



NEWSLETTER OF THE DISABILITY JUSTICE TASK FORCE (DJTF)

Welcome!

BY JEFF LAFATA-HERNANDEZ

As summer winds down and we prepare for the fall ahead, there are many great things in store. Apple cider donuts, pumpkin carving, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October), back-to-school festivities, and so much more! We hope you find this edition of the DJ Times helpful as we continue to make our work at Triangle and in the community accessible and inclusive for all this fall.

Want to join the DJTF?
Reach out to Jeff at
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Assistive Technology - More Than Music: How Noise-Canceling Headphones Support Inclusion

BY ETHAN LINSKY

Creating inclusive communities means understanding that people may use different tools, strategies, and accommodations to participate in a meaningful way.

For many people with disabilities, noise-canceling headphones are more than a way to listen to music. They can be an important accessibility tool that helps people manage their sensory environment and engage more comfortably in the world around them.

Busy environments such as schools, workplaces, public transportation, and community events can sometimes be overwhelming. Multiple conversations, loud or unexpected noises, electronic sounds, and other competing sounds can contribute to sensory overload or make it difficult to focus and remain regulated.

Being able to manage the sounds around you can make the difference between simply getting through an environment and being able to fully participate in it. While noise-canceling headphones can be particularly helpful for people with disabilities, anyone may benefit from using them to reduce distractions, improve focus, or create a more comfortable sensory environment.

Most importantly, wearing headphones should not be viewed as a sign that someone is disengaged, rude, or antisocial. For many people, headphones are an accessibility strategy that makes meaningful participation possible, and not a way to avoid engagement.

Creating truly inclusive communities means recognizing that participation does not look the same for everyone. When we understand and respect the tools people use to navigate their environments, we create spaces where more people can feel comfortable, independent, and empowered to participate.

Accessible Recreation - A Day at the Zoo in the Fall

BY MELISSA STROUT

Not many people realize there are 2 great zoos within our backyards!

Franklin Park Zoo in Boston and Stone Zoo in Stoneham offer great experiences to enjoy this fall. With a variety of animals and events there is something for many.

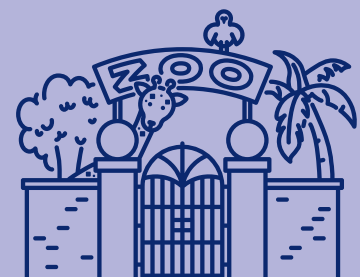
Some great events to check out this fall include:

- Boston lights going on from August 14th to November 8th at Franklin Park Zoo in the evenings where you'll be immersed in colorful lantern displays and interactive activities.
- Jack-o-lantern Nights going on from October 1st to October 31st at Stone Zoo. This event includes hundreds of illuminated pumpkins, sculptures and fun!

Both zoos offer a number of accessibility considerations which can be found on the FAQ pages:

- Franklin Park Zoo:
zooneewengland.org/franklin-park-zoo/hours-info-faq/
- Stone Zoo:
zooneewengland.org/stone-zoo/hours-info-faq/

Enjoy the zoo!



Accessible Arts & Culture - Exploring Greater Boston This Fall

BY CHARLIE WARREN

Art and cultural spaces belong to everyone. For our Triangle, Inc. community—across Malden, Randolph, Salem, and beyond—disability justice means having full, equitable access to the rich creative life of our neighborhoods. When cultural spaces are intentionally designed with universal access in mind—offering sensory-friendly accommodations, barrier-free physical pathways, tactile engagement, and economic inclusion—they open up vibrant opportunities for our participants, staff, and families to connect and thrive.

Here are several accessible, inclusive arts and culture opportunities across the Greater Boston area, North Shore, and South Shore to explore this season.

Public Art & Outdoor Exploration

- **The Great Elephant Migration (Commonwealth Avenue Mall, Boston)**
 - **What it is:** A monumental public art installation featuring 100 life-sized elephant sculptures hand-carved from lantana camara by Indigenous artisans in India.
 - **Accessibility highlights:** Because the installation spans the flat, paved central promenade of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall (Back Bay), it offers smooth wheelchair and mobility-device access, plenty of shade, and zero admission barriers.
 - **Pro tip:** Free and open daily through early autumn. For visitors who also enjoy animal exhibits, Franklin Park Zoo in Boston provides wheelchair rentals, paved main paths, and sensory backpack kits at guest services.
- **Mass Audubon All-Persons Nature & Sculpture Trails (Blue Hills / South Shore)**
- **Near Randolph:** The nearby Blue Hills Trailside Museum and nature center grounds offer wide, flat boardwalks, tactile guide markers, and multi-sensory interpretive stations.

Museum & Visual Arts Access

- **Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) – Salem**
 - **Highlights:** PEM offers fully accessible gallery spaces, elevators, and wide corridors in the heart of Salem.
 - **Access resources:** PEM provides free sensory kits (with noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, and communication boards) at admissions, low-sensory rest zones, and ASL-interpreted events.
- **Converse Memorial Gallery & Local Exhibits – Malden**
 - **Highlights:** Housed in the Malden Public Library, the gallery hosts rotating exhibitions and historic works in an accessible setting.
- **Community arts:** Watch for local initiatives through Urban Media Arts (UMA) and Malden Cultural Council events, highlighting accessible, neighborhood-centered workshops.
- **Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) Access Programming – Boston**
 - **Highlights:** The MFA offers specialized access tours, including *Beyond the Spectrum* for neurodivergent visitors, *Feeling for Form* tactile/descriptive tours for blind or low-vision guests, and Deaf-led ASL gallery tours.

Resources for Planning Accessible Outings

- **ArtsBoston All Access Calendar:** Filters regional theater, music, and gallery events by specific accessibility features (ASL, sensory-friendly, wheelchair access, audio description).
- **Card to Culture Program:** Offers free or steeply discounted admission (\$0–\$3) to cultural institutions across Massachusetts for EBT, WIC, and ConnectorCare cardholders.

Disability History - Ed Roberts and the Independent Living Movement

BY KASSI SOULARD

Many people are familiar with disability rights leaders like Judy Heumann, but fewer know about Ed Roberts, a disability activist often called the "Father of the Independent Living Movement."

Ed Roberts contracted polio at age 14 and spent much of his life using a wheelchair and an iron lung to assist with breathing. At a time when many people with significant disabilities were expected to live in institutions or remain dependent on family members, Roberts challenged those assumptions.

In 1962, he became the first student with a significant physical disability to attend the University of California, Berkeley. Despite concerns from administrators about how he would live on campus, Roberts successfully advocated for the supports he needed and went on to earn both bachelor's and master's degrees.

While at Berkeley, Roberts connected with other disabled students who shared many of the same barriers. Together, they formed a group known as the "Rolling Quads," which advocated for greater accessibility, disability services, and independent living supports. These efforts eventually led to the creation of the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley in 1972, the first organization of its kind in the United States.

The Independent Living Movement promoted a simple but powerful idea: people with disabilities should have the same opportunities as everyone else to make decisions about their own lives, live in their communities, attend school, work, and participate fully in society.

Today, independent living centers exist throughout the country, and many of the supports people with disabilities rely on can be traced back to the work of Ed Roberts and the disability advocates who fought alongside him. His legacy reminds us that accessibility is not just about ramps and doorways. It is also about self-determination, choice, and the right of every person to direct their own life.

Want to learn more? Massachusetts is home to several Independent Living Centers that provide services, advocacy, and resources to people with disabilities. Learn more at: mass.gov/independent-living-centers

Anti-Ableism Resources & Tips

BY JEFF LAFATA-HERNANDEZ

Interdependence: One of the 10 Principles of Disability Justice

As we continue to challenge ableism in our work, remember that independence does not mean doing everything alone. We all rely on other people, relationships, tools, and supports to navigate our personal and professional lives. This is interdependence, and it is a natural part of being human.

In disability services, we can unintentionally reinforce ableism when independence is treated as the ultimate measure of success. Supporting someone in reaching their goals should not mean encouraging them to need less support or to do things the same way as everyone else. Instead, we can focus on helping people build meaningful lives on their own terms, with the relationships, accommodations, and supports that allow them to thrive.

By embracing interdependence, we recognize that asking for and receiving support is not a weakness. It is part of how communities work and is essential to creating a world where everyone can pursue their goals and contribute their strengths.