

NEWSLETTER OF THE DISABILITY JUSTICE TASK FORCE (DJTF)

Welcome!

BY JEFF LAFATA-HERNANDEZ

Welcome to the Disability Justice Task Force (DJTF) Newsletter!

As the DJTF, we have been listening to the Triangle Community and working to provide opportunities for education, support, and change regarding Disability Justice and Anti-Ableism work at Triangle. One request we heard from many of you was to receive updates on our work as a task force and to provide ongoing resources to the Triangle workforce. We hope you find this quarterly newsletter a helpful resource for understanding the work of the Task Force, how you can be engaged with our work, and to learn more about resources to help you in our work every day at Triangle.

Since the start of the DJTF, we have been working on many projects, some that you are aware of and others we want to ensure you have access to.

- **Shared Language Guides:** The DJTF created the Shared Language Guide and the Quick Reference Tool to assist staff in ensuring we use anti-ableist language when discussing our work at Triangle. These are two great resources for all staff to utilize to use appropriate language when talking about our work and the Disability Community. You can find the [Shared Language Guide here](#) and the [Quick Reference Tool here](#).
- **Employee Training:** The DJTF, in partnership with the EPIC team, now provides a one-time mandatory Ableism Training for all Triangle employees. This training provides an essential foundation for our work at Triangle and our continued efforts to expand our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals as an organization. [Click here to sign up for the Training](#).
- **Employee Feedback:** The Task Force received great feedback from the survey sent to all employees last year. We also know it is essential to provide accessible and confidential ways for Triangle employees to provide feedback, concerns, questions, and ideas to the Task Force. Therefore, we now have an anonymous form that can be submitted to the Task Force anytime. [You can find this form here](#).

These are just some of the projects the Task Force has been working on, and there is much more to come. We are excited to share our work with you through these quarterly newsletters.

We hope you enjoy this first issue, which includes information about accessible resources, disability resources, and more!

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Everyday Accessibility

BY ANNE GACHOHU

In 2023, a press release from the US Census Bureau Survey revealed that over 42.5 million Americans, around 13% of the country's population, lived with disabilities. Despite this, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantees equal access to public buildings, businesses, employment, transportation, telecommunications, commercial facilities, and state and local government services, and prohibits discrimination based on disability.

According to a joint report by WHO and UNICEF, more than 2.5 billion people worldwide require one or more assistive products like hearing aids, wheelchairs, or communication and cognition apps, and this number is expected to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050.

Fortunately, technology has played a vital role in improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. Innovative solutions have made it possible for people with disabilities to navigate the world, communicate, learn, and work with ease, and technology has eliminated barriers, enabling individuals with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives.

This segment aims to raise awareness of the need for assistive technology, current available assistive technology, and the latest technological developments in disabilities. It contributes to Triangle's mission of empowering people with disabilities and their families to enjoy rich, fulfilling lives.



Accessible Recreation

BY MELISSA STROUT

Each newsletter we will highlight some cool recreational activities across the state. This month, we are highlighting the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Universal Access Program. This program offers information and events on a wide array of recreational activities. Activities include hiking, golf, sailing, skiing, and more! There is a calendar of events on their website, as well as links to a number of programs. There are some eligibility requirements as a part of their Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC) so be sure to review those too.

[Click here to check them out!](#)

Local Arts + Culture

BY CHARLIE WARREN

Hey, theater lovers of all abilities! Have you ever dreamed of belting out a show tune, bringing a character to life, or simply enjoying a night out at the theater? Well, hold onto your playbills, because Boston's theater scene is bursting with opportunity, and it wants you there – front and center!



Taking the Stage: Auditioning for a Play

So, you've got the acting chops and a monologue that would make Shakespeare jealous? Boston has a vibrant community theater scene with tons of productions looking for fresh faces (and voices!). Here's a backstage pass to nailing your audition:

- **Be Prepared, Be Powerful:** Research the play and your character. Show the director you've done your homework!
- **Warm Up that Whistle:** No, really! Do some vocal exercises to loosen your voice and project clearly.
- **Dress to Impress (the Play, Not Necessarily the Director):** Wear something comfortable that reflects your character's vibe, but allows you to move freely.
- **Channel Your Inner Zen:** Auditions can be nerve-wracking, but take a deep breath and focus on having fun with the character.

Curtain Up! Enjoying a Show

Maybe you're more of an audience member – that's fantastic too! Here are a few tips to make your theater experience delightful:

- **Pick Your Play:** Boston offers everything from Broadway hits to quirky local productions. Browse the listings and find a story that sparks your interest.
- **Accessibility Matters:** Many theaters provide assisted listening devices, open captioning, and audio-described performances. Check the theater's website or call ahead to inquire about these options.
- **Relax and Take it In:** Theaters are for everyone to enjoy the magic of live performance. So, sit back, relax, and let the story transport you!

Bonus Tip: Several Boston theaters, like the Huntington and Lyric Stage, offer sensory-friendly performances with adjusted lighting and sound effects to create a more comfortable environment for people with sensory sensitivities.

So, what are you waiting for? Boston's theater scene is ready to embrace you, whether you're a seasoned thespian or a wide-eyed theatergoer. Break a leg (metaphorically, of course) and have a blast!

Accessible Meditation

BY KRYSTAL LINN

The benefits of mindfulness and meditation are immense: experiencing less stress, feelings of more emotional regulation, better sleep, lower blood pressure, better digestion, and greater attention to tasks. It can be helpful to those who have chronic pain and illness, addiction disorders, and those who are neurodivergent or with executive functioning disorders. Many who could benefit from mindfulness or meditation often feel that the practice is out of their reach, believing that they need to “clear their mind,” sit straight and still, practice for extended periods, or focus solely on their breath.

Meditation Posture

Meditation can be done while seated straight or inclined, on the floor or in a chair, with legs crossed or straight out, or while lying down. There is no wrong position for meditation. And you never ever need to be still in meditation. Moving, rocking, stretching, twitching, or any voluntary or involuntary movement are all welcome during meditation. Do not suppress a need to move, itch, or stretch during meditation, as it can take you from a place of comfort to a place of distraction or deregulation.

Silent or Guided Meditation

Meditation can be silent or guided. You can use a meditation app, join a meditation community, or silently meditate at home. There are body scan meditations which are common in mindful-based stress reduction, but sometimes focusing on the body can be uncomfortable. Counting meditations or using mala beads to count meditations is common in Zen meditation. Chanting or mantras can help focus the mind for those with ADD or who are neurodivergent. Guided imagery is a great way to relax and can often help those with sleep disorders. Try a few meditation types and mix it up based on what you need in that moment.

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“Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally.”
- JON KABAT-ZINN

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Anchors For People with AD/HD, PTSD, or Who Are Neurodivergent

An anchor, or what it is that you focus your attention on, can be your breath, a sound, a mantra, or an object. Many people who are neurodivergent, have AD/HD, or experienced trauma or PTSD are uncomfortable focusing on their breath. The practice of focusing on the breath can be deregulating, causing stress or feelings of disassociation. Using a palm stone, mala beads, stress ball, or other fidget can be used as an anchoring tool. Using a pleasant sound or music is an option for an anchor. Using a sound without lyrics or nature sounds is often recommended, as spoken word could be distracting and overwhelming. For those who are visually or hearing impaired, an anchor can be a soft blanket or strip of satin or silk, warm or cool water, or any pleasant sensation or feeling.

Eyes Closed or Open

You don't need to close your eyes to meditate. Keeping your eyes open but looking at a spot on the floor is always an option. So is using a picture or object to focus on.

Aphantasia

If you are someone who can't visualize an object or scene in your head, or you have aphantasia, try focusing on the idea or even the word of what you are being asked to visualize. “Practice” seeing the thing without judging yourself for not seeing it. Or practice a form of meditation that asks you to repeat a word, phrase, or mantra. Use a body scan meditation that asks you to focus on and relax one part of your body at a time. Listen to meditative music, or meditate silently.

Anti-Ableism Resources & Tips

BY JEFF LAFATA-HERNANDEZ

Many of us are working to remove barriers to employment and increase community engagement for the individuals we serve. That comes with many challenges before considering how ableism may impact our daily work. One way to ensure we are not perpetuating ableism in supporting people in their journey is by asking if I am trying to “fix” a part of someone’s disability or if I am trying to make their journey more accessible. Or as it is covered in Ableism Training, the Medical Model vs Social Model of Disability. (Not familiar with this? [Click here to sign up for Ableism training today!](#))

Two examples of how one may perpetuate ableism in supporting individuals would be:

- Directing an Autistic individual that they must wear a tie to all job interviews, although you know that wearing a tie is sensory overload and highly uncomfortable for them. Instead, we should work with the individual to find professional options to wear for their interview where they can be comfortable and fully present.

or

- When running an employment readiness workshop for a group, you stop someone from walking back and forth and tell them they must sit down because it’s too distracting. Instead, it’s crucial to understand how that stimulation will increase that individual’s ability to learn and participate in the workshop, so asking them to move to the back of the room to pace will accommodate their needs and increase their engagement while limiting distractions for others.

How else can we be sure we are promoting the Social Model of Disability and challenging ableism in our work?



Disability History



BY KASSI SOULARD

You might know that the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) was passed in 1990. But did you know that this landmark civil rights law expanded on an existing federal law?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 banned discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds. Section 504 was based on previous laws which banned race, ethnic origin, and sex-based discrimination by federal fund recipients, and was the first federal law that recognized disability as a civil rights category.

The advances created by Section 504 marked the first time that the exclusion and segregation of people with disabilities was seen as stemming from discrimination. However, the subsequent administrations of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter failed to sign regulations which would lead to the enforcement of Section 504, which led to widespread sit-ins and demonstrations starting in April 1977. Led by Judy Heumann and others, protestors’ efforts were successful, and U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph Califano enacted regulations for Section 504 on April 28, 1977.

Want to join the DJTF?
Reach out to Jeff at
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