

Carol Busbee for the Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities

Mission

The MCPD's mission is to serve as a network, catalyst, and referral organization that will enhance equality and self-advocacy for people regardless of their disability.

For more information, view the [Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities Website](http://www.cheyennemcpd.org) at <http://www.cheyennemcpd.org>

I have spent my entire adult career working with people who have disabilities, thirty some years. During this time, I have experienced companionship, friendships, comradery, sympathy and empathy, but never a lifelong disability. When asked to work on this educational project about the nuances of disabilities, my thoughts took me to the idea of experiencing a disability for myself. My mind ran through ideas of confining myself to a wheelchair for a day, using earplugs to mute my hearing or glasses that were not my prescription. There are so many different types of disabilities, I could take any action to experience what the people I spend my days with experience. I could ask my family to help me accomplish the tasks that needs done for the day, they are supportive, and surely, they would help with my research. They would sacrifice a little and it would be a fun learning experience for them too! I was getting excited; this will be a great project. I thought about all my daily tasks and activities. I began planning how I would accomplish each and developing my list of things needing done. Then, the thought scurried through my head, I cannot do this, it would interfere with my day. Let me repeat that-it would interfere with my day. As the thought started sinking through my brain, I started experiencing a sense of shame. Really, it would interfere with my day! Pathetic. I have done a tremendous disservice to every person who has a disability. I put this project on hold; I needed to think about what I perceived as being the inconvenience of a disability.

This weekend I was trying to catch up on some necessary readings related to my work. I came upon a document that opened with an interesting philosophy of the late Dr. Tony Ruiz, Senior Research Associate at UNH Institute on Disability. Dr. Ruiz believed in the value and abilities of all people. He felt it is the workplace tasks and environment, not the individuals that were the sources of disabilities. In reading this, I really had reason to stop and reflect upon my thoughts of the inconvenience of being disabled. Perhaps, being disabled is not as inconvenient as I perceive it to be, perhaps, we, as society are the ones who make it inconvenient? What a novel thought. I began thinking about how many people with disabilities are contributing to our society-Steven Hawking for example-the brilliant theoretical physicist who was afflicted with motor neurone disease, eventually losing all ability to use muscles, walk or speak. He was able to continue his work due to an excellent support team. Imagine what other people with disabilities could do with support teams!

In Wyoming, there are 66,426 people or 11.7 percent of our population who experience a lifelong disability according to the 2013 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium. Of those,

only 27.9 percent between the ages of 18 and 64 work full time, year round. If we changed our philosophy to match that of Dr. Ruiz, how many more could go to work or provide tremendous contributions to our society. How many of us would realize that a disability is not an inconvenience-just another person with a different circumstance?

I asked a friend who spends her day in a wheelchair about this idea-inconvenience, she said that sure, things can be hard, if streets are not shoveled, the chair can get stuck, if things are in the top cupboards, she can't reach, but the greatest inconvenience is the people who purposefully ignore or are rude about her chair. She does not want people to re-arrange their lives on her behalf, but simply saying, can I help makes a huge difference. We should all be saying it to each other already. All of us have something to contribute and accomplish-but every one of us needs support to do so-whether we have a disability or not. It is not a matter of inconvenience; it is a matter of supporting our fellow humans. It's the right thing to do.