Independent & Active in the Southwest

James Ian
Finding an Identity

LivAbility
Edition 17 | Summer 2019

Lyft & VMI Partner
Ride-sharing options expand to PHX

6 Jobs from Home
Real work-from-home opportunities!

Morgan’s Wonderland
San Antonio’s “Uber-accessible” water park

Adaptive Athletics
Scholarship chances expanding in Southwest
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On July 26th, 2019, we will celebrate the 29th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This historic piece of legislation was a watershed moment in civil rights for people with disabilities worldwide. It was the culmination of two and a half decades worth of relentless advocacy.

Things are not perfect today, but we only need to look at our progress to be encouraged for an even better future. Some of the stories you’ll read in this edition of LivAbility are certainly evidence of that.

Not enough can be said about the effort required to open the new light rail station at 50th Street and Washington, near Ability360.

It’s a clear indication that the disability community should be included when it comes to public transit. It was a monumental achievement for all who voiced their support for its construction.

We proved that advocacy can move mountains and create incredible change anywhere!

Next, let me say goodbye to two of 360’s VPs who are retiring this summer. Susan Webb and Gwen Dean have been with us from the beginning and both were instrumental in our growth, success, and stature within this community. Thank you and good luck, ladies!

As I peruse all the stories in this edition of LivAbility and I think about everything happening locally, nationally and beyond, I’m reminded of how much has been accomplished. We are living productive lives when yet in the not-too-distant past people with disabilities were considered to be a burden.

This spring I met Daniel Gomez a delegate from the U.S. Department of State’s Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP). The program trains and supports leaders to serve their local communities by increasing access and opportunities for participation in adaptive sports. Daniel is developing an adaptive surfing program for youth in México. This young man was professional and organized and had a passion for introducing people to surfing. I’m confident he is out there making a difference and I hope you take the time to read about his journey on page 40.

I hope everyone realizes they too can find a way to make a difference. Find your passion, get mad about the current conditions and then just get busy. It’s a great time to celebrate 29 years of progress and inclusion. It’s also an opportunity to do your part before the BIG THREE-OH arrives next year.

Phil Pangrazio
Ability360 President & CEO
Welcome to another edition of LivAbility.

Welcome to our Summer edition of LivAbility! We’re stoked to share Edition 17 with our readers, as we continue to push past the friendly confines of Arizona and tell the stories of people, places and things all around the Southwest. If there is any takeaway from this edition, it is how many people with disabilities are out there living richly-fulfilling lives.

Nothing says summer more than a water park. Except an “ultra-accessible™” water park and that’s what San Antonio, Texas has for everyone to enjoy! As it turns out San Antonio is home for one of our contributors, Sarah Farrell, as she gives us all reason to head to the Lone Star State in the future.

Kasey Kaler (our editor extraordinaire) takes us to Southern California and introduces you to our cover story, James Ian, a musician who writes and records his songs in LA.

We also write about some new university athletic department programs of interest. Arizona State is now offering a degree in disability studies. San Diego State University has an exciting new adaptive sports program which segues perfectly into a story about the University of Arizona continuing to offer scholarship opportunities to young athletes. Angeline Carbajal tells us the story of two athletes who will be joining their men’s and women’s basketball programs this Fall.

Finally, we bring you some fascinating transportation news. After years of endless advocacy, we at Ability360 have a very accessible light rail stop right at our front door, between Washington Street and 50th Street. It is a game-changer for Phoenicians and Tony Jackson gives us his favorite places to enjoy along the light rail.

But perhaps more relevant to all our readers is a story from Gabrielle Olivera about Lyft and VMI partnering to offer an accessible-ride pilot program.

The future is knocking on our door and hopefully, it’s a game-changer for all of us!
Welcome to the newest edition of LivAbility

LivAbility is a quarterly lifestyle magazine for people with disabilities. Each edition contains articles that promote an active, fulfilling lifestyle for every ability.

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Contributors

Kelly Beaubien
Kelly Beaubien has been a member of the Ability360 family for over five years as a caregiver. Kelly has a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Arizona State University and teaches English to ESL students. She is the mother of two boys and wife to Ability360 graphic designer, John Beaubien. In her free time, she enjoys crafting and the occasional live 5k or virtual race.

Angeline Carbajal
Angeline Carbajal is an experienced Program Coordinator at the University of Arizona. She has a passion for storytelling and is living proof you can live without the Oxford comma. She's a Southwest native and managed to graduate with two degrees from the UA without drinking a single drop of coffee.

Brielle Carter
Brielle Carter works as a Program Manager at Ability360's Sports & Fitness Center. She’s a Waterford, Wisconsin native, where she grew up on a farm and was involved in 4-H. Her favorite athletic activity is indoor cycling.

Cirpiano Chayrez
Cirpiano Chayrez Jr., (C.J.) is a student at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in sports journalism. His love for all Arizona sports teams began in 2008, and he has been living with the consequences ever since.

Sarah Farrell
Sarah Farrell is a Texas native, digital journalist, avid hiker and tennis fanatic. She's currently working on her master's in sports journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

Christian Guerithault
Christian Guerithault is an alumnus of Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. He majored in Sports and Media Studies through ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business. Christian is a Phoenix native and has two older brothers. He is the biggest sports fanatic you’ll ever meet and hopes to one day work in the front office of a professional sports team.

Tony Jackson
Tony Jackson is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. He started playing power soccer in 2009 and has no plans to stop anytime soon. In addition to being an athlete, he puts his journalism skills to use as a broadcaster of power soccer tournaments around the world. He currently works at the Ability360 Sports & Fitness Center, and also coaches and plays for Ability360 FC.

Aitana Yvette Mallari
Aitana Yvette Mallari is an online media journalist who runs on caffeine and WiFi. She's lived in the Middle East, Asia, and both coasts of the U.S. and writes about health, tech, and amazing people doing amazing things. She is a graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and probably has a deadline to get to.
Steve Norton

A native of Santa Ana, CA, Steve Norton has been in the hospitality industry for the past 30 years. He attended New York’s prestigious Culinary Institute of America and has worked as a private chef. Steve loves to share his knowledge and expertise in healthy eating, including menu planning, managing a food budget, and cooking with fresh ingredients.

Gabrielle Olivera

Gabrielle Olivera is a student at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. When Gabrielle isn’t writing or filming stories, she’s planning her next trip destination. Gabrielle hopes to make a lasting impact with the stories that she writes.

Summer Sorg

Summer Sorg is a student at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication specializing in photography and digital journalism. Her heart lies in storytelling, nature and exploring. Summer plans to use her talents to highlight important issues and inspire people to care.
Rachel Fisher (middle) stands with her daughter, Madison (left) and her guide dog, Austin (right)
#BlindGirlProblems and enjoying the absurd in the everyday

by Aitana Yvette Mallari

It was a #blindgirlproblem—Not noticing the stove was on, Rachel Fisher placed the lid of her crockpot over a burner.

“I had never seen plastic melt in such a way,” she says, laughing.

It’s a candy-coated kind of laugh, usually found in leaf piles and the tops of birthday candles, not so much anecdotes about visual impairment. But these #blindgirlproblems, as she and her friends have dubbed them, are all about enjoying the absurd in the everyday: things like getting addresses wrong, or miscalculating how far away an object is, or realizing that the sweet couple walking down the street with their child was actually just an old woman and an unrelated man carrying a folding chair (which really happened to Fisher). She might’ve lost a crockpot, but she did gain another story to tell and laugh about, and that was fine by her.

It wasn’t always like that.

A Liability

Rachel Fisher has Stargardt’s macular dystrophy and retinitis pigmentosa, the former being a genetic eye disorder that causes progressive vision loss. Although symptoms of Stargardt’s occur in childhood, Fisher wasn’t diagnosed until she was 15.

A high schooler in Cicero, Illinois, she had gone to get her driver’s permit and was sent to a retina specialist at Wheaton Eye Clinic.

“They hadn’t really diagnosed Stargardt’s during that time,” Fisher says. “The guy who tested me had just gone to a conference that talked about it.”

She learned that the cones and rods in her eyes don’t receive enough blood, so they die. And little by little, Fisher loses her ability to see.

Currently, she has no depth perception—everything is flat. There’s light and shadow, but not a lot of greys in the middle. She has a blind spot in her eye, exactly on her central vision. Her left eye is far worse than her right, a blur of flashes and muted colors, so there’s no dependable remaining vision there. She also has night blindness and uses a service dog.

“The thing about having your vision constantly deteriorate is that you’re always in a process of grieving,” Fisher says. “I’m okay now, but say in two weeks I realize I can’t recognize something ... you have to literally process it and grieve continually.”

ADA wasn’t enforced when she was growing up. Thought of as a liability, Fisher was pulled from classes and the sports that she loved, like swimming. When most kids her age were being told they could be anything they wanted to be, she was told that her disability stunted her destiny.

“If you were blind, you’re either a telemarketer or customer service person,” she says. “Not really encouraging.”

Her first semester at university wasn’t any better. Fisher was double majoring in interior lighting design and ADA compliance, but her classes were rife with professors who saw no point in teaching someone who couldn’t see a majority of the learning material.

It was like swimming against the tide. Without support or money for more than a single semester, she left.

And for some time, she was a telemarketer.
A New Start

When Fisher makes an art piece, she sketches first and outlines her work with a hot glue gun. This creates a raised medium she can feel. She then uses color theory to lay things out.

“It’s a lot longer than a regular sighted person because of all the mapping and groundwork,” she says.

Many completed works are donated to Guide Dogs of the Desert, a nonprofit, and some can be seen hanging in the Westward Ho in Downtown Phoenix.

Her return to art can be traced back to her days at the Foundation for Blind Children, where she learned braille and attended women’s groups. It’s where she met her mentor, Cynthia Woods, who is blind. Woods encouraged her to hold on to her passions, even when Fisher was diagnosed with an extremely rare, new version of Stargardt’s and was feeling disheartened with the future.

“Does it matter?” Woods says, during their many one-on-one moments. “You’re losing your vision anyways.”

It was because of her that Fisher did a research paper on artists with visual impairments, and incorporated so much of her visual process—like braille—in her work.

Using her art, Fisher immersed herself in the community, helping others learn what she learned and how to navigate the world.

“I have always had a passion for public speaking and advocacy,” Fisher says. “Disability, it’s not a label. It’s part of who you are.”

She decided to take another shot at college, this time at Arizona State University, where she pursued a degree in recreational therapy.

And although she was back in school, a few things had changed: she was 40, a single mother, and frankly, unstoppable.

Her Biggest Fan

Come July, Madison Fisher will be 15—the same age her mom was when she was diagnosed.

Although she doesn’t have Stargardt’s, she does wear glasses.
for astigmatism, and they both have ADHD (Rachel Fisher was diagnosed as an adult).

"I think my daughter has benefitted from having a parent that not only has a disability, but is so open about it," Fisher says, noting that Madison is even considering a career in a similar field.

Being a visually-impaired mom on top of being a single mom, Fisher works nights so she can be with her daughter during the day, and doesn’t hide the struggles she faces in the process.

"Some parents fault me for it, but I share it in a way she can understand," Fisher says. "I can't lie, it's been stressful, and with a disability, my income isn't as high as other people. But through this, I teach her how to budget and to work with what we got."

Over time, Fisher has seen Madison grow to become a compassionate, independent soul ... who still likes spending time with mom, of course. In fact, Madison is her biggest fan, especially when it comes to her education.

"I have one semester left until I earn my bachelor's degree," Fisher says. "She'll go, 'You can do it, you're almost there.'"

The Next Step
According to Fisher, accessibility at ASU was leagues better than her previous college, with resources and support at the ready from faculty and students alike. She’s part of the inclusion board, working to make the campus as accessible as possible.

"I'm a gold guide, so I get to talk about being visually-impaired, a transfer student and bringing my dog," she says. "It's all open, and there's no stigma."

Her next step involves accessibility in regards to the student body, like helping students unlearn disability stereotypes, as taxing as that may seem.

"It’s about patience," Fisher says. "You don’t always want to be patient. You don’t want to always spend 20 minutes explaining to people. But all this ignorance is out of lack of education, and every bit of education helps."

It’s a mindset that's been decades in the making.

"I still think the vision I have is great," Fisher says. "I get to see the world in my perspective. Why not use it to help people?"

And while she doesn’t view herself as an inspiration, she’s definitely inspired.

"This is finally what I wanted to do— to help people, to get a college degree, to teach about inclusion," Fisher says. "I'm at the beginning. I'd love to look back in the next five years and see what happens, and [what] I'm going to do."
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In the Dark (The CW) Review

“In the Dark” is the story of an impassive, heavy-drinking blind woman in her 20s, named Murphy (played by actress Perry Mattfeld, who is not blind), as she and her guide dog, Pretzel (not a typically trained guide dog) take on the world. During a night of heavy drinking, Murphy and Pretzel stumble upon the deceased body of her teenage friend, Tyson. After Tyson’s body disappears, the police halt their investigation, and Murphy decides she is going to bring Tyson’s murderer to justice with the help of Pretzel.

While the show’s direction remains dark in comparison to other reviewed shows and films, the CW takes it through some of the same themes with Murphy struggling to find herself and her purpose all while struggling through her guilt and grief. The show is great entertainment but is explicit and is not recommended for viewers under the age of 14. While the murder investigation is the vehicle driving the show, it also seems to be the driving force behind Murphy’s averse emotional growth.

Overall, I give this show a 2.5 out of 4 for its growth potential and for Murphy’s transition from the aggressive anti-heroine to the hero. ~ Kasey Kaler

The Upside (Movie) Review

“The Upside” is based on a true story, a remake of the 2011 French movie “The Intouchables.” The story begins with a billionaire who is quadriplegic (Bryan Cranston) hiring a recently paroled convict (Kevin Hart) to be his personal care assistant. An unlikely pair, they quickly develop a strong friendship while helping each other become the best versions of themselves.

The first upside to this movie is that the title reframes the stereotype that having a disability means living a life of gloom. The story is definitely a reflection of the title. It gives you an inside look at living life with a disability. As a person who uses a wheelchair and has had caregiving services, I could relate to several of the situations that arose in the movie. While it would be nice to see an actor with a disability play the main role, I thought Bryan Cranston did a great job. I really enjoyed the movie, and I’m looking forward to watching the other three versions to see the different interpretations. On a scale of 1-4, I would rate this 4. ~ John Beaubien

2. Indian film “Oopiri” (2016)
3. Argentinian film “Inseparables” (2016)
So if you're looking for some shows/movies relating to disability this summer, we hope you take the time to check these out. Let us know if there are others we should review for our Fall edition.

Editor@ability360.org

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**Atypical (Netflix) Review**

This show follows the life of Sam, an 18-year-old with autism, and his journey to independence after he decides to pursue a romantic relationship. Keir Gilchrist, the actor playing Sam in the TV series does not have autism. To more accurately develop Sam's personality in the second season, directors of the show worked with David Finch for his perspective as a person on the autism spectrum. In another attempt at increasing disability representation in the second season, the show introduced five new characters with autism, each played by an actor who has autism. The characters are part of Sam's peer group in the show, and while they are all supportive characters, they add to the storyline, and it's a clear sign the show sees the importance of real disability representation. Overall, I've enjoyed watching the first two seasons and have already recommended it to many. The show is simultaneously comedic and moving. On a scale of 1-4, I would rate this 3 (potentially more if the main character were played by an actor with autism). ~ Summer Sorg

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**Special (Netflix) Review**

"Special" is the executive-produced, written and starred-in miniseries by Ryan O'Connell and is based on his memoir *I'm Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves*. O'Connell is a mid-twenties writer trying to make a career for himself, all while figuring out his identity as a gay man, a disabled person, a writer, a son and a friend. The eight-episode series takes us through O'Connell's story of making new friends, exploring his sexuality, and becoming independent of his mother, something that's relatable to all of us no matter our abilities. While the show's tendency for over-dramatics sometimes outshines the witty writing, it is still a breath of fresh air to a watcher who also happens to use a power wheelchair. There's a perspective in the writing that even Hollywood's finest would have trouble replicating. On a scale of 1-4, I would rate "Special" as a 3 out of 4. ~ Kasey Kaler
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Summer means more daylight hours to spend outdoors and also signals the arrival of fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables. Like blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, cherries, mangoes, melons, peaches, nectarines, pineapple, avocados, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and squash. They all offer a variety of flavors and health benefits. Fruits are full of antioxidants, vitamin C and manganese (a trace element that our bodies need to function); peaches are low in calories and rich in vitamin C; mangos are high in fiber, low-calorie and contain vitamins A and C; avocados contain more potassium than bananas and have heart-healthy monounsaturated fats; and, tomatoes are a great source of vitamin C, vitamin K, potassium and folate.

More often than not, preparing fruit and vegetables involves chopping, slicing and/or dicing. While many adaptive cutting tools are available online, one of my favorite tools is a rolling mincer. I also use Dycem discs (a sticky mat placed under the board) to prevent my cutting board from moving around. Food processors, food choppers and mandolins are also great kitchen tools for cutting. Mandolins are extremely sharp, so it’s important to be cautious when using mandolins.

Finding the adaptive cutting tool that works best for you depends on your dexterity, ability and strength. A great alternative to chopping your own fruit and veggies is buying them pre-chopped, which most grocery stores offer. If you have a caregiver or roommate, you can ask for their assistance in preparing chopped fruits and veggies, so they are readily available when needed.

A variety of cooking methods can be used to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, like grilling, baking or sautéing. Many people associate summer with cooking on the grill, which
is a healthy method of cooking. When grilling, remember to brush your fruit or vegetables with butter or your favorite cooking oil to prevent them from sticking. You can also spray cooking oil onto the grill grate prior to heating the grill. If you prefer, you can still get those great grill marks by cooking on an indoor grill pan.

Grilled fruit kebabs or vanilla yogurt topped with grilled peaches are delicious and healthy dessert options.

Salsa is a tasty way to combine fresh fruits and vegetables. It can be used as a dip or topping for fish, pork, chicken or your favorite salad greens. Try this recipe below for a taste of summer freshness!

All my best,

Chef Steve

---

**FRESH SUMMER FRUIT SALSA**

*Estimated Cooking Time:* 20-30 minutes

*Servings:* 2-4

**INGREDIENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS**

- 1 T tomato, seeds removed and finely chopped
- 1 Small avocado, de-pitted and finely chopped
- 1 Mango, peeled, de-pitted and finely chopped
- 1 Peach (firm, but ripe) de-pitted and finely chopped
- ¼ cup strawberries, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon red onion, minced
- 1 lime, juice only
- 1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons avocado oil
- Kosher salt & black pepper, to taste

Optional Toppings Prior to Serving: Crumbled cotija or feta cheese, pepitas, or sunflower seeds

Mix all ingredients and chill until ready to use.
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Contract services are funded under contract with the State of Arizona.
Lyft and VMI are partnering to make ride-sharing for those using a wheelchair to be as simple as it is for others.

Before 2019, Lyft, the ride-share app, did not have an accessible option for people with disabilities. This is changing for Valley riders.

Recently, Vantage Mobility International (VMI), one of the largest manufacturers of wheelchair accessible vans, partnered with Lyft to ensure that people using wheelchairs can be accommodated in Phoenix.

Though in the early stages of its pilot, Lyft hopes this program eventually spreads throughout the country.

“First and foremost, we are trying to provide access. Lyft has been an incredible partner with us with this opportunity to serve a population,” Jeff Butler, a project manager with VMI said.

Lyft, founded in 2012, operates in 640 cities and is constantly expanding the app features by testing out self-driving vehicles and launching scooters.

“A big part of the pilot is for us to figure this out and make sure that they have a smooth ride going forward,” Kaled Deeb, Lyft’s operation manager said. “So we’d love for anyone that participates in the pilot to let us know and give us feedback so that we can perfect the process,” Deeb added.
Oftentimes, accessible public transit can be unpredictable or untimely, making it difficult for those who rely on it to plan and carry out their day.

“It’s really important, as a wheelchair user, to have predictable access to transportation,” Butler said.

Currently, there are six wheelchair accessible Lyft vehicles available in Phoenix. According to Deeb, Lyft hopes to have approximately 35 at the end of a three-month testing phase.

As part of the program, Ability360 will offer training sessions to drivers, teaching them how to interact with people with disabilities.

According to Deeb, Lyft plans to target their best drivers that are interested in assisting in the program. The drivers are then referred to VMI for an accessible van.

Although Lyft’s program is in a testing phase, Uber unveiled UberACCESS to the Phoenix market in 2015. UberACCESS introduced two new programs, one being UberWAV, an option for wheelchair accessible vehicles, and UberASSIST, which is designed for people who desire a helping hand during a ride.

“We believe that anyone should be able to get a ride and go wherever they need to whether they are in a wheelchair or not in a wheelchair,” Deeb said.

At the end of June, Lyft also announced that it is now an enrolled Medicaid provider in Arizona. With this, people can take ride-share vehicles, such as Lyft, to appointments.

If you want to take your next ride with Lyft, you can opt-in by downloading the Lyft application, using the left-side menu to select settings and selecting wheelchair access.
Since 2013, Ability360 has had a true partner in the MaxInMotion Foundation. The program they generously fund allows children ages 4 to 18 with physical disabilities to participate in adaptive sports one Saturday a month for six months of the year.

The program has expanded considerably since its inception. In the first two years, participants learned both power soccer and wheelchair basketball. Participation increased in 2015 after the program introduced wheelchair tennis. In the years following, two new sports were introduced: wheelchair lacrosse and adaptive golf. Clinics also ran for a longer time period from July to December.

In 2018, baseball was added. This year, MaxInMotion clinics are offered eight months out of the year because of the program’s tremendous popularity.

“MaxInMotion is extremely proud to partner with Ability360 to help bring sports opportunities to deserving kids in Arizona,” Jonah Shacknai, founder of MaxInMotion, said. “We are very excited about our future collaboration and look forward to many years of working together.”

MaxInMotion allows youth participants, and their family members, to receive the benefits of recreation without any financial barriers, as the clinic is fully-sponsored. Participants come from as far as Florence, Ahwatukee, Prescott, Glendale and everywhere in-between. An average of 13 children participate each week in the program. It offers much more than just exposure to adaptive sports for these young people and their families, one mother stated.

“MaxInMotion has made a huge impact on our family, especially our son, Jackson,” said Monica Lindmark, the mother of brothers, Jackson and Holden, who have attended MaxInMotion for five years. “Before MaxInMotion, Jackson was only a spectator when it came to sports. The clinics have given him the opportunity to play all the sports he loves so much and branch out into other sporting activities that he hadn’t even considered previously. He’s made so many friends and been coached by talented, dedicated athletes.”

Lindmark added that the clinics also give her younger son the ability to play and bond with his brother in ways they would otherwise not experience.

Over the last six years, the program has utilized the expertise of coaches from the Wheelchair Suns, Ability360 Power Soccer players, Ability360’s nationally-ranked wheelchair rugby athletes and Ability360 tennis coaches. All have played a significant role as mentors, providing in-depth skills, guidance and encouragement.

Youth adaptive sports alumni from past MaxInMotion events have also mentored and coached the younger athletes who aren’t involved in the program. In addition to these alumni, volunteers like Ethan Shacknai, who is Max’s brother and Jonah’s son, make the program more meaningful.

“I had the privilege of helping these terrific kids participate in all sorts of wheelchair-based sports activities last summer. It was heartwarming to see the smiles on their faces, and I can only admire their tremendous commitment and dedication,” Ethan said.
Ability360’s youth sports programs have been able to flourish over the years with support from the MaxInMotion Foundation, and the impact is vividly felt by participants and family members alike.

With the changes the program has undergone over the years, there’s no doubt it will continue to grow. For more information and to get involved in the clinics, visit www.MaxInMotion.org.

Ability360 Donation Information

Ability360 is a 501(C)(3) organization. Through contributions to Qualifying Charitable Organizations (formerly known as the Working Poor Tax Credit), you can donate your Arizona Tax Credit to Ability360. If you would like to consider a planned estate gift to Ability360, such as a will or trust, life insurance policy or retirement account, please designate the gift to Ability360 in your estate/beneficiary documents and/or execute a gift agreement clearly indicating your legacy wishes. All donation information can be found on our website at www.ability360.org/donate.

For more information, please contact Meghan Fable, director of development, at meghanf@ability360.org.
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Meghan Fable
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For many, summer means cookouts, pool days and having fun in the sun with close friends and family. When it comes to making sure you have all the summertime essentials, you may want to add the Float’n Thang to your checklist.

The Float’n Thang is a flotation device designed to allow users to lounge in the pool in varying positions, while also allowing users to bring along their favorite beverages with two built-in cup holders.

Doug Masi, CEO and Founder of Float’n Thang, said the inspiration for his creation began when he was using aqua therapy to recover from knee surgery and pool noodles weren’t getting the job done.

“I would have to double up on noodles just to get the right buoyancy and I thought, ‘If only this had a couple of cup holders it would be alright,’” Masi said.

Masi designed the Float’n Thang to fit people of all shapes and sizes, so the whole family can enjoy each of their own.

“It’s fit to support someone who is between 200-300 pounds, so it can float kids like crazy,” Masi said.

Masi’s business partner and General Manager of Float’n Thang, Pete Cabrera, also emphasized how versatile their product is.

“With a variety of floating positions, the options encompass just about everyone, no matter your physical condition,” Cabrera said.

The unique flotation device can be purchased online, Floatnthang.com, where the price for a single Float’n Thang starts at $89.00.
College is an exciting time for anyone with new people, places, and experiences. Collegiate life is becoming more adaptive to students with disabilities, especially regarding sports.

Many campuses, like San Diego State University (SDSU), are implementing adaptive sports into their athletic department.

Following the Aztec Adaptive Sports Showcase—an elite competition that includes U.S. Paralympic athletes from wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair tennis teams, in January 2018—SDSU approached former Paralympian track and field athlete Ahkeel Whitehead with an idea.

Whitehead; Keith Jones, chairman of the board of advisors; and Dr. Antoinette Domingo, an assistant professor in SDSU’s Doctor of Physical Therapy program were tasked with creating a five-year adaptive sports program. The three worked to co-found the Adaptive Athletics Department and the program officially began in March 2019.

“Our plan is permanent but our program requires more money in order to grow,” Whitehead said. “So as the program becomes more successful and gathers resources it’ll stabilize [or be permanent].”

Prior to implementation, the Aztec Adaptive student organization stood in its place. It was built in a similar style to Arizona State University’s Devils Adapt, a training program that focuses on improving physical strength as well as building confidence in adaptive athletes.

The student organization was founded by Kathy McCarty, who later teamed up with Dr. Domingo to write and subsequently win a grant that would jumpstart the officially-sanctioned SDSU program.

Since the implementation of the program, two track and field athletes have been signed this summer. Currently, wheelchair tennis and ambulatory track and field are offered. Athletes have the opportunity to earn partial scholarships provided...
by Hollister Incorporated, a medical supply company. Scholarships help draw in high-caliber athletes.

“I have seen a few universities begin to make serious moves to foster this kind of programming,” Whitehead said. Some include the University of Central Florida and the University of Clemson.

The University of California, Los Angeles, offers various sports including skiing, archery, kayaking, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis. Eastern Washington University started a wheelchair basketball team in Spring 2018. The University of Arizona has an expansive adaptive athletics program, supporting six teams, including men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball, rugby, track and road racing, handcycling, and tennis.

Although approximately 20 universities offer adaptive athletic programs, more programs are popping up across the nation.

However, it is programs like SDSU’s that have created a blueprint for future adaptive athletic programs.

Moving forward, college life is starting to offer more opportunities to people with disabilities. Adaptive sports are becoming a larger option and are even giving students the opportunity for scholarships. Thanks to people like Whitehead, Jones and Dr. Domingo, these programs are building a foundation for adaptive sports in universities.
A BLUEPRINT
for Adaptive Athletics

The power of sport to provide opportunities to higher education

Thousands of young athletes across the U.S. dream of the day they’ll play college sports, but the reality is only a small fraction get the opportunity.

For wheelchair basketball players Samantha McMinn and Stephen Hernandez, their dreams have manifested. McMinn and Hernandez received athletic scholarships to play wheelchair basketball at the University of Arizona (UA) starting in August.

“I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THIS SCHOLARSHIP,” SAID McMINN. “I FEEL LIKE I’VE WORKED SO HARD TO BE ABLE TO PLAY AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL.”

Samantha McMinn
Conowingo, MD.
The recent high school graduates discovered sports early on, but both loved basketball most.

Hernandez, from South Phoenix, went to a charter middle school known for athletics. He was the only disabled kid in the school, but that didn't stop him from participating in kickball, football, basketball and track. For most of his childhood, Hernandez never knew adaptive athletics existed, until one day, he and his mom saw a flyer in his doctor's office for a standup amputee three-on-three basketball tournament at Ability360.

"When I was first introduced to the disabled community, I was shocked, because I didn't know there were this many people like me," said Hernandez.

Coaches from Ability360 recruited him to play wheelchair basketball on their division three team at age 13. He's never put the ball down since.

McMinn, from Conowingo, Maryland, started playing wheelchair basketball when she was 6. Her parents tried multiple avenues to get her involved in sports, including the Special Olympics and a disabled soccer program, but neither aligned with her interests. One Saturday morning, McMinn's parents took her to see a basketball program they read about in a magazine called the Bennett Blazers in Baltimore, and the rest is history.

"It really has had an impact on her life," said Keith McMinn, Samantha's father. "It's opened new doors and has given her a lot of confidence both socially and academically."

Approximately 15 universities in the U.S. offer adaptive sports programs, but not all offer athletic scholarships. With tuition constantly on the rise, scholarships help relieve financial burden and demonstrates the commitment the school has to the student's future.

"A lot of people liked Stephen and wanted him to come play ball, but the scholarship the University of Arizona provided set a mark and separated them from everyone else," said Daniel Hernandez, Stephen's father. Competition for adaptive athletes is fierce as more universities begin to establish adaptive athletic programs. Scholarships are integral to recruit top-level athletes.

"The University of Arizona's out-of-state tuition is higher than all of our competitors, so we would not be able to compete if we couldn't offer scholarships," said Peter Hughes, athletic director at UA's Adaptive Athletics program. "Athletes like Sam and Stephen deserve scholarships because they are among the best in the nation at their sports and perform well academically."

"It validated his hard work and path, where we believed he could go and the future we want for him. [The scholarship] was key for us and really showed the commitment UA had to our son and investing in his future."

Stephen Hernandez
Phoenix, AZ.
As most musicians would, James Ian (born James Ian Thomas) speaks about his music with an infectious smile, hoping that listeners can relate in some way to his lyrics, his instrumentation and the emotion in his voice—all a manifestation of who he is as a person and what he hopes listeners see reflected in their own personalities.

For as long as he can remember, from singing his first song around 2 years old to producing an album—one in which he recorded and played all the instruments for—music has been Ian’s escape.

“It’s a chance for me to open up and be raw. It’s a tangible way to tap into emotions and a source of hope—at least for me. Music saved me from my reclusiveness and depression,” Ian said.

To Ian, music is a powerful healing tool that helped him navigate growing up with a disability.

Ian was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) in 1997 at 15 years old. SMA is a neuromuscular disease that attacks the neurons that control all the voluntary muscles in the body.

“I was falling a lot more, and I couldn’t get up on my own. Around 14, my dad asked me to get up out of a chair without using my hands, and I couldn’t do it,” he said.

Ian was diagnosed initially with another disease, Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

“My parents were very scared by that diagnosis, but they kind of shielded all of that from me and took me to get a second opinion,” he said. “Right before I turned 15, we got the SMA Type 3 diagnosis.”

As Ian continued through high school, he started having trouble using stairs and felt like people were always watching. That’s when he began trying to hide his disability.

By the time Ian got to Georgetown University, he became even more secluded. “I got really reclusive. I had friends, but I wasn’t going out. I wasn’t going to parties. I wanted to hide SMA. I didn’t want to talk about it.

“So, I got really into songwriting. I was writing songs for my own satisfaction.”

And using songwriting in a remedial way.

The songwriting, and even just writing, that’s something his mom, Gail Thomas, looks back on fondly, even when he wasn’t taking formal lessons.
"He started making things up and writing," she said, a smile evident in her voice. "He’s always been a very gifted writer."

When he was 20, Ian bought himself a drum kit, ironically one of the toughest and most physically-demanding instruments (the symbolism isn’t lost on him either).

He started drumming in a local band and singing again in small doses at campus events.

But he was still thinking of himself as an "undesirable person."

"I had a good friend sit me down and tell me 'dude, tons of people want to connect with you. They call you a ghost because you’re never around,'" Ian recalled. "And I remember thinking I need to put being scared aside, and just go out there and be me and use [SMA] as a vehicle to get out there."

Although Ian started playing a lot more on campus and meeting more people during his undergraduate years, he stayed in his shell.

Ian was having a hard time finding his rightful place in the world.

After undergrad, Ian joined a band in D.C. as a singer and keyboardist, playing shows all over the East Coast, before starting in pursuit of a law degree from Georgetown.

Everything music-related was starting to take off for Ian, and that’s when he decided that law wasn’t something he wanted to focus on, instead turning to further explore his first love, music.

After all, when the first time your parents remember you singing was at 2 years old, it may have been fate at play.

"His dad played wind instruments ... So, he always listened, and then later that kind of evolved into picking up instruments and taking piano lessons around 5 years old," Thomas said.

"I had a couple of times that I fell down on stage. And people were like, 'what the hell. Is this kid drunk?'. I used it as an opportunity to talk about SMA. It was a turning point. I was like, I can do so much good. I can advocate for this disease, raise awareness and raise money by just being who I am and playing music."

Ian started writing songs again and using practice time as a part of his exercise regimen, starting with the physical demands of playing the drums and working that into a daily routine of using a treadmill and eating healthy.

With SMA, motor neurons that control basic muscle functions used for repetitive motion like playing an instrument, degenerate over time.

Which makes his 2017 album, "Labor of Love," feel much more influential than most other R&B/Soul records.

"This album became therapeutic. I needed to exercise, so recording the album and rehearsing became like training."

"Let's just do it" is a phrase that he remembers vividly.

"I remember thinking maybe someone out there with SMA could be 'yo, this dude did this whole album and it was hard, but maybe I could do my something, whatever it is, too.'"

So he tried it out. Spending time writing, rehearsing and in the studio recording.

"When I heard all of the pieces [of music] of the puzzle. I’ve never heard drums, bass, guitar, vocals and more all at once—I was so
proud. I must have done something cool. So I was really pumped," Ian said.

And really excited for his friends and family to hear it; although, he still felt nervous putting it out there.

"You want people to like your baby," he laughed. "No one wants to put your baby up and hear somebody said your baby is ugly."

But the reaction from his family and his ex-band members was quite the opposite.

"My dad was one of the first ones to hear it ... He was like, 'this is incredible, you should be so proud.' And if my dad likes it, I must have done something really cool. Damn, people like the baby."

"Our oldest [Ian] and our youngest [his sister Ariel] are in the entertainment business, but he's just so impressive and gifted. His ability to write and connect is so impressive," Thomas said.

The album is rife with quiet emotion in his voice and lyrics. In the nine songs, Ian's music evokes the likes of Lenny Kravitz's tone, Al Green's emotionally-charged lyrics, and John Mayer's instrumentation.

Like a lot of R&B musicians, Ian's Instagram is filled with posts featuring him with a sultry expression that oozes quiet confidence, guitar-in-hand, sitting on a stool in front of a microphone.

"Music is a source of hope. It's gotten me through some really tough times. Music saved me."

It wasn't always like this for Ian, but now it's a place he feels most at home.

(adapted from this article: https://thevices.com/entertainment/interview-ian-quinn)
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When a person has a disability, working at a desk job can be difficult for some. From transportation issues to just not feeling up for it, an at home job can be more appealing for people who fear being trapped in a busy office all day.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, across all age groups, the employment-populations were much lower for people with disabilities than those who do not have a disability.

As the disabled population makes up a large portion of those who are unemployed, the internet has provided more opportunities for full-time jobs right in the comfort of your own home.
Below are 6 at-home jobs that almost anyone can do:

1. **An Apple at-home advisor**
   - Great for people who are disciplined, confident and self-motivated
   - Will provide your own network connection
   - “Home and work don’t clash, but collaborate”
   - Receive a benefits package, product discounts and time off

2. **Kaplan**
   - Employs over 19,000 people with flexible individuals’ jobs in education and training
   - Supports and rewards its employees with competitive pay structures
   - Other benefits may include paid time off and discounts on education courses

3. **American Express**
   - Offers jobs that allow working remotely, such as a virtual customer care professional
   - According to their website, high performance is rewarded with target-driven incentives

4. **Hilton**
   - Opportunity for growth and advancement throughout the company Hilton
   - Benefit packages available
   - Stable year-round work

5. **Xerox**
   - Has more than 8,000 people working from home
   - Wide range of jobs such as customer care, tech support, data entry and image tagging
   - Have a Heroes@Home program in which they hire qualified veterans and military spouses for at-home jobs employment opportunities

6. **Amazon**
   - Customer service part-time job in a 20-29-hour week
   - Only available in certain states
   - Eligible for health benefits after 90 days of employment
   - Receive retirement planning and paid time off

For people looking for at-home jobs, websites like Flexjobs can be a great source, of finding a job through featuring 53,000 different companies.

“It really gives the worker a lot of different options. It also gives employers access to employees in areas they might have not been able to access before,”

said Mika Cross, vice president of Employer Engagement and Strategic Initiatives for Flexjobs.

According to Cross, they have helped about 4 million people in the past 12 years find careers that aren’t commission-level jobs, using the website.

“It helps provide access and inclusive employment options,” Cross said. She also encourages people to look into hybrid jobs depending on the lifestyle choices of some people.

Carolan Quennenville works at home for Ability360. She’s worked from home since 2004, after a surgery.

“All I have to do is leave my kitchen to my work room,” Quennenville said. She also said that she enjoys not dealing with transportation issues.

Despite all the benefits of working from home, Quennenville said that there is something she misses about working at a traditional office. “You don’t get to work with your coworkers. I miss that. There’s nothing like being with a group of people,” she added.

Keith Meadows works from home with Disability Solutions assisting clients with disabilities across the country. Since all of his clients are spread out, he decided to work at home, as there was no need to be in an office.

“I find my productivity higher,” Meadows said. “The merging of personal life and business life is a much starker contrast,” Meadows added.

Although working from home may take discipline for some, it can be a great option for anybody who has issues with transportation or would like to work at their own pace.
EMBRACE THE FREEDOM!

AZ ADAPTIVE WATER SPORTS

Register at www.azadaptivewatersports.org
Call 602-228-3660 for more information
The program focuses on empowering emerging leaders to serve their local communities by increasing access and opportunities for participation in sports. This year, Ability360 was honored with Daniel Gomez, our fifth delegate.

During Gomez's mentorship, he developed a detailed action plan to address challenges sports programs face in México. Action plans are designed to be implemented upon the emerging leaders' return home and have the common goal of creating sports opportunities for underserved and disadvantaged populations.

Over the last four years, Ability360 has hosted and mentored a delegate from the U.S. Department of State and the University of Tennessee's Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP): Sport for Community.
In three weeks, Gomez was able to try out all adaptive activities that Ability360 has, e.g. adaptive golf, climbing, wheelchair paddle boarding, power soccer and even the terrain hopper.

To help his cause, Ability360 sent Gomez home with a beach wheelchair, pop-up tent, marketing materials, knowledge of an independent-living lifestyle, partnerships, what an inclusive fitness center looks like and much more.

Since Gomez has left Ability360, he has secured an alliance with the largest surf culture and sports platform, the Surf Open League, a promotional platform of those involved in the surf industry in México with those who hope to turn the capital into a hub of professional surfing festivals, exclusive tourist experiences, management of elite athletes, and specialized products, which Surfeando Sonrisas clinics will be part of.

Surfeando Sonrisas is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of children with disabilities through adapted surfing based in México City.

Founded by Gomez and a group of friends, Surfeando Sonrisas’ main focus is to fight against the misguided mindset that people have about disability in the country. Gomez works spreading awareness through motivational speeches in the community where he speaks about social inclusion and promotes self-confidence and independence.

There are four core programs that Surfeando Sonrisas fosters. One is existing surf schools, where Gomez works on training surfing schools, providing knowledge about the equipment needed to become inclusive to all abilities. There are also clinics that Surfeando Sonrisas offers to children with disabilities; if there is a child interested in furthering their development as a surfer, they offer grants to help them continue with training. Finally, every summer they have the #SubeteAlaOla annual event.

Just about a month after his visit in Ability360, Gomez returned back to México, full of energy and ideas to make the second edition of this annual event happen. Thanks to his determined attitude, not even the short timeframe to plan nor the challenge to manage everything from a distance were enough to stop Gomez from delivering a great event.

This year, Surfeando Sonrisas received 45 participants, 30 of them with physical disabilities, 50 volunteers, 10 instructors and eight staff members. In total, more than 200 people congregated in Playa Bonfil in Acapulco, Guerrero to surf.

If you would like to learn more about Surfeando Sonrisas and how you can help Gomez and his team continue to support, visit www.surfenadosonrisas.org.
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Summer camping retreats can be the highlight of a youngster’s three-month break from school. Making ‘smores around a campfire, canoeing on the lake and making potential life-long friends while bunking in a cabin is definitely the preferred alternative to eight hours of sitting in a classroom.

But what happens when you’re no longer an adolescent, but still crave that summertime camping experience? The desire to relive those glory days becomes even harder to fulfill if you’re someone with a physical disability.

These were the things Tina Fisk had in mind when creating Camp with a Ramp.

“There’s tons of kids’ camps and ways to get kids involved, but once you’re 18, you’re done,” Fisk said. “That’s such a shame.”

As an occupational therapist for the past 28 years, Fisk has always had a passion to assist people with physical disabilities, specifically those with spinal cord injuries. That passion turned into a camp where anybody with a spinal cord injury or disease can enjoy a three-day cabin camping experience.

The vision started in 2006 when Fisk, a group of nurses, physical therapists and volunteers got together and decided they wanted to create something uplifting for adults.

Before Camp with a Ramp, the three-day adventure was the Arizona Spinal Cord Injury Retreat, which ran from 2006-2010.

Disagreements among volunteer staff and board members caused the program to go on a six-year hiatus starting in the summer of 2011. However, when the opportunity for a comeback arose, Camp with a Ramp was born.

Since its 2017 return, Fisk is often reminded why she decided to bring it back.

“I want people to feel that when you have an injury or some disability, your life is not over,” Fisk said. “You may live it in a different way, but everything is still possible as it was before.”

Camp with a Ramp will be held from August 1–4. More information available at www.campwitharamp.com.
Exploring Morgan’s Wonderland: How one theme park is setting a standard of accessibility and inclusion

by Sarah Farrell

Miriam Larson and her family have a checklist every time they visit Morgan’s Wonderland. Ride the carousel ... check. Take a lap around the park on the train—in the last car of course, because you get the best view facing backward ... check. And finally, spend some time in the air-conditioned sensory village—a popular feature during the sweltering Texas summers.

Larson’s mom, Nicki, works as a life-skills instructional aide at an elementary school in Central Texas. The first time the family visited Morgan’s Wonderland was through a yearly trip with the school, and both Larson and her mom were in awe of what the park had to offer. “The first time we went, it was really amazing because of the accessibility of everything,” Nicki Larson said. “It’s not like going into Six Flags and it being stressful with the amount of people and the ability to move around.”

Morgan’s Wonderland is an ultra-accessible theme park in San Antonio, Texas. A term used to describe how the park is accessible to anyone of any age and any ability, Chief Operating Officer, Ron Morander, said.

Larson has optic nerve head drusen and began losing her sight three years ago, when she was in fifth grade. She visited the park before and after she lost her sight, and “it’s not much different,” she said, “because there isn’t anything that I can’t do there.”

Morgan’s Wonderland is the only park of its kind in the world. It opened in 2010, and since then has welcomed more than 1.6 million visitors from around the U.S. and the world, including dozens of trips funded each year by the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Project Angel Fares.

Admission to the park is free for anyone with a physical or cognitive disability.

What exactly makes this park ultra-accessible though?

The answer is in the details.

There are features like adaptive swings, some with the ability to strap wheelchairs directly into them, a playground surface that is soft, rubbery and easy to move over and rides that have seamless wheelchair access. Unlike most other theme parks, there is not a separate access point on rides for those in a wheelchair.

“When you’re here and you have a different ability, nobody notices,” Morander said. “It’s just, ‘Okay, we’re here to have fun.’ And that’s the commonality of everything. Everybody likes to play.”

Ashley Rocha, who works as an admissions representative at the welcome center, has been coming to the park as a guest since it opened, and according to Rocha, she’s the only little person on staff. “Morgan’s
Exploring Morgan’s Wonderland: How one theme park is setting a standard of accessibility and inclusion

Morgan’s Wonderland was the first place I could ever go on a playscape with my brothers and just run around with them, and do fun things and not have to worry about having any limitations like at SeaWorld or Fiesta Texas,” she said.

Some rides, like the carousel, have models out front that allow guests to feel the seats and get acquainted before getting on the ride. Guests also have access to RFID wristband trackers, called the GPS Adventure Band, which allow them to keep track of group members as they explore the park. There’s even a 3D park map for those who are visually-impaired like Larson.

What truly sets this park apart is its water park, Morgan’s Inspiration Island, which opened in 2017. It features five splash pads, various water slides and a riverboat adventure ride, all of which are completely accessible, thanks to the park’s fleet of waterproof wheelchairs.

There are seven accessible changing rooms, two with Hoyer lifts, that allow guests to privately transfer out of their chairs into three types of waterproof chairs. The PneuChair—developed by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL)—uses high-pressure air instead of batteries as an energy source. It gives everyone the ability to enjoy the water park.

Sports Outdoor and Recreation (SOAR)—a nonprofit organization established by the Gordon Hartman Family Foundation to oversee Morgan’s Wonderland—worked with the researchers to develop the technology. There are currently only 11 of these chairs in the world, and 10 of them are at Morgan’s Inspiration Island, Morander said. According to the University of Pittsburgh, the team is looking to establish a long-term licensing agreement where the chair could be used in a variety of markets.

“BEING ABLE TO HAVE SOMEONE THAT HAS NEVER EXPERIENCED A WATER PARK AT ALL IS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING,”

Christina Odom, a park employee at the water park wheelchair valet and occupational therapy assistant, said. “There’s a family that came, they traveled in their van with their child hundreds of miles just to come here. Just for the water park.”

Ask anyone who’s visited the park, and they’ll tell you that Morgan’s Wonderland is truly one in a million.

“I think it’s amazing, because there’s not a whole lot of options out there for accessible parks,”

Nicki Larson said. Other parks will help you with accessibility, but “because [Morgan’s Wonderland] is so catered to us, it makes it so much more of a fun experience for the kids and their parents,” she said.

To plan a trip or learn more about the park, visit: www.morganswonderland.com.
After months of peer-pressure from a good friend, I decided to play an adaptive sport: power soccer. Because I have muscular dystrophy, I figured that was the only sport I could play.

I started by test-driving one of the power soccer Strike Force chairs. Now, some of the video clips I’d seen of the game made it look slow and boring, but man was I wrong! The joystick is so sensitive; you might’ve thought I was having a seizure based on how I was swerving left and right. I gained a bit more control driving at faster speeds, and I was immediately hooked!

I officially tried out in September 2018, and to my amazement, I made the team! I was thoroughly addicted to the rush I feel playing each game.

I’m married with children and work for an organization that serves the disability community, so I know what it feels like to be part of something significant, but somehow this felt different.

We participated in local tournaments to build our in-game skills and meet the requirements to enter, for the first time, into the annual United States Power Soccer Association (USPSA) national tournament.

Our team, Ability360 FC entered into the Founders Division of the 2019 United States Power Soccer Association (USPSA) national tournament.
USPSA MK Battery Conference Cup Series at the Turnstone Center for Children and Adults with Disabilities. The Founders Division is the fourth out of four levels.

As the days counted down, I started to hear support from everyone around me. As the tournament drew near, I felt excited, and my stomach let me know I was also nervous.

It was time to chart that dotted line on the map. We began our day at 3 a.m. and landed in Chicago around 2 p.m local time. We then loaded our gear into a couple of vans and the Arizona Spinal Cord Injury Association bus/trailer combo. On that drive, locked into the floor with my teammates, I think we leveled up to family.

Before and after each game, we honor our friend and teammate who passed away this year by saying his name, Austin. The first game against Sac Valley Flames we lost, but soon after, we gained momentum, beating one team after another.

On the third day, after battling some really tough teams, we faced Sac Valley Flames again. This time was different. This time we were ready with a new strategy. The horns signaled the end of the game and the score read Ability360 FC: 4, Sac Valley Flames: 0.

As our team came together in center-court I caught our team captain/coach, Tony Jackson turning his head left to right as he yelled “Yes! Yes!”

As we gathered in a circle, our chair guards clanged together in traditional power soccer high-five style but with a little more energy. I thought to myself, "Wow, we did it!” Even out loud, it was unbelievable. This was the first time I’d achieved so much with a team at this level of competition, and it felt great! At that moment, I realized how important this was to me because I could feel myself tear up.

At the USPSA banquet, our team was called to the stage to receive honors. The first place trophy was ours! We celebrated with our trophy and individual medals on the dance floor.

The next day, we made the long journey back to Arizona as national champions.
TEMPE UNVEILS ACCESSIBLE PICKLEBALL COURTS

Continuing a mission of inclusion, 8 courts opened at Tempe Sports Complex

by Cipriano Chayrez
On Friday, May 17, eight pickleball courts opened up to the public at the Tempe Sports Complex. Two of those eight courts have larger dimensions and playing parameters, making them accessible to anyone playing in a wheelchair.

Craig Hayton, parks manager and supervisor of the project, said that the two altered pickleball courts are the first-of-their-kind in Arizona.

"We wanted to provide inclusive opportunities for our residents, much like what we do with our playgrounds," Hayton said. "We wanted to make sure that folks with all abilities can play together."

The fully-accessible courts are 15 feet long and 12 feet wide, whereas the normal dimensions of a typical pickleball court are just eight feet by eight feet. The space between the fencing and the sidelines on either side is also increased from eight feet to 12 feet.

The eight new courts join seven athletic fields, four softball fields, a youth baseball field, a skate park and a dog park at the Tempe Sports Complex.

Tempe Mayor, Mark Mitchell, said having facilities that anyone can enjoy emphasizes one of the city’s core values: diversity.

"No matter what your race, your religion, your age, your community of origin, your gender, your sexual orientation or your disabilities," Mitchell said. "Everyone, you're all welcome and included in the City of Tempe."

The sport of pickleball itself has been described as a combination of badminton and tennis, but a paddle is used instead of a racquet, and a ball similar to a whiffle ball is the object in play. Mitchell participated in an inaugural game on the new courts, which was his first time playing the sport.

"I'm fairly athletic, but hopefully I can pick it up because, from my understanding and what I see, it's quite the phenomenon," Mitchell said.

Tempe’s Public Information Officer, Melissa Quillard, said having courts that anyone can enjoy means a lot to the city.

"What's really, really amazing about the accessible pickleball courts, is this is one of the few sports where everybody can play together," Quillard said. "This encompasses inclusivity at its best."
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ABILITY360’S TICKET TO WORK PROVES SUCCESSFUL

Over the last 5 years, 350 individuals have returned to work and generated over $73 million in salary

by Susan Webb

Bill Couch went to work today as a systems data manager. Martha Nieto checked in as a data programmer. Denise Conn clocked in as a security guard.

It’s no extraordinary feat—what these three are accomplishing. They are ordinary people, working regular jobs. They are among 347 Arizonans that earned $73 million in wages from 2013 to 2018.

The difference is that all three of these valued employees, and 344 others, have a physical or mental disability that took them out of the workforce for several years. However, now they are back at work, thanks in part to a program called the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work.

“A serious illness or injury keeps millions of experienced, hard-working people out of the workforce every year,” said Susan Webb, vice president of Ability360 Employment Services. “Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a safety net that helps replace lost income. But it is only a fraction of their previous earnings. Getting back to work is the only way to live a good life again and secure a better retirement.”

Ability360 is a Social Security Administration contractor providing Ticket to Work program services. It is open to anyone receiving SSDI benefits between 18 to 64 years old. Ability360 offers comprehensive services to help workers transition back to work, with up to 45 months of job-retention services.

However, the program has aimed even higher.

“This program is not about having a few extra bucks to spend,” Webb said. “It is about getting your economic life back and preparing yourself for a comfortable retirement. It takes work and commitment to achieve that.”

Sometimes that takes updated skills training or other activities to develop attributes that meet the needs of potential employers.
This kind of training was a feature Couch found valuable upon learning about the program.

“That just made it seem like it was made for people that have situations in life where they find they can’t work, but they want to,” Couch said. “And they [program coordinators] don’t want you to fail, obviously. And each employment network is a little bit different.”

The reality is that many people are unable to return to the job they had before getting onto benefits.

“I had a professional life at one point, I had a really good education, which helped me get my foot in the door,” Couch said. “I felt like I was missing out on a lot of things: having a career again, having a much better financial situation again.”

Conn and Nieto, like Couch, wanted to go back to work and take control of their financial situation.

“I’ve always been self-sufficient,” Conn said. “And I didn’t know how to resolve any part of my life without working. I wanted to be productive. And I didn’t want to give up.”

It takes internal motivation like Conn’s to get back in the workforce. “We are just a catalyst to put all the pieces together,” Webb said.

She suggested that anyone who gets onto SSDI should quickly think of what they can do to prepare for a better future while recovering or adjusting to life with a disability. She cites how people who have always done heavy labor wear out long before retirement age and do not have computer skills to change careers to something more sedentary. Taking online basic computer training from home can make a big difference down the road.

Although this program offers participants guidance and supports them while they succeed, their skills, attitude and hard work is why people see progress.

“It wasn’t easy to get a job,” Nieto said. After graduating, Nieto had no internship to allow her to grow the skills she wanted to. However, her worries did not prevent her from securing a job. The Ticket to Work program provided Nieto with the resume-building skills she needed.
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Every Tuesday, a small group of eight gathers in a conference center at Ability360, attending a wellness program that helps adults living with a disability to develop healthy habits. It’s called Living Well with a Disability.

The program has been around for years, but this summer is different. It’s the first time it’s being offered in Spanish.

Viviendo Bien con una Discapacidad, will be a 10-week workshop in which the students learn how to adjust to life with a disability, visible or not.

The class touches on a wide range of topics such as problem-solving, healthy communication and self-advocacy. Students also participate in challenges and adapt to use technology to improve their independence.

Rebeca Cavazos teaches the course to students. When Cavazos took the class three years ago, it was in English.

“It changed my perspective about how to live with a disability. I want the Latino community to have the same opportunity because there are so many resources that they have access to, but don’t know,” Cavazos said.

“There’s a high demand for Spanish classes and workshops. There’s a community out there that does not speak English,” Norma Burciaga, one of Cavazos’ students said.

Burciaga said that even though she’s only been in the class for a few weeks, it has already made an impact in her life.

“She [Cavazos] accommodates each need according to our needs and disabilities,” Burciaga said. “She’s very good at doing that.”

Cavazos hopes that the class helps those that need help adjusting in their preferred language.

As for Burciaga, when asked the most important thing that she’s learned so far?

Self-acceptance.

“[I] need to accept that I am a person with a disability and in this case, an invisible disability, which is not seen to the naked eye,” Burciaga said.

“I think self-acceptance is fundamental. Accepting is the first step to develop with the resources you have,” Cavazos said.

In the end, Cavazos has a simple objective: “I would like every Latino with a disability in Arizona to have the opportunity to change their life with this class. To start, you have to come take the class to live your life in an independent way,” Cavazos said.

Those interested in taking the class in either English or Spanish can sign up at www.Ability360.org.
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3rd St/Jefferson (Phoenix): Chase Field, Talking Stick Resort Arena, AZ Science Museum, Herberger Theater, PHX Convention Center

Talking Stick Resort Arena - Home of the Phoenix Suns, Phoenix Mercury and Arizona Rattlers, the arena is a year-round entertainment destination. Surrounded by a multitude of restaurants and bars, you’ll have plenty of options for a night out on the town.

Mill Ave./3rd St. (Tempe): Mill Ave., Downtown Tempe, Tempe Town Lake

Tempe Beach Park - When its not hosting a big festival or Ironman Triathlon, the park is a destination for outdoor enthusiasts. There are more than two miles of bike and running trails, as well as boats and paddleboards. There’s also a baseball field and a water park for kids!

Center St./Main St. (Mesa): Mesa Center for the Arts, AZ Museum of Natural History, Nile Theater, i.d.e.a. Museum

Nile Theater - This legendary music venue provides an intimate setting to see your favorite artists. During the day, the Nile Coffee Shop offers visitors locally-roasted coffee, and a breakfast and lunch menu.
Arizona State University Launches Disability Studies Bachelor’s Degree Program

by Summer Sorg
This fall, Arizona State University (ASU) is launching a new Disability Studies bachelor’s degree program. Similar programs are rare across the southwest, and it will be the first-of-its-kind in Arizona.

Northern Arizona University (NAU) offers a disability studies minor and the University of Arizona (UA) offers majors in different subjects related to disability.

Disability studies certificate programs are common in universities across the Southwest, and there are even a number of disability studies minors offered. However, only three universities in the Southwest offer degree programs, of bachelor’s or above, in disability studies: California Baptist University (offers a Master’s in Disability Studies), California State University in Sacramento (offers Master’s in Disability Studies) and Utah State University (offers disability studies doctoral program).

“I THINK IT’S AN IMPORTANT ENOUGH SUBJECT, AND IT HAS SO MANY NUANCES TO IT, THAT IT REALLY JUSTIFIES AN ENTIRE DEGREE,” said Theresa Devine, associate professor at ASU, who will be teaching Disability Aesthetics in the program this fall.

Devine has been advocating for a disability studies bachelor’s degree at ASU since 2012.

“This is something that really needs to happen. It’s a civil rights movement,” she said.

The program will offer courses ranging from social and cultural analysis to science and literature, focusing specifically on the social-cultural model, working on the environment rather than the individual.

“Professors from many different backgrounds have stepped forward to give a real intersectional understanding of disability and how it exists within identity studies,” Devine said.

The outline of the program was significantly influenced by the work of 2015 ASU graduate student, Greggory Ohannessian, who researched and wrote his applied project around a proposal for a disability studies program at the university.

“The medical model is all about trying to fix the person with the disability, trying to find if there’s any treatments and cures,” Ohannessian said. “The social model of disability is more about finding the social and environmental barriers that prevent a person with [a] disability from interacting with their community, and also getting the things that they need.”

Four years after he made a proposal to ASU, the program is finally being enacted.

“The issue of disability has become more visible,” said Majia Nadesan, professor in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at ASU. “There’s been a lot of interest in the program from community members.” Nadesan is on the board of directors who worked to make the program a reality, and she will also be teaching a course in the program called disability studies and communication advocacy.

Nadesan said the program’s material is relevant—if not vital—in almost every field of study, from engineering to education.

“It’s not just for people who are disabled, or who are interested in disability because it touches us all,” she said. “... [There’s] respect for the fact that when people have a disability, that doesn’t disable them from all kinds of incredible achievements.”

It’s just about providing the right accommodations.

“Those [accommodations] make everybody win ... It’s not a zero-sum game to give everyone an accommodation,” Nadesan said.

Louis Mendoza, director of the School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies at ASU expects to see the program evolve as more students create the demand for a greater range of courses. Ultimately, he hopes it creates advocates.

“There was a strong need for this ... Through having a more complex understanding of this community, we can look at it through the lens of empowerment. That is, how can we empower people with information—with skills—to make change or to live better lives.”
Thanks to your support, we opened the new 50th Street/Washington light rail station to easily connect you to Ability360 and provide connections to communities throughout the region.