



Member of the Aures Opportunity Network



From Bias to Belonging

A Disability Pride Month Conversation

NJ Department of Military & Veterans Affairs

August 4, 2025

WELCOME

Brian Fitzgerald
President & CEO, Easterseals New Jersey



Meet Today's Presenters:

Audra Zammit **Director of Workforce Development**

- **Director Statewide Supportive Employment Services**
- **Bachelor Degree in Deaf Culture and History/Linguistics**
- **ASL Sign Language Interpreter**
- **Disability advocate 20 years**
- **Leader in Supportive Employment Services 10+ years**



Shari Dua **Statewide Business Developer**

- **Business Developer for all New Jersey's 21 counties**
- **Legally deaf professional**
- **30+ years-experience in Business Development, Marketing, and Recruiting**
- **Served 7 years in a leadership role, Cubmaster, Boy Scouts of America**



With a special thank you to BreeAnn Fox, and our ASL Interpreters, Liz and Kate

Today's Conversation:

From Bias to Belonging

- I. The story behind Easterseals NJ, and Disability Pride Month!
- II. What *inclusion* truly feels like.
- III. Barriers – You may not always see them; but they do exist.
- IV. Tools to build a more inclusive future, and success stories of true inclusion.
- V. Your role in making belonging reality, answering your questions, an opportunity for you to share your Disability Pride story, and closing messages.



Easterseals NJ

Empowering people with disabilities across NJ for over 75+ years

LIVE

- Residential services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Residential services for people with a diagnosed mental illness
- Individual supports

LEARN

- Intensive case management
- Supportive housing case management
- Care coordination
- Day habilitation
- Community inclusion

WORK

- Supportive Employment
 - Vocational Training
 - Ticket to Work
 - Extended Employment
 - Supported Employment
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
 - ASL Interpreters
 - Supportive Employment Services

PLAY

- Travel program
- Respite: in home, out-of-home, hotel

The Story Behind Disability Pride

- Celebrates identity, resilience, and visibility – not hiding it
- Rooted in the passing of the Americans with Disabilities' Act – July 26, 1990
- Moves us from shame and silence to empowerment and pride
- Disability is not a deficit – it's a powerful part of diversity



The Story Behind Disability Pride

March 12, 1990 - Disabled Activists Crawl Up the Steps of the U.S. Capital



Watch Video Here:



<https://youtu.be/WHWcJiNQZEw?feature=shared>

The Story Behind The 'Disability Pride Flag'

Created by Ann Magill, Disabled Advocate & Author (2021)

Having All Six "Standard" Flag Colors: signifying that Disability Community is pan-national, spanning borders between states and nations.

The Black Field: Mourning and rage for victims of ableist violence and abuse

The Diagonal Band: "Cutting across" the walls and barriers that separate the disabled from 'ideal' society, also light and creativity cutting through the darkness

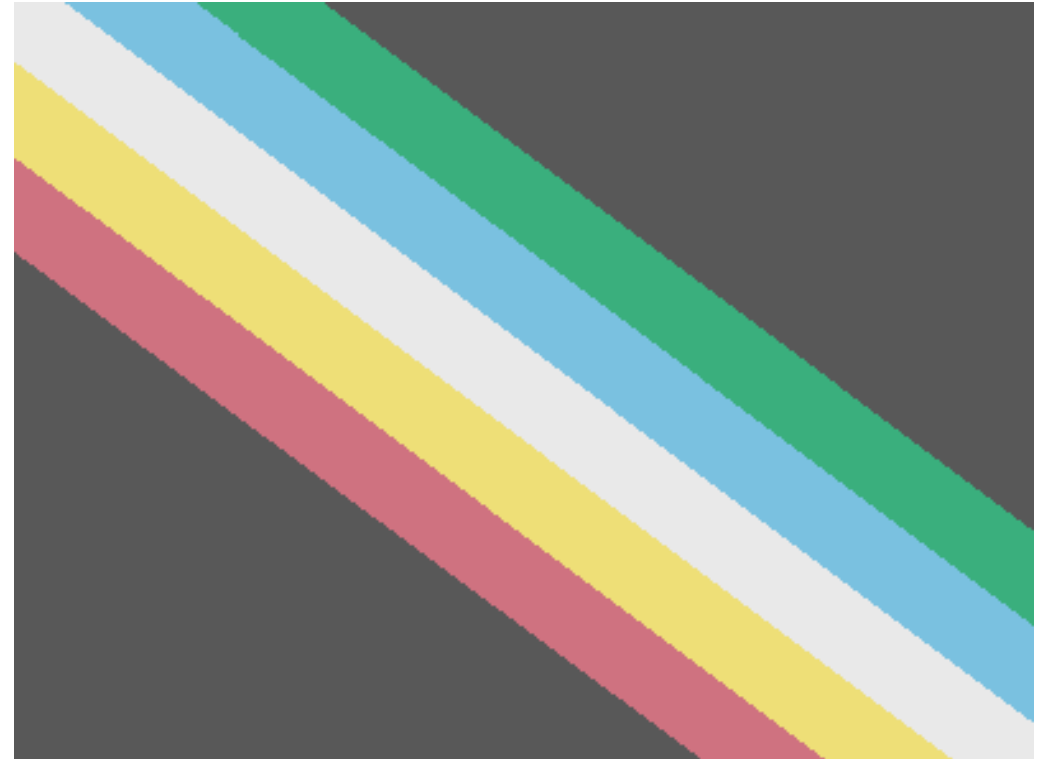
The Red Stripe: Physical Disabilities

The Gold Stripe: Neurodivergence

The White Stripe: Invisible and Undiagnosed Disabilities

The Blue Stripe: Psychiatric Disabilities

The Green Stripe: Sensory Disabilities



Disability Pride Isn't Just About Feel-Good Moments. *It is About:*

- **Honoring hard truths**, because bias and exclusion *still happen daily*
- **Equipping allies** to do better
- **And amplifying disabled voices** – even (especially) when those voices are sharing pain, gaps, or hard-earned wins

**Pride
is also
Progress**
Progress

Section II

*What Does Inclusion
Truly Feel Like*



What does inclusion mean to you?

DINNER TABLE SYNDROME

*For more information on the detailed meaning of this piece, by Nancy Rourke, please visit:
<https://nancyrourke.com/dinnertablesyndrome.htm>*



Person-First Language vs. Identity-First Language

**I am
deaf =**

‘deaf’ (lowercase):

- Medical term used to describe hearing level
- Can be legally deaf without hearing aids inserted (Shari)
- Often occurs later in life, may speak and use hearing aids/cochlear implants
- **Person First Language**



**I am
Deaf =**

‘Deaf’ (capital D):

- Represents cultural identity within signing community
- Typically born Deaf or occurred later in life
- Places the disability-related Word first
- **Identity–First Language**



Breaking Down Barriers - Ableism & Audism Explained



Ableism

Discrimination or social prejudice against people with disabilities.

- Assumes disabled people are *'less than'*
- Believes disability is a problem to be fixed
- Prioritizes non-disabled norms
- Ignores access, accommodations, or inclusion
- Shows up in policies, media, education, hiring



Audism

A specific form of ableism that targets Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

- Prefers speech over sign language
- Assumes Deaf people need to be 'fixed'
- Denies communication access (no captions, no interpreters)
- Believes Deaf people can't lead, teach, or make decisions
- Reinforces power imbalance through communication control

Disability Etiquette PSA

Video brought to you by: The U.S. Government



Watch Video Here:



dcgovernment

[https://youtu.be/Gv1aDEFIXq8?
feature=shared](https://youtu.be/Gv1aDEFIXq8?feature=shared)

Say the Word: Disabled

"To name us is to include us"

"WE ARE NOT
SEEKING POLITE
LANGUAGE. WE ARE
SEEKING POWER,
ACCESS, AND EQUITY."

– Kashaf Alvi, Deaf Author

- 1 in 6 people are disabled globally (WHO, 2023)
- Euphemisms like 'differently-abled' don't dismantle barriers
- The word disabled is not negative – it's truth and identity
- Inclusion starts when we stop avoiding who people are

Section III

Barriers

You may not always see them; but they do exist.



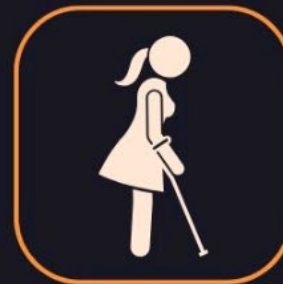
We Don't Owe an Apology for



We don't apologize for:
Asking
Adapting
Existing



My access
needs



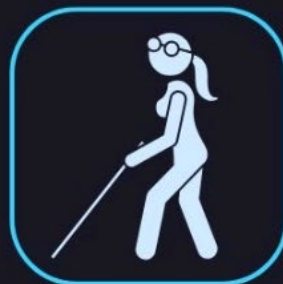
My lived
experience



Self-
advocating



Asking for
adjustments



Needing
rest



Masking or
unmasking



Communicating
differently



Saying
no



Taking up
space



Challenging
ableism



Setting
boundaries



Existing
unapologetically

Personal Bias & Systemic Gaps in the Workplace

Resume Gaps: Red Flag?

....OR is it an Opportunity to Ask:

"What is your story?"

"What strengths or skills did you acquire?"

Interviewer discomfort can be a missed opportunity to recruit unique talent!

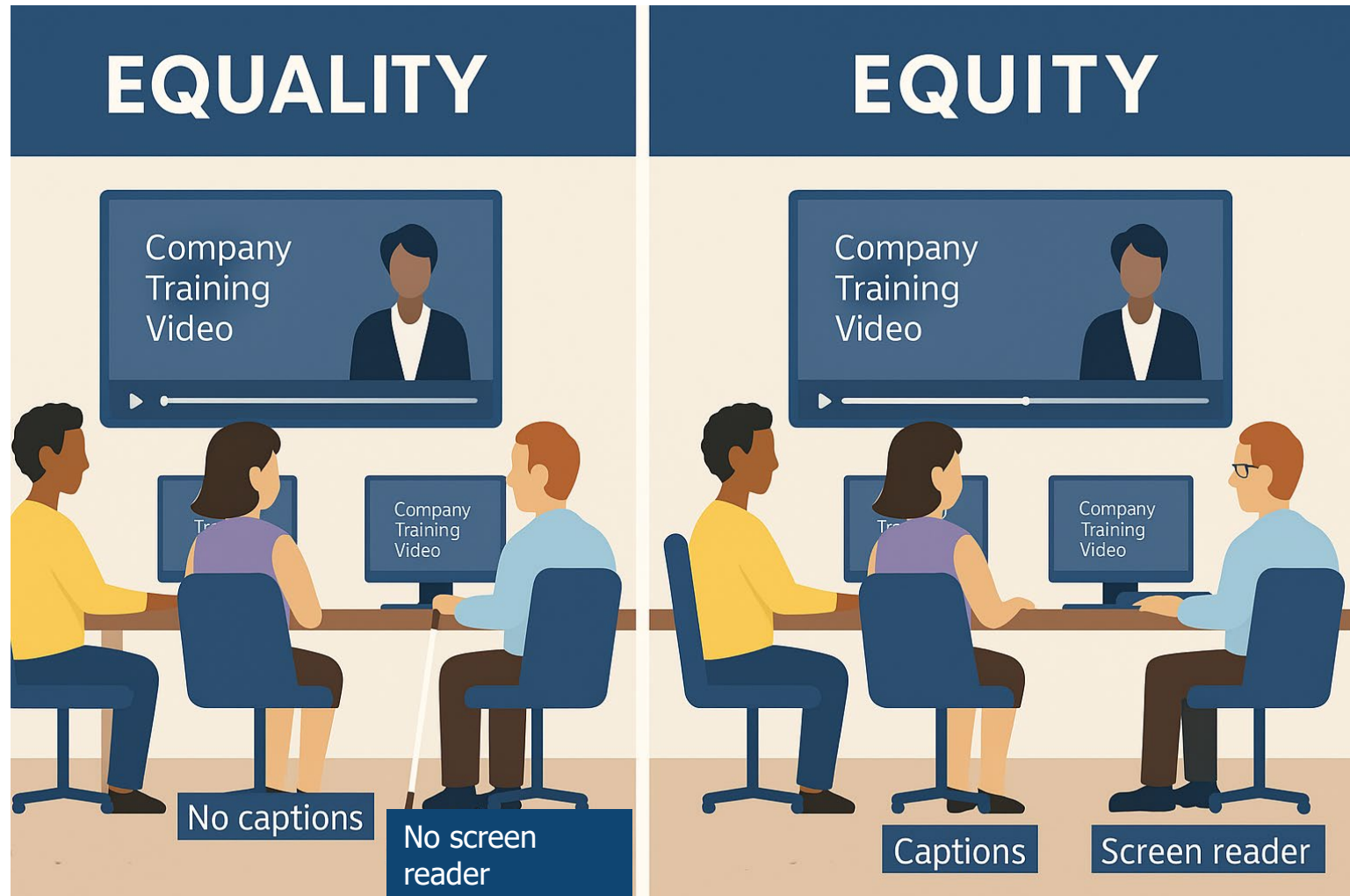
Systemic bias shows up in policies, technology, and assumptions.



Emotional and Physical Barriers

“I feel...”

- Frustrated
- Invisible
- Devalued
- Isolated



Section IV.

Tools To Build a More *Inclusive* Future

and

Success Stories of True *Inclusion*



True Inclusion for Staff & Veterans with Disabilities

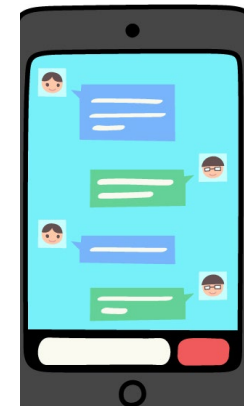
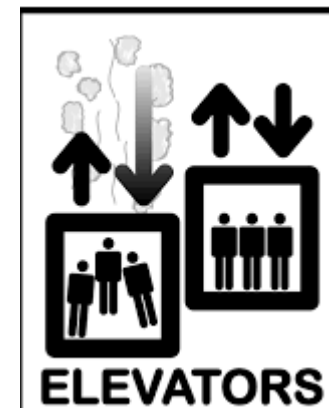
Ask: “What supports do you need to succeed?”
Build inclusion into *every* stage of work



Screen Reader



Video Interpreter



Supervisor & Staff Tips: Everyday Inclusion



- Use plain language, check for understanding
- Use white boards, high contrast markers & accessible height
- Caption videos and enable live transcripts
- Share agendas and materials early for meetings & interviews
- Ask how your team member prefers to communicate
- Arrange for meeting rooms to be in a U-shape when able
- Model inclusion – greet everyone, invite everyone to work events
- Think: *“How would I want to be treated?”*. Ask, don't assume.

John Hoerer & Miss Tango

An Easterseals' Veteran Success Story

- U.S. Army Veteran
John Hoerer
& Miss Tango
- Veteran Staffing Network
 - *Contact Information
Provided, End of
Today's Presentation*



Watch Video Here: <https://youtu.be/n4i4O0xD1bw?feature=shared>

Section V

**Your Role In Making
Belonging Reality**

Answering Your Questions

Closing Messages



Inclusion Happens When You...

- Don't assume someone's needs
- Build systems that expect differences
- Listen with the intent to change

*Inclusion is more than a DEI goal..
It's a daily practice.*



Reflection and Takeaways



- **What does inclusion and belonging mean to you?**
- **What is your takeaway from today, or what moved you the most?**
- **What did you learn that you will begin to put into practice in your office or everyday life?**

Post your response in the chat.

Disability Pride...it's about
more than a flag or a month.

It's about...

Let's remove barriers – physical,
emotional, systematic, and attitudinal –
so that *no one* is left out.



“

Share Your Disability Pride Story!

We'd love for you to share your Disability Pride story with us!

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera

OR



<http://bit.ly/479tc0B>

OR



sdua@nj.Easterseals.com

Email Shari Directly



**PLEASE
POST YOUR QUESTIONS
IN THE CHAT**



Know Someone Hiring?

Easterseals NJ has Job
Candidates ready & able to
work throughout NJ!

Please email Shari:
sdua@nj.Easterseals.com

...if you know somebody who
is ready to change somebody's
life!

Thank you!



Do you support a team that could benefit from our no-cost training?

We are passionate about educating!

Please reach out to Shari Dua, Business Developer for more information.

Sample topics include:

- **Interviewing Individuals with Disabilities**
- **Communicating with your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Employee**
- **Disability Etiquette**
- **Disability Pride**
- **The Benefits of Hiring Individuals with Disabilities**
- **and Custom Presentations**

Easterseals NJ Veterans Services

Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals

Provides prompt, high-quality, outpatient mental healthcare to veterans (regardless of discharge status), active-duty servicemembers, and their families in NJ via telehealth.

General Information/Potential Clients:

eseal.org/Cohen-Clinic

info.mfc@eseal.org

(240) 847-7500

Questions for Clinic management please check with Grace Caulfield, Easterseals VP and Director of The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic

gcaulfield@eseal.org

Easterseals Veterans Services Continue

Veterans Staffing Network

- Free job coaching for veterans (regardless of discharge status) and military family members
- Fee-based placement services (essentially a social venture staffing agency) to help companies recruit and retain veterans/military family members on a temp, temp-to-hire, or direct hire basis

General Information/Potential Clients (veterans/military family members seeking employment coaching or companies looking to hire):

www.veteranstaffingnetwork.org

(855) VET-7111

Questions for Program Management, please check with Christine Corte, Director of the Veteran Staffing Network

ccorte@eseal.org

THANK YOU

To Director Lee-Turner and the DMAVA –
We are grateful for your service to America.



Member of the Aures Opportunity Network

**Interested in
Services?
Please call:
855-215-4541**

Please direct Questions or Comments here:

**Shari Dua, Business Developer
SDUA@NJ.EASTERSEALS.COM**

www.eastersealsnj.org

908-907-9637