of Technology as a Professional Fellow Scholar, where he obtained a Master in Business Administration. Currently, Joshua is the managing partner at Schwarz Financial Services LLC, and founder of DeafTax.com. He resides in Honolulu, Hawaii with his wife, who is also hard of hearing, and their four children.

1

ADA has helped me tremendously in the area of communication access – providing the interpreters needed to successfully complete my education, and video-relay services (VRS) to enable the everyday communication needs for the effective operation of my business. This has also extended to my personal life as my wife and I have been able to access full communication when attending to the needs of my family in medical, legal and educational settings.

2

Ten years from now, ADA will enable a wider acceptance of access needs for all people with disabilities, as a practical matter rather than a compliance matter. With the continued advances of organizations like NDI to influence public policy, even more entities will make informed choices about how to provide access to all people. Furthermore, from an economic view, the cost of access will decrease (economy of scale) as infrastructure will be designed to ensure access, and more entities will incorporate proactive access planning into their operations.



Miranda Kennedy, MPP

Director of Training, National Disability Employment Initiative (DEI), U.S. Department of Labor

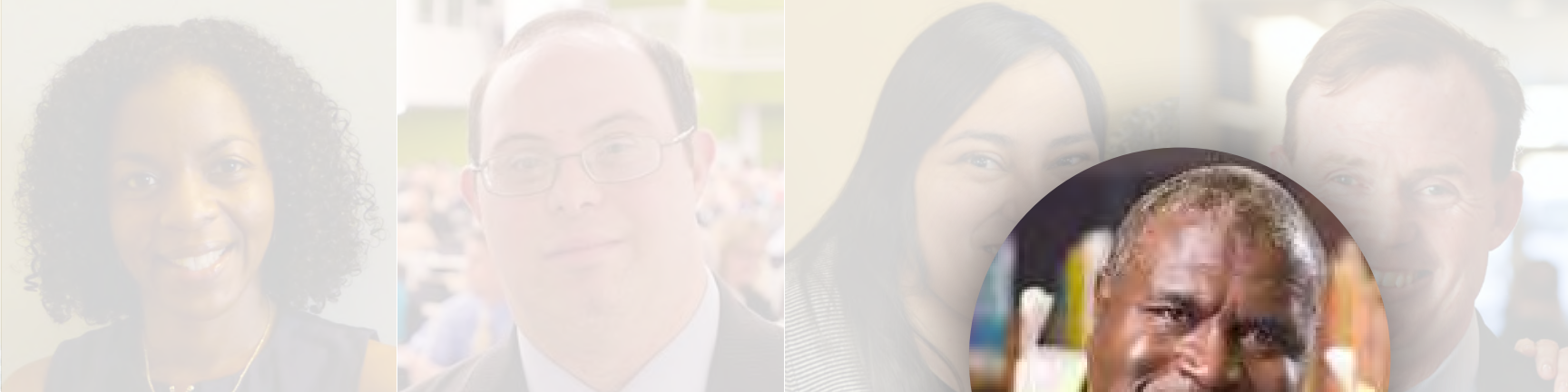
Miranda Kennedy is Director of Training for the U.S. Department of Labor's National Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). Miranda has extensive expertise in the areas of researching and analyzing policy issues, developing and executing training, and implementing promising practices in the areas of youth in transition, workforce development, cross-system service coordination, employment, entrepreneurship, asset development, assistive technology, community participation and inclusion. Miranda holds a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Denver and lives near Boulder, Colorado with her two children.

1

I acquired my traumatic brain injury in the late 1990's shortly after the ADA was passed. The ADA has been foundational in my ability to advocate and receive the accommodations I needed to go to school, go to work and be self-sufficient. My life would be something out of a modern day Dickens novel if it weren't for the ADA, and my life is great – thanks to the ADA. My gratitude and love of this beautiful piece of legislation on its 25th birthday would bring tears to my eyes if my tear ducts weren't broken. On a broader level, the ADA is the backbone civil rights legislation upon which all of our collective work has been built.

2

My dream for the ADA@35 is that we fully realize all of its promises. There is still a great deal of fear and misinformation that keeps many people with disabilities locked in a pattern of subsistence on benefits and a life locked in poverty. By 35, I hope we have our tipping point, with the advent of new technologies and a changing economy and mindset around disability, and that the "disability default" of a life on the margins will be removed from the equation.



Ricardo Thornton, Sr.

Disability Advocate, President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Ricardo Thornton has worked at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library since 1978. He is a member of Project ACTION!, a coalition of adults with disabilities and a member of the D.C. Developmental Disabilities Council. In addition, he acts with the theatre group Players Unlimited, and is an international ambassador with the Special Olympics. Ricardo and his wife Donna were the subjects of *Profoundly Normal*, a made-for-TV movie. In 1997, *The Washingtonian* magazine named Ricardo a "Washingtonian of the Year." In 2014, President Obama appointed Ricardo to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

1

In the past, I always relied on the system to manage everything. But now, I feel like I'm advancing, that my wife and I are growing. I have a checking account and a debit card to pay my bills. It makes me feel really good to be independent. I wanted to show people I could do it and I hope that other people with disabilities see that and want to do it as well. I think the message the ADA sends out is that we shouldn't label people with disabilities, but respect us for the skills we have and realize it's important for us to be successful just like anyone else.

2

In the next 10 years, I'd like to see more people with disabilities being employed and focus on how we can redefine employment and redefining how people can contribute, what that means. There should be more of an emphasis on skills and job training, especially in career trades. Because everyone can contribute, we all have gifts. I would also like to see more work with our youth – especially early intervention. And that more information is available to parents so they can help their kids grow and succeed, and to let them know there is something else after graduation.



Lucy Aponte

Artist and Owner, Life's Unlimited Zenith (LUZ), LLC

Elena (Lucy) Aponte was born in Ohio and moved to South Florida when she was nine years old. Lucy owns Life's Unlimited Zenith (LUZ), LLC., a fine art business. Notwithstanding her disabilities, Lucy has evolved into a creative spirit. Using various techniques, and supported by a team, Lucy creates art designs that inspire those who see and purchase them. Lucy has five collections: "Dare to Dream," "Possibilities," "Believe in...," "Enjoy Nature" and "Prosperity." In life and in work, Lucy lives by the Aponte's family mission statement: Love, learn, share and serve. Lucy is a reminder that, "Not being able to speak is not the same as not having anything to say, to do, to learn or to dream!"

1

The ADA has allowed me access to the following: (1) medical treatment, including access to test evaluation; (2) accessible hotel accommodations; and (3) accommodations and accessibility on cruise ships, which allows me to enjoy vacations with my family.

2

Due to the power of assistive technology, more individuals with disabilities will be able to perform jobs that were not possible before. This will allow more people to be employed, have the opportunity to start their own business and become more financially independent.



Rich Donovan

CEO, Fifth Quadrant Analytics

Rich Donovan is an internationally recognized subject matter expert on the convergence of disability and corporate profitability. He has spent more than 10 years focused on defining and unlocking the economic value of the disability market and is responsible for creating the 'Return on Disability' concept and model. Rich provides corporate and government clients with insights and tools to frame disability as a global emerging market. His annual report, *The Global Economics of Disability*, is prominently featured on the European Union website and is frequently quoted by businesses, governments and NGOs when defining the size, scope and value of the disability market. Rich also happens to have cerebral palsy.

1

While I do not believe that legislation causes society to change, it does signal society's expectations and demand. In economics, demand is like gravity is to physics – it impacts actions at every step. The ADA has caused actors in the economy to adjust their views on the disability market faster than they otherwise might have. It has provoked intelligent and motivated individuals to research disability as a market, proving to others that the space is worthy of time and capital. The disability market is large enough to stand on its merits, and the ADA was the first institutional signal of demand. Curb cuts are nice, but this initial demand signal is its real legacy.

2

Disability will be recognized as the world's largest emerging market by companies, investors and governments around the world. Rather than a 'social problem', in need of 'welfare,' this market will be seen as a valuable revenue opportunity and source of real innovation by the world's best thinkers. Fiscally speaking, when reframed, disability reduces government spending by 50 percent, simply because most are absorbed into the private economy. As companies/brands/governments compete to satisfy 'disability demand,' income and wealth-building replace civil rights and advocacy as the dominant topics in the media and policy debates.



Sheree Carara

Associate, Global Trade & Loan Products, J.P. Morgan Global Trade Services

Sheree Carara was born in Kingston, Jamaica and currently resides in Larchmont, New York. She has been employed by J.P. Morgan, New York for the past seven years where she is currently assigned to the Global Trade Finance group covering Latin American and North American financial institutions and corporate clients. Prior to joining J.P. Morgan, Sheree completed Spanish language studies at Colegio de España in Salamanca, Spain. She will always remember the date July 3, 2013, the day when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis... the day that she officially had the right to state that she had a disability.

1

Prior to my introduction to the ADA, I was confused and uncertain about the way forward with MS. Through the ADA, and the support of J.P. Morgan, I now have an understanding of what disability really means and it most certainly doesn't mean that a 'normal' life is over. It was a difficult journey, but I now have the freedom and economic independence to live my life even though I may need help at times. Acknowledging my disability and asking for help doesn't equate with incompetence, nor is it something to be embarrassed about. I had to understand a lot more about the new me with MS and, when I did, I relied on the ADA to provide me with knowledge and to infuse me with confidence and independence.

2

I am extremely proud of J.P. Morgan and all their efforts towards ensuring that people with disabilities have opportunities and also the right tools and support to complete tasks. My prediction or wish is that other companies, whether big or small, will do the same. The ADA has continuously provided help and awareness from state to state, and I want everyone with a disability to be able to proudly self-identify that disability without worrying or wondering if their disability will hinder them at work, at school, using public transportation, owning their first home or any other goal they want to achieve.



Tom Foley

Deputy Director, World Institute on Disability

Tom Foley's professional experience includes more than 25 years as an advocate in the Independent Living Movement, focusing on wealth building, employment policy, tax policy and information technology access in employment, government and education, both internationally and in the U.S. Since joining World Institute on Disability (WID) in 2007, Tom has been instrumental in the development of federal and state legislation aimed at increasing participation of people with disabilities in wealth building and employment programs. In 2008, Tom was recognized as a Coalition for Enterprise Development (CFED) Idea. In 2011, Tom received the Centers for Financial Innovations and Inclusions 2011 National Partners Award for Developing Outstanding Financial Inclusion Strategies.

1

As a person who is blind, I have seen firsthand how the ADA promised and delivered improved access to educational opportunities, books, materials and instruction to improve my and others employability and opportunity for economic advancement. At the same time, the ADA has provided the right to access banking and financial information in an accessible format so that millions of people with disabilities can make better and more informed decisions around student loans, home mortgages, banking, retirement savings and investing. These rights, paired with the individual responsibilities of full citizenship, provide a foundation and roadmap to build a better economic future for all Americans.

2

Recent legislative and regulatory advancements, such as the ABLE Act and Section 503, provide new opportunities for people with disabilities to go to work, earn a living and save for the future – without fear of losing their hard-earned benefits. There is perhaps no better time in American history for people with disabilities than right now! Over the next 10 years, I believe the disability community, with our government, corporate and non-profit champion partners, will see a significant increase in workforce participation rates and a reduction in the overall number of people with disabilities living in poverty. Let the next decade be known as a tipping point, the decade that equal economic expectations for all Americans were finally realized.



Kathy Martinez

*Senior Vice President, Disability Market Segment & Strategy,
Enterprise Marketing, Wells Fargo & Company*

Kathy Martinez is Senior Vice President, Disability Market Segment & Strategy for Wells Fargo where she works to expand the company's capabilities and programs dedicated to serving customers with disabilities and their families. Kathy joined Wells Fargo in March of 2015 from the U.S. Department of Labor where she served as the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). Under her leadership, ODEP launched the award-winning Campaign for Disability Employment, a national, multi-organization public awareness initiative that seeks to educate individuals about the value and talent people with disabilities bring to America's workplaces. Born blind, Kathy speaks and publishes from a compelling, personal perspective on disability employment. She is a graduate of San Francisco State University.

1

The ADA helped me and millions of others become more actively engaged in the world. The ADA allows me to participate in my community more independently. I'm able to take the bus and BART to work. Stops on both systems are called out so I always know where I am. When I travel, because of the ADA, I am able to find my hotel room without help. I can check in and go right to the correct room because there is braille on the doors. In my job, I have access to a screen reader, which allows me to access the information on my computer screen. I can fully contribute at work, as well as at home.

2

Our next frontier is economic empowerment. My picture of economic empowerment is to see the employment rate of people with disabilities increase by 20 percent, and to see us have access to and knowledge about financial instruments and products that can help us invest, save and join the middle class. I also see the fear of hiring and working with people with disabilities decreased. Then, with an increased number of people with disabilities employed, I would like to see more in executive positions and others with non-evident disabilities being "out" in their jobs. Weaving disability into our work environments and cultures will be the norm.



Oscar Jimenez-Solomon, MPH

Research Scientist and Research Coordinator, New York State Psychiatric Institute Center of Excellence for Cultural Competence

Oscar is a consumer researcher dedicated to improving the quality of life and economic inclusion of people with psychiatric disabilities. Currently, he is conducting a study to develop an evidence-based Peer-Supported Economic Empowerment intervention. This project builds on his experience at the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS), where he spearheaded the “We Can Work” and “We Can Save” campaigns as Director of Community and Economic Development. Oscar received a Bachelor of Sociology at Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and a Master of Public Health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

1

For me, the ADA is personal. In 2003, many thought I had a brilliant future ahead. Born in Peru, I graduated from a prestigious U.S. university and started an international academic career. But depression, anxiety and addiction disabled me. By 2004, I could no longer work, spent several months institutionalized, lived at a homeless shelter, became suicidal and convinced that my academic career was over. Ten years later, I was not only alive, but married and starting a family, living in a decent apartment and returning to the academic career I left in 2004. The ADA has made it possible for me to enjoy reasonable accommodations when I need them, receive treatment and support and be given another opportunity to do the work I love.

2

Much has improved for people with psychiatric disabilities in the last 25 years, yet there is much left to be done. My hope for 2025 is that new legislation, policies and supports, built on the framework of the ADA, will allow for ALL people with disabilities to enjoy improved access to employment and economic integration opportunities. Almost 10 years after the ADA was enacted, the landmark Olmstead Decision ruled in favor of the right of people with disabilities to receive necessary supports to live, work and go to school in the most integrated settings possible. This includes supporting individuals to overcome the barriers that challenge their integration and economic advancement.



Alexandra (Alex) McArthur

Senior Associate Consultant, Taproot Foundation

Alexandra (Alex) McArthur is a Senior Associate Consultant with the Taproot Foundation's Advisory Services Team in New York City. In this role, she helps strengthen communities by helping companies build and implement high-impact pro bono programs. In 2011, she was named Ms. Wheelchair America to promote inclusion for people with disabilities at the national level. She is a 2012 Coro Fellow in Public Affairs and a 2012 Starting Bloc Fellow for Social Innovation. Alexandra serves as Vice-Chair of the board directors of the National Disability Institute and Co-Chair of the Junior Board for IncludeNYC. In 2014, she was chosen as a White House Champion of Change for disability and employment.

1

For me, the ADA has allowed me to have financial freedom and personal liberties. I do not worry about being rejected from a job based on discrimination. I use reliable, accessible public transportation, which allows me to be an active member of my community. I don't expect to ever be a financial burden on my parents, as my job allows me to pay my expenses and put money into savings. Ultimately, the ADA has allowed me to grow up expecting everything out of life that someone without a disability might expect. It has allowed me to strive, to work, to plan and to accomplish.

2

I envision a world where people with disabilities are seen as an asset in the workplace and are better represented within the middle class. In 10 years, I hope additional legislation will empower people with disabilities to join the economic mainstream through policies that encourage employment and asset-building, but protect necessary government supports. I predict that companies will see people with disabilities as an integral population in their workforce and consumer segment, which will result in increased employment rates and products and services geared towards people with disabilities.



Ari Ne'eman

President and Co-founder, Autistic Self Advocacy Network



Ari Ne'eman is the President and Co-founder of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, an advocacy organization run by and for autistic adults seeking to increase the representation of autistic people across society. In 2009, President Obama nominated Ari to the National Council on Disability (NCD). He was confirmed by the Senate in July 2010 and currently chairs the Council's Entitlements Committee. Ari was recently appointed to the Advisory Committee to Increase Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities at the U.S. Department of Labor. Ari has a bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, where he studied political science in the Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program.

1

The ADA articulated a broad vision for inclusion for people with disabilities. From the beginning, inclusion in the workforce and financial empowerment was a big part of that. It isn't just about getting a job - though that represents a critical aspect of the American dream. It is also about ensuring that people with disabilities have an opportunity to participate in a broader vision of financial inclusion. Access to banking, access to investment and any number of other things that help build wealth are areas that we need to help build a pathway into the middle class for people with disabilities.

2

We need a concerted effort to open up the workforce to people with disabilities, similar to previous efforts to create opportunities for other marginalized groups. The new 503 regulations and the President's affirmative action efforts within the federal government are a valuable starting point. However, more must be done for private sector employment. Consideration needs to be given to methods that will both scale and create opportunities within inclusive workplaces at real wages, not segregated ones. Inclusion is an important value in and of itself. For our own sake, we should be addressing the barriers, from society and from ourselves, that have kept people with disabilities from fully participating in community life.



“Three weeks ago we celebrated our nation’s Independence Day. Today we’re here to rejoice in and celebrate another ‘independence day,’ one that is long overdue. With today’s signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom.”

- PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH
July 26, 1990

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