

Jewish Disability Advocacy Day: Learn, Lead, Help Legislate

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Jewish Disability Advocacy Day

This February 23 & 24 [join](#) together virtually with thousands of community members from across the nation to raise one powerful voice in advocacy and take action to advance the rights of people with disabilities.



When Lori Frisher called her company [Ready or Not Media](#), the name was not a question she was asking herself. She is ready—in fact, it’s fair to say that as a deaf, Jewish woman who is a proud member of the disability community, she has been preparing for this moment her entire life.

“Ready or not” is a question she is asking all of us. Are you ready to learn more about people with disabilities? Are you ready to rise above discomfort and become comfortable with the disability community?

If your answer to that question is, “I want to learn more,” then Frisher is the person to consult. And, yes, she is ready, especially at a time when communities and companies are focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which she believes should include enhanced awareness of the needs and buying power of people with disabilities.

“If you are going to talk the talk, then you should be willing to walk the walk,” Frisher says. “If you are committed to supporting DEI, then you should integrate people with disabilities within the fabric of your organization.”

That is the goal of the 14th annual Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) which takes place in February. JDAIM is a unified effort among Jewish organizations and communities worldwide to raise awareness and foster inclusion of people with disabilities. It’s a call to action to honor the gifts and strengths of all people. And Frisher is on the frontline of that mission.

Ready or Not Media

With Ready or Not Media, Frisher taps into community resources she has built throughout her career to give people with disabilities a voice. She offers impactful services including public speaking, media appearances, corporate training for both management and employees, compelling event planning, and consulting on marketing and branding campaigns.

Her website points out that one out of every seven people on the planet lives with some sort of disability, a population with \$8 trillion in global purchasing buying power. It’s a community that people can join at any point in their lives by sustaining temporary disabling injuries that may eventually heal. Doing the right thing with this community is more than just checking a box. It’s the smart thing, especially for companies looking at their bottom line.

Frisher is uniquely qualified to advocate for people with disabilities. She was born with moderate-to-severe hearing loss, and over time, she has lost even more hearing. She is now learning to sign, but that is really a footnote to her life of accomplishment, which includes jobs with major media companies and corporations. Still, the story of how she literally lost her voice during the COVID-19 pandemic only to find a new voice of advocacy is one worth hearing.

Discovering Her Voice

Diagnosed with hearing loss as a toddler, Frisher wore hearing aids for 30 years and relied on lip reading to fit into a hearing world. She was mainstreamed in school, played Division I tennis at University of Hartford, joined a sorority, and delivered her commencement address. After college, she headed to work in the world of advertising, sales, and media in New York City, not an environment for the faint of heart. When her hearing loss presented hurdles in the corporate world, she found ways to jump over them.

“I have the tenacity and drive to do well,” Frisher says. “I am always challenging myself because I have an entrepreneurial itch.”

She has worked with U.S. Paralympians. She was vice-president for community development of a multi-media company serving the disability audience with print, digital, and broadcast content.

“In that position, I could champion more than 100 nonprofit organizations to place disability issues in the media, and I organized events with some extraordinary people who could raise awareness about their mission,” she says. “I gained a lot of confidence, and I could also see how important this work was.”

Then life presented her with more challenges. In her late twenties, she developed melanoma. The disease returned when she was in her late thirties. Interferon chemotherapy treatments reduced what limited hearing she had, and that additional loss of hearing made her eligible for cochlear implants.

“With the cochlear implants, I no longer have any of my own residual hearing. I am now deaf,” she says. “It is a new way of life for me, and I believe that’s why I appreciate deaf culture even more.”

For Lori, people’s lips disappeared behind masks during the pandemic, making it even harder to communicate. And then she became ill. She had all the symptoms of COVID-19, but she tested negative. Week after week, the undiagnosed illness continued, now with a frightening new symptom: she lost her voice, robbing her of the ability to advocate for herself. Eventually, she was diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder, and her voice gradually returned. But ironically, that time when she could not speak enabled her to find a new professional voice.

“I didn’t have a choice at that point. I was forced to slow down and reflect on my life,” she says. “I asked myself, ‘What do I want to champion for the rest of my life?’ And now I have found my calling.”

A Disability Strategist Goes to Work

At the Clayton Hotel and Members Club in Cherry Creek, Frisher has found a community of social, business, and creative leaders dedicated to living meaningful and impactful lives. Belonging to the club and meeting like-minded people has fueled her entrepreneurship, and the Clayton Hotel has provided a launchpad for Ready or Not Media, bringing disability awareness to the forefront for members, hotel management, and employees.

Frisher created an event for the Clayton members and the community called “Sip and Sign,” teaching attendees sign language for common words. She also held another event she called “Success Beyond Disability,” bringing in a wounded warrior executive double-amputee to talk with the group and encourage people to touch and handle his prosthetic legs.

“I want people to experience disability in ways they have never done before,” Frisher says. “The next time they see an amputee, they’ll have a new reality for what that feels like.”

She also has done disability training for employees at the hotel. Each employee was assigned props that reproduced the experience of living with a disability—a cane, a wheelchair, a blindfold, crutches, and hearing aids—in the hopes that this experience would help demystify disability. Afterward, the response from employees was overwhelmingly positive with comments like, “[I] gained the perspective of others,” “It was a great educational moment,” “It was amazing.”

As she continues to build Ready or Not, Frisher plans to continue her other business, [Top Shelf Baskets](#), curated gift baskets. She collaborates with the giver, learns about the recipient, and creates gifts that are customized and memorable.

“The whole foundation of both Top Shelf and Ready or Not is the same,” she says. “It’s relationship building, whether through unique gifts or through events and programs that are interactive and fun. Top Shelf Baskets creates conversations that would never have happened otherwise. That’s what Ready or Not does as well.”

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