



ISSUE 1, SUMMER
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Conscious *Being*



DISABILITY • ART • FASHION • CULTURE • BEAUTY • BOOKS • MUSIC • TRAVEL • LIFE



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This issue's guest illustrator:

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WELCOME TO. Conscious *Being*

Just over a year ago I had an idea to create a publication on Medium. This publication would be a space and platform where disabled women could finally feel heard. I had no idea what it would be called or where it would head, but I knew that it had the potential to be something special. Well, my friend's Anj and Hannah helped me name it - Conscious Being. And then I started to get writers sending me pitches - including Chloe, who is now my deputy editor. And my little publication on Medium started to get noticed.

Then a few months ago I floated the idea of turning Conscious Being into a digital magazine that would be accessible (we are trying very hard with this, so do tell us how we can do it better), fashionable, and exciting. Chloe jumped on the idea and a couple of months ago we brought Jade, our graphic designer, on board. I couldn't feel luckier than to have these two amazing women on my

team who get my vision. What is my vision? To make Conscious Being a global magazine for disabled women by disabled women. Our aims are to actively and with purpose employ disabled women and their allies. Our goals are to create a culture that truly reflects the lived experience of disabled women, without any of the cold, medicalised stereotypes that come with disability.

Disabled women have full lives. Disabled women are career women. Disabled women are partners. Disabled women are single. Disabled women are mothers, grandmothers, adopted and foster mums. Disabled women are carers and being cared for. Disabled women are artists and dancers and actors. Disabled women are sporty and athletic. Disabled women are whoever they wish to be and Conscious Being reflects this.

So welcome to our first issue - our heart issue - our issue to say we have arrived and we

are here to stay. We would love to know your thoughts, so do engage with us on social media and let us know what you love, what you learnt, and what you want to see in future issues.



Liz x

Elizabeth Wright
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FEATURES

REN-FOZARD

Conscious

news



Crip Camp Nominated for An Oscar!

The Netflix documentary Crip Camp was nominated for an Oscar this year. This important step in recognition firmly put disability on the wider cultural map, beyond the usual stereotypes that plague the disabled community. A huge congratulations to Judith Heumann, James Lebrecht and the team. If you haven't watched Crip Camp yet make sure you check it out on Netflix.



Arts Activated 2021 is On.

The Arts Activate Conference programme is being finalised and will include over 20 sessions and events, featuring many international and Australian guests.

Australia's leading arts and disability forum, the conference will involve both virtual and live sessions held over three Monday's in August, the 9th, 16th, and 23rd. The theme of the conference this year is 'Building Back for Everyone.'



BBC Commissions 12 Disabled Artists.

The BBC has commissioned 12 deaf, neurodivergent and disabled artists to create new film and audio work. Some of the work commissioned includes new short music film Silent World by deaf musician Signkid, and Blind-sided, a comedy drama by Jamie MacDonald. These commissions are part of the Culture in Quarantine initiative.



Alice Wong and Making Space for Disabled Asian Americans.

Founder of Disability Disability, Alice Wong, has been featured in the Huffington Post series Asian Americans Out Loud. In her article, Alice speaks about her intersectional experiences being disabled and Asian, "Growing up, I really stuck out, I was almost always the one physically disabled kid in the classroom, and almost always one of maybe just a few Asian Americans. So there were never any spaces that reflected me."

(Conscious Being stands against Asian Hate. You can donate to the #StopAsianHate campaign here - <https://gofund.me/e0652b3a>)



Tracey Emin Exploring Her New Reality.

On now at the Royal Academy London is Tracey Emin's latest exhibition, Tracey Emin/Edvard Munch: The Loneliness of the Soul. After a battle with cancer, Tracey now has ongoing chronic illness and much of her work is inspired by her new lived experience, including grief, loss and longing.

FAITH'S WORLD

Faith Guilbault Does Not Want Your Pity!

Faith is a 17 year old from Bel Air in the United States who has cerebral palsy. A model, horse rider and sled hockey competitor, Faith has opened up her life to the wider world through her documentary, Faith's World. Her documentary is set to educate and change people's ideas and beliefs about disability. Set to air in over 150 countries and be sent to 1.8 million American teachers, the film, with an introduction by Ashley Judd, will be a part of a teacher toolkit around disability. "I think the intent is the humanization of hard topics so that people can talk about it to help American young people think about these large topics," Carter said.

"Because it is personable, it can become actionable."



FIRST OF ITS KIND PERIOD GUIDE LAUNCHED

City to Sea, the organisation behind the education programme Rethink Periods and campaign Plastic Free Periods, has launched a first of its kind product guide for period products that includes considerations specifically asked for by users with disabilities. The guide comes with a star ranking system for considerations such as heightened sensitivities, reduced dexterity, preparation and maintenance, and comfort.

The new guide is designed primarily to support people with impairments and conditions, enabling them to make informed decisions about which period products they wish to use, potentially leading to an improved quality of life during menstruation.

Intrigued by the guide, we wanted to know how it came about... The guide came about after the organisation reached out to Disabled people to find out what impacted their choice of period products. And the results were interesting. 2 in 5 people were dissatisfied with the period care products that they currently use, with 88% of those dissatisfied using big-brand tampons and 42% using big-brand pads.

Only 8% of people who were dissatisfied were using menstrual cups, period pants or pads, the period care options that are better for our health and the environment. Generally, the experience of having periods alongside a condition or impairment involved heightened difficulty. Factors such as reduced dexterity, limited mobility, sensory discomfort, catheters, incontinence, increased pain, fatigue and lack of sensation all contribute to periods being described as 'inconvenient', 'dreadful', 'impossible to deal with', 'difficult to manage', 'messy' or 'painful'.

The vast differences in menstrual experience greatly impact period product choices, but there was a general consensus that there is a huge gap in menstrual education and information for the Disabled community. There was a collective call for more tailored information about periods.

City to Sea's Campaigns Manager, Jasmine Tribe said, "Through empowering people with this knowledge and expanding the conversation around periods, we give agency to people to make decisions that best suit our bodies, our finances and the planet. Today's new guide is a first of its kind that specifically responds to the ideas and concerns raised by people in the Disabled community."

Imogen Fox, a 38-year-old Queer Disabled person added, "I've had periods on and off since I was 16, but due to my impairment it's hasn't always been easy to manage them. Most people don't realise that Disabled people have additional needs when it comes to managing menstruation and we need to talk about this more."



We agree, periods and menstruation management for disabled women and people have to be talked about more and we think this guide is a great place to start.

To find out more information head to <https://www.citytosea.org.uk>



Esprit

"I was the girl who did everybody's homework, but I was also, like, student council president and yearbook editor and, like, all-around overachiever. Like, I'm disabled, but I can do anything."

– Maysoon Zayid

BOOK

Reviews

Act Your Age, Eve Brown Review by Louise Collins



Act Your Age, Eve Brown is a wonderfully diverse book, without ever making you feel as though it's simply ticking boxes. The representation is honest and beautifully natural. A 5 Star book.

Described as "a certified hot mess", Eve Brown is the youngest of three sisters - who both have books of their own - and she has no idea what she wants to do in her life. She loves helping people, but she has no career path whatsoever, and it's starting to grate on her and those around her. After being compared to her sisters, and being reminded of her failed career plans, Eve all but runs away to a small village where she accidentally runs over Jacob, the owner of a B&B - a B&B that just so happens to need a new chef. Overwhelmed with guilt and the need to help out, Eve takes up the job just until Jacob's arm gets better. Despite their rocky start, they learn to work with each other, and from there, their relationship grows. As they become closer, they start to learn more about each other and themselves, and they realise they have a lot more in common than they previously thought.

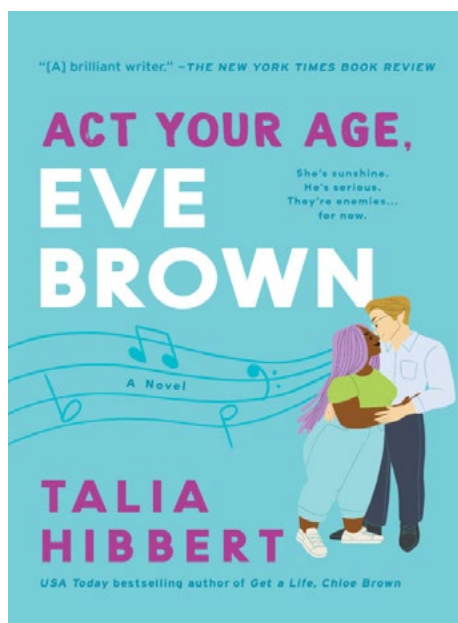
This book is truly beautiful, and Talia Hibbert is a genius. Eve Brown is a plus sized Black woman, who learns throughout the novel that she has autism. This comes forward after Jacob, a character we know has autism from the beginning, recognises traits associated with neurodivergence within Eve. As everything clicks into place with Eve's neurodivergence, she is able to make sense of her past experiences and her current habits, and it comes as a huge weight off her shoulders. Instead of being shocked that she has autism, it makes sense to her, and she welcomes the label, thankful that she can now understand herself better. Where Jacob and Eve have been made to feel weird for their differences in the past - with some outright ableism in one chapter - they find comfort in their similarities, and their autism is something that brings them shared comfort in such a beautiful, warm way.

Hibbert's entire bibliography is stunningly diverse. Many of her protagonists are Black women, and there is a diverse range of body types - showing that beauty comes in every shape and size. More importantly, her books are all romances, so having such diverse main characters moves away from the typical love interests we've been presented with for so many years. As well as this, Hibbert herself is a Black woman with autism and fibromyalgia, and she

reflects this in a lot of her books. Eve's oldest sister Chloe, has chronic pain, and several of her characters have autism, which allows many of her characters to fall into the hashtag #ownvoices.

Her books are wonderfully sexy, and she shows that sexiness doesn't have one appearance. She shows disabled and fat characters, and characters of different races and ethnicities, as beautiful and sexy, because there's nothing to say that they can't be. Too many romance novels have one idea of what attractiveness looks like, but Hibbert refuses to allow that to remain the norm. She shows her characters as sexy - and they know they're sexy - which is all the more amazing. Her books are full of body positivity, disability representation, mutual growth, vulnerabilities, mutual pleasure, and sex positivity, and who doesn't want this?

Act Your Age, Eve Brown quickly became one of my all time favourite novels, because everything inside worked to make it so representative and breathtakingly bewitching. The representation in this book is impeccable, and Hibbert shines a light on so many marginalized people. If you haven't read any of Hibbert's books so far, remember her name! You won't regret it.



Haben Review by Deodosia Chen Co-Founder, The Intersectional Book Club



Confident, sharp, and humorous, Haben is the epitome of her namesake, "pride." As the daughter of two Eritrean parents that fled war-torn Ethiopia, her memoir is as resilient and stirring as her parents who resisted an oppressive regime to become refugees in California. Here, we capture Haben's intriguing life journey where she wields her power and voice in a classroom, world, and society that are designed for people that can see and hear. Here, she is disabled. But this is far from her identity.

Unlike many blind kids, Haben was expected to do chores and was treated no differently than her siblings. Her upbringing clearly grounded her and gave her further ammunition to discover, stretch, and build on her abilities: "I'm the expert when it comes to what I can and can't do." This mindset was key when it came to living life to the full and battling through her struggles in a world that too easily associated her deaf-blindness with a lack of competence and talent. We see this quite humorously illustrated when she bribes her greedy cousin, Yafet with a peanut butter and jelly (PB&J) sandwich: if he would admit that a deafblind person (i.e. Haben), could make a PB&J sandwich, then she would make him one. But if he couldn't admit that his personal observations didn't contradict the "truth" that he learned from society - that all blind people are incompetent - then she wouldn't make him one. Haben teaches us honest truths at the end of each chapter, with this one highlighting the importance of rejecting the dominant narrative of ableism, which undoubtedly takes a conscious effort.

The love, acceptance, and support from her family, in particular her parents, shine through as she's eventually allowed to travel to Mali in a school-building project, to dance salsa, and to many of the things that she wills. In perfect parallel, Haben draws similarities "between her family's story of struggle and loss and her struggles as a Deaf-blind girl in a sighted, hearing world."

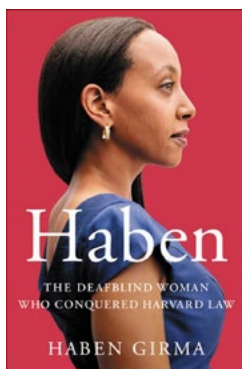
However, the familiar experience of being treated disparagingly and navigating people's discomfort around her Deaf-blindness is clearly iterated and painfully felt. This exclusion is heartbreakingly felt even in her family and in blind camp, where she struggles to "hear the ball in goalball" and "hear the music for the play." But the

way she tackles this, whilst accepting and recognising this solitude, is with gusto, wit, and rigour.

I know what you must all be thinking: "How inspiring"...and rightly so! But Haben takes serious issue with this ostensible complement, which is used too frequently by non-disabled people to describe disabled people, "usually for the most insignificant things, that the word now feels like a euphemism for pity." Haben is unafraid to call-out our very often flawed ways of perceiving high-achieving, disabled individuals. Instead, we should question whether their "inspiration" is a sign of us feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable, or rather praise for genuine achievement.

Looking to the future, there are many issues that need to be tackled head-on to include disabled people in our sighted and hearing world. Whilst Haben was able to gain mini victories on several occasions - from winning her case for the cafeteria to helping win the case against Scribd - there is still a lot to be done to dismantle our world's barriers against disabled people. As she recounts, around seventy percent

of blind people are unemployed. Not everyone can read Braille. Not everyone knows sign language. More tech developers are designing with inclusion in mind that increases opportunities for students with disabilities, but there is a long way to go to not only enable people with disabilities to gain more education and employment opportunities. Employers also have an opportunity to tap into a significant talent pool, with "more than 1.3 billion people with disabilities around the world."



This book is written fluidly and makes for an easy read. You'll be surprised how quickly you finish this and how it compels you to look at yourself in the mirror. Since, disabled or not, sighted or not, "each of us holds just the tiniest fraction of the world's wisdom. Admitting we don't know everything will aid us on this Trek for Knowledge." Do not be afraid to look within, check your assumptions, and use your whole character to define your own limits - not the boundaries and labels that the world imposes.

A Curse So Dark and Lonely Review

by Chloe Johnson

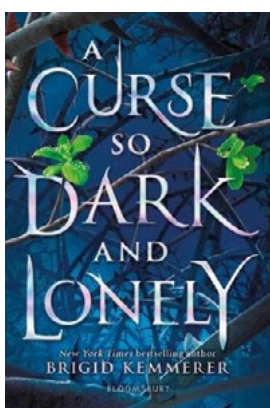
I came to A Curse So Dark and Lonely a huge fantasy fan, and an even bigger fairytale adaptation fan. I enjoy the clever turns of phrases where you can notice a spin has been taken on a "tale as old as time", and there was plenty of this in A Curse So Dark and Lonely. Released in 2019, this is a YA retelling of Beauty and the Beast. Harper, the main character, is disabled - she has cerebral palsy, and this is never shied away from. I definitely enjoyed this aspect, as often Disabled characters are left as "possible" - riddles for fans to find out, perhaps at times because of the context of the book (Jesper from Six of Crows anyone?) but, for the most part, due to the lack of disability visibility in real life.

Harper seems to combat this. At first. A Curse So Dark and Lonely was best-selling - a feat considering a disabled main

character - and we can't lose sight of the progress this made. I enjoyed the fantasy aspect of the book far more than the characters - although Harper was, at times, charming and amusing (discussing the stockholm syndrome we expect to find in Beauty and the Beast was a nice touch by Kemmerer) However, Harper seems to fall flat in disability representation. It all seems a bit trite. I can't speak for everyone - especially as I don't have cerebral palsy myself - and a lot of people I have seen read this book enjoy the fact that Harper's disability doesn't ever hamper her but, for me, it feels a little lazy. Fellow reviewer, Grace LaPointe points this out in her own review:

"The CP representation becomes even more unrealistic, though. Later in the book, Harper successfully learns archery and how to throw knives (!!)

As someone with CP, I obviously can't say that no one with CP could ever do this. I can only say that, judging by myself and all the



other people with CP I've known, it would be very unlikely. CP also affects balance and coordination. It can cause muscle spasticity, its opposite (ataxia or lack of muscle tone), or tremors. So, these would be impossible or incredibly dangerous feats for most of us."

It seems as if Harper is intended to be "just" as good as other fantasy heroines, without having her be different. However, I can also accept that some people may view this as Harper combating stereotypes that disabled women have to be coddled or looked after - I was pleasantly surprised that there was no "magic cure" to Harper's cerebral palsy. The plot of this book is fairly interesting, especially with Harper's family life, and I enjoyed the elements of fairytale mystery immensely. Overall, this book points in the right direction - and I did enjoy it, and would consider buying the other two books in the series - but I would perhaps have enjoyed it if there would have been more exploration around Harper's disability. Indeed, this may be something that comes from further books.

If you would like to read a more in-depth review of A Curse So Dark and Lonely, by a woman with cerebral palsy, please visit: <https://gracelapointe.medium.com/a-curse-so-dark-and-lonely-mixed-feelings-edb0750d8d6a>

PODCAST

Review

Writer Louise Page wanted something more than a sanitised version of first-wave feminists. When Disability Arts Online created a call out for their Covid Commissions, she told them so. This resulted in a fictionalised retelling of the real lives of Mabel Normand, Rosa May Billinghurst and Helen Keller - incredibly poignant moments in disabled women's history, but rarely discussed in a classroom. Louise's writing

is gripping, the stories being told intertwined so that we can connect them thematically, and it provokes contentious issues between disability and feminism; showing that, right at the beginning of the movement, three prominent women were engaging with feminist rhetoric whilst being disabled.

Keller is especially an interesting portion of the podcast, with her story delving into the myth that she was saved by her teacher - Anne Sullivan - combating a major trope that disabled women face of not acknowledging the woman herself for her

'New Women' Podcast Review

by Chloe Johnson



own achievements. Keller continues to remain one of the most famous deaf-blind people known for her activism, lecturing and writing and it was really eye-opening to see a different side to her written by Page, as we explored her left-wing approach to politics. Also enjoyable was Mabel's story - full of challenging female stereotypes and embracing "lady adventurers". The podcast flows prettily, feeling almost like an audio-book, and it is both interesting to learn about these characters as well as entertaining. If you're intrigued by finding out more about the disabled women behind the suffragette movement in shorter chunks than an audio-book would provide, this is the podcast for you.

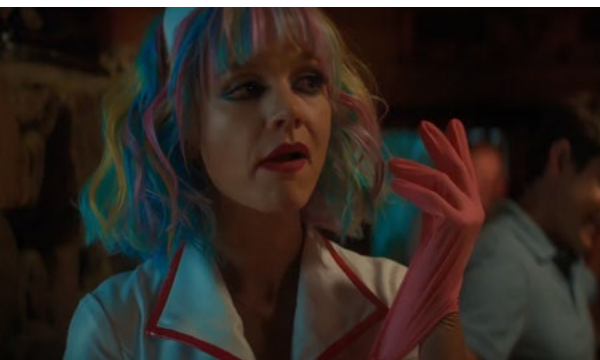


FILM

Promising Young Woman Review by Rosie Strawbridge



Having been a fan of Emerald Fennell since she flounced onto my screen as Patsy Mount in *Call the Midwife* back in 2013, I had been desperate to see her directorial debut, *Promising Young Woman*, for a while before it was nominated for five Academy Awards.



Before having even seen the film, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride for a woman I do not know when I saw the number of awards it was being nominated for. I jumped at my chance to watch it when it was released onto NOW in the UK. *Promising Young Woman* follows Cassie (Carey Mulligan), a medical school-drop out, and her response to a series of traumatic events during her time there. She spends her days working as a barista and her nights feigning drunkenness to 'nice guys' attempting to take advantage of her, only to shock them with her sobriety and make them explain themselves. She reunites with a former college classmate Ryan (Bo Burnham) and through him comes back into contact with a series of people involved in the events that led her to drop out of medical school. Ryan and Cassie go on a date where Cassie is surprised by the connection she forms with him, with Ryan promising to take things so slow he'll 'barely move', they start a relationship and then... Well, I'll leave you to watch and find out. The film shows some likeness to *Fleabag*, although this is hardly surprising considering Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Fennell are old friends.

It took me quite some time to put pen to paper after watching *Promising Young Woman*. It left me with many thoughts I still haven't processed, but eventually I sat down with an appropriately pink coloured pen to throw all my thoughts down and collate what I was trying to say into something comprehensible enough to be published.

With its uses of women made pop music about love and men, its bright colours and trendy pastels that contrast the dark theme of the film we are reminded that the world carries on with its losses unspoken about. *Promising Young Woman* discusses the trivialisation of sexual assault in our society through quippy humour and stone-cold representation of predators and rape apologists.

Despite Cassie's fearlessness in facing men, we see her jumping at the movement of Jordan Green, a former lawyer who represented a rapist years before. This shows the time Cassie has spent allowing herself to be assaulted by men has taken a toll on her more than she shows, or perhaps, even realises, and is a fantastic, yet subtle, directorial choice from Fennell. Continuing the directorial representation of Cassie's mental health, throughout the film

Cassie chews on straws and sweets, as someone who finds chewing a good stim to stem anxiety this theme stood out to me; removing my own straw from my mouth in embarrassment only to notice it had gone back in within the next five straw-biting minutes.

My main criticism of the film is the lack of diversity. Laverne Cox as Cassie's boss and Sam Richardson as one of Cassie's targets, are the only people of colour with speaking roles in the film. Cox's character is never said to be cis or trans which some will argue is ground-breaking to not mention Cox being trans, other will argue it erases trans existence – I see the argument on both sides and as I am not trans I have not passed judgement on this having not found anyone in the trans community speaking out on it. The film also featured one of my most hated lines "does she have a boyfriend?" Partner, just say partner, it hardly confuses the scene and scans just as well. You may think I'm being pernickety, but I can't help but roll my eyes at any form of heteronormativity. It is however made clear that Cassie has some form of mental illness, she shows an obsessive personality, although whether this is a result of the second-hand trauma or has always been a part of her personality is never discussed. Her parents suggest long-standing signs of Cassie's mental illness, they imply she has previously run away from home, and early in the film she forgets it is her own birthday. Whilst the lack of clarification on Cassie's health is pertinent to the film and its message of trivialisation

Review

of suffering, this leaves us with no explicit disability representation, but quite honestly, what do we expect?

The production team also actively chose to cast men known best for playing wholesome characters to remind us predators can be anyone, which made my production obsessed brain incredibly happy. Don't listen to the reviews written by men describing the film as 'shallow' and 'confused'. This response quite elegantly, albeit tragically, proves Fennell's point in making this film. For this exact reason, I think all men should watch *Promising Young Woman*; it will wheedle out the bad guys who will continue to brag about their behaviour, or tell us it's #NotAllMen, and show us the genuinely good guys who will look at what they've seen and learn from it. However, we as women need to encourage this growth by explaining why this attitude is continuing the problem.



All in all, Fennell shows finesse as a director and writer, and *Promising Young Woman* was definitely worth losing our redhead lesbian midwife for.

ID: Images show correlating book covers with their reviews. This page features a movie still of actress Carey Mulligan dressed as a colourful haired nurse. Also shown is the 'Promising Young Woman' movie cover which shows the main character looking in a mirror, and 'Promising Young Woman' written in pink lipstick.



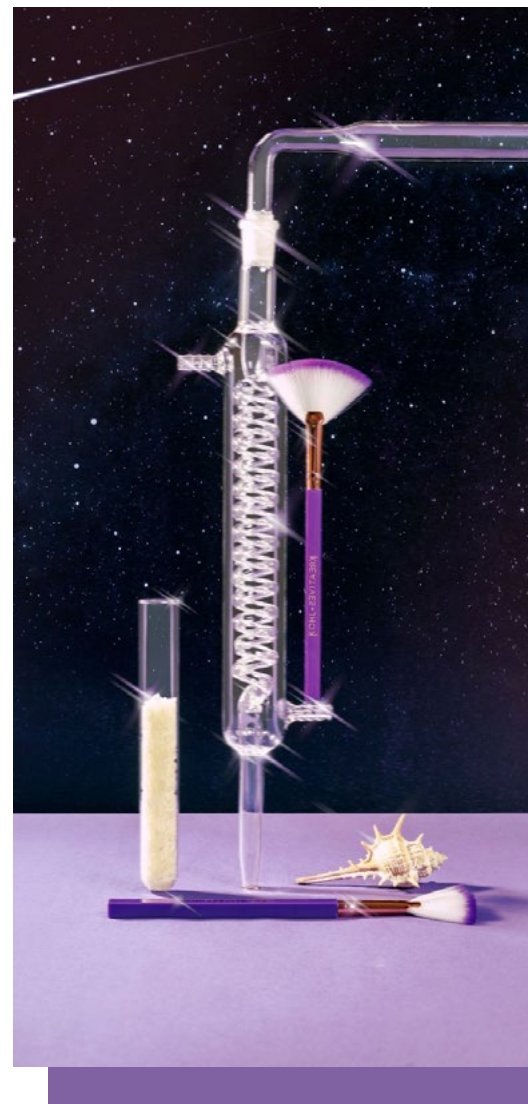
Sustainability *or* Disability?

A

rguably, sustainability has become a buzzword in the fashion and beauty industry. The industry has been challenged on the idea that, instead of focusing on adapting to what consumers really need, they are looking to make their brand or business look good in the short term; consumers are rapidly demanding transparency and accountability from retailers. This has resulted in words such as eco-friendly, vegan and sustainable becoming key parts of the fashion and beauty industry. Whilst there is undeniable positivity in this movement – after all, there is no Planet B – are disabled people being left behind?

In the rush to become sustainable, brands have arguably left behind the fight for inclusive consumer goods – with disability especially forgotten. It seems as if, despite the “purple pound” roughly being worth £249 billion to the UK economy, brands would rather focus on the latest tick box than a hugely untapped market. Why is this? Is it because the fashion and beauty industry cannot rise to the creative challenge of being inclusive of disability and sustainable?

It’s difficult enough for disabled people to find fashion and beauty that are stylish and useful, so to add on sustainable is a bracket where consumers fall short. There seems to be an “either or” mentality within mainstream fashion where brands focus on the environment, or they aim to be inclusive. However, independent fashion is definitely on the rise for both sustainability and inclusivity; showing that it is possible to check more than one box.



ID: Two purple and white Kohl Kreatives makeup brushes plus decorative shells, plants and bath salts displayed in a scientific lab set up.

Here's one brand who is hot on our radar for this issue, providing accessible beauty for all...

Now, **Kohl Kreatives** aren't new, per se, but they are a brand that we wish we had known about years ago. Their signature Flex Collection comprises of five brushes which are free-standing, have easy-grip handles and fully bendable heads to allow for precision without hours of painstakingly re-doing every cat eye and contour - and that's just the start of this start-up. The brand shows that inclusivity is, firstly, not just a blanket statement, but that it can also be fun. One of the main gripes we have at Conscious Being about accessible fashion and beauty is that it can all be very clinical. To an extent, this makes sense, not all products can look pretty whilst keeping functionality - but we love that Kohl Kreatives haven't compromised their gorgeous design.

Their new Mi Fan is inspired by galaxy imagery, perfect for a highlight that is out of this world. Although they are fairly expensive, Kohl gives you a large incentive to buy their products.

Not only are they great for motor difficulties, they use a zero waste system and the founder, Trishna Daswaney, uses the money made from Kohl Kreatives to support free workshops for cancer care patients, those undergoing gender transitioning, and for those with motor difficulties. Kohl Kreatives, therefore, are an eco-friendly, inclusive brand which are useful for those with a wide range of disabilities without compromising on style.



ID: Purple and white Kohl Kreatives makeup brushes plus decorative shells, plants and bath salts displayed in a scientific lab set up. Image below shows three different rose gold flexible makeup brushes.



We would love to hear your thoughts on this topic, feel free to tweet us at @consciousbeing2

Interview with *Carla Costa Darlino* of adaptive fashion brand **MAUDA**

A new fashion brand for all women made in Scotland, crafted with a European edge. Mauda focuses on accessible fashion, and the brand's designer, Carla, is currently working on their section collection >

Chloe: Hi Carla, could you tell us a bit about Mauda?

Carla: I live in Edinburgh but I'm originally from Portugal. Mauda is mainly for women and children and is born from this fusion of cultures. I created this brand as an undergrad; during the course, I had already created designs on larger bodies – I definitely noticed that larger sized bodies didn't get as good feedback! There's definitely a mental block where something isn't conventional that the tutors didn't like. However, what I wanted to do was fashion that actually matters. I stumbled across Senead Burke and I realised a lot of clothes targeted only to disabled people seem to imply that disabled people have a less meaningful existence. And that's just not true. All of the clothes are made by me.

Chloe: How did you get into fashion?

Carla: Fashion has been with me since I was young. I remember as a child making clothes from ripped tights and old clothes that didn't fit; my auntie is a seamstress, my grandma crochets, and my mum taught me to sew. However, nobody really supported a career in fashion, so I went into IT and financial services. Eventually, I went and did a European Studies degree, and fashion always stayed with me. I made small pieces for me, I saving to buy a sewing machine; I've always wanted to invest in fashion. I'm glad that I took the time to learn how to do it professionally.

Chloe: How do you think brands can benefit from being accessible?

Carla: Well, there's a lot more people that can be interested – there's a huge market available that isn't being catered for! What I've learnt so far is that any challenge forces you to be creative and think of what you can do outside of the conventional.

There's such a huge opportunity for creativity, to deviate from what we know. It helps us to break out from a mass consumption design remit, and gain a huge market who are willing to be catered for and who want to express themselves. You've got this preconceived idea that velcro is for sportswear, or elasticated garments are more formal...but when you're needing to make user friendly clothing, you change the way it's seen and break with the conventional notion of design and material. I think a lot of people think that if it's not visible we don't have to deal with it, so they shy away from disability because it scares them. It's part of the human condition to do that but disability won't go away. Unless we face it in a different way, we will suffer because we have such a negative perspective, I think.

Chloe: How are your clothes adaptive? Who are they catered for?

Carla: The first collection I created, the concept is more of a universal design to be very user-friendly. I haven't catered for a specific disability with this collection, I have instead looked into limited mobility and how to aid that. So that means: t-shirts with opening at the shoulders, elasticated waistbands with wide legs to be able to adjust a prosthetic, things like that. The first collection included a lot of research from different groups; people with visual impairments, people with limited mobility or limb difference...I tried to look into the common denominators – which meant a lot of easy fastenings and elasticated waistbands.

Now that I'm working on the second collection, I'm trying to hone in more on specifics. So for one piece, a dress, I've reached out to a woman called Charlotte who has a stoma

bag. I learnt lots of stuff about a stoma bag and what needs to happen to accommodate one in clothing, for example so that it doesn't damage the fabric and how it can be incorporated within the design. There was a lot of secondary research, and I've created a few pieces that are more targeted for specific conditions. I'm hopeful that this new normal will be a more



ID: Image shows model Maria Tabacaru in a white shirt against a yellow background. She holds a sign that reads "See the able not the label".

accessible one.

Chloe: How would you like to expand your business – would you want to reflect your accessibility within your brand?

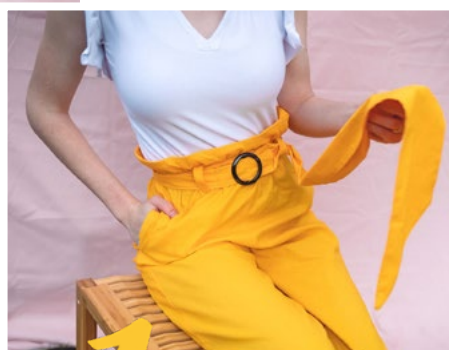
Carla: Yes, definitely. So in collaboration with Able Model Management, I made it very clear that I want my brand to first and foremost be a fashion brand, primarily focusing on adaptive clothing. I think that's an important distinction; I want people to see both the fashion, but the contribution to

g
DA

Style Match



What would we pair with these yellow Mauda trousers? >



Pair with this teal ditsy floral bardot crop top from In The Style - £24



SHOP

Pair with these mint leather platform sandals from LeatherByHannaKo

on Etsy - £106



SHOP

Finish off the look with these lilac floral clay earrings from Wolf and Badger - £18



SHOP

make the disability community feel more represented. My thank you cards go out in English and Braille, and it's things like that which, in the future, I'm hoping I can outsource that kind of work to disabled people.

Chloe: Finally, we've talked a lot about the ethos of Mauda - but what type of person wears your clothes?

Carla: A happy person! Someone who wants to embrace life and likes colour - somebody who likes flares and happy feelings. Being from Portugal there's lots of nice weather, so Mauda has that sunny and positive vibe. Stylish clothing that is comfortable and colourful.

Fashion News

SPORTY SLIP-ONS

Nike have recently released a new trainer designed with a collapsible, step-in heel and one-pull fit system, designed to enable putting on shoes without bending down.

This is a huge step forward in accessible fashion, however we would love to see this in a plain black for work. It would be great to see similar work being done to non-sport fashion!



SHOP



We are yet to see how accessible they truly are, but we would love to hear your thoughts. Tweet us @consciousbeing2

Rachel here from BraEasy, I want to ask you a question, when was the last time that you checked your actual bra size?

Did you know that 70% of women are wearing the wrong bra size? This can lead to neck, shoulder and even back pain.

Women's bra sizes change multiple times a year. Not to mention one brand is not like the other. As you age your breasts change shape; gravity is not your friend, or mine. In your 20's your breasts are at their peak (pun intended!) and you are also more likely to become pregnant, so the changes as you age can be dramatic. I speak from experience.

In your 30's you begin to notice stretch marks and again you need to look at the support your girls are getting from the bra you are currently wearing. In your 40's you start to feel that your breasts are softer— the perky days of your 20's are slowly declining.

Hormones have a great deal to do with all these changes and each time you need to re-evaluate the bra style that offers you the best support. Wearing the wrong bra can cause so many issues; that neck, shoulder and back pain I mentioned earlier is often associated with the weight of our breasts. Some women take action and get a reduction. This can help, however we recommend you see a specialist if you are wanting to consider these options.

Changing your bra style is a lot more important than a lot of women recognise.

What makes it so confusing is when you loose weight, your bra size not only goes down a size, but your cup size goes up.

And what about caring for your bra?

All bras should be changed daily and hand washed only. You should be using a bra wash bag if you pop it in the machine. That way it comes out clean and intact— not a pile of mangled fabric. It's also worth remembering that bras have a limited life and we tend to wear them to death. We stretch them beyond the original size and when you go to the shop you wonder why that size doesn't fit you anymore. Has the shop changed suppliers?

The shop hasn't changed suppliers; your two-year-old bra is now stretched beyond its original size. So changing your bra style is important. As is buying a new bra every six months. Did you know that there are thirteen different bra styles you can buy?

Until now.

Now there are fourteen styles— have you heard about the latest bra from BraEasy?

BraEasy have an adaptive bra that every body can wear. I don't know about you, but I hate the hook and eyes. And trying to do them up behind my back is an impossible feat of finger fumble gymnastics. With the BraEasy adaptive bra we use today's technology, with



velcro side openings (on both sides) so you can put this bra on with just one hand. Let me tell you, taking it off is a dream in under two seconds.

We love the fact that this bra was designed by women for women.

And the bonus is that BraEasy has an amazing bra measurement systems, that you can use for free to check your size in the comfort of your home. Our advice before using the measurement system? Put on your best bra before measuring to get the best results.

The easiest bra to put on yet!

Rachel x

**CHECK THEM OUT AT
BRAEASY.COM**



Accessibility is CREATIVITY

What's New?

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) attracted thousands when it made its virtual exhibition *Dream* – a pioneering use of live capture and gaming technology – which positioned the audience within a self-contained narrative that follows EM Williams as Puck, from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, along with the rest of his faerie friends. It is halfway between a play and a dreamscape, and the story – which incorporates the plays themes without reenacting the play – points to setting the standard for more interactive events such as this in the Arts.

Directed by Robin McNicholas of MLS, the scope of this show is fairly limited – interaction is streamlined to only a few moments dragging fireflies across the forest on your screen. However it is the potential of this type of performance that is most notable. Nonetheless, the story is still enjoyable, with the visuals especially stunning. Nick Cave, known for his musical prowess, is the narrator for our story and the collaboration – with the Manchester International Festival, Marshmallow Laser Feast and the Philharmonia Orchestra – really makes the space (because it seems neither a play nor a game) enjoyable. *Dream* is a real sample of how virtual events could reform, rather than outright replace, theatre, and the Behind The Scenes options are just as interesting as the actual event. The RSC have advertised this as a developmental stage in their collaboration with the digital; with the mystical forest (complete with hypnotic creatures and lively colours) and warm orchestral music, we were left captivated by the visuals – although we wondered how inclusive the end result may have been.

Visit the RSC *Dream* Online

The RSC are clearly aiming this project to explore digital access, rather than other kinds of accessibility, with the production including fairly easy-to-follow instructions and a hint at the future of theatre involving a digital – perhaps even immersive – aspect. The digital divide within the arts is something that this performance especially brought to mind. With over 7,000 people attending its opening night, it is clear that the event was popular, however it begs the question: is this accessible because it wants to be, or because it has to be? There is no doubt that *Dream* came about because of the pandemic but does that mean it will be a product of the pandemic or will the RSC continue to develop these ideas to expand on accessible theatre? Live-streams have been around for a long time, can we not do more?

Accessible is a term that has been used a lot within the last decade, however never more than this past year. Whilst access is a political construct – a human right – it is also a spark for creative fuel. We would love to see places like the RSC expanding their interpretation of accessibility to include disabled people in every performance, including their digital pieces. The concept of accessibility for disabled people can, and should, be a creative one – not a clinical-feeling tick box.



ID: Image shows an enchanted style forest, filled with lit up fireflies and reflective yellow lights, the title *Dream* and "a live, online performance set in a virtual midsummer forest" in grey overlay the image.

Company Highlight



Graeae is a bold and innovative company that explores the “aesthetics of access” from the very conception of their artistic process, employing Deaf and disabled artists to be centre-stage, as well as behind the scenes developing new writing projects. Here at Conscious Being, we find many of our values reflected in Graeae, and we love that they embed a range of tools such as audio description and sign language within their projects, rather than as an accessory. The company also champions young artists to make it in the, rather cutthroat, arts industry, and produces a wide range of training models, including inclusive practice for drama schools and accessible e-marketing for theatre venues. We love that Graeae are committed to tackling accessibility issues at their source, and we are excited to see what they will do this summer.

[Visit the Graeae Theatre Online](#)



ID: A photograph of the front of the Graeae Theatre at Night time. The font display shows large decorative letters G, R, A, E, A, and E. Spotlights light up the letters. Trees surround the frame.

Digital Arts Spaces – Art Et Al

In 2020, Sim Luttin (from Arts Project Australia), Slominski Projects (headed up by Lisa Slominski) and Jennifer Lauren Gallery (headed up by Jennifer Gilbert) noticed something was wrong. The arts needed more inclusive programming for “neurodivergent, intellectually and learning-disabled artists to be seen”. So, Art et al. was developed. Art et al. aims to be international and inclusive. It is a digital curatorial platform that includes collaborations between artists from supported studios, their peers and arts professionals. The online platform, featuring new commissions and exciting conversations, amplifies diverse and intersectional voices within creative practice. Here at CB we think this is an exciting progress in the world of curatorial practice, and it’s even more amazing that it was produced under three women’s innovative ideas.

[Visit the Art Et Al Online](#)

The website publishes commissioned writing around art, digital and in-person exhibitions, as well as original cross-media content. Defined by groups of artists – in both Australia and the UK – who self-identify as neurodivergent, intellectually or learning disabled, Art et al. tackles the issue of cross-cultural examination by those who would most benefit from the platform. Art et al seems to thrive on the idea that accessibility can be an important part of the creative process. Commissioned content just released includes a collaboration between Cherelle Sappleton, an artist based in Ramsgate in the UK, and Australian studio-based artist Thom Roberts.

As well as their commissions, the online platform provides accessibility measures including downloadable Easy Reads, BSL interpretation, audio translations, video captioning and FAQs to explain any language which may be difficult to understand – exhibiting a keen sense of self-awareness in how they are trying to work within the industry both externally and internally. To get involved with Art et al. you can submit to their #MondayMuse, which is a curated open call opportunity for neurodivergent, intellectually and learning-disabled artists, or you can visit their website to check out their upcoming work. We can’t wait for the platform to develop even more to include inclusive, intersectional and international talent for us to enjoy.

THERE IS NO IN A

Charli explains the lived experience of realising and gives some advice for others considering

I realised I was asexual when I was 14 and received my first diagnosis at 15 – a diagnosis which made me begin to explore the idea of being disabled, rather than just having a diagnostic label. I spent most of my teenage years trying to unpick and understand these identities, to feel able to lean into them and feel like they truly belong to me.

There's a process that comes with identity and it's so unique to every individual. Some feel a need to grieve, some take time to accept, and some simply feel relief and belonging. For me, learning the term asexual came with an almost automatic sense of liberation, because it explained so much, despite taking a period of time to accept afterward. Both the relief and the delayed acceptance were similar to when I discovered I was autistic. It was like a penny had dropped.

In comparison, I resisted the idea of chronic illness a lot more – and that's okay. Asexuality is not about a lack of hormones nor an issue concerning mental health or genetics, although that is the response we often receive. It's unfathomable to a lot of people that you could simply not experience sexual attraction without there being an underlying issue, because we live in a society so focused on sex, with a heavily sexualised media to boot. This is often pushed further onto those of us who do

have health issues they can easily attach our asexuality to, but your identity is valid. Asexuality is not a medical problem. You don't have to attach it to your disabled identity, dismiss it or hide it. This attempt to justify asexuality is created by a society which doesn't understand the sexual orientation, attributing the orientation to disability whilst at the same time desexualising disabled people. It is not an issue for which you are responsible.



**"YOUR IDENTITY
IS VALID"**

NO FAULT LINE ASEXUALITY

ing you're asexual
g their sexuality...

The asexual spectrum is complex and varied so you may find that you aren't sure where you fit on it. I originally thought I was demisexual before realising that I was asexual demiromantic.

You are harming no-one by taking on a label, sitting with it for a while, and realising it is not the correct one for you. Neither of course should there be any pressure to have a label at all; it doesn't determine how your life looks, if you have relationships or if you have sex.

"ASEXUALITY ISN'T A 'FAULT.'"

You might have times
- days, weeks or more
- where you don't feel totally empowered by your identities. I lost sight of my asexual identity for a couple of years for a variety of reasons, ranging from internet discourse to a focus on my disabilities. There isn't a rule book to the feelings you must hold, nor is there one on the way you have to identify. Sometimes it's just a part of you.

**"THE ASEXUAL SPECTRUM IS COMPLEX
AND VARIED SO YOU MAY FIND THAT YOU
AREN'T SURE WHERE YOU FIT ON IT."**

It isn't something that makes us less of a person, or a piece missing from us that we should be trying to get back or be ashamed of. I have been told so many times that I surely cannot be fulfilled without sexual attraction, but I don't see it that way. I am fulfilled by my relationship, my friends, my family, my work. Simultaneously, I love my identity, and it is a huge part of myself. It is a part of how I walk the world every day. It intertwines itself with my femininity and disabilities, how I perceive myself and the rest of the world. The recognition of this will always be important to me.



Article by Charli Clement
Follow Charli @charliclement_

FINANCE TRACKER

Money is a taboo topic; so is disability. We want to give you a real insight into the struggles and triumphs of disabled women and how they spend their money.

PROFILE

AGE: 28

LOCATION: MANCHESTER

CAREER: PHD RESEARCHER

SALARY: I HAVE A FIXED £15,000 TAX-FREE STIPEND TO COVER COSTS DURING MY COURSE. THIS IS PAID QUARTERLY RATHER THAN MONTHLY SO I WORK OUT MY BASE EXPENSES AND THEN PAY MYSELF A WEEKLY INCOME TO COVER FOOD ETC.

WHO'S AT HOME: I LIVE ALONE IN A 2 BED, CITY-CENTRE FLAT.

WHERE MY MONEY GOES

I live in the city centre in a flat my parents own. It's a kind of family investment that we have all contributed towards which means that I can pay towards a mortgage rather than pay a private landlord. I feel really lucky to have this chance because I love being in Manchester within walking distance of cafés and bars.

Since moving in, my career has been quite changeable. I left the job I moved for within a few months to freelance as a writer, which I managed for over 2 years. I am now doing a PhD which has stabilised my income and provided some better security. I hope the PhD will also offer better career opportunities in the future.

Being diagnosed with ME and fibromyalgia made a big difference to my financial picture. I was most ill while freelancing and found it tough making new contacts and getting contracts. Though freelancing was ideal in theory because I could manage my energy better, the stress of having an insecure income made it increasingly difficult to find the energy to get work. After my PhD, finding a stable job where I can manage my energy at the same time will be my top priority.

I spend a significant proportion of my income trying to manage my health condition, from small extras like paying for nearby parking where others might walk, to larger costs such as regular physiotherapy for my back pain. My main motivation in increasing my income in the future is to be able to afford other therapies such as hydrotherapy and to resume SCUBA diving, which is strangely effective!

Since switching to a keto diet to improve my health, my food bill has also increased. I used to spend around £30 per week but now spend closer to £60. This is largely because the cheaper staples like pasta and beans are no longer any part of my diet. I eat a lot of eggs which are a good source of fat and protein and batch cook as often as I can to save energy, time and money. In an ideal world, I would like to buy a second freezer so that I have enough meals for days where I can't cook from scratch. I'm saving up!

The pandemic has undoubtedly changed my spending too. I used to visit a local cafe and write there, happily sipping through several pots of tea and a meal to go with. Once the cafe is open again, I will resume my habit and hopefully they can cater for my new diet too! I was also getting used to a 1 hour+ commute to university but since the pandemic, we have all been working remotely. This has been great for reducing travel time and costs and I hope that I will be able to continue to work largely from home.

I'm very sociable and pre-lockdown used to feel lonely sometimes as I couldn't get out as much as I wanted to. Since lockdown, I've spent much more time talking to people remotely and Zoom has been a fantastic investment. My friends have always embraced the cheap night-in to play games together and this has been able to continue in some sense even while we are physically apart. I really hope that once we emerge from the pandemic, we can still Zoom often because it is working so well for me and my health.

FINANCIAL PICTURE

Expenses each month:

- £400 in "rent"
- £45 electricity
- £20 water
- £35 internet
- £45 physiotherapy
- £20 phone contact
- £14 Zoom
- £12 subscriptions: Netflix and Disney+

Savings:

None - every time I put some money away, something else happens! It's an uphill struggle at the moment but I have a strategy and keep building a bit at a time.

Debts:

My parents have been really understanding throughout my attempts at a career and now through my PhD. So, while they won't be knocking at my door any time soon, I am aware that I owe my parents a lot for rescuing me multiple times when money was really tight. I have a 0% credit card that I use to build my credit rating but have recently relied upon a little more, particularly at the end of each quarter.

Financial goal:

I try to be sensible with my money and budget as best I can but since leaving university after my MA, I've never really been comfortable and have relied on family support. I have a strong independent streak and really want to be self-sufficient.



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WHEN YOUR “ACCESSIBLE” HOLIDAY ISN'T ACTUALLY ACCESSIBLE...

If you're a fellow travel junkie, you'll be familiar with the excitement and adrenaline that pumps through you as you dot the i's and cross the t's on the details of your holiday.

By Elvy K, www.elvysblog.com

Disabled travellers will know that an accessible holiday requires way more planning to make sure it meets your needs. But what do we actually mean when we talk about an “accessible” holiday? Those of us in the disabled community know the diversity in disability, meaning two people with “similar” disabilities could have completely different

needs and require vastly different adaptations. The social model of disability explains this well with its recognition that people are made disabled by barriers in society (physical or attitudes), rather than by how their bodies function. Thinking about what accessible means to you and your specific needs is key in also thinking about how you would cope should things go wrong.



ID: Woman's hands shown writing travel plans in a notebook on a wooden desk. Surrounding her on the desk is foreign money, passport, a camera, binoculars, a map, suitcases and a cup of tea. Image below shows a woman on a balcony looking at a city view, she wears a bright yellow jacket and sun hat. Her arms are spread open above her head.



It's important to emphasise that things don't always go wrong, and in my experience, most of my holidays have been a success. On the occasions where things have gone wrong, the first key element is to take a step back, take a deep breath, and think things through.

Below are some key points to get you thinking about your coping strategy:

1 Establish your biggest priority/concern: – Whether its loss/damage of equipment, needing medical assistance, or requiring an accessible room, knowing what your number one priority is, sets out your plan to cope with the unforeseen circumstance you find in front of you. As someone with a physical disability, my wheelchair is always my biggest priority. Things such as how I can move around or whether I can use a bathroom dictates my focus. If my wheelchair is broken or a room is not accessible, I need to prioritise how to get it fixed or how to acquire an accessible room. Understanding the most important element of your disability and how it will affect your health and holiday experience should then influence how you deal with a situation.

2 Record EVERYTHING: – From booking, inquiring about access needs, to trying to resolve an issue such as damage to equipment or discrimination you may experience, record it. It might be something you think you will do later, but keeping a record of things as they happen, emails, conversations, and names of people involved not only helps you keep track and hold people accountable, it also provides evidence if you need to make a legal or financial claim.

4 Contact your insurance: – Contacting your insurance is a straight forward action that can help resolve your issues quickly. If you have insurance, contacting them to make sure they can support you with extra costs relating to your biggest concern can be a quick and easy fix. It could mean cutting your holiday short and buying an early ticket home; it's important that you understand how your insurance cover can support you and your disability.

5 Get help from your support system/advocacy: – Many hands make light work; when you're stuck abroad and feeling stressed, it can always help to get some support from loved ones or an advocacy service. When my wheelchair broke down at the airport in Amsterdam, a family member in the UK managed to get a hold of someone at the airport to help me. This saved me a lot of panicked googling and battery life which were all very essential at the time. They can also help with searching for support in the country you're in, whilst you try and work with the people directly in front of you.

3 Always keep a hold of your original documents: – Quite often when something has gone wrong at the airport, with transport or at the hotel, people ask to see your passport, booking information, ID etc. Especially when you're abroad, always present these as needed, but never let anyone disappear with your original documents. I once made a financial claim against an airline based in Spain who asked for my original passport and ticket. I instead had my originals certified by a law firm, and sent them copies. Once your original documents are lost, not only does this hinder your case, but also adds an extra layer of stress to your already stressful situation.

Many destinations continue to work to be more inclusive and below are some recommended destinations for disabled travellers, for example:

- **Barcelona, Spain** – Barcelona has a fairly accessible transport system and accessible hotel options. A city with fairly flat terrain making it a great destination for those with mobility needs, and not to mention great architecture.
- **Singapore, Singapore** – Singapore has good accessible transport with level and ramp access. Although a number of shops and temples have steps, there are many step free markets, with bigger temples providing ramp access.
- **Prague, Czech Republic** – With its old classic European architecture, the city still retains its old infrastructure meaning most shops and restaurants have steps. Despite this, the city is small and easy to get around. Visiting in the summer months is recommended so you can enjoy outdoor dining.



ID: Woman in a wheelchair photographed from the back, she is on a path, looking at a monument at sunset.

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Jessica Kellgren-Fozard

is the Youtube star smashing stereotypes on what it is to be a disabled woman...

10 Favourite things

Living with two rare genetic conditions, HNPP and EDS, Jessica is also deaf and partially visually impaired. Her signature vintage style (with Victory Rolls to die for) is aspirational. She holds iconic status in the LGBTQ+ community, reflected in her being named in the 2020 Pride Power list and highly commended as a rising star in DIVA magazine. Jessica's general joie de vivre for life is infectious and so we had to ask her, what are her 10 most favourite things in the world...

1

Her dogs, Walter and Matilda - they bring so much joy and comfort to me with their unconditional love.

2

Phillipa Gregory novels - I love a good historical fiction, especially where the protagonists are women.



3

The Lake District - childhood holidays visiting my grandparents are the happiest memories.

5

Greys Anatomy - a good tearjerker and medical mysteries that are wrapped up in an hour are the best.

7

Vintage clothes - vintage is sustainable and I just loves 40s & 50s style.

10

Her online community - creating an online community with people of shared experiences is so valuable, not only to my members, but to myself as well.



4

My wife Claudia - my favourite human ever.

6

Char Kway Teow - my favourite Malaysian noodle dish.

8

Plants - I love gardening and has been enjoying making over my garden in my recently purchased home. We now have the perfect cottage garden look.

9

Living in Brighton (UK) - to live and have a home in such an inclusive and historically LGBTQ+ friendly place, makes me feel safe and that I belong.



Photo by Kitty Wheeler Shaw

Find Jessica



Youtube - Jessica Kellgren-Fozard



Instagram - @jessicaoutofthecloset



Twitter - @JessicaOOTC

FAVOURITE THINGS

27

Explore

“Disability is articulated as a struggle, an unnecessary burden that one must overcome to the soundtrack of a string crescendo. But disabled lives are multi-faceted – brimming with personality, pride, ambition, love, empathy, and wit.”

– Sinead Burke

The Writer - MEET ACTIVIST Tara Moss

Who do you get when you combine a human rights activist, “forensic tourist,” and author? Why Tara Moss of course...

In the 90's I was living out my teen years rocking out to Nirvana, though secretly listening to Mariah Carey, my favourite film was Clueless, and in the later part of the decade I read a book called Fetish by Tara Moss. I admit, I picked up Fetish to read because in my teens I thought Tara Moss was so cool. In the era of supermodels, she was the effortless Canadian model living in Australia. For us Aussie teenage girls she was the epitome of making it in the world. So to read her fresh off the printer book was the logical next step in idolising our idol.

“We deserve to take up space, and to be represented.”

What I now realise is that I am connected to Tara in a more profound way than just her books. We are part of the global disabled community, a community that is advocating and fighting for more representation, rights and access. And Tara is at the forefront of this fight, especially for those with chronic illness and pain. I was so excited when Tara agreed to be interviewed for this change makers feature, because she is a global change maker when it comes to disability.



ID: Image shows Tara Moss in a navy blue patterned dress and long leather boots. She sits in a wheelchair cross-legged. The wheelchair wheels are decorated with skulls and flowers. Tara has long dark brown hair and is wearing a black face mask.

Find Tara :



first asked Tara to tell me a little about herself in her own words and her response was gloriously detailed, "I am a Canadian-Australian author of 13 bestselling books, a human rights advocate, documentary maker and host, and disabled ambulatory wheelchair user, cane and rollator user, with CRPS (Complex Regional Pain Syndrome). I am most definitely a 'spoonie'." If I had thought Tara was cool as a teen, she was proving that with time and confidence, you could own your disability like a rebel.

I asked her about her diagnosis with CRPS. As someone with limb difference I can never understand another person's experience with disability, and I think it's important that we can learn from each other. After a hip injury in 2016, Tara was diagnosed with CRPS, "My life has been radically changed by my injury and subsequent Complex Regional Pain Syndrome. Because chronic pain is invisible, and my mobility aids are not, I think many people don't understand that the pain is the most significant part of CRPS. While many seem to focus on the visible mobility challenges, it is what is invisible that is the most challenging for me. Pacing and pain management are a big part of my world."

Tara's openness is rally what stands out. By facilitating discussions and showing others who have similar conditions that they are not alone, she is changing the face of what disability is and can be. And through her profile she is able to take this discussion to a wider audience—those, especially non-disabled, who read and love her books and documentary work.

I had to ask her about her books, how could I not! Her story as a writer is just as fascinating as her disability one. She describes herself as a "forensic tourist" and she talks about the lengths she goes to for her book research, "being set on fire, choked unconscious – do not try this at home – and going to morgues, prisons and courtrooms."

But it isn't just the research that drives her need and love to write, especially in the crime genre, "The crime genre is one I keep coming back to, and I think that it's particularly excellent for exploring issues of social justice, class, ableism, sexism and violence. In fact, the hardboiled genre – and my novel *The War Widow* is very much a response to classic midcentury hardboiled – developed in part as a way to begin telling stories of the streets and the working class, instead of only the tales of Kings, Princesses or the upper classes. In crime stories I can write about injustice, in a suspenseful and compelling form. That's something that keeps me coming back."

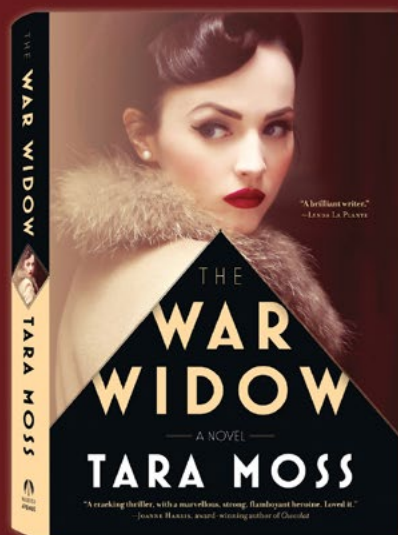
The War Widow is Tara's latest book. Set in 1946 it features PI Billie Walker and her disabled war vet assistant, Sam. But she hasn't always stuck to the crime genre, in fact she has also been published in historical crime fiction, paranormal YA, contemporary crime fiction and non-fiction. "It is simply my passion for storytelling that sees me write so broadly – there are so many stories to tell. What ties each of my books together is my lifelong project of centering women and girls in my storytelling."



"The crime genre is one I keep coming back to, and I think that it's particularly excellent for exploring issues of social justice, class, ableism, sexism and violence."

You can purchase
The War Widow here –
[Penguin Random House](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/9780307484441/the-war-widow-by-tara-moss)

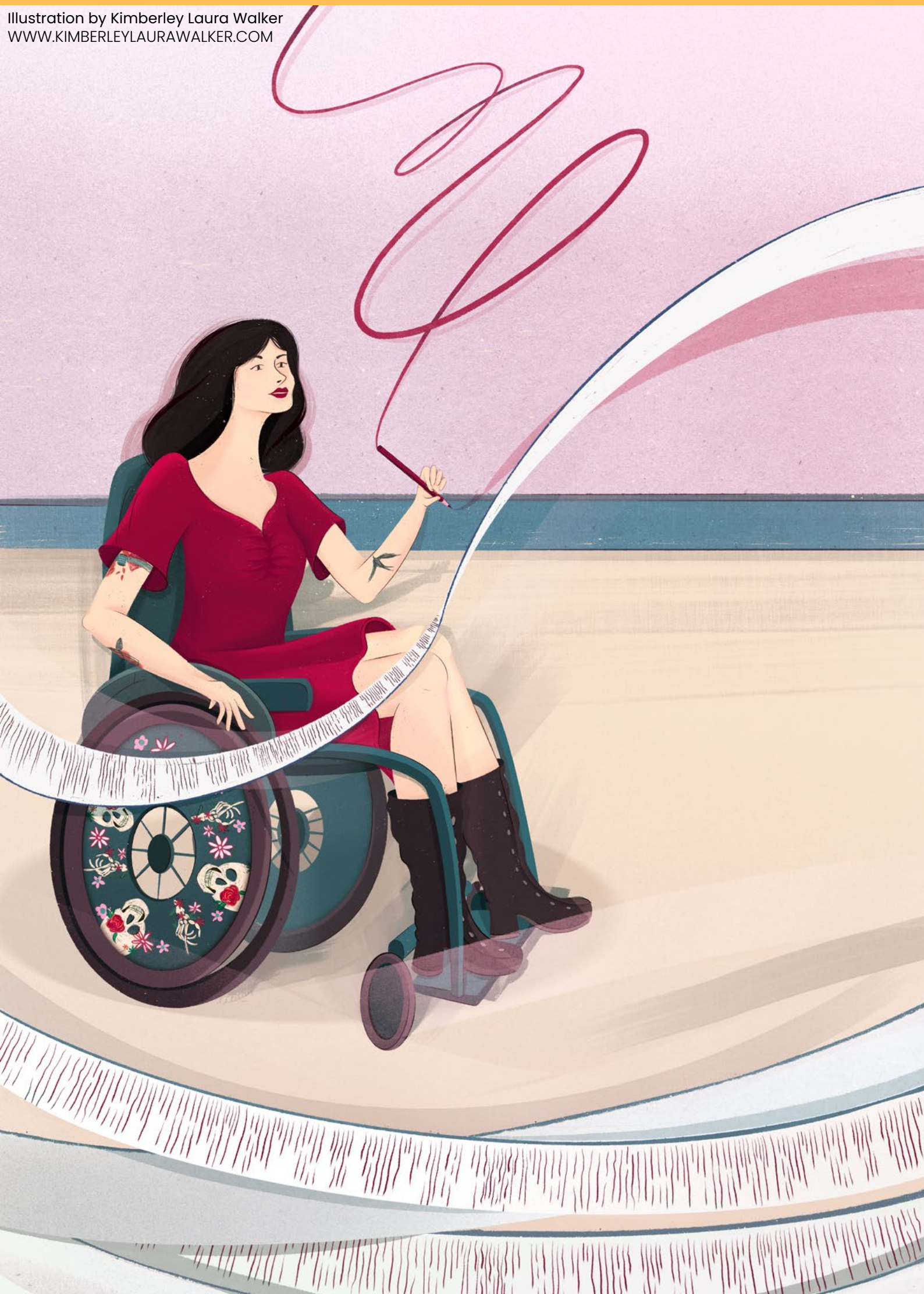
ID: Both Images show Tara Moss' new book *The War widow*, which features a young woman with brunette hair in a stylish up-do, and 1940's style makeup (Red lip and winged black eyeliner). Image below features a review from award-winning author Joanne Harris. It reads "A Cracking thriller, with a marvellous, strong, flamboyant heroine. Loved it".



**"A cracking thriller,
with a marvellous, strong,
flamboyant heroine. Loved it."**

—Joanne Harris, award-winning author of *Chocolat*

 HarperCollinsCanada



In recent years Tara started her side Instagram account @ taraandwolfie. Who is Wolfie? Wolfie is Tara's first proper walking stick. Never in my life had I thought to name my own mobility aid, my prosthetic leg.

I love the idea of naming our mobility aids though, as it seems like such a revolutionary act. It's like giving two fingers to the ableist system that says we should be ashamed of our bodies and minds.

Tara states, "I decided to start Tara and Wolfie as a way of documenting my experiences with Wolfie, my first proper walking stick. It has grown since that first notion and has become a place to focus discussion on mobility aids, being proud and open as a woman with disability, and connecting with others in the disability community, which has been immensely rewarding."

Tara has a lot to say about ableism. And rightly so. Visible or invisible disability, we all experience ableism in some way, shape or form. And with our mobility aids such a visual signifier of disability, we can internalise disconnect with what actually supports us. Tara told me "Ableism is sadly rife, including internalized ableism. Anyone reading this publication will know that. I know from studies that many who would benefit from using mobility aids won't leave the house with them, or even use them in private, due to stigma, causing them to shrink back from fuller participation in life and worst of all, experience more pain, dizziness, falls risk or other health issues. I'm passionate about normalizing mobility aids and demanding accessibility so they can be used without barriers."

Tara's passion for Wolfie (and her other mobility aid, her wheelchair Hera) reveals a loving acceptance of where she is at, an unequivocal celebration of who she is today and all that got her there.

Finally, I asked Tara what advice she would give to other disability activists and change makers, "I would say Reach out. Reach out to the disability community and be a proud part of it, because there is a lot of support and information there to rock your world. In terms of advice on being a public advocate, I wrote a book called Speaking Out, which is essentially a handbook for women and girls interested in having their voices heard and becoming advocates. It is filled with specific advice for how to research, write, engage confidently in public speaking, handle criticism, trolls, bullies and more. It is hard to distill, but if there is one key message, is that we have the right to speak out. We have just as much right to speak out, be heard and take up public space as the next man, or nondisabled person.

We deserve to take up space, and to be represented. We have a right to a full life and to participate in democracy, in our communities and public spaces, and have lives free from violence, bullying and silencing."

This. The right to speak out, the right to be heard, and the right to take up space. We stand alongside you Tara, as disabled women, as women demanding the chance to thrive. Tara believes in the mantra "nothing about us, without us," as do I, and with change makers such as Tara leading the way, we can create the change we need for all disabled women.



Tara & Wolfie



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ID: Image above shows Tara Moss standing in a navy blue fitted velvet evening dress. Tara has dark brown hair in an up-do and is wearing black eyeliner and red-lipstick. She is using her walking aid Wolfie.

Image to the left shows Tara sat on a metal bench with her daughter. Tara wears a leopard print dress, knee high black boots and has her walking aid Wolfie with her.

Photos of Tara by Berndt Sellheim

The Dancer -

MEET ACTIVIST

Kate Stanforth

Diagnosed with ME and EDS as a young teen, Kate Stanforth's love of dance endures. Here she tells us how, with creativity and innovation, she is making dance accessible...

At 26 years of age Kate Stanforth already has an enormous list of achievements under her belt. You might know her from modelling with George at Asda, her successful TikTok videos or perhaps you saw her recently on Channel 4 demonstrating how she tap dances as a wheelchair user. Rightly so, her face has been everywhere over the last couple of years.

"But amongst all this success Kate is still dealing with the day to day reality of disability"

Kate lives in Northumberland in the UK and lives with various conditions including ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) and EDS (Ehlers Danlos Syndrome). She started dancing at just 2 years old, and by 8 years old she was beginning pre-professional training, dancing before and after school and on the weekends. She was getting nominated for international awards and achieving high marks, when at 14 years old she suddenly became ill. Since then Kate has been diagnosed with various conditions and has experienced varying levels of health, including being bed-bound and now, being able to dance in her wheelchair for short amounts of time.



ID: Image above shows Kate Stanforth sitting in a ballet pose next to her wheelchair. The image is in black and white. Photo by Hannah Todd Photography.



Whilst Kate's life may not have turned out exactly how she imagined, she's now been able to use her dance background to teach others, including adapting things to enable disabled people to take her classes. She's using her experience of the barriers she's faced in the industry to build an environment which is welcoming and inclusive. She has her own accessible dance studio now, which enabled her recently to finally open her own inclusive dance school.

A recent addition to her dance school are Beatz classes, tap dancing, where Kate has been trying out her new tap dancing gloves. By attaching the elements of a tap shoe to gloves it enables wheelchair users, and those with less leg mobility, to tap dance. Kate recently got the chance to teach Strictly Come Dancing professional Oti Mabuse how to tap dance with her hands, alongside Steph McGovern on her Channel 4 show 'Steph's Packed Lunch'. This TV feature has been just one part of Kate's success over these past couple of years.

Throughout lockdown Kate has grown her platform on TikTok massively, having gained over 60,000 followers now. There has been a huge rise in disabled people using the platform to share their lives over the past year, and it's become a great place for education too. It's been allowing people like Kate to educate a whole generation.

Remember all those TikTok dances? Well Kate has often adapted them for wheelchair users on the platform. She has filled a gap in the market that most people weren't even aware of in the first place. The popularity of her dance classes proves just how much demand there is for inclusive dance lessons and good disability representation within the dance industry.

Campaigning is also one of Kate's passions and through her social media, and modelling for clothing brand George at Asda, she has done just that. As an ambulatory wheelchair user, a wheelchair user who can walk, it's been important to Kate to show that some people who use wheelchairs can stand or walk, in the hopes of people like herself receiving less abuse from the general public due to a lack of awareness. It hasn't been easy though, after the George at Asda campaign she was alerted to a 350+ comment thread that referred to her wheelchair as a prop. She was even reported by

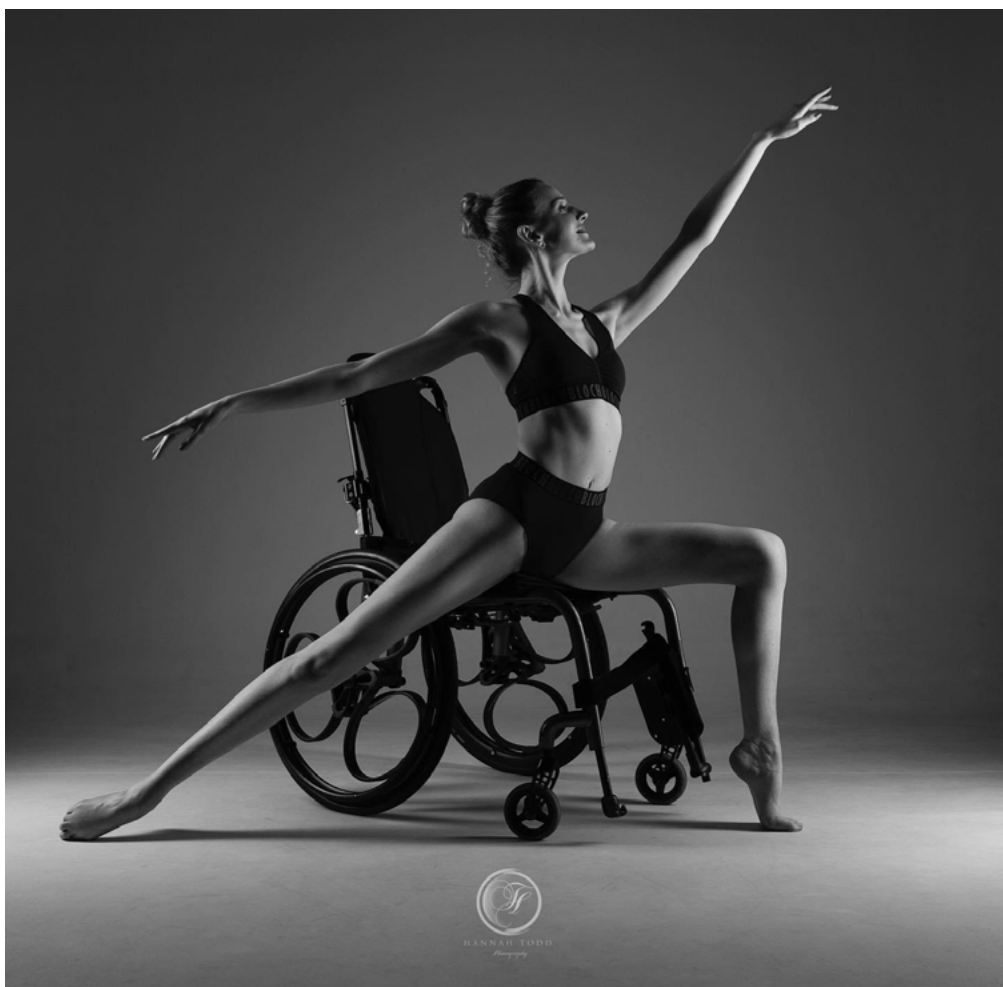
one individual simply because she stood up in an advert. As an ambulatory wheelchair user myself I am all too familiar with this kind of abuse and ignorance. But, as Kate says, it only makes her campaign harder.

As human beings on social media we often only want to show the highlights, but amongst all this success Kate is still dealing with the day to day reality of disability. Kate describes her health as a rollercoaster, and she doesn't shy away from sharing this reality with her followers. Her honesty, mixed with her sense of humour, her talent and drive, have gained her an incredible following across various platforms.

Kate Stanforth is one to watch right now, and I can't wait to see where her success takes her next. You can follow Kate across her social media @katestanforth, where you'll find information about her accessible dance classes.



ID: Image above shows Kate sitting in her wheelchair with her arms in the air next to a poster of her in the same position in a clothing store.



ID: Image above shows Kate Stanforth perched on the edge of her wheelchair in an extended ballet dance pose. The image is in black and white. Photo by Hannah Todd Photography.

The Community Builder -

MEET ACTIVIST

Amy Kavanagh

The pandemic, for many people, has been an opportunity for innovation and change. Here, Rachel Charlton-Daily has spoken to Amy Kavanagh on how she has pivoted during a very tough year...

It's been a busy past twelve months for Amy Kavanagh, when the world shut down the visually impaired campaigner and activist became "landlady" of her very own virtual pub, The Staying Inn, which quickly became a vital community for disabled people. She also welcomed her guide dog Ava into her life, has continued to raise awareness of her campaign #JustAskDontGrab, and launched her own freelance consultancy.

Amy is a huge force of nature in the disability world, so I was keen to find out how she got where she is, what led her to activism and what's left to conquer. We caught up over zoom, whilst Ava snoozed beside her.

Considering that Amy is such a big advocate for herself and others, it was a shock to discover that she wasn't always that way, in fact she used to hide her disability. "As a young person I was kind of brought up to be like, be as normal as possible, of course I didn't realise how much internalised ableism that held" Amy reflects.

Instead of asking for help and risking looking vulnerable she just accepted that falling over, hurting herself and bumping into things were a part of her every day life. She also put herself down a lot about her issues, internalising that she just

wasn't trying hard enough "which was ridiculous because no amount of trying hard is going to make my retinas work properly!" She discovered online disability activism whilst at university when she sought help with her mental health, through chatting with other academics she had a revelation about herself "it always sounds really silly when I say this, but then I was like, 'Oh yeah, I'm blind too. Like, there's this other thing I have!'"

It was only through engaging with people online that she was able to figure out her own internalised ableism and feel confident enough to start using a white cane. More than anything the online community helped her realise she could still be herself and be disabled

"I'd so inherited that really toxic idea that being a disabled person meant that you weren't independent, that you couldn't do anything." She reflects whilst laughing, "it was just radical for me to meet other blind and disabled women who were into makeup and going to the pub and all that kind of normal stuff."

When she accepted herself and started giving her body what it needed she realised just how much it had all been affecting her. "It's wild to reflect on it now, that a part of my day that I had normalised

was falling over because I didn't want to accept I needed to use a white cane."

It's through online activism and having the confidence to use a white cane that her hugely successful campaign #JustAskDontGrab originated. She realised once she became visibly disabled, many non disabled people wanted to help her, but it wasn't always in the right way. Instead of asking if she needed help people would physically grab her and direct her places she didn't want to go. She shared her experience with her friends online "I sort of asked 'guys does anyone else get grabbed a lot?' and loads of people were like 'yep! Welcome to team disabled, people will grab you now!'" From this she created the hashtag because, as she puts it, "that's all I want, just ask me if I need help".

Although well meaning, a lot of the experiences Amy has had have been down to non-disabled people just not knowing how to deal with an independent disabled woman. They panic and help in the most unhelpful ways, such as the time a woman tried to take her to the RNIB at half past six on a Friday night. "What do you think they do? Fold us all up in the cupboards and get us out to tune the pianos in the morning?" she laughs.

Of course that's one of the funny stories, there's also the dark side to #JustAskDontGrab.

Amy has always spoken bravely and been an advocate for the awareness of sexual violence of disabled women, so understandably the last couple of months have been difficult.

"I think the difficult thing as a disabled woman is that we still occupy this space of everyone being so shocked that it happens and how you have to navigate the intersecting ableism and misogyny that underpins that." The disbelief stems from people desexualising disabled women and not believing anyone would do this to them.



ID: Image above shows Amy Kavanagh wearing an all black outfit with a red chunky necklace and green sunglasses. She has shoulder length, blonde curly hair. Amy is crossing the road with her guide dog Ava. Image by Kaye Ford Photography.

This undoubtedly adds to her trauma, but it's in moments like this that she's glad #JustAskDon'tGrab exists.

She attributes the success of #JustAskDontGrab down to the fact that it not only resonated with disabled people, but it gave them something to signpost others to. The hashtag has been used thousands of times and she regularly does media interviews about it.

"I think together we're stronger, together we'll make a bigger movement and together we'll achieve change."

Something that Amy has become renowned for during the pandemic was her newfound role of 'landlady' at her own online pub, The Staying Inn. She created The Staying Inn as a community for disabled people who felt isolated during the first lockdown. What started with a joke logo created during a few drinks with friends on zoom soon became a hugely popular weekly event. "One person said that we were the first voices they'd heard all week that weren't the TV or the radio. And it was kind of then that I realised how isolating this was going to be for so many disabled people that are already so isolated." Over a year later The Staying Inn has hosted everything from discos to British Sign Language lessons, seminars on how to break into journalism to classic pub favourites like quizzes and even Taskmaster.

Through crowd funding they've raised over £20,000 and Amy wants to see it grow bigger and better. Whilst appetite is waning as the world opens up, she knows there will always be an audience for it. In the future they hope to get charity status so they can get

grants and bring in consultants to help her franchise The Staying Inn in a way that's tailor made to different disability groups. "It's a changing world and a changing need, but I think it still has a role."

The pandemic has also allowed Amy to realise her dream of making activism her full time job. She says she made this decision as it allowed her to spend her energies on something she was passionate about.

"If the pandemic has shown me anything, it's on the negative sides, how little society values disabled people, but it's also shown me the incredible resilience and resourcefulness and solidarity and community we have as disabled people." Another reason she wanted to make it her career was so that she could ask to be paid for it, which would mean others with smaller profiles could feel more comfortable doing the same.

As our call winds to a close I ask her what she would like to achieve, "world peace," she laughs mimicking a Miss World contestant.

"I would like to continue being part of building communities of disabled people to work together for change," she tells me seriously, it's clear she's passionate about giving back to the community who helped her discover how strong she could be.

"I think together we're stronger, together we'll make a bigger movement and together we'll achieve change."

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Find Amy:





The Accessible Cook -

MEET ACTIVE

Hortense Julien

Hortense shares with us the positive impact that running and healthy eating has had on her chronic pain...

When Hortense and I connected on zoom I couldn't help but beam back at this woman who was so full of life, literally glowing through the screen with a wide smile on her face. Hortense Julianne is a culinary force to be reckoned with and a disabled woman with a passion and drive for teaching people how to use good cooking for good health. I started off by asking about her disability journey and how it had impacted her focus on food and health.



Hortense, a thoughtful look on her face, launched into her story, "when I was about 20 I was diagnosed with a type of rare cancer. It is a hybrid cancer with tumours that grow and eat muscles and bones around them, so the only way to get rid is to destroy the muscle and bone around it. It is a tumour that reoccurs. The first time I had it it was in the anterior part of the chest, but accessible from the back. So my left shoulder plate has been cut off and I have no muscles on that side, so I have scar going from the middle of my shoulder to the side of my breast. I'm impaired on my left arm, I have very little strength in it. I then had to have radiotherapy. A year after treatment my tumours came back and so I had to have a second surgery and the only way they could access it was through the front, so I lost my first rib and the muscles around it and my clavicle came down a bit."

She laughs as she tells me, "I tell my nephews that I had a fight with a shark and I won." This reminds me of my own stories that I would tell my nieces and nephews, a shark bit my arm off, I glued my fingers together, and most morbidly, I got run over by a train. Perhaps, even with our different disability journeys, we have a similar sense of humour about our conditions.

ID: Image above shows Hortense Julianne wearing a white tank top with black straps, and matching diamond necklace and drop earrings. She is smiling and looking into the camera.

ST ne

I asked Hortense what has been the ongoing result of the cancer and surgery. She replied, "I was left with chronic pain. This then developed into neuropathic pain. This was the biggest nightmare of the journey to be honest, because the neuropathic pain side of things, it was even worse than being ill. It became the centre of my life, and when you are in pain it is an invisible disability."

I nodded along with her in empathy. One of my best friends, Jess, has chronic pain. There are days where she is more disabled than myself due to her pain and inflammation; though people would look at me with my very visible disability and my friend with her invisible disability and claim me the "winner" in the disability stakes. I asked Hortense how she deals with the pain.

Hortense nodded and rubbed her left shoulder before continuing, "running really helped me deal more with the pain, leading to a reduction in the amount of medication that I was on. What was interesting was that I realised the pain of running, at some point, took over the neuropathic pains. Basically, I learnt to tolerate pain a bit more. For a few years I was living on 16-20 pills a day, I was on the highest doses of something called Gabapentin. Because of my increased pain tolerance due to running I was able to reduce the amount of medication that I was on down to 2-4 codeine a day. Running really helped me to understand the different pains a little bit more."

As someone who can't run, I asked Hortense if running connected her to her body, like walking did for me. She nodded, "so much of running is about your mind speaking to your body. The conversation can drive you mad, but your mind has to convince your body to get out of the house and just say 'keep on going.' The internal conversation includes constantly checking your body and thinking about how you are moving. By the time you have finished the run you are mentally and physically exhausted."

I smiled. I got exactly what she was saying— my whole life has been an internal conversation between my mind and body about how and where I move. And our lives are also about understanding how we can keep our bodies healthy, even with our impairments and conditions. I wanted to know more about Hortense's other passion— cooking.



"YOUR HEALTH IS YOUR WEALTH"

ID: Image shows Hortense Julien after completing a marathon for charity. She is wearing running gear, a yellow bandana, sunglasses and is holding up her completion medal.

As someone who likes to eat healthy (with the occasionally treat thrown in, I do have a sweet tooth after all), I had never taken the step into full veganism. Hortense faltered at my insinuation that she was vegan, "I am not vegan per se, but my consumption of meat is very limited. One of the things that I really pay attention too is my food. Vegetables are the number one and I make sure that I eat them primarily. I don't want anything to happen to my body that is triggered by me."

She explained to me how she uses food to stay healthy, "I tend to cook all my food because I know exactly what is in it. I research into the nutrients of food; sometimes I can just have yoghurt with turmeric and a bit of sugar in it, on a day where I am fully inflamed. I can have my pomegranates which are full of antioxidants. Food is really important and I am forever looking for new ways to incorporate vitamins and minerals into my food."



ID: Image above shows Hortense Julienne wearing a black tshirt, black jeans, a yellow belt and matching yellow bracelet. Hortense has long black hair in braids, she is smiling and holding up a bag of pink sweets.

I felt a little regretful at my pretty lax diet from the past week, a lot of pasta and crisps. Was Hortense really the extreme health perfectionist I always wished I could be? "I am not to great at drinking enough water though..." she grinned. I sighed in relief. Even Hortense has health practices she can improve upon.

"We live in this world where I don't want people to be put off by labels."

Hortense's passion for food and cooking and its connection to health is driven by her background. Born in Cameroon and raised in France, Hortense knows about the health value of good meat and vegetables. She also reveals a deep concern for the welfare of animals, "the amount of chicken that is eaten in the UK is huge, and this means that the chickens often get mistreated and they have to be grown faster and injected with steroids. It is not safe to eat. Your health is your wealth." I asked her if this was also why she encouraged limiting the amount of meat that we eat. She nodded, "that is why I went on my journey, to show people what they can eat instead of meat. And if you do buy less meat it means that you can afford to buy higher quality meat when you do eat it."

Recently one of Hortense's recipes was published in The Independent. It was British Sandwich Week and the image that they used for the article was her sandwich— caramelised tofu with a walnut and basil pesto. This recipe is in her new cook book, Plant-based Ideas for Carnivores, which she hopes will be accessible to everyone regarding disability, chronic illness and health.

Hortense also runs a snack company called "Miss Nang Treats," with an aim to make snacking healthy for vegans and carnivores alike. "I won my first food award last year and it was for being the most inclusive brand of nuts and seeds snack," Hortense told me excitedly. "And we live in this world where I don't want people to be put off by labels. I want people to know what they are eating. My whole brand is no e-numbers, make it accessible, no weird words, because I want people to know that they can go to the supermarket and cook a fully vegan dish without having to go to specialty shops."

I told Hortense that I wanted to get her book, that she had inspired me to look again at my eating habits. Being disabled myself, I understand the need to keep myself as healthy and fit as I can. The stronger my body now the better as I get older. Hortense agreed, as she says "your health is your wealth." And Hortense, as a change maker in the food and wellness industry, leads the way in illustrating the benefits of healthy eating with chronic illness.



YOU CAN PURCHASE HORTENSE'S 'PLANT-BASED IDEAS FOR CARNIVORES' COOKBOOK HERE:

[HTTPS://MISSNANG.COM/
PRODUCT/PLANT-BASED-IDEAS-
FOR-CARNIVORES-COOKBOOK/](https://missnang.com/product/plant-based-ideas-for-carnivores-cookbook/)

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Pre-Trial Therapy: Falling Through The Cracks

An interview with a steering group formed to discuss and tackle the issues surrounding CPS pre-trial guidelines around sexual violence...

Erene Hadjiioannou, Dorothy Hodgkinson, and Tayba Azim were three individuals who kept seeing disempowering consequences of reporting sexual violence to the police; namely around pre-trial therapy. All three have professional backgrounds within the sector – Erene is an Integrative Psychotherapist specialising in sexual violence; Dorothy is an Independent Advocate, Facilitator and Coach; and Tayba is an Integrative Psychotherapist with an interest in supporting female survivors of domestic violence within the South Asian community. For survivors who decide to report sexual violence, pre-trial therapy is crucial to communicate and process the difficulties that reporting often presents. However, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidelines – and the way in which these guidelines can be interpreted – can present major problems. All three were seeing the same issues crop up working with female survivors of sexual violence and all three are now part of a steering group attempting to influence change around what they call “ambiguous factors” regarding pre-trial therapy.

It is over a zoom call on a rainy day in February that I get to ask the steering group about these issues.

“Every single survivor” Erene says, “is the owner of their own experience, we want to humanise that legal system.”

But what, exactly, is so wrong with that system?

“From a therapeutic side, there’s no standardised training for pre-trial therapy. This means we’re not fulfilling our ethical requirement for the many survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Because there’s no standardised training, this means some therapists aren’t even aware of the guidelines which can jeopardise cases. For survivors, you can’t talk about the details of what happened. On the ground, this means people either choose not to have therapy or report. Therapeutic service providers [once they find out you have a sexual violence case] say yes we can offer you structured therapy or time limited, but not talking therapy, or people are turned away from services. Case notes are routinely requested even if the therapy isn’t related.”

All this leads to inaccessibility of therapy services for survivors, as well as infringing on the integrity of the therapist’s role. CPS guidelines mean that talking therapy pre-trial can not discuss details of their experiences, with anyone, including their therapist. This highlights the issue of “false memories”, which is the popularly disregarded idea that therapists can create a memory of abuse that did not occur if allowed to talk freely. This means that, beyond the difficulty of deciding to report, there is often a choice between seeking justice and accessing therapy, as well as an issue of integrity for therapy services themselves.

“Women, and especially Disabled women, are being left behind by the inaccessibility of the UK justice system, and no amount of sympathy for the 97% in headlines will rewrite these rules.”

The steering group, after forming in 2019, sat down with these issues, and professionals such as criminal barristers to send professional recommendations to improve the guidelines.



"We're basically working within really ambiguous factors, which can be difficult, we have a roundtable meeting with places such as SheSmith, Inspiring Women Changemakers and Womens Aid to find a way forward. There was a public consultation in October of last year, and we submitted a 65 page report to CPS with recommendations, which is a concrete step.

Primarily our aim is to allow survivors and professionals to be heard completely throughout the process. We want to be allies to that process, and we felt like we couldn't just do nothing."

The steering group, as well as other campaigning groups throughout the country, are attempting to change this painful landscape for survivors. When asked how they think this will change how we view mental health and whether this will have any knock-on effects, Erene went on to say:

"It opens up the conversation that anyone can be affected by sexual violence."

"From my own experience, when I was doing particular group work with a stabilisation group, with women who were survivors... there was something about us empowering them with the resources that they already had within them. There were situations where the judges had told them to seek therapy but some of them had children so were unable to and the mental impact was huge. Talking about CPS guidelines and the impact it may have on individuals could have a massive impact on some survivors. Sexual violence is a very individual experience, and that can be quite isolating.

Some groups of women [I've worked with] were quite vocal – and were proud to have spoken about it – and some who were so unable to express what had gone on.

One thing which is worth including is we also wanted to note the use of language talking about these topics can be very limiting. Survivors are diverse in how they are processing what happened to them, what forms of therapy are helpful... there are so many complex things that are on top of dealing with what happened. Therefore, we are very explicit on using gender-neutral language. Anyone can be a survivor or a perpetrator. There are so many misconceptions out there and people don't see what they need reflected back.

Often, there's this idea that the criminal justice system won't understand and so opening up a dialogue between therapeutic and legal professions bridges that gap. It opens up the conversation that anyone can be affected by sexual violence. I always think that people get frustrated with the Criminal Justice System as it can feel intimidating and it's not very accessible to lots of different community groups."

CPS guidelines hinder – and, arguably, re-traumatise – survivors reporting process. Now that these CPS guidelines are under review, which for many feels like a long overdue victory, we can start forward thinking. There is so much more to be done to aid survivors during this process. From an accessible viewpoint, where are the survivor specific guidebooks to talk them through these guidelines, and how they affect them? Reporting can be a harrowing process, and it being so inaccessible to so many communities means that many survivors are not reporting – feeding into rape myths, stereotypes and unconscious

bias, as well as leaving survivors without justice or adequate care. It is thanks to tireless work by those such as this steering group that survivors of sexual violence are seeing changes in societal attitudes, however it is not enough. The public gives only brief flashes of attention to such life-altering situations – because it is unpalatable – however this does not mean that the suffering does not continue behind the curtain.

Women, and especially Disabled women, are being left behind by the inaccessibility of the UK justice system, and no amount of sympathy for the 97% in headlines will rewrite these rules. Survivor's deserve the chance to be heard.

If you've been affected by any of the issues in this article, or want more information about services; here are a few resources available:

– National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247 or through the contact form or live chat service

– Ask for 'ANI' in a participating pharmacy. 'ANI' stands for Action Needed Immediately but also phonetically sounds like the name Annie. If a pharmacy has the 'Ask for ANI' logo on display, it means they're ready to help. They will offer you a private space, provide a phone and ask if you need support from the police or other domestic abuse support services.

– The Rape Crisis national freephone helpline on 0808 802 9999 (12–2.30pm and 7–9.30pm every day of the year)

– Voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid, Victim Support, The Survivors Trust, or Leeway are also available.

The Positive in the Pandemic:

how disabled women have pivoted into new lives

The pandemic has certainly had a negative impact on so many lives, but were there any positives, especially for disabled women...

Watching the announcement on TV that we were going into a lockdown that could last how long, nobody knew, I felt my heart sink. As a self-employed speaker and workshop lead, most of my work was done face-to-face. This lockdown meant the immediate cancellation of so much work. I suddenly saw my year spread out in front of me without any income and no hope. I felt sick. And as a disabled woman I also saw the potential of this global disaster setting back the rights and supports that disabled people had experienced for... well, rights that we are still fighting for. My disability already impacted my life in ways that non-disabled people could never understand, how would the pandemic deepen this?

Due to the voracious spread of a new disease, our day-to-day lives changed in profound and diverse ways.

And the changes weren't just about shielding and the protection of our physical health and wellbeing. The consequences on our mental health and wellbeing, so impacted by isolation and change, has been all encompassing—especially for disabled people like myself.

In the recent UK government report Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain, of disabled people

78%

were identified being very or somewhat worried about the effect the coronavirus was having on their life compared to 69% of non-disabled people.

The areas of life being most impacted for disabled people include:

medication essentials
access to healthcare
wellbeing groceries

For disabled women the impacts can be even more significant. For generations disabled women have had to fight for diagnosis of chronic illness and/or impairment and access to appropriate and accessible care for their conditions. They also often have to fight for accessible sexual health care, domestic abuse support, pre- and postnatal care, mental health and wellbeing support, education and employment support, the list goes on.

So with a crack to confidence and an underlying fear, many disabled women have felt their lives slip backwards, including my own, but there are sparks of optimism.

Whilst we could choose to focus on the negative, we also need to look at the positives, to tell the stories about the successes, changes and hopes of disabled women as they navigate one of the toughest times in history.



"The impact the pandemic has had on my day to day life as a disabled woman was in the beginning, I worried about getting food shopping and the basics in, as I was one who was shielding initially," says Phillipa Connolly, a woman living with Cerebral Palsy. I could sense her frustration. Phillipa has faced a dichotomy of experiences. Losing her teaching job as a teacher at the start of the pandemic, Phillipa has spent the past 12 months at home with a teenage son who's mental health was affected by the lockdowns. Because Phillipa was shielding she had virtually no social life, and her own mental health really started to suffer too. But when asked what was a positive that came from the lockdowns, shielding and job loss, Phillipa really opened up.

"I'm used to my own company, so I used the isolation to plough myself into projects that I needed to finish," Phillipa explained. As a history enthusiast and writer, Phillipa saw the lockdown as an opportunity to finish writing the first volume of a historical fiction series she had been working on, *The Timeless Falcon*. She spent the first lockdown investigating and securing an agent for her writing, started a PhD and took part in a number of documentaries to do with history. In a world that is often too quick-paced for disabled people,



women like Phillipa realised that the enforced slow down was the time to pick up speed for projects that she otherwise may not have begun or had the time and energy to complete.

Payal Kapoor, a blind woman living in India, also took advantage of this slowdown to pivot.

Payal is a blind woman, speaker, storyteller, and trainer from India. She uses all of her talents to educate people about disability and in her advocacy work. At first, she felt that the pandemic had taken away her independence. "A skill that took years to perfect," Payal told me. "It was a crippling impact, unable to use my sense of touch, something that blind people rely on all the time."

For Payal though, the innovation and opening up of online communication for nearly everything created unforeseen opportunities. "Sitting at my desk, a whole new career path opened up for me— motivational talks, disability awareness workshops for schools and corporates; everything became so much easier. I also made the decision to start my own podcast, teaching blind and visually impaired people how to cook accessibly."



In terms of negative impact, Elvy tells a similar tale, "COVID mostly impacted my ability to go out into the world. My whole world now feels as though it's limited to my home, for socialising, work, university studies, eating, and even medical appointments."

TESTING POSITIVE

Again though, Elvy talks about pivoting, discovering that she could make positive changes in her life that she otherwise would not have made. "The impact of Covid on my work life meant that, at the peak of it, it was overwhelming due to the field that I was in. I made the decision to resign from my job and pursue a Masters degree in the career I am most passionate about." This change of career really supported Elvy's mental health and wellbeing; and yet, **the pandemic has also had a positive impact physically as well.**

"As a wheelchair user the physical environment was a lot more difficult than I realised. Having to fight heavy doors, using up energy to do toilet transfers, etc would leave me exhausted by the end of the week. Working from home has completely taken this away from me and I've noticed a massive difference in my energy levels and physical health."

My initial fears I held at the start of the pandemic was unfounded. I discovered that if I pivoted in my work and social engagement, utilising the creative problem solving skills my disability has given me, I could find a path to independence and sustainability. Smoothly I switched from face-to-face presenting and socialising to virtual. With aplomb I started consultation and leadership coaching work. With a bravery I didn't know I had, I took on a magazine editing role, despite only ever having worked as a writer before. And I actually spoke more to my family in Australia this past year than I ever have.

Don't get me wrong, there have been tough moments. I have cried, felt fear, laid in bed with a sore throat convinced I had Covid. I have felt trapped as my independence wained and I learnt more and more on my housemate to do the shopping and other chores. Homesick and heart sore, I wondered when I would ever see my family in Australia again.



But ultimately, what I have seen is my ability to adapt was greater than I thought.

Creating boundaries that work better with my physical and mental energy has, in actual fact, meant I have been able to work **more**. And play **more**. And be **more**.



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Esthetic

"I stand not just for a disability, but I stand
for women and women's rights."

– Lauren Wasser

ONLY THE STRONG EVER TRIED

By Emily Nicole Roberts

At the end of my 20's, I bought a camera and started filming my life. Filming my ability in order to expose my differences and similarities in life, raw and barely edited. My name is Emily Nicole Roberts, I'm 22, from Swansea in South Wales and I have a condition called Cerebral Palsy which means I'm a full time wheelchair user.

I can edit video footage, but I can't edit what I'm filming. With every single video made and shared, I got more comfortable watching myself in videos, and being myself in real life. My cerebral palsy was there for all to see online.

"I will always use my voice to scream about what disabled people can do"

To watch. To comment on. Like. Dislike.

I can hope that my content made most people feel comfortable. I'm sure there are others who felt the direct opposite. Regardless of who sees me and what I represent for them... my aim is unaltered. Disability is not a synonym for disadvantaged or doomed. Ability takes many forms.

My YouTube videos consist of things like, pushing my wheelchair up a ramp while becoming out of breath. Putting a bra on backwards whilst losing the hooks between my fingers. Getting up from a fall while laying on the floor, my limbs wobbling as they lift me up.

Exposing myself and my disability seemed like a personal nightmare at first. Truthfully, even I expected to watch my struggles online and wince. When I was a child, I always wanted to try and hide my inabilities, even asking my mum or dad to ONLY lift me up or help me, when nobody was near... I was embarrassed and ashamed that I needed help to live, so, I used to punish myself by not participating in life at all. Self sabotage was the only thing I could choose. In my psyche, if I couldn't do things 'normally' - my pride and naive stubbornness decided 'you can't do them at all.

Ironically, I went from not wanting to be seen by even one pair of eyes, to gladly broadcasting my entire life on the internet without question. I went from telling myself that nobody would want to even, acknowledge my existence, to staring down a camera lens and showing people my entirety, forcefully.

Wiping my makeup off, showing my scars, admitting painful and personal truths about myself. I was once described as 'gobby' and I'm quite proud of that.



Weirdly, and mostly, because 'little me' didn't think she was worthy of a voice, didn't think people would listen or care to hear her. I will always use my voice to scream about what disabled people can do— I want to change lives by filming mine. Whether it's just by giving someone a smile or a renewed sense of their worth, relatability is so important to me in a society that can sometimes seem distanced.

'Only the strong survive' should be replaced with 'Only the strong ever tried'

Never once did I envisage that I would become so intimately honest and so unapologetic about my struggles and successes. In a year, I have made videos that have made me cry, given me strength and reminded me of fear too! I have made videos that got me a job at the BBC creating inclusive content online. I have made videos that got me noticed by Radio One. I have made videos for the charities who are helping the next generation.

I have made videos which have given me a different perspective of my own sense of self. I have never felt so able and I have never felt so alive.

Want to appear as our next personal profile? Email in at liz@consciousbeingmagazine.com



@EMILYNICOLEROBERTS



PERSONAL ESSAY

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PHOTO BY @HARKIKARAN ON INSTAGRAM

MEET

AI



VANYA RAO-MIDDLETON

The artist who uses her
bright and bold artworks to
amplify social justice issues...

WEBSITE - WWW.ANANYAPAINTS.COM
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FACEBOOK - @ANANYARAOMIDDLETON

WHO AM I?

to express myself post-brain injury and as someone living with multiple sclerosis. Vivid,

vibrant and explorative, my illustrations focus on the lived experiences of women in relation to the realities of living with chronic illness and being at the intersection of disability, race and gender.

My artwork has been recognised by brands such as Instagram, Schuh, the UK Parliament and the BBC for the powerful ways in which I use it to move people into joining conversations around disability justice and other political issues.

I am a disabled woman, illustrator and chronic illness activist based in London and Lisbon. My activism and artwork are intimately connected, which enables me to create artwork that is powerful and empathy-driven. I use illustration as a tool to create impactful work that centres the lived experiences of marginalised communities.

As a disabled creator, my artwork is a means



WHO / WHAT INSPIRES ME?

My roots as a mixed race person really inspires a lot of my work – being mixed race often means that you live between the lines – between two (or more!) communities. I think that being mixed race has helped me to be more sensitive and empathy-driven in my

work. My work is also heavily inspired by social justice movements and the lived experiences that drive social change. My life sits at the intersection of race, gender and disability and I try to use my experiences and feelings from this to create work that speaks to people from marginalised communities.



ALISE DISABILITIES



WHAT IS MY ARTISTIC PROCESS?

I have a background in academic research and Marketing, so a really important part of my work as an illustrator is to take the time to research around the brief I'm illustrating. A big part of my research process involves creating a library of images that inspire me, looking up details around the brief including any background information I can get my hands on and anything related that I think will feed into the illustration I create. Once I've finished my research, I use these as starting

points to create illustration drafts. My drafting process is usually quite simple and I prefer to keep my drafts loose and in black and white. I allow myself to be explorative with ideas at this point as well as rough indications of composition. Once I've chosen a route to continue to work on for the illustration, I'll then start to map out colours onto my work, which really helps to convey the mood of the piece. After that, I'll work on the final illustration using my preferred art software—Procreate!



YOU GOT THIS!



RELAX



TRACK
YOUR
FEELINGS



CONSCIOUS BEING

Podcast Moments

Conscious Being has a podcast series where we interview innovative, exciting disabled women who share their lived experiences, insights and joy. This issues podcast moments come from Season 1, Episode 3 of the CB Podcast.



ID: IMAGE SHOWS TASNIM HASSAN, WHO HAS LONG DARK HAIR AND LARGE ROUND GLASSES. SHE WEARS A GRADUATION GOWN AND IS SMILING.

Meet Tasnim Hassan, a PhD student researching the intersections of disability and race.

"I'm someone who has been pretty much a student activist for the the past couple of years, I have been passionate about supporting disability related things, and now I am a PhD student who is exploring the relationship between disability and ethnicity."

"I feel like I had my own full journey with disability and I never realised how much coming from an ethnic minority background impacted my experience as well, as well as being a woman and from a working class background."

"The more you meet people from diverse backgrounds, you start to see the similarities, but you also start to see the differences."

"Growing up I met a lot of disabled people, it wasn't until the National Union of Students that I got to be involved with the National Disabled Students campaign and that honestly changed how I viewed disability. You got meet people who were similar to you and people that wanted to make it better."

"As soon as I came across the Social Model of Disability I was like, this makes a lot of sense, and if people saw disability this way it would really make people not so negative towards people with disabilities."

"This is one of the connections I make from growing up from an ethnic minority background, the social model of disability definitely doesn't reach these particular communities very well."

"Growing up I always thought to myself, yes I have a disability, but I never thought of myself as a disabled person, the time where it hit me more, where I felt like I was a disabled person was when I wasn't able to go to a university of my choice, I had to go to a local university."

"When I started to meet more people with disabilities, more people from other ethnic minority backgrounds, I kind of realised I wasn't on my own and kind of talking about my own experiences, people could relate."

**FOLLOW TASNIM ON TWITTER
@TASNIMHASSAN94**

ID: IMAGE SHOWS A SILVER MICROPHONE IN A STAND, NEXT TO A LAPTOP WITH A WEBCAM. THEY SIT ON A WHITE DESK INFRONT OF A WINDOW.



**TO LISTEN TO THE FULL PODCAST YOU
CAN CHECK OUT EPISODE 3 ON:**

**APPLE PODCASTS,
SOUNDCLOUD AND STITCHER**

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Conscious Being is the first magazine of its kind to explore feminist disability from an angle full of joie de vivre – featuring fashion, beauty, art, culture, music, and hard-hitting journalism, all with a lens of disability, without the clinical feel that is widespread in disability activism. With regular columns exploring travel to relationships,, and features that explore the very rich and vibrant world of disability, Conscious Being is a full-bodied publication targeted at Disabled women who are intellectually curious and creatively driven. It is also a wonderful way for non-disabled allies to engage with the community.

If you are a business, organisation, or social enterprise with values around inclusion and diversity, positive representation, and equal pay, then you could be the right advertising fit for Conscious Being.

*To find out more about our packages and rates contact us at
liz@consciousbeingmagazine.com or chloe@consciousbeingmagazine.com*

"I am not a snowflake. I am not a sweet, infantilising symbol of fragility and life. I am a strong, fierce, flawed adult woman. I plan to remain that way, in life and in death."

– Stella Young

Conscious
Being