



A DAY
IN A
WHEELCHAIR

SM

Experiential Program Promoting
Disability Rights as Human Rights

Recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative University



Kristin Duquette, Founder

Kristin Duquette is a 2013 Trinity College graduate with a B.A. in Human Rights. She is passionate about disability youth, sport and empowerment. She is a 5x American Paralympic Record Holder, former US Team Captain for the 2010 Greek Open, and 3x Junior National Record Holder in swimming. Kristin is also a former Goldman Sachs Scholar and began her activism work during her time in college.

Kristin is the founder of a disability empowerment college program called *A Day in a Wheelchair*, promoting Disability Rights as Human Rights. Also, Kristin's summaries of UN disability policy have been archived in the Academic Council on the United Nations System. Kristin is affiliated with the American Association of People with Disabilities, the Challenged Athletes Foundation, and the Clinton Global Initiative University. Kristin is currently an ambassador for One Young World and continues to promote disability rights as human rights.

PREFACE

The World Needs More Disability Inclusion and Acceptance

Posted on April 22, 2013 by admin in [The World Needs...](#)

By Kristin Duquette

Did you know that people with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in the *world*? The World Health Organization estimates that, “1 billion people in the world have some form of disability.” And out of that 1 billion, 110-119 million experience barriers of social stigma and discrimination on a daily basis.

Why am I telling you this? Because every person with a disability can think back to an experience where they were shunned or not accepted because of their disability. The disabled community is a minority group, and society needs to understand what it truly means to create and live in an inclusive environment.

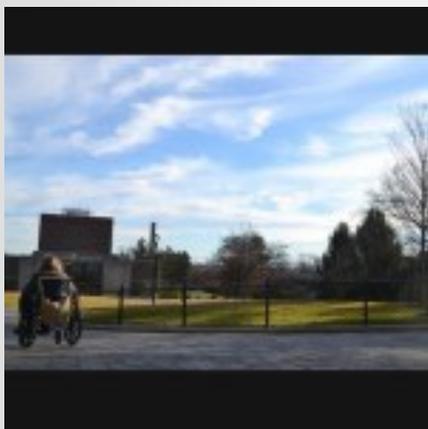
The person is not disabled. Despite apparent limitations, let me remind you that *everyone* has shortcomings. Society disables the person in the physical and social realm from infrastructure to social interactions.

My hope is for the world to realize that we are all interdependent. And in doing so, the world will understand that people with disabilities are human and have rights and talents to contribute.

I believe that we can all create disability inclusion on a micro level. How? Check out the video my friends and I made at Trinity College. We started a college program called A Day in a Wheelchair. I believe that discrimination occurs because of fear and the unknown. A Day in a Wheelchair places people in wheelchairs to understand that people with disabilities are people and have rights.

Ultimately, participants realize that people with disabilities should not be feared of or looked down upon. Through lived experience, we are breaking these social stigmas and barriers.

And more importantly, to combat this issue we can all look at each other in the eye, as equals and as humans. We can look past our differences and treat each other with respect and dignity deserved, including those with disabilities.



You can contact A Day in a Wheelchair at adayinawheelchair@gmail.com to bring our project to your campus, community or, office.



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Program Overview

A Day in a Wheelchair (ADW), is a program that seeks to bridge the gap between sympathy and empathy, to redefine the personhood of people with physical disabilities and promote a greater understanding that disability rights are human rights in an effort to remove disability stigma. ADW places able-bodied participants in chairs for 12 hour periods with the goal of promoting an empathetic understanding of disabled experiences. Combining the wheelchair experience with film and a structured discussion of disability rights, these participants learn to act as ambassadors in their communities and help promote a culture of understanding around disabilities through a critical human rights lens.

A Day in a Wheelchair program positively changes disability stereotypes and continues to make an impact with college students. The program is unique in its mission as it incorporates participants' experiences through film and open community discussions.



Why we did this program?

The most important issue we face is changing the broader culture of social-marginalization, specifically for people with physical disabilities. Our culture, as portrayed through radio, television, social media and the Internet reinforces how a young girl or boy should act and present themselves physically (i.e., how they perform identities and culture). The human world is a social world. Thus social perception is the key to changing the culture. To that end, we can have protests, make legislation, and create jobs. Yet while these steps are important, they lack efficacy in their promotion of empathy instead, and often unintentionally, supporting sympathetic interactions; people often sympathize with disabled persons, but imagining oneself as disabled can be a challenge for able-bodied persons. *A Day in a Wheelchair* seeks to bridge the gap between sympathy and empathy, to re-define the personhood of people with physical disabilities, and to promote greater understanding of disability rights as human rights.



Why we need to spread the word?

Based on statistics from the Council for Disability Awareness* *updated on July 3rd, 2013:*

- Just over 1 in 4 of today's 20 year-olds will become disabled before they retire.¹
- Over 37 million Americans are classified as disabled; about 12% of the total population. More than 50% of those disabled Americans are in their working years, from 18-64.²
- 8.8 million disabled wage earners, over 5% of U.S. workers, were receiving Social Security Disability (SSDI) benefits at the end of 2012.³
- In December of 2012, there were over 2.5 million disabled workers in their 20's, 30's and 40's receiving SSDI benefits.³



*(www.disabilitycanhappen.org/chances_disability/disability_stats.asp)

1.U.S. Social Security Administration, Fact Sheet February 7, 2013

2.U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011

3. U.S. Social Security Administration, Disabled Worker Beneficiary Data, December 2012



Audience

This program can be implemented in almost any venue: from companies, colleges and universities to the public school system.

Education Programs

The public school system is an ideal audience for this program in order to ensure that the recent (2013) legislation from the United States Department of Education's Section 504 to enforce athletic participation for students with disabilities occur.



Public School System—Present the ADW program to each state's Commissioner of Education who then can identify towns/schools that could incorporate

- Middle Schools—*A Day in a Wheelchair* can be incorporated alongside anti-bullying/discrimination awareness campaigns .
- High Schools—*A Day in a Wheelchair* is perfect for high schools as it promotes inclusion versus exclusion. This can be incorporated in the classroom and can empower students by creating teams and coordinating the event at their school.

- Colleges—The ADW program can be incorporated into a psychology, sociology, human rights and film curriculum by promoting discussions and awareness to occur and sharing the costs between departments. Another option is to incorporate the program as part of freshman orientation. Obtaining an understanding that disability rights are human rights will enable future leaders to incorporate this learning into their decision making. These great minds will have the ability to personally better understand and gain a deeper appreciation of empathy for others.

Corporations/Organizations

Corporations and organizations can benefit from *A Day in a Wheelchair* Program as it promotes an inclusive work environment. By understanding how one might live their life as being physically disabled, employees will ultimately understand that regardless of one's differences, there is always talent that can contribute to a project and company's objective. In addition, *A Day in a Wheelchair* promotes innovative thinking by navigating one's day with new equipment. By thinking outside of the box, employees will better understand how to address project challenges in the company environment.

Opportunities from incorporating *A Day in a Wheelchair*.

- Create awareness
- Inclusion
- Societal Changes



Event Toolkit

Team (Minimum of 4 individuals.)

- Program Leader- overseeing on campus project and reporting updates to *A Day in a Wheelchair* Program
- Treasurer- handling the bank account and money. Also need to establish a bank account and create partner relations and sponsors for funding. Supporting faculty and/or campus club or organization for funding.
- Logistics- handling the wheelchairs rentals
 - Identify and contact durable medical equipment vendor.
 - Determine local vendor for DME. Specify hospital manual push wheelchairs.
 - Get a project team together and also figure out a contract with a vendor for wheelchairs
 - Negotiate rental of wheelchairs, cost may vary depending who picks up/drop off (approximately \$35 to \$50 each daily).
- Outreach- communicating with clients, social media- running social media outlets- and for colleges- student leaders to organize and help run the program to make it a college/student campus program.
 - Rent a student video camera (provided by school) and coordinate someone to film and interview for the event.. This is not only crucial to event participants, but also campus and off campus observers as they can gain from participants' perspectives and experiences regarding disability.
 - Editing software (optional).

Resources needed

- Minimum 4 people to coordinate 30 to 35 participants.
- Supporting faculty and/or campus club or organization for funding.
- Equipment vendor for wheelchairs.
- Video camera.
- Editing software.

Event Toolkit

Timeframe Overview

- Minimum of 1 month lead time notice to vendor for wheelchair rentals.
- Week before promote (ie posters, flyers, etc).
- Participant registration sign up week of event.
- Event—minimum 12 hours (can be modified for other time intervals.)
- Post event activities:
 - Participant debriefing on camera.
 - Edit video data, varies with software and knowledge level as well as dedicated time. Preferably by film student, class or someone with film editing experience.
 - Campus/classroom discussions, to be determined by coordinators.
 - Video published for public awareness.



Event Procedures

Step 1—Conduct initial discussions with onsite coordinating group.

- Determine funding support.
- Identify what school or organization wants to get out of having this event?
- What do you want people to know, purpose?
- Be aware not to solely highlight inaccessibility, the wheelchair or disability of a person but rather empowerment.

Step 2—Determine date of event.

Step 3—Identify and contact equipment vendor.

- Specify hospital manual push wheelchairs.
- Rented 30 wheelchairs from Hudson Mobility costing \$35 a chair for 3 days equal \$1050.

Step 4—Rent a student video camera (provided by school) and coordinate someone to film and interview for the event.

- This is not only crucial to event participants, but also campus and off campus observers as they can gain from participants' perspectives and experiences regarding disability.
- Individual filming will be responsible for interviewing participants before and after wheelchair usage as well as throughout the event.
- Individual will edit film to create a disability rights video capturing the event.
- Video will be shared in discussion after event with participants and school community.

Step 5—Advertise to campus and create interest.

- Circulate flyers/posters in key locations announcing date of event and sign up dates.
- State significance of project and importance in spreading disability rights. For instance, have you been curious about what it'd be like to be in a wheelchair? Want to gain a sense of disability? State why (to promote disability rights and that people with disabilities are people).
- Gather participants for upcoming event.

Step 6—Event Week

- Develop liability and waiver form.
- Identify security to return equipment.
- Specify interview time, information gathering of data.
- Specify event day responsibilities.
- Share coordinators and participants contact info.
- Identify location where wheelchairs will be located onsite.

Step 7—Event Day

- Students and campus participants sign waivers
- Participants pick up wheelchairs.
- Leaders of event provide 5 minute instruction on how to use a wheelchair, ie open doors, going down hills safely.
- Participants give an appropriate time to return wheelchair.
- For security purposes, participants are asked to leave collateral, some form of identification until they return, ie student ID's or license.
- Throughout event, individual with camera is filming the day and conducting pre and post interviews.
- Participants return chairs at conclusion of event.
- Post interviews occur at time when chairs are returned.

Step 8—Post Event Activities

- Wheelchairs are returned to vendor the next day or appropriate time agreed upon with vendor.
- Video data editing. Time varies with individual's knowledge base and discretion of data/video selected.
- Project leaders determine date for post discussions open to participants and campus.
- Thank you notes sent to participants. Also include invitation to campus discussion.
- Hold discussion
 - Video is shared.
 - Issues raised regarding disabilities, new disability perspectives and a comfortable dialogue promoting disability rights.
 - Discussion goal is to bring light to disability life through empowerment, rights and treatment of others. (introduce the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.)
 - Power point presentation encouraged during discussion.
- Project analysis, summary or overview of program impact.
- Students can pledge that they support disability rights as human rights.

Toolkit Helpful Tips

- Wheelchair rental information can be obtained by contacting adayinawheelchair@gmail.com.
- Video recording is strongly encouraged as it is the most accurate way to show the participants experience.

Program Analysis/ Conclusions

Initial Intention

The program was initially designed to bring forth the inequalities and poor social interactions that people with disabilities commonly face.

Question- Through disability stimulation, can an able-bodied person's preconceived thoughts and interactions regarding a person with a disability change for the betterment of social justice and equality?

Initial Expectation

By placing able-bodied people in wheelchairs who are open to disability stimulation, the expectation was that these participants would consciously and subconsciously change their social interactions by being more empathetic towards people of diverse groups.

In addition, by filming participants' experiences the public would benefit from listening to engaging and thought provoking conversations. By posting these short films, our hope was that the public would begin to value programs that promote empathy and connectedness with diverse groups.

Not only would the participants be impacted by the event, but also the bystanders within the environment the program is being held. As disability is usually an out-of-sight-out-of-mind issue, by having numerous wheelchairs visible in the environment the expectation was to have bystanders think about disability and have that issue be a more common topic for the program day. The expectation and hope was to have bystanders reflect on their preconceived beliefs on disability.

Analysis of Program

With program production, it is evident that Team Leaders need to clearly communicate their findings and work leading up to the event of the program. If communication is not clear, then internal problems may occur.

In addition, social interactions and empathy is a stronger theme and is understood by participants when there is not as much advertisement on environment where program will be held. The intention was to have honest feedback and with heavy advertisements, feedback will not be as strong.

More men than women want to participate in the program. From our understanding and interpretation, this alludes to an image issue and the majority of women not being comfortable or as open to disability stimulation.

Bystanders on program environment were impacted by the program and received initial expectations.

The majority of participants did take away positive interactions and empathy when participating in the program.

There was a section of participants that did not receive the message that the program was intended for. These participants took away that it was hard to be in a wheelchair and being disabled.

Some participants and bystanders believed that the program was intended to promote inaccessibility issues and rethinking accessible infrastructure. While this is an important issue, the program's initial intention and expectation is to show participants that people with disabilities are first and foremost people and can begin these thoughts through empathy and disability stimulation.

Advertising for post discussion should be more important than the program participation.

Conclusion Results

The program may not be most beneficial being held at the same venue every year. The program was initial designed to give most honest feedback on disability issues and help promote an inclusive environment. By doing the program every year, the intention and initial message may not come across to the participants and reaching the most people.

All Project Leaders must work together in order to produce the best program for participants.

Money and time should not be heavily used for program advertising but for post discussion advertising. This is evident as the program wants honest feedback and social interactions when participants are in wheelchairs. The program can have an all inclusive and supportive environment through participation, filming and post discussion.

Going forward, Project Leaders should make it more clear to participants the expectation and message the Program promotes as this is not solely an inaccessibility and infrastructure issue.

Recording program via film and releasing them to the public has not only raised awareness to the cultural issues that the program is addressing, but has also served as advertisement for the program.

The program has proved to be beneficial and promotes inclusive communities regarding disability and diversity groups.

Program Analysis

Conclusion

Ask a question

Do background research

Construct a hypothesis

Test your hypothesis by doing an experiment

Analyze your data and draw a conclusion

Communicate your results.

Participants Responses

How did this impact you?



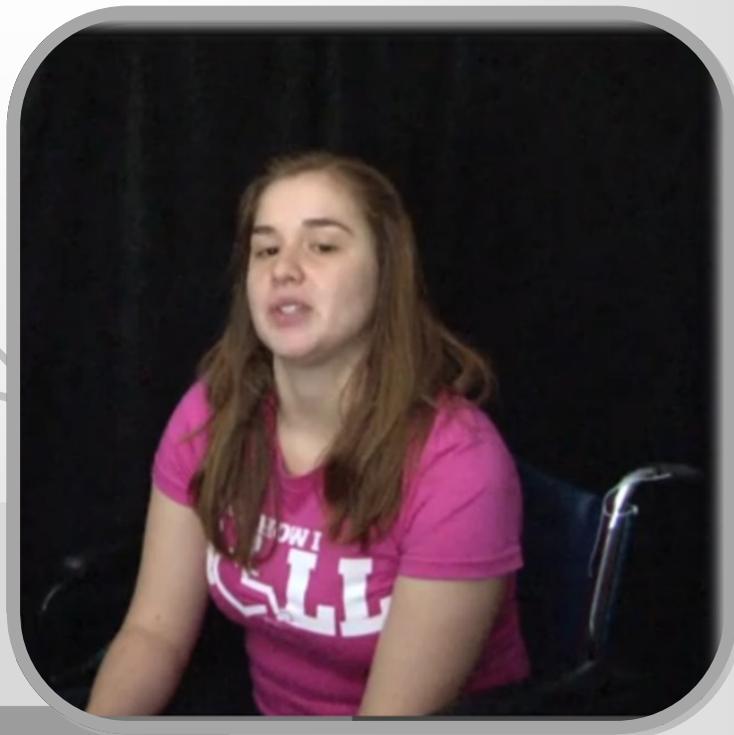
"It really changes the way you look at the world."



James Jones,
President of Trinity College
Participant

"It taught me how much I really don't know about it and tells me how much I have to learn about what it's like to be disabled."

Claudia Trafton
Co-Organizer
Class of 2016



How did this impact you?



This is the most incredible experience I've ever encountered I believe people in wheelchairs are not handicapped, it's us that walk around labeling them that are handicapped.

Patrick Robinson

“Don't be afraid to approach someone in a wheelchair and not think of them as any different because we are just like everyone else, we're humans, we're the same, just sitting down.”



Briana Scalesse, Co-Organizer
Class of 2016

What do you want people to know?



“They’re champions, the stuff that they have to do honestly, it’s admirable.”



“It takes bravery to walk into a room and acknowledge that you’re different and that everyone else is going to look at you differently.”

What reaction did you get?



“People - they don’t know what to do with you”

What I've Learned...

"I don't look at a disabled person through their disability ... so I know all of my friends who are disabled as themselves."



"I'm the same person being in the wheelchair or not and I feel like that's true for any disabled person."



Testimonials

"I have family members who are disabled and I remember growing up as a kid being very sensitive and aware of disability rights, although I may not have had the language to describe what I was feeling at that time. When I found out about A Day in a Wheelchair project I was impressed with the performative aspect of the action and the potential it holds to mobilize college students not only in the United States, but throughout the world. I was even more impressed by the students spearheading the project largely because of their sincere and genuine commitment to social justice and human rights, and the way they translated theory learned in the classroom into a viable human rights campaign."

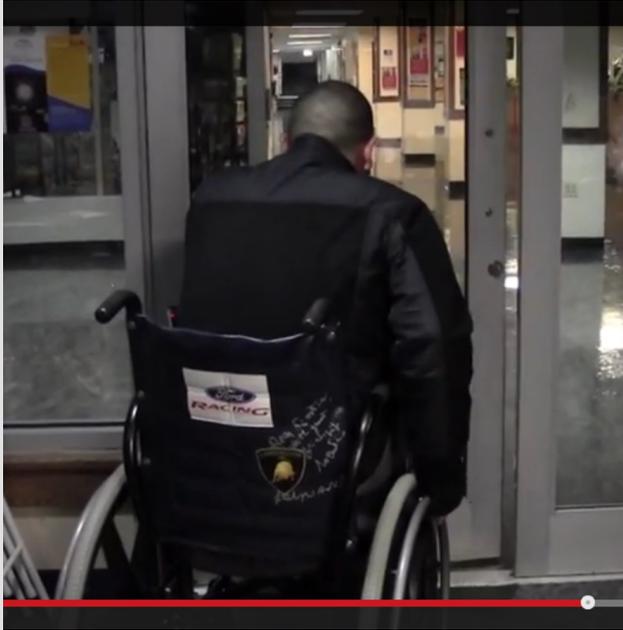
Seth M. Markle
Assistant Professor of History and International Studies
Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Minor in African Studies
Faculty Sponsor, Trinity in Cape Town Study Abroad
Trinity College

"Organized to commemorate Human Rights Day on December 10, A Day in a Wheelchair raised unprecedented awareness on campus about disability rights. As a form of experiential learning, it offered people an opportunity to better understand and reflect upon the everyday reality of having a disability. The project, most profoundly, challenged conventional views: re-labeling disability rights as human rights uniquely emphasizes what connects us all—not what separates us."

Sonia Cardenas
Charles A. Dana Research Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Human Rights Program
Trinity College

Jason Rojas

Connecticut House of Representatives, District 9



Youtube responses

[Lindsey Larson 1](#) March, 2013

“This is actually done really well and I think these people really did learn something. I think sensitivity experiments like this should be required to graduate from high school. Maybe then people wouldn't stare and treat people with disabilities, like myself, like we're less than human.”

[policefan1982](#) February, 2013

“Good to open people's eyes about the everyday challenges faced by those who deal with physical disability. THANK YOU for this awareness project.”

[Jeanne VTW](#) January, 2013

“This should be shown in every High School and College, (maybe at orientation?), and a version for younger children would also be good- maybe with a hands-on demonstration. I had to spend time in a wheelchair as a student nurse in training to see what's it was like- it's not easy by any means. A good lesson learned. Nice job.”

Ask a question
Do background research
Construct a hypothesis
Test your hypothesis by doing an experiment
Analyze your data and draw a conclusion
Communicate your results.

1. Recognition and statement of the problem
2. Choice of factors, levels, and ranges
3. Selection of the response variable(s)
4. Choice of design
5. Conducting the experiment
6. Statistical analysis
7. Drawing conclusions, and making recommendations

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Kristin Duquette

US Paralympic Athlete, Disability Advocate

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Roll in My Chair

Posted: 12/28/2013 5:47 pm

Read more > A Day In a Wheelchair, Trinity College, College, Community Organizing, Impact, Impact, Disability-Stigma, Grassroots Activism, Wheelchair, World, Impact News

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"You never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." - To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee.

Disability is usually an out-of-sight-out-of-mind issue and can be an uncomfortable topic for many. [The World Health Organization](#) estimates that: "over a billion people live with some form of disability." And as the rate of disability continues to increase, people with disabilities still experience barriers of social stigma and discrimination on a daily basis.

As a wheelchair user and college student, I became frustrated with how the general public perceives and treats people with disabilities. Frustrating encounters included: the constant staring, social exclusion because of stairs or lack of accessibility to the "elephant" or disability in the room that many people were afraid to discuss despite me initiating the topic. With this in mind and these common occurrences that many people with disabilities experience, I realized the need to educate and connect all communities about disability through a human rights framework.

Roll in My Chair

Posted: 12/28/2013 5:47 pm

In 2011, I founded a program called [A Day in a Wheelchair](#) on [Trinity College's](#) campus in order to promote that people with disabilities are first and foremost people. The person is not disabled. Despite apparent limitations, let me remind you that *everyone* has shortcomings. Society disables the person in the physical and social realm from infrastructure to social interactions. And as the human world is a social world, the key to changing culture is social perception.

To that end, we can have protests, make legislation and create jobs. Yet while these steps are important, they lack efficiency in their promotion of empathy and often unintentionally, support sympathetic interactions. People often sympathize with disabled individuals, but imagining oneself as disabled can be a challenge for able-bodied persons. A social shift needs to occur in connecting the able-bodied and disabled communities. Through a human rights perspective, once communities see each other as humans with potential, marginalized groups will no longer be seen for their differences, but rather their strengths.

A Day in a Wheelchair is a student-focused program that seeks to bridge the gap between sympathy and empathy, to redefine the personhood of people with physical disabilities and promote a greater understanding that disability rights are human rights in an effort to remove stigma from disability. *A Day in a Wheelchair* places able-bodied students in chairs for 12 hour periods with the goal of promoting an empathetic understanding of disabled experiences. Combining the wheelchair experience with film and a structured discussion of disability rights, these students learn to act as ambassadors to the campus community and help promote a culture of understanding around disabilities through a critical human rights lens.

I believe that *A Day in a Wheelchair* positively changes disability stereotypes and continues to make an impact with college students. The program is unique in its mission as we incorporate participants' experiences through film and open campus discussions. As stated by a 2012 student participant:

"I'm the same person in a wheelchair or not and I feel like that's true for any disabled person."

In addition, 2013 participant Patrick Robinson added:

"I believe people in wheelchairs are not handicapped, it's us that walk around labeling them that are handicapped."

This year, [Connecticut State Legislator Jason Rojas](#), [President Jones of Trinity College](#), the Dean of Faculty, 3 staffers and 27 students participated in our program. And in our second year of running, [Dr. Spezialetti](#), Trinity Film and Computer Science Professor, had her students film, ask questions to participants and create their own videos now uploaded on YouTube. In participating and following our efforts, President Jones stated that: "this [*A Day in a Wheelchair*] is a prime example on how dedicated students can make a difference in our small corner of our world."

Roll in My Chair

Posted: 12/28/2013 5:47 pm

Society needs to realize that people with disabilities are people. As stated by disability expert [Eli Wolff](#) of the Institute for Human Centered Design and University of Illinois:

"A Day in a Wheelchair has the power to change the general perception and understanding of disability and should be implemented on all college campuses across the United States."

And *A Day in a Wheelchair* continues to change disability stereotypes and actions on a college grassroots level. But this isn't just a social issue on a grassroots level; this is a social issue on a global level.

My hope is for the world to realize that we are all interdependent. We are all more alike than different. We are all more interconnected than separated. And more importantly, we all have the power to bridge what divides us.



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Final Comments



This is not just a social issue on a grass roots level but it's a social issue on a global level. First and foremost, people need to understand that people with disabilities are people. If they don't understand that, then how can any progress be made?



Contact Information



adayinawheelchair@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/ADayinaWheelchair>

Disability Rights are Human Rights

Trinity College Event Student Leaders

2013 Event

Jessica Bosco '16

Brianna Scalesse '16

Claudia Traftan '16

2012 Event

Kristin Duquette '13

Sean Snyder '13

Charley Wedeen '13