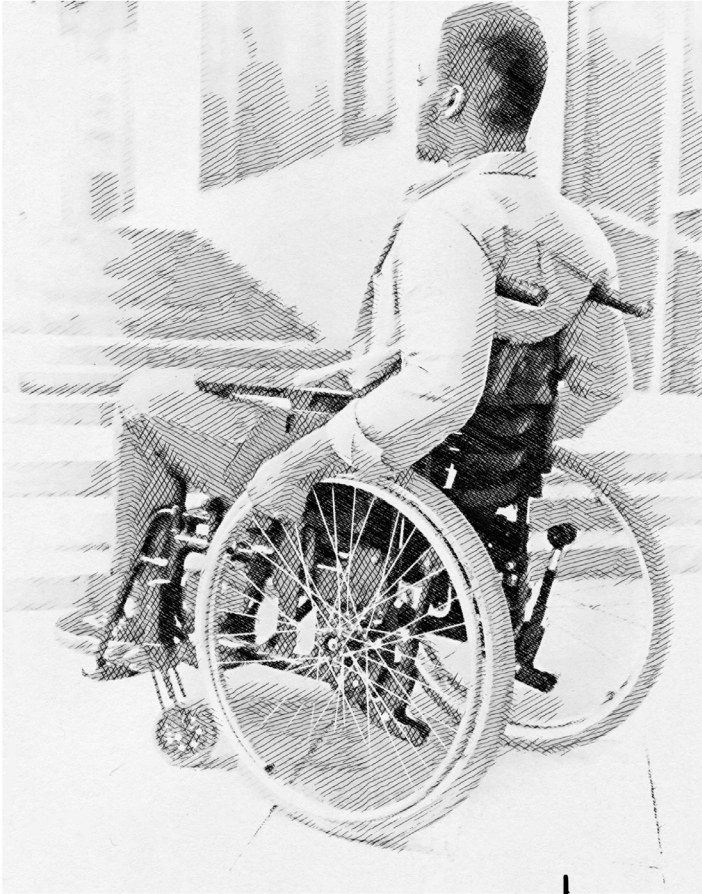


Accommodations



by D1Yabled

Before I Even Knew!!!

Before my disability, I had no comprehension of the barriers disabled people encounter. I was oblivious to the necessity and significance of accommodations. When I sustained my injury and became a part of the disabled community, I not only had to relearn how to get out of bed, use the toilet, brush my teeth, eat, and get dressed, but I also had to figure out how to be in a world that was not made to include disabled people. As I tried to navigate my way in this newly inaccessible environment, I began to realize how deeply this affected not only my own life but the lives of an entire community. The more I looked around, the more I noticed that because of the way our society so narrowly defines and recognizes disability, this affects more people than I realized.

Before I became disabled, I was part of a DIY community with my band, Creamy 'Lectric Santa. We did not rely on people or corporations with money to support our music. Instead, we performed at smaller venues who were interested in our music or houses with space for the band, enough electrical outlets, and an audience. Whenever we went on tour, we found places to perform by contacting local bands we'd played with or out-of-state bands we'd met at their shows in Miami. We'd ask about the places they played or if they knew people we could contact to book shows. It was a community where people helped people; it was about making connections and helping marginalized people to have a voice and a public place to share. One problem or oversight in this community, however, was that their list of the marginalized failed to include disabled people.

When we would arrive at a new venue, I often found the lack of accommodations made it difficult or impossible for me to perform with my band. The first time I went to play a show after becoming disabled, I realized the stage was inaccessible. No ramp allowed me, in my wheelchair, to get onto the stage and perform. In order for me to play, I had to transfer myself onto the stage and then my band-mates needed to put the wheelchair on stage separately. Depending on how much room there was on the stage, they would either help me into the chair or I would transfer myself back into it from the floor. It happens as an audience member, too. One of the first shows I attended at a record store did not accommodate me to watch a band. There wasn't even an accessible way for me to get to the register and buy a record!

As a brown woman, I always felt that my presence in these communities was essential and helped create space for people like me. I thought this would be the same as a disabled person, but something was different about being disabled. I thought that this community, of which I was a part, believed in including people who weren't usually included, for whatever that reason was. Wouldn't a disabled person want to be included in a world where they were accepted despite their difference?

Whenever I would finish performing, so many people told me how much they loved my band, but not one single person acknowledged the inaccessibility of the stage or the barriers I had to overcome to perform.

When I shared my experiences, people felt sorry for me, but no one in this community took any kind of action to make things more accessible. No one realized how wrong it was to make me, a partially paralyzed person attempt to fit into a world designed for non-disabled people without any barriers. This was when I realized that as a disabled person, I was not fully seen as a human being. I may have been appreciated as a musician but it was as if part of who I am fundamentally as a person became invisible. If my disability can be ignored or looked past, if no accommodations are made for me to participate, then my presence was not being valued in the community.

It is important to understand why accessibility and accommodations are so important for disabled people in every aspect of life. Disabled people are human beings who deserve to be included in all communities without barriers, and their presence has great value. It is important to raise awareness and take action to create accessible spaces to encourage inclusion and equality for all individuals.

What In The Heck Are Accommodations?

Accommodations mean making arrangements or modifications to include everyone regardless of a person's ability or needs. The American Disability Act (ADA) is a federal law passed in 1990 prohibiting discrimination against disabled people. It says that reasonable accommodations must be provided so disabled people can participate as fully as their peers. These rights are fundamental for employment, public services, transportation, and telecommunications. Unless you are disabled, most people are ignorant of the law and believe that when they have to provide accommodations, they give special rights to disabled people, but they are wrong. Accommodations are not special rights, they are equal rights! As a member of the disabled community, I am constantly frustrated that we still have to fight for basic accommodations such as ramps and accessible bathrooms, those things that would enable us to participate fully in society.

The lack of accommodations also profoundly affects the disability community economically. 25% of disabled people in America live in poverty simply because they are denied the same resources and opportunities as non-disabled individuals. It is appalling that nearly a quarter of disabled people are destined to live in poverty because of this. We are not asking for special treatment; we are demanding equal treatment. Accessible bathrooms, ramps, and assistive technology are not luxuries. Instead, they are essential for us to have the same opportunities as everyone else. Without these accommodations, disabled people will always be left behind, unable to contribute to society like non-disabled individuals.

When the pandemic happened in 2020, together we all shifted the way we lived life. Everybody quarantined, worked, or went to school remotely, created flexible work hours. Video chatting apps became the norm for work and socializing. We were all accommodated so we could continue to live.

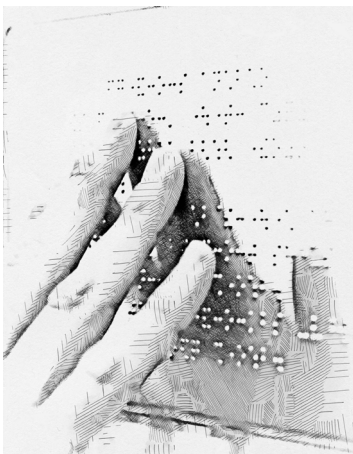
Now is the time for everyone to recognize the importance of accommodations, to take action to ensure that they are provided in all areas of life and that every human has the right to education, work, housing, and access to food.

Disabled people have the right to live independently and make meaningful contributions to society just like anyone else. We learned from COVID-19 that it is our collective responsibility to advocate for and demand equal rights and access for the disabled and all individuals. Accommodations are not only necessary for our well-being, but they are a significant step towards true equality and justice for everyone.

What are examples of accommodations?

The time for communities to think about accessibility is long overdue. The ADA does have a whole list of accommodations, but that doesn't mean every disabled person will be accommodated. Disabled people are diverse, with unique needs and challenges. Accommodating disabled people is not a one-size-fits-all approach. There are apparent accommodations like ramps, grab bars, or accessible bathrooms, but there are some that aren't always as obvious. Here are some other accommodations that may not come to mind immediately.

- Assistive technology like screen readers, magnifiers, or hearing aids
- Sign language interpreters or communication aids for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Braille materials or audiobooks for individuals with visual impairments



- Modified workstations or equipment for individuals who have mobility impairments or use mobility devices
- Flexible work arrangements or altered job duties for individuals with chronic health conditions
- Extended time or a quiet testing environment for individuals with learning disabilities or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Provide caregivers or assistants to support disabled to be able to go to school, work, eat, or go out.
- Service animals for individuals with disabilities



How can a community be inclusive of disabled people?

Asking

When people realize they have not considered how they can include disabled people, they feel ashamed or embarrassed, and, in turn, become afraid to ask. Asking is welcomed. Disabled people want to be part of a community, so when they are asked by someone how they can be accommodated, they will be excited to share.

Including

We have witnessed how our communities have shifted recently to include the LGBTQ community by asking people what their pronouns are in almost every environment.

If we can shift our mindset to be more inclusive in this way, how hard would it be to ask if anyone needs accommodations? To this day, disabled people still have to ask if they can be accommodated or, even worse, assume they will be accommodated and are not. This is entirely backward. When we include a simple statement for a meeting or event, "If you need accommodations for an event, please let us know," you automatically include disabled people anyone else by default.

Informing

When you run a business, gallery, venue, or place with events, it's your responsibility to communicate the type of accessibility your platform has available. Don't say you're "ADA friendly" or "ADA compliant" without providing specific information or, at the very least, provide contact information for someone to find out how they can be accommodated. If you are contacted by a disabled person, ask them how they can be accommodated. Disabled people deserve to know exactly what accommodations are available in place.

When you do not make an effort to do this, then you are taking away disabled people's choice to determine if they can participate. From my own experience, it is frustrating and exhausting for disabled people to have to search high and low for accessibility information. We shouldn't have to spend hours or days to find out if we can participate in something.

This is the time to step up and prioritize accessibility. Don't make disabled people fight for their right to participate. Make it clear, make it accessible, and make it happen.

How accommodating disabled people would help create a world that would accommodate everyone?

Elderly

When I think of the dream I have for the world, I say that I'd like to see a world where we create communities that provide accommodations for those people with the least amount of ability and the most chronically ill. That's why I think of the elderly in our community first.

Statistically, older adults are the group of people with the highest amount of disabilities in our communities. This group also contributed significantly to the world we live in today. It is not perfect by any means but they have lived through significant historical events and contributed to the workforce that helped build the communities we call home.

Accommodations for the elderly can take many forms. Making public spaces and buildings more accessible, providing transportation options, having seating for those who cannot stand for long periods, and providing health-care services.

As we age, we will all become more susceptible to various physical and cognitive impairments than we do when we are younger. We may experience reduced mobility, decreased vision or hearing, and memory problems. Due to these disabilities, it can make it challenging for older adults to participate in their communities completely. Sadly, this can lead to feelings of social isolation and loneliness. By inviting the elderly to be included in our communities, we begin to eliminate ageism.

By creating accommodations for the disabled, we allow the elderly to share their perspectives from history and experience and the young to share their passion and enthusiasm. By doing this, we erase stereotypes and prejudices we have about age.

Women

Because we have such a negative view of disability, we do not dare address the fact that women experience physical and emotional disabilities routinely when they are pregnant, require pregnancy leave, have periods, and go through menopause. Instead, we describe women's experience as solely human or biological when, in reality, what is occurring is disabling. These situations may be temporary but they can still be categorized as a disability. When we accept this, then we will find ways to accommodate women by:

- Equipping public facilities with amenities like changing tables, menstrual products, and lactation rooms.
- Provide flexible work schedules, video conferencing, ergonomic workstations, or private spaces for nursing or pumping.
- Encourage people to talk to women and about what women experience during their period, when they are pregnant, have postpartum depression, or are going through menopause so they understand how to accommodate them with their temporary disability.

- Support women during these stages of life by creating things like paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and reasonable accommodations for pregnancy-related medical conditions.

And finally, create a culture of inclusivity that recognizes and celebrates women's unique experiences and actively work to address any barriers to equal access and participation. When we can acknowledge and accommodate these aspects of women's lives, we create a place for women to take part regardless of what stage of life they are experiencing.

How can accommodating benefit businesses?

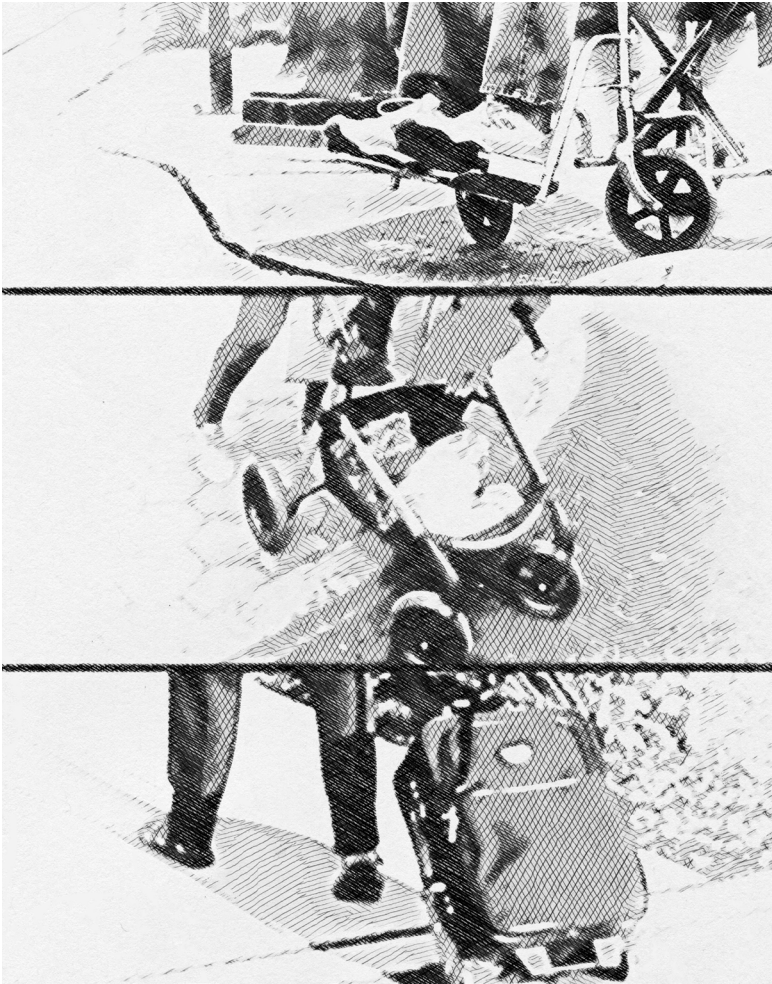
When any business — be it a store, venue, gallery, restaurant, or whatever it is — willingly provides accommodations, doing so can increase their customer base, improve customer satisfaction, comply with legal requirements, enhance brand reputation, and positively impact employee morale. As a business, accommodating people can seem overwhelming or expensive, but it will benefit not only disabled person but the business itself.

Accommodations are something I always think about as a disabled person because, without them, I cannot fully participate as the people around me. However, the truth is that we accommodate our communities for the disabled. We are accommodating them for everybody. A perfect example of this would be the curb-cut effect.

The curb-cut effect began when disabled people demanded curb cuts to roll around cities in their wheelchairs to participate in their communities as everybody else. Over time, non-disabled people benefit from these curb cuts as much as disabled people and have no idea why they exist. Disabled people would not be the only people that benefit from accommodations. Everybody would, and that is why it is so important.

Curb Cuts

For Everyone!!!



When we frame the idea of accommodations from the perspective of disability, for some reason we push back against it. When in reality humans have always accommodated themselves whether it's to create a world so we can drive cars or figure out how to accommodate an entire community because there is a pandemic. I myself never realized the significance of accommodations, even though I was raised by a disabled mother. Until I had become disabled vvl was so ignorant to the concept of accommodations and why they are so important to everyone. I literally had to experience not being able to get onto a stage, not being able to use the bathroom, or not being able to hang out with family and friends because of the lack of accessibility. When we accommodate we include everyone!!



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