

Celebrating Judith Huemann's 76th Birthday

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY & ABLEISM

The D.C. Office of Human Rights invites you to join us in celebrating the life and accomplishments of Judith Huemann (December 18, 1947-March 4, 2023). Huemann is widely considered the “Mother of the Disability Rights Movement” and has been internationally recognized as a leader in the disability community.

Some of her many accomplishments include: co-founding Disabled in Action in 1970; implementing legislation at the national level for programs in special education, disability research, vocational rehabilitation, and independent living (including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act); leading a 504 sit-in at the San Francisco office of the Department of Health; serving as the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services under President Clinton; serving as an advisor on disability and development at the World Bank; and co-founding the World Institute on Disability.

Huemann was also appointed by Mayor Adrian Fenty as the District’s first Director of the Department on Disability Services.



DEFINING DISABILITY

Disabilities may be broadly categorized into auditory; cognitive, learning, or neurological ; physical ; speech ; or visual impairments or conditions. A disability may be present at birth, called congenital disabilities ; develop at any point during a person's lifetime ; be caused by injury or trauma ; or be associated with other chronic conditions . Disabilities can be progressive, static, or intermittent.

AUDITORY (e.g., Auditory processing disorder; Deafness (total or partial))

COGNITIVE, LEARNING, OR NEUROLOGICAL (e.g. addiction; autism spectrum disorder; bipolar disorder; dementia; Tourette's syndrome; traumatic brain injury (TBI))

PHYSICAL (e.g., arthritis; asthma; chronic pain; diabetes; dwarfism; irritable bowel syndrome; obesity)

SPEECH (e.g., Apraxia, Dysarthria; Lisp, Stuttering)

VISUAL: (e.g., Blind; Limited/Low Vision; Partially Sighted; Colorblindness; Nightblindness)

Hidden or Invisible Disabilities

One of the most prevailing myths about disability is that they are always visible. Some statistics suggest that nearly 20 percent of Americans have a hidden disability. Because they are not easily apparent, their symptoms lead to misunderstandings, false perceptions, and judgement.



DEFINING ABLEISM

Ableism is a “set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with [disabilities] and often rests on the assumption that they need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other.”* Much like racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. ableism is embedded into our culture due to the limited, yet prevailing beliefs society has around disability. It often shows up as curiosity; a desire to be “helpful”; unrecognized privilege; prejudice; discrimination; and stigma.

Exists on different levels: institutional (e.g., medical ableism); interpersonal; and internal.

In Practice (some examples):

- Assuming people have to have a visible disability
- Asking invasive questions
- Framing disability as inspirational
- Offering unsolicited medical advice
- Using the accessible bathroom
- Using harmful, offensive, and/or outdated language
- Using a mobility device as an arm rest

In Language (some examples):

- “Blinded by/blindspot”
- “Handicapped”
- “High/low functioning”
- “I’m super OCD”
- “Mute”
- “Obsessed”
- “Oh, you look so normal”
- “Wheelchair bound”



*Smith, L. (N.D). #Ableism. Center for Disability Rights. <https://cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/>.

03 THE CURB CUT EFFECT

WHAT IT IS:

The Curb Cut Effect (or Phenomenon) is when an accommodation or improvement made for individuals with disabilities benefits everyone-regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

BRIEF HISTORY:

Though the first curb cuts were installed in Michigan in 1945 to support WWII veterans, they gained momentum after Ed Roberts, then a student at UC-Berkeley, and others called for legislation to eliminate barriers to access for people with disabilities. In response, Congress passed the Architectural Barriers Act in 1968.

EXAMPLES

- Automatic doors
- Closed captioning and subtitles
- OXO good grips kitchen utensils
- Ramps and
- Technology assistance (Siri, dictation, FaceTime, etc.)

WHY IT MATTERS:

You or someone you know will most likely experience a temporary or permanent disability in their lifetime. By addressing ableism, we ensure accessibility and inclusion for all.

05

PROTECTIONS UNDER DCHRA



**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

Disability is a **protected trait** under the D.C. Human Rights Act of 1977 (DCHRA)

Under the DCHRA, disability is defined as “a physical or mental impairment substantially limiting one or more major life activities; physical can include auditory, speech, visual, and/or neurological impairments and mental can include cognitive and learning impairments.” It applies to all four enforcement areas: educational institutions, employment, housing, and public accommodations and government services.

If you or someone you know believes they have experienced disability discrimination (within the last year), please visit ohr.dc.gov to learn how to file a complaint. (Current and former DC government employees and applicants must first undergo EEO counseling if they alleged discrimination occurred within the last 180 days.)

Disability is the **third** most reported type of discrimination in the District following sex and race.

