



Special Interest Articles:

- Focus of our August issue: Working Toward Inclusion and Accessibility
- Clare Woods Academy/Cupertino Home



I choose not to put "dis" in my ability.
Robert M. Hensel

Individual Highlights:

Interview with Tekki Lomnicki 2

Sister Marygrace: working with Developmentally Disabled in CA 3

Interview with Karen Tamley 4

Temple Grandin to visit Clare Woods Academy 5

Web Resources: Advocating for People with Disabilities 6

Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon, Sr. Marjorie White, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee

Working Toward Inclusion and Accessibility

By Sister Shannon Fox

In this issue of our Social Justice Newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*, we focus on advocating for people with disabilities.

You will read about how **Bartlett Learning Center, Inc.** (Clare Woods Academy and Cupertino Home), throughout its history has advocated for

the needs of students with disabilities.

Two women, **Tekki Lomnicki** and **Karen Tamley**, in responding to my interview questions, share their thoughts on inclusion of people with disabilities. Both are powerhouse women who have spent their careers advocating for people with disabilities.

Also, **Sister Marygrace Puchacz** shares with us about her work with East Bay Services to the Developmentally Disabled, creating programs for adults who speak Mein, Cambodian, and Vietnamese.

May you find this issue of our newsletter instructive and challenging. ■

Sponsored Institution Clare Woods Academy/ Cupertino Home Advocate to Individuals with Special Needs

By Sister Shannon Fox

Clare Woods Academy will celebrate its 50th Anniversary this year! It was founded in 1969 by Sister Rita Marie Malachinski who saw a need in the community to educate students with special needs.

Sister Rita Marie recalled that when the school was first being founded it required a lot of advocacy on the part of the staff and parents to find funding.

She recalled several trips down to Springfield, IL to advocate for legislation that would provide funding to educate students with special needs.

The school changed with the times. It was first called Bartlett Learning Center and was housed on a portion of the Immaculata Congregational Home campus in Bartlett, IL.

Now located in Wheaton, IL as of 2013, it is a therapeutic day school that services

over 30 districts across the western suburbs of Chicago.

We have students from ages 5–21. Advocacy for students is still an important part of the school culture. The school tries to ensure each student's needs are being met to the best of our ability.

We advocate with districts, potential employers, and other community resources (such as group homes) for our students.

Our students participate in typical school activities such as homecoming games, school dances, and school plays.

We also have a scouting program and participate in Special Olympics. We recently opened up the "Cardinal Shop" in downtown Wheaton where students make

Continued on p. 2

“Hard things are put in our way, not to stop us, but to call out our courage and strength.”

—Author Unknown

Bartlett Learning Center...continued from p. 1

and sell crafts in our very own store, getting much needed work experience.

Bartlett Learning Center, Inc. also includes a group home for men called **Cupertino Home**.

Started in 1990, Cupertino Home is a Community Integrated Living Arrange-

ment (CILA) group home, which houses adult men with developmental challenges.

Located in Warrenville, Illinois, Cupertino Home is a community-based program focusing on the client's needs and aspirations. It also provides a broad range of support services. ■

Interview with Tekki Lomnicki

Sister Shannon

These are questions posed by Sr. Shannon, and Tekki's responses.

In what capacity do you work to advocate for people with disabilities?

I am the Artistic Director of Tellin' Tales Theatre and a person with dwarfism. Our mission is to shatter the barriers between the disabled and non-disabled worlds through the transformative power of personal story. I advocate for children and adults with disabilities to perform their original works—not just to tell their stories, but also to create theater using movement, lighting and sound. It's important for me to have people with disabilities participate in theater on an equal playing field alongside those without disabilities.

What changes have you seen over time in the inclusion and treatment of people with disabilities?

I have noticed that people with disabilities are given more chances now to participate in theater and film. When I first started out, I could not get a main-stream role in theater to save my life though I went on auditions and was also trained as an actor. When I saw people with dwarfism in film they were usually comedic roles. Now we have reality shows starring people with dwarfism, but I would still like to see more of us in serious roles. I think Peter Dinklage is a groundbreaking person with dwarfism in film and theater though he doesn't advocate for us. In general I have noticed

that Gen X and Z individuals are more accepting of people with disabilities and are treating us as equals. With the adoption of the ADA, we have more rights but I still feel we have a long way to go regarding the attitudes of the public. There are still too many people who use offensive language when speaking about us.

What do you wish people without disabilities knew about the inclusion of people with disabilities?

I wish they knew that we are more like them than they think. Sure, our bodies may be different, but we have many of the same stories that connect us—stories of heartbreak, joy, marriage, sickness etc. Also I wish they knew how hurtful condescending attitudes and “inspiration porn” are to us. We do not want to be treated as people who are “lesser than”. Also that we have had to be extremely resourceful in our lives and this can be a valuable asset in problem solving in business and theater.

What role do you think people of faith can play in advocating for people with disabilities?

I think that people of faith can advocate for us as children of God. As teachers, to help children have an accepting attitude. At church to welcome people with disabilities by making sure worship spaces are accessible and we are included in the liturgy as readers, altar servers, apostolic ministers and choir members.

Continued on page 3



Tekki Lomnicki

Interview with Tekki...continued from p. 2

How can our schools better help prepare students with disabilities?

They can prepare them by not coddling them. I think it's important to give them the services they need, but still hold them to the same educational standards as their peers without disabilities. This will prepare them for the world outside of school. They

will not get breaks out there as adults. I also feel it's important to have all field trips and assemblies be accessible. I have heard too many stories of students with disabilities not allowed to go on certain field trips or relegated to a corner of the stage during school choir performances—away from their peers. ■

"We embrace our immigrant roots and identify with the struggle of all people to find a home in this world."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

Sister Marygrace: Working with Developmentally Disabled in California

We are Committed ... To journey with our sisters and brothers who are "on the fringe" "the edge of Society."

East Bay Services to the Developmentally Disabled has created Day Services for adults who speak Mein, Cambodian, and Vietnamese.

There are many barriers which have socially isolated these groups, including language, mobility, and poverty. Many of them are still socially isolated from the mainstream society. The Mein people used to live in the mountain area of Laos near the border of China.

The Mein people have their own language, but do not have written language. There was no formal schooling, and people relied on each other for survival and subsequently built a strong family bond between members including extended family. A number of the Mein people have disabilities ranging from deaf, intellectual and severe disabilities since they were young. Family members and parents felt guilty of their children's disabilities and felt they were obligated to serve them especially in all custodian needs. They do not believe in "training" their children and adults with disabilities and prefer to tend to them in their wants and needs.

Just as the Mein people, the Cambodians fled their homeland due to a civil war. Some of the families continue to have a long struggle with their traumatic war experience which has a big impact on their daily life. Their trust in people, especially the professionals is very limited. Multiple barriers like language, mobility and community violence contribute to their social isolation. Many of the parents suffer from multiple health conditions and their ability to raise their children is greatly impacted. This is more noticeable with children and adults with special needs. Families are unable to provide training for these children and refuse to seek and receive help.

Because of these realities, some Families are not "trusting" the opportunities for their son or daughter. Our appeal and outreach has to be of a more creative, supportive, and Personalized approach in order to "Open the Door."



Sister Marygrace Puchacz (center) in classroom at East Bay Services to the Developmentally Disabled located in Concord, California



Sister Marge White (our President) visiting with one of the groups

What delightful young people who are eager and Open to the exciting opportunities and possibilities ahead. It is our role and privilege to Honor and evoke all the potential and encourage each individual in their unfolding Journey of personal growth. ■

Interview with Karen Tamley

Sister Shannon



Karen Tamley

These are questions posed by Sr. Shannon, and Karen's responses.

In what capacity do you work to advocate for people with disabilities?

I am appointed by the Mayor to serve as the Commissioner for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities for the City of Chicago. Through this position my charge is to make Chicago a fully accessible inclusive city for people with all types of disabilities. I also have a disability myself and am the parent of a child with a disability so my advocacy extends beyond just my professional role.....

What changes have you seen over time in the inclusion and treatment of people with disabilities?

Many, many changes. I was born with my disability and grew up in a time before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was in existence. When I was born the doctors told my parents that I would likely never sit up and never leave home. There were few expectations for people with disabilities at that time that we would be independent, get jobs and live quality lives. When I grew up few things were accessible mostly because there were not laws requiring accessibility and disability issues were not considered like they are today. At that time, I had to be carried into most stores and restaurants because they were inaccessible. Few corners had curb ramps for wheelchairs because no laws required it. I could not ride the public bus with my friends because they either did not have lifts or very few buses had lifts. At that time, there was nothing requiring a public transit system to purchase accessible buses. In addition, I was not allowed to go to my neighborhood school

with my sister because of my disability. This was a time before we had education civil rights laws that required students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment. Only when IDEA was passed (back then, PL-92-142) – in the 4th grade was I allowed to attend my neighborhood school.

Right out of college I did an internship for a disability rights lawyer in Washington DC. He taught me everything I needed to start my work in the disability advocacy field. At the time, he had just finished working to help draft language for the ADA. During that summer internship he gave me a ticket to attend the signing ceremony of the ADA on the White House lawn. It was so exciting yet little did I know, at that time, how the ADA would truly impact my life for the better and millions of other people with disabilities. Now I can ride any public bus in any city in the country. Now I can choose which accessible restaurants and stores I patronize. Now kids with disabilities must be educated in the least restricted environments. Now there are expectations for kids with disabilities to go to college, become employed, and be part of their communities. We have a long way still to go on many fronts, but the ADA has already changed so much of our world just in my lifetime.

What do you wish people without disabilities knew about the inclusion of people with disabilities?

That we want to be included. We don't want "special" or "separate". We are everywhere. We are the fastest growing segment of the population – one that anyone can join at any time. Most disabilities

Continued on p. 5

"Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational
Commitments
26th General Chapter

December 3

UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations' (UN) International Day of Persons with Disabilities is annually held on **December 3** to focus on issues that affect people with disabilities worldwide.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities re-affirms and draws attention to the rights of people who live with disabilities.

Interview with Karen...continued from p. 4

are non-apparent. You can't see them. We want a world where we feel comfortable disclosing our disabilities and living our authentic selves. When people with disabilities are included, everyone is included. If I can't get somewhere because it is inaccessible for my wheelchair, my whole family cannot get there. So, inclusion benefits families and so many more that do not have disabilities (now).

What role do you think people of faith can play in advocating for people with disabilities?

Understanding that we don't want charity or pity or paternalism. We want the same things and the same rights as everyone else. Disability is a natural part of the human condition and something that will touch all of us at some point in our lives. Think about how people with disabilities can be included into your faith community. How do you welcome people with disabilities? Are you accessible? How might you accommodate someone who uses a wheelchair or is blind or deaf or has an intellectual disability? Being part of a faith

community is—for many—being a part of the community-at-large and that is what we are working towards – full inclusion in every aspect of life.

How can our schools better help prepare students with disabilities?

As a parent of a child with a disability, I would say that providing them the support they need in the classroom is the most critical, while being mindful of inclusion and equality. Part of also preparing students with disabilities, I think, is to teach all kids kindness and acceptance of kids with disabilities – and difference in general. Zero tolerance for bullying is critical to the success of any student. The flip side of bullying, I think, is social isolation. Being inclusive is very important to the development and school experience of kids with disabilities, so I think to “prepare” a student with a disability is to look at the whole ecosystem – not just the child themselves but the teachers, administrator, and other students. ■

Temple Grandin to Visit Clare Woods Academy


A Night With Temple Grandin

Open House—November 18, 2019
2:00 pm Clare Woods Academy

Keynote Speaker—November 18, 2019
5:00 pm Edman Chapel

Master Class—November 19, 2019
10:00 am Clare Woods Academy

blcinc.org/temple-grandin

Presented by Clare Woods Academy in association with Wheaton College's Faith and Disability Initiative

Dr. Temple Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and she has been a pioneer in improving the handling and welfare of farm animals. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts

Temple's achievements are remarkable because she was an autistic child.

At age two she had no speech and all the signs of severe autism. Many hours of speech therapy, and intensive teaching, enabled Temple to learn speech. As a teenager, life was hard with constant teasing.

Mentoring by her high school science teacher and her aunt on her ranch in Arizona motivated Temple to study and pursue a career as a scientist and livestock equipment designer. ■

As part of Clare Woods Academy's 50th Anniversary Celebration, we are pleased to have Dr. Temple Grandin as our Keynote Speaker.

The Night with Temple Grandin is co-sponsored by Wheaton College's new Faith and Disability Initiative and will be

held at Wheaton College's Edman Chapel on Monday, November 18, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.

The following day, Tuesday, November 19, 2019, Ms. Grandin will be facilitating a Master Class for educators and practitioners.



Resources: Learn More about Advocating For People with Disabilities

Check out these YouTube Videos:

- [Video on Self Advocacy](#) (2-minute video on what Self Advocacy means to People with Disabilities)
- [Video: 10 Self-Advocacy Tips for Young People](#) (3½-minute video: "10 Self-Advocacy Tips for Young People with Disabilities")

Web Resources for Advocating for People with Disabilities

- <https://themighty.com>
Articles and information on various disabilities, written by people with disabilities
- <https://www.ada.gov>
Home page of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- <https://sites.ed.gov/idea>
Home page of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- <https://www.blcinc.org>
Clare Woods Academy/Bartlett Learning Center, Inc. Home page
- <https://www.templegrandin.com>
Home page of Dr. Temple Grandin

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

—Francis of Assisi

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **October**.

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Dorothy Pagosa** by Wednesday, **September 25th**.

~ Your Social Justice Committee

"Our Franciscan spirituality inspires and guides us in responding to any needs calling out to us."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

Mark your Calendar:



International Day of
Persons with
Disabilities

3 DECEMBER